Seizing History: Christianising the Past in Late Antique Historiography

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Late Antiquity from the third to the sixth centuries was the era of the development of the great Christian narrative, an interpretatio Christiana of the history of humankind. This meant reassessing and relocating past histories, ideas and persons on the historical mental map. In this construction of the past, Christian writers built on the models of the preceding tradition, creating competing chronologies and alternative histories. This article analyses the concept of history conveyed by two Christian fourth- and fifth-century historians, Eusebius of Caesarea and Orosius, and discusses the various ways in which these writers created the Christian past. One of the ways was to determine the greater antiquity of Christianity in comparison to the Greco-Roman tradition. This led Eusebius to develop his synchronistic chronology of the human past in his Chronici canones. In his approach, Eusebius developed further the Greek chronographic tradition for Christian apologetic purposes.

Another way was to interpret history as guided by divine providence. For example, for Orosius in his Historiae adversus paganos, the appearance of Christianity in the Roman Empire was part of the divine plan for humankind. The concept of divine providence was also connected with ideas of divine favour and anger. In the world view of ancient Christian writers such as Orosius, divine retribution played an important role in explaining the adversities of humankind. Even though Orosius is usually dismissed in modern scholarship as a crude and unsophisticated historian, his ideas deserve a more nuanced reading. This article argues that both Eusebius and Orosius developed their views of history in contention with other, prevailing views of the past. Both writers aimed to challenge these views – Eusebius with his synchronistic chronology and Orosius with his reappraisal of the entire history of Rome.

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We all know that in the telling and retelling of an event,
or series of events, there will be as many accounts as there are tellers.
An event should be recorded. Then it must be agreed by whoever's task
it is that this version rather than that must be committed to memory.
– Doris Lessing, The Cleft

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Mari Isoaho (ed.)
Past and Present in Medieval Chronicles

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Late Antiquity, the period from the third to the sixth centuries, was the era of the development of the great Christian narrative, an *interpretatio Christiana* of the history of humankind. As is well-known, writing a narrative of the past "means imposing a linear and coherent structure upon the protean mass of past happenings".[1] In the evolving Christian understanding of history, this meant reassessing and relocating past events, ideas and persons on the historical mental map.

The construction of Christian history was one of the most important elements in shaping Christian identity.[2] "Without the shaping provided by the past, the 'present' would float anchorless", as Judith Lieu remarks in her discussion on history, memory and the invention of tradition among the first- and second-century Christians.[3] This article examines how Christian writers of Late Antiquity shaped their past and present. To this end, I analyse the concept of history conveyed by a few Christian ecclesiastical writers in the fourth and fifth centuries, focussing on Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chronici canones* and Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos*.

In my discussion I argue that both writers developed their views of the past in contention with other, prevalent views of history. With his synchronistic chronology in *Chronici canones* Eusebius challenged the views of his contemporaries on two fronts: both the pagan views of the past and the views of his co-Christians. I show that Eusebius's chronology was connected to the centuries-old competition for the prestige of antiquity. The older the Christian tradition could be shown to be, the better it was expected to be. In addition to proof of antiquity, Eusebius had to convince his co-Christians to repudiate the millennial expectations of his time by establishing a chronology of historical events. In his *Historiae adversus paganos* Orosius confronted the contemporary Roman views with his subversion of the entire history of the Roman Empire. He endeavoured to show that human history was guided by divine providence and filled with signs of divine retribution; the emergence of Christianity at a particular time belonged to this divine plan. Modern scholarship has habitually looked down on Orosius as a simplistic historian by comparison with more sophisticated thinkers such as Augustine of Hippo. In the following pages I demonstrate that Orosius took an active part in the most critical discussions of his time. His ideas about human history are best understood on their own, not merely as the unsuccessful commission of the more prominent intellectual, Augustine.

1 The expression is from Halsall 2007, 165.
2 For history as the most important vector in the Christian understanding of the world and in the Christian systematization of knowledge, see Inglebert 2008, 211.
3 Lieu 2004, 82. Lieu 2004, 62 also points out that a sense of sameness (that is, identity) is maintained by remembering, and at the same time what is remembered is defined by the presumed identity.

Late Antiquity was a creative period, crucial for the development of many different genres of historical writing such as chronicles, *consularia*, epitomes, *breviaria*, chronographs and church histories. I do not distinguish between genres and subgenres here.[4] Instead, my analysis of the Christian construction of the past is thematic and concentrates on issues such as competing chronologies, the prestige of antiquity, the history of humankind as the prehistory of Christianity, as well as the work of divine providence in history and divine retribution.

Apologetic Histories and Competing Chronologies

In this construction of the past Christian writers built on the models of preceding traditions, namely the universal histories by Hellenistic Greek, Jewish and Roman writers, and developed competing chronologies and alternative views of the past. This was the case, for instance, with Eusebius of Caesarea (ca 260–339), who "almost single-handedly"[5] created the genre of church history with his *Ecclesiastical History* and essentially developed the chronicle genre with his *Chronikoi kanones* (*Chronici canones* or *Chronological Canons*), thereby influencing the subsequent tradition of medieval chronicles in the East and the West. Eusebius's *Chronicle* was a two-volume work consisting of *Chronographia* (a collection of reigns and source lists) and *Chronici canones*. The Greek version of Eusebius's *Chronici canones* is now lost, but there are translations into Latin (the continuation by Jerome) and in Armenian, two Syriac epitomes and several Greek witnesses. *Chronographia* survives in Greek excerpts and Armenian translations.[6]

In his *Chronici canones* Eusebius utilised earlier Greek historiography, chronographies (studies of dates and times),[7] as well as the so-called Olympiad chronicles.[8] In addition, he drew on Greek scholars, particularly Porphyry of Tyre, who in his treatises, and foremost in *Against the Christians* written around 300, vehemently criticised Christians and the novelty and barbarity of their religion. Porphyry's attacks on Christianity show how significant the discussions on time and tradition were in Antiquity. It is in reaction to Porphyry's detailed polemic against Christianity that Eusebius eventually

4 For a useful discussion on the Latin chronicle traditions, see Burgess & Kulikowski 2013, especially Chapter 1, "Nomenclature and Genre" and the Addendum, "Toward an Ecumenical Vocabulary," in which the writers launch a scholarly discussion on terminology.
5 According to Burgess 1999, 21 (see also Burgess 2002, 7).
6 Burgess & Kulikowski 2013, 119–126. Burgess 1999, 66, suggests that there were probably three major editions of the *Canones* (in 311, 313/314 and 325), whereas according to Adler 2008, 591, there were two editions.
7 Greek histories used by Eusebius included, e.g. Diodorus Siculus and chronographies by Eratosthenes and Apollodorus. Diodorus Siculus was amply used by other Christian writers as well. For the tradition of Greek chronographies and universal histories, see Mortley 1978, 316–317, 325, Mosshammer 1979, 84–105, Croke 1982, 196, Croke 1983, 119–120, 122, 126, Inglebert 2001, 297–298, Jeffreys 2003, 521 and Feeney 2007, 47–51.
8 Eusebius was also influenced by the genre of the Hellenistic Olympiad chronicles of which two fragments survive, an Oxyrhynchus papyrus (POxy I 12) and an excerpt from Phlegon of Tralles (extant in Photius, Bibliotheca cod. 97). Burgess & Kulikowski 2013, 89–91, 122, with translations of the fragments, 313–316.

set out to collect and systematise chronological tables in his *Chronici canones*.[9] For Eusebius, history and chronology functioned as defensive weapons.

Other Christian historical works, treatises, chronographies and *breviaria*, before and after Eusebius, were also mostly apologetic in character. Christian apologists needed to reply to the charges that Christianity was an innovation without foundation in ancient tradition. Attacks on ethnic or religious groups included assaults on their alleged inferiority in age, and therefore, chronologies were an essential element in their defence. The second- and third-century Christian apologists collected comprehensive testimonies and lists of kings and dates in order to prove the chronological priority of Christianity.[10] The third-century chronographies by Julius Africanus and Hippolytus were at least partly compiled in order to demonstrate the greater antiquity of Christianity as compared to the Greek and Roman traditions and consequently its superiority.[11]Apologetic chronography was not a Christian specialty, but had its roots in Jewish as well as Greek writings. As a result of the encounters between the Greeks and other peoples, especially during the Hellenistic period, Greek writers were keen to advocate the priority of Greek culture in comparison to other traditions. For their part, Jewish writers defended their tradition with the help of chronologies in the inter-religious rivalries during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[12]

It was from this Jewish apologetic tradition that Christian writers largely adapted the chronological tools for their own writing. In Christian apologetic writings and chronographies, Christians were identified as the true descendants and continuators of the Hebrews, Moses and the prophets. Numerous calculations were elaborated to synchronise and systematise the chronology of Old Testament events and thereby to show the anteriority of Moses in comparison to the Greek tradition, to demonstrate that "our Moses is older than your Homer". Moreover, eschatological concerns and millennialist expectations played an important role in Christian chronological speculations. Millennialistic (or millenarianistic or chiliast) ideas presupposed a messianic rule that would last a thousand years. With the help of chronological calculations, it was thought that the date of the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world could be determined. I will first examine how the notion of an authoritative antiquity

9 Burgess & Kulikowski 2013, 120–121; Burgess 1999, 81; Burgess 1997, 497, stressing Porphyry's fundamental role in sparking Eusebius's interest in chronography. Burgess 1997, 496 interprets *Chronici canones* "in the light of persecution narrowly survived", while for Barnes 1981, 113–120, 126–147, it is a work of confidence, peace and pure scholarship.

10 E.g. Tatian, *Oratio adversus Graecos* 35–41 (ed. Marcovich 1995); Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* 3.17–28 (ed. Grant 1970); see also n14; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.21 (101–147) (ed. Mondésert & Caster 1951).

11 Julius Africanus's *Chronographiae*, a five-volume work written in Alexandria around 220, survives extant only in a few fragments and references in later historical works. Hippolytus's *Chronicle*, written in Rome around 235, survives in a Greek version and in Latin translations (known as the *Liber generationis*). Julius Africanus's fragments have been edited in Wallraff et al. 2007 and Hippolytus's, in Bauer & Helm 1955.

12 For the cultural apologetic in the Greek world, see Burgess & Kulikowski 2013, 99–105. For the Jewish apologetic, see Alexandre 1998, 1–40.

influenced the Christian concept of history, and then I will discuss how millenarianistic expectations shaped Christian chronographies.

The Rivalry for a Greater Antiquity

Studies of chronology were vital in the defence of Christianity against its critics and, accordingly, to the construction of the Christian identity in relation to both Jews and 'pagans'.[13] Chronological comparison between the Hebrew and Greek traditions had already been made by Jewish writers, especially in Alexandria, to demonstrate that the Jewish tradition was prior and thus superior to the Greek. As Christians interpreted their religion as being identical to the religion of the primordial Hebrew patriarchs, Christian writers were ready to adapt Jewish chronography to their apologetic uses. For example, the second-century Christian apologist Theophilus of Antioch described the need to defend the antiquity of the Hebrew tradition and – as the result of this takeover – Christian tradition:

> From the compilation of the periods of time and from all that has been said, the antiquity of the prophetic writings and the divine nature of our doctrine are obvious. This doctrine is not recent in origin, nor are our writings, as some think, mythical and false. They are actually more ancient and more trustworthy.[14]

Theophilus collected dates of world history as proof of the greater antiquity of his Christian tradition.[15] Eusebius also remarked on how important it is to study chronology in order to demonstrate the antiquity and superiority of the Christian tradition:

> Now it would be well to examine their chronology, I mean the dates at which Moses and the prophets after him flourished: since this would be one of the most conclusive evidences for the argument before us, that before dealing with the learned men (*logiôn*) among the people we should first decide about their antiquity.[16]

Why was it so important to prove that one's tradition was primeval and even the oldest of all the cultures? In the Greco-Roman world and the Mediterranean world in general, the idea of antiquity implied superiority in all respects. The premise that something is true only if it is ancient was seldom questioned. In the case of a religious tradition, its alleged antiquity affirmed its validity. The most ancient culture was also claimed to be the source of all other cultures; accordingly, Moses and the prophets were argued to have been the original source of Greek wisdom and of Platonic philosophy

13 The terms pagans, heretics and Arians are labels developed in religious disputes and used by rival groups to denigrate their opponents. They should therefore be read with inverted commas throughout this article and understood as convenient shorthands.
14 Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* 3.29 (trans. Grant 1970, 145, with my modification).
15 Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* 3.17–28 (ed. Grant 1970).
16 Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 10.8.18 (eds. des Places & Schroeder 1991; trans. Gifford 1903).

in particular.[17] Platonic philosophy was integrated into the true heritage of Christianity; it was even argued that Plato had learned his wisdom from the Hebrews in one way or another.[18]

In this process of demonstrating the antiquity of Christianity and collecting material from Jewish, Greek and Roman sources, Christian intellectuals interpreted the preceding history of humankind as the prehistory of Christianity. Thus, the past was used to gain more complete control of the present and the future.[19] The seizing of the past and making claims for it by Christian writers and opinion leaders was and is nothing new, particular or exceptional for Christianity. Take-overs were (and are) carried out by other writers and cultures, too. Different narratives of the past constantly compete for hegemony, and writers compete with one another for the authority to interpret the past.

The take-over by Christian writers of Late Antiquity has been called the Christian domestication of the pagan Greco-Roman past, meaning that what was good and useful in the past was in fact 'ours' or Christian. Christian intellectuals justified the use of Greco-Roman (pagan) literature with the idea of the right use (*usus iustus, chrêsis dikaia*): what was thought to be expedient and compatible with Christian doctrine was to be regarded as 'ours', Christian, and taken over for Christian use; in the words of Augustine of Hippo, "as if from its false owners for our own use" (*tamquam iniustis possessoribus in usum nostrum*).[20] Eusebius, for example, argued that Christians were the true heirs of primeval wisdom, Moses and the prophets, as well as the Platonic tradition, rather than the pagan Greeks, who had simply stolen and distorted these original truths.[21] Eusebius's contemporary Lactantius had a similar vision of the history of humankind: true and original wisdom was derived from the Hebrews and was identical to Christianity.[22] It is in this rivalry over the priority of past wisdom that chronology emerged as an important vehicle, first in the writings of second- and third-century apologists and chronographers, and later in the histories and universal chronicles of fourth- and fifth-century historians.[23]

17 The late antique disputes on the prestige of antiquity are more thoroughly discussed in Pilhofer 1990, Stroumsa 1998, 26, Buell 2005, 63, and Kahlos 2013a, 27–38. For the idea of the dependency between Moses and the Greek culture, especially regarding Platonic philosophy, see Ridings 1994 and Droge 1989.

18 Fuhrer 1997, 90–91; Clark 2004, 569.

19 For the Christian use of the past, see Cameron 1991, 122, 138, Moriarty 1997, 6, and Kahlos 2013a, 27–38.

20 Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.40.60–61 (ed. Simonetti 2000). For the idea of the right use, see Gnilka 1984 and Kahlos 2006, 60–62. On the Christian domestication of the Greco-Roman past, see Hedrick 2000, 86.

21 E.g. Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica* 7.1.79; 8.3.10 (ed. Heikel 1913). Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 2.5 (ed. des Places 1978).

22 Lactantius, *Institutiones divinae* 2.14 (ed. Monat 1987).

23 For the competition over past wisdom, see Kahlos 2013a, 27–38.

Millennialist Expectations and Competing Chronologies

Competing chronologies existed not only in regard to Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian claims to the past, but also in different Christian chronologies, which vied with each other. Christian chronographers such as Julius Africanus and Hippolytus reconstructed their chronology of history from the creation of the first human, Adam. For instance, Julius Africanus identified the dates when the world was created, Christ was born and Christ would return.[24] As mentioned above, chronology was harnessed to meet millennialist expectations: the date of the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world, it was believed, could be calculated. According to then current eschatological views, the world was to endure six thousand years from the year of Creation; Christ, it was believed, was born in the year 5500 after the Creation. This eschatology was connected with the interpretations of the week of the Creation as the six millennia. The final day of rest was understood as the last millennium before the end of the world.[25]

Eusebius emerges as an important exception to this interpretation, deliberately challenging the millennialist speculations of his Christian contemporaries and beginning his *Chronici canones* with Abraham and Ninus, the King of Assyria. R.W. Burgess explains Eusebius's negative attitude to millenarianism as a reaction against the highly popular millennial expectations during the Tetrarchic persecution.[26] It also appears that in starting his *Chronicle* with Abraham, Eusebius followed the Greek historical view, which distinguished between things historical and datable and things mythical and not datable: he made Abraham a contemporary of Ninus, who was generally regarded as the first historically known and datable king.[27]

Eusebius reasoned that it was impossible to reconstruct the chronology of the world from the creation of the world. According to the Armenian version of *Chronicon*, he remarked that there could not be complete accuracy with respect to chronology and even appealed to the Scriptural authority: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7). This was said, according to Eusebius, to discourage those who made futile calculations, not solely regarding the end of the world but about all times. He continued emphatically that by no means was it possible to know unerringly the chronology of the entire world, not from the Greeks, not from the barbarians, not from other peoples, not even from the Hebrews. Competing views of history and chronology can

24 Julius Africanus, *Chronographiae* F14 (ed. Wallraff et al. 2007). For Africanus's chronological system, see Wallraff et al. 2007, xxiii–xxix.

25 For a concise discussion on the development of millennial expectations in early Christianity, see Lössl 2009, 31–44, and Whitby 2007, 281–283. For the connection between millennial expectations and ideas of historical recurrence, see Trompf 1979, 204–209.

26 Burgess 1997, 492.

27 Inglebert 2001, 301.

also be detected in Eusebius's warning as he advises his readers not to be deceived into thinking that chronology can always be precisely defined and speaks with disdain about boastful chronographers.[28]

Eusebius's scepticism about exact dates both for the beginning and the end of the world was exceptional, and therefore, it has even been suggested that his *Chronici canones* did not survive because its chronology differed from the standard datings of the time. Later chronicles, such as that by Diodorus of Tarsus in the late fourth century and the chronicles by Panodorus and Annianus in the early fifth century, reworked Eusebius's chronology but re-calculated the dates from the Creation of the world.[29]

Eusebius did not create the chronicle genre, but he did make an essential contribution to its development with his *Chronici canones*.[30] His approach became the model for later Byzantine chronicles and through its translation into Latin and its continuation by Jerome was a model for Western medieval chronicles as well. In Christian usage chronicles with their linear structure could be invested with eschatological meaning in which human history had an identifiable beginning and an expected end, whether these could be accurately calculated or not. For Christian readers chronicles could also serve as accounts of divine providence that influenced the history of humankind. The works of divine providence could be seen in Eusebius's *Chronici canones*, in which the reduction of columns of text from nine (nine kingdoms) to two (Hebrews and Romans) and finally to a single column (Romans) could be interpreted as illustrating the change from the polyarchy and polytheism of the past to the monarchy and monotheism of the present.[31] The reduction of columns may also show the narrowing interest in the world outside the Christianised Roman Empire as the realms of the nine columns shrink into the single column of Christian Romans.[32] Similar teleological interpretations of human history were woven into other Christian histories such as Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos*.

Works of Divine Providence

As mentioned above, in several Christian historical works the history of humankind before the birth of Christ was construed as the prehistory of Christianity. The past was divided into the pre-Christian era and the Christian era, with the birth of Christ as the dividing point. Pre-Christian times were often seen as the preparation for the birth of Christ and the emergence of Christianity, and subsequently, everything

28 Eusebius, *Chronicon* 1.1–2 (ed. Karst 1911; trans. Bedrosian 2008).
29 Burgess 2006, 30; Wallraff et al. 2007, xxxv–xxxvi; Whitby 2007, 283–285. For Adler (2008, 590–591), Eusebius's *Chronicle* was a radical departure from the earlier tradition, while Burgess 1997, 492–495, highlights Eusebius as a scholar and historian unique to his age.
30 For the early development of chronicles in Greco-Roman Antiquity, see Burgess & Kulikowski 2013, 63–98.
31 For the meaning of Eusebius's columns, see Burgess 1999, 81, and Burgess & Kulikowski 2013, 124.
32 Van Nuffelen 2010, 166–167. As van Nuffelen argues, the apparent universalism in chronicles is mainly due to the literary conventions of the genre.

that had happened in the past culminated with Christ's birth. Even the very title of Eusebius's treatise – *Praeparatio evangelica* (*proparaskeue euangelike*) – in which he defends Christianity and argues for its intellectual and cultural superiority – refers to this preparation. In historical works such as Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos*, a number of events and persons in the past were interpreted as models or *typoi* for the forthcoming history of Christian salvation. Another historian of Late Antiquity who interpreted history with a similar kind of typology was Sulpicius Severus in his *Chronicle*.[33]

Orosius's *Histories against Pagans* (*Historiae adversus paganos*), written in 416–17, was connected to the notorious sack of Rome by the Goths led by Alaric in 410. As is well known, Augustine of Hippo started to write his voluminous *De civitate dei* at least partly in response to the pagan accusations against Christians in the aftermath of the sack of Rome. Pagan Romans saw the defeat of Rome as the result of the rise of Christianity and the subsequent neglect of the old gods. Augustine not only set about writing his own apologetic document to refute the slanders of pagans, but also instigated his client, the Spanish presbyter Orosius, to collect further historical proof to enhance Augustine's argument. As Orosius humbly states in the prologue to his *Historiae*, he is writing at the instigation of his patron Augustine and in reply to the disparagement of pagan Romans.[34] It has been surmised that Orosius's devoted effort was not appreciated by Augustine, who later dissociated himself from Orosius's undertaking.[35] Nor has Orosius's work been given much value by modern scholars. He has always been overshadowed by Augustine's colossal output,[36] and consequently, his work has often been interpreted merely as a theology of history and measured against Augustine's theory of history in *De civitate dei*, instead of being considered a proper history of its own or evaluated in the context of Late Antiquity.[37]

33 For Sulpicius Severus's views of history, see Williams 2011, Trompf 1994 and van Andel 1976, 59–74.

34 Orosius, *Historiae* (1. prol. 1–13) (eds. Arnaud & Lindet 1990). For reactions to the sack of Rome, see de Bruyn 1993, 405–421, and the volume edited by Pollman, Harich & Schwarzbauer 2013.

35 This assumption is, however, based only on a few remarks in Augustine's writings: Augustine, who in his earlier correspondence shows affectionate support for Orosius, mentions his client only once after the completion of *Historiae*, making a casual remark about "a certain Hispanian presbyter" (Augustine, *Retractationes* 2.44 [ed. Mutzenbecher 1984]). In the books of *De civitate dei* composed after Orosius's work, Augustine distances himself from the optimistic view of human temporal history that Orosius advocates. For the relationship and different views of history of Augustine and Orosius, see Goetz 1980, 136–147, Koch-Peters 1984, 40–42, Frend 1989, 24–27, Trompf 2000, 293, Merrills 2005, 38–39, and Formisano 2013, 160–161.

36 The amount of modern research on Augustine's philosophy of history is abundant. For useful recent surveys, see the volumes edited by Vessey, Pollmann & Fitzgerald 1999 and Horn 1997.

37 Recent views of Orosius's enterprise vary considerably. Some scholars (Burgess 2004) see Orosius as "a tendentious hack who tried to shoe-horn world and especially Roman history to a pre-conceived theological interpretation", while others (Zecchini 2003, 320) regard his work as "a masterpiece of Christian Latin historiography". For balanced views of Orosius, see Van Nuffelen 2012, Formisano 2013, Brandt 2009, 121–133 and Merrills 2005, 35–99; e.g. Van Nuffelen 2012, 24, writes that he does not "aim at catapulting him among the stars of late antique literature" but rather at seeing Orosius as "a good example of how history was written in the fourth and fifth centuries"; Merrills 2005, 63, admits that Orosius's *Historiae* "is not a great work of philosophical or cosmographical scholarship" but states that "through his consistent application of geographical imagery, the historian presented a comprehensible view of human development"; Formisano 2013, 153, acknowledges the work as "an important innovation within both pagan and Christian historiography".

Instead of making positive and negative assessments of Orosius's capabilities, a more reasonable way of approaching him is to try to contextualise his work as part of late Roman rhetoric and historiography.

Orosius does what he promises in his prologue: he lists the evidence for his argument by giving a systematic catalogue of human miseries from the Creation until his own time. Orosius starts his survey of the human past emphatically with the Creation as in this way he wants to convince those who "wish it to be believed in their blind opinion that the origin of the world and the creation of humankind were without beginning". Here Orosius differs from Eusebius's approach who, as we saw above, warned his readers not to attempt any accurate calculations based on the Creation.[38] However, Orosius's remark vaguely targets the cyclical views of history often found in Greek and Roman literature. Orosius does not give much emphasis to the period before Ninus, the King of Assyria. The main part of his discussion actually starts with Ninus, and in his survey he follows the basic lines established by Eusebius's *Chronicon* and its continuation by Jerome.[39]

The dispute over the sack of Rome colours the entire work, as Orosius reassesses human history, especially Roman history, to show that the past was filled with wars, miseries and catastrophes even when the old gods were still being worshipped; thus the rise of Christianity did not cause the calamities. For instance, Orosius contrasts the miseries of the present, namely the recent sack of Rome, with the mythical sack of Rome by the Gauls during the early republic. The earlier defeat and six-month siege was far more detrimental to the Romans than the present defeat and sack of three days, even though Orosius's pagan opponents do not "weigh equally the story of a past disaster with a calamity in the present". In Orosius's comparison the present was considered better: "Behold the times in comparison with which the present is weighed; behold the times for which our memory sighs".[40] The sack of Rome by the Gauls in 390 BCE had been a traumatic event for the Romans and was frequently referred to in Roman literature, including in Late Antiquity, by Christian and non-Christian writers alike.[41]

Orosius's *Historiae* is one of the numerous Christian works of Late Antiquity on *de providentia* that interpreted the past as the manifestation of divine will, especially chastisement and punishment sent from the divine sphere. In tracing this divine will in the past, chronicles, universal histories,

38 Arnaud-Lindet 1990, 10 n. 2. Augustine dedicated two chapters to the refutation of the cyclical conceptions in *De civitate dei* 12.10–11 (eds. Dombart & Kalb 1993). For the cyclical conceptions of history, see Trompf 1979, esp. 179–231.

39 Orosius, *Historiae* 1.1.2: *... qui cum opinione caeci mundi originem creaturamque hominum sine initio credi velint ...* For Orosius's chronology, see Merrills 2005, 45–46.

40 Orosius, *Historiae* 2.19, esp. 2.19.12: *En tempora quorum conparatione praesentia ponderantur; en, quibus recordatio suspirat; en, quae incutiunt de electa vel potius de neglecta religione paenitentiam!; esp. 2.19.4: Cui cladi audeat quisquam, si potest, aliquos motus huius temporis conparare, quamvis non aeque pendat praeteriti mali fabulam praesentis iniuria!*

41 For the importance of the Gauls' sack of Rome in the collective memory of the Romans, see Kahlos 2013b, 185. For a comparison of Goths and Gauls, see Goetz 33, 98.

breviaria and other historical works in which the events of the past were clearly and briefly listed were particularly expedient.[42] For his part Orosius set out to demonstrate this providential nature of history, arguing that the appearance of Christianity within the Roman Empire was part of the divine plan. It was by no means a coincidence that Christ was born during the reign of Emperor Augustus when the power of the Romans had reached its peak. Accordingly, Orosius connects the birth of Christ with the peace of Augustus (*pax Augusta*).[43] Earlier, in a similar manner, Eusebius had pointed out that Augustus had prepared a unified empire for the appearance of Christianity in the world, and a second-century bishop, Melito of Sardes, had built a connection between the rise of Augustus's imperial power and the growth of Christianity.[44]

In Orosius's vision, all events were related to one another: Emperor Augustus's triumphs (*triplici triumpho*) and the height of his power (*potestatis nomen*), the closing of the entrances of the temple of Janus (*ipse Iani portas sopitis finitisque omnibus bellis civilibus clausit*) as the sign of a permanent peace (*pacis signum*) after the civil wars, and the great census as the sign of a unified society (*per communionem census unius societatis effecta est*).[45] Orosius states that "by some hidden order of events, he [Augustus] had been predestined for the service of his [Christ's] preparation". Moreover, Orosius draws parallels between Christ and Augustus: Augustus unites humankind (*orbis terrarum*) politically as Christ unites humans in Christianity; Augustus's peace, *pax Augusta*, precedes *pax Christiana*; Augustus arrives as the victor to Rome, and Christ is born; Augustus establishes a monarchy, while Christ establishes monotheism.[46] Similarly, as we saw above, in Eusebius's *Chronici canones*, the reduction of columns from nine to two, and finally to a single column demonstrated the transformation from polyarchic polytheism to monarchic monotheism. Lactantius insisted that, just as the empire was

42 Just to mention a few, *Carmen de providentia Dei*, often attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine *(Vigiliae Christianae* Suppl. 10 [ed. Marcovich]), *De perversis suae aetatis moribus epistola*, sometimes attributed to Claudius Marius Victor (*Patrologia Latina* 61, 969–972), Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei* and John Chrysostom's *De fato et providentia* (*Patrologia Graeca* 50, 749–774). Trompf 1990, 318 n10 speaks of "a veritable industry" devoted to the written defence of Providence in later Antiquity. For ideas of history as God's tool, see Goetz 1980, 49–70.

43 Orosius, *Historiae* 6.22. Orosius gives a favourable view of Augustus, e.g. stressing that the emperor refused the title of *dominus*, the lord, during the same time the genuine *dominus,* Christ, was born (6.22.4); Augustus was pre-eminent in power and mercy (6.1.5). For the connection between the Incarnation and the *pax Augusta*, see Merrills 2005, 41, and Goetz 1980, 82–84.

44 Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 1.4.4 (eds. Sirinelli & des Places 1974). The fragment of Melito's apology addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius is preserved in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical history* (4.26.7). Fiedrowicz 2000, 43–44, 204; Klein 2000, 212.

45 Orosius, *Historiae* 6.20 (with other signs); 7.2.16 (*census*); also 3.8.5–7; 6.17.10; 6.22; 6.20.5; even nature manifested the power of Augustus and the birth of Christ: a circle resembling a rainbow formed around the disc of the sun: *hora circiter tertia repente liquido ac puro sereno circulus ad speciem caelestis arcus orbem solis ambiit, quasi eum unum ac potissimum in hoc mundo solumque clarissimum in orbe monstraret, cuius tempus venturus esset, qui ipsum solem solus mundumque totum et fecisset et regeret.*

46 Orosius, *Historiae* 6.20.8: *quam hunc occulto quidem gestorum ordine ad obsequium praeparationis eius praedestinatum fuisse*. Orosius, *Historiae* 3.8.8, states that even calumniators had to admit that the peace and tranquillity of the whole world were not the result of the emperor's magnitude but of the power of Christ (*non magnitudine Caesaris, sed potestate filii dei*); in 22.2.5 Augustus's peace corresponds to the peace of Christ. Koch-Peters 1984, 40–42, even reads Augustus as a John the Baptist figure, a forerunner of Christ.

in need of a single leader, humans needed one God. Furthermore, Orosius's contemporary Prudentius depicted Roman monarchy and Christian monotheism as advancing together.[47] Orosius also explains the rise of the Roman Empire as preordained: during the great tranquillity and universal peace settled by the Romans, the Christians were able to spread their religion "as Roman citizens among the Roman citizens".[48]

A History Filled with Signs

In his *Historiae* Orosius interpreted a number of past events and people as signs of the forthcoming salvation history. This typological method was common among Christian theologians of Late Antiquity: the accounts of the Old Testament, the history of the Hebrews, were taken as *typoi* that signified the coming history of Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. In a similar manner Orosius construes the ten plagues of Egypt in the Exodus story as a sign of the ten persecutions of Christians.[49]

The tenth and last plague killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. Likewise, in Orosius's scheme, the tenth punishment of the tenth and last persecution was the perdition of the first-made idols that Romans so loved.[50] Here the comparison between the ten plagues and the ten persecutions is constructed with a series of repeated *ibi* – *hic* (there that time – here now) sentences. There [in Egypt] the people of God were never again dragged into slavery – here [in the Roman Empire] the people of God were never again forced into idolatry. There the precious vessels were handed down to the Hebrews – here the most significant temples of the pagans (*praecipua paganorum templa*) were turned (*cesserunt*) into churches for the Christians.[51] The Egyptian gold taken by the Hebrews was a frequently-used metaphor in Christian fourth-century discussions on the Christian use of secular literature as well as on the Christian take-over of shrines of the old gods.[52] Furthermore, Orosius continues his comparison by

47 Lactantius, *Institutiones divinae* 1.3.19 (ed. Monat 1986). Prudentius, *Contra orationem Symmachi* 2.430–442 (ed. Cunningham 1966). For the connection of monarchy and monotheism in early Christian literature, see Fiedrowicz 2000, 204, and Kahlos 2007, 183–184.

48 Orosius, *Historiae* 6.1.6–8: *deinde ut in magno silentio ac pace latissima inoffense et celeriter noui nominis gloria et adnuntiatae salutis velox fama percurreret vel etiam ut discipulis eius per diversas gentes euntibus ultroque per cunctos salutis dona offerentibus obeundi ac disserendi quippe Romanis civibus inter cives Romanos esset tuta libertas*. Even Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, is made use of to serve the divine plan (6.1.5).

49 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.27.2–3: *Quia 'haec in figura nostri facta sunt' [1 Cor. 10:6]. Uterque populus unius Dei est, una populi utriusque causa. Subdita fuit Israhelitarum synagoga Aegyptiis, subdita est Christianorum ecclesia Romanis; persecuti sunt Aegyptii, persecuti sunt et Romani; decem ibi contradictiones adversum Moysen, decem hic edicta adversus Christum; diversae ibi plagae Aegyptiorum, diversae hic calamitates Romanorum*. The number of ten persecutions became established in subsequent Christian tradition even though other figures also appear in Christian histories: Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 1.2 gives six persecutions, while Sulpicius Severus, Chronicon, 2.33, gives nine persecutions and reserves the tenth for the impending future. For a discussion, see van Andel 1976, 122–128.

50 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.27.13: *Ibi postremo decima plaga quae et novissima omnium fuit, interfectio filiorum quos primos quique genuerant: hic nihilo minus decima id est novissima poena est omnium perditio idolorum quae primitus facta in primis amabant*.

51 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.27.14: *Ibi numquam postea populus Dei ad servitutem retractus: hic numquam postea populus Dei ad idololatriam coactus est. Ibi Aegyptiorum vasa pretiosa Hebraeis tradita sunt: hic in ecclesias Christianorum praecipua paganorum templa cesserunt.*

52 The metaphor of the booty taken from the Egyptians was connected to the discussion on the right use of Greco-Roman literature and the whole cultural heritage. See n. 16.

making a prediction for the future: the Egyptians pursued the Hebrews and were destroyed by eternal perdition (*aeterna perditio*) in the Red Sea. Thus, at some future time a persecution by pagans is still pending for Christians who are otherwise journeying (*peregrinantes*) in freedom. This will happen in the future before the crossing of the Red Sea, that is, the fire of judgement (*ignis iudicii*), but Orosius does not specify when this last judgement will take place.[53]

Orosius reasons that all ten persecutions of Christians were followed by ten punishments in the same way as the plagues struck the obstinate Pharaoh and Egyptians. Similarly, in the early fourth century Lactantius in *De mortibus persecutorum* outlined the punishments for each persecuting emperor – even for Emperor Aurelian, who did not live long enough to start any persecution.[54] In Orosius's view the history of humankind has been shaped by the divine punishment and chastisement that follow the wrongdoing of humans and especially of their rulers.[55] In the logic of divine retribution, Orosius was not alone: many Christian and non-Christian writers alike attributed misfortunes to the depravity of individuals, collectives and communities.[56] Another fifth-century Christian historian, Sulpicius Severus, introduces human history as a series of divine punishments from Adam and Eve onwards.[57] Moreover, the church historian Philostorgius explained calamities as a sign of divine anger; he even stressed that the claims of pagans result "not from natural causes, as the children of Hellenes suppose", but really are the scourges of divine wrath.[58] The above-mentioned Lactantius explains in *De ira dei* that divine retribution will come sooner or later: "Even if God's patience is great and most useful, he nonetheless punishes the guilty, albeit later. Neither does he permit them to continue their sinning as he has perceived that they are incorrigible."[59] In his *Church History*, Eusebius explained the beginning of Tetrarchic persecution as resulting from the "laxity and sloth" and internal rivalries that Christians had fallen into during the long peace and freedom under the reign of Emperor Gallienus. Hypocrisy and dissimulation rose to great heights of wickedness and, consequently, called forth divine judgement.[60] Thus, ecclesiastical leaders could rebuke their fellow Christians as harshly as they did

53 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.27.15: *Ita et nos quidem libere peregrinantes superventura quandoque persecutio gentilium manet, donec mare Rubrum, hoc est ignem iudicii, ipso domino nostro Iesu Christo duce et iudice transeamus.* For the ten plagues and the ten persecutions, see Goetz 1980, 62–65.

54 Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 6 (ed. Moreau 1954) reasons that Aurelian had at least planned to persecute Christians and thus deserved the punishment.

55 E.g. Orosius, *Historiae* 6.1.26–27; 7.15.5; 2.1.1.

56 For further discussion, see Trompf 2000, 4–12 (in general), 13–106 (non-Christians), 113–122 (Christian apologists), Stathakopoulos 2007, 106–115, Verdoner 2011, 174–183, and Kahlos 2013b with examples. For the earlier tradition, see Heck 1987.

57 Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicon* 1.2–3; 5; et passim. For the logic of retribution in Sulpicius Severus, see Trompf 1994.

58 Philostorgius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 12.9; see also 10.9; 10.11; 11.7; 12.8–10 (eds. Bidez & Winkelmann 1981).

59 Lactantius, *De ira dei* 20: *Sed cum maxima et utilissima sit Dei patientia, tamen, quamvis sero, noxios punit, nec patitur longius procedere, cum eos inemendabiles esse perviderit* (ed. Ingremeau 1982). For Lactantius's views on divine anger, see Trompf 2000, 118–122.

60 Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.1.7–8 (ed. Bardy 1958).

others (and usually even more harshly): in the fifth century Salvian of Marseille explained the political and military decay of the Roman Empire as divine punishment for the corruption of contemporary Roman Christians. In Salvian's judgement, Christians deserved punishment for their sins, not only as individuals, but also as a community.[61]

For his part Orosius usually attributed misfortunes to divine retribution for the sins of pagans.[62] Accordingly, he explained the sack of Rome in 410 as divine chastisement and remarked that it was God who raged more than humans in the present destruction. Orosius states that God allowed a bolt of lightning to strike the Forum with its empty images of the old gods in order to show the Romans why he had sent the Goths against Rome.[63] Nevertheless, the calamities that happened during the reigns of Christian emperors needed to be explained too, and Orosius expounds on these as punishment for heresies. For instance, the earthquake during the reign of Emperor Constantius II was allegedly the consequence of the emperor's adoption of Arian doctrine. Constantius, who had refused to allow idolatry to enter the main entrance (*per ianuam*), permitted heresy to come in through the secret door (*per pseudothyrum*).[64] Similarly, the Huns and the Goths came to harass the Empire as punishment for the Arian emperor Valens, who persecuted the Nicene Christians – the only true Christians in Orosius's eyes. Valens ultimately received due punishment in the Roman defeat and his own death at the battle of Adrianople against the Goths in 378.[65] Similarly, Valens' demise is explained by Theodoret of Cyrrhus as divine punishment: the emperor was an enemy of piety and fought against God; consequently, God shifted the balance in favour of the barbarians. For Theodoret, Valens' case is an example of how "God chastises those who abuse his patience".[66] Likewise, in the fifth century in his *Church History*, Sozomenus stated that the dissensions among Christians were followed by disturbances and commotions in the Roman state, with the Huns and Isaurians causing the trouble.[67] In Orosius's vision, divine punishment is the consequence of human failure. Thus, humans cause misery by sinning.[68] Orosius implies that humans cannot blame Christians, the gods or fate for their miseries, since humans themselves, through

61 E.g. Salvian of Marseille, *De gubernatione dei* 6.2; 6.6; 6.11; 8.2 (ed. Lagarrigue 1975). For Salvian, see Lambert 1999, 115–130.
62 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.22: Valerian's persecution was punished by pestilence, the Roman defeat in the war with the Persians, the capture of Valerian by the Persians and civil war. Orosius rejected any attempts at a natural explanation for the pestilence; 7.8: Rome was punished with civil war between Galba, Otho and Vitellius because the Romans had persecuted Christians and killed the apostle Peter; 7.9. The Jews were punished with the destruction of Jerusalem.
63 Orosius, *Historiae* 2.19.14: *in hac clade praesenti plus deum saevisse, homines minus. … ictu fulminum forum cum imaginibus vanis quae superstitione miserabili vel Deum vel hominem mentiuntur, abiectum est.*
64 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.29.3; 7.29.5.
65 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.33.10; 7.33.15–19. For contemporary reactions to the battle of Adrianople, see Lenski 1997.
66 Theodoret, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.33; 4.34; 4.36 (eds. Parmentier & Hansen 2008). For an analysis of Theodoret's logic of retribution, see Trompf 2000, 215–231.
67 Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.25.1 (eds. Bidez & Hansen 2008). For a discussion on Sozomenus's concept of history, see Leppin 2003, 238, and Trompf 2000, 218–220.
68 E.g. Orosius, *Historiae* 2.3: *quod autem misere vivimus, intemperantiae nostrae.* All the external deeds, good or evil, are fruits of the internal state of an individual: *cunctaque vel bona vel etiam mala quae foris geruntur internis esse radicata* (2.17). For a discussion, see Lacroix 1965, 100.

human greed in particular, are the cause of misfortunes.[69] Similarly, fifth-century church historians Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomenus saw a double causality at work in history: both divine beings and human beings simultaneously affected history.[70]

Rome, the Fourth Empire

In Orosius's eyes people nonetheless fared better in Christian times and under Christian emperors: even civil wars were handled neatly and swiftly when the Christian emperor Theodosius I achieved almost bloodless victories over his adversaries.[71] Orosius stresses that in the civil war against the usurper Eugenius, Theodosius's victory cost only two men's lives, those of Eugenius and Arbogastes, with the exception, of course, of the 10,000 Goths who fought on Theodosius's side and died in battle and whose demise the historian counts as an advantage rather than a loss.[72]

Additionally, Orosius argues that in fact it was because of the Christians that Rome did not face even more horrible miseries and that God showed mercy on Rome. The famous 'four empire theory' that Orosius introduces in Book 2 of his *Historiae* is connected to the idea of Rome spared. The four empire theory was based on the apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism, that is, the vision in Daniel, although similar synchronisms between kingdoms and ideas of the *translatio imperii* (transfer of rule) were also developed in Hellenistic Greek and Roman literature; it was, for example, calculated that at the same time as Rome was founded, the realm of Assyria fell.[73] In the four empire theory, the empires vary: for his part Orosius lists Babylon, Macedonia, Africa (Carthage) and Rome. As A.H. Merrills states, what is original in Orosius's composition is the depiction of the four empires in explicit geographical terms as representing East, North, South and West respectively.[74] Orosius, a presbyter from Hispania, was also emphatically western in his interpretation, as he modified the earlier interpretations to include western elements.[75] When simultaneously the East fell and the West arose, Orosius finds this very much in line with the synchronisms of the earlier chronographic traditions.[76] Why then, he asks, did Babylon

69 Orosius, *Historiae* 2.8; 7.10. Cf. Augustine, *De civitate dei* 3.14 (eds. Dombart & Kalb 1993).

70 E.g. Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5, praef. 5 (eds. Hansen, Périchon & Maraval 2006) who wrote that he "cannot believe this invariable interchange is merely fortuitous, but am persuaded that it proceeds from our iniquities; and that these evils are inflicted upon us as merited chastisements" (trans. Leppin 2003, 237). For an analysis, see Leppin 2003, 236–237.

71 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.35, esp. 7.35.6: *Ecce regibus et temporibus Christianis qualiter bella civilia* … transiguntur. Orosius, *Historiae* 7.35.8 reassures the reader that this was no coincidence. Orosius also defends the civil wars of his time in 5.22.10–11.

72 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.35.19: *Eugenius captus atque interfectus est; Arbogastes sua sese manu perculit. Ita et hic duorum sanguine bellum civile restinctum est, absque illis decem milibus Gothorum quos praemissos a Theodosio Arbogastes delesse funditus fertur: quos utique perdidisse lucrum et vinci vincere fuit.*

73 On the chronicles and Daniel's vision: Croke 1983, 121–122; Adler 2008, 587; Merrills 2005, 51–53, 98; Fear 2010, 180–181. For the synchronisms of Greek and Roman historiography, see Feeney 2007, 47–51, and Van Nuffelen 2012, 49.

74 Orosius, *Historiae* 2.1.3–4; 2.2.1–4. Merrills 2005, 53, 98–99; see also Brandt 2009, 124–125, and Goetz 1980, 71–79.

75 This is pointed out by Fear 2010, 183. Orosius introduced Carthage as the third empire and eliminated Persia.

76 Orosius, *Historiae* 2.2.10: *siquidem sub una eademque convenientia temporum illa cecidit, ista surrexit.*

fall and Rome remain? His answer is that Rome was allowed to continue as an empire because its emperor converted to Christianity. Rome was pardoned because of the Christians.[77]

How did the present create the past? In Orosius's vision of history Rome of the present time (his time) was clearly and bluntly linked with explanations of the Roman past. In discussing the fall of Babylon, for instance, Orosius projects the fate of Babylon onto the present and mentions that his contemporaries wonder whether Rome is trembling in its old age or has been weakened by external forces.[78] In Orosius's view Rome was spared only because of the Christians, and thus Rome was not automatically meant to continue as *Roma aeterna* – eternal Rome –, as was manifested in many fourth- and fifth-century writings, especially in panegyrics and imperial propaganda. For Orosius, Rome's continuity was conditional. It depended on the Christians and their morals.[79] In Orosius's view Rome did not automatically continue, but deserved its continuity only because of Christians and their superior morals. With his vision of a less heroic past, Orosius clearly challenges the Roman elite interpretation of Roman history as glorious. This is why he uses most of the folios in his *Histories* to review the Roman republic before Emperor Augustus, using the tools of the Roman pagans themselves, in order to demystify the Roman past altogether.[80]

Orosius disparaged his contemporaries for their groundless and useless longing for the great Roman past. He claims that his pagan adversaries do not inquire into the future (*futura non quaerant*). Moreover, they either forget or do not know (*praeterita autem aut obliuiscantur aut nesciant*) about the past. Still, because they are so ignorant, they keep on denigrating the present (*praesentia … tempora*).[81] The things in the past do not become any better only because they are in the past, he reasons, objecting to the nostalgia of his contemporaries. For example, someone who is disturbed by fleas in bed in the present finds the present nuisance worse than the serious fevers that the person suffered in the past.[82] However, Orosius goes beyond this reasoning, as for him, even though *tempora Christiana* is not a complete peace, the Christian era must be superior to any period in the past. Not only were the past times no better than the present, but moreover they were in all respects worse than the present. This

77 Orosius, *Historiae* 2.3.6–7.
78 Orosius, *Historiae* 2.6.14: *… et nostri incircumspecta anxietate causantur, si potentissimae illae quondam Romanae reipublicae moles nunc magis inbecillitate propriae senectutis quam alienis concussae viribus contremescunt*. For the fall of Babylon, see Orosius, *Historiae* 2.6.12–14 (Babylon fell in the midst of affluence).
79 This is stressed by Van Nuffelen 2012, 20, 50–53, 147–152, 188.
80 Adler 2008, 597; Van Nuffelen 2012, 21, 62, 81.
81 Orosius, *Historiae* 1. prol. 9: *… qui cum futura non quaerant, praeterita autem aut obliviscantur aut nesciant, praesentia tamen tempora veluti malis extra solitum infestatissima ob hoc solum quod creditur Christus et colitur Deus, idola autem minus coluntur, infamant*.
82 Orosius, *Historiae* 4. praef. 4.

leads him systematically to construe events in the past as more miserable than in the present.[83] Even the barbarians (that is, the Goths) who caused the Romans so much trouble abandoned their swords and turned to ploughs, treating the Romans as allies and friends.[84]

Towards the end of his *Historiae* Orosius declares that the Christian times – the present – were exceptional "because of the greater presence of Christ's grace". This optimism was what modern scholars have usually regarded as the cause of Augustine's detachment from Orosius's work: Augustine had a more pessimistic view of human fate on earth even after the triumph of Christianity and was disappointed at his client's simplistic views.[85] Be that as it may, Orosius's optimistic assessment of the *tempora Christiana* in this world became influential in later medieval writing.[86] He invested the human past with meaning and a goal and interpreted temporal events and kingdoms as integral and intelligible parts of a divine plan. In Orosius's view humankind, even through temporal history, advanced towards a better future. In his clearly optimistic stand Orosius is one of the earliest ideologues of progress.[87]

Conclusion

In this article I have shown that the Christian narrative of the history of humankind as an essential part of Christian identity was developed during Late Antiquity. Christian intellectuals wrote their histories in a rivalry with the predominant views of history of their time, challenging Greco-Roman and Jewish ideas of the past and present. However, I am inclined to argue that they also copiously utilised and took over for the 'right use' what they regarded as expedient and valuable in those traditions.

I have demonstrated how two Christian writers, Eusebius and Orosius, challenged other, prevailing views of history. In the early fourth century Eusebius endeavoured to enhance Christian identity by demonstrating the greater antiquity of Christianity in comparison to the Greco-Roman tradition. Furthermore, he had to confront the millennial expectations of his fellow Christians. In his *Chronici canones* Eusebius developed an elaborate synchronistic chronology of the human past as a reaction

83 E.g. Orosius, *Historiae* 1. prol. 14: *Nanctus sum enim praeteritos dies non solum aeque ut hos graves, verum etiam tanto atrocius miseros quanto longius a remedio verae religionis alienos: ut merito hac scrutatione claruerit regnasse mortem avidam sanguinis, dum ignoratur religio quae prohiberet a sanguine; ista inlucescente, illam constupuisse; illam concludi, cum ista iam praevalet; illam penitus nullam futuram, cum haec sola regnabit.*

84 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.41.7: *Quamquam et post hoc quoque continuo barbari exsecrati gladios suos ad aratra conversi sunt residuosque Romanos ut socios modo et amicos fovent.* Similar optimism is voiced by Themistius (*oratio* 16.211d; eds. Schenkl & Downey 1965) who advocated the policy of accommodation in which Goths could become settled in Thrace and "share our offerings, our tables, our military ventures, and public duties". The oration was delivered after the peace treaty made by Theodosius I with Goths in 382. For the context, see Lenski 1997, 143–144 and Garnsey & Humfress 2001, 101.

85 Orosius, *Historiae* 7.43.19: *… Christianis tamen temporibus propter praesentem magis Christi gratiam ab illa incredulitatis confusione discretis.* For a discussion on the differences between Augustine and Orosius, see Trompf 2000, 293–294.

86 For the impact of Orosius's work in the Middle Ages, see Goetz 1980, 148–165; Fear 2010, 184–185, who extends the impact as far as to Marx and Fukuyama. Formisano 2013, 164–167 argues that in Orosius's vision of history "it is as if time has come to a halt and historical change has ceased".

87 Fear 2010, 179 remarks: "History therefore has become a journey or pilgrimage, a[n] image which is familiar to us all, especially in its secular mutation: 'progress'".

to Porphyry's detailed polemic against Christianity. In the manner of earlier Christian apologists and chronographers, Eusebius's chronographic and historical works were at least partly apologetic, defending Christianity against the charges of Christian novelty. However, by starting his chronology with Abraham and Ninus, Eusebius also contested the earlier Christian chronologies that started their calculations from the Creation of the world and the first human, Adam, and that were closely connected with millennialist speculations.

In the early fifth century Orosius was involved in the debates between Christians and pagans about the fate of the Roman Empire in the aftermath of the sack of Rome in 410. His *Historiae adversus paganos* was a response to the charge that Christians were to be blamed for the decline of Rome. The Roman Empire was in misery and ruins because it had been converted to Christianity and the old gods had been neglected. In order to refute these claims Orosius reviewed the entire history of Rome, demonstrating that the alleged glorious past of Romans in fact consisted of war, despair and suffering. Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos* is a counter-narrative set against traditional Roman historiography. Instead of a magnificent Roman past, he construes a history of humankind in which things happen under the guidance of divine providence. Christ is born and Christianity appears in the Roman Empire during the reign of Emperor Augustus just when Roman power was at its height – all this according to a divine plan.

The past and present of early Christian writers were shaped through contention and in debate. As I have shown, the issues that Eusebius and Orosius had to respond to differed, but they both made ample use of the Greco-Roman tradition that they encountered. Both writers took over and reinterpreted the Greco-Roman past to explain and legitimise their own present: in Eusebius's case to articulate the Christian triumph in the course of the 'Constantinian turn' and in Orosius's case to defend the Christian Empire in the early fifth-century crisis. Eusebius contributed to the development of the chronicle genre, while Orosius advocated the progressive view of history with a meaning and a goal. Both writers with their historiographical tools endeavoured to deconstruct the ancient tradition that regarded what was older as better and brought about a different relationship with human history.

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