Joshua Benjamins CAMWS Annual Meeting

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Session H: Late Antiquity

Cyclicism and Early Christian Historiography: Mapping the Past in Orosius’ *Historiae*

**1.** ...iure ab initio hominis **per bona malaque alternantia**, exerceri hunc mundum sentit quisquis per se atque in se humanum genus videt. (1.1.10)

*Anyone who views the human race through himself and in himself realizes that, since the origin of humanity, this world is justly administered* ***through the alternation of good and bad times****.*

**2.** Exaggerare hoc loco **mutabilium rerum instabiles status** non opus est: quidquid enim est opere et manu factum, labi et consumi vetustate, Babylon capta confirmat: cuius ut primum imperium ac potentissimum exstitit ita et primum cessit, ut **veluti quodam iure succedentis aetatis** debita posteris traderetur hereditas, **ipsis quoque** **eandem tradendi formulam servaturis**... ita…et nostri incircumspecta anxietate causantur, si potentissimae illae quondam Romanae reipublicae moles nunc magis inbecillitate propriae senectutis quam alienis concussae viribus contremescunt. (2.6.13-14)

*There is no need to elaborate at this point on* ***the******unstable condition of changeable things****. Whatever is created by the work of human hands collapses and is consumed by old age, as the capture of Babylon confirms. Just as soon as its empire emerged as the first and mightiest, it came to a sudden end, so that* ***as if by a sort of law of succeeding ages*** *its due legacy might be transmitted to the next generation,* ***which in turn was to preserve the same rule of transmission****... So too…our own people in unreflective anxiety debate whether that once all-powerful might of the Roman republic is now tottering, shaken to its core by the feebleness of its own old age more than by external blows.*

**3.** Igitur **Romani status agitur semper alterna mutatio et velut forma Oceani maris**, quae omni die dispar nunc succiduis per VII dies attollitur incrementis nunc insequentibus totidem diebus **naturali damno et defectu interiore** subducitur. (6.14.1)

*Thus* ***Rome’s condition is always disturbed by alternating change, like the contour of the Ocean’s swell*** *which is different every day: now it is lifted up for seven days by increases which grow progressively less; now for the same number of days it is drawn away* ***by a natural loss and inner absorption****.*

**4*.* revera pares sunt et conferuntur inter se hae duae captivitates**: illa sex mensibus desaeviens et tribus diebus ista transcurrens; Galli exstincto populo urbe deleta ipsum quoque Romae nomen in extremis cineribus persequentes et Gothi relicta intentione praedandi ad confugia salutis, hoc est sanctorum locorum, agmina ignara cogentes… (2.19.13)

***Truly these two sacks are alike and comparable to one other****: the one raging on for six months and the other running its course in three days; the Gauls exterminating the people, obliterating the city, and pursuing the very name of Rome in the last ashes, and the Goths abandoning their intention to plunder and driving the unknown masses to refuges of safety, that is, sacred places…*

**5.** Anno ab urbe condita DCVI, hoc est eodem anno, quo et Carthago deleta est, Cn. Cornelio Lentulo L. Mummio consulibus ruinam Carthaginis eversio Corinthi subsecuta est, **duarumque potentissimarum urbium parvo unius temporis intervallo per diversas mundi partes miserabile conluxit incendium** (5.3.1)

*606 years after the founding of the city, in the very same year in which Carthage was destroyed, in the consulship of Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus and Lucius Mummius, the utter overthrow of Corinth followed close upon the destruction of Carthage, and* ***in the short span of a single period the pitiable inferno of the two most powerful cities lit up different parts of the world****.*

**6.** ...**quamvis in tantum arcanis statutis inter utramque urbem convenientiae totius ordo servatus sit**, ut et ibi praefectus eius Arbatus regnum invaserit et hic praefectus huius Attalus regnare temptarit; tametsi apud hanc solam merito Christiani imperatoris adtemptatio profana vacuata sit. itaque haec ob hoc praecipue commemoranda credidi, ut tanto ineffabilium iudiciorum Dei ex parte patefacto intellegant hi, qui insipienter utique de temporibus Christianis murmurant, unum Deum **disposuisse tempora et in principio Babyloniis et in fine Romanis**... ecce similis Babyloniae ortus et Romae, similis potentia, similis magnitudo, similia tempora, similia bona, similia mala... (2.3.2-6)

*And yet by hidden decrees* ***the order of the whole parallelism between the two cities has been preserved*** *to such an extent that in the one case its prefect, Arbatus, seized power, and in the other its prefect, Attalus, tried to rule. Yet only in the latter [Rome] was the impious attempt thwarted through the merit of the Christian emperor. This, then, is the primary reason why I thought these matters worthy of mention: so that these men who foolishly grumble about Christian times might understand, from such a partial disclosure of God’s ineffable judgments, that the one God* ***has disposed the times for both the Babylonians at the beginning and the Romans at the end****... See how Babylon and Rome are alike in origin, alike in power, alike in magnitude, alike in duration, alike in good, alike in evil...*

\*All translations are my own. Latin citations are drawn from Zangemeister.

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