

## Project Description

### **Orosius' History of War – Historiography in a Christian-apologetic perspective**

Unlike his contemporary and temporarily supporter Augustine of Hippo, the presbyter Orosius of Braga (North Portugal) and his work are hardly known nowadays. This was different during the Middle Ages: especially Orosius' historiographical work, the *Historiae adversum paganos libri VII* (written around 415/17), were a standard work of history. Historians like Bede Venerabilis, Isidor of Seville, or Otto of Freising used Orosius' writings, and the number of manuscripts of his work also points to its broad reception. In his work the author takes into account the whole history of mankind from Adam and Eve until his own times in a Christian perspective. Orosius collated different traditions and sources, such as the Old Testament, Greek mythology or Roman historical writings, in order to present a consistent and continuous process of history.

However, the historical value of the work is highly influenced by its apologetic aim. As a Christian presbyter, Orosius did not give an 'objective' presentation of historical facts and details. He wrote his work during a time of radical change, the gradual downfall of the Western Roman Empire. The sack of Rome by the Goths had taken place recently (410) and it was especially unfortunate for the Christian religion, which had just become the new official cult. Hence, Orosius desired to demonstrate that the growing faith could not be made responsible for the troubles of his time. With this background kept in mind, his historical work naturally is to be read critically. A negative judgement about the Christian author often is the result in contemporary literature, which for example ascribes him tendentious and adulterant depictions, undermining his credibility. The work's historical content seems to get lost behind the theological motivation.

This project aims at examining Orosius' historical and theological work with a strong focus on the context of warfare and its implications. War plays an important role in the *Historiae*, since Orosius structures his apologetic by enumerating all kinds of documented wars, violence and miseries from the fall of mankind on up to his own times. According to Orosius, only the birth of Christ and the following Christian emperors were able to interrupt this almost endless series of wars. It will therefore be of great interest to take a closer look at the way in which the author realises the transition of pre-Christian wars to Christian wars – which still play an important role. How did Orosius achieve a distinction between Christian and previous times without obvious breaks in his narrative? In other words: How did he reconcile the historical and the theological material in his work?

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