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II

GILDAS'S EDUCATION AND THE LATIN CULTURE OF SUB-ROMAN BRITAIN

Michael Lapidge

IT is usual to regard Gildas as an eccentric and idiosyncratic writer. Because of the difficulty of his Latin he has customarily been categorised with certain early mediaeval authors of notoriously difficult Latin — with the seventh-century Irish authors (as we now think them to be) of the *Hisperica Famina*, or with the Anglo-Saxon Aldhelm (*ob.* 709 or 710). This categorisation has tended to obscure Gildas's very real links with the Latin authors of late Antiquity. Worse, perhaps, it has encouraged the (unspoken) assumption that Gildas's Latin training was similar in kind to that of the *faminators* or Aldhelm, an assumption which might appear to be confirmed by accounts of his training found in mediaeval hagiography. Yet if this assumption can temporarily be suspended, it quickly becomes apparent that we have little idea of how Gildas acquired his competence in Latin. It may well be, as a distinguished scholar has recently remarked, that 'we can know little about Gildas's education';¹ but scepticism about the certainty of answers should not preclude the asking of questions. The purpose of the present essay is, first, to ask what may legitimately be inferred from the Latin of the *De Excidio Britanniae* about how Gildas was educated, and then to enquire whether such inferences may throw any light on our understanding of Latin culture in sub-Roman Britain.

I shall begin by drawing a broad distinction between the traditional, Classical education of the late Roman schools on the one hand, and the monastic education of late Antiquity and the early middle ages on the other. First, let us consider the traditional Roman education.² The pattern of Roman education was adapted from that of Hellenistic schools and remained essentially unchanged from the third century B.C. to the last years of the Roman empire in the late fifth or early sixth century A.D.. In this traditional system the student, after primary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, passed into the care of a *grammaticus* for some five years (roughly from the age of eleven to sixteen) from whom he was expected to acquire an articulate knowledge of 'correct' Latin, the *recte loquendi scientia*; and 'correct' Latin was adjudged to be that employed by the venerated

¹ Winterbottom, 'The preface', p. 287.

² The classic study of Roman education is that by Marrou, *A History*; there is also a useful and accessible account by Bonner, *Education*.

curriculum-authors, pre-eminently the poetry of Vergil. Hence the curriculum of the *grammaticus* consisted in minute and painstaking analysis of Vergil, line by line and word by word; hence the writings of many ancient grammarians (notably Donatus and Servius) consist in little more than minute analysis of Vergil's diction. If he came away from the *grammaticus* with nothing more, the student of the traditional Roman school would have the ability to express himself in 'correct' Latin and would have an intimate familiarity with Vergil's poetry. At approximately the time when he became a *uir togatus* (about the age of sixteen), the young Roman proceeded from the care of the *grammaticus* to that of the *rhetor*, from whom he was to learn proficiency in what we should call 'public speaking' — the technique of declamation. Through the repetition of preliminary exercises (called *progymnasmata*) the student first became adept at handling the elements of declamation (narrative, fable, maxim and the rest) and then gradually the various means of embellishing these elements, the numerous rhetorical schemata (*epanaphora*, *antistrophe*, *antithesis*, *apostrophe*, and so on). He was then able to proceed to learning the composition and delivery of the speech itself. Training at this stage consisted almost entirely in the composition of practice-speeches on specified topics: the topics of deliberative orations or *suasoriae* were chosen from Classical literature (for example: debate, in the person of Achilles, the pros and cons of selling the body of Hector), and those of judicial orations or *controversiae* were based on tenets of Roman law. Sometimes the topics chosen for practice-declama- tion were remote from normal life, and the rhetorical schools were frequently criticised for the irrelevance of their teaching. Nevertheless, the object of the teaching was to make the student readily familiar with the structure and delivery of an oration. It was the function of the rhetorical schools to provide the Roman civil administration with advocates adept at pleading under any circumstance.³

For many provinces of the Roman empire, there is sound evidence for the operation of grammatical and rhetorical schools. For Gaul in particular we have the abundant testimony of the fourth-century poet Ausonius.⁴ For Roman Britain, unfortunately, there is no such testimony. But in so far as Britain was then a diocese of the Roman empire, there is no difficulty in the assumption that here as elsewhere in the Empire *grammatici* and *rheto- res* would have been involved in the instruction of the local population and would have occupied teaching posts paid for by the state. In fact several scattered pieces of evidence serve to confirm the assertion made by Tacitus in the first century A.D., namely that, soon after the conquest of Britain by Agricola, the Romano-British population, far from showing a distaste for the Latin language, very quickly evinced a passion to command it.⁵ Early in the second century we have evidence of a Greek *rhetor* named Demetrius

3 See Parks, *The Roman Rhetorical Schools*, especially pp. 61—107; Stroux, *Römische Rechtswissenschaft*; and Bonner, *Education*, pp. 309—27.

4 Haarhoff, *Schools of Gaul*, especially pp. 39—52.

5 *Agricola*, §21: 'ut qui modo linguam romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent'.

active in Britain,⁶ and at approximately the same time the poet Juvenal could write that 'eloquent Gaul has taught the Britons to plead'⁷ — apparently implying that Gaulish *rheto- res* were at that time being imported for the purpose of establishing rhetorical schools on the Roman model. In the third century there is a fleeting reference to a Romano-British *rhetor* who was the father of the military leader Bonosus.⁸ In the fifth century the writings of St Patrick, a Romano-Briton who had been abducted at the age of sixteen by Irish raiders (at precisely the age, we might suppose, when he would in different circumstances have passed from the school of the *gram- maticus* to that of the *rhetor*), contain ample evidence that trained rhetori- cians were still to be found in Britain. Patrick in his *Confessio* addresses his *seniores* in Britain somewhat defensively in that they (unlike himself) were 'clever rhetoricians' (*Confessio*, §13: *cati rhetorici*), accomplished in mat- ters pertaining to the law (*legis periti*) and expert in that rhetorical concision known technically as *breuitas*⁹ (*Confessio*, §10: *breuitate disert*). But even without Patrick's explicit testimony we should be obliged to suppose the presence of *rheto- res* in late Roman Britain, for Roman Britain like every province of the Empire had need of civil servants and administrators, skilled in declamation and law, to sustain the huge bureaucracy of Roman government; and it was the function of the rhetorical schools to provide these administrators.

The function of the monastic schools, on the other hand, was utterly different.¹⁰ Monasteries were established as a retreat from (and repudiation of) the secular world and its administration. The earliest Egyptian monks, the pattern of whose lives served as model for Western monasticism, were for the most part illiterate peasants such as St Anthony.¹¹ So far from admitting or tolerating the study of rhetoric and secular literature, the Egyptian monks actively rejected it. Their sole concern was with the Scrip- tures, psalmody, and prayer. Accordingly, when monasticism was first practised in the West, it incorporated the Eastern prejudice against secular learning — a prejudice which inevitably was confirmed by the prejudice of Western intellectuals such as Jerome or Paulinus of Nola who, in an effort to strengthen their christian resolve, forced themselves to reject outright the

6 Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*, §2; see also discussion by Frere, *Britannia*, pp. 128, 134, and 139.

7 Juvenal, *Saturae*, XV.111—12: 'Gallia caesidicos docuit fecunda Britannos / de con- ducendo loquitur iam rhetore Thule'.

8 *Historia Augusta*, XXIX.14 (= Flavius Vopiscus, *Firminus, Saturninus, Proculus et Bonosus*, §14): 'Bonosus . . . origine Britannus . . . ut ipse dicebat, rhetoris filius, ut ab aliis comperi, paedagogi litterarii'. The point turns on whether Bonosus was merely flattering himself in describing his father as a *rhetor*, whereas in fact he was a kindergarten teacher; in any case the father must have taught in Roman Britain where Bonosus was born.

9 See Lausberg, *Handbuch*, I.169—71.

10 On monastic education see Roger, *L'Enseignement*, pp. 144—69; Leclercq, 'École', cols 1824—31; Marrou, *A History*, pp. 439—51; and Riché, *Education and Culture*, pp. 100—22.

11 Athanasius, *Vita Sancti Antonii*, §72.

Latin classics on which they had been nurtured.¹² The contempt for letters was reasserted by the earliest monks of Gaul. Thus Sulpicius Severus reminds us in his *Vita S. Martini* that salvation was not preached by orators, but by fishermen, and that the kingdom of God is not to be found in eloquence but in faith.¹³ The responsibility of the christian is to live in a holy and religious manner; to imitate secular letters is simply *stultitia*.¹⁴ St Martin was a praiseworthy subject because he was above all a rude, unlettered (*inlitteratus*) soldier.¹⁵ The same contempt for letters, and particularly for rhetoric, is expressed by Cassian who, in his *Institutiones*, equates accomplishment in rhetoric with the sin of vainglory (*cenodoxia*)¹⁶ and asserts that 'the syllogisms of dialectic and Ciceronian eloquence are unworthy of the simple truths of faith'.¹⁷ Cassian's *Institutiones* constituted one of the principal texts in the establishment of monastic discipline (and hence monastic education) in the Latin West. In other words, although early Western monasteries undertook the task of instructing in the Scriptures and ancillary writings the oblates committed to them, it is quite clear — given the violent prejudice of the monastic founders against secular letters and especially against rhetoric — that this instruction was based entirely on (and restricted to) biblical and liturgical texts.¹⁸ There is no evidence whatsoever that rhetoric, the mainstay of traditional Roman education, was ever taught in a monastery in late Antiquity.¹⁹

A similar conclusion may be reached with regard to the so-called 'episcopal' or 'presbyteral' schools of late Antiquity.²⁰ The function of such schools was simply utilitarian: at a time in the sixth century when municipal schools in Gaul were in ruin and no longer able to provide an adequate supply of adequately literate bishops and priests, there is evidence that certain literate bishops who had had the advantage of a thorough training in Latin (that is, in traditional schools at an earlier period of their lives) undertook to provide elementary instruction for their clergy with the aim of ensuring a supply of bishops and priests able at least to pronounce the mass. I may cite one well known example: Gregory of Tours (born 538) was committed as an oblate to the bishop of Lyon, by whom he was taught to read

and write through study of the psalms;²¹ he was subsequently ordained a bishop, although his Latin was never 'correct' by the standards of a traditional school.²² It hardly needs to be stressed that there was no place in the curriculum of an episcopal school for the study of Classical texts, and certainly none for rhetoric. Indeed, the *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, promulgated in Provence sometime in the second half of the fifth century, expressly forbid a bishop to read 'books of the pagan authors'.²³ In this connexion one need only recall the famous letter of Pope Gregory (590–604) to Bishop Desiderius of Vienne, in which the bishop is severely chastised for undertaking to teach grammar to some members of his episcopal school (*grammaticam quibusdam exponere*), where by 'grammar' the pope is evidently thinking of secular letters (*nugis et saecularibus litteris*).²⁴ Again, there is no need to stress how remote the traditional teaching of rhetoric, with its *progymnasmata*, *suasoriae* and *controversiae*, would have been from the work of the episcopal schools.

To the modern observer, one of the most curious aspects of the repudiation of Classical letters by the proponents of Western monasticism is that, in nearly every case, the author in question had received a thorough training in traditional Roman schools before entering the service of the Church. Of the aforementioned authors, Sulpicius Severus, Paulinus of Nola, and Cassian had all been thoroughly instructed in Classical schools so that they could write correct and elegant Latin; yet they scorned the system which had instructed them. Even Pope Gregory the Great was said to have been trained in 'grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric' to such a standard that his accomplishment was second to none in Rome.²⁵ Wherever we find a christian monk in the Late Latin period whose Latin is correct and who is easily familiar with the devices of rhetoric, we may be quite sure that he did not receive his education in the monastery. Such would be the case with Jerome, or with his Romano-British opponent, the heresiarch Pelagius, who, given his formidable accomplishments in forensic oratory, must surely have been trained in Britain in a rhetorical school before departing for Mediterranean regions (probably during the 380s).²⁶ A similar conclusion is to be drawn

12 See Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers*, especially pp. 309–28, and Ellspermann, *The Attitude*.

13 *Vita Sancti Martini*, praefatio: '... quia regnum Dei non in eloquentia, sed in fide constat. Meminerit etiam salutem saeculo non ab oratoribus ... sed a piscatoribus praedictam' (ed. Fontaine, I.248).

14 *Ibid.*, §1 (ed. Fontaine, I.250–2).

15 *Ibid.*, §25 (ed. Fontaine, I.312): 'Nisi quod mirum est homini inlitterato ne hanc quidem gratiam defuisse'.

16 *Institutiones*, V.1 and 4 (ed. Petschenig, pp. 81–4).

17 *Ibid.*, XII.19 (ed. Petschenig, p. 220): 'qui simplicem piscatorum fidem corde simplici retinentes non eam syllogismis dialecticis et Tulliana facundia spiritu concepere mundano'; cf. also Cassian's repudiation of his early training in secular letters, *Collatio* XIV.12 (ed. Petschenig, p. 414).

18 See Riché, *Education and Culture*, pp. 113–22.

19 See Roger's painstaking analysis of references to secular learning in Gaulish saints' Lives: *L'Enseignement*, pp. 161–9.

20 See Leclercq, 'École', cols 1831–9; Marrou, *A History*, pp. 444–7; and Riché, *Education and Culture*, pp. 122–9.

21 Gregory of Tours, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, §6.

22 See the exhaustive study of Gregory's Latin by Bonnet, *Le Latin*.

23 *Statuta ecclesiae antiqua*, §5 (ed. Morin, *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis Sermones*, II.91): 'ut episcopus gentiliu libros non legat'.

24 *Epistola* XI.xxxiv (edd. Ewald & Hartmann, II.303). On Gregory's attitude to grammar see further De Lubac, 'Saint Grégoire'; Riché, *Education and Culture*, pp. 145–57; and Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, pp. 31–54.

25 Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* X.1 (edd. Krusch & Levison, p. 478): 'Litteris grammaticis dialecticisque ac rhetoricis ita est institutus ut nulli in urbe ipsa putaretur esse secundus'; see further Riché, *Education and Culture*, pp. 139–45, and Courcelle, 'Grégoire'.

26 Pelagius went to Rome, it would seem, in order to study law; but while at Rome he was baptized and abandoned the law-courts for a career in the Church (Jerome, *Epistula* L.2 [ed. Hilberg, II.389–90]: 'forum neglegens se ad ecclesiam transtulit'). His rhetorical training can be deduced both from the fact that he was able to speak Greek and because his Latin writings betray at every turn the devices of public oratory. Jerome referred to him as 'homo latinissimus et facundissimus' (*ibid.*). See further De Plinval, *Pélage*, pp. 60–74, and *Essai*, pp. 49–72.

from the accomplishments of Faustus of Riez. Faustus was by origin a Briton (Alcimus Auitus refers to him as *ortu Britannus*),²⁷ but he became abbot of the monastery at Lérins ca 433 and subsequently bishop of Riez ca 460. His colleague and contemporary Sidonius Apollinaris had great admiration for Faustus's accomplishments in philosophy — he referred to Faustus as an *Athenaei consors*, no light words for a man of Sidonius's learning — and rhetoric, remarking that in earlier life Faustus had engaged in public displays of forensic oratory (*in palaestris exerceris urbanis*).²⁸ We can be certain that Faustus did not acquire his expertise in philosophy and declamation at Lérins before he became abbot: such disciplines were anathema at Lérins as at other Gaulish monasteries.²⁹ The most reasonable explanation is that Faustus acquired his training at the hands of a *rhetor* in Roman Britain before departing for the monastic life at Lérins. This inference, taken in combination with the evidence of Patrick's writings mentioned earlier, suggests that rhetorical schools were flourishing in Britain as elsewhere in the Empire during the first half of the fifth century. It remains to be seen whether such an inference has any relevance to the case of Gildas.

Our problem is to determine whether Gildas was the product of a traditional Roman education, or whether he had acquired his training in a monastery of the sort which was being established throughout western Europe during the fifth and sixth centuries. Before turning to the *De Excidio Britanniae*, however, it is necessary to consider the evidence of the earliest *uita* of Gildas by the eleventh-century monk of Ruis (Brittany), for it is this *uita*, in its extant form a text of the eleventh century, which supplies the received account of Gildas's education. According to the *uita*,³⁰ then, Gildas was educated as follows. At a very young age (*puerulum*) he was taken into a monastery by one Hildutus. There he was put to the study of both holy scripture and the liberal arts; not surprisingly, given his later career, he inclined more to the former than to the latter.³¹ While living at the monastery (*in coenobio*), young Gildas performed two outstanding miracles. He continued to study with Hildutus both in secular letters — but

only as far as was necessary (*prout res suppetebat*) — and in holy scripture, but then he set off for Ireland so that he might seek the learning of other wise men 'both in philosophy and in divine learning'.³² When he had wandered through the schools of several scholars, Gildas decided to renounce the flesh utterly; whence from that day until the last day of his life Gildas 'chastised his body with fasting and vigils'.³³ The monk of Ruis is at pains here to explain that this conversion to the stricter way of life took place when Gildas was aged fifteen.³⁴ How is this hagiographical account to be interpreted? Although the *uita* clearly explains that Hildutus was responsible for the monastic education of his charges, there is mention of liberal arts and philosophy; some commentators have even concluded from this that Hildutus was himself a *rhetor*. But in fact the text itself gives the lie to any such interpretation: it is most unlikely that any traditional schools (teaching philosophy and rhetoric) were to be found in Ireland in the first half of the sixth century, for Ireland had never been part of the Roman empire; and in any case Gildas — according to his hagiographer — renounced all learning at the age of fifteen, precisely the point at which a Roman teenager would have passed from the care of a *grammaticus* to that of a *rhetor*. Whatever the hagiographer is trying to tell us about Gildas's education, he is *not* saying that Gildas was trained by a traditional Roman *rhetor*. His vague words about philosophy and the liberal arts are best taken as an example of the empty topos, concerning education in the liberal arts, which occurs so frequently in hagiography from the sixth century onwards.³⁵ According to his hagiographer, then, Gildas's education was monastic.

Let us return to the question raised earlier: our problem is now to ask whether evidence based on the *De Excidio Britanniae*, and particularly on its latinity, can be squared with the hagiographer's account of Gildas's monastic education. As I mentioned in connexion with other fifth-century christian Latin authors, the marks of the traditional Roman education were indelible: from the *grammaticus*, a command of correct latinity and fluent familiarity with the best Latin authors, particularly Vergil; and from the *rhetor*, a knowledge of how to plead a case and a familiarity with the techniques for so doing. By contrast, we should not expect to find such features in the Latin of an author trained in a monastery or an episcopal school. Are these features attested in the Latin of *De Excidio Britanniae*?

First, let us consider the marks of training at the hands of the *grammaticus*: correct Latin and fluent familiarity with Vergil. In assessing the correctness of the latinity of a Late Latin author, however, a further factor needs to be borne in mind, namely whether or not the author in question was a native speaker of Latin. A Latin speaker might betray his knowledge

27 Auitus, *Epistula* IV (ed. Peiper, p. 30).

28 Sidonius, *Epistula* IX.ix (ed. Luetjohann, p. 158). In another letter (IX.iii) Sidonius compliments Faustus on his prose style 'rich in tropes and figures and distinguished by the varied elegance of its vocabulary' — *istud in uobis tropologicum genus ac figuratum limatisque plurifariam uerbis eminentissimum* — and praises him for having delivered a speech which steered a middle course between religious and forensic conventions — *spiritalis regulas uel forenses quiddam contionantem* — conventions of which, according to Sidonius, Faustus was a past master (ed. Luetjohann, p. 152). Once again, such mastery of the conventions of forensic oratory could not have been learned in a monastery.

29 See Riché, *Education and Culture*, pp. 100–6, especially 102: 'Lérins was first and foremost a center of asceticism. This is what the clergy and laymen sought when they came to Lérins for a short stay or to retire there forever'; see also Courcelle, 'Nouveaux aspects'.

30 Ed. Williams, *Gildas*, II.317–89.

31 *Ibid.*, II.328: 'Beatus igitur Gildas sub magistrali in schola diuinae scripturae et liberalium artium constitutus, conspiciens utriusque doctrinam elocutionis diuinis curauit magis erudiri doctrinis . . . '.

32 *Ibid.*, II.334: 'Iren perrexit, ut et aliorum doctorum sententias in philosophicis atque in diuinis litteris inuestigator curiosus exquireret'. On this alleged trip to Ireland, see also the remarks of Richard Sharpe, below, p. 200.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*: 'a quinto decimo aetatis suae anno per totum uitae praesentis spatium quo in hoc uixit mundo . . . '.

35 Roger, *L'Enseignement*, pp. 161–9; Leclercq, 'École', cols 1829–31.

of spoken Latin by allowing himself to employ vulgarisms not permissible in 'correct' Latin. On the other hand, an author whose native language was not Latin, would — unless his training had been comprehensively thorough, and conducted by a native speaker — betray his linguistic background by grammatical and lexical solecisms. At a certain point in the Late Latin period — when and where precisely is not easy to define — a clearly perceptible distinction emerges between authors whose native language is Latin and those who have learned Latin as a foreign language.³⁶ It is not easy to ascertain whether Gildas was a native speaker of Latin. The assumption is normally made that the population of Roman Britain would have consisted of three linguistic classes: those who spoke only Latin (aristocrats, officials of the Roman government), those who spoke both Latin and British (merchants, estate-owners), and those who spoke only British.³⁷ Gildas has generally been taken as a member of the second class: a Briton, a native speaker of British who subsequently acquired a training in Latin. This may well be right; but there is little evidence to support it. Gildas does not describe himself as a speaker of British; quite to the contrary he describes Latin as *lingua . . . nostra*.³⁸ Nowhere in *De Excidio Britanniae* is there to be found a calque on a British word or phrase of the sort which later become characteristic in British Latin authors from the ninth century onwards (such as *pars dextralis* for Welsh *parth deheu*).³⁹ Gildas reveals some knowledge of etymology of British names,⁴⁰ but this is not incontrovertible evidence that he was a native speaker of British (he was also familiar enough with Old English to cite one word of that language — *cyulis* — correctly, but no one, I take it, would be prepared to argue that he was a native speaker of Old English). Similarly, it has been suggested that Gildas's addresses to the British *tyranni* betray knowledge of British panegyric poetry;⁴¹ but this evidence is equivocal at best, and may as well betray familiarity with Latin poetic tradition.⁴² In short, if someone were to argue that Gildas was a native speaker of Latin, I doubt that he could be refuted on the evidence of *De Excidio Britanniae* itself. On the other hand, however, Gildas's Latin betrays no influence of spoken, or vulgar, Latin. Of the numerous phonological and morphological vulgarisms which disfigure (say) the Latin of Gildas's Roman-British predecessor Patrick,⁴³ none is found in Gildas: no example of loss of final *-m* following a vowel, no nominative absolute, no confusion of active and deponent verb, no compound preposition. It is true that a few minor features of Gildas's Latin may reflect the influence of the spoken language (such as the use of *proprius*

36 Lot, 'A quelle époque'; Norberg, 'A quelle époque' and 'Latin scolaire'.

37 Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 97–106.

38 *De Excidio Britanniae*, I.23: 'tribus ut lingua eius exprimitur cyulis, nostra longis nauibus'.

39 See, for example, Asser, *De Rebus Gestis Aelfredi Regis*, §§35 and 78[79] (ed. Stevenson, pp. 27 and 64).

40 See Jackson, 'Varia: II'; Wright, 'A note'; and Sims-Williams, below, pp. 186–8.

41 See Lewis, 'The tradition'.

42 See the remarks of Patrick Sims-Williams, below, pp. 169–92.

43 See Mraz, 'St. Patricius'.

for *suus* or of *quidam* for *aliquis*), but such features are widely attested in even the most correct Latin authors of the fifth century.⁴⁴ On the question of the correctness of Gildas's Latin, then, it is worth repeating the conclusion reached by François Kerlouégan after an exhaustive study of Gildas's latinity: that 'like the most correct authors, Gildas most often uses the Classical diction whose survival was guaranteed by schools and books'.⁴⁵

Another aspect of the 'correctness' of Gildas's Latin which needs to be considered here is his alleged use of glossary-words. Gildas, in common with many other Late Latin authors, affected the use of unusual vocabulary — grecisms, poeticisms, neologisms. It is also true that some of the more unusual items in Gildas's vocabulary reappear in early Mediaeval Latin writings such as the *Hisperica Famina* or those of Aldhelm.⁴⁶ With respect to unusual words, however, it is essential to bear in mind the difference in usage between an author who was a speaker of Latin (or someone who had been trained by, or who had frequent contact with, a native speaker of Latin), and a non-Latin-speaking author who was obliged to draw his vocabulary from glossaries and word-lists without having any means of determining whether he correctly understood the exact denotation and many connotations of a particular word. An example will illustrate this distinction. In Classical Latin, the plural substantive *fasti* (-orum) was used to denote a calendar or almanac which enumerated all festivals of the year, but the word subsequently acquired the more specific meaning of books containing a list of the consuls who have given their names to particular years. At some point, no doubt in the Late Latin period, the word *fasti* was glossed accurately as *libri ubi sunt nomina consulum*.⁴⁷ But when the tradition of naming consuls had itself been discontinued and the significance of recording their names forgotten, an early mediaeval scribe copying the explanation of *fasti* assumed that the supplementary information concerning consuls' names could be dispensed with, and accordingly produced the much abbreviated (and downright misleading) gloss *fasti: libri*.⁴⁸ Now it would easily be possible for an author ignorant of the true meaning of the word *fasti* (plural) incorrectly to infer from the abbreviated glossary-entry that the word *fastus* (singular) was nothing more than a synonym for

44 Cf. Kerlouégan, 'Le latin': 'les faits . . . montrent bien que le *DEB* reproduit l'état de langue couramment attesté chez les écrivains du V^e siècle . . . Vue dans son ensemble, la syntaxe du *DEB* ne paraît donc pas plus marquée par la langue parlée que celle de la majorité des auteurs du V^e siècle' (p. 156); and again, 'Il [sc. Gildas] emploie sans doute des vulgarismes, mais ce sont les vulgarismes qu'il a appris à l'école, les vulgarismes intégrés dans la langue littéraire' (p. 159).

45 *Ibid.*, p. 156: 'Il faut noter . . . que, comme les auteurs les plus soignés, Gildas utilise le plus souvent le tour classique dont l'école et les livres assuraient la survie'. Kerlouégan's exhaustive study of Gildas's language is found in his (unfortunately unpublished) doctoral dissertation, 'Les Destinées'.

46 See Kerlouégan, 'Une liste'; bear in mind, however, that Aldhelm certainly and the *Hisperic* faminators probably were familiar with Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* (see below, n. 50).

47 Goetz *et al.*, *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*, IV.237, and V.293 and 568. Cf. IV.341: 'libri ubi nomina consulum scribuntur'.

48 *Ibid.*, V.419, 428, and 552.

'book'. Accordingly, the occurrence of the singular form *fastus* to mean simply 'book' will indicate at once that an author has derived this lexical item from a Latin glossary rather than from contact with the living language. Thus, for example, Aldhelm in the preface to his *Carmen de Virginitate* describes his earlier prose work on the subject of virginity as a 'fasti seriem . . . priorem' (*Carmen de Virginitate*, line 21), where clearly he thinks that *fastus* satisfactorily describes his earlier treatise as a 'book'. From this and similar examples we know that Aldhelm's unusual vocabulary is for the most part glossary-based, of second-hand derivation.⁴⁹

The point is this: as far as I have been able to determine, Gildas employs no words which are manifestly derived from glossaries — no words, that is, which are used in such a way that their inappositeness can best be explained on the assumption that they were derived from a glossary by an author ignorant of living Latin. This is not to deny that there are words in Gildas which later found their way into glossaries, for it is easily demonstrable that *De Excidio Britanniae* served as a quarry for compilers of glossaries and for later authors in search of unusual words.⁵⁰ But there is no reason for supposing that Gildas himself drew any of his extensive vocabulary from glossaries, a point which may be illustrated by a few examples. The word *catasta* in Classical Latin meant a platform on which slaves were exposed for sale. Now at one point Gildas uses the word to mean a 'troop' ('mittit satellitum canumque prolixiorum catastam': I.23), a meaning which is attested in glossaries and mediaeval authors.⁵¹ Here, one might argue, Gildas was drawing on a glossary. But it is certain that Gildas knew what the word meant, for elsewhere he uses it in its correct Classical denotation ('ut ad carcerem uel catastam poenalem . . . traheremini': III.109). Rather, he seems to have taken some poetic liberty with the word such that it became a pointed term of abuse — 'a larger troop of followers and dogs', all no doubt worthy (in Gildas's estimation) to be sold as slaves on the auction-block or platform. It is interesting that Gildas's use of *catasta* as a term of abuse is echoed by the fifth-century Roman poet Rutilius Namatianus, who uses the word contemptuously in reference to a 'troop' of Jews (*De Reditu Suo*, I.393: 'cetera mendacis deliramenta catastae'). In the case of Rutilius, who was *praefectus urbi* in 414, there can be no doubt that as a Latin speaker he knew the correct denotation of the word but allowed himself the liberty of using it as a term of contempt. Gildas, I should argue, did likewise. Other apparent glossary-words in Gildas may be explained in the same manner⁵² — as an aspect of his search to embellish his prose with

poetic vocabulary.⁵³ For this reason, it is quite misleading to associate the vocabulary of Gildas with that of the Hisperic faminators or of Aldhelm, as some commentators have done. Kerlouégan, for example, points to the word *macero*, which in Classical Latin meant 'to soften' or 'to weaken' and hence 'to vex' or 'to torment', but was misunderstood by the faminators and Aldhelm to mean 'to strike or pierce (with a sword)'.⁵⁴ Gildas uses the word twice, but in each case he uses it in its correct Classical Latin sense: 'derelinque exitiabilem ac temetipsum maceraturum . . . furorem' (II.32: 'abandon the rage . . . which will some day waste you') and 'non tam militari manu quam flagris callidam gentem maceratuos' (I.7: 'torment a cunning people with scourges rather than military force'). It is entirely possible that the meaning given to the word by the faminators and Aldhelm derives from misunderstanding of the second of these passages in Gildas (perhaps via a Gildas-based glossary); but it is impossible that Gildas himself misunderstood the word's meaning.

Analysis of the alleged glossary-words in *De Excidio Britanniae* strongly suggests, therefore, that Gildas did not derive his Latin vocabulary at second-hand from glossaries,⁵⁵ but rather from first-hand knowledge of Latin as a living language. This suggestion is corroborated by consideration of other aspects of his vocabulary, such as technical terminology. A scholar thoroughly familiar with the prosopography of the late Roman empire recently had occasion to remark that 'Gildas is a writer who consistently and carefully uses technical terms precisely and accurately; *foederati*, *annona*, *hospites*, *praepositi*, *consilium* and *consilarii* are late Roman terms correctly used, as is *cuneus* for a military formation'.⁵⁶ Other words, such as *epimenia* to mean 'military provisions' (I.23), might be added to this list.⁵⁷ One might also point to the technical terminology for Roman weights and measures which Gildas employs in his 'Penitential':⁵⁸ *himina romana lactis* ('a Roman half-pint of milk') or *tenuclae uel battuti lactis romanus sextarius* ('a Roman pint of whey or buttermilk'). Such terms could scarcely be derived from a glossary, for Gildas's stipulations would have no meaning for an audience which did not clearly understand the exact amount specified by *himina* or *sextarius*. Gildas's 'Penitential' was evidently intended for an audience among which the Roman terms for weights and measures were still

49 On the use of glossary-words by mediaeval authors, cf. the remarks of Lindsay, *The Corpus, Épinal, Erfurt and Leyden Glossaries*, pp. 97–105, and his introduction to Stevenson, *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, pp. vi–viii; see also Marenbon, 'Les sources', pp. 79–82.

50 For the use of Gildas or a Gildas-based glossary by the Hisperic faminators, see Herren, *The Hisperica Famina*, I.20–3; for Aldhelm's use of Gildas, see Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, p. 301, n. 1, and Kerlouégan, 'Une liste'; for Gildas-batches in glossaries of the Anglo-Saxon period see Lindsay, *The Corpus, Épinal, Erfurt and Leyden Glossaries*, p. 15, and Hessels, *A Late Eighth-century Latin—Anglo-Saxon Glossary*, pp. 240–1.

51 On Aldhelm's use of *catasta*, see Kerlouégan, 'Une liste', p. 559.

52 For example, the word *molossus* (II.34), commonly found in mediaeval glossaries to mean 'dog', is used as a poeticism by Vergil, *Georgics*, III.405.

53 On Gildas's poeticism, see the remarks of Neil Wright, below pp. 113–15.

54 Kerlouégan, 'Une liste', pp. 554–5. All Gildas's unusual usages as described by Kerlouégan may be simply explained as poeticisms (*ambro*, *caespes*, *clustellum*, *comanipularis*, *conuolatus*, *cuneus*, *propalo*, *protelo*, and *refocillo*) and do not, therefore, provide evidence that Gildas derived his vocabulary from glossaries. The great value of Kerlouégan's study lies in showing how Aldhelm and the Hisperic faminators, lacking first-hand knowledge of Latin as a living language, were unduly influenced by the exotic, poetic nature of Gildas's language.

55 I thus dissent from the opinion of Thompson, that 'in his vocabulary [Gildas] must have drawn on glossaries for his rare words rather than on extensive reading' ('Gildas', p. 210).

56 Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, p. 132; cf. also Thompson, 'Gildas', pp. 217–18.

57 Stevens, 'Gildas sapiens', p. 369, and Thompson, 'Gildas', p. 217.

58 On the attribution of this text to Gildas, see the remarks of Richard Sharpe, below, pp. 196–8.

current.⁵⁹ The implication must be that the audience in question was one for which Latin was a living language.

In other words, Gildas's Latin should not be assessed by the standards of Mediaeval Latin authors whose knowledge of the language derived from books; rather, Gildas's often highly ornate vocabulary is best to be understood in the context of the stylistic predilections of Late Latin prose authors for whom Latin was a living language.⁶⁰ It is not possible here to undertake an exhaustive study of those features of Gildas's vocabulary which link him to the tradition of Late Latin prose style, but several points may be mentioned. Gildas, for example, has a pronounced penchant for unusual agentive nouns terminating in *-or*: *adinuentor* (III.67), *adstipulator* (II.39 and 43), *ambitor* (III.67), *commessor* (III.67 and 87), *condebitor* (I.1 and 19), *contemptor* (II.32), *delator* (I.8), *depressor* (II.32), *depulsor* (II.33), *fabricator* (I.21), *grassator* (I.21), *mulcator* (III.67), *essor* (II.32), *speculator* (I.1), *stabilitor* (II.38), *subuersor* (I.21), *unctor* (I.21), and *uindemiator* (I.24). Several of these words are rarities indeed and appear to be coinages by Gildas,⁶¹ whereas others may derive from identifiable sources;⁶² in any case, the penchant for such nouns is well attested in other Late Latin prose writers, particularly Sidonius Apollinaris,⁶³ Alcimus Auitus,⁶⁴ and Ennodius.⁶⁵ One might also point to Gildas's use of nouns in *-men*, *-mentum*, *-tas*, and *-tudo*, of adjectives in *-bundus*, of inchoative

59 Bieler (*The Irish Penitentials*, p. 241) argues that the word *ferculo* in Gildas's 'Penitential' is not the common Latin word *ferculum* meaning 'a dish of food' but is rather a misreading of *serculo*, a hypothetical latinised form of Old Irish *sercol*, 'titbit'. Bieler's argument is not compelling without further evidence (Latin *ferculum* makes perfectly good sense in context) but, if accepted, would have bearing on the case for a Roman audience for Gildas's 'Penitential'.

60 On the Late Latin stylistic predilection for unusual vocabulary see in general Hofmann & Szantyr, *Lateinische Syntax*, pp. 740–71, as well as the following individual studies: Goelzer & Mey, *Le Latin*; Zimmermann, *The Late Latin Vocabulary*; Løyen, *Sidonius Apollinaire et l'esprit précieux*; and Gualandri, *Furtiva Lectio*.

61 Notably *condebitor* and *depressor*.

62 The word *uindemiator* possibly derives from Horace, *Saturae*, I.vii,30; note that Horace and Gildas agree in the spelling *uindemiator*, whereas the word is usually spelled *uindemitor*.

63 I note the following unusual forms in Sidonius: *appetitor*, *consiliator*, *derogator*, *despector*, *distributor*, *uplicator*, *effractor*, *elictor*, *falsator*, *fractor*, *frequentator*, *incentor*, *inhiator*, *inspector*, *inuitator*, *murmurator*, *negator*, *oblatrator*, *potor*, *precator*, *publicator*, *pugillator*, *relator*, *reparator*, *repensator*, *rimator*, *satisfactor*, *suscitator*, *suspector*, and *tractator*.

64 Auitus uses the following unusual forms: *adiurator*, *censetor*, *contradictor*, *destructor*, *dissolutor*, *diuisor*, *uplicator*, *erogator*, *exactor*, *fideiussor*, *frequentator*, *iactitator*, *incentor*, *laniator*, *mansor*, *negator*, *nominator*, *peruasor*, *redditor*, *speculator*, *subuersor*, *succisor*, *taxator*, *temerator*, *tractator*, and *transmissor*; see further Goelzer & Mey, *Le Latin*, pp. 463–5, and Goelzer, 'Remarques', pp. 179–81.

65 Ennodius uses the following unusual forms: *admissor*, *adstipulator*, *aestimitor*, *cohabitator*, *comisator*, *concussor*, *commissor*, *compulsor*, *decoctor*, *dictor*, *effusor*, *elocutor*, *exceptor*, *fideiussor*, *impugnator*, *impulsor*, *irrisor*, *maledictor*, *mansor*, *occisor*, *pacator*, *patrator*, *perlator*, *potator*, *praestitor*, *precator*, *profligator*, *promulgator*, *quaesitor*, *remediator*, *repensor*, *retentator*, *supplantator*, *truinator*, *usurpator*, *uenerator*, and *uulgator*.

verbs in *-esco* and (grecising) verbs in *-izo*, or of adverbs in *-iter* and *-tim*.⁶⁶ Gildas's use of grecisms also links him with Late Latin stylistic tendencies. In addition to a large number of words ultimately of Greek origin which had become common coin in ecclesiastical Latin by the fifth century, Gildas uses several less common grecisms: *amphibalum* (II.28), *cauma* (I.19), *celeuma* (I.25), *fantasia* (I.11, II.34, and III.67), *flegma* (II.34), *mastigia* (I.7), *neuma* (II.34), *organum* (II.34 and 37, and III.67), *plasma* (III.67), and *stigma* (I.18). Each of these grecisms, however, is attested in other Late Latin authors.⁶⁷ It is perhaps worth noting as well that Gildas's grecisms show none of the orthographic mutilation which frequently occurs in Mediaeval Latin texts where grecisms are extracted from glossaries by authors possessing no knowledge whatsoever of Greek.⁶⁸ In this as in other respects Gildas's Latin style most closely resembles that of Continental authors of the fifth and early sixth centuries, and reveals that like them he had learned to write Latin regarded as correct by Late Latin standards: presumably he had been taught by a Roman *grammaticus*.

This supposition receives some support from consideration of the range of reading revealed in Gildas's writings. It has often been stated that the range of Gildas's reading was narrow and restricted, perhaps never more emphatically than by E.A. Thompson, who credits Gildas with mere knowledge of 'a passage of Orosius and . . . a couple of phrases of St Jerome', and even asserts that 'there is certainly no evidence that [Gildas] had ever read the complete works from which he extracted his quotations'. In Thompson's view, Gildas is 'like a man who is citing a "Dictionary of Quotations" or of "Notable Sayings" rather than a scholar who is drawing spontaneously on his reading'.⁶⁹ Assessment of the breadth of another man's learning must always be a matter of subjective opinion; but Gildas is not, in my opinion, a writer of limited reading. He seldom quotes verbatim from a work which he has read (excepting the Bible, of course), but the texture of his Latin suggests a background of wide and easy familiarity with Classical and Christian literature — an impression which is confirmed as more and more allusions are identified in his writing.⁷⁰ Certainly he was

66 On these aspects of Gildas's vocabulary, see Kerlouégan, 'Les Destinées'.

67 The possible exception is *neuma*, whose derivation and meaning are unclear in context. Gildas states that the 'praises of God are not heard, nor is the *neuma ecclesiasticae melodiae*' (II.34). None of the normal meanings of Greek *νεῦμα* ('sign', 'command', 'inclination') is entirely appropriate here; on the other hand the far commoner word *πνεῦμα* ('breath' or 'spirit') is not appropriate either. Williams misunderstands the construction of the sentence, taking *neuma* as if it were *pneumate*, and translates the phrase inaccurately as 'the song of church melody' (*Gildas*, I.81); Winterbottom accurately reproduces the construction but translates the phrase somewhat evasively as 'the melodious music of the church' (*Gildas*, p. 34). Until the word's meaning has been clarified, it cannot be taken as evidence for ignorance of Greek on Gildas's part.

68 See Berschin, *Griechisch-lateinisches Mittelalter*, pp. 44–5. Note that Gildas is always able to give the correct form of oblique cases of Greek-derived words: *haereseos* (I.13), *stigmata* (I.18), *caumate* (I.19), *celeumatis* (*celeumatos* would be slightly more correct) (I.25), and *plasmata* (III.67).

69 'Gildas', p. 210.

70 See discussion by Neil Wright, below, pp. 107–14.

easily familiar with Vergil.⁷¹ At many points his diction is indebted to recollection of Vergilian phrasing, as (for example) where he describes how the Britons, first frozen in terror, then turned tail and ran from Roman swords: 'dantur et colla gladiis, *gelido per ossa tremore currente*' (I.6). The diction here is unmistakably derived from similar passages in the *Aeneid*: 'gelidusque per ima cucurrit / ossa tremor' (*Aeneid*, II.120—1); 'gelidus Teucris per dura cucurrit / ossa tremor' (*Aeneid*, VI.54); and 'gelidusque per ima cucurrit / ossa tremor' (*Aeneid*, XII.447). Adumbration of Vergilian diction is one means by which Gildas heightened the poetic effect of his prose. But it would be misleading to think that Gildas knew Vergil and no other Latin poet. There are many passages in *De Excidio Britanniae* which reveal indefinable but unmistakable debts to traditional Latin poetic diction. I choose one example of many: Gildas prefaces his discussion of the martyrs Alban, Aaron, and Iulius by stating that God sent these luminaries lest Britain be 'plunged deep in the thick darkness of black night' (*crassa atrae noctis caligine*: I.10). The word-order here is that of prose, but the last three words fall easily into the pattern of an hexametrical cadence — *atrae caligine noctis* — and Gildas no doubt had this or a similar cadence in mind as he wrote his sentence. He may have been thinking (say) of Lucan's phrase *atra caligine cursus* (*Pharsalia*, I.541), the notion of 'black darkness' perhaps being reinforced by Vergilian lines such as 'quis globus o ciues *caligine* uoluitur *atra*' (*Aeneid*, IX.36) or 'uoluitur ad muros *caligine* turbidus *atra* / puluis' (*Aeneid*, XI.876—7). Alternatively, an hexameter-cadence such as one from Silius Italicus — *nigrae caligine noctis* (*Punica*, XI.513) — may have been Gildas's model; in any case the cadence *caligine noctis* was common in Late Latin poetry.⁷² Finally, the notion of the thickness of blackness may ultimately owe something to an expression of Lucretius, *caliginis aër / crassior* (IV.349—50). I am not suggesting that any one of these passages was Gildas's model, simply that Gildas's words *crassa atrae noctis caligine* are only explicable on the assumption that he was thoroughly familiar with Latin poetic diction. Such familiarity does not come from reading one or two books in excerpt.

The evidence of Gildas's Latin, particularly the correctness of his grammar and the accuracy of his knowledge of the Latin lexicon in combination with his ready familiarity with Vergil and Latin poetic diction, places him firmly in the context of Late Latin authors of the fifth and early sixth centuries and suggests that, like them, Gildas may have received his education in a traditional Roman school at the hands of a *grammaticus*. We must now

ask if there is any evidence in Gildas's writings of training at the hands of a *rhetor*.

The principal distinguishing marks of the proficient orator — and hence of training in rhetoric — were the clarity of structure of the speech and the expertise in drawing on an arsenal of verbal devices in order to make the case with elegance, emphasis, and wit (obviously the technique of oral delivery was also important, but it is irrelevant to the present discussion).⁷³ We are very well informed on what the Romans considered desirable as regards structure and verbal expression, for a number of rhetoricians stretching in date from Cicero and the anonymous author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* in the first century B.C. to Martianus Capella in the fifth century A.D. discussed these matters with what now seems to be interminable length and unnecessary detail. We may begin with the question of structure.⁷⁴ For convenience I shall summarise the discussion of Martianus Capella (as being the nearest in date to Gildas), although in fact it matters little which rhetorical treatise serves as basis for discussion,⁷⁵ given that the tradition of Roman rhetoric was essentially conservative and admitted almost no change during the six or seven centuries of its florescence, and given that Martianus Capella was in any case relying heavily on earlier authorities (principally Cicero's *De Inuentione* and *De Oratore*, and the third-century *rhetor* Aquila Romanus).⁷⁶ In the discussion of rhetoric which constitutes Book V of his *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*,⁷⁷ Martianus supplies a description of the parts of a properly structured speech. First, it must have an *exordium*, in which the orator explains his reasons for speaking and attempts to make his audience receptive to his arguments (§545). The *exordium* is followed by the *narratio*, which explains the circumstances of the speech (§550). The *narratio* may be one of four sorts: *historia* (an historical account of the circumstances of the case in the manner of, say, Livy), *fabula* (recounting a story neither true nor credible), *argumentum* (a fiction explaining not what has happened but what could have happened), or *iudicialis assertio* (a factual statement of the circumstances from the legal point of view). The *narratio* is followed by the *propositio* (§553), the statement of the speaker's case, which may be either a bare statement (*nuda propositio*) or may be accompanied by reasoning (*ratione subiecta*). The statement is followed by the detailed argument of the case, the *argumentatio* (§557), with which that case is proved. The *argumentatio* could be one of two sorts: artificial or inartificial. Artificial *argumentatio* might involve tales, allegories, and the like, whereas the inartificial involves precedents, hearsay, public records, oaths, and witnesses (*testes*) (§560). Finally, the

71 Gildas purports to quote Vergil directly on only one occasion (I.25), where the quotation is introduced by the phrase *ut dicitur* ('innumeris onerantes aethera uotis' = *Aeneid*, IX.24). But Gildas's text contains numerous reminiscences of Vergilian diction; see, in addition to the parallels in Mommsen's apparatus, the list provided by Winterbottom (*Gildas*, p. 10) and the further parallels noted by Neil Wright, below, pp. 112—14. Many more remain to be identified, no doubt; for example, the phrase *mucrone corusco* (III.71) is clearly indebted to Vergil (*Aeneid*, II.333) or to Statius (*Thebaid*, I.614, IX.542, and X.774).

72 Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, line 483; Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, XIX.422; Hilary of Poitiers, *In Genesim*, line 30; and Paulinus of Périgueux, *Vita Sancti Martini*, IV.194.

73 Cf. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I.iii,4; Cicero, *De Inuentione*, I.vii,9; and on Roman declamation in general, see Bonner, *Roman Declamation*, especially pp. 51—70, and Kennedy, *The Art*, especially pp. 313—22.

74 A concise account of the various Roman authorities on the structure of a speech is given by Lausberg, *Handbuch*, I.146—240.

75 Cf. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I.iii,4; Cicero, *De Inuentione*, I.xiv,19; and Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, III.ix,1.

76 Stahl et al., *Martianus Capella*, I.118—19.

77 I quote from the edition of Dick & Préaux, *Martianus Capella*.

argumentation may be summed up by recapitulation (*anacephalaeosis*) (§564) before the orator proceeds to the *epilogus* (§565), in which he incites the audience either to indignation or to mercy for his client.

The operation of structural divisions within a forensic speech may be conveniently illustrated by reference to one of Cicero's greatest speeches.⁷⁸ The speech *Pro Sestio*,⁷⁹ delivered in 56 B.C., is a (successful) defence-plea delivered at the trial of Publius Sestius, who had earlier been a supporter of Cicero during the latter's exile in 58–57 B.C., and who was being prosecuted by Cicero's arch-enemy Clodius under the *lex Plautia de ui* for having employed an armed bodyguard during his tribunate (a more or less trumped-up charge, according to Cicero). The speech is a long one (it is probable that the speech in its present form represents a written elaboration of what was actually delivered at the trial), and much of it is taken up with exposition of Cicero's political viewpoint. The structure of the speech, however, is readily discernible.⁸⁰ In the *exordium* (§§1–5), Cicero explains that he will speak not (as he had wished) to thank his supporters (such as Sestius) but to drive away further danger; accordingly, his tone will be one of lament rather than eloquence, of sorrow rather than wit (§3),

atque ego sic statuo, iudices, a me in hac causa atque hoc extremo dicendi loco pietatis potius quam defensionis, querellae quam eloquentiae, doloris quam ingenii partes esse susceptas.

Accordingly, the judges are invited to believe that the bitterness of his speech is to be attributed to dutiful sorrow and just indignation (§4):

itaque si aut acrius egero aut liberius, quam qui ante me dixerunt, peto a uobis, ut tantum orationi meae concedatis, quantum et pio dolori et iustae iracundiae concedendum putetis.

Cicero concludes his *exordium* by listing (in a string of phrases beginning with *de*) the topics relative to Sestius which he will treat: 'dicam ego de omni statu P. Sesti, de genere uitae, de natura, de moribus, de incredibili amore in bonos, de studio conseruandae salutis communis', etc. (§5). The next division of the speech, the *narratio*, consists of a lengthy account of Sestius's career and in particular of the political events of the preceding four years and their bearing on Cicero's own career (§§6–95); it is clear that this *narratio* is of the subtype called *historia*. The historical account of the events leading up to the trial of Sestius encourages Cicero to propose, in the *propositio* of his speech (§§96–8), that there are in effect two classes of men in public affairs, one allying itself with the people (*populares*), the other with the aristocracy (*optimates*); it is the *optimates* who desire what is best for the state, namely peace with honour (*cum dignitate otium*, a much discussed Ciceronian theme). The subsequent *argumentatio* is of the

inartificial type, and consists in lengthy citation of evidence first against the *populares*, then in favour of the *optimates* (§§98–143); here Cicero excoriates the *populares* in characteristically abusive language, and adduces witnesses of many sorts (even including the frequent citation of Latin poets) in support of the cause of the *optimates*. Cicero concludes his speech with a brief *epilogus* (§§144–7) in which he asks mercy for his client Sestius. It will be seen that, although *Pro Sestio* is a very bulky and apparently rambling speech, it nevertheless adheres to a strictly defined form.

Many centuries later, Gildas began his *De Excidio Britanniae* by stating that he would be 'weeping rather than declaiming' (*deflendo potius quam declamando*). But was Gildas declaiming at all? In other words, is it fruitful to analyse *De Excidio Britanniae* in terms of the traditional structure of a Roman declamation?⁸¹ In the first place, Gildas's work is not a speech, but rather (as he states explicitly) a letter: *in hac epistola* . . . However, by late Antiquity, epistolography had come to occupy a central position in rhetorical teaching. The fourth-century rhetor C. Iulius Victor, for example, taught that many of the rhetorical devices employed in speeches were also pertinent to letters;⁸² in other words, the structure of a public letter was expected to follow that of a speech.⁸³ Furthermore, there is the problem that the circumstances of Gildas's work are apparently remote from that of a trial-speech such as Cicero's *Pro Sestio*. But Roman rhetorical teaching recognised several categories of declamation besides the purely judicial; in particular, a speech might be 'demonstrative' (*demonstratiuum*), so called because it expounded something 'either by praise or blame' (*aut laudando aut uituperando*), whence there were said to be two sorts of demonstrative oratory, praise (*laudatio*) or blame (*uituperatio*).⁸⁴ The structure of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* may be convincingly interpreted in terms of demonstrative oratory: a *uituperatio*, let us say, *in patriam uitiosam*.

De Excidio Britanniae begins with an *exordium* (I.1–2) in which Gildas sets out to bewail 'the general loss of good' in tearful lamentation. Interestingly, Gildas's mention of *querelis* recalls the *querellae* of Cicero's *exordium* to the speech *Pro Sestio*, just as Gildas's sadness (*condolentis*) corresponds to Cicero's *dolori*; and as Cicero's bitterness was to be attributed to his sorrow (*dolori* . . . *concedendum putetis*), so Gildas's lament is to be attributed (*edicturum putet*) to sorrow for his country. Again like Cicero, Gildas ends his *exordium* with a list of phrases dependent on *de* and setting

⁷⁸ On the structure of Cicero's speeches in general, see Neumeister, *Grundsätze*, pp. 71–7.

⁷⁹ I quote from the edition of Klotz & Schoell, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Scripta*, VII.161–250.

⁸⁰ On the structure of *Pro Sestio*, see Kennedy, *The Art*, pp. 195–6; see also the brief account of this speech by Nisbet, 'The speeches', pp. 64–6.

⁸¹ Winterbottom ('The preface', p. 277) briefly suggested that 'the structure of the book as a whole might remind us . . . of a forensic speech'; my following remarks were inspired by this fruitful suggestion.

⁸² Halm, *Rhetores*, p. 447: 'Epistolis conueniunt multa eorum, quae de sermone praecepta sunt'.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, where Iulius Victor explains that there are two sorts of letter, private (*familiares*) and public (*negotiales*), and then adds concerning the latter: 'in hoc genere et sententiarum pondera et uerborum lumina et figurarum insignia compendii opera requiruntur atque omnia denique oratoria praecepta'.

⁸⁴ On these various divisions, see the list of authorities cited by Lausberg, *Handbuch*, I.85–138; for sake of concision I quote here from Isidore, *Etymologiae*, II.iv.5.

out the contents of the account, of his country's vices, which is to follow ('de situ, de contumacia, de subiectione, de rebellione . . . [etc] . . . dicere conamur'). Then follows a *narratio* (I.3—26) of the *historia*-subtype in which Gildas first gives a physical description of the island and then follows it with the potted historical summary of Britain and its waves of invaders which has so frequently attracted the attention of historians. Next comes the *propositio*.⁸⁵ Just as Cicero had directed his *propositio* at two political classes (the *populares* and *optimates*), so Gildas directs his attack at two targets: the holders of secular and of ecclesiastical office. Accordingly, the structure of his *propositio* (and its accompanying *argumentatio*) is bipartite: the *propositio* against holders of secular office is found in II.27—36, that against holders of ecclesiastical office in III.64—75. In each instance Gildas's case is that those entrusted with power and responsibility have betrayed that trust. In support of his allegations against them, Gildas in his bipartite *argumentatio* of the type called inartificial (II.37—63 against secular, III.76—105 against ecclesiastical office) calls witnesses: 'ut in ore multorum testium omne comprobetur Britanniae malum' (II.39). The *testes*⁸⁶ whom Gildas calls are the authors of Scripture, and the bulk of *De Excidio Britanniae* is taken up with their testimony against the sins and abuses prevalent in Britain. Gildas closes the work with an *epilogus* (III.106—10) in which, with an eye on the judgement which is to follow his case, he first reminds the offenders of the punishments (*aeterna supplicia*) attendant upon their evil deeds, and finally ends with a prayer to the *Deus totius consolationis et misericordiae* (III.110) for mercy for his clients (as it were), the few good shepherds active in Britain. Although not technically a speech, therefore, *De Excidio Britanniae* has a structure which is that of a declamation pronounced by the prosecution against a vice-ridden country. The choice, manipulation, and control of this structure would have come most naturally to someone who had been trained in declamation by a *rhetor*.

It is not only the structure of *De Excidio Britanniae* which reveals Gildas's debt to rhetorical training; the entire conception and style of the work is rhetorical. Consider the apostrophes to the five *tyranni*, addressed almost as if they were present (in the courtroom, as it were).⁸⁷ The violence of Gildas's language has been thought surprising, but it is of a piece with the violent invective with which Cicero frequently addresses his opponents in his speeches — for example, Catiline (*In Catilinam I*, §6), Piso (*In Pisonem*, §§1—3) or the Catiline conspirators *en masse* (*Pro Sulla*, §27). The same

85 It is perhaps worth remarking that, as Gildas sums up his *propositio* against ecclesiastical offices (III.75) before moving on to the *argumentatio*, he 'returns to his theme' — *sed ad propositum reuertar* — where he clearly has the technical term for the theme of his speech in mind; cf. Cicero, *Brutus*, §82 ('ut egrederetur a proposito ornandi causa'); *De Oratore*, §203 ('ad propositum reuertamur'); and Seneca the Elder, *Suasoriae*, I.7 ('itaque ad propositum reuertar').

86 Cf. III.65 (the evils of the clergy are metaphorically to be stoned by Gildas and his *testes*, 'witnesses'); and III.106, 'sed quid sparsim positus amplius utentes testimoniis'.

87 Cf. the remarks of Winterbottom who observes that the addresses to the *tyranni* are 'in the manner of forensic apostrophe' ('The preface', p. 279, n. 11).

Catiline conspirators are addressed in Cicero's *Pro Sestio* in language reminiscent in its violence, use of animal-imagery, and detailed cataloguing of sins of Gildas's denunciations of the *tyranni*. Thus Cicero says of Clodius: 'ille nefarius ex omnium scelerum colluione natus parum se foedus uiolaturum arbitratus est, nisi ipsum cautorem alieni periculi suis propriis periculis tenuisset. Hanc taetram immanemque beluam . . .' (*Pro Sestio*, §§15—16); or of Gabinius, 'alter unguentis affluens, calamistrata coma, despiciens conscios stuprorum ac ueteres uexatores aetatae suae . . . hominem emersum subito ex diuturnis tenebris lustrorum ac stuprorum, uino, ganeis, lenociniis adulteriisque confectum . . .', etc. (*ibid.*, §§18—20). Diatribe such as this is clearly in the same tradition as Gildas's denunciation of Vortiporius — 'diuersis parridiis et adulteriis constuprato' . . . 'quasi culminis malorum omnium stupro', etc. (II.31). So too Gildas's diction reveals at every turn an awareness of the conventions of oral delivery (a feature which stands out prominently in comparison with the speeches, which of course were delivered orally). Thus we find the frequent verbal interjections used for emphasis and to hold attention — *age*, *quaeso*, *inquam*, *immo* and others; or antitheses drawn by means of the simple verbal contrast *non solum . . . sed etiam* or *uerum etiam*;⁸⁸ or the orator's favourite device of mentioning a fact while purportedly bypassing it (the device is called *paraleipsis*), most often with the verb *mitto* and its compounds.⁸⁹ In fact Gildas is brilliantly proficient in using the full arsenal of rhetorical figures of speech. It would be a tiresome chore to list all such figures of speech in Gildas (for almost every sentence contains one), but it might be helpful to set down a few examples alongside parallels in the speeches of Cicero. For example, one can mention Gildas's frequent outbursts of indignation (called *apostrophe* or *exclamatio*) to his imagined audience: 'Quo utique nihil ei usquam perniciosius nihilque amarius factum est. O altissimam sensus caliginem! O desperabilem crudamque mentis hebetudinem!' (I.23);⁹⁰ or his use of a long string of questions (called *erotema*), such as that which constitutes the whole of III.69—74;⁹¹ or a

88 *De Excidio Britanniae*, I.22, 'non solum uero hoc uitium, sed et omnia quae humanae naturae accidere solent'; III.65, 'quorum uitam non solum laudo, uerum etiam cunctis mundi opibus praefero'; cf. Cicero, *In Catilinam I*, §5, 'nihil cogitas quod ego non modo audiam sed etiam uideam'; *In Catilinam II*, §8, 'Nunc uero quam subito non solum ex urbe uerum etiam ex agris ingentem numerum . . . conlegerat'; *ibid.*, §22, 'postremum autem genus est non solum numero uerum etiam genere ipso . . .'; and also the long train of such contrasts, *ibid.*, §14.

89 *De Excidio Britanniae*, I.4, 'igitur omittens priscos illos . . . errores . . . nec enumerans patriae portenta . . .'; cf. Cicero, *In Catilinam I*, §§14—15, 'praetermitto ruinas fortunarum tuarum . . . ad illa uenio quae non ad priuatam ignominiam uitiorum tuorum . . . pertinent . . . Ac iam illa omitto — neque enim sunt aut obscura aut non multa commissa postea'; *In Pisonem*, §90, 'mitto diplomata tota in prouincia passim data; mitto numerum nauium . . . mitto rationem exacti imperatque frumenti; mitto ereptam libertatem populis ac singulis . . .'.
90 Cf. Cicero, *Pro Sulla*, §23: 'O miserum et infelicem illum diem . . . o falsam spem, o uolucrum fortunam, o caecam cupiditatem, o praeposteram gratulationem . . .'. Examples of *apostrophe* abound in Cicero's speeches.

91 Examples of *erotema* also abound in Cicero's speeches; note, for example, the string of questions in *In Pisonem*, §§87—8.

sequence of question-and-answer in which the direction of the reasoning is cleverly anticipated (the device is called *rationatio*), 'Num centennis tu ob religiosa merita uel coaeuus Mathusalae exceptus paene omni prole seruaberis? nequaquam' (II.30);⁹² or of insistent repetition of the one word or phrase (called *epanaphora*), such as 'tunc quantae fugae, quantae strages, quantae diuersorum mortium poenae, quantae apostatarum ruinae, quantae gloriosorum martyrum coronae, quanti persecutorum rabidi furores, quantae econtrario sanctorum patientiae fuere, ecclesiastica historia narrat . . .' (I.9);⁹³ or the jamming together of words without distinction or connective (called *asyndeton*): 'et ob hoc reges publici priuati sacerdotes ecclesiastici suum quique ordinem seruauerunt' (I.26).⁹⁴ Examples of rhetorical figures could, as I have said, be multiplied indefinitely. The simple point is that Gildas reveals a masterly dexterity in the manipulation of such devices — dexterity which is best explained on the assumption that Gildas was well trained in the art of declamation.

Let us consider one final aspect of Gildas's rhetorical training, as it emerges from his writing. I have stressed that the principal aim of rhetorical education in the Roman empire was to provide skilled orators able to plead effectively in the law-courts, and to this end a good part of rhetorical education was taken up with study of the law (notably in the composition of *controuersiae*). Now it is striking that one of the prevailing concerns of *De Excidio Britanniae* is with law and jurisprudence. Gildas complains, for example, that Britain has *iudices*, but that they are wicked (II.27); here as elsewhere he uses the word *iudex* in such a way as to make clear that he fully understood what the office entailed in the late Roman legal system.⁹⁵ At one point he refers explicitly to a *regula recti iudicii*, where his reference is presumably to a written lawcode.⁹⁶ He upbraids Constantinus, *tyrannus* of 'Damnonia', for having broken an *horribile iuramenti sacramentum* which had been established *Deo primum iureque iurando* (II.28). In his indictment of the holders of secular office, he quotes *Sapientia* I.1 ('diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram') and then remarks tartly, 'hoc unum testimonium si toto corde seruaretur, abunde ad corrigendum patriae duces sufficeret' (II.62). Most interesting is the fact that Gildas was thoroughly familiar with the technical vocabulary of the law-courts. Two examples may be mentioned. As he summons his witnesses (*testes*) in what I have described as the *argumentatio* of his declamation, he writes 'respondeant itaque pro nobis sancti uates' (II.37). Here *respondeo* does not simply mean 'reply', but is

used in a technical sense, to denote the giving of evidence by those qualified as *jurisconsults*.⁹⁷ In Roman law, those who pleaded were not normally experts in legal technicalities, and were obliged therefore to resort to the expert opinions of *jurisconsults*; in using the word *respondeo*, Gildas is subtly adumbrating the expertise of his witnesses. Elsewhere he writes concerning the evidence to be given by his witnesses, 'in ore multorum testium omne comprobetur Brittanniae malum' (II.34). The word *comprobo* here is a technical, legal term, and means 'to establish by means of judicial evidence'.⁹⁸ Gildas's use of such terminology indicates that he was familiar with the language (and procedure) of Roman law-courts. It is not easy to see how such familiarity can be explained except on the assumption that Gildas had undergone training at the hands of a *rhetor* in preparation for a career in the law-courts.

Consideration of the structure and rhetorical figures of speech in *De Excidio Britanniae* thus confirms the impression gained from consideration of the purity of Gildas's Latin grammar and vocabulary, namely, that he was the product of late Roman schools and as such is rightly to be compared with those Late Latin authors who had received a similar schooling. This conclusion is corroborated by other independent investigations: for example, that of Neil Wright, who has convincingly demonstrated⁹⁹ that Gildas's highly mannered, poetic prose is best to be explained by comparison with that of Caelius Sedulius, a Gallo-Roman *rhetor* probably of the mid-fifth century; or that of Michael Winterbottom, who observed that the epistolary conventions manipulated by Gildas in *De Excidio Britanniae* are best to be understood through comparison with those observed in the *De Gubernatione Dei* of the fifth-century Gallo-Roman Salvian of Marseilles;¹⁰⁰ or that of Giovanni Orlandi, who shows that Gildas's use of *clausulae* affiliates him with other authors of the late Empire.¹⁰¹ In short, it is time to relinquish the opinion (fostered by mediaeval hagiography) that Gildas was the product of a monastic education of the sort received at a later time by (say) the Hisperic faminators or by Aldhelm, whose works Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* has been thought to resemble. On the contrary, Gildas's writings furnish suggestive evidence that he received a rhetorical training in the traditional Roman manner. Subsequent work on the Latin of Gildas, therefore, should look backwards to late Antiquity rather than forwards to the middle ages, for it is by consideration of the careers of certain Late Latin authors that the rhetorical features of Gildas's Latin are best to be understood. A few examples¹⁰² are: Faustus of Riez, who probably received rhetorical training in Britain but became abbot of Lérins by ca 433, probably in his early thirties; Salvian of Marseilles, whose writings give abundant evidence of rhetorical and juridical training but who

92 Cf. also *De Excidio Britanniae*, I.1. (the passage beginning 'Quid? — mihimet aio — tibine, miser . . .'); examples of *rationatio* abound in Cicero, but note especially that in *In Catilinam* I, §§20—1.

93 Cf. Cicero, *In Catilinam* II, §7: 'Quis tota Italia ueneficus, quis gladiator, quis latro, quis sicarius, quis parricida, quis testamentorum subiecto, quis circumscriptor, quis ganeo, quis nepos, quis adulter, quae mulier infamis, quis corruptor iuuentutis, quis corruptus, quis perditus inueniri potest qui se cum Catilina non familiarissime uixisse fateatur?'

94 Cf. also *De Excidio Britanniae*, I.12 ('fundunt construunt perficiunt'), and Cicero, *In Catilinam* I, §32, 'ut Catilinae profectione omnia patefacta inlustrata oppressa uindicata esse uideatis'; *In Catilinam* II, §1, 'abiit excessit euasit erupit'.

95 Cf. the remarks of Paul Schaffner, below, pp. 151—5.

96 Cf. Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, p. 134.

97 Gradenwitz *et al.*, *Vocabularium Iurisprudentiae Romanae*, V, cols 170—8.

98 *Ibid.*, I, cols 854—5.

99 Below, pp. 114—28.

100 'The preface'.

101 Below, pp. 129—49.

102 Details of the careers of the authors mentioned below may be found in Schanz *et al.*, *Geschichte*, IV.

renounced this secular training and spent some period of his life at the monastery of Lérins before becoming priest and *episcoporum magister* at Marseilles; or Sidonius Apollinaris, born of a noble Gallo-Roman family, who received a traditional rhetorical training and pursued a secular career to its highest office, that of *praefectus urbi* in 468, but then became bishop of Clermont-Ferrand (ca 470) and renounced the writing of the secular praise-poetry which had been the mainstay of his brilliant career; or Magnus Felix Ennodius (ca 473–521), a distinguished *rhetor* from whose pen a number of *dictiones* or scholastic declamations survives (including both *controuersiae* and *suasoriae*), but who subsequently became bishop of Pavia (ca 513); or Dracontius, author of the influential christian Latin poem *De Laudibus Dei*, whose proficiency and training in rhetoric (at the hands of the African Felicianus) is shown by the fact that he composed several poems in the form of rhetorical school-exercises, including a *controuersia de statua uiri fortis* and a deliberative oration placed in the mouth of Achilles, debating whether or not to sell the body of Hector; or Alcimus Auitus, author of a lengthy christian Latin poem on the Creation and Fall, whose letters show him to have had a thorough training in rhetoric and whose epitaph described him as an orator of unparalleled eloquence; or Cassiodorus, who attained to the high secular offices of consul (514) and thereafter to *magister officiorum*, whose collected administrative despatches (called *Variae*) are overburdened with exuberant rhetoric, and who subsequently founded a monastery whither he retired to devote himself to the study of christian literature; or Arator, a student of the *rhetor* Ennodius mentioned above, whose poem *De Actibus Apostolorum* was a staple of the mediaeval curriculum, but who was admired by his contemporary Cassiodorus for his proficient knowledge of Roman law; or Venantius Fortunatus, who was trained in grammar, rhetoric, and law at Ravenna in the mid-sixth century, but who subsequently became bishop of Poitiers. The list of such men could be protracted to great length. It is on the example of careers such as these that any hypothetical reconstruction of Gildas's career must be based. Their example permits the following hypothesis: that Gildas was trained at the hands of a *grammaticus* and then a *rhetor* (in the traditional Roman manner) in preparation for a secular administrative career; that he was subsequently ordained (and, perhaps, converted to the monastic order,¹⁰³ with the renunciation of his earlier secular training which such a conversion would imply); that he then followed a career in the British Church as an outspoken critic of corruption in Church and State alike.

What relevance does such a hypothesis have for our understanding of Latin culture in late Roman Britain? Let us assume, for the sake of discussion, that Gildas was a native Romano-Briton who had been trained in his homeland¹⁰⁴ and that his floruit fell during the middle years of the sixth

103 If that is what is meant by his words in III.65 (*nostro quoque ordine*); cf. Chadwick, 'Gildas'.

104 If, for sake of argument, Gildas had been trained elsewhere — in Gaul, let us say — my following remarks would have no relevance to sub-Roman Britain. Note that Caradog of Llancarfan in his *Vita S. Gildae* (composed near the middle of the twelfth century) states that Gildas studied in Gaul for seven years: 'transfretauit Mare Gallicum, in ciuitatibus

century.¹⁰⁵ I have stressed throughout that Roman rhetorical training had the severely practical aim of supplying administrators and advocates for the huge bureaucracy of Roman government; to meet this end, the government endowed schools and chairs of rhetoric throughout the Empire.¹⁰⁶ Roman government and rhetorical education went hand in hand; without the one, there was little use for the other. During the course of the late fifth century, when the fabric of Roman government began to disintegrate, state-supported schools began to close. Pierre Riché has observed that the latest datable attestation for the operation of a state-supported school in Gaul is 474.¹⁰⁷ With the disappearance of state-schools, those members of the aristocracy who wished to pursue a secular career were obliged to seek education, by private means, from an ever-diminishing number of *rhetores* willing to accept students. This makeshift system of private education in the traditional manner endured in Gaul into the early sixth century, and in Rome itself throughout the sixth century.¹⁰⁸ It would be unwise to suppose *a priori* that state-supported schools survived in Britain later than in Gaul (if indeed they had survived that long); Gildas, accordingly, must have received his rhetorical training through private instruction from a *rhetor*. That he was willing and able to do so must imply that a career in secular administration was still a feasible undertaking — in short, that some facsimile of Roman government was still in operation during his youth (in fact Gildas's correct use of terminology pertaining to Roman government points in the same direction).¹⁰⁹ If the conventional dating of Gildas is correct, some recognisable form of Roman government must have existed in Britain in the early years of the sixth century, a century after the time when the Britons, according to the sixth-century Greek historian Zosimus, 'ejected the magistrates of the Romans and, so far as they could, set up their own government'.¹¹⁰ A century seems a long time for Roman institutions to have survived; but here too our picture of Romano-British society has perhaps been unduly influenced by the picture of Dark-Age Wales gained from mediaeval sources. In any case, Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* implies an audience literate enough in Latin to take the point of his criticisms. There are no grounds for imagining Gildas as a lone voice speaking to an

Galliae remansit studens optime spatio .vii. annorum' (Williams, *Gildas*, II.394); but this is not evidence for the history of the sub-Roman period.

105 The conventional dating of Gildas is based on entries in *Annales Cambriae*. How much reliance may be placed on these entries is discussed by David Dumville, below, pp. 51–9.

106 On the state's support of education under the Empire see Marrou, *A History*, pp. 400–12, and Bonner, *Education*, pp. 146–62.

107 'La survivance', p. 436.

108 The last *rhetor* at Rome known by name was one Securus Melior Felix, who in 534 added a subscription to a manuscript of Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis* (see Préaux, 'Securus Melior Felix'); see also Riché, *Education and culture*, pp. 17–51.

109 Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, pp. 132–4.

110 The passage of Zosimus is translated by Rivet & Smith, *The Place-names*, p. 102; cf. Thompson, 'Zosimus 6.10.2'.

uncomprehending audience of illiterate barbarians.¹¹¹ His work is highly polished and sophisticated and implies an audience (no matter how great or how small) of similar sophistication. Interesting light is thrown on the sophistication of Gildas's audience by a remark of Alcimius Auitus in a letter to one Sigismund (a Burgundian, and hence a native speaker of Germanic) datable roughly within the first two decades of the sixth century.¹¹² The less polished one's Latin style, Auitus remarks, the more likely it is to be intelligible; hence even grammatical errors may be admitted with impunity. Gildas apparently felt unable to take such liberties. One of the *tyranni* named by Gildas, Maglocunus, had received training from a *magister elegans* (II.36). I take it that the man in question was a *rhetor* who accepted students for private tuition and that, in as much as he was *praeceptor paene totius Britanniae*, his reputation for this teaching was considerable. That he was a *rhetor* is implied by Gildas's adjective *elegans*, a word which is naturally used to describe an orator or an author with a polished, rhetorical style¹¹³ but which could scarcely be used to describe a monastic instructor. We know that Maglocunus at some point entered a monastery and became a monk of exemplary faith, but this conversion must have taken place after his instruction by the *magister elegans*.¹¹⁴ It is tempting to think that Gildas's audience included more than just one man capable of appreciating the rhetorical structure and polish of his diatribe. But to think in such terms is to imply that much more of the fabric of Roman civilisation was still visible in sixth-century Britain than has hitherto been assumed.

111 An interesting parallel is the case of Venantius Fortunatus who in the 560s addressed a number of Latin praise-poems to various Frankish nobles. Unlike Gildas, however, Venantius avoided the conventions of ancient rhetoric; he adopted those of his hosts (see Meyer, 'Der Gelegenheitsdichter', pp. 3—12), so that one is always aware that Venantius is addressing himself to a barbarian audience. Cf. also the remarks of Patrick Sims-Williams, below, pp. 169—70.

112 *Epistola XLVIII* (ed. Peiper, p. 77): 'Ac cum in lingua nostra hoc magis habituri sint intelligibile, quod minus fuerit expolitum, in litteris, quas per conseruum meum fieri praecepistis, possunt uitia cum securitate dictari'.

113 Cf. Cicero, *De Inuentione* I.xxxv, 61, 'a rhetoribus eis, qui *elegantissimi* atque artificiosissimi putati sunt'; *ibid.*, I.xxxvi, 63, 'causidicum . . . subtilem et *elegantem*'; *ibid.*, I.xliii, 81, 'orator modo sit *elegans*'; Seneca, *Controuersiae* I.iv, 11, '*elegans* magis declamator quam uehemens'; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* X.i, 78, 'Lysias . . . subtilis atque *elegans*'; *ibid.*, X.i, 93, 'tersus atque *elegans* maxime . . . auctor'; Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, §24, '*elegans* et declamatorium ingenium'.

114 It is unlikely that the *magister elegans* would have been giving his instruction in a monastery, for the adjective *elegans* would be utterly inappropriate to a monk who had relinquished the world and its accomplishments.