

OROSIUS' USE OF VERGIL IN *THE SEVEN BOOKS OF HISTORY AGAINST THE PAGANS*

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Introduction

In 418 C.E., a Spanish presbyter named Orosius published one of the first Christian histories to cover the entirety of human history.¹ Titled *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, it was initially commissioned by Augustine of Hippo as a compilation of disasters to strike the world before the coming of Christianity to Rome.² Much of the previous scholarship regarding Orosius has centered on his contributions to historiography and the large impact he had on later historical writing.³ While much has been done towards the analysis of these influences, less has been contributed to an equally enlightening subject matter: the influences on Orosius himself. Many of these influences can be traced through both sacred and secular veins, but the most evident and puzzling example is that of Vergil, the first century B.C.E. poet. A tension seems to emerge between the Christocentric aims of Orosius' work and his constant referrals to Vergil throughout his *History*. So much of the Roman poet's background and religious views are in direct contrast to Orosius', and yet Vergil is a source that Orosius not only values within his Christian history, but upholds in ways other pagan authors are not.⁴ Further study into this anomaly reveals a somewhat ulterior motive within Orosius' writing that is not explicitly stated within his own work.⁵ Orosius'

¹ Many historians studying Orosius attribute the first name "Paulus" to him, but it is important to note that this may be based more on tradition than historical evidence. There are references to a "P. Orosius" to be found in various historical sources, but it is unknown whether this refers to a name (Paulus) or simply an abbreviation of his title (Presbyter). Due to this uncertainty, this paper has chosen to refer to the historical figure by his known name, Orosius, rather than the traditional Paulus Orosius, while still recognizing the traditional attribution of this name to him throughout historical study. David Rohrbacher, "Orosius," in *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002), 135.

² Rohrbacher, "Orosius," 135-36.

³ Orosius becomes most notably the primary historian referenced by medieval historians. His popularity continues into the Renaissance period before dying off during the more objectively minded historical writings found in the Enlightenment. Giuseppe Zecchini, "Latin Historiography: Jerome, Orosius, and the Western Chronicles," in *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity: Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.* ed. Gabriele Marasco (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 329.

⁴ Harrison C. Coffin, "Vergil and Orosius," *The Classical Journal* 31, no. 4 (1936): 236.

⁵ Of course, being unable to identify and translate the original Latin from which many of these texts are derived from, many of this paper's conclusions will be tentative. To acknowledge these limitations, and as a reminder that these texts were viewed through translation rather than in their original language, the names of these primary texts will be referred to by the English translations of their titles throughout this paper. However, this study will still be

use of Vergil within the *History Against the Pagans* is an attempt to synthesize his Christian history with the larger legacy of Roman Imperial history, providing his new history with the historical and rhetorical credibility needed in order to reach his intended audience.

Orosius as a Historical Figure

Despite his significant work as a presbyter and historian, not much else is known about the personal history of Orosius himself. Most historians attribute his birth as being somewhere between 370 C.E. and 380 C.E., though some venture to place it as late as the 390s C.E.⁶ However, these estimates are based entirely on the narrow lens of time during which we have evidence of his activities and how old he would have had to be to carry them out. Evidence of his background is primarily contained within the three of his writings that have survived and a few scattered letters from his contemporaries, most notably Jerome and Augustine of Hippo. As such, the historical lens through which Orosius is viewed is inseparable from his relationship to these other people and issues. Most knowledge of him apart from these figures and their conflicts is unknown. Orosius cannot be seen as a figure with individual agency, at least not with the evidence to survive the passage of time. This is not to completely separate him from ever having such agency, but it must be something kept in mind when attempting to characterize him from a historical perspective. Much of the true historical Orosius has unfortunately been lost to time, making what information we can glean from him within these writings all that more crucial to determining his rationale concerning the use of Vergil within his *History*.

useful as a foundational investigation into this relationship between historian and historical source, on which further study and textual analysis can build.

⁶ Older historical scholarship, such as Coffin, place Orosius' birth near the later time frame of the 390s C.E. More recent scholarship – including Zecchini, Rohrbacher, and Schildgen – tend to place his birth earlier in the 370s or 380s C.E.

What agency can be gleaned from the little that is known regarding Orosius is contained within his initial introduction to the pages of history. This event comes with his arrival in Hippo to study under Augustine in 414 C.E.⁷ Even here, however, Orosius attributes his actions as directed by the will of another agent, namely God. “God has sent me to you; God now gives me hope in you, as I consider how it came about that I have come here. I recognize why I have come here; it was not by my will, not by necessity, not by the agreement of others that I left my homeland. I was driven by some hidden force until I was brought to the shore of this region.”⁸ While Augustine himself would later attribute Orosius’ arrival to a “burning zeal in regard to the Holy Scriptures,” it is unlikely that this aim excluded other more pragmatic intentions.⁹ With him came the controversies of his parish in Spain, namely the rise in popularity of heresies such as Priscillianism and Origenism.¹⁰ “We have been more seriously wounded by evil teachers than by the bloodiest of enemies,” he writes in his initial plea to Augustine.¹¹ Such imploring from Orosius compelled Augustine to take Orosius and his cause under his watch, where their relationship would grow to the point that Augustine entrusted him with the delivery of his writings to Jerome in Jerusalem in 415 C.E.¹² The records of Gennadius, which continued Jerome’s *Lives of Illustrious Men*, characterized his purpose: “to teach the nature of the soul” to Hieronymus and those gathered

⁷ W.H.C. Frend, “Paulus Orosius,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 615.

⁸ Augustine, Paulus Orosius, and Augustinian Heritage Institute, *Arianism and Other Heresies*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century; Part I: Books, Volume 18, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 97.

⁹ Augustine, “Letter CLXIX,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church [1st Series]*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 543.

¹⁰ Zecchini, “Latin Historiography,” 320.

¹¹ Augustine, Paulus Orosius, and Augustinian Heritage Institute, *Arianism and Other Heresies*, 97.

¹² Frend, “Paulus Orosius,” 615.

in Jerusalem.¹³ This characterization implies a high level of trust within their relationship, confirmed all the more with his later commissioning.

Despite Orosius' affiliation with Augustine in historical tradition – likely due to his direct proximity and attachment to Orosius' *History* – it can be reasonably argued that it was Orosius' time with Jerome rather than Augustine which had more of an impact on the presbyter's overall theology and perspective on history. Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel* in 407 C.E., as well as his *Commentary on Isaiah* in 408–409 C.E., both include allusions to a political theology which would later become the cornerstone of Orosius' arguments within his *History*.¹⁴ In addition to this, it was Jerome who drafted Orosius' aid in the rising Pelagian controversy.¹⁵ Orosius' time in Jerusalem under the tutelage of Jerome was greatly overshadowed by this growing conflict, which he himself quickly became caught up in. His witness on behalf of Augustine at one of the synods in Jerusalem became so controversial that it would later lead to the Bishop John calling him, “you who have blasphemed!”¹⁶ After this incident, his time in Jerusalem would be cut short with the discovery of St. Stephen's relics, which he was entrusted to take west to the island of Minorca.¹⁷ Gennadius would later go on to characterize him as a “man most eloquent and learned in history,” indicating his reputation was not significantly tarnished as a result of his conflict with Bishop John.¹⁸ The continued good repute of Orosius can most likely be attributed to his second published work, aptly titled *An Apologetic Book*, which serves as both a striking defense of his words at the synod as

¹³ Gennadius and Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men,” in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series, vol. III*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1952), 393.

¹⁴ Zecchini, “Latin Historiography,” 319.

¹⁵ Frend, “Paulus Orosius,” 615-616.

¹⁶ Paulus Orosius and Ruth May Gover, “The Liber Apologeticus of Paulus Orosius: A Translation and Commentary” (Master's Thesis, Queens College of the City University of New York, 1969), 9, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

¹⁷ Gennadius and Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men,” 393.

¹⁸ Gennadius and Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men,” 393.

well as a further refutation of Pelagianism.¹⁹ Within this book, the same staunch emphasis on acting out God's will rather than his own is present: "I am forced to point my finger at the wolves caught within the flock of sheep; and I am forced to do this because of faith and zeal, not my own zeal, however, but that of Christ... For it is God's will and decree that the evil, which was patiently borne, be necessarily disclosed."²⁰ Such strong language conveys that the supremacy of God's will over the will of man was an important concept to Orosius which he did not seek to personally usurp nor did he appreciate it when others did.

Orosius' return to Augustine in 417 C.E. would prompt the bishop of Hippo to commission him to compile a list of disasters, wars, and tragedies strewn throughout human history.²¹ The final product of this commission would be Orosius' *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*. This book now serves as the last historical footprint of Orosius before he is once again lost to history. It is important to note that while the direct commission of Augustine to Orosius was either never recorded in writing or has since been lost, the surviving evidence suggests a much simpler assignment given to Orosius by Augustine that what his *History* becomes. With this in mind, two further things must be recognized concerning what little is known about its creative inception.

First, despite his commissioning by Augustine, it should not be assumed that Orosius began his research with the skewed purpose of finding only the evils of the past for his *History*. In his prologue to Augustine, he confesses that he did not initially believe the Bishop of Hippo's request would bear fruit for Augustine's argument in the *City of God*, and that it is only the findings of his research that convinced him of the true horrors found in the historical past.²² "I gave myself to the task and I was especially overcome with confusion, to whom, as I repeatedly considered the matter,

¹⁹ Gover, "Liber Apologeticus," 242.

²⁰ Ibid, 1.

²¹ Frend, "Paulus Orosius," 616.

²² Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, 40.

the calamities of the present times seemed to boil over beyond measure. For I found the days of the past not only equally oppressive as these, but also the more wretched the more distant they are from the solace of true religion...”²³ Such sentiments suggest that it was the result of his research that his argument began to form surrounding the nature of history and the place of Christianity within it.

Second, it is important to recognize the tension that exists between the commissioned task and the resulting commission, particularly when it comes to written works. While the nature of the *History Against the Pagans* as a commissioned piece is critical to understanding the context of Orosius’ writing and purpose, the history remains his own original historical work, separated from Augustine in everything save the initial commission. There is little to suggest that Orosius’ apology and conclusions reflect those of Augustine’s. In fact, there is quite the opposite. Nothing is mentioned of Orosius’ work in the subsequent chapters of the *City of God* written after the *History Against the Pagans* completion, and the conclusions which Orosius draws within his *History* are subtly refuted by Augustine’s later analysis. Further research into these differences and attempted refutations on Augustine’s part must be saved for further research at a later point, but for the purposes of this paper, the independence of Orosius’ work is still important to recognize. The conclusions drawn from Orosius’ *History* cannot be taken and incorporated into any historical analysis of Augustine’s own work, as the bishop of Hippo’s involvement regarding the piece begins and ends with his commission of it. This is particularly important to note in regards to Vergil, a source used in both Augustine’s *City of God* and Orosius’ *History Against the Pagans* but with drastically different ends in mind.

²³ Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*, 5.

Vergil's Place in Orosius' Historical Context

The seamless continuation of Roman ideals and traditions rooted in polytheistic paganism and imperialist expansionism into the Christian era of the Roman Empire is a vast and complex area of research, unable to be covered adequately within the confines of this paper. However, the upholding of Vergil as the standard for all historical works is certainly an example of this anomaly. There is no doubt that amongst the likes of Orosius and his tutor Augustine, Vergil was considered history. As educated men living within the Roman Empire, they inherited the legacy of the *aetas Vergiliana*, or Vergillian Age.²⁴ Vergil's *Aeneid* became the standard by which the Empire's literary and historical works were judged, one built up by both the authoritative will of the emperors and the emotional appeal of its subject matter. The work succeeded in giving the people of Rome a collective history to rival those they were surrounded by.²⁵ In one sense, to exclude Vergil from a piece of historical writing or literary work – or worse, to outright challenge him – would be to exclude the foundation of Roman society and culture from the work in question as well as any later contributions to it.

In addition to this, it is important to remember that despite the “kingdom” language which surrounded the coming of Christianity, it was not itself the coming of a new civilization. Christians born into the Roman Empire were still imperial subjects, tied to the earthly jurisdiction and national identity of Rome. This duality can be seen reflected in the New Testament writings themselves: “Jesus said to them, ‘Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s’.”²⁶ These remarks characterize the initial spread of Christianity as motivated not by a

²⁴ Don P. Fowler and Peta G. Fowler, “Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro),” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Third Revised, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1607.

²⁵ Philip Hardy, “Virgil,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilization*, First Published Edition, ed. Graham Shipley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 931.

²⁶ Mark 12:17 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition). See also Romans 13:1-7 (NRSVUE).

challenge and usurpation to the world to which it was born, but rather an integration, subversion, and eventual transformation of its initial practices into a new form. As such, it should not necessarily be surprising to find the works of someone like Vergil influencing the works of a Christian historian like Orosius. As a man educated within the Roman Empire, Vergil would have been presented to Orosius from the earliest days of his education as history, perhaps even by teachers who considered themselves Christian.²⁷ To suggest that the polytheistic nature of Vergil's works makes such influence an impossibility is to divorce Christianity from its position as a growing religion within the larger Roman Empire. The more accurate depiction of Christian life within the Roman Empire would be one which resides within the dissonance of considering pagan works like Vergil's as valid historical source without conceding to the existence of the pagan deities within them. In some cases, including Orosius', this tension might be lessened by noting that the pagan authors lived before the enlightenment of Christ's coming.²⁸ In this sense, the presence of these imperfect polytheistic elements within the great histories of old served to point out the imperfections and ignorance inherent to the periods of history before Christ, which Orosius' then seeks to make perfect through the writing of his own *History*.

Within Orosius' personal context and relationship with Vergil's works, it is not difficult to see that he held them in high esteem. Vergil is referred to within the *History Against the Pagans* more than any other historical source, with Coffin's work on the subject counting thirty-eight instances over the course of the seven books.²⁹ This prevalence indicates that allusions and references to Vergil were a crucial element of Orosius' chosen literary self-presentation when

²⁷ Coffin, "Vergil and Orosius," 236.

²⁸ Orosius speaks of a similar concept in his *History* when speaking on Tacitus: "He said nothing about the cities which had been burned because of the sins of men, as if ignorant of them." Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America, 1981), 23.

²⁹ Coffin, "Vergil and Orosius," 236.

crafting his history.³⁰ The Roman poet is not relegated simply to the time periods in which his own works reside, but is referenced in almost every single individual book.³¹ Some of these references are direct references to what Vergil's history describes, such as the arrival of Aeneas to Italy or the conquest and eventual fall of the Spartan state.³² Still, Vergil is hardly the only source Orosius consulted for his history of the early Roman Republic. Other influences such as Livy and Eutropius are referenced just as much as Vergil is over the course of the *History*.³³ The presence of Vergil within other portions of Orosius' work causes him to stand out from these as a sources consulted not just for history, but something more as well.

In other instances, Orosius' use of Vergil appears to be more rhetorically motivated, using him to embellish his own prose through direct quotation. This rhetorical use is perhaps most distinct in the beginning of Book Four, which begins with the first and only direct mention of Vergil by name: "Vergil reports that Aeneas said... 'Perhaps some day it will be pleasing to recall even these events.' This sentiment, aptly expressed once, always carries with it by its very different effects a threefold force... future events, while they are made more desirable by an aversion for the present are always believed to be better."³⁴ Perhaps the most intriguing use of Vergil within Orosius, however, is the places where Orosius comes closest to challenging and refuting Vergil. However, he does not characterize his remarks as a challenge to Vergil directly, but rather as a challenge to those who condemned Christianity for the sacking of Rome by the Visigoths. One such example can be found in Book Six: "The Christian emperors ordered the sacrifices to cease

³⁰ Peter Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

³¹ This is brought into more striking significance with his inclusion in Book Seven, which details the history from Christ's birth up until Orosius' present day. Given that Vergil died before the coming of Christ in 19 B.C.E., Vergil's insistence in using him as a source of evidence and/or inspiration is notable. Fowler and Fowler, "Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro)," 1602.

³² Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*, 38 and 80.

³³ Zecchini, "Latin Historiography," 320.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 120.

and the temples to be closed, and so ‘all the gods went forth, abandoning sanctuaries and altars, by whom this Empire had stood firm’.”³⁵ This final example of Orosius’ use of Vergil within his *History Against the Pagans* is rare, but it does show that the historian is not blind to the pagan and polytheistic content of Vergil’s works. Rather, it demonstrates his ability to simultaneously use his sources as evidence to back up his claims, embellish and enhance his own rhetorical voice, and connect his historical prose back to his overall apologetic objective without endorsing those religious beliefs which would compromise his overall argument.

Vergil’s Place in *History Against the Pagans*

One of the most prevalent themes throughout Orosius’ *History Against the Pagans* is his intense loyalty to the Roman state and his celebration of its response to the Christian message. Such emphasis is built into the very nature of his *History*’s structure. Using the groundwork of Daniel 2, Orosius frames history as a series of four kingdoms, each ravaged by cycles of carnage, war, disaster, and ultimately death.³⁶ However, when compared to his contemporary’s interpretation on the same passage, there is a shift in its interpretation westward to make Rome the figurehead of this Old Testament prophecy.³⁷ Orosius depicts these in the beginning of Book Two as “[the] four chief kingdoms preeminent in distinct stages, namely: the Babylonian kingdom in the East, the Carthaginian in the South, the Macedonian in the North, and the Roman in the

³⁵ Zecchini, “Latin Historiography,” 231.

³⁶ More specifically, the passage is Daniel 2:31-35, with its interpretation detailed in 36-45. It concerns the rise of four kingdoms, each represented with a different metal: gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Luc De Coninck, “Orosius on the ‘Virtutes’ of his Narrative.” *Ancient Society* 21 (1990): 47.

³⁷ Augustine’s interpretation of this passage, for example, depicted the four empires as the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and finally the Romans. Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Divine Providence: A History: The Bible, Virgil, Orosius, Augustine, and Dante* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012), 51-52.

West.”³⁸ Already, this shift suggests that the position of Rome within this prophecy is valuable to the argument that runs through Orosius’ entire *History*.

As one of the most prominent sources of Roman history and one which bridges Roman history with that of the Macedonians, Vergil’s rhetoric on the rise of Rome through works such as the *Aeneid* proves invaluable to establishing the primacy of Rome within Orosius’ own work. Paired together with Homer’s own epics, Vergil’s writing fleshes out the Trojan Wars, Aeneas’ coming to Italy, and the establishment of the city of Rome there.³⁹ His synthesis of these two sources suggests historical importance is shifting from the Greeks in the Trojan War – as depicted in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – towards what will eventually become Rome – as foreshadowed in Vergil’s *Aeneid*. Of course, both Homer and Vergil’s epics rely heavily on the divine intervention and oversight of their various pagan deities, which make no appearance within Orosius’ telling of these events. However, Orosius is not above integrating these divine influences and guidance into his own work, attributing them instead to the Christian God. Such is the case with his later description of Caesar Augustus’ rise to power in Book Six:

From the foundation of the world and from the beginning of the human race, an honor of this nature had absolutely never been granted in this manner, not even to Babylon or to Macedonia, not to mention any lesser kingdom. It is undoubtedly clear for the understanding of all, from their faith and investigation, that our Lord Jesus Christ brought forward this City to this pinnacle of power, prosperous and protected by his will; of this City, when he came, He especially wished to be called a Roman citizen by the declaration of the Roman census list.⁴⁰

This description also aptly depicts the primacy of Rome, a concept which becomes one of Orosius’ most crucial pieces of evidence to the history he seeks to tell, with Christ as its ultimate figurehead. And for the omnipotent and omniscient Christ to be established as this central figure,

³⁸ Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*, 44.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 37-38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 281-282.

the primacy of the nation to which Christ was born – the Roman Empire – must also be established. Yet the synthesis of this idea with the larger prophecy of Daniel 2 requires him to address both the history of Rome and these other three empires as well. He must describe not just the prosperity of Rome to come from Christ's birth and blessing on their Empire, but the ruin of those empires which preceded its coming as well. For his argument to succeed, it must communicate no trace of doubt to the audience that no other time in history was better off than the Roman Empire is now, even despite its current plights.

Here, Orosius can again be seen calling upon the Roman people's familiarity with Vergil as well as the poet's own rhetorical skill for his argument. The versatility and emotion surrounding Vergil's work allows for Orosius to draw upon these descriptions to better convey to his audience how they should relate to the history he is telling. One example of this comes with his description of the Peloponnesian War, a conflict which happened nearly four centuries before Vergil and eight centuries after the events described in his *Aeneid*, which Orosius ends with a referenced paraphrase of Vergil.⁴¹ "For who will unfold the slaughter of that time, who the deaths in words, or who can equal the grief with tears? Yet these very misfortunes, because they have grown dim by the passing of many centuries, have become exercises for our talents and delightful topics for stories."⁴² This use of Vergil allows Orosius to bridge the gap between the past strife of other nations and the Roman people, connecting them to it through reference to their own nation's past woes. Through Vergil, Orosius depicts each empire as having the same toils and difficulties that Rome faced in the younger years of its civilization. However, while those empires were doomed to fail because of those struggles, Rome prevailed. Orosius' framing of Rome as the last of the four empires

⁴¹ Coninck, "Orosius on the 'Virtutes' of his Narrative," 54.

⁴² Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*, 74.

described within Daniel portrays it as the one which will go on to break the mold through the blessing and coming of Christ.

Rome is the vehicle by which Christ becomes the center point of Orosius' narrative, and as such is characterized by its unique blessings from God. The inherent primacy and glory of Rome is perhaps the greatest commonality between Vergil and Orosius. Though his writings surround a much earlier time, Vergil's celebration centers around the rise of Caesar Augustus and the coming of the *Pax Romana*, a truth recognized even as far back as antiquity.⁴³ As an educated man within the Roman Empire, Orosius would have been subjected to teachings and readings – including the works of Vergil – which passed down this “standard, idealized image of the Roman past.”⁴⁴ This idealization is crucial for Orosius in particular because it is something he proceeds to closely tie to his Christocentric argument in the *History*. Breaking from his mentor Augustine, Orosius instead follows Jerome on this path, attributing the success of Rome to the divine workings of the Christian God in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ.⁴⁵

Nowhere can this emphasis on Rome's success be seen better than his integration of the *Augustustheologie* into his *History*, a concept most likely passed down to him during his time with Jerome.⁴⁶ The concept of *Augustustheologie* during late antiquity was the belief that God chose from all the years, eras, and powers on earth to send Christ down during the reign of Caesar Augustus because Augustus had been prepared by God to prepare the world for the Incarnation.⁴⁷

⁴³ Fowler and Fowler, “Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro),” 1606.

⁴⁴ Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, 10.

⁴⁵ Certain historians attribute this divergence regarding Rome as the reason Augustine's *City of God* maintains a prevelance which Orosius' *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* does not. Augustine intentionally does not tie his theological and historical arguments to the prosperity and success of Rome, elevating his Christian “City of God” to a more spiritual or metaphorical image of an eventual civilization to come. Orosius' conclusions within his *History*, however, do tie themselves to the success of Rome in past, present, and future. As such, the eventual fall of the Roman Empire makes many of his theological and historical claims surrounding Christianity, Rome, and God fall apart as well. Zecchini, “Latin Historiography,” 323.

⁴⁶ Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah* in particular, published in 408/9 C.E., conveys many ideas surrounding the intentionality of Christ's birth within Augustus' reign. Ibid, 319.

⁴⁷ Rohrbacher, “Orosius,” 142.

This concept was, of course, very appealing for many Christians in late antiquity, including Orosius, as it tied even the pagan roots of the Roman Empire to the larger, universal plan of the Christian God. In addition to this appeal, the *Augustustheologie* assuaged any potential guilt felt on behalf of the Empire for its various bloody conquests in pursuit of the coveted *Pax Romana* and the brutal enforcement of it since its arrival with Augustus.⁴⁸ As someone with an established favor of Roman society, no doubt this concept was viewed by Orosius as both an endorsement of Rome's overall primacy within history and further evidence of the providence of God over the course of all history, not simply the history pertaining to his chosen people at a given point.

The *Augustustheologie* also provides Orosius a method by which to turn Vergil's potentially problematic existence in a pagan, pre-Christ era into evidence of his overarching argument's validity. As mentioned above, the use of Vergil – a pagan source – within a Christian history is a relatively minor concern when examined in the context of late antiquity. However, one place in which this minor tension could be inflamed was in the context of religious debate, which Orosius' *History Against the Pagans* was primarily dealing with. As such, one way Orosius uses the *Augustustheologie* is to justify his view of Vergil and the Roman Empire as figures playing active roles in God's larger design for the world. Vergil's works were one of the ways in which Augustus established himself as the supreme and divinely blessed Caesar of the Roman Empire, cementing his conquest as the fulfillment of prophecies uttered when the roots of Rome were just being established.⁴⁹ It was Vergil who helped to frame the coming of Augustus as the “central purpose of Rome's historical identity,” bringing with him the ideals of law and peace.⁵⁰ It can be

⁴⁸ Coincidentally, one such victim of this enforcement was Jesus Christ himself, a thought that was certainly uncomfortable to acknowledge once Christianity was widely recognized and endorsed by the Roman Empire. The *Augustustheologie* thus also serves to vindicate the role the Empire played within the execution of Christianity's Savior on account of it all being ordained by God's larger salvific plan.

⁴⁹ Fowler and Fowler, “Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro),” 1606.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

rightfully reasoned that Vergil's works helped to elevate Augustus to the authoritative position he would need to usher in the *Pax Romana* required for Christ's coming. The continued use of Vergil within Orosius serves as a way of honoring the Roman Empire's sacred role in God's larger plan for the preparation of the Greco-Roman world to receive Jesus Christ. The respectful use of Vergil by Orosius demonstrates this appreciation in multiple instances throughout the *History*, most notably in Book Five: "At one time it was said *and truly said*: 'We are kept away from the hospitality of her sands. They stir up wars and forbid us to step on the very edge of their land.'"⁵¹ This can also be found in Book Six as well: "Therefore, *wisely did the poet forewarn*: 'They depart without advice and hate the seat of the Sibyl'."⁵²

With all this said, Orosius' belief in the *Augustustheologie* must not be confused for inherent devotion to Rome for Rome's sake. It is clear that the crowning jewel of this Roman epoch is the coming of Christ himself. Christ is the one who gives the *Augustustheologie* meaning. The latter serves to prepare the way for the former, but it is always the former which can and does give meaning to the latter. Orosius always goes to great lengths to clarify that Augustus, Vergil, and the entire epoch of Rome is not given primacy due to its own merit, but because of the will of God and the Empire's acceptance and adoption of Christianity. Orosius again returns to Vergil to reinforce this distinction between pre- and post-Christian Empire:

Oh blessed beginnings of Christian times! How you have prevailed in human affairs, so that even the cruelty of man was able rather to wish for disaster than to find it! Behold, hungry ferocity complains about the general tranquility: *Impious fury within: Sitting on cruel arms and bound behind its back with a hundred brazen knots, roars horribly with a bloody mouth.* Rebellious slaves and fugitive gladiators terrorized Rome, overturned Italy, destroyed Sicily, an object of fear to almost the

⁵¹ Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*, 176. Emphasis added.

⁵² *Ibid*, 260. Emphasis added.

entire human race in the whole world. But in the days of salvation, that is, in Christian times, not even an inimical Caesar can break the peace.⁵³

Orosius' use of Vergil here serves to further embellish his point, harkening back to the days before Christianity and the terror to be found there. The brutality of Vergil's writings, which have been used by some to describe him as outright anti-war, as well as his prevalence within Roman society allow Orosius to contrast his descriptions of carnage before Christ's coming with the peace of Roman rule since the coming of Christ and Rome's acceptance of Christianity.⁵⁴

As an educated man well familiar with the rhetoric, history, and the then-modern day sociopolitical situation, Orosius recognized the position Vergil's works held within Roman society as one he could use to his advantage within his Christian apology.⁵⁵ The versatility of Vergil's work allowed him to be used as a primary source, a way to relate to his intended audience, and as a way to point back to his overall argument. However, the nature of Orosius' relationship to Vergil expands beyond just author and source. Many of the same mindsets and interpretations of Rome's place within the world are shared between them, albeit one coming from the mouth of a polytheistic pagan and one from a monotheistic Christian. As such, while Orosius can certainly be seen twisting Vergil to suit his own Christian ends, it may be Vergil who finished the work with a greater hold over Orosius. How much of Orosius' views on the primacy of Rome came directly from Vergil's works and influence over him will always to some extent be unknown. However, the consensus shared between them regarding the place of Augustus Caesar and Rome at the very least begs the question, even if the answer will forever be beyond us.

⁵³ Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*, 292-293. Emphasis added to distinguish portion derived from Vergil's *Aeneid*.

⁵⁴ Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Divine Providence*, 37.

⁵⁵ Frend, "Orosius," 617.

Conclusion

Despite its relative obscurity in recent times, Orosius' *History Against the Pagans* was well received in his own time as a well-crafted rhetorical argument and strong defense for the Christian faith.⁵⁶ No one before had ever explored any other method of relaying Christian history other than through chronography, the standard format for most historical works in that day.⁵⁷ Orosius became the first to return to the older tradition of classical historiography, crafting a universal history that opened up the breadth of Christian history to include the history of the entire world rather than just that which was contained after the coming of Christ.⁵⁸ The book's rhetorical skill, research, and proximity to Augustine's own name and work allowed for it to become the staple for historical writing for many years to come, particularly in the West. After the fall of Rome, the *History Against the Pagans* went on to inspire the likes of Bede, Isidore, and Dante.⁵⁹ Frechulf of Lisieux in particular would even adopt the concept of the *Augustustheologie* in his own universal history, written around 830 C.E.⁶⁰ However, his influence was felt in the East as well. A surviving Arabic translation of Orosius' work dating back to the fourteenth century suggests that his reach stretched into the Muslim world as well, beginning with a collaboration between Christian and Muslim translators in Spain before passing into North Africa and beyond.⁶¹ It would only be during the Enlightenment that Orosius' fame would dwindle as his work began to fall short under the emphases of objectivity and accuracy that came to define that age's historical research.⁶²

⁵⁶ Frend, "Orosius," 617.

⁵⁷ Zecchini, "Latin Historiography," 321.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 321.

⁵⁹ Rohrbacher, 149 and Christian C. Sahner, "From Augustine to Islam: Translation and History in the Arabic Orosius," *Speculum* 88, no. 4 (2013): 905.

⁶⁰ Graeme Ward, "All Roads Lead to Rome? Frechulf of Lisieux, Augustine and Orosius," *Early Medieval Europe* 22, no. 4 (November 2014): 492, 502-503.

⁶¹ Sahner, "From Augustine to Islam," 906-908.

⁶² Zecchini, "Latin Historiography," 329.

Orosius' use of Vergil within these texts reveals much both about the way in which Christians of late antiquity were affected by the legacy of Rome's pagan past and demonstrates the ways in which that would continue to affect Christianity long after Rome's eventual fall. Though Orosius' original argument of Rome being the final epoch of this world, unconquerable due to the divine favor resting upon it, was proven wrong with its fall and the fracturing of the Empire into East and West, his work is also a testament to the faith placed by Christians of late antiquity in the sanctity of the Roman state to which they belonged. Vergil's appearance within the *History Against the Pagans* speaks to this faith, providing a way to synthesize the influences of the pagan past with the present Christian reality. However, Orosius' use of Vergil also points towards the lasting impact which Roman civilization had on its subjects, one which invariably seeped into almost every other part of their lives. Together, these two reveal Orosius to be walking a thin line between respect and reverence for Vergil and the Roman Empire he represents.

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