

### Reading for Seminar 3 - *Historiae adversus paganos* (418) by Paulus Orosius

The Betty Behrens Seminar on Classics of Historiography

Thursday 29 May 2025, 2.15pm – 4pm

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Please read the Introduction to Andy Fear's translation of Orosius's *Historiae* into English – pages 1-25

Please read the following passages from the *Historiae*:

1. The beginning of the *Historiae* (Prologue), where Orosius addresses Augustine who had requested that Orosius write the *Historiae*. The Prologue is immediately followed by Orosius's geographical description of the entire world (not provided), and the conclusion to this description – pages 31-36, and page 50
2. Orosius's descriptions of the Gallic and Gothic sacks of Rome (390 BCE and 410 CE respectively), and the closing passage of the *Historiae*, where Orosius again defers to the authority of Augustine – pages 106-8, and pages 401-4, pages 406-7, and pages 411-14
3. The end of Book Six and the beginning of Book Seven which include the Coming of Christ, the Roman empire, and the accession of Augustus, synchronised according to divine providence – pages 315-17, and pages 320-25
4. The sufferings of war and imperial expansion, and Christian Roman identity as the antidote – pages 206-10

The Introduction and all extracts are taken from:

Fear, A.T., *Orosius, Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (Translated Texts for Historians 54; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010)

Translated Texts for Historians  
Volume 54

# **Orosius**

## **Seven Books of History against the Pagans**

Translated with an introduction and notes by  
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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. LIFE

For an author who was to become so popular in the Middle Ages, there is disappointingly little concrete information about the life of Orosius; even his name is unclear.<sup>1</sup> Jordanes refers to Orosius Paulus,<sup>2</sup> and the fragment of the *Histories* in the *Bibliotheca Laurentiana*, which probably dates to the sixth century, speaks of Paulus Orosius, but earlier sources, such as Augustine and Jerome, and later ones, such as the seventh-century Visigothic bishop of Saragossa, Braulio, simply refer to our author as Orosius.

The date of Orosius's birth is as opaque as his name, nor is anything known of his childhood and upbringing, his own works being almost entirely devoid of autobiographical details. Braulio believed that Orosius had been a follower of the heretic Priscillian who was later brought back to orthodoxy by Augustine.<sup>3</sup> This seems most unlikely and is probably derived from Braulio's knowledge of Augustine's *Book against the supporters of Priscillian and Origen dedicated to Orosius* (*Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas*), but his ignorance of Orosius's own attack on the Priscillianists, the *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum* which provoked Augustine's reply. Orosius's writings contain quotations from, and, more importantly, adaptations of, Classical authors, showing that he had had a good literary education. From this we can infer that he may well have been a man of some pedigree and have stemmed from a wealthy family. Probably, like his near contemporary, Patrick, he was a member of the curial class, though the two were to have very different lives.

Orosius's entry into the historical record comes in a letter of commendation written by Augustine to Jerome written in AD 415. In it, Augustine

1 For an extended discussion of Orosius's life see Vilella (2000).

2 *Getica* 9; the odd order of names here suggests that conceivably Jordanes mistakenly expanded an abbreviation, Orosius P[resbyter], as Orosius Paulus.

3 *Letter* 44 = PL 80 693–94; Riesco Terrero (1975) 170–71.

is at pains to mention Orosius's youth, but gives us no other clues about his background.<sup>4</sup> When Augustine wrote to Jerome, Orosius was already a priest and so must have been towards if not, given Augustine's persistent harping on the theme (it is mentioned on three separate occasions), at the very youngest age at which ordination was possible. According to the letter of Pope Syriacus sent to Evemerius, the metropolitan of Tarragona, and that sent by Innocent I to the bishops of Spain, this limit in the peninsula was 35. However, this age seems to have been the exception not the rule and elsewhere 30 was accepted as the lowest age for entry to the priesthood. Given that this is what would have been known to Augustine, maybe we ought to assume that Orosius was around 30 at the time Augustine wrote to Jerome, making the date of his birth around AD 385.<sup>5</sup>

Although questioned in recent years,<sup>6</sup> Spain remains the clear candidate for Orosius's birthplace. Gennadius refers to him as 'the priest Orosius, of Spanish origins',<sup>7</sup> while Braulio writing to Fructuosus of Braga lists him among the 'most eloquent and learned' products of Galicia.<sup>8</sup> The implications of our ancient sources are supported by Orosius's own writing. He takes evident pride in the resistance to Rome at Numantia, in the fact that Spain has supplied Rome with 'good emperors' such as Trajan and Theodosius the Great,<sup>9</sup> and has eye for details in Spain, such as the lighthouse at Corunna, which is not repeated elsewhere in the empire. To these details can be added his description of the Spanish town of Tarragona as 'our Tarragona'.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, short of an unequivocal statement of the fact, the evidence for Orosius's Spanish origins is as solid as it could possibly be.

Debate has also raged over from precisely what part of the peninsula Orosius hailed. The reference to 'our Tarragona' mentioned above has led some scholars to believe that this was Orosius's hometown. This was certainly the view among many older commentators, such as Baronius and Mörner. On the other hand, in the context where it is used, 'our' could simply mean 'Spanish', and there has also been a long tradition, now supported by the majority of modern commentators, of following Braulio in seeing Orosius's

4 Augustine, *Letter* 166 = PL 33 720–21; CSEL 44 547–48. Augustine was 60 at the time.

5 See Raymond (1936) 5, following Mörner (1844) 19.

6 See Arnaud-Lindet (1990) xi–xii.

7 *Ecclesiastical Writers (De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis)*, 39 = PL 58 1080–81.

8 *Letter* 44 = PL 80 698–99; Riesco Terrero (1975) 180–83.

9 Numantia 5.5, see also Orosius's description of the Cantabrian Wars 6.21; lighthouse, 1.2.71; good emperors 5.23.16, 7.34.1.

10 7.22.8.



*patria chica* in the north-west of the peninsula.<sup>11</sup> Braga is often seen as the most likely candidate for Orosius's hometown, above all because he refers to two colleagues named Avitus as *cives mei*, 'my citizens', and Avitus of Braga, who is likely to be one of these two Aviti, later calls Orosius 'my son and fellow-priest'.<sup>12</sup> But these references, while perhaps suggestive, are in no way conclusive. If we are to reject *noster*, when referring to Tarragona, as having a personal reference to Orosius, his use of *meus* here is no stronger, while Avitus's remarks need not imply anything other than affection from one priest towards another. In many ways, Corunna seems a more appropriate candidate for Orosius's place of birth.<sup>13</sup> While lying within Galicia, and so not contradicting Braulio's comments, this town seems to occupy a special place in Orosius's affections; the singling out of its lighthouse in the *Histories* as 'a work with which few can be compared' is particularly striking. Augustine may also give us a hint here when he writes that Orosius has come to him 'from the shores of the Ocean' and 'from the furthest reaches of Spain – that is Ocean's shore'. However, it is worth remembering that Orosius, albeit to produce a forced contrast, is happy on one occasion to refer to Tarragona, located on Spain's Mediterranean coast, as 'the utmost West'.<sup>14</sup> Any speculation on our author's hometown therefore remains, in the last analysis, mere speculation.

At some point in the early fifth century, Orosius was forced to flee from Spain to North Africa. The account of his flight in the *Histories* implies that this was done under duress and placed him in danger.<sup>15</sup> The precise date of his escape is disputed. Some, using Orosius's comment that he fled at the first sign of trouble, have suggested that he left for Africa in AD 409 when the first serious barbarian incursions into Spain began, but this seems unduly pessimistic, and the most likely date for Orosius's flight is AD 411.

11 e.g. Corsini (1968) 15. Ibañez Segovia defended this position in 1681 in his *Disertaciones eclesiásticas por el honor de los antiguos tutelares contra las ficciones modernas*.

12 *Commonitorium* 3, *Letter of Avitus to Palchonium* (*Epistula Aviti ad Palchonium*) = PL 41 805.

13 See Javier (1982) 177–78; Torres Rodríguez (1985) 25–27.

14 Augustine, *Letters* 166 and 169 (= CSEL 44); 6.21.19–20.

15 3.20.6–7, 5.2.1. Later in the work, *Histories* 7.41.4–6 suggests that Orosius's flight was relatively easy and this is the view taken by Sánchez Salor (1982) 15. The problem we face here is the degree of rhetoric to be found in the *Histories*. The context of the first two passages is one where an emphasis on the difficulties of flight would be useful for Orosius's argument, while in the final passage Orosius is at pains to emphasise the benefits of the Christian epoch and so may well be downplaying the difficulties involved in flight. The first account appears the more credible of the two, but with no corroborating evidence, it is important to keep an open mind.

#### 4 SEVEN BOOKS OF HISTORY AGAINST THE PAGANS

This is when the Sueves occupied Braga and, according to Hydatius, ‘those parts of the west which lie on the edge of the Ocean’ which would include Corunna.<sup>16</sup>

On his arrival in North Africa, Orosius became acquainted with St Augustine, presenting the bishop of Hippo with his *Memoir on the Error of the Supporters of Priscillian and Origen* (*Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*).<sup>17</sup> The work suggests involvement in doctrinal disputes in Spain and is a good indication of Orosius’s combative disposition. The account of his journey to Africa in the *Memoir* differs from that presented in the *Histories*, and states that he had arrived to consult Augustine on issues of doctrine, coming to Africa ‘neither through any wish or my own, nor through compulsion, nor at the suggestion of another, but after being moved by some unknown power’.<sup>18</sup> Given that Augustine had previously criticised priests who had abandoned their flocks in the face of barbarian invasions, it is perhaps not surprising that Orosius chose to make no mention of his flight when writing to him.<sup>19</sup>

Augustine produced his *Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* in reply to Orosius’s work,<sup>20</sup> but was unable to satisfy some of his enquiries. He therefore sent him on to Jerome in Palestine, commending him highly.<sup>21</sup> Orosius may have travelled to Palestine via Egypt, where he speaks of seeing various books at Alexandria, and the Red Sea, where he may have seen what he believed were the wheel ruts from Pharaoh’s army preserved under the water.<sup>22</sup> While we have no evidence of how the relationship between Jerome and Orosius worked in practice, the two men’s similarity of character implies that they would have got on well together.<sup>23</sup> It is likely that during his stay, Orosius acquired a copy of Jerome’s *Chronicle*, which was to be a major source for the *Histories*. In Palestine Orosius soon became involved in the Pelagian controversy, representing the anti-Pelagian

16 Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 17.49.

17 PL 31 1211–16; CSEL 18; Torres Rodríguez (1985) 729–43.

18 *Commonitorium*, 1.

19 See Augustine, *Letter* 228 = CSEL 57 484.

20 PL 42 669–78.

21 Augustine, *Letter* 166 (= CSEL 44 547). Given the tension that at times flared up between Jerome and Augustine, one cannot help wondering whether Augustine’s sending Orosius to Jerome was an act entirely devoid of malice.

22 Alexandria, 6.15.32; wheel ruts, 2.10.17.

23 Jerome is certainly complimentary about Orosius in a letter to Augustine (Augustine, *Letter* 122 = PL 33 752; CSEL 56 56–71).

cause at a synod in Jerusalem convened on 28 July 415 by Pelagius's ally, bishop John of Jerusalem. The synod went badly for Orosius and afterwards he was accused by John of denying that man could be free of sin even through the agency of divine grace. To defend himself he wrote his *Defence against Pelagius concerning the Doctrine of Freewill* (*Liber Apologeticus contra Pelagium de Arbitrii Libertate*).<sup>24</sup> Towards the end of 415 a further Council at Diospolis (20–23 December), which Orosius did not attend, gave Pelagius a clean bill of orthodox health.

In this respect Orosius's stay in the Holy Land was not a happy one,<sup>25</sup> but it was perhaps leavened by the discovery on 3 December 415 of the body of the protomartyr Stephen by Lucian of Kaphar Gamala. Avitus of Braga, a fellow Spaniard staying with Jerome, managed to obtain some of Stephen's relics, including, as he proudly says, not just dust, but solid bones,<sup>26</sup> and he gave them to Orosius to take to Palchonius, the bishop of Braga. Orosius had promised Augustine that he would return from the Holy Land via North Africa and so put in on his way home with a letter from Jerome to Augustine, a further letter and some works of Jerome for his pupil Oceanus, the official minutes of the Council held at Diospolis, and a letter from Heros and Lazarus for Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage.<sup>27</sup> He arrived in the midsummer of 416.<sup>28</sup>

While in Africa, Orosius attended the Council of Carthage in 416. He then set out for Spain, but the chaos into which the peninsula had descended prevented him from returning home. He left the relics of Stephen in Magona<sup>29</sup> on Minorca and returned to Africa.<sup>30</sup> This is our last notice of Orosius, apart from the internal evidence of the *Histories* which show them to have been written by AD 418. We have no knowledge of his later life or death. Gennadius merely notes that Orosius won his reputation during the final years of Honorius's reign. We must presume that this reputation was based on the publication of the *Histories*. It seems unlikely that such

24 PL 31 1173–1212; CSEL 5 603–64; Zangemeister (1967) 601–64; Torres Rodríguez (1985) 756–880.

25 Jerome, writing to Augustine, describes these as 'most difficult times', *Letter* 134 = CSEL 56 261–63.

26 *Letter of Avitus to Palchonius*, 8 = PL 41 807, 'ossa solida'.

27 Augustine, *Letter* 166 (Orosius's promise); *Letters* 175 and 180 (Orosius's baggage).

28 Augustine, *Letter* 175.

29 The modern Port Mahon.

30 *Letter of Severus (Epistula Severi)*, 4 = PL 41 823. For a modern edition, see Bradbury (1996). For a discussion of Orosius's journeys and the use of these relics, see Gauge (1998).

a pugnacious character would have rested on his laurels, and it is therefore likely that Orosius met an early death at around the age of 40, probably in North Africa.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. THE HISTORIES

When then did Orosius write his *Histories*? Again, there is no consensus. According to Orosius, who is our only source of evidence, the *Histories* were commissioned by Augustine after the completion of the first ten books of the *City of God*, and while Augustine was working on the eleventh. The work must therefore have been commissioned after Orosius's arrival in Africa prior to which Augustine had no knowledge of him, but when? A *terminus ante quem* is provided by the death of the Gothic king Vallia in AD 418, as he is the ruling king of the Visigoths at the end of the work.<sup>32</sup>

One resolution to the problem is to see the work as being started soon after Orosius's arrival in Africa, broken off by his trip to the Middle East, and completed on his return. This would have the advantage of giving Orosius time for research, but there is no positive evidence to show that this was the case:<sup>33</sup> Augustine, when commending Orosius to Jerome, makes no reference to any historical work, either commissioned or begun. Another approach would be to see the work completed during Orosius's stay in Africa after his return from the Holy Land, but before his attempted return to Spain.<sup>34</sup> A final solution would be to see the work as being written by Orosius after he had been forced to return to Africa, having failed to return to mainland Spain. Augustine, when speaking of the promise Orosius made to revisit Africa, refers to him returning to Spain, but gives no hint of anything other than a brief stop-over in Carthage. Severus of Minorca, the unexpected recipient of Stephen's bones, refers to Orosius arriving in Minorca when returning to Spain from Jerusalem. This also implies that Orosius's stay in Africa had been a short one. If this is the case, it is perhaps most likely that the *Histories* are a product of Orosius's exile, written in

31 In more apocalyptic fashion Arnaud-Lindet (1990) xx suggests Orosius died in a shipwreck when returning to Africa from Minorca.

32 7.43.10.

33 See Fink-Errera (1954), Lacroix (1965), and Arnaud-Lindet (1990) xxii–xxv.

34 See Sánchez Salor (1982) 15. Penelas (2001) 22 believes that this is when Orosius finished the definitive version of his work, but suggests it may have been begun during Orosius's first visit to Africa.

Africa after he had failed to return home, making them the product of under a year's work.<sup>35</sup>

Either of the final two solutions makes more sense than the first. The main objection to them – that such a lengthy work could not be researched in such a short time – is weak. There is no need to believe that Orosius consulted widely for his work. The bulk of his material is drawn from a small number of standard historical works. Moreover, the *Histories*, though well written, do show signs of misunderstanding of their source material, and while, as will be seen, some of these 'misunderstandings' are deliberate, others are not; and these, along with various lapses in editing, suggest that the *Histories* were composed in haste.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. INTENTIONS

We have only Orosius's word that Augustine commissioned a work from him, and only deductions based on this statement, and from the work itself, that it was a history that was so commissioned. Specifically, we are told that it was to be a book setting out 'concisely and in order' all the troubles 'found in times gone by that I could discover in all the records of the histories and annals which are to be had at the present time'.<sup>37</sup> Like Augustine, who worried about the danger of becoming a mere compiler of facts, Orosius too wanted his work to have some purpose.<sup>38</sup> What we have therefore is not a mere list of disasters, but a continuous narrative. The commission certainly did not provide the 'essential material' of the *City of God* as Trevor-Roper once asserted: book three of the *City of God*, which contains similar material, had already been written when Orosius began his work.<sup>39</sup> Orosius's end product, however, was unique for its times. While previous Christian writers had composed histories of the Church, Orosius produced a history of the secular world from a Christian perspective, and it was the combination of this subject matter with its new ideological interpretation

35 See Bradbury (1996) 24–25.

36 See, *inter alia*, the conflicting time schemes of 1.1.5–6 and 1.21.20; the curious chapter 'title' at 1.2.91; the division of Valerius Antias into two historians at 5.3.3–4.

37 1 *Preface* 10.

38 Augustine, *City of God* 3.18; 3 *Preface* 3.

39 Trevor-Roper (1955); date of composition, 1 *Preface* 11. Perhaps Trevor-Roper was drawing on Dante, *Paradiso*, canto 10, where the 'defender of the Christian Age whose writings Augustine used for his own betterment', *quello avvocato de' tempi cristiani del cui latino Augustin si provide*, is normally seen as Orosius; see Toynbee (1902) 121–36.

that was to lead to Orosius's work becoming a great success in the Middle Ages.

Orosius took the view that previous historians, because they were pagans, had necessarily missed the underlying message to be found in history: an error that he regarded as his duty to correct.<sup>40</sup> This message was that the unfolding of history shows the unfolding of God's plan on earth, and that the arrival of Christianity therefore necessarily marks an improvement in man's condition regardless of any first appearances to the contrary which, as Orosius is happy to admit, may have seemed to contradict this message unless one looked at the *longue durée*.<sup>41</sup> It is a message that Orosius repeats relentlessly, telling his reader in no uncertain terms that 'you've never had it so good', continually challenging him to find a happier epoch than the present in man's history,<sup>42</sup> and emphasising how trivial present troubles, by the very nature of their being present, always appear much worse to the thoughtless than the major disasters that have occurred in the past.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, for Orosius the march of history does not merely show God's plan at large; His direct intervention in particular events is also readily discernible. These interventions began with divine punishment for original sin in the Garden of Eden,<sup>44</sup> but can also be seen throughout historical time. Such interventions, which Orosius regards as uncontroversial and incontrovertible, are normally made to punish sin.<sup>45</sup> These sins are both secular and religious. The destruction of a library in Rome by lightning, for example, is seen as punishment for Commodus's murder of part of the Senate.<sup>46</sup> Rituals at Rome that involve burial alive or murder bring outbursts of madness and military defeats.<sup>47</sup> Naturally, Orosius sees the persecution of Christians as immediately bringing down divine vengeance. Nero's execution of Peter and Paul brings a plague and Boadicea's rebellion in Britain in its wake,<sup>48</sup> plague immediately follows Marcus Aurelius's persecution,<sup>49</sup> and rebellion

40 1.1.13.

41 1 *Preface* 13–14. One interesting argument Orosius uses is the success of Claudius's expedition to Britain undertaken after the birth of Christ and the arrival of St Peter to preach in Rome, compared to the previous failure of Caesar's British expedition; see 7.6.11.

42 Above all 7.43.16, but see also 2.11.8, 2.19.4, 2.19.12, 5.18.29, 5.22.5–15, and 5.24.9.

43 See the extended argument/diatribe on this theme at 4 *Preface*.

44 1.1.4, 1.3.1, and 7.1.3.

45 See 7.3.5–6.

46 7.16.3.

47 3.9.5–3.10 and 4.13.3–8.

48 7.7.11.

49 7.15.5.

in Gaul is Severus's reward for his attacks on Christians.<sup>50</sup> Trajan, an emperor of whom Orosius generally approves, is punished by childlessness for his attacks on the Church.<sup>51</sup> Heresy too attracts divine retribution. Constantius's flirtation with Arianism produces a massive earthquake in the eastern empire, as does the adoption of the Arian Valens as emperor. For Orosius, this emperor's heresy was also responsible for the military disaster at Adrianople.<sup>52</sup>

While punishing the wicked, God rewards the faithful. Constantine's adoption of Christianity is repaid with a major victory over his enemies, and the rapid growth of his new foundation, Constantinople, is due to its being a Christian city.<sup>53</sup> The emperor Gratian defeats a large horde of barbarians at Argentaria by placing his faith in Christ.<sup>54</sup> But the best example of divine favour is that of Orosius's hero, Theodosius, to whom the Goths and Persians surrender because of his almost Christ-like demonstration of faith and whose piety brings the divine aid that assured victory at the river Frigidus.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, it is the piety of the current emperor, Honorius, that dooms the usurpers who rise against him.<sup>56</sup> Orosius is also quick to recruit changes in fortune to his cause, making the point that defection from God's party brings a fall in its wake. Arbogastes enjoys success as Theodosius's general, but fails when he joins the pagan Eugenius, and Mascezil, after a triumphant campaign against Gildo in Africa, also falls from grace when he begins to persecute the Church.<sup>57</sup> As well as specific members of the faithful, Orosius also believes that the very presence of Christians in a community alleviates suffering, as God is more inclined to be merciful when there at least some men attempting to follow His will.<sup>58</sup> This view necessarily means that more suffering was to be found in the pre-Christian era than after the incarnation: 'I found that the days gone by were as fraught as the present, and all the more horribly wretched as they were further from the salvation of True Religion.'<sup>59</sup>

Such an ideologically orientated interpretation of history carries its own dangers. While it can be comforting and heartening to read that one is

50 7.17.5.

51 7.33.4 (see Orosius's earlier special pleading for Trajan at 7.12.4).

52 7.29.5, 7.32.5, and 7.33.17.

53 7.28.27–30.

54 7.33.8.

55 7.34.7 and 7.35.15–22.

56 7.42.15.

57 7.35.12 and 7.36.13.

58 2.3.7.

59 1 *Preface* 14.

part of an inevitably triumphant process, it can also be troubling when the historical record fails to meet such expectations. One obvious strategy here for an historian is to avoid any mention of such awkward data, but while Orosius is guilty of this from time to time – the most striking example being his silence over the massacre at Salonica ordered by his hero Theodosius in 390 – normally he is honest enough to record events in the Christian period which do not seem to fit into his plan and express himself to be perplexed. This is how he deals with Constantine's execution of his sons.<sup>60</sup> In the end, Orosius accepts that God moves in mysterious ways and that sometimes His decisions cannot be understood by mere men. Like Alexander Pope, he asks us to accept this problem with faith and believe that 'whatever is, is right'.<sup>61</sup>

The overall structure of the *Histories* shows the influence of Christian apocalyptic thought, though Orosius does not labour this overtly in the text. The seven books of the *Histories* reflect the seven days of creation in Genesis. They also have important implications for Orosius's eschatological beliefs. The final, seventh, millennium on various readings of the Bible is meant to usher in Christ's reign of one thousand years which would be followed by the last battle with Satan, the Final Judgment, and the recreation of Heaven and Earth.<sup>62</sup> This was already a matter of some controversy within the Christian church of Orosius's day. Some Christians looked forward to the coming of the seventh millennium as a cataclysmic event that would augur the end of time, a view normally characterised now as premillennarian. Others, most notably Augustine, were deeply worried by this literalist approach to the Bible and regarded the birth of Christ as heralding the start of the seventh millennium which would then continue with a mixture of good and evil until the Second Coming and Final Judgment, a viewpoint now normally referred to as amillennarian.<sup>63</sup> Orosius, however, seems closer to a third viewpoint, the postmillennarian, where the seventh millennium is again initiated by the birth of Christ, but what follows is a thousand-year reign of increasing peace and plenty as Christianity spreads across the world. The fact that the seventh book of the histories takes its starting point from the birth of Christ is highly suggestive in this respect. Orosius tells us that God has ordained Babylon

<sup>60</sup> 7.28.26.

<sup>61</sup> 7.43.18; cf. 7.41.10.

<sup>62</sup> The seven days of Genesis give a timescale for completeness. This is then combined with Psalm 90.4 and 2 Peter 3.8 where we are assured that a thousand years is a day in the sight of God. The world, therefore, will last for seven millennia. The details of the seventh millennium and the end of the world are described in Revelation 20–21.

<sup>63</sup> See *City of God*, 20.7–9.



to rule at the beginning of this world and Rome at its end. His seventh book therefore represents the seventh millennium that will last until the Second Coming.<sup>64</sup> Orosius certainly thought the number seven important; it is the ‘number by which all things are judged’ and had put an end to both the kingdoms of Macedon and Carthage.<sup>65</sup> Rome too was badly affected by this number, though we are told it escaped harm.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, Orosius assumes his readers know why seven is such a dangerous number and so never gives an explicit statement about this matter, but the general sense is that seven is the number of completeness and so marks the end of things.<sup>67</sup>

If this were all that could be found in Orosius’s *Histories*, it could be regarded as a worthy but somewhat ineffective work. The symbolism of the seven books would carry no resonance with his non-Christian readers. Perception of divine intervention in the world was by no means unique to the Christian world, and while pagan critics would have had no quarrel with Orosius’s methodology, they simply would have argued that it was misplaced. Sadly, Orosius’s work has been all too often seen in this light, and much scholarship has been expended quarrying Orosius’s sources out of the *Histories* while paying little regard to the work itself.

This is a great pity. Orosius writes well and uses the full repertoire of the rhetorical techniques available to late antique writers. *Recusatio* is deployed on occasions,<sup>68</sup> and Orosius has a particular love of contrast, chiasmus, and verbal puns. He has had a good classical education and the deployment of his learning shows that he is writing for those of a similar background. To understand the *Histories*, it is important to bear in mind that Orosius’s career had been that of an ecclesiastical polemicist. His work is not a mere list or chronicle, but a work of polemical history with a specific target – the pagan intellectuals of the day and their argument that Christianity had ruined Rome<sup>69</sup> – and it is designed to face down his opponents in the most effective way possible.

64 2.3.5.

65 7.2.9; cf. 4.23.6.

66 7.2.10.

67 This sentiment lies at the back of the ‘seven ages of man’. This is found in the Hippocratic work, ‘On the Number Seven’, for which see Roscher (1913). It is likely to be Orosius’s source, as the work was known to the early Church Fathers, see Ambrose, *Letters*, 44. The notion is also found in Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*, 4.10, and in early Jewish thought, see Philo, *On the Maker of the World (De Mundi Opificio)* 30.89–43.128. It is most famously found in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, Act II scene vii. For numerology in antiquity in general, see Barry (1999).

68 1.12.3 and 5.1.9.

69 1 *Preface* 9.

When writing to Jerome, Augustine describes Orosius as ‘keen-spirited, swift to speak, and full of zeal’ and of his wish to become a ‘useful vessel... for the refutation of heresies...’ The picture thus drawn is one of a highly combative individual. This is born out by Orosius’s own self-characterisation as a ‘hound of the Lord’ found in the *Preface* to the *Histories*.<sup>70</sup> In general, Orosius’s instinct when confronted with pagan opposition to his faith was not to conciliate, but to attack. Given his contemporary situation, the most important issue facing him was the sack of Rome at the hands of the Goths and the role that Christianity was perceived as having played in this disaster. The sack certainly had been a shock for the Church and made the early fifth century seem a much darker and more despondent place to most Christians. Jerome was horrified; ‘what can be safe if Rome has fallen?’ he asks, and elsewhere bewails that, ‘the whole world has perished with this single city’.<sup>71</sup> Augustine was to deal with the problem by insisting on the distinction between the earthly and heavenly cities and placing priority on the latter. Orosius, though, was to take a very different tack.

Far from lamenting the sack of Rome, as did his contemporaries, Orosius’s solution was to confront the problem it posed for the Faith head on, by denying that there was a problem at all. He makes the bold claim that the sack was of no significance, and goes on to stand on its head the standard pagan view that it had come about because of Rome’s neglect of her traditional gods by insisting that its occurrence was, in fact, due to the presence of pagans, not Christians, in the city.<sup>72</sup> The centrepiece of his tactics was to contrast the sack of Rome in AD 410 by the Goths with that of the Gauls in 390 BC. Orosius presents the latter as an unmitigated disaster, compared to which the former is so trivial that it is hardly worth mentioning at all, and in fact brought positive benefits by cleansing Rome of pagan iconography.<sup>73</sup> For Orosius the key difference between the two events is Christianity. The sack of 390 BC was a sack of a pagan city carried out by pagans, but the sack of AD 410 was God’s justified chastisement of a partially Christian city performed by Christians (Orosius here carefully forgets that the Christians concerned, Alaric’s Goths, were Arians – a heresy upon which earlier

<sup>70</sup> Less charitably Kelly (1975) 317–18 describes Orosius as a ‘talented, opinionated, narrowly-orthodox, impetuous young man’ and ‘aggressive and tactless’. This is hard, but probably fair.

<sup>71</sup> Jerome, *Letter* 123, see also *Letter* 127; *Commentary on Ezekiel* (*Commentaria in Ezekiel*), prologue.

<sup>72</sup> 7.37.8 and 7.38.7.

<sup>73</sup> 2.19.13–15.

in his narrative he has heaped much abuse) and mitigated by the presence of Christians in the city.<sup>74</sup> Other disasters, including natural disasters, are given the same treatment, and again it is Christianity which is presented as the key mitigating factor. An earthquake at Constantinople is avoided by the prayers of the Christian emperor Arcadius, in contrast to the disasters that happened in pagan times at Eborac and Helice,<sup>75</sup> and when Orosius records that a disastrous plague of locusts struck Africa in 125 BC, and he goes on to note that while such plagues still occur in his day, they are now bearable.<sup>76</sup>

#### 4. SECULAR RELIGIOUS HISTORY

The use, or lack of use, of the Bible in the *Histories* also shows the care taken to maximise the impact of the work. Given his career as a controversialist, Orosius had a good working knowledge of the Bible: the *Comminitorium* and *Liber Apologeticus* both contain extensive biblical quotations, and Orosius's stay with Augustine shows that he was intensely interested in biblical exegesis. But Orosius also realised that pagans were unlikely to be impressed by an extended use of Scripture and so knew that if he was to defeat his opponents, he would have to fight on ground that they would accept contained the truth. His technique therefore is to let secular history justify the ways of God to men and show how this fits the Christian message rather than vice versa.<sup>77</sup> An example of this approach is the 'rain miracle' that occurred during Marcus Aurelius's German campaigns. Orosius here uses an unimpeachably pagan source, the letters of the emperor himself, to assert that it was the prayers of the Christians in his army that brought this miracle about and then retrojects the notion of God's protection of the Romans back to the rainstorm that deterred Hannibal from marching on Rome.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, when Orosius synchronises the birth of Christ with the accession of Augustus, it is the miracles attending the latter that he draws on to make the point that this is more than coincidence.<sup>79</sup> While, therefore,

<sup>74</sup> 2.3.7.

<sup>75</sup> 3.3.1–2.

<sup>76</sup> 5.11.

<sup>77</sup> The work only contains one extended allegorical passage – the application of the ten plagues of Egypt to Roman history, 7.27.

<sup>78</sup> Marcus Aurelius, 7.15.11. For a detailed discussion of Marcus Aurelius's letter, see Kovács (2009) 113–21; for Hannibal, see 4.17.8–9; cf. 5.15.15.

<sup>79</sup> 6.20; see also Augustus's refusal to be called 'master' at 6.22.4–5.

some biblical quotations are found in the *Histories*, they are far fewer than may have been expected, and in the first book Orosius deliberately emphasises that he will not rely on the authority of the Bible to make his points.<sup>80</sup> One exception to this is the account given of the Exodus from Egypt, but this is done only after an attack on the accuracy of Tacitus and an assertion that pagan historians accept Moses as a good practitioner of their art, which allows the Bible to be presented as a work of history rather than one of religious dogma. This secular approach is also seen in Orosius's use of Jerome. Jerome's Latin version of Eusebius's *Chronicle* contains a large number of notes concerning ecclesiastical history. Orosius, while drawing on the secular notes heavily, scrupulously avoids ecclesiastical material, the use of which would defeat his purpose.

While Jerome's Christian *Chronicle* forms the spine of Orosius's work, the vast bulk of his sources are pagan. This poses a problem for Orosius, but it is one that he turns to his advantage. This is done in two ways. As we have seen, Orosius mines his sources for arguments that his opponents will find hard to gainsay, precisely because they are drawn from pagan writers. But Orosius is also happy to attack such authors. On several occasions, he claims that his researches show his pagan predecessors to be unreliable. The inaccuracy that he detects is normally a failure to agree on figures, and he finds it particularly worrying when this happens for events that were contemporary with the historians concerned.<sup>81</sup> The most innocent reasons he suggests for such errors relate to simple human failings such as a wish to flatter patrons, leading to a tendency to exaggerate success and downplay failure; but at times, particularly with Tacitus, more sinister accusations of deliberately distorting the past are raised.<sup>82</sup> Given that Orosius himself is none too careful with the finer details of his own work, this is hardly a justified approach, but raising doubts about previous historical accounts lies at the heart of all revisionist history. Orosius wishes to undermine the credibility of earlier works in his reader's mind in order to create the impression that there had been no reliable account of pagan history produced by pagans themselves, so leaving his new Christianised account of the past as the most authentic record available.

<sup>80</sup> 1.1.8.

<sup>81</sup> See 4.5.10–11, 4.20.6–9, 5.3.3–4 (where Orosius manages to turn one historian into two), and 6.1.30.

<sup>82</sup> 1.10.5.

## 5. SOURCES

The sources Orosius used were probably not great in number, though a specious lustre of wide reading comes from his secondary use of the fragments of authors found in the notes of Jerome's *Chronicle*. His main source for Greek history is Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus's *Philippic History*.<sup>83</sup> Justin composed his epitome in the second or third century AD, while Trogus's original work dates from the end of the first century BC. Livy, often at second hand via epitomes, the second-century historian Florus, and late fourth-century writer Eutropius form the main base of Orosius's passages concerning the Roman Republic. In the Imperial period, Eutropius's work becomes more prominent along with the now lost fourth-century 'History of the Emperors' or *Kaisergeschichte*.<sup>84</sup> Orosius also shows knowledge of Caesar, Sallust, Tacitus, and Suetonius. His approach to these sources was by no means naive. While at times he takes material verbatim or with very minor alterations, they are more often approached with a careful eye for selectivity. Instances of failed prophecy are seized upon as demonstrations of the folly of pagan religion,<sup>85</sup> while pagan prophecies that seemingly come true are suppressed,<sup>86</sup> as are accounts of successful pagan divine intervention.<sup>87</sup> At times more open manipulation occurs. Leonidas's speech to the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae is carefully edited to give it a sense quite different to the original found in Justin.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the sack of the Phoceans' temples is portrayed as evidence of the impotence of the pagan gods, but Orosius's source, Justin, presents it as divinely inspired punishment for the Phoceans' earlier blasphemy.<sup>89</sup> Later Orosius tells us that the consul Gurgus was defeated after the 'snake of Aesculapius' was brought to Rome, leaving the reader to infer that there is a causal link between

83 For a discussion of this work see Yardley and Heckel (1997) and Yardley (2003).

84 The existence of the *Kaisergeschichte* was postulated by Enmann (1883). For modern discussions, see Barnes (1970) and Burgess (1995).

85 e.g. 3.22.3 and 4.13.14.

86 e.g. 4.10.3, where the sacred chickens rightly predict the Roman defeat at the battle of Drepanum.

87 For example, at 2.10, Orosius suppresses Justin's comments that before Salamis Xerxes had sacked Delphi and hence was waging war on the gods as well as the Greeks, as he has no wish to imply that pagan gods could have been a factor in the Greeks' victory at Salamis. He also suppresses the Delphic oracle's comments about the wooden walls of Athens being her salvation.

88 2.9.6.

89 3.12.17; cf. the destruction of the Temple of Vesta at 4.11.9.

the two events. In Livy, however, who is Orosius's source, the two events occur in the opposite order.<sup>90</sup> Pagan sources are used to discredit the oracle of Ammon, and Mithridates' final speech is also recruited to the cause of refuting paganism by a careful misinterpretation of its actual sense.<sup>91</sup> This studied editing of the pagan past is intended to leave the reader feeling that Christianity's critics are refuted by the very authors they would claim as their own.

## 6. STRUCTURE

The shape of the *Histories* as a whole is also informed by a careful polemical strategy. Orosius begins his work with a description of the world, probably taken from a map.<sup>92</sup> This does describe the known world at the time and its ostensible purpose is to give a geographical context for the rest of the *Histories*.<sup>93</sup> However, no further use is made of it, nor does it describe all the areas later found in the body of the work. It can be seen as establishing Orosius's universalist credentials but, beyond this, it is redundant.<sup>94</sup> It may not even serve that purpose, but merely be a product of Orosius following the historiographical conventions of his day:<sup>95</sup> the full title of Trogus's work is *The Philippic History and the origins of the world and description of the earth*<sup>96</sup> and it may be that this title provided a model for Orosius.

After the curious *geography*, the work continues with the history of the Near East and moves onto the classical Greek period and the Hellenistic kingdoms, but the predominant focus, and main subject, of the book is the history of Rome, 'the head of the world', which Orosius regards as

90 3.22.5–6; Livy, *Per.* 11.

91 3.16.13 and 6.14.11–17.

92 See Miller (1896) 4–5.

93 The geography was to become a source for, *inter alia*, the early eleventh-century 'Cotton Map' and the late thirteenth-century medieval *mappa mundi* of Hereford Cathedral which has the inscription 'Orosius's description of the *ornesta* of the world which is shown within'; see Harvey (1996) app. 1. For its impact on medieval geography in general, see Paget (1902) and Moore (1903).

94 For a contrary view, see Merrills (2005). Corsini (1968) 85 speaks of Orosius's universalism in time and space, but a reader will soon notice that this universalism is more apparent than real in the *Histories*.

95 See Cicero, *On the Orator (De Oratore)*, 2.62–64. The phenomenon of the redundant geography is all too frequently found in modern works of history.

96 *Historia Philippica et totius mundi origines et terrae situs*.

particularly important.<sup>97</sup> While, at first sight, this seems to be a descent into parochialism, albeit an understandable one, as Orosius's readers were subjects of the Roman Empire, Orosius's interpretation of history is more subtle than this. His strategy is to persuade his reader that Rome's history is from the beginning a Christian history and so it is paganism, not Christianity, that is alien and damaging to Rome. To begin this argument, Orosius suggests that just as there is one God in heaven, so there should necessarily be one dominant power on earth – conveniently this turns out to be Rome – and men should have the humility to submit to this power as it is the only way that peace will come about.<sup>98</sup> It is therefore God's design to unite all peoples together under one empire to enable Christianity to spread more rapidly, and his chosen instrument for doing so is the Roman Empire. The history of Rome, then, precisely is universal history and Rome's empire is, unlike those that preceded it, one that has divine sanction.<sup>99</sup> Orosius's Romanisation of the Christian faith is also a clever counter-attack against his opponents who wished, particularly after the sack of Rome, to portray Christianity as alien to Rome. Roman history for Orosius is both universal history and Christian history; the three are inseparable from one another: as he says at the beginning of Book 5, everywhere he goes, he will 'encounter my country, religion, and laws'.<sup>100</sup>

The centrality of Rome in salvation history is therefore a key theme for Orosius and one that reflects his western origins and audience. While intensely proud of his Spanish origins, his pride is in not just in Spain herself, but also in her contribution to the empire at large.<sup>101</sup> He is happy to style himself as a 'Roman and Christian'<sup>102</sup> and to refer to Rome as 'our country'.<sup>103</sup> In short, he agrees with his contemporary Rutilius Namatianus that Rome had 'made a single fatherland from far-flung nations'.<sup>104</sup> As Christianity was historically a religion of the east, its focus on the east and

97 1.12.3 and 2.12.2. At 2.12.1, Orosius says he has no intention of just concentrating on Rome, but this claim to universalism is belied by what follows and the following section shows where his true priorities lie.

98 6.17.9; cf the hostility to the Gauls' resistance to Rome at 6.22.2–7.

99 2.1.2–5 and 6.1.5–8.

100 5.2.1.

101 5.23.16.

102 5.2.6.

103 5.19.22. Orosius would have been quite shocked to read Menéndez Pidal's (1940) xxxvi–xxxvii comments that 'he was the first openly to question the foundations of the Roman state and feel that his homeland was something opposed to it'.

104 About His Return (*De Reditu Suo*), 63.

its claims made for people there may well have struck much of Orosius's target audience as at best tedious and at worst absurd. By making Rome the clear focus of God's plans for the world, we can see a conscious plan on Orosius's part to adapt traditional Christian apologetics to fit a broader canvas, producing an account which would have seemed more credible and compelling to his Western readers.

## 7. CHRONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS AND THE ORDERING OF TIME

Given his wish to show that secular events prove the truth of Christianity, it is perhaps not surprising that Orosius uses the common chronological systems of his day rather than one centred on the incarnation. Such a system was not in fact available: the universal Christian chronology used today was devised some 100 years after Orosius's death by Dionysius Exiguus.<sup>105</sup> However, it is noticeable that Orosius chooses not to date events from the birth of Abraham, as does Eusebius/Jerome's *Chronicle*. Rather, prior to the foundation of Rome, Orosius dates events by Olympiads. He then uses, as was common in Roman historiography, the date of Rome's foundation as the starting point for his chronology.<sup>106</sup> Orosius dates the foundation of Rome to 752 years before the birth of Christ, a year which fell in the sixth Olympiad and 414 years after the fall of Troy.<sup>107</sup> The date of the foundation of Rome was subject to some dispute in antiquity. The commonest accepted date was that posited by the late republican scholar Varro – 754/3 BC. However, Orosius's date has official sanction in that it is that which was used by the *Capitoline Fasti*, the official list of Roman magistrates erected in the forum at Rome, and it may be for this reason that he chose it, as it would once again link his account of the Roman past with the 'official' version of the day.

The chronological structuring of the *Histories*, as well as the method of enumerating years, also shows careful thought, but here Orosius is prepared, indeed determined, to use Christian concepts. Nevertheless, in keeping with his overall approach, the two schemes that he uses, while inspired by Christianity, are not presented to the reader in explicitly Christian terms. The first

<sup>105</sup> See Declercq (2002).

<sup>106</sup> Normally such dates are styled *AUC* (*Ab Urbe Condita*), 'from the foundation of the City'.

<sup>107</sup> 2.4.1; 6.22. Eusebius places Rome's foundation in the fourth year of the sixth Olympiad, 1264 years after the birth of Abraham.



is drawn from the Book of Daniel. Here, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a statue composed of four different materials that are interpreted as four kingdoms that are to dominate the world in succession.<sup>108</sup> This prophecy, which had originally been a thinly veiled attack on the Hellenistic ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes, had already been developed to become a standard part of Christian chronology and apologetics.<sup>109</sup> The four kingdoms represented by the statue were normally interpreted by Christian writers as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, 'Greek', and Roman empires. Orosius accepted that the vision outlined the evolution of historical time, but produced a new interpretation of it, which was much more firmly focused on history as it would have been understood by inhabitants of the later Western Roman Empire. The Persian Empire is collapsed into the Babylonian, leaving Macedon as the second empire. The vacuum created in this way is filled by Rome's great rival, Carthage, as the third empire, leaving Rome as the fourth and final empire.<sup>110</sup> The end result of this revised chronology is the same as the original, but Orosius's new explanation of the vision would have seemed a far more credible version of historical development to his Roman readers than those offered by previous Christian interpretations, mired as they were in a narrow eastern perspective.<sup>111</sup> Orosius's approach to the vision in Daniel is a striking innovation which shows him not as a thoughtless chronicler, as he is too often caricatured, but as a man prepared to look at the basic material of his faith and adopt new approaches to it. Nor should we see this as a mere rhetorical strategy. Though it would have indubitably been useful as a debating tool, it is difficult not to believe that Orosius was entirely sincere in his interpretation. Sadly, this new framework for looking at the world's history is not then exploited to its full potential in the *Histories*, as Orosius's main concern in it simply lies in the way in which can be used to demonstrate that the Roman Empire is the culmination of God's plans on earth. In particular, he presents Rome as the anti-type of the first empire,

108 Daniel 2.31–45. For the notion of a succession of kingdoms or *translatio imperii*, in historical thought, see Trompf (1979) esp. 200–49.

109 Daniel's dramatic date is the sixth century BC, but it was in fact written between 167 and 146 BC, as had already been deduced by Porphyry in the third century AD – see Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel* (*Commentaria ad Daniel*), prologue. = CCSL 75a 617–18.

110 2.1.4–5 and the recapitulation at 7.2.

111 The discussion of the prophecy in Daniel has been the object of much labour, most of it futile, over the centuries. For an introduction to the main issues involved, see Rowley (1935). Oddly, Orosius's version was to fade from memory, leaving the Middle Eastern version as the dominant one in Christian thought; see, for example, the somewhat bizarre comments of the *NIV Study Bible* (London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto, 1985), 1277 and 1281.

Babylon, which fell through its corruption and paganism, while in contrast Rome has been preserved through her Christian faith.<sup>112</sup>

Orosius's other chronological scheme, of which he makes much more use, is even more firmly centred on Roman history. This is another four-fold division of time:<sup>113</sup> the first division runs from the genesis of man to the reign of Ninus of Babylon, the second begins from Ninus (the point at which Jerome's *Chronicle* and Justin's *Epitome of Trogus* begin) and continues to the foundation of Rome, the third continues from the foundation of Rome to the accession of Augustus, and the fourth takes history down from Augustus's reign to Orosius's own day. These four divisions are treated very unevenly: the first and second are dealt with in Book 1, the third takes up Books 2 to 6, and the fourth is dealt with in the lengthy Book 7. These divisions in themselves show Orosius's desire to place Rome at the centre of history and also his wish to demonstrate the improvement that Christianity has made to the world. This has its beginning with the birth of Christ which is synchronised with the reign of Augustus, so it is natural that the catalogue of disasters, which mankind suffered in the pre-Christian period, the gravamen of Augustine's commission, forms the lion's share of the work.

The synchronisation of Christ and Augustus is a vital feature of Orosius's writing, as it serves to underline his message that Rome is the key part of God's plan for mankind. Christ, the 'prince of peace',<sup>114</sup> is born at the time when Augustus has established for the first time peace across the earth, something that Orosius emphasises is not mere coincidence, but a self-evident part of God's plan.<sup>115</sup> The *Pax Romana* therefore, for those who care to consider the facts fully, is a *Pax Divina*. The Romans in the *Histories* have in many ways supplanted the Jews, who occupy a remarkably small place in Orosius's thinking, as God's mechanism for bringing his plans for mankind to fruition.<sup>116</sup> Like the Jews of the Old Testament, they often lapse from their appointed task and are tried and found wanting, but they

112 2.3; 7.2.

113 This is initially a threefold scheme, see 1.1.5–6, but 1.21.20 implies the fourfold scheme as outlined here.

114 Isaiah 9.6.

115 6.20.4–8 and 6.22.9; cf. 5.1.12.

116 Orosius sees the Jews as once being the people of God, but as having alienated their status through rejecting the Christian message, 7.27.2, not to mention being responsible for the Crucifixion, 7.4.13. Rome, God's new instrument, brings down divine vengeance on them when Titus destroys their temple, 7.9.5–6. Strikingly, the Jews become one of the ten plagues of the Roman Empire, in Orosius's allegorical treatment of the ten plagues of Egypt, 7.27.

nevertheless remain God's chosen instrument. The sack of Rome, or rather, as Orosius would have it, Rome's delivery from a sack, in Book 7 of the *Histories*, takes on the colouring of the Jews' exodus from Egypt in Book 1. The culmination of this process is that Christ chooses to become incarnate as a Roman, thus giving divine sanction to, and Christianising, Rome and, perhaps equally significantly, the Imperial Roman state. This unique assertion that Christ was a Roman citizen is based on a false understanding of the nature of Roman citizenship in the early empire prior to Caracalla's grant of universal citizenship in AD 212. Nevertheless, it shows how Orosius has developed not the pessimistic thinking of his contemporaries, but rather the optimism of a previous generation of Christian writers, and sees the empire as almost the instantiation of heaven upon earth. This can be seen from Orosius's presentation of Rome as the anti-type of Babylon, the archetypal wicked empire of the Bible. The parallels between the two are emphasised, but so is the crucial dissimilarity that while Babylon fell, Rome still stands.<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, the message of the *Histories* is that Rome will continue to stand. Orosius's comments that King Athaulf initially wished to replace 'Romania' with 'Gothia', but then realised this would be impossible and so lent his support to the empire, are important evidence for this belief.<sup>118</sup> Orosius had a visceral dislike, probably based on personal experience, of barbarians and this dislike is occasionally found in his work,<sup>119</sup> but in his more reflective moments he sees the barbarians as Rome's future. The reason for this belief is that Christianity, whose purpose is to unite all peoples, has tamed them. Orosius strikingly declares that the sack of Rome was worthwhile because it led to the conversion of peoples who would otherwise have remained pagan.<sup>120</sup> This is not an assertion that Rome has no worth, but rather a demonstration of divine providence. Paradoxically, for Orosius the sack of Rome did not weaken, but strengthen, the city, as it led to the spread of Christianity and Christianity was to unite all peoples under Rome. Orosius notes that the Burgundians have been tamed by Christianity, continuing, 'they have recently all become Catholics, received priests

117 2.3.2–8.

118 7.43.5–7.

119 For a general dislike see 7.42.2. For specific instances, see the highly suggestive *grand guignol* description of the Scordisci at 5.23.18; the comment that the loss of his hero, Theodosius's, Gothic allies at the River Frigidus was a 'gain' for Rome, 7.35.19; and the description of the Vandals as a 'effete, greedy, treacherous, and sorrow-bringing race', 7.38.1.

120 7.41.8.

from us whom they obey, and live peacefully, calmly, and causing no harm, looking on the Gauls not as their subjects, but as their Christian brothers'.<sup>121</sup> The most important feature of this passage is that the Burgundians' priests have been sent to them from the Roman Empire. Orosius takes the view that a people's coming under the aegis of the Church will naturally entail falling under the influence of Rome. Here we see Orosius's postmillennarian hopes come to the fore: the seventh millennium is already here and it will be one of increasing peace as Christianity spreads across the world, civilising barbarians and bringing them into Rome's orbit.

## 8. NOTES OF CAUTION

Despite this approving attitude towards Rome, Orosius, informed by his opposition to Pelagianism, is nevertheless at pains to emphasise that the city has achieved nothing worthwhile by herself and that none of her success or destiny is a product of her own doing. Rather it is only Divine Grace that has made the Roman Empire a success, and this has been done often in spite of the Romans, not because of them.<sup>122</sup> At times Orosius can be particularly savage towards Roman failings. It is no coincidence that the sharpest of these attacks comes when he compares the perfidious nature of Rome to the pristine virtues of his provincial compatriots at Numantia.<sup>123</sup> For Orosius this dependence on Divine Grace is true even of the present where it is the faith of Honorius, and indeed that of his enemies, the Goths, not Roman arms that render the sack of Rome in AD 410 harmless.<sup>124</sup>

Famously Orosius combines this lesson with another Christian doctrine, that of the horror of war. Military glory had traditionally been the centre of Roman pride. Orosius disparages this in two ways: first, by emphasising the number of defeats that Rome has suffered but, more notably, by also underlining the tragedy of war.<sup>125</sup> In particular, his descriptions of battles lay stress not on the fame won in them, but on the numbers who died. This emphasis on the suffering of war is a striking contrast to the mainstream of Roman historiography and Torres Rodríguez is right to characterise it as a

<sup>121</sup> 7.32.13.

<sup>122</sup> 1.16.

<sup>123</sup> 5.5.

<sup>124</sup> 2.3.7.

<sup>125</sup> 3 *Preface* 1

‘genuine revolution’ in the writing of history.<sup>126</sup> In the same vein, Orosius also underscores that Rome’s glory is built on the sufferings of others and that, if in the future Rome is defeated, those who defeat her will be seen not as barbarians, but as great leaders in their turn.<sup>127</sup> These sentiments have led to him being seen as a kind of ‘left-wing heretic’.<sup>128</sup> But this is to misunderstand Orosius, who is a highly conservative writer and who, while emphasising the horrors of war, also worries about the enervating effects of peace and comes close to enunciating the traditional conservative Roman argument that war abroad produces moral rectitude and unity at home.<sup>129</sup> His other opinions follow in the same mould: he is in no way disturbed by slavery, and takes an orthodox aristocratic position on the major events of Roman history, being, for example, violently opposed to the Gracchi.

## 9. OROSIUS’S CLASH WITH AUGUSTINE

Is Orosius therefore guilty of precisely what Augustine warned against – believing it possible to create the City of God in this world and seeing Rome as heaven on earth? This is not an entirely fair accusation. Parts of Orosius’s vision of the future are by no means happy: he believes, for example, that a final apocalyptic persecution that will usher in the end of the world lies ahead<sup>130</sup> and, as a good Christian, he does on occasions emphasise the triviality of the earthly life compared to the life to come.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, the general tone of Orosius’s work does come perilously close to the positions that gave Augustine concern. If not heaven on earth, his postmillennarian views mean that Christian Rome will certainly bring heaven closer to earth as the last millennium progresses.<sup>132</sup> For a moment in Book 2 it appears that he may subscribe to the cyclical theory of history and that Rome will, in her turn, succumb to the passing of time.<sup>133</sup> But it is only a moment. We are

126 Torres Rodríguez (1985) 65, though he goes too far in seeing Orosius as presenting history generally from the point of view of the ‘masses’. Orosius’s views on most issues, such as slavery, are those of an aristocrat.

127 5.1.4 and 3.20.12.

128 Lacroix (1965).

129 1.16.8, 3.2.1, 3.6.1, 3.8.4, 4.16.21, and 5.8.2.

130 7.27.15.

131 5.2.6 and 7.41.9.

132 For a general discussion of this danger of ‘immanentising the eschaton’ of Christianity, see E. Voeglin (1952; 1968).

133 2.6.13–14.

also told that God has ordained the Roman Empire for the end of this epoch and so it seems clear that for Orosius the empire will only end when time itself comes to an end at the end of days.<sup>134</sup> Orosius's self-characterisation as a 'Christian and a Roman' is correct; his work is not merely Christian polemic, it is patriotic Christian polemic. This would have appealed to the Roman gentlemen who were his intended audience, but also reflects his own views on the world. Such an outlook may well be the reason for Augustine's later silence about Orosius's work, apart from one oblique attack on it.<sup>135</sup> For Augustine, a millennarian turned amillennarian, the lesson of the sack of Rome is that it has demonstrated the inherent fragility of all human affairs and the folly of thinking that the City of God could be constructed on earth.<sup>136</sup> The relationship between the two men is opaque, but it seems unfair to characterise Orosius as Augustine's 'henchman' who 'didn't understand a tithe of what he said to him'.<sup>137</sup> While Orosius does at times defer to Augustine in the *Histories*,<sup>138</sup> he is equally not afraid to disagree with him.<sup>139</sup> It seems more likely that the young Spaniard did understand the old man he admired, but simply differed with him at a fundamental level about what the future held.

## 10. LEGACY

Time is not kind to historians who indulge in predicting the future and Orosius's dream of a Christian empire rejuvenated with barbarian blood was doomed to failure. Ironically, he is often now seen as of value for the history of his own day and of nugatory importance for the bulk of his historical work. But this is a modern view. Orosius's Christian interpretation of the classical past, often oddly entitled the *ormesta* or *ormista*,<sup>140</sup> became a standard reference work on antiquity for the medieval world. Already by the end of the fifth century, he had become a Christian classic and his reputation was to

134 2.3.5.

135 At *City of God*, 18.52, Augustine, though mentioning no one by name, attacks the idea that the ten plagues of Egypt are an allegory for later history, an idea that is applied *in extenso* by Orosius at 7.27.

136 See in particular *City of God*, 15–18.

137 O'Donnell (2004).

138 4.20.25.

139 6.20.4; see Mommsen (1959).

140 An enigmatic term. It is probably an abbreviation for Or(osii) m(undi) (h)ist(ori)a. See Crone (1965) 448.

last into the early modern period.<sup>141</sup> More than two hundred manuscripts of Orosius survive and the work was translated into many European vernacular languages including Old English<sup>142</sup> and into Arabic at the court of the Caliphs of Cordoba by Hafṣ al-Qūfī and Qāsim ben Aṣḥab, whence it passed into later Arabic historical thinking, most notably being used as a source by Ibn Khaldūn.<sup>143</sup> Orosius was a source for many later historians such as Jordanes (whose *History of the Goths* (*Getica*) begins with an explicit reference to Orosius and a close paraphrase of 1.2.1), Gregory of Tours, Gildas, Bede, and Alfonso X. The *Histories* also provided an important model for how one should go about writing chronicles – Orosius’s influence in this respect can be seen in Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon* and Otto of Freising’s *History of the Two Cities* (*Historia de Duabus Civitatibus*). He also appears as the ‘pleader’ found in the 10<sup>th</sup> Canto of Dante’s *Paradiso* and as a strong influence in a popular twelfth-century redaction of the Alexander Romance.<sup>144</sup> His geographical excursus, which circulated independently of the main work,<sup>145</sup> also had a powerful lasting effect, providing not simply material for cartographers but also a model for later geographical writing such as the enormously popular *Image of the World* (*De Imagine Mundi*) of the early twelfth century.<sup>146</sup>

The early modern period saw a strong decline in Orosius’s reputation that has not been arrested, and he has now become relegated to the backwaters of history. Hobsbawn remarked of him ‘No historian today cares a rap what [he] wrote, [or] thinks [his] views worth a minute’s consideration’.<sup>147</sup> Hobsbawn should have been more careful. As a Marxist he wrote with the assumption that history necessarily followed a preordained course just as much as Orosius did. Perhaps the spirit of the Spanish priest is not as dead as many would like to believe.

141 Pope Gelasius in AD 494 speaks of Orosius’s *Histories* as an ‘indispensable work’, *Decree of Pope Gelasius and 70 Bishops on Apocryphal Scripture* (Gelasii Papae decretum cum septuaginta episcopis habitum de apocryphis scripturis) = PL 59 161. Nor were his words unheeded: his near-contemporary, the grammarian and mythographer Fulgentius, draws heavily on Orosius as a source for his *The Ages of the World and of Man* (*De Aetatibus Mundi et Hominis*); see Whitbread (1971).

142 Often attributed, but falsely, to Alfred the Great; see Liggins (1970) and Bateley (1970).

143 For manuscripts in general, see Bately and Ross (1961). For Alfred, see Bately (1980); for the Arabic edition of Orosius, the Kitāb Hurūshiyūš, see Penelas (2001) and Christys (2002) ch. 7.

144 The so-called J2 redaction of the translation of Leo of Naples.

145 See Riese (1878) 24–55.

146 See Doberentz (1880; 1881).

147 Hobsbawn (1955).

## BOOK ONE

### PREFACE

**1.** I have obeyed your instructions, most blessed father Augustine, and hope that I have done so as competently as I did willingly. However, in either event I hardly feel the urge to explain whether I have done well or badly, **2.** for you have already done the work of assessing whether I could do what you wanted done, whereas I am satisfied with the evidence of obedience alone, provided I have been able to adorn it with will and effort. **3.** For as in the great house of a great squire, although there are many different kinds of animal that are useful to the household, the dogs' task is not the lowliest.<sup>1</sup> They alone have been given a nature which urges them on to carry out willingly the tasks for which they have been trained, and, through some innate disposition towards obedience, hold back, simply showing a disciplined tremor of expectation, until they are sent off with permission to act by a nod or a sign. **4.** They, indeed, have their own special desires, which excel those of the beasts as much as they approach those of rational creatures: namely to perceive, to love, and to serve. **5.** For perceiving the difference between their masters and strangers, they do not hate those they attack, but rather are full of zeal for those they love.<sup>2</sup> And in their love for their master and his house, they keep watch not because nature has endowed their bodies with this ability, but keep their guard through the conscientiousness of a love full of cares. **6.** Whence, in the mystic allegory found in the evangelists, the Canaanite woman did not blush to say that whelps eat the crumbs from beneath their masters' table and that the Lord did not disdain

1 This phrase echoes Virgil, *Georgics*, 3.404 'Nor is the care of the dogs your lowliest task'. Virgil's dogs guard the house and are used for hunting. Here Orosius sees the house as the Church and the squire as God, while he is one of the dogs that guard the Church and hunt down its pagan opponents.

2 Orosius sees the dogs as a metaphor for Christian apologists. His ability to live up to this ideal in the *Histories* is mixed.



to hear her.<sup>3</sup> **7.** The blessed Tobit, too, though he had an archangel as his guide, did not refuse a dog as a companion.<sup>4</sup>

**8.** Thus, bound by special love to that general love which you inspire, I willingly obeyed your will; for since my lowliness owes this act to the instruction that Your Paternity ordered and this work of mine, which returns from you to you, is entirely yours, my only contribution to it is that I did the work willingly.

**9.** You had instructed me to write against the arrogant wickedness of those who are strangers from the city of God and are called pagans, taking their name from crossroads and fields in the countryside, or otherwise gentiles because they know of the things of this world.<sup>5</sup> These men, as they do not look to the future and have either forgotten or are ignorant of the past, besmirch the present as a time particularly full of evils, far beyond those which are always with us, and do so for this reason alone: because Christ is believed in and God worshipped, while their idols are worshipped the less. **10.** You instructed me therefore to set out in a book, concisely and in order, all the troubles caused by wars, the ravages of disease, the sorrows caused by hunger, the terrible events brought about by earthquakes, the unexpected disasters caused by floods, the terror caused by volcanic eruptions, the savagery of lightning strikes and hailstorms, and the misery caused by parricide<sup>6</sup> and other such crimes, found in times gone by that I could discover in all the records of the histories and annals which are to be had at the present time. **11.** I thought it right that Your Reverence should not be bothered with this slight work while you were working hard to complete your eleventh book against these same pagans, the soaring rays of ten others of which having already swiftly shone across the whole world, as they

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 15.27.

<sup>4</sup> Tobit 5.16. The archangel is Raphael.

<sup>5</sup> The use of pagan in this sense was a recent innovation in Christian rhetoric. Orosius here is distinguishing between the pagans of town and country, but also skilfully uses the classical preference for urban life here by contrasting the city of God with the countryside of the pagans. To the ancient mind countrymen were notoriously stubborn and slow-witted and so this contrast also fits with Orosius's claims about pagan blindness in failing to see the obvious truth of Christianity. For further discussion of 'pagan', see O'Donnell (1977).

<sup>6</sup> Orosius draws a sharp difference between the killing of family members and of non-family members, regarding the former as a much worse sin. His word for this form of killing is parricide, which, despite its more narrow meaning in modern parlance, has been retained in the translation in order to preserve this distinction.

blazed forth from a watchtower of the church's bright light.<sup>7</sup> **12.** Moreover, your holy son, Julian of Carthage,<sup>8</sup> a servant of God, strongly urged me to carry out his request concerning this matter in a way that would equal his faith in asking me to do it. **13.** I gave myself over to the work and straight away found myself in confusion, for I had often thought that the disasters of our present times seemed to rage beyond what could have been expected. **14.** However, I found that the days gone by were as fraught as the present, and all the more horribly wretched as they were further from the salvation of True Religion. So through this scrutiny it became clear, and rightly so, that Death, greedy for blood, had reigned when there was no knowledge of Religion which keeps bloodshed at bay. For when Religion spreads forth its light, death is confounded; death is imprisoned, when Religion is strong; indeed, in the profoundest sense death will not exist when Religion alone reigns. **15.** An exception, of course, is in those final days at the end of the world when the Anti-Christ will appear and the Final Judgement is held. At that time, Christ the Lord has prophesied through His own words in the Holy Scriptures that there will come troubles the likes of which have never been seen before<sup>9</sup> **16.** and then in the unbearable torments of that time, it will be not in the way which happens now and has always occurred in the past, but, through a much clearer and more serious judgment that the saints will receive their approbation and the wicked their damnation.<sup>10</sup>

## 1

**1.** Almost all scholarly writers, both Greek and Latin-speaking, who have recorded in their words the deeds of Kings and peoples for posterity, have begun from the time of Ninus, the son of Belus, the king of the Assyrians.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A reference to Augustine's *City of God*. Given that Orosius was greatly impressed by the lighthouse at Corunna, see 1.2.71 below, maybe this metaphor is of a lighthouse.

<sup>8</sup> Nothing is known of Julian.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 24.21; Mark 13.19.

<sup>10</sup> For the notion of retributive justice in Orosius, see Trompf (2000) 292–309.

<sup>11</sup> This is of course untrue; however, it is true of one of Orosius's major sources, Justin. Augustine states that Belus was the first king of the Assyrians in his *City of God*, 12.11 and 18.2, though this had not been written at the time that the *Histories* were composed. Ninus may be the Nimrod of Genesis, but neither Orosius nor Augustine makes this identification explicitly. He probably should be identified with the historical King Tukultinurta I (1235–1198 BC) whose name means 'I trust in Ninurta'. Ninurta was the Assyrian god of war. 'Belus' is likely to be a euhemerisation or misunderstanding of 'Ba'al' or 'Lord', a common Semitic religious title for deities

2. Although through blind prejudice they want us to believe that there was no beginning to the world or creation of mankind,<sup>12</sup> they have nevertheless decreed that wars and reigns started at this point, 3. as if prior to this the human race had lived like cattle and then at this time had woken up for the first time like they had been shaken and roused to a new state of wisdom. 4. But I have decided to trace the beginning of men's misery from man's original sin, merely gathering together a few short examples. 5. 3,184 years passed from Adam, the first man, to Ninus, the so-called 'Great', when Abraham was born.<sup>13</sup> These years are omitted by, or unknown to, all historians. 6. There are then 2,015 years from Ninus, or from Abraham, to the time of Caesar Augustus: that is to the birth of Christ which took place in the 42<sup>nd</sup> year of Caesar's reign, when peace was made with Parthia, the gates of Janus were closed, and wars ceased all over the world.<sup>14</sup> During this time, every form of action and inaction was ground out either by men of affairs or those who wrote of them. 7. This is why the matter in hand now demands that a few things be taken, albeit as briefly as possible, from those books which deal with the beginning of the world and which gained credibility in the past by predicting future events which subsequently came to pass. 8. This is not because I want to insist on their authority to anyone, but because it would be worthwhile to draw attention to the common consensus which I share with everyone else.<sup>15</sup> 9. First, we hold that if the world and man are ruled by a Divine Providence which is good and hence just, man, who by his fickle nature and through his freedom to choose is weak and insolent, must be guided lovingly, when he needs help, and must also justly be punished when he abuses his freedom to excess. 10. Anyone who looks at himself, and through himself at mankind, will perceive that from mankind's beginnings this world rightly has been subjected to alternating good and bad times. 11. Then, we are taught that sin and punishment for sin began in the

12 Orosius here is attacking the cyclical theory of history, albeit he appears to misunderstand it. Augustine, *City of God*, 12.10–11, provides a better Christian critique, though this would not have been available to Orosius when he wrote.

13 Orosius has taken this date from Jerome's *Chronicle*. Jerome in turn took his date from Eusebius. Jerome divides the total into 2,242 years from Adam to the flood and 942 years from the flood to the birth of Abraham (2016 BC) which he then uses as the prime point of dating in his *Chronicle*. In these notes Jerome's dates are expressed as *A Abr.* 'from Abraham'.

14 See 6.22.1, when Augustus closed the Gates of Janus for the third time. The birth of Christ heralds an outbreak of peace in the world, a theme close to Orosius's heart.

15 Orosius's 'books' are those of Old Testament. His tactic by asserting that there is a common consensus about the nature of the world is to demonstrate that the foundations of this consensus can only be rationally held by accepting the truths of Christianity.

time of the very first man.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, we see that even those who begin their accounts in the middle of history and make no mention of previous ages, talk of nothing but wars and calamities – **12.** for what else can wars be called, except disasters that affect one side or the other?<sup>17</sup> Now evils of this type, both those which happened then and those which still happen to some degree today,<sup>18</sup> are without doubt sins made manifest or hidden punishments for sin – **13.** so what should stop me from revealing the cause of the symptoms that other historians have described, or from revealing in a short account that previous ages, which, as we have shown, lasted far longer than our present times, endured sufferings similar to those of today? **14.** I shall, therefore, in as far as I am able to call events to mind, give an account of the quarrels of mankind from the foundation of the world to the foundation of the City, then move on down to the rule of Caesar and the birth of Christ from which time all the globe has remained in the City's power, and then continue down to our own days,<sup>19</sup> **15.** and in doing so will reveal, as if from a watchtower, the diverse parts of the world ablaze with evil after being fired with the torch of lust.<sup>20</sup> But before doing this, I think it is necessary **16.** to describe the globe where man dwells, first in the threefold scheme into which it was divided by our ancestors, and then by regions and provinces, **17.** so that those who are interested when they are told of disasters caused by war or plague somewhere, might learn more easily not just of the event and its date, but also its location.<sup>21</sup>

16 The notion that man has always suffered for his sins is a central theme of Orosius's outlook.

17 The suffering caused by war is another persistent theme of the *Histories*.

18 The largest of these is the sack of Rome in AD 410. The triviality of present suffering compared to that found in the past is a theme to which Orosius frequently returns.

19 Orosius's tripartite scheme is not carried out evenly. Book 1 deals with events down to the foundation of Rome; Books 2–6 deal with his second period; and Book 7, the third.

20 The image of the watchtower is perhaps a reference to Isaiah 21, but may equally be drawn from Orosius's own day.

21 cf. Cicero, *On the Orator* (*De Oratore*), 2.62–64. Orosius's aim is a noble one, but he never refers back to his geography in the rest of the work.

## 3

**1.** Therefore after this world had been created and adorned, man, whom God had created righteous and stainless, perverted and besmirched himself and, as a consequence, the whole human race, with lustful sin. Straightaway righteous punishment followed this unrighteous licentiousness. **2.** For all of us, unwillingly though we be, can either feel the force of the sentence of God, the Creator and Judge – which has been established for sinful man and, because of man, for the Earth, and which will endure as long as men dwell on the earth – by denying it, or, by trusting in it, endure it. Those whose obstinate minds are not persuaded by the truth of the Scriptures are branded as guilty by the testimony of their own weakness.<sup>135</sup> **3.** The most reliable authors<sup>136</sup> very clearly state that the sea was poured over all the land and a deluge unleashed upon it, so that the world became entirely sea or sky,<sup>137</sup> and that the human race was entirely destroyed, save for a few kept safe in the ark as a reward for their faith and in order to create a new race. **4.** Even those who know nothing of times gone by, or of the Author of those times, have born witness that this was so, learning of it by putting together the evidence and hints given by stones which we see on far-flung mountains encrusted with sea- and oyster shells and which often show signs of being hollowed out by the waves.<sup>138</sup> **5.** Now, although I could produce more compelling proofs of this sort which are worth relating, let these two principal points be sufficient, *viz.* that concerning the fall of the first man and the condemnation of his offspring and life, and that concerning the damnation of the entire human race which followed from it, **6.** so I shall merely say that if pagan historians have at some point dealt with our theme, these two arguments will be expounded more fully, along with all the others, at the same place in my history where they raise the issue in theirs.

135 The guilty Orosius has in mind are the Pelagians who refused to accept the doctrine of original sin.

136 Orosius means the Bible, here Genesis 6–8. Perhaps there is also an implied criticism of the reliability of pagan authors whom he goes on to attack.

137 cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.291.

138 cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.264, Pomponius Mela, 1.6.2.

7. Then the city of Atalante, which lay next to the territory of Locris, was cut off by a sudden onrush of the sea and left a desolate island.<sup>174</sup> Plague fell upon the wretched remnants of the Athenians and laid waste to them for a long time.<sup>175</sup>

## 19

1. 355 years after the foundation of the City,<sup>176</sup> the siege of Veii, which had lasted for ten whole years, destroyed the besiegers rather than the besieged. For the Romans had lost many men to the frequent, sudden sorties of their enemies and were forced to run the risks of war during the winter, spending the winter under canvas and enduring cold and hunger in the sight of their enemies. 2. They finally captured the town in a surprise attack from tunnels without giving any worthy demonstration of Roman courage.<sup>177</sup>

3. This useful rather than noble victory was followed by the exile of the dictator Camillus, who had defeated the people of Veii,<sup>178</sup> and then by the invasion of the Gauls and the burning of the city. 4. Let someone dare, if he can, to compare this disaster with any upset of the present day, even though tales of past troubles are not given the same weight as injuries suffered in the present.

5. The Senonian Gauls led by Brennus were laying siege with a large and powerful army to the town of Clusinum, which is now called Tuscia,<sup>179</sup> when they saw the Roman envoys who had come to make peace between the two parties, fighting against them in the front line. Outraged, they lifted the siege of Clusinum and marched on Rome with their entire force.<sup>180</sup> 6. As they came on, they were met by the consul Fabius and his army, but

174 Jerome, *Chronicle*, *A Abr.* 1592 = 328 AUC/426 BC; again this is too early for Orosius's narrative sequence.

175 Jerome, *Chronicle*, *A Abr.* 1587 = 323 AUC/431 BC; again too early for Orosius's narrative sequence.

176 399 BC. Livy, 5.23, places the end of the siege in 358 AUC/396 BC.

177 Orosius draws on Florus, 1.6.8–9, for his account of the fall of Veii; for a fuller account, see Livy, 5.22–23.

178 Augustine, *City of God*, 3.17, mentions the exile of Camillus as an act of ingratitude at Rome.

179 The Senonian Gauls' original home was by the banks of the Seine, but by this time they had occupied a strip of land by the Adriatic south of Ravenna, known as the Gallic Lands, the *ager Gallicus*. Clusinum is the modern Chiusi, and normally spelt Clusium in antiquity; perhaps Orosius has been confused by Livy's constant use of *Clusini*, i.e. 'the people of Clusium' in his account. Only Orosius asserts that the town was called Tuscia.

180 This story is found in Livy, 5.36.

Fabius did not stop them – rather the enemy’s onslaught cut his army down, laying them low, as if they were a crop ready to be harvested, and passed over them.<sup>181</sup> The river Halia bears witness to Fabius’s disaster, just as the Cremera does to that of the Fabii.<sup>182</sup>

It would not be easy, even had Rome not been burnt afterwards as well, for anyone to recall a similar disaster to Roman arms. **7.** The Gauls entered the city that lay open before them. They butchered the senators who sat rigidly in their seats like statues, cremated them by firing their homes, and buried them under the fallen gables of their own roofs. **8.** They then laid siege to all the surviving young men of the town whom our sources agree numbered scarcely 1,000 and who were lying low in the citadel on the Capitol Hill.<sup>183</sup> There through hunger, disease, desperation, and fear the Gauls wore them down, subdued them, and finally sold them: **9.** for the Romans made peace by handing over 1,000 pounds of gold as the price for the Gauls’ departure. This was not because Rome had such a low reputation among the Gauls, but because they had already ground the town down so much that it was unable to pay more.<sup>184</sup>

**10.** When the Gauls left, where there had once been a city marked out, there was a horrible heap of formless ruins. On all sides *the sound of echoing voices*<sup>185</sup> of those wandering through the rubble and unknowingly over their own possessions resounded, keeping them on tenterhooks as they nervously listened out. **11.** *Their spirits quaked with horror; even the silence was terrifying,*<sup>186</sup> for small numbers in a great space produce panic. As a result, they contemplated, decided, and, indeed, attempted to change where they lived, dwell in another town, and even to call themselves by a different name.<sup>187</sup>

181 Q. Fabius Ambustus, who was not a consul but one of the military tribunes with consular power who ruled Rome at this time.

182 The account of the battle is taken from Florus, 1.7.7; however, the account of the embassy is not, as Florus, 1.7.6, makes no mention of Roman ambassadors fighting against the Gauls and blames the embassy’s failure on Gallic barbarism. The Halia is normally referred to as the Allia, and may be the modern Fonte di Papa, 12 miles from Rome. Fabius was not a consul, an error that Orosius copies from Florus. In fact, three Fabii were present among the military tribunes with consular power, Livy, 5.36.10–11. Florus probably confused Quintus Fabius, one of the ambassadors who fought the Gauls (Livy, 5.36.7) with Quintus Sulpicius Longus, the commander at the Halia, and Orosius has followed this error.

183 This figure and the reference to ‘sources’ is taken from Florus, 1.7.13.

184 For doubts about the extent of the Gallic sack, see Cornell (1995) 313–18.

185 A slight adaptation of Virgil, *Georgics*, 4.50.

186 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.755.

187 A proposal by some of the tribunes; see Livy, 5.49.8.

**12.** Behold the times to which the present is compared! Behold the times for which nostalgia sighs! Behold the times that demand penance for the religion that had been selected, or rather neglected!<sup>188</sup> **13.** In truth, these two sacks of Rome are alike and can be compared with one another.<sup>189</sup> One raged on for six months, the other ran its course in three days. The Gauls exterminated the people, destroyed the City, and pursued the very name of Rome down to its uttermost ashes. The Goths abandoned their intention to plunder and drove columns of confused citizens to safe havens – namely the Holy Places of the City. In the first sack scarcely a senator, even out of those who fled, was to be found alive, in the second scarcely one could be found who had perished, save for some who done so by accident while hiding. **14.** I could safely say that the number that were saved in the first incident was the same as the number who died in the last.

Plainly, as the facts show, and as ought to be stated, during the present disaster God was more enraged than the men involved, for He Himself carried out what the Goths could not have done and so showed why He had sent them. **15.** For since it is beyond human powers to burn up bronze beams and overturn the mass of great edifices, the forum with its empty idols, whose wretched superstition lies about what is God and what is mortal, was cast down by a thunderbolt and all those abominations which the enemy's fire did not reach were overturned by fire sent from heaven.<sup>190</sup>

**16.** Now since there is an abundance of material, which cannot in any way be dealt with definitively in this book, I have put an end here to this volume so that we may examine what is left in the ones that follow.

188 Orosius has carefully omitted all mention of pagan religious events during the sack by the Gauls that would have undercut his position. These included Juno's geese saving the Capitol from the Gauls and the Pontifex Maximus's sacrifice on the Quirinal Hill; see Livy, 5.41 and 5.47.

189 i.e. the sack of Rome by the Gauls described here and Alaric's sack of Rome described at 7.39. The contrast between the two events is a centrepiece of Orosius's defence of Christianity.

190 See 7.39.18.



curried favour for himself by threatening to restore the pagans' temples and demolish churches as soon as he began to reign.<sup>457</sup> A few of their followers who had been party to these deep machinations were also punished along with them. In this way, with minimal effort, the Churches of Christ and a pious emperor were freed from danger and avenged and the punishment of but a few men.

7. However, after such an increase in blasphemy and no sign of repentance, the long-postponed punishment of the City finally arrived.<sup>458</sup>

### 39

1. Alaric came, besieged, threw into panic, and burst into Rome as she trembled, but he first gave the order that whoever had fled to the holy places, above all to the basilicas of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, were to be left safe and unharmed.<sup>459</sup> He also told his men that as far as possible, they must

457 Orosius is the only extant source that makes this claim.

458 This one sentence suppresses the period of chaos that broke out after Stilicho's death. First, the Roman troops in the north of Italy massacred the families of the barbarian *foederati*, provoking 30,000 of these to join Alaric; see Zosimus, 5.36. Alaric then invaded Italy and besieged Rome in the winter of AD 408/9. The siege may have reduced the inhabitants of the city to cannibalism; see Olympiodorus, *fr.* 4. Some 40,000 slaves fled to Alaric and there was an attempted resurrection of pagan rites in the City led by the City Prefect, Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus, apparently with the complicity of Pope Innocent I; see Zosimus, 5.41–42, and Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 9.16.3. Orosius could have mentioned this incident, as it would have helped his theme that Rome was justly punished for backsliding from Christianity. However, he must have decided that this would be too damaging to his main point – that Alaric's attack on Rome was negligible compared to the sacks of the pagan past. Alaric was finally bought off for 5,000 pounds of gold, 30,000 of silver, 3,000 of pepper, 4,000 silk tunics, and 3,000 scarlet-dyed fleeces; see Zosimus, 5.41. After the breakdown of further negotiations, Alaric once again besieged Rome at the end of AD 409. This time the City, with his blessing, proclaimed the *praefectus urbi*, Priscianus Attalus (see 7.42.7 below), emperor and appointed Alaric supreme military commander of the empire, *magister utriusque militia*; see Zosimus, 6.7. Our sources imply that the Romans were happy to do this and that these events brought Honorius close to flight to the east (see Zosimus, 6.7–8), facts that Orosius cannot permit to be known about his hero. In AD 410, Alaric fell out with Attalus and had him deposed at Arimminum; see Zosimus, 6.12. It was at this point that Alaric decided to sack Rome. For a modern account of this confused period, see Matthews (1975) ch. 11.

459 Orosius's choice of verb for Alaric's entry into Rome, *inrumpere*, 'to break in', is perhaps chosen to deny any question of treachery. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 3.2.20–32, explicitly states that the Visigoths entered the city through treachery and perhaps this was also true of Zosimus, 6.7, whose account of the sack is lost, but who hints here that the Anicii family may have betrayed Rome. Alaric entered through the Salarian Gate on 24 August AD 410. For churches as refuges in the sack, see also Augustine, *City of God*, 1.2 and 1.7.

refrain from shedding blood in their hunger for booty.

**2.** And in order to show all the more that this storming of the City was brought about by God's displeasure rather than the enemy's valour, it came to pass that in the same way as Lot the Just was taken away from Sodom by God's hidden providence, the blessed Innocent, the bishop of the Church of Rome, at that time had his seat at Ravenna in order that he should not see the destruction of his sinful people.<sup>460</sup>

**3.** As the barbarians rampaged through the City, it happened that in a certain convent one of the Goths, a powerful, Christian man, came across an elderly virgin, who had dedicated her life to God. When he asked her, politely, for gold and silver, **4.** steadfast in her faith, she promised him that she had a great deal and would soon bring it forth, and brought it forth. When she saw that the barbarian was astounded by the size, weight, and beauty of what she had brought out, but had no idea of the nature of the vessels, Christ's virgin said to him, **5.** 'These are the sacred vessels of the Apostle Peter, take them, if you dare, and you will be judged by your act. I dare not keep them, as I cannot protect them.' **6.** The barbarian was moved to religious awe through his fear of God and the virgin's faith, and sent a messenger to tell Alaric about these matters. He immediately ordered that all the vessels should be taken back, just as they had been found, to the basilica of the Apostle **7.** and that the virgin and any other Christians who might join her be taken there with the same degree of protection. They say that her convent was in the other half of the City, far away from the holy sites, **8.** and so each piece was given to a different individual, and they all carried the gold and silver vessels openly above their heads, providing a great spectacle for all to see. This pious parade was protected by drawn swords on every side,<sup>461</sup> **9.** and Romans and barbarians joined together in singing openly a hymn of praise to God. The trumpet of salvation sent its note far and wide as the City fell, calling out and rousing up even all those who were in hiding.<sup>462</sup> **10.** From all sides the vessels of Christ<sup>463</sup> came running to the vessels of Peter – even many pagans joined the Christians,

<sup>460</sup> See *Genesis*, 19.16. Pope Innocent I held office from AD 402–417. Orosius suppresses the fact that Innocent was in Ravenna as part of an embassy sent from Rome to urge Honorius to negotiate with Alaric; see Zosimus, 5.45.

<sup>461</sup> Orosius intends his reader to recall the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea here; see 1.10.15.

<sup>462</sup> See Matthew 24.31 (compare the use of Matthew 24.21 at 1, *pref.* 15) and Revelation 11.15.

<sup>463</sup> i.e. Christians.

professing, though not possessing, the faith and in this way managed to save themselves for that time when they would be all the more undone<sup>464</sup> – and the more the Romans gathered here in their flight, the more eagerly the barbarians surrounded and defended them.

**11.** O sacred and ineffable discernment of Divine Judgment! O what a holy river of salvation, which rose in a small home, and, as it ran its blessed course to the seats of the saints, piously snatched up wandering souls in danger and carried them off to the bosom of salvation!<sup>465</sup> **12.** O glorious trumpet of Christ's army, which, while calling all alike to life with its sweet music, does not rouse up the disobedient to salvation, but rather leaves them, devoid of excuses, to death. **13.** This mystery of the parade of vessels, singing of hymns, and leading forth of the people<sup>466</sup> was, I believe, like a great sieve through which out of the assembled population of Rome, just like out of a great mass of corn, living grains set in motion either by circumstances or by the truth, passed through all the hidden gates of the city along all the circumference of its walls.<sup>467</sup> **14.** All those who believed in their present salvation were received from the granary prepared by the Lord, while those left, already condemned because of their lack of belief or disobedience, remained to be burnt and destroyed like dung and straw.<sup>468</sup> Who can fully understand these miracles or praise them as they deserve?

**15.** On the third day after the barbarians had entered the city, they departed of their own free will.<sup>469</sup> A number of buildings had been set alight, but not on the scale of the disaster that had occurred in the 700<sup>th</sup> year from the City's foundation.<sup>470</sup> **16.** For, if I were to recall the fire that the Romans' own emperor Nero brought about for his own amusement, it would be beyond doubt that this second fire, started by an emperor's dissipation, could not be likened to this one, brought on by the victor's wrath.<sup>471</sup> **17.** Nor ought I to recall the Gauls' sack of Rome as something similar – they held Rome, treading on the ashes of the burnt, ruined city for almost a year.<sup>472</sup>

464 cf. the more charitable comments of Augustine, *City of God*, 1.1.

465 A parallel with the 'oil miracle' of Augustus, 6.18.34, is intended here.

466 Again, a parallel with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt is intended here.

467 Orosius has in mind Amos 9.9, where we are told that God will sieve Israel through the nations because of her lack of faith, but will still preserve her.

468 An allusion to the parable of the wheat and the tares, Matthew 13.25–30.

469 A parallel with the resurrection is intended here.

470 See 6.14.5.

471 Orosius appears to have elided his great fire of Rome of 52 (50?) BC (see 6.14.4–5 and 7.2.11) with the fire in Rome during Nero's reign that occurred in AD 64; see 7.7.4–7.

472 See 2.19.7–15.

**18.** And so that no one should doubt that the enemy was allowed to do this in order to punish the arrogant, debauched, blasphemy of the town, at this same time the most famous buildings in the City which the enemy was unable to set alight were destroyed by lightning.<sup>473</sup>

## 40

**1.** And so 1,164 years after the foundation of the City, the City was breached by Alaric. Although this deed is of recent memory, if anyone were to see the great numbers of Rome's population and listen to them, he would think, as they themselves say, that 'nothing had happened', unless he were to learn of it by chance from the few ruins which still remain from the fire.

**2.** During the breach, Placidia,<sup>474</sup> Prince Theodosius's daughter, and sister of the emperors Arcadius and Honorius, was captured and married by Athaulf,<sup>475</sup> a kinsman of Alaric and, as if Divine Judgment had made Rome hand her over as a hostage and, as it were, a special pledge of goodwill, finding herself in an influential marriage to a powerful barbarian was of great use to the state.<sup>476</sup>

**3.** Meanwhile, two years before the breach of Rome, the Alans, Sueves, Vandals, and many other tribes with them, were, as I have mentioned, roused up by Stilicho,<sup>477</sup> crushed the Franks, crossed the Rhine, invaded the Gallic provinces, and marched straight through them as far as the Pyrenees. They were halted by this barrier for a time and poured back over the neighbouring provinces.

**4.** While they indulged in an orgy of destruction in the Gallic provinces,<sup>478</sup> in the British provinces Gratian, a citizen of that island, usurped power and was killed.<sup>479</sup> Constantine, a man from the lowest ranks of the army, lacking in any ability, and whose only appeal was in his name, was chosen in his stead.<sup>480</sup> Immediately he had usurped power, he invaded the Gallic

<sup>473</sup> See 2.19.15.

<sup>474</sup> See *PLRE* 2 Placidia 4.

<sup>475</sup> See *PLRE* 2 Athaulfus.

<sup>476</sup> Orosius is less than truthful here: Galla Placidia was captured before the sack of Rome and was not married by Athaulf until AD 413. She then married against Honorius's wishes. The wedding took place in Narbonne. For Gallia's life in general, see Oost (1968).

<sup>477</sup> 7.38.3–4.

<sup>478</sup> For a contemporary description of the devastation wreaked in Gaul, see Orientius of Auch, *Commonitorium* 2.165–84 = CSEL 16 234.

<sup>479</sup> See *PLRE* 2 Gratianus 3. Orosius omits the previous military usurpation of Marcus in Britain; see Zosimus, 6.3.1. Gratian ruled for four months.

<sup>480</sup> See *PLRE* 2 Constantinus 21 and Drinkwater (1998). The self-styled Constantine III

victory, and then entrusted with the task of guarding the Pyrenees and their passes, this job being taken away from the old and reliable guard composed of the peasantry.<sup>488</sup> **9.** As a consequence, the *Honoriaci*, loaded down with plunder and further tempted by the wealth of the province to let their crimes go all the more unpunished and to have more scope for crime, betraying their watch over the Pyrenees, opened the passes and let all the tribes who were wandering through the Gallic provinces into the Spanish provinces and joined with them.<sup>489</sup> **10.** After indulging for a time there in great and bloody raids and causing destruction of both life and property, things for which they too now have some regret, they drew lots to divide up their gains and settled in those parts which they hold to this day.<sup>490</sup>

## 41

**1.** I would now have the opportunity of saying a great deal about matters of this kind, save that, according to all men, the secret voice of conscience speaks only to each man's mind individually. **2.** The Spanish provinces were invaded and suffered devastation and slaughter. But this is nothing new. For during these two years while the enemy's sword raged, they endured from barbarians what they had suffered at the hands of the Romans for some 200 years and what, indeed, they had received at the hands of rampaging Germans for nearly twelve years in the reign of the emperor Gallienus.<sup>491</sup> **3.** Still, what man who fears God's judgment and knows himself, his deeds, and, indeed, his thoughts, would not confess that everything he has suffered, he has suffered justly, and, in fact, endured little? Or, on the other hand, if he does not know himself or fear God, how could he argue that these things were not justly done and of little account?

**4.** Since this is so, God's clemency through the same piety, which He had long foretold, brought it about, in accordance with His Gospel where He continually gives the advice: *When they persecute you in one city, flee*

488 For the issue of whether a *limes* existed in Spain at this time, see Arce (1982) 66–69 and 165–68.

489 The invasion began on a Tuesday in late AD 409, 28 September or 12 October; see Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 15.42.

490 The Hasding Vandals settled in north-west Galicia, the Siling Vandals in Andalusia, to which they gave their name, (V)andalusia, the Alans in Lusitania and Carthaginiensis, and the Sueves in Southern Galicia.

491 From AD 409 until the treaty of AD 411. Orosius's account is paralleled by that of Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 40. For Spain's suffering under Roman rule, see 5.1.6. For her suffering at the hands of the Germans, see 7.22.7.

to another,<sup>492</sup> that anyone who wished to go out and leave could use the barbarians themselves as paid helpers and defenders. **5.** The barbarians themselves willingly offered to do this and, although they could have killed everyone and carried off all their belongings, they demanded a paltry fee to pay for their services and the task of carrying over the goods. Very many took advantage of this, **6.** but those who insolently disbelieved the Gospel of God or, with twice as much insolence, did not even listen to It, and did not give way to God's wrath, were rightly seized and destroyed by that wrath when it fell upon them.<sup>493</sup> **7.** However, immediately after these events, the barbarians foreswore their swords and turned to the plough,<sup>494</sup> and cherished the remaining Romans as allies of a kind and friends, with the result that some Romans who prefer freedom in poverty to trouble and taxation under Rome can be found among them.<sup>495</sup>

**8.** Even if the barbarians were sent into the territory of Rome for this purpose alone – that the Churches of Christ throughout the east and west alike should be filled with Huns, Sueves, Vandals, Burgundians, and a countless host of believers of different races – God's mercy should be praised and extolled, seeing that, albeit with some loss on our part, so many peoples came to recognise the Truth Which they would have been unable to find without this opportunity. **9.** For what loss is it to the Christian who yearns for the life eternal to be taken from this world at any time or in any way? Or what gain is it for a pagan who has hardened himself against the Faith in the midst of Christians, if he drags out his days a little longer, since he who gives up hope of conversion will be doomed to die in the end?

**10.** Now because God's judgments are ineffable and we are neither able to know them all nor explain what we know of them, I would briefly state that the chastisements of God's judgment, in whatever way they are inflicted, are rightly suffered by those who know Him and rightly suffered by those who know Him not.

492 In fact this is only said once in the Gospels: at Matthew 10.23. Orosius may well have thought the verse had particular meaning for his own life.

493 Orosius appears to be justifying his own flight from Spain here. Given that he wrote the *Histories* in Africa, the Donatist controversy that centred on what was the appropriate response by Christians to persecution, and which was still a live issue in the region, may also have been in his mind.

494 cf. Isaiah 2.4 and Micah 4.3.

495 See Salvian, *The Guidance of God* (*De Gubernatione Dei*), 5.21–3. Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 41, on the other hand, describes the division of Spain into various areas of barbarian influence and the 'enslavement' of the Spaniards there.

or after being bribed with gold, it is unclear which, had him executed at Carthage.<sup>516</sup> Marinus was immediately recalled from Africa, reduced to the rank of a private citizen, and dismissed to be punished or to look to the repentance of his conscience.

### 43

1. 1,168 years after the foundation of the City, Count Constantius halted at the city of Arles in Gaul and doing what had to be done with great energy, drove the Goths from Narbonne and forced them to depart into Spain, taking special care to cut them off from any trade by sea and stopping them importing foreign goods.<sup>517</sup> 2. At this time, Athaulf was the ruler over the Gothic tribes.<sup>518</sup> He became king in Alaric's place, after the breaching of the City and Alaric's death. As I have mentioned, he married the emperor's captive daughter, Placidia.<sup>519</sup> 3. It has often been heard, and was proved by his end, that he was clearly a keen partisan of peace and chose to fight loyally for the emperor Honorius and use the Goths' might to defend the Roman state.<sup>520</sup>

4. I myself heard a devout, sober, and serious man from Narbonne who had served with distinction under Theodosius, telling the most blessed priest

concerning the legitimacy of Caecilian's ordination as bishop of Carthage. The Council was composed of 284 representatives from each side of the dispute and was presided over by Marcellinus (to whom Augustine dedicated the first books of his *City of God*). Marcellinus ruled in favour of the Catholics and on 30 January AD 412 an imperial edict, *Theodosian Code*, 16.5.52, outlawed the Donatist church. Nevertheless, despite persecution (for which see Augustine, *Letters*, 133) Donatism survived until the Arabs overran North Africa in the eighth century. For the conference *acta*, see Lancel (1974) and for comments on it, Tilley (1991). For a detailed account of the schism, see Frend (1952) and Tilley (1997).

516 Marcellinus was executed in September AD 413. Orosius is our only source for Marinus being responsible for his execution.

517 The winter of AD 414/415. The Vandals made good the Goths' food shortage, selling them grain at highly inflated prices – see Olympiodorus, *fr.* 29.

518 Athaulf established his capital at Barcelona which appears to have surrendered peacefully to him.

519 See 7.40.1. Orosius does not see the union, as did his fellow Spaniard Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 57, as a fulfilment of the prophecy in Daniel 11.6, that a queen of the south would marry a king of the north.

520 Athaulf's philo-Roman attitudes can be seen in his wedding. Both he and Placidia were dressed in Roman style and classical-style wedding hymns, *epithalamia*, were sung for the couple, first by Attalus, the deposed emperor, and then by two other Romans, Rusticius and Phoebadius. The pair had a child, significantly named Theodosius, who died in infancy and was buried in a silver coffin near Barcelona; Olympiodorus, *fr.* 24, 26.

Jerome in Bethlehem, a town in Palestine, that he had been a great friend of Athaulf in Narbonne and had learnt this about him, often before witnesses: that when he was too full of confidence, strength, and cleverness,<sup>521</sup> **5.** he was accustomed to relate that at first he earnestly had wanted to obliterate the name of Rome and make the Romans' land the Goths' empire in both word and deed, so that there would have been, to put it in everyday speech, a *Gothia* where there had once been *Romania* and that he, Athaulf, would now be what Augustus Caesar had once been. **6.** But when, after long experience, he had proved to himself that, because of their wild barbarism, the Goths were completely unable to obey the law, and because he believed it wrong to deprive a state of laws (without which a state is not a state at all), he chose at least to seek for himself the glory of having restored and extended the Roman Empire by the might of his Goths and, since he could not be her supplanter, to be remembered by posterity as the author of Rome's renewal.

**7.** It was for this reason that he strove to avoid war, and for this reason that he strove to love peace. He was influenced to carry out everything required to set things in good order by the persuasive advice of his wife, Placidia, without a doubt a woman of keen intellect and clearly virtuous in religion.<sup>522</sup> **8.** It is said that he was killed in the Spanish city of Barcelona through the treachery of his own people, while making every effort to make and offer peace.<sup>523</sup>

**9.** After Athaulf, Segeric was made king by the Goths, but although he was, through God's judgment, inclined to peace in the same way, he was nonetheless killed by his own men.<sup>524</sup>

**10.** He was succeeded on the throne by Vallia whom the Goths elected precisely to break the peace, but who was ordained by God precisely to strengthen it.<sup>525</sup> **11.** He was especially terrified by God's judgment because in the previous year when a great band of Goths had mustered themselves under arms and attempted to cross in their fleet to Africa, they had been caught up in a storm twelve miles from the Straights of Cadiz and died

<sup>521</sup> A euphemism for being drunk?

<sup>522</sup> See Oost (1968).

<sup>523</sup> Athaulf was murdered in August AD 415. According to Olympiodorus, *fr.* 26, the king was killed by a retainer named Dubius who was determined to avenge his old master. According to Jordanes, *History of the Goths*, 31, Athaulf was killed by a Goth named Everwulf whom he had angered by sneering at his small size.

<sup>524</sup> See *PLRE* 2 Segericus. Segeric ruled for only seven days. Orosius suppresses Segeric's murder of Athaulf's children despite them being under Church protection and his maltreatment of Galla Placidia; see Olympiodorus, *fr.* 26.

<sup>525</sup> See *PLRE* 2 Vallia.



a wretched death.<sup>526</sup> **12.** He was also mindful of the disaster suffered in Alaric's time when the Goths had tried to cross over to Sicily and, under the eyes of their comrades, been carried off by a storm and pitiably drowned.<sup>527</sup> He therefore made a highly favourable peace with the emperor Honorius, giving him nobles of the highest lineage as hostages.<sup>528</sup> He also restored the emperor's sister, Placidia, who had lived in honour and unmolested at his court, to her brother.<sup>529</sup> **13.** He put himself in danger for Rome's security, attacking the rest of the tribes that had settled in Spain – he did the fighting, but conquered for Rome.<sup>530</sup> **14.** Moreover, all the other kings, those of the Alans, Vandals, and Sueves were disposed to make treaties on the same terms with us. They sent ambassadors to the emperor Honorius, 'Make peace with us all, and take hostages from us all,' they begged. 'We ourselves will fight and perish, but we will conquer for you, it would be an everlasting boon for your state, if we were to perish, one and all.'<sup>531</sup> **15.** Who would believe this, if it were not confirmed by the facts? At the present, every day we learn from frequent, reliable reports that in the Spanish provinces these people wage war and slaughter each other, and that Vallia, the king of the Goths, in particular wishes to make peace.<sup>532</sup>

**16.** For this reason, I would happily grant that this Christian epoch be freely criticised, if anything from the beginning of the world down to the present day can be shown to have been concluded with similar good fortune. **17.** We have shown, I believe, and demonstrated almost as much by pointing, as by my words, that innumerable wars have come to an end, a great number of usurpers have been put down, and the most savage tribes have been defeated, restrained, surrendered, and emptied of their strength with the minimum of bloodshed, no battles, and hardly any killing. **18.** All that remains is for our critics to repent of their efforts, blush at the truth,

526 i.e. the Straits of Gibraltar. Orosius is our only source for this incident, for a discussion of which see Kulikowski (2004) 169.

527 At the end of AD 410; see Olympiodorus, *fr.* 15. Orosius perhaps does not discuss the incident at length because Alaric is said to have been turned back by a pagan enchanted statue which would have suggested to his readers that paganism could be efficacious.

528 The treaty was struck in AD 416.

529 See Olympiodorus, *fr.* 31.

530 cf. 1.16.3 and 1.17.3. Vallia defeated the Alans and Siling Vandals in AD 417–18. Orosius is ever the optimist: a more cynical historian might have thought that the Goths, having failed to cross to Africa, were intent on securing Spain for themselves.

531 This speech is a fabrication by Orosius.

532 For these wars, see Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 52, 55, 59–61; *Gallic Chronicle of 511*, 33, 35–6; and Sidonius Apollinaris, *Poems*, 2.362–65.

and believe in, fear, love, and serve the One, True God for Whom all things are possible and learn that His every act, even those that they think wrong, is good.

**19.** In accordance with your instructions, most blessed father Augustine, I have set down, with Christ's aid, the lusts and punishment of sinful men, the conflicts of our age, and the judgments of God from the beginning of the world to the present day, that is over 5,618 years. I have done this as briefly and as clearly as possible, separating the years which through the nearer presence of Christ's grace are Christian ones from the previous chaos of disbelief. **20.** So now I am secure in the enjoyment of the one thing for which I ought to long – the fruit of my obedience.<sup>533</sup> As for the quality of my little works, you, who commissioned them, must see to that – if you publish them, they must be approved of by you, but if you destroy them, you will have disapproved of them.

<sup>533</sup> 1, *pref.* 2.

to surrender, recovering in battle the Roman standards that they had once captured under Mithridates.<sup>346</sup>

29. The Parthians, thinking that all the eyes of the conquered, pacified world were on them, that the whole might of the Roman Empire would be turned on them alone, and because they were already gnawed by a guilty conscience over the death of Crassus which they knew would be avenged, returned to Caesar of their own free will the standards that they had captured when they killed Crassus. After handing over members of their royal family as hostages, and through their sincere supplications, they then earned a firm treaty for themselves.<sup>347</sup>

## 22

1. So in the 752<sup>nd</sup> year after the foundation of the City, Caesar Augustus, after giving every nation from east to west, from north to south, and all around the encircling Ocean an all-embracing peace, closed the gates of Janus for a third time.<sup>348</sup> 2. That they remained shut in perfect peace from that time for almost the next twelve years was shown by the rust on them nor were the gates pushed open again until the sedition at Athens and the troubles in Dacia in Augustus's extreme old age.<sup>349</sup> After he had closed the gates of Janus, Caesar endeavoured to nourish and propagate by peace the state that he had sought out by war. He promulgated many laws through which he inculcated the custom of discipline in the human race through a respect that was freely given.

4. He rejected being called 'master' on the grounds that he was only a man. *Indeed, when he was watching the games, the line 'O good and fair master' was spoken in one of the mimes and everyone broke out into enthusiastic applause as if it referred to him, but he at once suppressed this unbecoming flattery by gesturing with his hand and through the expression on his face. The following day he put an end to it by issuing a stern edict and after this would not let either his children or grandchildren call him master*

346 The campaign, though not the recovery of the standards, is noted by Jerome, *Chronicle*, A *Abr.* 2003 (= 12 BC).

347 The standards were returned in 20 BC. The hostages were the four sons of the Parthian king, Phraates IV.

348 i.e. the third time Augustus had personally closed the gates and the fifth time in all Roman history that they had been closed. See Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 13, and Suetonius, *Augustus*, 22. The date of this event is impossible to determine accurately. Orosius's date conveniently coincides with the birth of Christ.

349 The problems in Dacia broke out in AD 10, those in Athens in AD 14.

*even as a joke.*<sup>350</sup> **5.** Now at that time, namely in the year when Caesar, through God's decree, had established the most secure and stable peace on earth, Christ, for Whose coming that peace was a servant and upon Whose birth angels exultantly sang to listening men, '*Glory to God in the Highest, and on the Earth peace towards men of good will*',<sup>351</sup> was born. At that same time he to whom all earthly power had been granted, did not suffer, or rather did not dare, to be called master of mankind, since the True Master of all the human race was then born among men.

**6.** So in the same year when Caesar, whom God in His deep mysteries had marked out for this task, ordered that the first census be taken in each and every province and that every man be recorded, God deemed it right to be seen as, and become, a man.<sup>352</sup> Christ was therefore born at this time and at His birth was immediately recorded on the Roman census. **7.** This census in which He Who made all men wished to be listed as a man and numbered among men was the first and clearest statement which marked out Caesar as the lord of all and *the Romans as masters of the world*,<sup>353</sup> both individually and as a people. Never since the beginning of the world or the human race had anyone been granted to do this, not even Babylon or Macedon, not to mention any of the lesser kingdoms.<sup>354</sup> **8.** Nor can there be any doubt since it is clear to all from thought, faith, and observation that Our Lord, Jesus Christ brought to the apogee of power this city which had grown and been defended by His will, vehemently wishing to belong to it when He came and to be called a Roman citizen by decree of the Roman census.<sup>355</sup>

**9.** Now, therefore, as we have arrived at that time when the Lord Christ first enlightened the world with His coming and gave Caesar a kingdom entirely at peace, I shall make this the end of my sixth book. **10.** In the seventh, if, with God's aid, I am equal to the task, I shall deal with the times when the Christian faith germinated, the times when it grew all the more

350 A very close paraphrase of Suetonius, *Augustus*, 53.

351 Luke 2.14.

352 cf. Luke 2.1.

353 A quotation from Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.282, where Jupiter predicts the coming greatness of Rome to Venus. Orosius may just be displaying his learning here, but it is possible that he wants to show his readers that a prophecy made by a pagan god has in fact been brought about by the True God.

354 Orosius's theory of the four kingdoms appears to have broken down here. There is no mention of Carthage, and the allusion to other kingdoms sits very uneasily with the theory.

355 Orosius is unaware that prior to Caracalla's grant of universal citizenship in AD 212, most provincials, though listed on the census, would not have been Roman citizens. Nevertheless, this is a bold move by Orosius which turns the Romans into the new chosen race.

amid the hands of those who would have stopped it, and how, after having advanced to its present position, it is still gnawed at by the abuse of those against whom we are forced to make this reply. **11.** And since from the beginning of this work I have not passed over in silence the fact that men sin and are punished for those sins, now too I shall expound what persecutions were inflicted on Christians, what vengeance followed them, and from this that all men are as a whole predisposed to sin and so are chastised individually.

and we should assume that they had knowledge of the future, since, where omnipotence is concerned, to foreknow and to will one's acts are one and the same thing – whatever their will demanded and was foreseen by them ought not to have been put off, but to have been created. This is especially so since they tell us that their Jupiter was in the habit of turning anthills into races of men as a game.<sup>5</sup>

**11.** Nor do I think that we need to consider the care that they took to perform religious ceremonies, since amid their endless sacrifices there was no end or respite from endless disasters until Christ, the Saviour of the World, shone forth. The peace of the Roman Empire was preordained for His coming, and, although I think I have already demonstrated this satisfactorily, I shall try to add a few proofs more.

## 2

**1.** At the beginning of my second book,<sup>6</sup> when I sketched out Rome's beginnings, I noted the many points of similarity between the Assyrian city of Babylon, which was the leading nation at the time, and Rome, which dominates the nations in a similar way today. **2.** I showed that the former had the first, while the latter has the last, empire; that the former slowly declined, while the latter gradually grew; that the former lost her last king at the same time the latter gained her first; that while, when Cyrus invaded, Babylon fell as if dead, Rome was confidently rising and, after expelling her kings, began to be governed by the counsels of freemen; **3.** and that, most of all, at the time when Rome won her freedom, at that time too the Jewish people who had been enslaved under the kings at Babylon received their freedom, returned to holy Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple of the Lord as had been foretold by the prophets.<sup>7</sup>

**4.** Moreover, I have noted how in between the kingdom of Babylon in the east and that of Rome which was rising in the west and nourished by her eastern inheritance, came the Macedonian and African kingdoms and that that these, one to the south and the other to the north, briefly held the role of guardian<sup>8</sup> and attorney.<sup>9</sup> **5.** Now I know that no one has ever doubted that

<sup>5</sup> See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 7.622, and Hyginus, *Fables*, 52.

<sup>6</sup> See 2.1–3.

<sup>7</sup> See *Esdras*, 1.1–6. The parallelism between Rome and the Jews is of interest here. Orosius is anxious to show Rome, even at this early date in her history, plays an equally important part as Israel in God's plans for mankind.

<sup>8</sup> A *tutor* in Roman law oversaw the affairs of a minor.

<sup>9</sup> cf. 2.1.4–5. A *curator* in Roman law oversaw the affairs of one incapable of acting on

the kingdoms of Babylon and Rome are rightly called the kingdoms of the east and west. Its position under the heavens and the altars, which endure to this day, set up by Alexander the Great by the Rhiphaean mountains,<sup>10</sup> teach us that the Macedonian kingdom was in the north. **6.** And what can be seen both in history books and in cities themselves tells us that Carthage surpassed all of Africa and extended the boundaries of her realm not only to Sicily, Sardinia, and the rest of the islands adjacent to her, but even to Spain. **7.** It has also been stated how both kingdoms endured for an equal number of years before Babylon was laid waste by the Medes and Rome invaded by the Goths.<sup>11</sup>

**8.** I shall now add to those facts this point in order to make it clearer that God is the sole Ruler of all ages, kingdoms, and places. **9.** The kingdom of Carthage stood a little over 700 years from its foundation to its destruction.<sup>12</sup> Equally, the kingdom of Macedon lasted a little less than 700 years from the reign of Caranus to that of Perses.<sup>13</sup> However, the number seven, by which all things are judged, put an end to both of them.<sup>14</sup> **10.** Even Rome herself, although she reached the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ with her empire intact, was nevertheless also affected when she came to this number **11.** to the point that in the 700<sup>th</sup> year after her foundation, a fire of unknown origin rose up and consumed 14 of her districts. According to Livy, Rome had never suffered as great a fire with the result that some years later Caesar Augustus spent a great deal of money from the public treasury to make good

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their own behalf.

<sup>10</sup> See 1.2.52.

<sup>11</sup> See 2.3.3.

<sup>12</sup> Orosius has used the figure from Jerome that he feels suits his purpose. Jerome, *Chronicle*, *A Abr.*1871, states that Carthage endured 678 years from her foundation to her fall, adding that 'others' believe the figure to be 749. Oddly, the former figure would have made a better fit for Orosius's theory, as Carthage's lifespan would then be closer to Macedon's, but he chooses not to use it. His manuscript may have been corrupt, or perhaps his arithmetic was at fault. Alternatively, he may not have been able to resist making a verbal contrast between 'a little over', *paulo amplius*, and 'a little less', *paulo minus*.

<sup>13</sup> According to Jerome, Caranus began his reign in *A Abr.* 1204 and the kingdom fell in *A Abr.*1850, making a total of 646 years.

<sup>14</sup> For Orosius seven is the number of completion as evinced by the seven days of creation. The composition of the *Histories* in seven books is also influenced by this view. The classical biblical example of the destructive power of completion is the fall of the walls of Jericho accomplished by seven trumpets on the seventh day they were paraded around the town walls, Joshua 6.13–17. For another example of the power of the number seven on the earlier Christian imagination, see Cyprian. *Treatise 3 (De Lapsis / On the Lapsed)*, 1.20.

the areas that had been burnt down.<sup>15</sup> **12.** Were I not recalled by consideration of the present, I could demonstrate that Babylon lasted for twice this number of years, when she was finally captured by Cyrus after existing for a little more than 1,400 years.<sup>16</sup>

**13.** I freely add this fact – that the famed holy man, Abraham, to whom divine promises were given and from whose seed Christ was promised to come forth, was born in the 43<sup>rd</sup> year of the rule of Ninus, the first of Babylon's kings, albeit his father Belus too is said, on no good evidence, to have been the first king.<sup>17</sup> **14.** Then in the present epoch Christ, Who had been promised to Abraham in the reign of Ninus, the first king, was born at almost the end of the 42<sup>nd</sup> year of the rule of Augustus Caesar,<sup>18</sup> the first of all Rome's emperors, although his father, Caesar, too distinguished himself, though rather as the architect of the empire than as an emperor.<sup>19</sup> **15.** He was born on 25 December, the date when all the increase of the coming year first begins to grow.<sup>20</sup> And so it has come to pass that while Abraham was born in the 43<sup>rd</sup> year, Christ's nativity came at the end of the 42<sup>nd</sup> year, so that instead of coming forth in part of this 43<sup>rd</sup> year, it should come forth from Him.<sup>21</sup> **16.** I believe that it is well enough known how much that year abounded with both new and unaccustomed blessings without me listing them: an all-embracing peace came to all the lands of the globe, there was not a cessation but an abolition of all wars; the gates of Janus of the two faces were closed as the roots of war were not pruned, but torn out; this was when the first and greatest census was held, when all God's creation of great nations unanimously swore loyalty to Caesar alone, and, at the same time, by partaking of the census were made into one community.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See 6.14.5.

<sup>16</sup> See 2.2.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, 18.2, lists Belus as the Assyrians' first king.

<sup>18</sup> Jerome, *Chronicle*, *A Abr.* 2015.

<sup>19</sup> i.e. Julius Caesar. Caesar is mentioned here in order to create a Roman parallel to the Ninus–Belus dispute. It was convenient for Orosius in this respect that Julius Caesar was at times viewed as the first 'emperor'; he is the first subject, for example, of Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* and Jerome notes that in 47 BC (*A Abr.* 1968) 'Julius Caesar was the first Roman to obtain sole power from which the leaders of the Romans are called Caesares'.

<sup>20</sup> Christ therefore is the symbol of a new epoch.

<sup>21</sup> An ingenious way of preserving the parallelism between Abraham and Christ in the face of the chronological evidence and, at the same time, of emphasising Christ's superiority to Abraham.

<sup>22</sup> Orosius wishes us to see the census creating a community in the same way that the Eucharist did among Christians.



## 3

**1.** So 752 years after the foundation of the City, Christ was born and brought to the world the faith that gives salvation. Truly, He is the Rock set at the heart of things, where there is ruination for whoever strikes against Him, but where whoever believes in Him is saved.<sup>23</sup> Truly, He is the blazing Fire that lights the way for whoever follows Him, but consumes whoever makes trial of Him.<sup>24</sup>

**2.** He is the Christ, the Head of the Christians,<sup>25</sup> the Saviour of the good, the wicked's Castigator, the Judge of all men, Who sets forth both in word and deed an example for those who will follow Him, through which to teach them all the more that it is necessary to endure the persecutions which they undergo in return for eternal life. He began His own sufferings soon after He came into the world through a virgin birth. For when Herod, the king of Judaea, learnt of His birth, he immediately decreed that He be murdered, and in his pursuit of this one child, killed a host of little children. **3.** Hence we see that just punishment befalls the wicked who vilely pursue their paths of evil;<sup>26</sup> hence we see that the degree to which the world is at peace is due to the grace given to believers and that the degree to which it is troubled is due to the punishment of blasphemers, though however things stand, faithful Christians have security as they either are at rest in the safety of the life eternal or profit even from this life on earth. I shall show this more readily, using the facts themselves to do so, as I reach these events in sequence.

**4.** After the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the World, came down to earth and was enrolled as a Roman citizen in Caesar's census,<sup>27</sup> the gates of war were kept closed, as I have mentioned, for twelve years in the blessed calm of peace. Caesar Augustus then sent his grandson Gaius to govern the provinces of Egypt and Syria.<sup>28</sup> **5.** As Suetonius Tranquillus tells us,<sup>29</sup> on

23 The rock of Salvation is a common Old Testament theme: see 2 Samuel 22.47, and Psalm 18.46. The rock is interpreted as Christ by St Paul: see 1 Corinthians 10.4. For the rock as a stumbling block to the wicked, see Isaiah 8.14, and Romans 9.33.

24 A reference to the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites through Sinai (Exodus 13.21) and the refiner's fire of Malachi 3.2; 3.3.

25 'Head' here is metaphorical, referring to Christ's role as the leader of the Christians, and actual, referring to His position as the head of the mystical body of the Church.

26 For the massacre of the innocents, see Matthew 2.16, and Jerome, *Chronicle, A Abr.* 2019. For Herod's death, a particularly gruesome affair that we are meant to remember here, see Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.174–78.

27 6.22.6–8.

28 The son of Augustus's daughter, Julia, and Agrippa. He was given proconsular power over the east in 1 BC.

29 Suetonius, *Augustus*, 93.

crossing into Palestine from Egypt, he disdained to pray in the holy, much-visited, temple of God at Jerusalem. After he told Augustus what he had done, the emperor in an error of judgment praised him, saying that he had acted prudently. **6.** And so in the 48<sup>th</sup> year of Caesar's rule such a terrible famine befell the Romans that Caesar commanded that troupes of gladiators, all foreigners, and great masses of slaves, apart from doctors and teachers, be expelled from the City.<sup>30</sup> So when the prince sinned in God's holy place and the people were beset by famine, the degree of the offence was made clear by the severity of its punishment.

**7.** After this, to quote the words of Cornelius Tacitus: *When Augustus was an old man, the gates of Janus were opened and new peoples at the furthest ends of the earth were sought out, sometimes with profit and sometimes with loss. This went on until the reign of Vespasian.*<sup>31</sup> Thus Cornelius. **8.** However, when at that time the city of Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed, as the prophets had foretold, and the Jews exterminated, Titus, who had been ordained by God's Judgment to avenge the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>32</sup> closed the temple of Janus on celebrating his triumph along with his father, Vespasian.

**9.** Therefore, although the temple of Janus was opened in Caesar's last years, nevertheless for many years afterwards, though the troops were girt for battle, no sounds of war were to be heard.<sup>33</sup> **10.** It was for this reason that in the Gospels when the Lord Jesus Christ was asked by His disciples, at a time when all the world was enjoying the profoundest calm and a single peace lay over every people, about the end of days which was to come, He said, among other things: **11.** *And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations*

30 Jerome, *Chronicle*, A Abr. 2022. For the expulsions, see Suetonius, *Augustus*, 42.

31 A fragment from a lost section of Tacitus's *Histories*. Orosius has presumably doctored this passage, as we know that Nero closed the gates of Janus in AD 66 (Suetonius, *Nero*, 13) and Tacitus is unlikely to have made the error attributed to him here. For Orosius it would be impossible to present a persecutor of Christians such as Nero as a bringer of peace. He was either unaware of Nero's closing of the gates or suppressed it.

32 See Daniel 9.26, and, perhaps, Zachariah 14.2.

33 Given the quotation from Tacitus cited above, this is a striking statement. Orosius appears to have become carried away with his own rhetoric.

*for my name's sake.*<sup>34</sup> **12.** He taught this from His divine foresight, strengthening the faithful by His warning and confounding unbelievers through His prophecy.

#### 4

**1.** 767 years after the foundation of the City, Tiberius Caesar obtained the empire after the death of Augustus Caesar and remained in power for 23 years.<sup>35</sup> **2.** He neither waged war himself nor even engaged in any significant war through his lieutenants,<sup>36</sup> except to anticipate and crush some local rebellions in a number of places, **3.** though it is true that in the fourth year of his reign, Germanicus, who was Drusus's son and Caligula's father, celebrated a triumph for his campaign against the Germans against whom he had been despatched by Augustus in his old age.<sup>37</sup>

**4.** However, Tiberius for most of his reign presided over the state with such great and grave moderation that *he wrote to some governors who were urging him to increase the tribute from the provinces that 'the mark of good shepherd is to shear, not flay, his flock'*.<sup>38</sup>

**5.** After Christ the Lord had suffered, risen from the dead, and sent forth His disciples to preach, Pilate, the governor of the province of Palestine, made a report to the emperor Tiberius and the Senate concerning Christ's suffering, resurrection, and the miracles which then followed, both those performed by Himself in public and those performed by His disciples in His name. He also reported that He was believed to be God by the growing faith of a great number of men. **6.** Tiberius proposed, and strongly recommended, to the Senate that Christ be considered as God, but the Senate was angry that this matter had not been brought to its notice first, as was the custom, in order that it might be the first to decree that a new cult be adopted. Therefore, it refused to consecrate Christ and passed a decree that Christians be

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 24.6–9.

<sup>35</sup> Orosius's date is correct. Tiberius reigned from AD14–37. Jerome, *Chronicle, A Abr.* 2030, is one year out at this point placing the beginning of Tiberius's reign in AD 13.

<sup>36</sup> Eutropius, 7.11, states that while Tiberius did not go to war, he waged war through his lieutenants. As Orosius wants to depict the early empire as a time of peace, he has chosen to downplay the nature of fighting under Tiberius.

<sup>37</sup> Drawn from Jerome, *Chronicle, A Abr.* 2033. Jerome has Germanicus triumph over the Parthians, but the German campaign is intended. For the beginning of these campaigns, see Syme (1974) ch. 4 and Wells (1972) ch. 7.

<sup>38</sup> A close paraphrase of Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 32. Tiberius's words are taken verbatim.

## BOOK FIVE

### 1

1. I know that a number of men could be influenced after my description of these events on the grounds that through the slaughter of many states and nations Rome's victories grew greater. Nevertheless, if they look carefully, they will discover that the City suffered more harm than good. For so many wars waged against slaves, her allies, her own citizens, or runaway slaves ought not to be seen as of little account, as they yielded no fruits of victory, but only great suffering.

2. But I shall ignore this fact in order that this period can seem to have been just as they wish it to have been. At this point I think they will say, 'What more blessed times were there than these in which there were never-ending triumphs, famous victories, rich booty, glorious parades, and mighty kings and long columns of conquered nations driven before the victor's chariot?' 3. I will reply briefly that they are accustomed to plead the case for these times and I have written a tract about the same times, and it is agreed that they concern the whole world, not just one city. See then that Rome's good fortune in her conquests is matched by the misfortune of those outside Rome whom she conquers.

4. How highly should we rate this scintilla of happiness, won at such a cost, to which is ascribed the good fortune of a single city amid such a great mass of misfortune which has laid the entire world in ruins? Or, if these times are thought so happy because one city's wealth increased, why should they not rather be judged as the most unhappy of times in which mighty kingdoms fell in the piteous devastation of many, well-governed nations?

5. Are perhaps these things were viewed differently at Carthage when after 120 years,<sup>1</sup> during which at times she trembled at the disasters of war and at others at the terms of peace, when as both a rebel and a suppliant

1 In fact, in Orosius's account there are 123 years from the outbreak of the First Punic War to the end of the Third Punic War.

by turns, she swapped peace for war and war for peace, and finally the whole town became one huge funeral pyre, as all her people in the depths of despondency flung themselves indiscriminately into the fire? Now, a small town stripped of her walls, part of her suffering is to hear of her former greatness.<sup>2</sup>

**6.** Let Spain give her opinion. When for 200 years<sup>3</sup> she watered her own fields everywhere with her own blood, while she could neither repel nor endure her persistent foe who, with no provocation, restlessly moved as it were from door to door, and when in various towns and places,<sup>4</sup> her people, broken by the slaughter of war and emaciated from the hunger of being besieged, killed their women and children and cured their sufferings by cutting one another's throats in mutual slaughter in a conclave of misery – what then did she feel about these times?

**7.** Finally, let Italy herself speak. Why did she quarrel with, oppose, and fight back against the Romans, who are one of her own, for 400 years,<sup>5</sup> unless good times for Rome signalled bad times for herself, and that the common good was harmed by Rome becoming the dominant power?

**8.** I need not ask what the countless nations of divers peoples, previously long free, but then conquered in war, dragged from their homelands, priced, sold, and scattered far apart into slavery,<sup>6</sup> would have preferred for themselves at that time, what they thought of the Romans, or what was their verdict on this period of history. **9.** I shall say nothing of those kings of great wealth, resources, and glory, who had long enjoyed great power, but were then captured, loaded with chains as slaves, forced under the yoke, paraded before the victor's chariot, and finally butchered in gaol.<sup>7</sup> It would be as stupid to ask their opinion, as it would be hard-hearted not to grieve at their sufferings.

**10.** Now, I say, let us look now at ourselves, and the life that we have chosen and with which we are comfortable. Our ancestors waged war and

2 Orosius is being highly disingenuous here. Carthage grew to be the largest town in the Western empire, save Rome herself.

3 The figure of 200 years is repeated by Orosius at 6.21.1. The period involved begins with Hannibal's attack on Saguntum and ends with Augustus's subjugation of Cantabria.

4 See 5.7.16 below.

5 See 5.22.1–4 below.

6 An echo of the fate of ancient Israel is present here.

7 The normal fate of an enemy leader paraded in a triumph at Rome was to be strangled in the Tullianum, an underground prison located on the edge of the Capitol.

wearied by it, sought peace and paid tribute: for tribute is the price of peace.<sup>8</sup>

**11.** We pay tribute to avoid suffering war and for this reason have put in and stayed at anchor in the port to which they finally fled to escape the storms of evil.

Therefore, I would look at our own days to see if they are happy. Certainly, I think them happier than the past, for what our ancestors finally chose for themselves, we have all the time. **12.** The tribulation of war that wasted them away is unknown to us. We are born into, and grow old in, that peace of which they had only the first taste after the rule of Caesar<sup>9</sup> and the birth of Christ. What for them was a compulsory levy of slavery, is for us a voluntary contribution for our defence. **13.** The enormous difference between past and present can be seen in the fact that what Rome once extorted from us at sword-point to satisfy her own extravagance, now she contributes with us for the good of the state we share. And if anyone says that the Romans were more tolerable enemies for our ancestors than the Goths are for us, let him hear and discover how different the things going on around him are to what he believes is the case.

**14.** Once the entire world was ablaze with war: each province had its own king, laws, and customs, nor was there any common fellow-feeling as the different powers quarrelled with one another. What then could draw together these scattered barbarian tribes whom even religion divided as they had different sacred rites?

**15.** If at that time someone, overcome by the burden of his sufferings, abandoned his country along with its enemies, to what strange land could he, a stranger, go? What people, who, in the main, were his enemies, could he, an enemy, ask for pity? Whom could he, a man who had not been invited in as an ally, nor attracted by a commonality of laws, nor feeling secure in religion's communion, trust on first meeting them? **16.** Or do Busiris, that impious sacrificer of travellers who had the misfortune to reach Egypt,<sup>10</sup> the cruelties practised on strangers by the shores of Taurian Diana and the still crueller rites found there,<sup>11</sup> and the crimes of Thrace and Polymestor<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Orosius speaks here from the view-point of a provincial.

<sup>9</sup> i.e. Augustus.

<sup>10</sup> See 1.11.2.

<sup>11</sup> The Tauri were a Crimean tribe who indulged in human sacrifice to placate a goddess identified as Diana in the classical world. Like the story of Busiris, this myth was common currency in antiquity, most famously embodied in Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

<sup>12</sup> Polymestor, the king of Thrace, murdered Priam's son Polydorus at the end of the Trojan War in order to obtain the treasure sent with him. The most famous instance of the legend is Euripides' *Hecuba*. Orosius is likely to have known the legend from Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.22ff.

towards guests who were their blood-relatives give us too few examples of this? And lest I seem to be lingering among events of the distant past, Rome is my witness in the case of Pompey's murder, and Egypt my witness in the case of his murderer, Ptolemy.<sup>13</sup>

## 2

1. However, when I flee at the first sign of any sort of trouble, I do this secure in the knowledge that I have a place to which I can flee, for I encounter my country, religion, and laws everywhere. 2. Now Africa has received me with the liberality I expected when I confidently came to her.<sup>14</sup> Now, as I say, Africa has received me into her undisturbed peace, to her very bosom, under laws common to both of us. A land of which it was once, and rightly, said:

*It shuts up a desert Shore to drowning men  
And drives us to the cruel Seas again.*<sup>15</sup>

now opens her broad bosom with genuine goodwill to receive freely allies who share her religion and common peace, freely inviting in the weary so that she can succour them.

3. Because I come as a Roman and Christian to Christians and Romans, I find my laws and nation in the broad sweep of the east, in the north's expanses, in the southern reaches, and in the safe refuges of the great islands.<sup>16</sup> 4. I do not fear my host's gods, I do not fear that his religion will bring my death, I have no land to dread where the resident is allowed to do what he will and the rover not allowed to ask for what he needs: a place where my host's law is not my own. 5. The One God, loved and feared by all, has ordained in these times when He wished to be acknowledged, this united kingdom. Everywhere the same laws, subject to the One God, hold sway. Wherever I should arrive as a stranger, I have no fear of being suddenly attacked like a friendless man. 6. For, as I have said, as a Roman among Romans, as a Christian among Christians, and as a man among men, I can call on the state's laws, a common knowledge of religion, and our

13 A reference to the murder of Pompey, 28 September 48 BC, when he fled to the Egypt of Ptolemy XIII. See 6.15.27–28.

14 The 'now' of the text suggests that this is a reference to Orosius's return to Africa after he found himself unable to return to Spain rather than his original flight from Spain to Africa.

15 Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.540–41.

16 The list covers the four points of the compass as the 'great islands', Britain and Ireland, lie in the west.

common nature. For the short time that I am here,<sup>17</sup> I have all the earth as if it were my homeland, for the place that is truly my homeland and which I love is far from the earth. **7.** I have lost nothing, where I love nothing, and have everything when He Whom I love is with me, especially because He, Who is the same among all people, makes me not merely known, but a neighbour to all, nor does He leave me in need *for the Earth and Fullness thereof are His*,<sup>18</sup> from which He has commanded that all be shared by all.

**8.** These are the blessings of our days: a peaceful present, hope for the future, and a common refuge.<sup>19</sup> These things our ancestors never enjoyed fully and because of this, they waged incessant wars, and being unable to change their homes, they remained in them to be wretchedly slaughtered or shamefully enslaved. This will become clearer and more obvious when deeds of old are revealed in chronological order.

### 3

**1.** 606 years after the foundation of the City – that is in the same year in which Carthage was destroyed – the ruin of Carthage was followed by the destruction of Corinth in the consulate of Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus and Lucius Mummius.<sup>20</sup> In this one short space of time, the piteous flames of two of the most powerful towns lit up different parts of the world.

**2.** The praetor Metellus<sup>21</sup> defeated the joint forces of the Achaeans and Boeotians in two battles, the first at Thermopylae and the second in Phocis.

**3.** The historian Claudius records that 20,000 men were killed in the first battle and 7,000 in the second.<sup>22</sup> Valerius and Antias agree that a battle was fought in Achaea and that 20,000 Achaeans fell along with their leader,

17 i.e. Orosius's earthly life, as opposed to his coming life in heaven.

18 A close paraphrase of Psalm 24.1.

19 Orosius has artfully transposed to Christianity the common pagan topos, found, for example, in Aelius Aristides (*To Rome (Ad Romam)*, 100), that the Roman Empire has made the world one. However, his intention in so doing is not to supplant the notion that Rome is the world's unifier, but to make Christianity an integral part of this process in order to show that Rome's God-given destiny has always been to be a Christian empire. For a translation and commentary on Aristides, see Oliver (1953).

20 Orosius's dating is two years out; Lentulus and Mummius were the consuls of 608 AUC/146 BC.

21 Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus, praetor in 148 BC, who held a propraetorian command in Greece until 146 BC. It is this command to which Orosius is referring.

22 The annalist Q. Claudius Quadrigarius who wrote in the 70s BC. Orosius is probably citing him second-hand via Livy.