1

Poetries of Place

> With sky-blue eddies the Mosel unwinds its flood and gently rolls its ample waters in its course. It licks the scented banks of spring-green grass, and softly washes the leaves of the plants that it passes.[1]

This sixth-century description of nature as inherently beautiful may seem surprising, since we are attuned to thinking about such comments as being part of a modern approach to landscape appreciation. Its author, Venantius Fortunatus, used the Mosel's beauty and bounty to demonstrate the success of his patron, the bishop of Metz. Though the river is in part stage and metaphor, Fortunatus appreciated and valued it for its own sake. Medieval writers could and did appreciate the abstract value of nature, the beauty of rivers and riverscapes, the power and meaning of the vista, and the role of people in that vista, both as viewers and participants.

This chapter focuses on the cultural transformations of Late Antiquity, using poems and letters produced between 300 and 600. Here I argue that Late Antique poets used rivers as ways of addressing changing social, political, and religious identities and to help them create new images of self and country. These early writers were responding to literary and cultural rivers and to real encounters with river ecosystems. They shaped a sense of place and community alongside the rivers of Gaul, and their poetry reflects a sensitivity to the aesthetics of these riverscapes and an awareness of the nonhuman world of river ecosystems. Gallo-Roman poetry highlights an appreciation for the natural beauty of rivers, an awareness of their ecological abundance, and a recognition of the

[1] Fortunatus 3.13, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 171.

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manifold ways in which human cultures, histories, and economies were drawn together.

This chapter hinges on the work of three poets whose lives spanned Late Antiquity: Ausonius of Bordeaux (c. 310–c. 395), Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 431–c. 489), and Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530–c. 600). These men were all trained following classical models and spent either the majority or the entirety of their lives in the province of Gaul. They lived through a transformative period in Gallo-Roman society, in which Roman and Gallic identities merged and transformed. They were all integrated into the classical literary and cultural traditions, and their poetry echoes that background. In the 300s, Ausonius was able to live the career and life of a late Roman civil servant: teacher, imperial tutor, and author. In the next generation, some of the traditional routes to power and prestige had fallen away, but they had been replaced by new opportunities within the Christian church. Sidonius Apollinaris, a Christian and a member of the Roman elite, married into the imperial family. His career culminated in appointment as the bishop of Clermont during a period when it was repeatedly besieged by the Goths, and after his death, he was venerated as a saint.[2] The political turmoil, warfare, and loss of many aspects of the classical society that he so valued are echoed throughout his poetry and letters, which are classicizing and nostalgic.

Fortunatus arrived in Gaul in a period of relative calm, as the new Merovingian kingdom had been established. An immigrant from Italy, Fortunatus embraced his new homeland and integrated himself first into the culture of the court and eventually into church administration, becoming bishop of Poitiers around 600. He also became a saint, venerated more for the lasting impact of some of his Christological poetry than his episcopal career.

All three of these men (it should be noted that none of the voices I examine in this chapter belong to women, who are vastly underrepresented in the surviving literature of Late Antiquity) were deeply connected to Roman culture and to the peoples and landscape of Gaul. The Mosel, in particular, became a thread that links their voices and experiences. Fertile and lush, it is a vital lifeline of Gallic economy, pride, and identity, on whose banks key cities and villas perch, and down whose course the traffic of empire flows.

Fortunatus places the Mosel in a traditional landscape of leisure that echoes those of Virgil's *Georgics* and *Eclogues*. Though rooted in classical

[2] Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar, *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, 694.

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poetry, Fortunatus draws new inspiration from a fresh landscape, and a fully imagined riverscape emerges, in which the river is brimming with life and connected to the land:

> What occupies his carefree mind in tranquil times, if he lingers by the banks of the wave-driven Rhine to catch with his net in its waters the fat salmon, or roams by the grape-laden Mosel's stream, where a gentle breeze tempers the blazing sun, where vine and river moderate the midday heat: shade under the knit vine-tendrils, water with fresh-flowing waves.[3]

These poets demonstrated a deep sympathy to the natural world. Their poems see rivers and nature as able to both hold and echo back human sentiments. Riverscapes held histories; they were tangible reminders of the passing of time and helped the poets connect to past and disappearing people, cultural values, and histories while working out how they wanted their present to look. Rivers helped the poets negotiate their current cultural complexities and explore the dynamics of social and cultural power. At other times they projected consciousness and feeling onto the natural world – such as showing empathy for fish, despite the many barriers that nature throws up between our experiences and theirs.

I am drawn to the complexity of the rivers these poems describe – they are bustling with life and industry that spill over the banks. The literary riverscapes of early medieval Gaul often reflect an awareness of the complex connections within and alongside rivers, and the authors have an interest in understanding and exploring them.

READING RIVERS[4]

> Does the Meuse, sweetly sounding, haunt of crane, goose, gander, and swan, rich in its threefold wares in fish, fowl, and shipping, detain him, or the Aisne where it breaks on grassy banks and feeds pastures, meadows, and fields . . .?[5]

Ausonius, Sidonius, and Fortunatus wrote hundreds of poems and letters, a surprising number of which describe and praise the natural and built environments of Gaul, using nature to express broader cultural and political concerns. Their writings contain fascinating details about the

[3] Fortunatus 7.4, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 427.
[4] Portions of the following discussions are drawn from Arnold, "Fluid Identities."
[5] Fortunatus 7.4, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 427.

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rivers themselves, human uses of rivers, the seasonality of water resources, and the risks and rewards of living in close proximity to rivers.

Their poems reflected the power of the rivers and used rivers to highlight human authority. In a poem dedicated to the emperor, Sidonius Apollinaris has the leader claim for his son: "He is already praised by Gaul and all Europe. Here he washes in the harsh waves of the Rhine, Arar, Rhône, Mosel, Matrona, Seine, Lez, Clitis, Allier, Aude, Waal: and having cut through the Loire with an axe in vain, he drank."[6] This list of rivers, harnessed together to show the expanse of a leader's political ambitions, is also a reminder of the multitude of small and large rivers that coursed through early Gaul. The list includes famous rivers, smaller tributaries, and even one that is now forgotten.

We have to acknowledge from the start that these poets were all members of the local elite, which during this time meant that they were or became fairly wealthy, part of the political and social upper classes, and increasingly Christian. They were also Latinate – schooled in the Roman educational system and seeped in the traditions of Latin literature. They lived in an era of profound cultural, political, and religious transformation. This is reflected in their writing, and we see that their engagement with the natural world was part of their process of working through complex issues of personal and collective cultural identity.

This chapter turns to ecopoetics, exploring why and how rivers appear in early medieval literary works. What was the purpose of describing rivers? Why did the poets pay attention to them? These poets' representations of the world, even when highly descriptive, are not faithful, but rather perceptual. They are responding to real natural spaces, but creating imagined or remembered spaces that they then present to others. These sources reveal to us a poetics of place, wherein the natural world is part of human and divine spheres and is deliberately drawn into the literary, cultural, and religious agendas of the poets.

Many of these writings contain short and evocative descriptions of the rivers of Gaul – some at moments of tranquility, others in moments of distress or disruption. Often the writers seem to have intended to highlight different features of various rivers. In a poem about the journey of the young princess Galswinth from Spain to Gaul, Fortunatus guides his reader along the Loire, Seine, and Rhône in a series of passages that suggest perceived differences between the region's riverscapes. "Soon chill

[6] Sidonius Apollinaris, poem 4. Translations of Sidonius' works modernize (when needed) those by Anderson, *Sidonius, Volume 1*, 76–79.

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Loire," he writes, "its waters running crystal clear, received her, where the smooth silt cannot even conceal a fish."[7] The long course of the Loire (more than 1,000 km) and its tributary network was described by later medieval writers, too. The author of the seventh-century *vita* of St. Praejectus described the Auvergne as "a delightful area (except that it suffers rather often from westerly winds and thunderbolts) nearby which flows the river Loire as it descends in its headlong course, flowing round the province of Aquitaine and after many twists and turns extending across a great stretch of land enters the wide sea, the Atlantic Ocean."[8]

The Loire flows from the Cévennes mountains in southern France, north to Orleans, where it then turns east toward the coast, passing Tours, Angers, and Nantes before emptying into the Bay of Biscay. Its major tributaries include the Cher, the Allier, and the Vienne, and the wider Loire valley includes Bourges, Limoges, and Poitiers. Prominent monastic communities along this river system included the Martin cult center in Tours and a series of three important Carolingian abbeys that "emerged along the banks of the middle Loire": Fleury, Le Mans, and Glanfeuil.[9] These religious centers created vast dossiers of hagiographical materials, many of which I draw on later in this book.

Fortunatus continues describing Galswinth's journey from the Loire to the Seine to Narbonne "where lapping its level shores the peaceful Aude gently mingles with the waters of the Rhône."[10] This description fits nicely with what we know of the Rhône delta, full of many major and minor meandering channels watering the Camargue marshes and entering the Mediterranean at Marseille. The Rhône rises in the Swiss Alps and flows to the Mediterranean (this is unusual within my set of rivers, which generally flow to the North Sea or the Atlantic). Lyon, Vienne, Avignon, and Arles are on the river, and the greater Rhône basin includes Grenoble and Dijon and the rivers Aine, Saône, and the Aude, a tributary that drains the Pyrenees into the Mediterranean.

Though Fortunatus might fairly describe the Aude as peaceful, the Rhône is anything but. It has a swift current, already recognized and described by medieval authors. Fortunatus imagines martyrs' blood staining the Alpine snow and dyeing red the "whirling waters of the Rhône."[11] These rapids, combined with the steep and treacherous

[7] Fortunatus 6.5, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 393.
[8] Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 282.
[9] Wickstrom, *Life and Miracles of Saint Maurus*.
[10] Fortunatus 6.5, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 391.
[11] Fortunatus 2.14, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 105.

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topography of the river's mountainous stretches, could be cause for alarm and lead to shipwrecks, flash floods, and other dangers. Up through the mid-twentieth century, this dangerous river was nicknamed the "furious bull." Sara B. Pritchard points out that the river was "remarkable under normal conditions, but a confluence of factors, including spring runoff and converging storms, could result in extraordinary floods when the river channeled nearly six times its 'average' flow, rising five or even six meters above low-water levels and stretching for miles beyond its banks."[12] Yet, premodern inhabitants adapted; as Pritchard points out, houses in the flood plains were raised, households had boats, and fishing became a common supplement to diets. This is reminiscent of Petra Van Dam's work on the "amphibious" Netherlands.[13]

The river system known to ancient and medieval writers as the Rhône is today given two names – upstream of Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) in Switzerland the river is called the Saône, and downstream the Rhône.[14] Pritchard discusses the Rhône as a "transnational river" and the history of international development of the river in the twentieth century. The rectification and engineering of the river transformed a dynamic and dangerous premodern river into a measurable, governable, and navigable waterway.

In the fourth century, Eucherius of Lyon carefully described the western juncture of the Rhône and Lake Geneva: "That place itself is located in a valley between two Alpine mountains, at which point people can, by means of a hard and difficult crossing, travel through the pass." Furthermore, "the Rhône is [there] made unsafe by rocky, harsh mountains piled high, scarcely yielding any space for paths at their bases."[15] There were clearly striking differences between these rivers before modern regulation. The question remains: when the poets wrote about them and ascribed to them separate characters, was that just poetic interpretation, or do the descriptors reflect a medieval awareness of these differences between rivers and riverscapes?

In a poem for bishop Leontius II of Bordeaux, Fortunatus praised Bordeaux and its river, the Garonne, as a way of showing the bishop's fame and greatness:

[12] Pritchard, *Confluence*, xv. [13] Van Dam, "An Amphibious Culture."
[14] Olivier et al., "Rhone River Basin," 248. [15] *Passio Martyrum Acaunensium*, §5.

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> Just as all rivers are inferior to the Garonne, so every eminence is subordinate to you. The Rhine issuing from the Alps does not foam with such great vehemence, nor the Po enter more forcefully the Adriatic sea; the Danube is its equal, for its waters have longer to flow; I have crossed them; I judge of things about which I know.[16]

What might he have known? What were the characteristics of this river?

To help answer this, I'll now turn to both modern knowledge of the Garonne system and the words of Ausonius. The Garonne meanders through several ecosystems and was even in the early Middle Ages an important transit route that saw many a traveler who "by bark, skiff, schooner, galley … traverses the windings of the Tarn and the Garonne."[17] It runs from the Apennines to the Atlantic, passing through "diverse relief … [of] such areas as the high Pyrenean glacial valleys and the Piedmont" and then into large floodplains, noted by Ausonius as the "wide flood of the Garonne."[18] The Garonne connects Toulouse, "along whose side the lovely stream of the Garonne glides past,"[19] Agen, and Bordeaux before emptying out into the sea. It bears a heavier sediment load than other French rivers, perhaps leading to Ausonius' description of the river's visual appearance: "so do my own vineyards cast their reflection on the yellowing Garonne."[20]

Though Fortunatus' earlier passage could be ascribed to poetic license or even exaggeration (which Fortunatus explicitly denies), some superlatives do apply to the Garonne. The river is the third largest in France, and it also stands out among the rivers of Gaul because of the strength of its tidal estuary. The Garonne joins the Dordogne outside of Bordeaux to form the Gironde estuary, almost 75 km long and a navigable connection to the Atlantic. This estuary's significant tidal flow (2.5–5 m) yields frequent and substantial tidal bores (in the case of this system, also called *mascaret*) that are water surges prompted by rising tides that can produce substantial, often unbroken waves on river courses that can move up to 160 km from the mouth of the estuary and extend all the way past Bordeaux.[21]

[16] Fortunatus 1.15, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 45.

[17] Ausonius epistle 26, trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 2, 96–97.

[18] Descy, "Continental Atlantic Rivers," 186. Ausonius epistle 27, trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius, with an English Translation*, 105.

[19] Ausonius, "The Order of Famous Cities," trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 1, 279.

[20] Ausonius, *Mosella*, trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 1, 236.

[21] Bonneton et al., "On the Occurrence of Tidal Bores."

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Until the 1960s, the Seine also had a notable tidal bore that was eliminated after centuries of regulation and engineering of the river. This bore was described in the ninth-century *Gesta Abbatum Fontanellensium*, where the author explains how "the spring tide waters arrive with such force that for over five miles or even more both the sound of its rumbling strikes human ears and the sight as if from the highest lighthouse its currents enter the river. And [the tide] is pushed through the streams of the aforementioned two rivers with such force that the water spreads across the nearby plains, like the Egyptian Nile, for the space of more or less eight hundred paces up to the walls of the monastery. And, the contest ended, the waters return back to the ocean whence they had come."[22]

The Garonne was seen as an unusual ocean/river hybrid. Ausonius describes the "sea-like Garonne" as "swelled with the flood-tide of the billowy deep" and as a river that "challenges the main."[23] Fortunatus writes that the Garonne "foamed with such great vehemence" and enters forcefully into the ocean.[24] Paulinus of Pella, a fifth-century poet and the grandson of Ausonius, wrote in an autobiographical poem that "at length, the end of my long journeying reached, I was borne into the land of my forefathers and to my grandfather's [Ausonius] house, coming to Bordeaux where beauteous Garonne draws Ocean's tidal waves within the walls."[25]

Sidonius describes the system's dynamics in remarkable detail. "There is a place," he writes, "where two rivers, the Garonne, sped whirling down from a dripping mountain-crag, and the mossy Dordogne, which rushes with like swoop to the plain and at last flows out from a bend in its sandy channel, gradually commingle their slowing streams." This confluence is the Gironde estuary, where "the sea rushes up against the current and with constant coming and going repels or courts the waters that the rivers roll down." He then mentions the tidal bore, explaining that "when the Garonne, repulsed by the waxing of the moon, once more gathers its own tidal flood upon its back, then it returns, speeding in headlong billows, and now seems to flow, not backwards, but downwards to its source. Then even the Dodogne, though as the lesser it receives from its flowing brother but a lesser share of the water is likewise swollen by the

[22] *Gesta Abbatum Fontanellensium*, §1.66.
[23] Ausonius, *Mosella*, trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 1, 263.
[24] Fortunatus 1.15, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 45.
[25] Paulinus Pellaeus, "the Eucharisticus," trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 2, 311.

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ocean and its banks become sea-shores."[26] This eloquent description is the geographical frame for an elite villa or castle outside of Bordeaux, which he often visited as a guest, and which is explored further below.

Sidonius acknowledges the seasonality of the Garonne when addressing the "kindly choir of Nereids," whom he asks to "teach the Naiads there at the season when the Garonne flows back thither and ye come, cleaving the sea in the midst of the river."[27] The Garonne was an unpredictable river, however. Bore tidal waves, which can be up to 1.3 m high, often occur as a series of high, rolling, unbroken ridges.[28] These bores are strong enough to shape the estuary and the river dynamics, disrupt small boat traffic, and have the potential to drown unsuspecting swimmers.

In a letter to a friend reluctant to make the trip to Bordeaux, Sidonius acknowledges people's potential misgivings about the Garonne, and indicates that expert knowledge of the tides and mixed ocean/river identity near the estuary was at times needed for safe travel. He encouraged his friend to make the journey and wrote that he would ease his way as much as possible, even sending a friend who "will traverse the back-flowing flood of the Garonne and meet you at the above-mentioned place not only with a fleet but with the river."[29]

This invocation of river travel is a chance for me to shift gears again – one of the reasons that these poets paid so much attention to the rivers is that they encountered them a lot more often than we do – rivers were roadways and resources – they were part of a network of human and natural systems, and the poets thought about what made rivers unique yet also how they were all connected to each other. Sidonius once answered a friend's request to hear about his trip from Gaul to Rome and "what rivers I viewed made famous by the songs of poets, what cities renowned for their situation, what mountains celebrated as the reputed haunts of deities, what fields claiming the interest of the sight-seer by reason of their memories of battle." In his answer, Sidonius focuses on his immediate experience with rivers – as a traveler on their waters. He describes the human infrastructure built up around the rivers, and the obstacles and

[26] Sidonius Apollinaris, poem 22, trans. Anderson, 270–71. [27] Ibid., 262–63.
[28] Bonneton et al., "On the Occurrence of Tidal Bores."
[29] Sidonius Apollinaris, letter 8.12, trans. Anderson and Semple, *Sidonius, Volume 2*, 475.

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aids to successful travel: "As to the rivers, I found that such of them as were not navigable had convenient fords or at any rate bridges fit for traffic: these our forefathers have constructed on a series of vaulted arches reaching from the foundations up to the roadway with its cobbled surface."[30]

Sidonius then boarded a boat, and once on the water, his description shifts from infrastructure to the rivers themselves as he "passed the Addua, the swift Athesis, and the sluggish Mincius, rivers which have their sources in the mountains of Liguria and the Euganeans." This letter describes the necessary stages of a trip to Rome, but we can see that Sidonius is also curious about the rivers themselves. Acting in ways reminiscent of modern leisure travelers, he starts poking up and down the river courses, exploring these new environments:

> In each case I cruised a little way upstream from the point of confluence so as to view each actually in the midst of its own waters. Their banks and knolls were everywhere clad with groves of oak and maple. A concert of birds filled the air with sweet sounds; their nest-structures quivered, balanced sometimes on hollow reeds sometimes on prickly rushes, sometimes too on smooth bulrushes: for all this undergrowth, nourished on the moisture of the spongy soil had sprouted confusedly along the river banks.[31]

Thoreau-like in his joy at recounting his riverine adventures, Sidonius provides a forceful reminder that modernity did not invent the appreciation for nature.

"Being by rivers –" writes McMillin, "whether that means residing alongside them, standing or swimming in them, walking in or near them – belongs to a special category of river experience."[32] Though the scientific articulation of ecology was not yet part of the learned person's repertoire, medieval people who lived alongside rivers and interacted with them on a regular and intimate basis understood, valued, and even had affection for the many processes and species that interact along the water's edge.

Medieval experiences of rivers would have been much different than ours. Both Ausonius and Fortunatus frequently travelled by river, with ample opportunities to observe the waters, the shores, and the natural and human activity up and down them. The pace of their travel, so different from that of today, encouraged them to observe difference and variation,

[30] Sidonius, letter 1.5, trans. Anderson, *Sidonius, Volume 1*, 353. [31] Ibid., 353

[32] McMillin, *The Meaning of Rivers*, 27.

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and the frequency of their trips in many different seasons would have highlighted the annual cycles that shape lesser-regulated rivers. It is also important to remember that medieval communities did shape and regulate rivers – building bridges, canals, weirs, millponds, sluices, etc. – though the scale at which they could do this cannot compare to our modern efforts, theirs were by no means "wild" rivers.

When Lawrence Buell coined the phrase "environmental imagination," he made the claim that literary or creative nonfiction had a space in the growing field of ecocriticism. Using Thoreau's work as his touchpoint, he argued for an expanded definition of the "environmental text" to include "the journal, the travel narrative, the natural history essay, the local sketch, none of which have gained the critical prestige of wilderness romance or the romantic nature lyric."[33]

Though it might seem that the gap between Walden Pond and the voices of fourth-century Latin poets, saints, and hagiographers is too vast to overcome, I hope here to demonstrate that the methods and questions raised by ecocriticism are applicable to the more distant past, and that early medieval voices can in turn be of interest to those working on more contemporary issues. Though these poets did not imagine themselves as either "nature writers" or ecologists, they nonetheless grappled with questions relevant to those who hope to understand other, different ways of interacting with our natural world and of understanding the intertwining of place, memory, nature, industry, leisure, and work.

THE MOSEL

The Mosel is a beautiful river set in an idyllic landscape. In the sixth century, Fortunatus evoked this beauty, writing that "with sky-blue eddies the Moselle unwinds its flood and gently rolls its ample waters in its course. It licks the scented banks of spring-green grass, and softly washes the leaves of plants that it passes."[34] This image of a lush, lazy river winding its way by vineyards is the one most often envisaged today, and one that spurs travel and tourism.

But the Mosel was also a major traffic artery, linking several key early medieval cities, most notably Trier and Metz. Near Trier it narrows

[33] Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 25.
[34] Fortunatus 3.13, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 171.

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dramatically (the valley being only 200–300m wide) flowing between the Hünsruck and Eifel mountains. Right before this narrowing, the river is joined by its largest tributary, the Saar, increasing the speed of the river, and leading over time to an accumulation of meanders carved into the rock. These introduce both navigation challenges and flood risks, especially in the winter, when the river is at its highest discharge rates.[35]

Further exaggerating our modern sense of the Mosel as calm is the fact that it is now heavily channeled and regulated. Hundreds of kilometers of the river are now navigable for large boats with a total of twenty-eight weirs and locks and a series of bypass canals, most constructed during the 1970s. As Uehlinger et al. point out, "the development of the Moselle and Saar Rivers to waterways for large vessel traffic severely affected river morphology, causing uniform cross-sections, stabilized banks, and loss of gravel bars. The numerous weirs also impede fish migration."[36] These changes also shifted cultural perceptions of the river, replacing a more varied and complex system with a postcard-perfect image.

The premodern river, far less regulated and controlled, frequently posed risks. We glimpse this dangerous river in a story of a salt merchant whose boat became unmoored at Metz and led the crew, unwittingly, down the Mosel to Trier. When they woke up, at first they were confused, because "we thought that we were still tied up at Metz, we did not know how we had traveled or how we had either sailed or flown." As it became clear just how far they had come, they became aware of the dangerous riverscape they had just unwittingly traversed. The surprised merchant reported that "we did not feel the river, and we avoided the welling waves of the Mosel river that cause wrecks; it is truly [amazing] that we safely passed by the rocks during the night."[37] Though couched in a tale of safe passage, we here see a fluctuating Mosel that was hazardous, with unpredictable waves and currents and treacherous rocks, threatening routine trade and transit up and down its length. Descending from the Vosges, the Mosel winds its way through France, Germany, and Luxembourg before emptying into the Rhine at Koblenz, "the point where," as Fortunatus described, "two rivers mingle their streams, the one the foaming Rhine, the other the fruitful Moselle."[38]

Perhaps the best-known work that I will be discussing in this chapter is Ausonius' fourth-century *Mosella*, a 438-line poem set up as a

[35] Uehlinger et al., "The Rhine River Basin," 239–40. [36] Ibid., 239–40.
[37] Gregory of Tours, "Miracles of St. Martin," §4.29, 296.
[38] Fortunatus 10.9, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 679.

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multidimensional hymn of praise to the river.[39] The poem is complicated and rich, and representative of the many different things that rivers meant to early medieval Gaul. Ausonius recognized the Mosel as part of an extended riverscape that included the river, the mountains, and the cities, fish, plants, animals, and people who lived in and alongside it. His river is a lushly imagined place, full of the products of natural bounty, human ingenuity, sites of memory and belonging, work and play. We see his emotional and deeply personal response to the river; he is a participant in the riverscape he describes, and his ability to "see" the river affords us a chance to see the medieval environmental imagination.

The *Mosella* shifts tone and topic frequently, leaving the impression of a series of collected vignettes, much like a modern traveler's postcards, rather than a smooth survey of the course of the entire river. As Michael Roberts points out, this approach fits the broader aesthetic of Late Antiquity. He argues that "Late antiquity preferred juxtaposition and contrast to logical interrelationship; contiguity no longer required continuity. The impression of an organic whole, the sense of proportion, is lost, but it is compensated for by the elaboration of the individual episode. Late antique poetry has its own unity, but it is conceptual and transcends the immediate historical content of a narrative."[40]

The opening of the *Mosella* is structured around an imagined trip along the river. After traveling to visit past historic battlefields, Ausonius walks through a nearby forest, emerging to find an overview of the Mosel valley opening up beneath him. Ausonius encourages his readers to gaze on the river, and to allow the gaze to wander and to rest as he conjures up visions of other rivers and other times. It is often presumed that an appreciation for nature, or for the "prospect" or view is a product of modernity and of the transformations of ideas of individualism and religion during the Enlightenment. Medieval people are generally understood to have no appreciation for nature or for the "landscape" – with St. Francis' prayers and Petrarch's "Ascent of Mont Ventoux" held up as exceptions that prove the rule. For one striking example of this, Augustine Berque writes of Petrarch's letter, "however, we are already in the fourteenth century, and Europe is *beginning* to look at landscape ... from the Renaissance on, the landscape as such begins to exist for Europeans."[41]

[39] Roberts, "The Mosella of Ausonius: An Interpretation"; Kenney, "The 'Mosella' of Ausonius"; Green, *The Works of Ausonius*.

[40] Roberts, *The Jeweled Style*, 56.

[41] Berque, *Thinking through Landscape*, 2. Emphasis mine.

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Yet, wherever we turn in the literature of late antique Gaul, we are confronted with writers who see and depict a complicated environment, and who appreciate the view.

Fortunatus describes a beautiful church of St. Martin, quickly noting that "the site itself adds to the appeal, as high over the fields it stands out on the lofty slopes of a swelling hill." He then takes this vantage of the church from below and shifts it, and our perspective, as he asks us to imagine in turn the view that the church enjoys: "On a high, extended ridge it overlooks all below, and everywhere it looks the prospect is delightful."[42]

The Mosel opens up secrets to careful viewers. "We can see through the depths," Ausonius continues, "seeing through to [your] inmost spaces, deepnesses and secrets, when [our eyes] pass over the soft shallows of the stream, and the deep blue light of the flowing waters reveals scattered shapes."[43] As Paolo Squatriti argues, in the early Middle Ages water's clarity was seen as a marker of purity and health.[44] Clarity invoked moral as well as biological purity, and the Mosel is a model river: "ship-bearing as the sea, bending like a river with your sloping waves, and resembling a lake with your glassy depths, as restless as the brooks you pass, you make yourself better than them, and your water is better for drinking than chilly spring waters [27–30]."

Clear, smooth, and slow, the Mosel encourages Ausonius to explore ideas of vision and reflection. The clarity allows people to look both at and through the river. This clarity (or honesty and transparency) allows perception of the true beauty of the river:

> A river keeping nothing secret, your depths can be seen through your smooth surface: like the refreshing air spreads out open to steady eyes, and the calm winds do not prevent them [from seeing/travelling] through open space, if, persevering, we can see through the depths, seeing through to [your] inmost spaces, deepnesses and secrets, when [our eyes] pass over the soft shallows of the stream, and the deep blue light of the flowing waters reveals scattered shapes. [55–62]

Pebbles shine and gleam like pearls on the bottom of the river, and the light reveals the green moss and the river plants.

Yet Ausonius was not content with this simple read; his poem moves quickly to complicate this act of viewing. He introduces a tension between

[42] Fortunatus 1.6, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 23–25.
[43] Ausonius, *Mosella*, lines 56–62. All translations of the *Mosella* in this section are my own. In this close read of the *Mosella*, I will be including line numbers in-text.
[44] Squatriti, *Water and Society*.

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the depths and the surface of the river and suggests that this first level of watching can be thin: "the fishes, however, playing together, a slippery multitude, by means of their meandering, tire out eager eyes [75–76]." The fish, between the surface and the riverbed, distract "eager eyes." Recognizing this initial gaze as incomplete, he begins what is the best-known portion of his poem, the so-called "catalog of fishes" in which he describes fourteen different fish of the Mosel, along with "all the offspring of their countless tribe" [231]. He describes their appearance, diet, behavior, and habitat (and sometimes taste when cooked). In his discussion of the salmon, "smeared with a reddish-purple," Ausonius picks up the connection between what happens below and on the surface of the waters. The salmon "beats the waves with broad tail, whose hidden strokes beneath the smooth surface from the middle of the stream, are revealed, echoed on the top of the water [97–100]."

When the catalog is complete, Ausonius again calls attention to the roving gaze, connecting it to the power of both beholding and naming, and, in a sense, to performance: "Let Bacchus' gifts introduce a new spectacle for our wandering gaze, drawn to the highest peak stretching high above harsh cliffs, pulled toward the sunny spots and bends and curves [where] the vines rise up in a natural theater [152–56]." As his invocation of Bacchus suggests, Ausonius connects his contemporary river to the rivers of the classical world. A brief discourse on the sensuality and secretiveness of the elusive nymphs allows Ausonius to add even more depth to his concept of vision, and he plays with ideas of the illicit gaze: "Let the secret things stay covered, and let Reverence remain hidden, secret in its small streams." Yet as soon as this idea is aired, Ausonius jumps right back to the licit view, starting the next line with a new view, announcing that "*this* enjoyable sight is no secret [187–89]."

This too is complicated because this permissible view into the river is actually of the non-river. It is instead the reflection of the landscape on the surface of the river: "the sparkling river reflects the shady hills, and the waters of the river seem to sprout leaves and the streams are sowed with vines." [189–91]. This gaze, which hides things that should be left hidden, blurs the images; reflections are not perfect, as "Everything swims, wavering, bound in motion, and the distant tendrils quiver, as a glassy vintage rises up in the waves." As dusk falls, the whole riverscape is blurred, and "the river itself blends with the image of the hills and the edges of the shadows tangle up with the stream [194–200]."

The reflected view of the landscape on the river has another focus, too; it is a reminder that the river is not mere water, but a whole place.

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Ausonius, since his first moment of looking, has been unable to see just the water. In fact, he never really sees the water. He sees either through it or off it, never fully envisioning the river in the ways that it is most often seen in the modern world – as a conduit for water. Instead, Ausonius' river is a composite – it is made of pebbles and fish and trees and vines and people and boats. Ausonius plays here with a unique feature of riverscapes – reflection and the permeable barrier of the water surface.

Ausonius' emphasis on reflection was picked up centuries later by Fortunatus, who also loved the Mosel. One of Fortunatus' more striking poems, "On His Voyage," draws directly on the *Mosella*. This poem describes Fortunatus' first arrival in Gaul and is structured around the river as a vehicle for Fortunatus' personal rise in political status, and his transformation from stranger to welcome guest. The poem begins when Fortunatus arrives at Metz and is attached to the back of the royal fleet and "speedily set sail on a slender bark."[45]

Though aware of the risks that river travel posed, Fortunatus tended to focus more on the Mosel's scenic qualities, and the power of time and the beauty of ruins restored. As he continued his voyage past Trier, he noted that "the very ruins show evidence of their power. On every side we see the threatening mountain peaks, where the pointed crags burst up through the clouds, where sheer cliffs raise up high their rocky faces, and shaggy stone outcrops surge upward to the stars. But here not even solid stone can be unfruitful: the stones give birth and from them wine flows."[46]

These rocks and cliffs become a clear aesthetic point of the landscape – a sublime reminder of the power of time and nature. They also feature into one of the most striking aspects of this poem – the power of the human voice. Fortunatus weaves his own voice and the voices of his new companions directly into the riverscape. Ausonius' poem highlighted the human gaze and called attention to it by pausing on various moments of visual reflection. Fortunatus augments his own voice by dwelling on another reflective feature of river valleys – the echo. He invokes classical myth and culture: "But so that no sweetness was denied me as I traveled, I feasted on the Muses, drank in music with my ears." He continues, weaving together the landscape and soundscape, as "the voices of the instruments rang out to strike the mountains, and the overhanging rocks

[45] Fortunatus 10.9, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 675. [46] Ibid., 677.

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echoed back to them their melody. Once the web of bronze strings let forth its gentle whisper, the bushes on the mountainside replied with reedy piping."[47] Fortunatus places the landscape in direct dialogue with the human voice and emotions.

He picked up the theme of nature echoing song and emotion yet again in "On Galswintha," a much darker poem that recounts the murder of the young queen. In this poem, the landscape twice echoes human emotion. First, when Galswinth leaves Spain, and "the valleys are filled with weeping, the heights tremble … and the very forest groans with the echoing murmur." The poet returns to the theme upon Galswinth's death, when her sister searches out the truth; "Germany heard the sister's passionate laments; wherever she made her way, she struck the stars with her cries. Often she called on you by name, Galswintha, her sister, a name the springs, forests, rivers and countryside echo back."[48]

Though he believes poetry doesn't have the power to save people, Fortunatus explains how Christian belief could. In other poems, he deliberately compares the decaying and forgotten bodies of pagans to the incorrupt bodies of saints, clothed and decorated by the practices of the Christian cult of the dead.[49] Christian saints and martyrs convey a truer blessing that "survives their passing," and "power is actually engendered in such men by death, and while they occupy the tomb, they bring strength to failing limbs."[50] He then wraps up the natural world into this discussion, comparing the saints to the richest of spices and the most beautiful of smells. He then tells his distant correspondent about how he often looks for him in the signs of nature: "If a light breeze comes up, he thinks that it brings a greeting."[51]

Winds and waters could carry human voices, greetings, and desires. In another poem, Fortunatus finds along the Mosel his own music reflected back to him: "Now with quivering murmur, now with clear song, the music echoes from the rock exactly as it passes from the air." As the reflections in Ausonius' poem unite the mountain and sky, for Fortunatus "Song joins with its sweetness the separate shores; one voice unites hills and stream in music."[52]

[47] Ibid., 679. [48] Fortunatus 6.5, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 397.
[49] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*. [50] Fortunatus 7.12, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 455.
[51] Ibid., 457. [52] Fortunatus 10.9, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 679.

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FLUID IDENTITIES

> Fortune wheels along, subject to the whim of chance, and our life, ever hazardous, never finds secure footing. Always uncertain . . . we humans live in a condition more fragile than glass.[53]

Recognizing that they were in a cultural and political borderland, the poets let rivers work for them as they worked through their own questions about cultural identity. Because so much of ecocriticism has been modern in its focus, the process that I am looking at in these poems has often been termed the development of a "national imaginary." Tricia Cusack links this to rivers and riverscapes, pointing out that "It is clear therefore that river narratives, transmitted through stories and visual imagery, have tended to metamorphose to accommodate the dominant religious and political groups in different cultures at different times. National riverscapes will be seen to fulfill a similar function that is, one adapted to carrying the contemporary ideologies of elite strata in the nation-state."[54] But how do we trace this impulse before the rise of the nation? As Franca Bellarsi claims, "Ecocritical questioning goes hand in hand with the interrogation of human identity and borders."[55] In spite of their distance from us in time, these authors' words and ideas resonate with modern concerns about ethnicity, identity, political boundaries, and the integration of new groups into states and societies.

Rivers' permanence in the landscape, ties to power and wealth, and ability to change, grow, and shrink – to adapt – and make them excellent metaphors for the concerns of fragile and adapting cultural groups. As T. S. McMillin notes in his study of rivers in American literature, "All of those variables make it difficult to pin 'rivers' down as a category of knowledge. And we also have to consider the notorious paradoxical qualities of rivers, their ability to be or do several things at once. Rivers *move*, flowing over land, through history, and among diverse groups of people, changing considerably from their source to their destination; yet they also *stay*, permanent blue lines on our maps, constant waypoints and lasting landmarks."[56] River borders are historically and culturally compelling because they make impressive, legible, and visible frontiers. Yet they are also fluid and shifting, attracting the attention of these poets who

[53] Fortunatus 6.5, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 377.
[54] Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities*, 8.
[55] Bellarsi, "European Ecocriticism: Negotiating the Challenges of Fragmentation?" 126.
[56] McMillin, *The Meaning of Rivers*, xii.

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were also exploring the ways that ethnicity, German-ness, and Roman-ness were constantly being repositioned and renegotiated.

All three poets construct and describe rivers as frontiers and as borderlands, linking identity to riverine allegiance and using differences between rivers as markers of the differences between peoples. This appears when the poets are negotiating the issue of what marks the German from the Roman. In turn, to firm up their own identities as members of a Roman-influenced elite, rivers and water become ways that the poets show the endurance of Roman identity and civilization (*romanitas*) in Gaul.

Finally, while acknowledging the complexities of ethnic identity, all three poets show a close identification with *place*. Their work creates a sense of geographic belonging, of being closely allied to a landscape and a place, embodied in the region's rivers. The Mosel, the Rhine, and the Garonne, in particular, signify the poets' belonging and Gaul as home and homeland. As Lawrence Buell points out, "place" can be a "resource of environmental imagination," and that "an awakened sense of physical location and of belonging to some sort of place-based community have a great deal to do with activating environmental concern."[57]

A growing body of work has shown the relevance of ecocritical concerns to medieval and Early Modern literature.[58] Though some of these works explore older pieces, most have focused on later authors, and particularly English ones, primarily the recognized authors viewed by modernists as relevant and resonant, such as Shakespeare and Chaucer.[59] However, little of this premodern ecocriticism focuses on medieval Latin literature, despite the fact that this dominated European culture for centuries before the emergence of vernacular writing. Late Antique and early medieval voices have much to contribute to ongoing discussions of the formation and transformations of environmental imaginations.

Rivers are compelling, and they are often used by artists as focal points of artistic engagement with both nature and human culture. In what follows, I hope to show that Late Antique poets used their poetic voices to reflect on, navigate, and participate in transforming their social contexts. The poets of Gaul, by bringing the rivers and riverscapes of Gaul into the foreground of their works, used nature as a way of exploring and confronting changed identities.

[57] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 56. [58] Nardizzi, "Medieval Ecocriticism."

[59] Siewers, *Strange Beauty*; Lees and Overing, eds., *A Place to Believe In*. Jones, *Reading Rivers in Roman Literature and Culture*, 44.

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Ausonius of Bordeaux's life and career (310–390) covered almost the entire fourth century. He came from a prominent, wealthy, and Christian Gallo-Roman family who were part of the newer elite. As Peter Brown wrote, "the aura of faded nobility that seems to have clung to his family proved an advantage to Ausonius."[60] Ausonius became a prominent teacher in Bordeaux, a job he held for almost thirty years. Around 364, he went to Trier where he served as a tutor to the imperial family, allying himself with the emperors Valentinian and his son Gratian. He retired to Bordeaux around 379 – just in time to avoid the turmoil of the 380s when Gratian was killed, shifting the political scene in Gaul quite dramatically.[61]

Ausonius wrote hundreds of poems and letters, ranging from 121 brief epigrams to the complex *Mosella*. The range of length, styles, and subject matter of Ausonius' poems makes them a hard corpus to master and has made Ausonius, in turn, both fascinating and frustrating. As R. P. H. Green notes, "a poet who tackles such matters as astrology, zoology, the Nicene Creed, the Olympic Games ... and if not cabbages and kings ... then at least hyacinths and Caesars, is likely to appear forbiddingly arcane and bewilderingly diverse."[62] This range is on full display in the *Mosella*, which presents a series of vignettes of human and nonhuman life along the river.

The authors of Late Antiquity were attuned to the subtleties, beauty, and natural dynamics of their local landscapes. Ausonius' Mosel is the prime geographic feature of Gaul and a symbol of Gallic pride. He links the river to economic development, sport and leisure, natural beauty and abundance, and, I argue, the successful integration of Germanic peoples into the Roman Empire. In the passage that follows, from late in the poem, Ausonius has just finished a long description of the villas and bath houses along the river (a subject I will return to) and then shifts the focus to the many tributaries of the Mosel:

> But for me, O Moselle – as worthy to be remembered as the ocean – how can there be an end to speaking of your sparkling tributaries, the numberless streams which run through many different mouths (into your) breadth. They might be able to change their courses, but instead they rush to bestow their name upon you. [349–53]

[60] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 188. [61] Sivan, "Redating Ausonius' Moselle."
[62] Green, *The Works of Ausonius*, vii.

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Ausonius then lists rivers that are tributaries of the Mosel, including the Sauer, the Drohn, and the "famed Kyll, known for its fish," finally invoking the Saar, which he describes as prolonging its course so that, though tired, "it may let its wearied mouth flow out underneath imperial walls." [369] Ausonius ends this excursus by concluding that "a thousand others desire to become yours, each according to the greater strength that propels it: each hurried by the course of their waves and their character." [362–64] Personifying the rivers suggests that each have wills and character of their own and are in fact agents in their destinies.

At first, this passage seems to be a poetic topography; but if we step back and take the Mosel as representing the Gallic version of Rome, and the other rivers as the Germanic tribes of the 300s, it becomes an even richer passage. We can read this as both a description of a powerful river and a way of the poet working out the complex status of the Roman tributary states – the many tribes who by the fourth century wanted to integrate into late antique Roman culture. Michael Roberts backs up this interpretation, pointing out that this "catalogue of tributaries . . . presents the ideal: a mutually gratifying, non-aggressive assimilation."[63] And Tricia Cusack sees a similar literary impulse in a 19th century work on the Thames, in which "the Thames functioned as a metaphor for the assimilation of waves of conquerors into a single stream of national history."[64] By the 300s, Roman culture was itself represented for many not by Rome itself, but by the vibrant cities along the Mosel. As Peter Brown explains, "it was a world where, for much of the fourth century, many roads led to Trier – and few to Rome."[65] Ausonius recognizes the agency and desires of the tributaries, all hurrying to join (with varying degrees of force) the Roman cultural stream. The tribal streams all aspired to become merged with the Roman Mosel.

RIVERS AND ROMANITAS

Rivers are porous boundaries, and though they marked Roman-ness and served to define the German other, those differences could still become blurry. Ausonius gives us the chance to explore this in more detail in a series of poems about a young Swabian slave, Bissula, who was given to him as spoils of war. Ausonius first freed his apparent concubine, and

[63] Roberts, "The Mosella of Ausonius: An Interpretation," 351.
[64] Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities*, 60.
[65] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 187.

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then devoted a full book of poetry to her, though only three of the poems survive. The first of these poems essentializes her ethnic otherness from the beginning, connecting her physical (and sexual) identity to her birth:

> Bissula, sprung from the stock of and (belonging to) the household gods beyond the icy Rhine, Bissula, knowing the origin source of the Danube, seized as a captive into my hands, but released from my hands, through her charms she has dominion over him whose war-prize she once was. Without a mother, lacking a tutor, [not knowing the patriarchal mastery of empire].[66]

Bissula is presented as able to intuit and embody nature. She in some ways *is* the icy Rhine, and she knows "the Danube's birth" – her own source and origins give her native knowledge. Yet Roman culture and her male master tame her, and she is freed. But though "civilized" she remains German:

> And, just as she was changed by the good things of Latin culture, she remained a German in appearance, with blue eyes and golden hair. The girl is changeable; sometimes her tongue defines her, sometimes her form; the one shows her to be born of the Rhine, the other of Latium.[67]

Bissula's culture and identity change – from free to slave to free again, barbarian to civilized, ruled to ruler – yet she is never fully transformed, and Ausonius struggles to classify her.

The link between language and identity is also made by Sidonius, who similarly wrestled with the issue of cultural, ethnic, and national identities. In a letter to Syagrius (the Roman military commander who would eventually be defeated by Clovis), Sidonius expresses his amazement at how the Roman learned "the German tongue with such ease." He asks him to tell how he "managed to absorb so swiftly into [his] inner being the exact sounds of foreign people" while also having mastered Virgil and Cicero's works.[68] In a letter to Mamertus of Vienne, he remarked upon the tensions between Rome and the Germanic peoples, and the ways that Gauls may have felt trapped somewhere between the two. He wrote that "there is a rumour that the Goths have moved their camp to Roman soil; we luckless Arvernians are always the gateway to such incursion." He continues, noting that the Goths were driven by "their failure so far to make the channel of the Loire the boundary of their territories

[66] Green, *The Works of Ausonius*, 31, lines 1–5. The part in brackets includes a problematic transmission of the text.

[67] Ibid., lines 9–12. Latium is a poetic and ancient phrase for Italy and Rome.

[68] Sidonius, letter 5.5, trans. Anderson, *Sidonius, Volume 1*, 181–83.

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between the Atlantic and the Rhone," which Sidonius imagined was due to the Auvergne.[69]

Generations later, Fortunatus echoed Ausonius' images of rivers as the markers and the mouthpieces of Empire. In a poem addressed to the emperor Justin and his wife Sophia, Fortunatus has Gaul and its rivers proclaim fealty to the Eastern Empire: "This action, Augustus, Gaul celebrates too in singing your merits, this Rhone, Rhine, Danube, and Elbe proclaim."[70] But of course, there is still a big question in this attempt to integrate or define the German: what about Rome?

In an imperial panegyric, Sidonius puts this question into the mouth of a personified Rome, who bemoans to Jupiter her dwindling culture and power, remembering a time when the empire had more sway and more visual power. Rome cries, "Alas! Where now are those pageants, those triumphs rich of a consul poor? My spears affrighted Libya's clime, and I laid the yoke even a third time upon the faithless Carthaginian."[71] Sidonius then presents the dwindling power of Rome in much the same way he in other works represents the ascendancy of the North – through her river. Rome adds that, once upon a time, at the height of her power, "Ganges of the Indian, Phasis of the Colchian, Araxes of Armenia, Ger of the Ethiopians, Tanais of the Getae, all trembled before my Tiber." Sidonius was able to recognize the shifting of power to the German lands, the changing character of the empire, and the beauty of the Gallic landscape and the way in which *romanitas* could still play out in "barbarian" or "foreign" lands.

Sidonius was well-positioned to understand this dynamic. He was from a powerful and well-connected Gallo-Roman family. He was raised as a Christian and he received both schooling and access to the highest levels of society, perhaps allowing for his eventual marriage to the daughter of the future emperor Avitus.[72] Through this marriage, he was connected with powerful people, and as is common in such a context, his career reached high points but was also full of turmoil and setbacks. His personal and political ties got him in some trouble once Avitus was killed, though he was able to win both a pardon and renewed positions from his successor Majorian (for whom he wrote a panegyric in thanks).

[69] Sidonius, letter 7.1, trans. Anderson and Semple, *Sidonius, Volume 2*, 287.
[70] Fortunatus, Appendix 2, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 775.
[71] Sidonius, Epigrams 7, trans. Anderson I, p. 125.
[72] Anderson, *Sidonius, Volume 1*, xxxii–xxxvi.

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Throughout his career he moved back and forth between Gaul and Rome, where he held political office.

Yet, when Majorian, too, was unseated and killed, Sidonius retreated to the Auvergne, the area in Gaul near Bordeaux. There, as Helge Köhler notes, "he felt more at home than in his birthplace of Lyons."[73] He focused during this period on his writing, though this was (according to Sidonius himself) set at the wayside by 470, when, perhaps as a result of his political disenfranchisement, or perhaps for more personal reasons, he took over as the bishop of Clermont. As bishop he was pulled back into larger affairs when the city was repeatedly besieged by the Goths. Despite his tumultuous and worldly role as bishop, Sidonius would be venerated as a saint after his death.

Sidonius' work was important even in his lifetime, and his literary fame was part of the key to his continued ability to politically reinvent himself.[74] Sidonius, like Ausonius, wrote hundreds of poems and letters, which he published during his lifetime. His 147 surviving letters were published in nine books, which provide rich and important evidence for the social and political worlds of late Rome. The first poems that he published were lengthy imperial panegyrics that draw on the work and style of classical poets, indicating the continuing importance of classical style in the Late Empire. Raymond van Dam points out that "Sidonius always retained a strong nostalgia for the Roman Empire."[75]

Rome loomed large in Sidonius' poetic imagination, and he expressed concern for the future of Rome's culture and power. Yet he also reveals his own deep connection to Gaul. In the same poem in which he laments Rome's decline, he has Jupiter suggest that in fact, there is another land that might save Rome: the Auvergne, which "carries its head high as sprung from Latin blood."[76] Sidonius presents it as a place of natural bounty and the potential seedbed for renewed empire. Auvergne is "a land famed for its men, a land to which Nature, the blessed creator of all things vouchsafed no peer in days gone by." Bordeaux is the center point of this landscape: "from the city extend rich and fertile fields; scarce are they cloven with the early ploughing when they thirst for the tardy seeds, and while the ox enjoys luxurious ease they display clods made black by some fatness mysteriously at work." Its soils abound and make the soils of Libya and Apulia look bleak and washed out. Though Rome may feel

[73] Köhler, *Briefe, Buch I/C. Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius*, 4. [74] Ibid., 8–10.
[75] Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul*, 349.
[76] Anderson, *Sidonius, Volume 1*, 129–30.

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that the Tiber and Italy have been leached of power, the Auvergne presents salvation. Jupiter sees in the Avernians "the sole hope for the world." Sidonius picks up this theme in another piece when he claims that the various Germanic groups of Bordeaux "are called for, so that the Garonne, strong as its warlike settlers, may defend the dwindled Tiber."[77]

Fortunatus later continued to develop the connection between the waters of Gaul and the cultural heritage of Rome. He wrote poetry both on request and as a way to seek patronage, and many of his poems reflect his clients' desires to be seen as part of a broader Roman literary and cultural scene. His reputation as a poet who could help give political and ecclesiastical efforts validation and the ring of *romanitas* appears to have spread quickly, and his first decade in Gaul saw, as Michael Roberts points out, the "most intense poetic activity" of his career.[78] Judith George wrote of Fortunatus that he can be considered "a Janus-figure, who looked back to and embodied for his generation the literary greatness of the classical past, but also, for ages to come, set the benchmarks and influenced writers on the continent and in the Irish and Anglo-Saxon world."[79]

Fortunatus was not shy about linking these Frankish princes, bishops, and minor nobility to the imperial past. He wrote of Duke Lupus of Champagne, "Under their consulships Roman power shone bright, but with you as leader Rome has returned to us here and now."[80] As had the other two poets, Fortunatus wrote poetry both on request of patrons and as a way to seek patronage, and many of his poems reflect his clients' desires to be seen as part of a broader Roman literary and cultural scene. In fact, as Judith George points out in her analysis, Fortunatus himself was an instrument of their aspirational *romanitas*, and for these patrons, she explains, "the poet is an appurtenance, albeit a valuable one."[81]

He wrote to Duke Lupus of Champagne that "Roman power shone bright, but with you as leader Rome has returned to us here and now."[82] Fortunatus is usually subtler than this and demonstrates *romanitas* rather than naming it outright. In several prominent instances, this is shown through control of rivers and waterworks. In what must be a knowing echo of his own predecessor's work, Fortunatus embraces both local pride

[77] Sidonius, letter 8.9, trans. Anderson and Semple, *Sidonius, Volume 2*, 447–49.
[78] Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow: The Poetry of Venantius Fortunatus*, 5.
[79] George, *Personal and Political Poems*, xviii.
[80] Fortunatus 7.7, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 437.
[81] George, Judith W., trans. *Latin Poet*, 113.
[82] Fortunatus 7.7, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 435.

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in place and *romanitas*, through an emphasis on the duke's reconstruction of the baths.[83] In both the rebuilding and in the second commemoration by Fortunatus, we can see, in Michael Dewar's words, "the continuing determination of the Gallo-Roman nobility to uphold tradition."[84]

His poems often evoke an older kind of Roman bucolic leisure; with villas, baths, fountains, and fishponds. Judith George argues that Fortunatus' focus on baths "indicates that all this work continues the classical style of Roman villa life."[85] The villa poems are also testimony to engineering, technological ingenuity, and the labor that lies behind landscapes.

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One of these poems, "Ad Gogo," presents a traditional life of the leisured elite, framing it to echo Virgil's *Georgics*, presenting his patron with a double dose of *romanitas*. The titular Gogo hunts, fishes, and enjoys an outdoors lifestyle of sport and comfort along the rivers of Gaul. "Tell me," Fortunatus asks, "what occupies his carefree mind in tranquil times, if he lingers by the banks of the wave-driven Rhine to catch in its waters with his net the fat salmon, or roams by the grape-laden Moselle's stream, where a gentle breeze tempers the blazing sun."[86] Here we see a medieval poet adapting a classical trope to a new landscape. But it is also more than that – it is a recognition of the characteristics and beauty of his adopted home, and an example of the ways that Fortunatus found in the forests, fields, and rivers of Gaul fertile ground for his poetic imagination.

All three of these poets appear to have been quite proud of and attached to their homeland and its landscape. In a series of poems about cities, *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, Ausonius wrote that he identified both Rome and Bordeaux as his homelands (*patria*): "I love Bordeaux, I devote myself to Rome."[87] Sidonius spent time in both Rome and Bordeaux, and his preference for the Auvergne shows up in a teasing letter to a friend. Sidonius writes "you say you are delighted that I, a friend of yours, have at last got a view of the sun, which as one who drank of the Arar, I have seen (you say) at all events very seldom."[88] The friend appears to have suggested that Sidonius must, as someone who, living in rain and clouds and fog and mist, must be loving the Mediterranean clime during his visit.

[83] George, *Latin Poet*, 72. [84] Dewar, *Leisured Resistance*, 99.
[85] George, *Latin Poet*, 110. [86] Fortunatus 7.4, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 427.
[87] Ausonius, "On the Order of the Cities," trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 1, 175.
[88] Sidonius, letter 1.8, trans. Anderson, *Sidonius, Volume 1*, 381.

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"You bring up against me the fogs of my countrymen," Sidonius writes, but how can he "talk this balderdash to me, you a native of Caesena, which is an oven rather than a town?" This letter underscores something that is important to recognize: early medieval Gallo-Roman people could artfully praise their own lands and identities, be proud of them, and prefer them to others. This sense of pride in place, of "belonging" to a landscape as well as a community has been a key theme taken up by ecocritics. As Lawrence Buell points out, placedness is closely connected to other types of bonding: "Those who feel a stake in their community think of it as their place .... Place is associatively thick."[89]

For Ausonius, the Mosel was a meaningful place that helped him situate himself within the new communities emerging in Gaul. In the opening passages of the *Mosella*, Ausonius describes travelling on foot through the Hunsrück, under a cloudless sky and the "golden" sun. He enters the forest, "where the sky is blocked from view by the green gloom," and then all at once walks out to a clearing with an overview of the Mosel valley opening up beneath him. He connects the landscape below him to his own identity and his own familiar landscape:

> Truly, the whole charming vista struck me as if it were my own homeland of Bordeaux, bright and cherished. From the heights [I saw] the roofs of the *villae* that clung to the riverbanks, and the green Bacchic hills and the beautiful Mosel River, flowing underneath, quietly murmuring [18–22].

This suggests an appreciation for and emotional response to the beauty of the view. Ausonius' pride in the Mosel (and by his own extension Gaul and Bordeaux) is apparent. He compares the river favorably to all other waters, describing it as "the greenest river: ship-bearing as the sea, with steep and sloping waters like a river, and with your glassy depths imitating a lake." Like Roman Gaul, the Mosel gets its strength and identity from the blending of the characteristics of all its tributaries. "You alone have everything: features of the spring, the river and the brook, the lake, and the double-flowing ebb and flood of the sea [26–33]."

THE *MOSELLA*'S HYBRIDITY

Towards the end of the *Mosella*, Ausonius invokes the Rhine, which he urges to incorporate the Mosel into its stream. Just as the smaller rivers "speed" to merge with the Mosel, the poet imagines the power of the

[89] Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 63.

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blended Rhine/Mosel. The Rhine and the Mosel do meet at Koblenz, but in the poem, this is presented in the future subjunctive, as something that might yet happen. In his essay "The Mosella of Ausonius," Roberts points out that "the successful unification [of the rivers and the peoples] is represented as something still to be achieved, and it is set in the context of the still uncertain outcome of imperial policy on and near the Rhine."[90]

Ausonius asks the Rhine "to measure out a space for the new stream, [with] fraternal waters increasing yours" [*Mosella*, lines 419–20]. The Rhine, by taking in other German waters, will expand and grow – but this is not to suggest that Ausonius saw all "Germans" as equal or as integrated into Rome. He was Gallo-Roman, and his concerns reflect those of the Gallic integration into Rome, especially when new Germanic peoples arrived to complicate matters and relationships. He addresses this tension via the Rhine, explaining that if the Rhine stretches out its channel to include the Mosel, they could be a tremendous force:

> Your source could extend twin banks, separated, and together pour out mouths through different courses. The men shall approach, quaking; the Franks as much as the Chamaves and the Germans. Then truly will you be considered the frontier. Then the twin name will come to you from this great river, and though you flow from a single source, you shall be called "two-horned." [433–37]

River gods were often depicted as horned; they also carry cornucopia, or horns of plenty, often associated with rivers.[91] So by wearing or having two horns the Rhine will be taking on two identities, and two sets of abundance. The idea of a twin name also links the Rhine to the Danube, referred to earlier in the poem as the "twice-named Ister," as does the connection between the river's source and the course of empire [106]. For the Rhine/Mosel hybrid, the two mouths and two sources of the river would thus help both blur and reinforce identities.

This is not to suggest that Ausonius sees all "Germans" as equal or as successfully integrated or integratable into Rome. He is Gallo-Roman, and his concerns reflect those of the Gallic integration into Rome, especially when new Germanic peoples arrive to complicate matters and relationships. He addresses this tension by explaining that if the Rhine would expand its channel to include the Mosel, both will benefit from the joining and doubling of the waters. At this point, in lines that could equally be meant for Rome again, Ausonius adds that this will give the

[90] Roberts, "The Mosella of Ausonius: An Interpretation," 351.
[91] Green, *The Works of Ausonius*, 509; Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 652.

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Rhine "strength to make the Franks and Chamaves and Germans tremble, and you will surely be maintained as the frontier. Then you will also have a name that fits your twin nature and even when you flow from a single source, you shall be called two-horned [435–37]."

It may still seem that this linkage of the rivers to the problems of multiple allegiances, loyalties and identities, and to the decisions that had to be made about which cultures and peoples to make tributaries and which to oppose, is a bit of a stretch. But in the next stanza, Ausonius himself makes the link almost inescapable, since he turns the issue of a "double source" directly onto himself: "I, tracing my origin to the Vivican people, but bound not newly to the hospitality of the Belgians, I, Ausonius with a Latin name but with my home and heartland in the borders of Gaul" [438–41].

Finally, in what could appear to be an abrupt ending, in the last stanzas of the poem he circles back to the idea of tributaries with which he started the poem – but instead of the upstream Nahe that is actually a tributary of the Mosel, he imagines a world in which all rivers hear of the Mosel, through this poem. He will send word of it to all the other waters, and, finally, "I will praise you to sea-like Garonne." [483]

The *Mosella* both begins and ends with invocations of other rivers, showing the ways in which rivers, even when given the spotlight, were understood as connected, integrated, and merging. Even in its own *encomium*, the Mosel is bounded and framed by other rivers, and with notions of hybridity and border crossing. The poem begins with the word "Transieram" – literally "I had crossed" [the river Nava], but figuratively a word that also invoked ideas of transformation and transition. Though the final word "Garumnae" seems less meaningful, Ausonius associates the Garonne with a particular kind of blurred identity. Because of its strong tidal character, the Garonne is an ocean/river hybrid: Ausonius elsewhere describes the "sea-like Garonne" as "swelled with the flood-tide of the billowy deep" and as a river that "challenges the main."[92] Ending his poem by evoking a shifting, changeable river keeps the reader aware of the crossings and complexities of the poem and of Ausonius' identity.

FORTUNATUS' RIVER JOURNEYS

Centuries later, Fortunatus similarly used rivers to explore the complexities, concerns, and preoccupations of the sixth-century elite, themselves

[92] Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 1, 17–19.

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also struggling to navigate political change and conflict, the growing cultural force of Christianity, the continuing gravitational pull of classical culture, and the new economic, urban, and geographical realities of Merovingian Europe. His poetry is full of descriptions of the natural world that surrounded him, including river poems filled with discussions of the nature of exile, homeland, and travel. The rivers become the points of transit along which Fortunatus and others transform their identities, and river travel becomes a kind of a pilgrimage.

Fortunatus was himself an immigrant to Gaul, though rather than moving across the German frontiers, he left Italy to become part of the Merovingian world. In an early poem addressed to the bishops of the church, he described himself as "an Italian, a foreigner and guest."[93] In later years, after having successfully become an essential part of the social and religious fabric of Gaul, Fortunatus reflected back on his arrival in the North, and wrote in a poem to an early patron: "When the foreign land of Germany occupied my vision, you were my father and took thought for my fatherland."[94] Fortunatus' transformation from Roman to Gaul was strikingly complete. After leaving Ravenna, he never returned to Italy, and his works reflect his adoption of his new homeland – in fact so much so that Michael Roberts has referred to his "Gallocentricity, which even marginalizes Rome."[95]

Though most famous in his own time for his religious writings, Fortunatus wrote many smaller poems, covering topics as wide-ranging as flowers, food, episcopal duties, and wedding celebrations. He was deeply indebted to his classical training and to Ausonius' work, but he also showed a willingness to be poetically adventurous and to experiment with newer genres of Latin poetry.[96] Though many of his poems are light, he did not shy away from tackling trickier issues including theology, good government, and the tabloid scandal of the day, the shocking murder of Galswinth, the Visigothic princess who married Childebert I.

One of Fortunatus' river poems that has direct connections to Ausonius' *Mosella*, is poem 10.9, "On His Voyage." It describes Fortunatus' arrival in Gaul and is structured around the river as vehicle for his personal rise in political status, and his transformation from stranger to welcome guest. The poem begins with a moment in which Fortunatus arrives at the royal court at Metz, but is kept at arm's length,

[93] Fortunatus 5.18, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 343.
[94] Fortunatus 7.8 trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 445. [95] Roberts, *The Humblest Sparrow*, 51.
[96] Brennan, "The Career of Venantius Fortunatus"; George, *Latin Poet*.

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an unknown stranger: "Meeting the royal pair where the walls of Metz stand strong, I was received by my lords and parted from my horse. Then I was bidden as a mariner to navigate the Moselle with oars."[97]

The poem then describes his river-borne experiences as he follows the royal fleet en route to the king's wedding, going down the Mosel to the Rhine confluence, and continuing up the Rhine. At the end of this voyage, he recognizes the beauty of Gaul. Through his poetry and through music, he himself is brought into the landscape and the culture and is received at court. The transformation wrought by Gaul's river is complete, and the question of identity might be answered at last. The poem ends with a royal feast at Andernach. Here the Rhine is surrounded by vineyards and farmland and "the splendid vista of abundance makes a still greater impression, because the people enjoy a second harvest from the rivers."

As the king prepares for a feast, he surveys all the things he commands, including his new poet, who now describes himself as part of the produce of the river: "[I] continue on as cargo on board the ship." While seated at the meal, "enthroned on high, the ruler counts the fish." As the "catch comes to him unbidden," so too has Fortunatus become part of the court. Reading Fortunatus into this fish is made all the easier by the fact that, throughout the poems, he plays with the issue of identity and with the boundary between fish and people, water and air, people and nature. The Fortunatus/fish is now "a citizen of the Rhine, though stranger here," and is "introduced to the table, and the seated throng dines on him in pleasure." As the fish feeds the bodies of the guests, the poet will nourish their hearts as part of these "pageants."[98]

Here, Fortunatus may also be picking up on a passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which the poet has a river nymph claim a similar transformation of identity, when she claims that "I have come here as a stranger. Pisa is my homeland and I have my origins in Elis, as a foreigner I inhabit Sicily, but this land is more pleasing to me than any place; I, Arethusa, now have these household gods and this dwelling."[99] Jones notes of this that "by the end of the passage, however, the nymph has become loyal to her new home. Like a colonist, she came as a foreigner, but has made this new place her permanent home."[100] Arethusa embodies her belonging to her new home when she is turned into a stream.

[97] Fortunatus 10.9, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 675. [98] Ibid., 681.

[99] Jones, *Reading Rivers in Roman Literature and Culture*, 44. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.493–97.

[100] Jones, 44.

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In "On Galswintha," Fortunatus recounts the princess' departure from Toledo, and her arrival in "the cold North" as "a refugee from [her] own native soil."[101] The poem is laced with images of the natural world; it is a story of loss (of family, happiness, home, and life) and longing, and these powerful emotions are echoed by the landscape. Fortunatus imagines her parting from her family and her homeland, writing that "rivers of tears disfigure the faces of the people."[102] Fortunatus has Galswinth express distress and worry, having her say "I am journeying in ignorance of these lands, fearful at what I will learn about first: the people, their character and manners, town, country, or forest."[103]

Fortunatus' answer to that question is distinct. As had been his experience leaving Italy, Fortunatus chooses to present her immigration as framed by experiencing first and foremost the changing natural world and an alien landscape. Once her sad and extended departure took place, and she left her mother's arms, Galswinth "passed over the cloud-capped Pyrenees, where July is chilled by frosty waters, where the mountains, white with snow, soar up to the stars and sharp peaks extend above the rain below."[104] Fortunatus' emphasis on the wetness of her trip is a clear antithesis to the dry "sands" of Toledo, and lets him frame her journey as a series of encounters with Gaul's rivers. "The rapid current of the Vienne was crossed by boat, her company quickly emerging from the swirling stream. Then soon the chill Loire, its waters running crystal clear, received her, where the smooth silt cannot even conceal a fish. Her journey ended where the Seine, its waves well-stocked with fish, rolls to the sea, curing by the tower of Rouen."[105]

Unfortunately, the transition of identities that Fortunatus was himself able to make was impossible for Galswinth; she was a captive to her marriage and was murdered shortly after her arrival in Gaul, possibly on her husband's orders. This cuts short all opportunity at her cultural integration. This poem resonates with the same issues of ethnicity and identity and "between-ness" that were so much a part of Ausonius' poetry. All three of these poets, whose lives and careers span almost the entirety of Late Antiquity in Gaul, were working through the questions of "who is who?" and "who belongs where?" How are new identities layered on top of old? How do identities blend and merge? Fortunatus picks up on the tensions of identity and of people pulled between two places and two cultures when Galswinth's mother laments her daughter's

[101] Fortunatus 6.5, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 377–79. [102] Ibid., 379. [103] Ibid., 385.
[104] Ibid., 391. [105] Ibid., 393.

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departure: "Here without you I will seem no less a wanderer and stranger, and in my own home I will be both citizen and exile."[106] After her untimely death, Galswinth's fate echoes her mother's state of being in-between, as she becomes "buried, though a foreigner, in a tomb all her own."[107]

Once Galswinth's murder becomes known, Fortunatus has rivers become the bearers of human news, emotions, and grief, and represent lands and peoples. Galswinth's sister called on nature to tell her of her sister's fate, begging her to "reply, as mute nature replies to your sister – stones, mountain, forest, water and sky. With anxious inquiries she questioned even the breezes." When news of her death did come, it came hurtling through the landscape and "rapidly crossed rivers and mountain ranges, so quickly did the wing laden with sorrow take flight."[108] Upon hearing of her daughter's death, the mother laments having let her leave Toledo, yet chooses to put emphasis on how nature had facilitated the parting. "If only rivers had risen and overflowed their banks," she cries, "as if the land was floundering, awash with floods of water." She wishes that nature had given signs – had prevented travel, and thus tragedy.

Fortunatus encapsulates the grief within a suddenly conjoined pair of riverscapes. Distance is rendered unimportant, and the natural world unites, briefly, the sundered polities and family: "In shared weeping, the sister in one place, the grieving mother in another assailed with their voices in one case the Rhine, in the other the Tagus. Here Batavia joined the grieving and there the Baetic realm lamented; here the Waal and there the Ebro sounded with their waters."[109]

For Fortunatus, rivers are integrative. This is the culmination of a Late Antique recognition that rivers were fluid boundaries, across and along which culture and identity spread. These poets represented and responded to common cultural concerns about defining, explaining, and understanding their own tenuous cultural identities. Rivers, ever-present and ever-changing, were powerful metaphors for these men, and in their hands the rivers were themselves transformed. In their works, though dependent on classical and Roman ideas, the medieval river emerges as a distinct metaphor, just as medieval culture, though sprung from Rome, transformed and emerged from Late Antiquity with distinct forms.

[106] Ibid., 387. [107] Ibid., 395. [108] Ibid., 397. [109] Ibid., 401.

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ECOSYSTEMS AND ENCOMIA

> If in his day Homer had seen the courses of streams dammed, he would have preferred that subject to fill his sweet work.[110]

These poets were aware of cultural, economic, and political transformations. From their positions of elite privilege and their connections to powers old and new, they saw their world changing, and much of their poetry deals with the worries and hopes that the changes triggered. At times, some also worked to actively deny it, to paint the world of Late Antique Gaul as still firmly rooted in a classical socio-economic tradition defined, in part, by economic estates or *villae*, the landed estates of the Roman elite.

Villas remained focal points of some of the extreme wealth available to the Gallo-Roman elite. An elaborate and extensive villa at Bliesbruck/Renheim, which was destroyed by fire in the fourth century (and periodically reinhabited though never rebuilt) bears witness. It is now run as an archaeological "culture park," which my students and I visited on our Gallo-Roman tour. The villa, located along the modern French/German border, is only 75 km from Metz. Excavations have unearthed a massive fourth-century complex consisting of a separate, walled villa of over 70,000 square meters, which the park claims as the largest such complex in the Saar–Mosel region.[111] There was a separate "vicus" area outside the walls consisting of a traditional roman bath house and a series of workshops for the tradesmen whose wares supported the main "palace-villa."

Bliesbruck is a "long-axial villa," a type unique to Gaul and Germany, with palatial main houses and large, clearly separated courtyards. This layout may be tied to Celtic predecessor buildings, further evidence for intermingling of Roman and Germanic cultures in Gaul.[112] The villa also appears to have boasted a giant "Jupiter-column," another physical manifestation of Gallo-Roman hybridity. Though this villa was not rebuilt after the fire, Hagith Sivan argues that despite the idea of collapse of Roman culture and economy, "it appears that many of [the villae in Aquitaine] were restored or rebuilt in the fourth century."[113]

[110] Fortunatus 3.10, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 163.
[111] www.europaeischer-kulturpark.de/Archaeologiepark-im-Ueberblick/Highlights/Villa.
[112] Sărățeanu-Müller and Derks, "The Roman Villa Complex of Reinheim, Germany," 314.
[113] Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux*, 69.

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There was still enough wealth and power to support many elaborate villa systems, especially along the rivers that remained core traffic arteries and the focus of grape and wine production, ever in demand as Christianity deepened its hold on Gaul. These *villae* represented continued Gallo-Roman fusion, and often became the subjects of poems, a clear marker of the continued cultural value placed on these sites even as the agricultural systems supporting these agro-estates transformed radically as urban centers shrank and new villages transformed the rural landscape.

Ausonius devoted a poem to one such estate, his "*herediolum*" or "little patrimony," which once belonged to his great-grandfather, a testament to the continuity of his family's bonds to the area around Bordeaux, and the relative stability of elite families' landholding. He describes the estate as having 200 acres of arable, 100 of vineyards, and 50 of pasture, with extensive woodlands "over twice as much as my pasture, vineyard ant tilth together." As was customary for the landed elite, the properties were maintained by others "of husbandmen I have neither too many nor too few." The property was well-watered, with a spring, a well, and "the unsullied river, which on its tides bears me by boat from home and back again."[114]

Though many of these *villae* would have still been an active and continuous part of Roman economy and society during Ausonius' lifetime, their heyday had long passed by the time that Sidonius was living and writing in the late 400s. As Hoffmann points out, as the villa-based settlement patterns disappeared over Late Antiquity, other relationships to the land were bound to change as well. Traditional, scattered sites of agricultural settlement were abandoned; "the Roman period had seen elite *villae* built all over the plain [of Noricum, near Salzburg]. Now those habitations were abandoned and not resettled, as newer sites were founded further up the hillsides ... the change was also from scattered small to fewer larger settlements." This was not a minor disruption: indeed, in Narbonne "more than half of Gallo-Roman sites were deserted by 500."[115]

Yet, Sidonius writes as if the *villae* near Bordeaux were in full flowering, giving his poems an unmistakable air of nostalgia. His writing is full of classicisms, anachronisms, and overly florid descriptions.[116]

[114] Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 1, 32–35.
[115] Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, 63.
[116] Sidonius, poem 22, trans. Anderson, 282–83.

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A friend's villa near Narbonne, "close to the city, the river [Aude], and the sea," merited comment, as "its lay-out charms the eye of the beholder" and "in addition, its fields and springs, vineyards and olive groves, its entrance-court, its park, its hill present a most lovely view."[117]

Sidonius is working out his anxieties about a transformed economy, in which traditional markers of privilege, power, and patronage were disappearing in favor of novel, untested ones. Linguistic, cultural, and ethnic changes were visible everywhere, and where once the Gallo-Roman elite had dominated high society, now Germans were entering the scene, with their strange language, harsh music, and unfamiliar customs. He wrote (perhaps satirically, in a "few jesting hendecasyllables") to a Roman senator of his life "among long-haired hordes, having to endure German speech." "Do you want me to tell you what wrecks all poetry?" he asks, before answering that, as anticipated, it is the dissonance of German and "barbarian thrumming."[118]

The countryside surrounding Trier boasted many such elite *villae*. The "villa rustica" at Mehring, one of the area's largest known estates, exemplifies both power and peril in the fourth century. Built in the second century, and renovated and expanded in the third and fourth, the villa comprised a large estate and had a main building of thirty-four rooms, richly decorated with mosaics and marble. Such wealth drew attention, and parts of the villa were destroyed by a Germanic attack in 355. Evidence of continued settlement (including by Germanic people) suggests that the site was inhabited much longer (and longer than many other *villae*) – until the end of the fifth century.[119]

One fourth-century villa at Welschbillig in the outskirts of Trier was so expansive and wealthy that the Landesmuseum suggests that it may have belonged to the emperors Valentian or Gratian during their Trier residence.[120] The property was massive, measuring some 28 x 12 km, and at its center was an elaborate, sixty-meter long reflecting pool surrounded by elaborate limestone balustrades topped with 100 human busts or "herms," known as the "Hermengalerie." Over seventy are now on

[117] Sidonius, letter 8. 4, trans. Anderson, 412–13.
[118] Sidonius, poem 12, trans. Anderson, 212–13.
[119] www.strassen-der-roemer.eu/stationen/roemische-villa-rustica-mehring. Mehring appears in the Urbar of the monastery of Prüm, and Verhulst calls it the monastery's "most important wine-producing estate." Schwab, *Das Prümer Urbar*, 30; Verhulst, *The Carolingian Economy*, 71.
[120] The site was then reused in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when a series of castles were built on the ruins of the villa.

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display in the museum. In addition to famous figures from classical culture, the busts include a series of portraits of Germans and Gauls and people of other non-Roman ethnicities.

Despite Sidonius' clear regret at the diminishment of Rome and his disapproval of large parts of Germanic culture, he was also able to recognize that despite the changing character of the empire, Roman ideas could still be cultivated in "barbarian" lands. So, he worked hard to create poetic visions of Gaul as heir and rival to Rome. Many revolved around the lavish praise of Gallic spaces and structures. As such, his poems built on a long-standing Latin poetic convention, that of encomia and panegyrics, poems in praise of people, places, and buildings.

All three of these poets composed what I'll call "villa poems" devoted to the little micro-Romes that bishops, counts, Roman officials, and Gallic leaders had built up for themselves in the cities and countryside of Gaul. This poetry of praise was written for patrons who wanted to be presented as Roman, and who wanted Latin-speaking poets to provide them with reflections of an elite lifestyle and identity, to show their wealth, taste, power, and culture to their peers. More often than not, these villas were on rivers, and water and rivers figure heavily into the representation of Roman-ness.

On the Castle of Pontius Leontius

Sidonius' poem, on "The castle (*burgus*) of Pontius Leontius," connects classical ideals with local Gallic landscapes. He connects this Gallic house to the classical world that he strove so hard to emulate and protect, even using a classical model, Statius' *Silvae*.[121] Sidonius (a Christian) imagines a conversation between the pagan gods Bacchus and Phoebus Apollo, in which Apollo tries to convince Bacchus to abandon Rome/Olympus and move with him to this castle along the River Garonne in Gaul. "There is a place," he writes, "where two rivers, the Garonne, sped whirling down from a dripping mountain-crag, and the mossy Dordogne, which rushes with like swoop to the plain and at last flows out from a bend in its sandy channel, gradually commingle their slowing streams …. Between these rivers but nearer to the one than to the other, there is a mountain."[122] This poem praises both Bishop Leontius and the estate he has built and links the landscape and culture of Gaul to classical models and standards.

[121] Pavlovskis, *Man in an Artificial Landscape*, 44.
[122] Sidonius, poem 22, trans. Anderson, *Sidonius*, vol. 1, 273.

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It also shows an appreciation for both the beauty (Apollo) and the pleasure (Bacchus) of that landscape.

Though the castle lies squarely in Bordeaux, because of the owner's *romanitas*, reflected in the building's baths, granaries, porticoes, etc., the gods (and Rome) can find their new home there. A familiar villa rises up out of an unfamiliar landscape, and a Northern river winds its way through the elaborate estate: "The house rises from the river's brim and gleaming baths are set within the circuit of the battlements: here when the surging waters are troubled by the murky north-wind, the eaten, jagged rock sends forth a roar from the scarred bank; then from a cleft in the crags torrent leaps forth and is shot aloft, showering spray on to the very roofs; it lifts up men in boats and often mocks them with sportive shipwreck; for when the storm is over the flood retreats and strands whole fleets that have been forced up into the baths."[123]

This binding of Roman identity to the new landscape is made even more explicit when Apollo tells Bacchus that he can have the vineyards and hills and the baths, and everything else as long as he agrees to grant Apollo "my spring, which flows from the mountain, shadowed by an arched covering of ample circuit, much pitted. This needs no embellishment, for Nature has given it beauty. It seems good to me that there no counterfeiting should seem good."[124] Here is an appeal to the fundamental, unembellished, natural identity of Gaul amidst the praise of the human-built trappings of *romanitas*.

Sidonius also describes the artificial circulation of water through the estate. A stream flows down the mountain, where it is "forced through open channels till at last it circulates its waters under cover through divergent tunnels." This movement contributes too to what at least one critic describes as a comic, jesting moment in the poem – in which water systems ensure that the fish present themselves willingly to diners. In the dining room (cenaculum), "a conduit of cast metal is near; there is a suspended tank in front of the door: into it the water falls from above, and fishes, advancing with the flow, find the end of their swimming in a room – but a watery one."[125]

In a twinned set of poems about the baths in his country house at Avitacum (on Lake Aydat in the Auvergne), Sidonius again emphasizes how important leisure waters were to this image of Gallic *romanitas*.

[123] Ibid. [124] Ibid., 281.

[125] Ibid., 279. Anderson notes that *cenaculum* can mean both dining room and "upper chamber" (in this case of the tank).

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In the first (poem 18), he takes pains to connect his local landscape to the cultural landscape of imperial Rome, directly claiming that his bath-house's roof "rivals the cone of Baiae" (a famous watery leisure site outside Rome). He then compares Gaul favourably to the "Lucrine swamp,"[126] or Lucrine Lake, a site near Baiae dotted with the *villae* of rich Roman families – tying Gaul and his own family to elite classical identities. He goes beyond linking himself with this prestige; as he will elsewhere, he claims Gallic superiority. He writes, "Rich Campania would be ill-pleased with the Lucrine [swamp] if she beheld the waters of our lake. That other shore is adorned by red sea urchins, but in our fish, O stranger, you see both characters. If you are willing and if you share our joys with contented heart, gentle visitor, whoever you be, you can create a Baiae here in your [imagination]."[127]

Fortunatus picked up Sidonius' pen in the next century, writing a poem about the rebuilding of Leontius' castle near Bordeaux by bishop Leontius II of Bordeaux (c. 558–68), almost certainly a direct heir. He addresses the timelessness of these connections between power, authority, and the episcopal family's history: "the seasons pass, yet your family's halls stand firm, and your house suffers no decline with you to bolster its fortunes. Its nobility has not diminished over the long sequence of years."[128] From this praise of his secular family, Fortunatus moves on to describe all the ways Leontius worked to better his spiritual family.

Fortunatus wrote fourteen poems to or about Leontius II, many emphasizing the ways the early medieval landscape still reflected classical *romanitas*. A triptych of poems in book one – positioned together as a set, poems 1.18, 1.19, and 1.20 – all take as their subjects specific late Roman villas in the area around Bordeaux that Leontius built or restored. The first, the villa of Bissonum, is set in a charming landscape: "the fields are scented, spangled with saffron coloring, the turf … entices with its scented grasses." Though "time had laid the building low as old age took its toll … Leontius by his efforts set it on recovery's path." The highlight of this restoration was the work on the baths: "he returned new baths to their former splendor, where the enticing pools refresh weary people."[129]

[126] By calling the lake a swamp or *stagnum*, Sidonius appears to be drawing on Martial, who also wrote in a poem (book 3, poem 20) about the Lucrine *stagnum*. Walter, *Martial: Epigrams*.

[127] Sidonius, poem 18, trans. Anderson, 256–57.

[128] Fortunatus 1. 15, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 41.

[129] Fortunatus 1.18, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 55–57.

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The next poem is about the villa of Vereginis, located "where in a rich landscape the fertile stream of the Garonne flows." Fortunatus points to both real and imagined decorative waters. The building sits on painted arches and "you imagine the seawaters painted there are actually flowing." Real waters flow below the arches, as "a hidden watercourse bursts forth into life from the native rock in a running spring of sweet, ever-flowing water." A second set of paintings depict a lounging shepherd, perhaps intended to remind viewers of both Christian iconography and the Georgics. Completing this image of rustic recreations, "fish swim in an enclosed pool below." It is the "fish beyond number" in the Garonne that appear in the final poem in this series, "On the Villa of Praemiacum," which again praises a "beautiful house and charming baths."[130]

Eventually, the immigrant got his own piece of the Gallo-Roman dream. Fortunatus received a villa of his own as a gift from his good friend, Gregory of Tours. This villa was located "where the wanton Vienne breaks its waters on the riverbank and as the sailor is carried along in his boat on the swelling current, he sees the cultivated farmland, while he chants the time for the stroke."[131] This sense of the motion of the water and of those borne along the river draws his own villa into the larger conversation in his poetry about motion and migration.

Fortunatus had traveled and traversed many waters and often asked readers to imagine him as "a sailor with myself at the oar, so my boat would move on the waters, breasting the waves in its course," as he does in the opening of a poem that imagines a trip "carried by whirling winds on the current of the Garonne" to Bordeaux.[132]

Bordeaux had been one of the cities included in Ausonius' gazetteer poem focused on twenty famous cities of the world. Several Gallic cities merited mention alongside Constantinople, Athens, and Alexandria: Trier, Arles, Toulouse, and Bordeaux. Ausonius defined these Gallic cities, epicenters of culture, by their riverine locations. He praises Trier for its peacefulness, due to its fortress and markets and its location, while "bounteous Mosel glides past with peaceful stream, carrying the far-brought merchandise of all races of the earth."[133] Toulouse "is girt about

[130] Fortunatus 1.20, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 57–59.
[131] Fortunatus 8.19, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 549.
[132] Fortunatus 7.25, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 485.
[133] Ausonius, "The Order of Famous Cities," trans. Evelyn-White, *Ausonius*, vol. 1, 270–71.

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with a vast circuit of brick-built walls, along whose side the lovely stream of the Garonne glides past."[134]

Bordeaux, Ausonius' home- and heartland is not "a barbarous land upon the banks of Rhine," but instead a "mild, and well-watered land" with mild winters and long springs. The city on the Garonne has "tidal rivers whose flood foams beneath vine-clad hills, mimicking the sea's ebb and flow." The city is also watered by a "spring-fed stream" with a marble fountain that captures the deep, fast-flowing waters. It has twelve sluices "and never fails to meet the people's countless purposes." He praises this fountain, the work of nature augmented by human hands: "Hail, fountain of source unknown, holy, gracious, unfailing, crystal-clear, azure, deep, murmurous, shady, and unsullied."[135]

Though it was not included in Ausonius' list, Metz is the subject of Fortunatus' poem 3.13, which emphasizes its beauty, brightness, and reliance on a bountiful nature – it is a well-sited city happy in its prosperity and its ability to draw from two rivers:

> Metz, founded in this spot, radiant and beautiful, rejoices that both its flanks are rich in fish. The smiling countryside charms with burgeoning fields; on one side you see crops growing, on the other roses.[136]

The river protects and brings identity to the city; it is full of fish, giving double abundance to the citizens. It is also defensive, and by "encircling" the city, helps keep it intact and integral, much as does the spiritual guidance of the "merit of your bishop."

Fortunatus highlights the *romanitas* of early medieval Gaul by praising these men's ability to restore, repair, and even surpass the former glories. In a striking example, he devotes a whole poem to Bishop Felix of Nantes' river engineering project (likely on the Loire), describing it as besting the works of Roman forebears. "Let ancient poets with the tales they tell step aside;" Fortunatus boldly begins, "the deeds of the past are put in the shade by recent achievements." He describes the project which included the damming of the river, the building of a new roadway, the building of a new hill, and the rechanneling of the river, "diverting the flow in a fresh stream, where nature denies it." He lauds the bishop for his ability to control "with a bridle even fast-moving streams."[137]

134 Ibid., 278–79. 135 Ibid., 282–85.
136 Fortunatus 3.13, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 171.
137 Fortunatus 3.10, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 163–65.

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This undoing and redoing of nature astonishes, and has echoes with some of Fortunatus' and Ausonius' descriptions of the fluidity of margins and borders along the Mosel:

> You raise up a valley here and hollow out a mountain; in a reversal of roles the one swells, while the other subsides. Each shape has taken on the outline of the other: the mountain settles in a valley, the valley mounts to the heights.[138]

The bishop's remodeling of nature means that "where once water rapidly flowed, behind a restraining barrier land has grown up, and where once boats, now wagons wend their way."[139]

These images of reversal of roles are echoed in his poem "On the Gers," in which it is nature that is responsible for the upheaval of an ecosystem. In this poem, nature itself is Fortunatus' focus, and it is a reminder of the degree of these poets' awareness of a complex, vibrant natural world in which humans are some, but not all, of the participants.

ON THE GERS

> How can it refresh others when it thirsts itself?"[140]

In my favorite of his many poems, Fortunatus writes about the Gers river, located in Southern France near Toulouse. It is a tributary of the Garonne, a fact that drives the opening of the poem. Fortunatus reconstructs the experience of this small, "subservient" tributary as it responds to seasonal fluctuations. By exploring the idea of networks of subordination binding riverscapes together and by closely watching one river and its dynamic system, Fortunatus sees rivers as parts of a connected whole.

The poem opens by addressing not the Gers, but the Garonne, reversing the way that Ausonius' *Mosella* ends by invoking the Garonne. "Perhaps, noble Garonne," Fortunatus opines, "your glory would have been lessened, if another river did not have a meager course of water. Because here the Gers slips along with a diminished volume, it draws attention to your riches by its impoverished supply." He returns to the idea of a hierarchy of rivers, which, like peoples, can be dependents on one another, adding that "indeed if one compares the two unlike rivers, where this is a stream, you, I think, will be the Nile. It is your subservient tributary you hold sway over it, you are the Euphrates of Gaul, it merely

[138] Ibid., 163. [139] Ibid. [140] Fortunatus 1.21, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 61.

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anonymous."[141] Fortunatus then turns his focus entirely, for some sixty lines, to the insignificant, anonymous, and subordinate Gers.

One of the most striking things about Fortunatus' poem is his evocation of the seasonal ruptures that riverine environments experience, through the vehicle and agency of rain. The poem gives voice and experience to the river and its denizens, but it is the failing and falling rain that triggers change, that shapes the course of the river and the poem. Lowell Duckert has noted that: "The agency of rain is typically hidden until it falls irregularly or causes something to fail." Of his own essay, he writes, "What follows is a rainy actor-network mode of inquiry,"[142] that can also be applied to Fortunatus' poem, in which people play only an off-stage part, and elements of the natural world are personified and given agency.

The Gers is a hydrologically variable Garonne tributary. Its seasonal pattern of drought and flooding sets the poem within a specific seasonal context. Summer has arrived, and the last of the spring floods have long since flowed into the larger Garonne, leaving the Gers even smaller and weaker. "When the scorching summer heat lies heavy on the land and the fields pant in distress, their soil parched and dry, when Titan furrows the earth with his fiery rays" the river dries up.

Medieval authors most often described the impact of drought on people and on the agricultural economy. Fortunatus takes a different tack – he works to understand and present the Gers' perspective. The river and its ecosystem are suffering from the summer heat. The river is barely a trickle, and as a result the whole area is dry, parched, and pitiful: "its sluggish flow in retreat scarcely ripples the dried up waters and river, and it gasps for breath along with its fish."[143] Fortunatus writes of a vanished river, "merely anonymous," an "insignificant stream" made remarkable only in its disappearing. Over a millennium later, Alice Oswald offers up a poem to another absent river, "little loose end shorthand unrepresented / beautiful disused route to the sea / fish path with nearly no fish in."[144]

Fortunatus focuses on fish and other denizens of the river and the fields, demonstrating an awareness of the interconnection between the experiences of the different species living in and along the rivers. But he also uses them to show how unknowable rivers are; they are a barrier, crossed only in extremis.

[141] Ibid. [142] Duckert, "When It Rains," 116.
[143] Fortunatus 1.2, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 61.
[144] Alice Oswald, "Dunt: A Poem for a Dried Up River" from *Falling Awake*, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/90863/dunt-a-poem-for-a-dried-up-river.

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In his focus on fish, Fortunatus again deliberately invokes Ausonius' *Mosella*. One passage in that poem, a description of the throes of a dying fish, has long stood out for its emphasis on the breaking of barriers between water and land and human and non-human. A boy catches a fish, and as it breaks through the surface of the water, into the realm of air and people, it struggles, and its plight catches the poet's attention:

> The moist catch dances on the dry rocks and dreads the fatal shafts of daylight. In its own river it had retained its strength, in our air it grows torpid and wastes its life panting on the breeze. Now almost spent, its weak body quivers and flaps, now its tail feebly suffers its last palpitations, and its mouth does not close, but with gasps the gills give up the air they have taken in, breathing their last.[145]

As Roberts points out, "the underwater realm of the fish is presented as a realm that is opposite but equal to that of humans. Our human sympathies are enlisted for the dying fish, which is represented as the victim of an act of aggression by the fisherman."[146] This shift of perspective and loyalty is brief, but powerful.

Although Ausonius encourages us to empathize with the fish, in the end, his reperception of the fish cannot change anything; he watches without control. This lack of control connects him to the dying fish, and to the throngs of other fish caught up in nets and snares. These fish are rushing into danger but aware too late of their perilous state. Ausonius extends this single example to a broader awareness of the lives and deaths of fish. In an image that pushes the reader to see how the invisible struggles of the fish are manifest on the surface, yet hidden, as are the traps set by the fishers, he writes of "the host of fishes, swimming aimlessly, mouths wide, unaware of malice/danger until after the hidden hook invades their innermost throat. Too late, they sense the wounds and then, they are agitated, the line trembles as they drag it down as witness."[147]

In "On the Gers," Fortunatus also imagines fish as living and dying creatures. As Ausonius claimed himself as direct witness, so too does Fortunatus, reminding us of his role as narrator and of his claim about knowing the Garonne. "I have seen," he claims, "a tiny fish emerge from the slime, caught in the mud, a shipwrecked vagrant on land."[148]

The fish is not the only one disoriented – the river too was uncertain: "Without any flowing stream it licks the exposed sands, and exiled in its own home it aimlessly trickles along."[149] As I've already suggested, exile

[145] Ausonius, *Mosella*, trans. Roberts, *The Jeweled Style*, 19.
[146] Roberts, *The Jeweled Style*, 21. [147] Ausonius, *Mosella*, lines 250–54.
[148] Fortunatus 1.21, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 63. [149] Ibid., 61.

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is a theme that Fortunatus visits often, working through his own feelings of exile and incorporation into a new identity. Fortunatus' extension of feelings of displacement and helplessness onto the natural world is thus even more compelling. His concern for the plight of fish continues throughout the poem, as does his sense of ecosystem disruption. The drought upset the whole system, since as a result, there was "neither land nor water; though fish cannot live there, equally no one can plow."[150]

The river system is constantly changeable. The exiled river returns to its home, but that process of homecoming is as disruptive as the exile had been. The drying up of the river, slow and inexorable, is reversed in moments by summer rainstorms. The Gers is so small that it doesn't take a deluge to transform it from one state to another: "But if even a light shower falls from the clouds, as soon as the rain hits the earth, the river is swollen and threatening."[151] The entire system again transforms, the river returns, but rather than returning to a previous stability, it experiences turmoil and trauma. The dried-up riverbed cannot contain the water, and as the rains continue, "suddenly what was just a pool becomes a sea." "Not content with its banks, its current takes short cuts, and pours out on teeming cropland what it drinks in from the hills," and the suddenly swollen river "lays waste the bounty of the fields." Fortunatus focuses again on rupture, disorder, and reversal:

> The harvest floats off in the flood, fish settle on farmland: in a topsy-turvy world the crops swim, the fish lies flat. What once was pasturage for sheep is now handed over to frogs, fish occupy the meadows and waters carry off the herd. The silures (catfish), in exile, finds lodging in the plain; more fish are caught on land than shortly before in the wave.[152]

This is a liminal zone, in which regular order is disrupted and a new and alien regime flourishes: "Only the frog swimming in the mire sounds its plaintive croaks; with the fish sent into exile, an interloper rules over the waters."[153] Fortunatus' labeling of the frog as interloper or foreigner connects to other themes from his river poetry. Rivers often served as frontiers, as clear but changeable lines of demarcation between kingdoms, identities, and warring parties – and they also served as markers and symbols of identity, around which questions about hybridity, belonging, and exile could be addressed. Fortunatus links the environment he sees and imagines to contemporary political and social concerns.

In this poem, Fortunatus' attention is directed at the common fish; the shipwrecked, small, trembling little fish caught in the mud and then

[150] Ibid. [151] Ausonius, *Mosella*, lines 37–38.
[152] Fortunatus 1.21, trans. Roberts, *Poems*, 63. [153] Ibid.

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caught in traps. The fish scattered over the fields by floods face a similar fate, as the nets have moved with the flooded stream, and "a hook sticks its catch where before there was marsh." So, the fish, thrown into both the mud and the fields, finds no peace. Fortunatus addresses this directly, pointing out that "it is all the same for the fish, whether the river rises or dries: in once case it's stuck in the mud, in the other exiled on land."[154]

These authors, living in an era marked by radical cultural, religious, and political transformations, were particularly concerned with issues of homeland, belonging, and exile. All three of the authors experienced individual change and transformations, and these seeped into their poetry. Local rivers represented homeland, foreign rivers stood in for alien cultures, and a shift of watershed could, indeed, lead to a personal transformation of belonging.

Fortunatus' attention to the unremarkable – frogs and fish and fields – is what catches my attention and was something that Fortunatus expected his readers to remark upon. In the final lines of the poem, he breaks the fourth wall, directing his words at his reader: "But why do I waste so much complaint on an insignificant stream? It's scorched by my words, but not replenished by waters. Enough that it burn on its own. Why do I increase the temperature?"[155] Fortunatus is playing with ideas of agency and time and the inability of human words to change what nature's actions set in place; and yet, he writes.

Commemoration, recognition, and acknowledgement have power, and poetry can both reflect and shape attitudes towards and actions upon rivers. So, what did rivers represent? What did they provide? "In the end," Fortunatus writes in his final lines, "we render up this single consolation of worth: [even] emptied of its waters, it yields up fishes."[156]

These poems push us to see in premodern works the same kind of complexity, nuance, and creativity that marks more modern environmentally inflected works. These poems yield up more than fish; they challenge modern and medieval readers to look past the surface of the rivers and to see their complexity, vitality, and agency. Riverscapes are capable of reflecting, transforming, and transmitting human emotions and concerns; yet, they can also call attention to the differences between the human and non-human, and highlight the complexities of the web of life, and the intricacies of human engagement with rivers.

[154] Ibid., 63–65. [155] Ibid., 65. [156] Ibid., 57–62.

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