Argumentative Essay:

Proving Aegidius and Syragius Kings

By Thomas Weichsel

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Notes:

For this paper, there will be a non-standard definition. A kingdom will be defined as “A fully de jure and de facto independent political entity with a monarch at the head of its government”.

A second clarification that will be brought up is that when I say king, it also means king equivalent, such as a “Rex Romanorum”. This is important as the languages of the time did not have the word “king” in the modern sense of the word and had their own definitions.

Another note that must be brought up is that in Celtic languages, there exists no word governor or high ranking government official, and they use king for that, so any text reliant on the Celts or their language, the word king must be taken with a grain of salt.

Fourth, there are many forms of the word Aegidius and Syragius, and so there will be brackets when Aegidius or Syragius is in a quotation without the spelling that I use in this paper. Examples of this include “[A]Egidius” instead of “Egidius”, and in the case of mentions like “Siagrius” or anything that sounds like those words, if it is implied, then assume that the text refers to those historical characters. There are instances where a variation of the word may not refer to one of those two specifically, however.

Fifth, all the translations for Edward James are not perfect, I tried my best, but there are a multitude of errors. When there is a (xyz) in the quotation, especially from James, then that is a probably better correction, I just didn’t go through all the thousands of pages nitpicking translations.

The name kingdom of Soissons does not mean that it is a kingdom, just a modern name.

The last note is that this paper does not directly cite the *Chronicles of Fredgar* as I have not been able to translate it or get my hands on a translated version of the text. The text will still be referred to via other citations and works by other historians.

Context:

The Kingdom of Soissons is a very under-researched state, and its extent throughout the region is highly debated amongst scholars. Its name was given to it recently, as no sources name the state itself. Its powerful position is not highly supported among primary sources, but there are also an equally small number of arguments against its widespread power through northern France. The accepted history for the rump state and its founding goes as follows: Aegidius was appointed as magister militarum of Gaul by emperor Majorian in 457(the year he became emperor), after Aetius was promoted to the position of magister militarum of the empire from magister militarum of Gaul. Majorian was a successful leader, regaining many Roman territories and significantly strengthening the institutions of Rome. In four years, he reduced his enemies to a state that they could not oppose Rome, even all together. This made him many enemies in the senate, though, and they killed him in 461 out of jealousy of his rising power and status, Ricimer, a high ranking Roman general also under Majorian, led this plot which killed. He used this chaos he created to install a puppet emperor, Severus, who Aegidius did not recognize. Aegidius was livid at Majorian's death and refused to accept anyone put forth by the killer of his lord. He created a breakaway state based in Noviodunum(Modern day Soissons), to oppose Ricimer and his puppet emperors. He fought many wars with Ricimer, and he fought the Foederati states that were physically in the way of him and Rome. He retook his home region from the Burgundian and Visigothic barbarians, slowly making his state stronger and stronger. Then, he extended the olive branch of friendship to the Visigoths, but before they could accept, he died a mysterious death in 465 AD. This is where the information becomes more shaky, as the two primary sources of the time argue over Syragius' title and what he did. This brings us into the Research Paper.

Arguments for the Kingdom

The four arguments that will be put forth to argue that the Kingdom of Soissons is a kingdom is proving that its existence is possible, using History of the Franks, a semantic argument, and an argument based on Arthurian Mythology.

Proving its feasibility:

To prove that the Kingdom is a possibility, this text will go through “contemporary” Roman Gauls history. Going through the history of Roman Gaul, we see that Aegidius was a successful leader of a state, as the evidence shows that even after his breakaway in 461, he was able to continue to lead armies big enough to require a kingdom to sustain. The evidence directly says,“In AD 463 Aegidius won what was probably a major battle at Orleans, defeating Frederic, brother of the Visigothic king. Frederic had earlier been campaigning against the bacaudae in Spain, on Rome's behalf. This battle is recorded in a number of sources, each with a slightly different angle. According to a chronicle written by Marius of Avenches, the battle, between Aegidius and the Goths, took place between the rivers of the Loire and the Loir, near Orleans. Hydatius reports that, in AD 463, ‘in the province of Armorica, Frederic, the brother of King Theoderic, rose up against the comes utriusque militiae Aegidius, a man of courage and commendable reputation and pleasing to God for his good works, and, with those with him, was defeated and killed’. The Gallic Chronicle of 511 entry for AD 463 does not mention Aegidius, but records the death of Frederic near the Loire, when fighting Franks; while Gregory of Tours writes that ‘Childeric fought battles at Orleans’ (no date given)”(Macgeorge). This evidence clearly outlines a strong presence of the Roman military under him, which indicates loyal troops, as if the troops were not loyal to him(as most were loyal to their direct magister militarum compared to the emperor), he would not have had the ability to defeat many powerful groups in

the region, such as the Burgundians and Visigoths. It even shows him fighting against Ricimer, a Roman loyalist general, a clear sign of rebelling from the empire to some extent, establishing that the state existed there until at least Aegidius' death in 465 CE, and it wouldn't be a stretch to assume its continuation is possible.

Gregory of Tours:

In Shotwell's translated version of Gregory of Tours *History of the Franks*, Syragius is referred to as "…king of the Romans, son of [A]Egidius, had his seat in the city of Soissons[Noviodunum] which [A]Egidius, who has been mentioned before, once held"(Shotwell 27). This directly indicates that he is a king, and is the strongest direct evidence of Aegidius and Syragius being a king or the equivalent thereof.

Another passage in *History of the Franks*, states that "And so they fought against each other and Siagrius, seeing his army crushed, turned his back and fled swiftly to king Alaric at Toulouse. And Clovis sent to Alaric to send him back, otherwise he was to know that Clovis would make war on him for his refusal. And Alaric was afraid that he would incur the anger of the Franks on account of Siagrius, seeing it is the fashion of the Goths to be terrified, and he surrendered him in chains to Clovis' envoys. And Clovis took him and gave orders to put him under guard, and when he had got his kingdom he directed that he be executed secretly."(Shotwell 27). This passage proves that Syragius was a major power in the region capable of fighting Clovis to an extent. Not only this, but he was such a major figure of the time that Clovis threatened war to the other major power of the region just to make sure his line would die. For the Kingdom of Soissons to be such a powerful and highly regarded state it needs to be independent and not only that, but powerful enough to stand on its own, showing that Gregory believed that the Kingdom of Soissons was in fact a kingdom.

Semantic Argument:

In this section is a semantic argument based on the definitions of three widely used dictionaries, and how using those dictionaries the state commonly referred to as the “Kingdom of Soissons” is a real state. First, to test if it is a kingdom, we check the definition of a kingdom, which is,“a country, state, or territory ruled by a king or queen” according to the Oxford Dictionary. The Soisson is already a state/country/territory and there is no reason to extend upon that. So we must prove that they are ruled by a king/queen(hereby simplified to just king). Oxford defines king as “the male ruler of an independent state, especially one who inherits the position by right of birth”. Knowing that we know what a kingdom requires, and how to meet those requirements, we must see if the “Kingdom of Soissons” as described by Gregory of Tours fits that definition.

The Soissons had,”... already from 461 CE, i.e. the death of Majorian, Egidius(Aegidius) was basically an independent ruler in northern Gaul”. This fulfills that they are a country or a state as they had their own government, and they were independent, as the source says, making the first section of both being a kingdom and a king fulfilled. Furthermore, under Syragius, the son of Aegidius, he had inherited the realm from him, making him now a hereditary ruler. That fulfills Oxford's definitions, but of course, there are other definitions, so for the sake of brevity and depth simultaneously we will take the Wiktionary’s and Merriam Webster's definitions.

Wikipedia states that a king is,“A realm having a king or queen as its actual or nominal sovereign” So thus, to be a kingdom, the “Kingdom of Soisson” must be a realm, with a king as its head. The “Kingdom of Soisson” we can agree is a realm, thus we move on, to check if it has a king at its head. The definition of king as defined by the Wiktionary is,“A male monarch; a man who heads a monarchy; in an absolute monarchy, the supreme ruler of his nation”. This requires either Aegidius or Syragius to be a monarch at one point, and thus we check the definition of a

monarchy. The second and fourth definition of a monarchy loops back upon either being a kingdom or having a king at his head, and due to their circularity, will thus be discarded. This leaves us with two definitions for a monarchy, the first being,“A government in which sovereignty is embodied within a single, today usually hereditary head of state (whether as a figurehead or as a powerful ruler)”. For Aegidius and Syragius, this definition fits, as the Soissons have all of their sovereignty and rule stemming from their leadership, and thus they are a kingdom by that definition. For the other definition,“A form of government where sovereignty is embodied by a single ruler in a state and his high aristocracy representing their separate divided lands within the state and their low aristocracy representing their separate divided fiefs”. It is an extension of the first. We already agree that the first section is true, and thus, we check if it happens to be feudal(what the second part is), and many consider Soisson to be a feudal/feudal-romanic state and thus it fills that definition.

Lastly, we must check if Merriam Webster's definition of a kingdom fits for the “Kingdom of Soisson”. Merriam Webster defines a kingdom as,”a politically organized community or major territorial unit having a monarchical form of government headed by a king or queen”. We know that the Soisson are a politically organized community, and a major territorial unit as they were able to collect taxes and hold legionary control over northern Gaul for 20 years. Not only that, but they had beaten the Visigoths(defended Arelate in 459), Burgundians(he took his homeland of Lugdunum 458) and the Franks(Ripurian invasion in 456). Thus they were an organized and major territorial unit. Furthermore, Merriam Webster defines monarchical form of government as,“of, relating to, suggestive of, or characteristic of a monarch or monarchy”, and a monarchy is,“undivided rule or absolute sovereignty by a single person”. Thus we must check if the “Kingdom of Soissons” is ruled only ever by one individual(funnily enough, this definition excludes dual monarchies as real monarchies, but the Soviet Union is one according to this). Properly enough, they are only ever ruled by Aegidius or Syragius one at a time, and only the General Paulus ever came close to that rank, but he never had autonomy, and was just a

powerful general. Lastly, we must check the definition of king. It is defined as,“a male monarch of a major territorial unit”. We already know that under Aegidius and Syragius(the only two rulers), the “Kingdom of Soissons” is ruled by a monarch of a major territorial unit as stated before.

Arthurian Legends Argument:

Bronwen Hosie describes Syragius and Aegidius’ connection to Arthurian mythology, and how it might describe it. “He was the last Roman military commander of the Kingdom of Soissons following his father and his life is dated circa A.D.430-486/7. He was defeated in battle, the Battle of Soissons, by Clovis of France and having fled, was then said to have been imprisoned by the Visigoths who handed him over to Clovis. He died shortly after … The father of Clovis, Childeric, had, at one point, helped the Gallo-Romans fighting against the Saxons during the time of Syagrius; although he was not always an ally; sometimes he was the foe. Syagrius, as Cadwr and Gwallog in legend, was said to have fought against the Saxons. It was Cadwr’s son, Constantine, who supposedly took over rule in Britain after the death of Arthur. To summarise from the additional information our Celtic ancestors provide it can be seen that Aegidius and Syagrius, in Celtic legend, had strong connections with Britain and King Arthur. Aegidius, under synonymous names in legend, was the first husband of Arthur’s mother and the father of Arthur’s half brother, Syagrius. In many instances he was said to be the father of Anna, the half-sister of Arthur”(Hosie).

This source has many inaccuracies due to being, well, Arthurian legends, so what it says will not over-ride anything. But, it can support what we know, and provide theories, as not all of it is false. Firstly, in Arthurian legends there is a commander named Cadwr or Gallog of the Soissons who fought the Saxons and the Franks. He is probably Syragius, as it states he was stabbed in secret by Glovius. Glovius though is probably Clovis(as the text states), as it does

state king of the Franks. But in Arthurian legends Aegidius/Aetius is the last Soissonic king, and thus their chronology is messed up. Furthermore, it states king Arthur is the half brother of Syragius, and Syragius' son(of whom we have no record), becomes Arthur's heir to Britain. But it provides even more unsupported information, of there being Anna, Syragius's sister. We do know though, historically that the line of Syragii continues at least into the 8th century.

Furthermore, we know that Gildas the monk recorded in "Groans of the Britons", that Aegidius was requested to help the Britons fight the Picts and Saxons, indicating that even before Majorian promoted him, Aegidius was known as a "king" by the celts. Remember though, that a celtic "king" does not mean king in the modern sense. There is a possibility, however, that Constantine, who is the king of the Britons, refers to Constantine III, a historical figure who used legions in Britannia proclaiming himself Caesar of Rome, and then left Britannia with those soldiers.

Defending the Sources:

In this section of the paper, all sources used to defend the claim that Aegidius and Syragius were kings. This is to ensure the reliability of the evidence for the arguments, and we will start by defending Gregory of Tours, then doing Penny Macgeorge and all the other scholars that have been cited.

Using Edward James:

Edward James himself(in the version I translated), the most staunch defender of the claim that Aegidius and Syragius were not kings even says by his own admission that,“everything we know comes from Gregory. He lived in Soissons”(James). Obviously, he died 50 years ago, and thus his work might be outdated, but if the most well known opposer to the kingship of Aegidius admits that the only source on that region directly opposes him, that shows that there is not much we can do to replace Gregory as a source. Even if he was only right half the time(Which he is more accurate), we would still be required to use him as a source due to the lack of other sources on the time period and region.

Though, there are real criticisms of using Gregory, which James brings up in the following passage,“The 5th-century Franks—or a group of Franks—may have regarded him as a king, another ethnic king; like his father Egidius, he may have led a group of Frankish soldiers and thus earned this royal title. Or perhaps the Romans regarded him as their king. But it is quite possible that the word was used for the first time by Gregory himself. He was interested in titles, and Syagrius’s title—as well as the sources of his authority—may have been a major concern for Gregory. For him, the word *rex* may have signified Syagrius’s independence from the Empire and the absence of an imperial or official title: Syagrius was not a *comes*, a *patricius*, or a *magister militum*, and it is likely that he did not recognize the legitimacy of the

emperors in Italy or even in Byzantium. Fré-dégaire(Fredgar), on the other hand, rejected Grégoire's[Gregory's] title of "rex" and chose "patricius" instead; perhaps he was right to do so. As Marc Bloch noted, Gregory did not understand the events of the fifth century: "As a subject of the Frankish kingdom, how could the good bishop have formed a clear and accurate picture of the extraordinarily complex political situation in a part of Romania(Roman empire) during the second half of the fifth century?""(James). This shows that Gregory might not have had a full understanding of the rapidly changing and complex politics of the time, but is in fact reliable to some degree. The other source, Fredgar, though, is less reliable, as we know nothing about who published it, why it was published, and when it was published. This means we should give deference to Gregory over Fredgar when they come into disagreement like here.

Another issue with Gregory as a source is that he could be interpreted as biased to make Clovis look like a stronger leader. Penny Macgeorge comes in to support Gregory as a source saying that,"It seems, however, implausible that Gregory would have concocted a story of a Roman becoming King of the Franks and connected it to sexual scandal about the great conqueror's parents merely to explain a folk memory of Franks fighting under Aegidius (especially if, as James believes, Gregory was set on glorifying Clovis). Another recent historian, Frye, returned to the older view and accepted not only that Aegidius became King of the Franks but the details of Gregory's story (see below for his interpretation of the reports of a battle at Orleans). In his model, Childeric and Aegidius were rivals for the Frankish throne, with Franks fighting for both sides. Childeric's activities in North Gaul are placed in the context of this rivalry, including the story in later sources of a Frankish victory over Aegidius on the Rhine, which he attributes to Childeric (although Childeric's name does not appear in this context)"(Macgeorge). This evidence speaks for itself indicating that Gregory is unlikely to have been overly biased in the parts James criticizes, and thus I will not extend upon it.

The last criticism of Gregory is that he tends to speak in riddles and slightly mess up dates, but slight errors in dates do not mean the actual material is wrong(and what we have

been able to verify has been mostly correct). The other part, that he speaks in “riddles” is a criticism of how we interpret him, and unless there is an alternative explanation for each passage, we should go with the mainstream one. It is fully possible that by “Rex Romanorum” Gregory just meant a Roman warlord, but that could be indicative of him being a king or a king equivalent. It is all a matter of how he is interpreted.

There is no point in defending the academic articles I cite, as the authors all have credentials and cite their own source, and are not disputed. If a dispute is made to happen over their reliability, it will be necessary to defend them, but right now there is no purpose.

Arguments Against the Kingdom:

There are some arguments against the “Kingdom of Soissons” being a kingdom that should be brought up. These are as follows: Warlord/rump states cannot be kingdoms, Aegidius was merely a general with civilian powers, and the “Comes hypothesis”.

Warlord states:

The argument that rump states and warlord states cannot be kingdoms is a misrepresentation of rump states. There are rump states of the Byzantine empire that are considered kingdoms, such as Trebizond. That is a direct counter example to that point. The belief that warlord states cannot be kingdoms is also easily disproven when looking at the chinese warlord states that have formed many times, and they were considered kingdoms depending on the individual states governance and other political matters defining a kingdom

General/administrative hypothesis:

This is a fairly interesting claim that Aegidius and Syragius were not kings, but only called that because many languages at the time had no word for administrative positions, and instead used “king”. This in fact is true for the Celtic languages, possibly disproving the Arthurian argument, but for the Franks, I have less knowledge of, and thus cannot say anything about it. Gregory of Tours, however, uses the latin term “rex”, to describe Aegidius and Syragius, and it is known that latin had a term for its own administration, as it had developed those words to describe itself.

Furthermore, Ashley Hern wrote her masters on late Roman military positions and can refute this claim of a misunderstanding of position. She directly states that “The creation of duces is often taken to represent late Roman separation of military and

civilian powers: a praeses continued to exercise the non-military responsibilities in their province”(Hern). This directly indicates that in late Rome, any military leader could not have civilian power, as this hypothesis would have you believe. Not only that, but Aegidius could not have been a civilian with military power. The strict Roman laws were set up to prevent this from happening. In the rest of her 250 page masters paper goes on about Roman military structure, and continuously hammers home that after Diocletian, the military and the civilian were becoming more and more divorced over time, leading to the almost total separation of them by the end of the empire.

“Comes Hypothesis”

There is a hypothesis, first put forward by Edward James, that Syragius was merely a “comes”, or a count, rebelling from the Frankish authorities, and Gregory merely increased Syragius’ strength to make Clovis look stronger. This could be true, and has a decently likely chance of happening, but currently has no supporting evidence for this claim, only a statement of Gregory’s unreliability, which was previously covered. Therefore, there is no need to bring it back up, but to mention Frye, with MacGeorge's support, a historian on the subject believes that Gregory is reliable, and backs it up by saying that making Syragius a king would not support this alleged aim.

Conclusion:

In summation, there is a near guarantee that Aegidius was a king or a king equivalent, and no historian debates that. The only place where there is an argument is whether after 465, the state Aegidius ran was still a kingdom. This is because we have shakier and shakier evidence in the time period, but ultimately, Gregory of Tours, Arthurian legends, and a semantic argument, all back up that Syragius were kings, while the only arguments against this rely on possibility and cannot prove anything, reliant on saying that Gregory is not a trustworthy source, or making multiple arguments on the English language and that of the Celts and Franks.