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# Zosimus, The First Historian of Rome's Fall

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WALTER GOFFART

The organizers of a symposium held a few years ago were not wrong to call the fall of the Roman Empire "Gibbon's problem."<sup>1</sup> Anyone with the slightest interest in Rome's fall is acquainted with at least the title of Gibbon's monumental *History* and instinctively associates Gibbon with the period he studied. Some come close to believing that Gibbon exhausted the subject.<sup>2</sup> No one, however, pretends that he originated it; his greatness lies in the scale and comprehensiveness of his treatment and in the style of his expression. The stream of intellectual development leading to his work has been traced back to the Italian humanists, to Petrarch and the *Decades historiarum* of Flavio Biondo.<sup>3</sup> But such an exercise only uncovers Gibbon's antecedents. The question asked here is, rather, who was first to write the history of the Roman Empire in the way Gibbon did, that is, as a completed tale of decline and disintegration? Though not unanswered, this question has attracted little attention.

The historian who fills this role is a Byzantine of disputed date, the retired treasury advocate Zosimus, author of a *New or Recent History* whose detailed portions extend from the third century A.D. to the year 410. As Ranke said: "Zosimus is certainly the first author who represented the history of a great epoch from such a standpoint that the active and dominant themes are follies and crimes; he repudiates Christianity and the dissipation of the resources of the state, together with the cause for this [dissipation of resources], namely the connection [of the Empire] with the barbarians. . . ."<sup>4</sup> Zosimus deserves our attention for being the first to do what Gibbon later did with unparalleled distinction. He was not simply a pessimist, writing in tones of dark foreboding in the manner of Sallust, Tacitus, and Ammianus; nor did he intend, like Orosius, to produce a catalogue of disasters and

<sup>1</sup> Lynn White, Jr., ed., *The Transformation of the Roman World: Gibbon's Problem after Two Centuries* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Compare C. T. Wood, review of *Memoirs of My Life*, by Edward Gibbon, *Edward Gibbon the Historian*, by J. W. Swain, and *Transformation*, ed. White, in *History and Theory*, 7 (1968): 145-46.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Dawson, "Edward Gibbon," *British Academy, Proceedings*, 20 (1934): 162-74; Arnaldo Momigliano, "Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method," in *Studies in Historiography* (New York, 1966), 40-55; T. E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages,'" *Speculum*, 17 (1942): 226-42.

<sup>4</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, vol. 4, pt. 2 (Leipzig, 1883), 265-66.

miseries. His purpose was unique and original. From a perspective that we might take to be *in medias res*, Zosimus deliberately related the history of the Roman Empire as a tale of decline and fall: "For just as Polybius narrated how the Romans acquired their sovereignty within a brief period of time, so I am going to tell how they lost it through their own blind folly within no long period of time" (1. 57. 1).<sup>5</sup> Though he lived in a state that called itself the Roman Empire, Zosimus in his own mind already stood where Poggio, Gibbon, and we ourselves stand: in the age following the fall of the world empire of Rome.<sup>6</sup>

Gibbon would not have been flattered to be placed in his company. Zosimus is hardly a historian of the first rank. Gibbon called him "a Greek rhetorician" whom the modern historian is "reduced to cherish" after the admirable narrative of Ammianus Marcellinus comes to an end. From footnote to footnote, he qualifies Zosimus as a servile Greek, unworthy of esteem and trust, neither a soldier nor a politician, prejudiced, partial, malicious, ignorant (three times), credulous, indecently bigoted, poor in judgment, a disingenuous liar, almost incredible in his crude simplicity.<sup>7</sup> His documentary value stems only from our lacking an alternative; after his account stops, one simply has to do without a comparable narrative source, with the result that "we must take our leave of [Zosimus] with some regret."<sup>8</sup> The authoritative editor, Ludwig Mendelssohn, expressed the same judgment in less colorful but more circumstantial terms:

The more familiar one becomes with Zosimus, the more one learns to distrust him. He confuses times, he is ignorant of places, he joins together disconnected subjects and dissociates connected ones; while he goes on at length with fables and miracles, he either omits or glosses over the main subject; he relates the same story twice in a slightly different way. In sum, one passage or the other [of the *Recent History*] may serve to illustrate every vice that dishonors the historian.<sup>9</sup>

Such verdicts are unlikely to be reversed. Zosimus is not to be compared with Gibbon as a practitioner of the historian's craft.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Zosimus is quoted from the translation of J. J. Buchanan and H. T. Davis, *Zosimus: Historia Nova. The Decline of Rome* (hereafter Buchanan-Davis) (San Antonio, 1967), 34. The Latin version of Zosimus' title, as it appears in the heading of the *Recent History*, is *comes et exadvocatus fisci*.

<sup>6</sup> For Poggio, see Dawson, "Edward Gibbon," 164; Edward Gibbon, *Autobiography*, ed. D. A. Saunders (New York, 1961), 154.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Gibbon, *A History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury (London, 1896-1900), 3: 33 n.92, 116 n.100, 98 n.71, 264 n.73; 2: 238 n.85, 199 n.199; 3: 137 n.12, 168 n.83; 2: 289, 507 n.79, 511 n.91; 3: 109 n.92, 321 n.101, 207 n.71, 129 n.132; 2: 310 n.69; 3: 237 n.58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 321 n.101.

<sup>9</sup> *Zosimi Historia nova*, ed. Ludwig Mendelssohn (Leipzig, 1887), xlvi. The inferiority of Zosimus by comparison with other narrators of the same events is the continual theme of C. Höfler, "Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der alten Geschichte, VII: Kritische Bemerkungen über Zosimos und den Grad seiner Glaubwürdigkeit," *Akademie der Wissenschaften (zu Wien), Sitzungsberichte*, Philol.-hist. Klasse, 95 (1879): 521-65.

<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, historians of Greek literature speak kindly of him as a stylist: G. J. Vossius, *De historicis Graecis libri IV* (ed. altera; Leiden, 1651), 261; Rudolf Nicolai, *Griechische*

Nevertheless it is appropriate to link the indecently bigoted Greek rhetorician with the English giant of late Roman studies, for Zosimus inaugurated the genre of Roman history that Gibbon made illustrious. Like Gibbon and any number of lesser practitioners of the genre, he presupposed that the events openly tell the tale of decline and fall. There is no mystery. One need only look at certain facts, for they are such self-evident violations of religious, political, and economic wisdom that they explain the ensuing collapse. As was seen and illustrated by the eighteenth-century commentator John-Frederick Reitemeier, Zosimus wrote an *histoire raisonnée* whose interpretation closely resembles that of modern authors.<sup>11</sup> By compiling his various statements, as Reitemeier did with great skill, one may assemble a comprehensive list of causes for Rome's fall that is just as good or bad as the list offered by any other historian. When measured by this standard, the inaugurator of the genre stands remarkably level with its greatest practitioner.

Once the history of the Roman Empire is written as a story of decline, the range of variation becomes quite narrow. It is extraordinary to discover how closely the derided Zosimus agrees with his unwitting modern emulators over the "causes" of decline. To be sure, we do not find Walbank's thesis that "the real cause" consisted in "the premises upon which classical civilization arose," or Toynbee's thesis that there was no recovery from the Peloponnesian War, or Beloch's thesis that decline began with the Roman conquest of Greece.<sup>12</sup> Avoiding such extravagance, Zosimus stands at the vital center; decline for him begins almost where it would begin for Gibbon: at the passage from the free commonwealth of Rome to the rule of an emperor.<sup>13</sup> The

*Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 3 (2d ed.; Magdeburg, 1878), 39; Alfred and Maurice Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature grecque* (Paris, 1899), 5: 1016; F. A. Wright, *History of Later Greek Literature* (London, 1932), 380; Albin Leski, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* (2d ed.; Bern-Munich, 1963), 908; Salvatore Impellizzeri, *La letteratura bizantina da Costantino agli iconoclasti* (Bari, 1965), 151.

<sup>11</sup> "Disquisitio in Zosimo, eiusque fidem," in *Zosimi Historiae*, ed. J. F. Reitemeier (Leipzig, 1784), xxi-xxviii; reprinted in Immanuel Bekker, ed., *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae* (Bonn, 1837), xxviii-xxxiii.

<sup>12</sup> F. W. Walbank, *The Decline of the Roman Empire in the West* (New York, 1953), 69. The theory derives from the ideas of Max Weber. A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 4 (London, 1939), 56-62. Zosimus 1. 3 comes close to voicing this view. Compare J. F. Leddy, "Toynbee and the History of Rome," *The Phoenix*, 11 (1957): 139-52. Julius Beloch, "Der Verfall der antiken Kultur," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 84 (1900): 1-38.

<sup>13</sup> Zosimus 1. 5. 2-4. Gibbon's only venture in this direction is a brief allusion: "The victorious legions, who, in distant wars, acquired the vices of strangers and mercenaries, first oppressed the freedom of the republic . . ." (Gibbon, *Decline*, 4: 161-62). This follows upon the comment that "we should rather be surprised that [the Roman Empire] had subsisted so long." But, in old age, Gibbon had second thoughts about where his narrative should have begun; he regretted not having begun earlier. (See Bury's introduction, 1: xxxv). Of course, part of Gibbon's originality by comparison with earlier authors was his admiration of the imperial period; see, for example, the account of his dinner-table debate with a champion of the Republic. Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 178-79. Em. Condurachi ("Les idées politiques de Zosime," *Revista clasica*, 13-14 [1940-41]: 119, 125) singles out the "republicanism" of Zosimus as especially worthy of attention. But it is by no means unique. Compare Sidonius *Carm.* 7. 100-04 ("Panegyric of Avitus"), in which Rome's *regnum* is mentioned as having been torn to shreds ever since all sovereignty passed into the hands of the *princeps*. Along the same lines, see 440 *NTheod* 7. 3, and Salvian *De gubernatione Dei* 1. 11, where the old Romans are

rest is just as familiar; Zosimus supplies material to suit all modern interpretive preferences. Fanciers of economic causes encounter the spoliation of great fortunes and the imposition by Constantine and Theodosius of new and vexatious tributes on every class, together with unfair and merciless collection.<sup>14</sup> Those tending toward administrative causes are offered the proliferation of praetorian prefects, generals, and their subordinates.<sup>15</sup> Military causes are represented by the relaxation of discipline, cantonment in cities, and the exclusion of pagans from the ranks.<sup>16</sup> The ferocity of Constantine toward his family, the licentious self-indulgence of Theodosius, and the nullity of Arcadius and Honorius constitute suitable personal failings.<sup>17</sup> Partisans of external causes will specially note Zosimus' references to the barbarians, whom imperial indulgence allowed to flood the army and to espy the languishing corpse of the empire they were supposed to defend.<sup>18</sup> Finally, there are religious causes in the form of Christian monks whose greed impoverished everyone in the name of poverty and, most of all, the abandonment of the ancient divinities and rites that had protected the Roman state.<sup>19</sup> Reitemeier discerned such a close correspondence between Zosimus and the moderns that he called on the ancient witness to correct his emulators. Zosimus, he pointed out, did not criticize Constantine for dissolving the praetorian guard; nor did he confirm "what is commonly believed [at present] . . . namely that the precepts of Christian religion had the effect of debilitating the martial spirit."<sup>20</sup> Fourteen centuries of time, five centuries of research, have hardly altered the pattern of decline offered by Zosimus; only the mix is somewhat different, the data somewhat more ac-

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presented as examples of men preferring public to private advantage. Berthold Rubin (*Das Zeitalter Justinians* [Berlin, 1960], 1: 165) is surprised that in 537 *Novel*. 62, *praefatio*, Justinian recalls "without misgivings" the Republican greatness of the Senate.

<sup>14</sup> Zosimus 2. 38; 4. 28-29, 32. 2-3, 40. 7-8, 59. 2-3; 5. 1, 12. The more important modern economic interpretations are discussed by Santo Mazzarino, *The End of the Ancient World*, tr. George Holmes (New York, 1966), 136-59.

<sup>15</sup> Zosimus 2. 32-33; 4. 27. Compare G. R. Monks, "The Administration of the Privy Purse: An Inquiry into Official Corruption and the Fall of the Roman Empire," *Speculum*, 32 (1957): 748-79.

<sup>16</sup> Zosimus 2. 33-34; 4. 23. 1-2, 27. 2-3; 5. 46. 3-4. Compare Ramsay MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963).

<sup>17</sup> Zosimus 2. 29, 39; 4. 28, 33, 43. 2, 44. 1, 50; 5. 1. 1-3, 24. Compare Jakob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, tr. Moses Hadas (London, 1949), 260-333, *passim*, on Constantine, and André Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien* (Paris, 1947), 208-21, 248-53, on Theodosius. The personal element was stressed in the widely circulated works of Victor Duruy (*Histoire romaine* [Paris, 1848; 21st ed., Paris, 1909]; *Histoire des Romains* [new ed., Paris, 1877-85]). Duruy is quoted and energetically refuted by Ferdinand Lot, *La fin du monde antique et le début du moyen âge* (rev. ed.; Paris, 1951), 197-98.

<sup>18</sup> Zosimus 4. 26, 30, 31, 34. 1-5, 39. 4-5, 40, 56; compare the conclusions of Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien*; A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602* (Oxford, 1964), 1027-31; and J. J. Saunders, "The Debate on the Fall of Rome," *History*, 48 (1963): 14-17.

<sup>19</sup> Zosimus 5. 23. 4-5; 2. 7, 29; 4. 18, 33. 4, 37. 3, 59; 5. 5. 8-5. 6. 2. For a summation of the modern form of the argument, see A. Momigliano, "Introduction. Christianity and the Decline of the Roman Empire," in *Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963), 6-16.

<sup>20</sup> "Disquisitio in Zosimo," xxiii-xxiv.

curate. The one noteworthy addition is a negative portrayal of the Roman third century, something that Zosimus could not quite see.<sup>21</sup>

The fundamental cause invoked by Zosimus—the abandonment of the ancient gods—is what draws him closest to almost every later author who has practiced his genre of Roman imperial history. Was Zosimus personally a devotee of the pagan gods? The Church historian Evagrius thought so, and so has everyone else. Probably he was, but his paganism had much in common with dourly austere Christianity.<sup>22</sup> His opinions proceeded not from emotional attachment to the gods but from principle: piety; reverence for ancient, hallowed things; a conservatism that is blind to its inconsistencies, like that of a modern atheist who reveres the age when everyone attended church. Austere philosophic paganism, “the religion of culture,” was a common trait among fourth-century defenders of the old gods; but they still had some taste and feeling for temples, rituals, festivals, and what went with them. These emotional ties are what made paganism still seem a dangerous menace to such a bishop as St. Augustine, who daily combatted the ingrained habits of his flock.<sup>23</sup> Zosimus was beyond all this. He did not miss the ancient gods.

<sup>21</sup> Compare W. E. Kaegi, Jr., *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (Princeton, 1968), 108–10. There is no trace in Zosimus' first book of the contrast—stressed by modern historians—between the periods before and after the accession of Commodus (180) or the death of Severus Alexander (235). For a categorical statement of this contrast in a popular work, see Denys Hay, *The Medieval Centuries* (London, 1964), 4: “In fact the Romans of the third century deluded themselves. The outward structure of their society was to some extent preserved, its inward spirit was already dead.” World War I may have led modern historians to take a particularly negative view of the third century. See Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Ruin of Ancient Civilization and the Triumph of Christianity*, tr. E. Whitehead (New York, 1921). In Max Cary's widely used *History of Rome* (London, 1935) and Michael Rostovtzeff's *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1926), the “end of Rome” appears to take place in the third century. For a current discussion, see Joseph Vogt, *The Decline of Rome*, tr. Janet Sondheimer (London, 1967), 11–86; but compare Michael Grant, *The Climax of Rome* (London, 1968), where an original attempt is made to revise the traditional negative interpretation.

<sup>22</sup> Evagrius qualified Zosimus as “this follower of foul Hellenism” (*Historia ecclesiastica* 3. 40, tr. anon., in *A History of the Church by Theodoret of Cyrus and Evagrius* [London, 1854], 379). Averil Cameron, “Christianity and Tradition in the Historiography of the Late Empire,” *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 14 (1964): 316–28, “The ‘Scepticism’ of Procopius,” *Historia*, 15 (1966): 466–82, and *Agathias* (Oxford, 1970), 89–111. Mrs. Cameron warns of the extent to which literary convention, forcing secular historians to treat Christianity remotely if at all, has led to misinterpretation of the religious beliefs of certain authors. Two apparent inadvertences, which sound odd in a professed pagan, are indicative that Zosimus breathed the atmosphere of a thoroughly Christian world (Zosimus 5. 18. 7 and 19. 5). It would be most unsuitable to regard these lines as Christian interpolations. Moreover, Zosimus' attitude toward the mime would have done honor to a bishop; see Augustine *De civit. dei* 1. 30–32, 2. 8, 4. 26, and below, nn. 53–55. Zosimus expressed no other interest in pagan rituals than that they should have been eternally performed. But the conclusion of Evagrius can scarcely be doubted. The special reverence of Zosimus for Athens (4. 18, 5. 5. 8–5. 6. 2) suggests a relationship between him and the intransigent Neoplatonism taught in that city; see Cameron, *Agathias*, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Bidez (*La Vie de l'empereur Julien* [Paris, 1930], 69) writes that Neoplatonism “croyait réhabiliter le passé: en réalité, cherchant à le moderniser, elle contribuait à l'abolir . . . En fait, cette philosophie antichrétienne fut plus pareille à la foi nouvelle qu'elle attaqua, qu'à la religiosité ancienne qu'elle défendait.” For “the religion of culture,” see H.-I. Marrou, “Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism,” in *Conflict*, 143. But fourth-century paganism was not only this; see Bidez, *La Vie*, 57–62, 67–89; Herbert Bloch, “The Pagan Revival in the West at the End of the Fourth Century,” in *Conflict*, 202–06 (on Roman aristocrats); Marrou, “Synesius,” 143–45; and P. R. Foerster and Carl Münscher, “Libanios,” in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, vol. 12 (Stuttgart, 1925), cols. 2535–37. On Augustine and paganism,

Instead, he castigated the innovation that consisted in abandoning the gods. Their abandonment summed up to him the multitude of innovations—from the establishment of the Empire by Augustus to Theodosius' creation of five *magistri militum*—that were responsible for bringing about the desolation he saw about him. Far from being a pagan votary, Zosimus invoked the worship of the gods chiefly as a symbol of the secret of empire. Empire, like religion, is a ritual with unchanging forms; religious repetition of the ritual assures eternity to the performers or, tautologically, to the performance. Faithlessly, the Romans departed from ritual; they innovated, and disaster ensued. This is the message of Zosimus.<sup>24</sup> It is also the message of any number of modern historians whose explanations of Rome's fall have stressed how the Romans, in this instance and that, departed from older, wiser, better ways of doing things—metaphorically, from the worship of the ancient gods.<sup>25</sup>

Zosimus is gaining in prominence. He occupies a place of honor in Santo Mazzarino's historiographical study, *The End of the Ancient World*, which emphasizes the contribution made by his *Recent History* to the modern elaboration of the problem of Rome's fall; its praise of Julian and disparagement of Constantine inspired Johannes Löwenclav, in his *Apology for Zosimus*, to raise the possibility that the first Christian emperor might be represented otherwise than in a laudatory way.<sup>26</sup> Another recent event in Zosimus studies has been the translation of the *Recent History* into English—for the third time, to be sure, but with greater guarantees than before of technical competence.<sup>27</sup> Zosimus also holds the center of the stage in a monograph on *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, in which he is regarded as representing the climax in the historical apologetics of paganism against Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

see F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, tr. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London, 1961), 29–75.

<sup>24</sup> See Zosimus 2. 7. 1: "As long as the above was performed precisely . . . the Romans kept their Empire . . . but, the rites having been neglected . . . the Empire gradually ebbed . . ." (Buchanan-Davis, 53). In Zosimus 4. 36, Gratian's refusal of the high priesthood is given as cause for his disastrous end. See also 4. 59. 3: "as other things which had been handed down from ancestral times lay neglected, the Empire of the Romans was gradually diminished . . ." (Buchanan-Davis, 192).

<sup>25</sup> Typical parallels are the good constitution of the Principate contrasted to the bad Dominate, the good laissez-faire economics of the early Empire contrasted to the bad *dirigisme* of the later Empire. For a recent example, see Ramsay MacMullen (*Enemies of the Roman Order* [Cambridge, Mass., 1966], viii–ix): "In the end, the dichotomy on which this book rests breaks down. There was little 'Roman' left in the Roman empire. Rather, the 'un-Roman' elements had come to the fore. . . ." Zosimus also rested his history on a dichotomy.

<sup>26</sup> Mazzarino, *End of the Ancient World*, 63–65, 92–99. Mazzarino is more interested in Löwenclav than in Zosimus, whom he calls an obstinate defender of "old forgotten things" and "not a really great historian" (p. 65).

<sup>27</sup> Buchanan and Davis were unaware of the 1814 translation; even that of 1684 is mentioned only on the dust jacket. An improved translation of Zosimus with a thorough commentary, as yet unpublished, has been prepared by Ronald T. Ridley of the University of Melbourne, Australia; an extensive article by Mr. Ridley on "Zosimus the Historian," based on his commentary, is forthcoming in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*. I am much obliged to Mr. Ridley for allowing me to consult his translation and for informing me of his work.

<sup>28</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 99–145. Other recent work on Zosimus includes D. C. Scavone, "Zosimus and His Historical Models," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 11 (1970): 57–67, and the study by Alan Cameron cited below, n.38.

Welcome as these publications are, they hardly make up for the decades in which Zosimus has been neglected. He is scarcely known except to the experts and seldom mentioned by them except in technical discussions of fourth-century history.<sup>29</sup> To substitute "Zosimus' problem" for "Gibbon's" would evoke blank stares. He presents us with the odd case of an author about whom research today is backward by comparison with its state at the beginning of the century. The value and interest of Zosimus for the history of his time and for the general problem of Rome's fall deserve to be more adequately grasped.

We know nothing more of Zosimus than the official rank he bears in the title of the *Recent History* and the pagan sympathies he displays in its pages. The work itself, which descends from a unique manuscript,<sup>30</sup> was apparently interrupted by his death. Book 6 ends abruptly after a few pages, carrying the story only to the eve of the sack of Rome by Alaric, although the author repeatedly says he will continue to his own time. The premature break might have been deliberate; the end point is a significant moment for a sensitive man to drop his pen, too overcome by what he is about to relate to continue. But Zosimus does not tell us this, and his final book shows the rough edges that one associates with a first, unpolished draft. The hypothesis that he died while writing is highly probable.<sup>31</sup> It was once thought that Christian scribes or editors had tampered with his text, but the presence of many passages potentially offensive to Christians disproves such an idea.<sup>32</sup> That

<sup>29</sup> It is noteworthy that Zosimus goes wholly unnoticed in Franz Dölger, "Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner," in *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt* (Ettal, 1953), 70–115. The article was first published in 1937.

<sup>30</sup> For lists of MSS and editions, see Mendelssohn, *Zosimi Historia nova*, xix–xxvii; Guyla Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. 1 (2d ed.; Berlin, 1958), 577; and J. J. M. Decroix, "Zosime," in *Biographie universelle*, vol. 55 (Paris, 1828), 470–73. Decroix gives editions only. Is there a Slavic translation of Zosimus? So one would think from reading the listing of the *codices slavici* in Bernard de Montfaucon's repertory of the Coislin collection, now in Paris (*Bibliotheca bibliothecarum manuscriptorum* [Paris, 1739], 2: 1042). Since a translation into Old Slavonic would probably derive from another Greek exemplar than that of the Vatican, with its lacunae, the existence of such a text is an exciting possibility. It seems, however, that Montfaucon made a mistake. The codex he lists has the same contents as the Greek MS now classified as Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Coislin 150 (see Robert Devreesse, *Le Fonds Coislin* [Paris, 1945], 136–37, vol. 2 of *Catalogue des mss. grecs*); no corresponding text exists among the Paris Slavonic MSS (letter of June 18, 1969, from Marcel Thomas, in response to my inquiry).

<sup>31</sup> Ernst Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1949), 707; Mendelssohn (*Zosimi Historia nova*, 288 n. to line 21, vii–viii) stresses the careless assembling of the book and argues that it must have been written in a short time. Reitemeier (*Zosimi Historiae*, xxi) entertains the idea that the balance of book 6 was lost in transmission. That the *History* as known to Evagrius and Photius ended where ours does makes this highly unlikely.

<sup>32</sup> Photius *Bibliotheca*, cod. 98 (ed. René Henry, vol. 2 [Paris, 1960]), 65–66. Those who endorse a Christian revision include Henry, 66 n.2; Condurachi, "Idées politiques," 118 (citing Croiset, *Littérature grecque*); and Emilienne Demougéot, *De l'unité à la division de l'Empire romain* (Paris, 1951), 575. The error of Photius was to suppose that "new" in the title meant "new edition"; he was drawing a parallel with the *History* of Eunapius, on which see W. R. Chalmers ("The *nea ekdosis* of Eunapius' Histories," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 3 [1953]: 165–70), who argues that Eunapius personally issued a second edition and that no Christians expurgated his work.

the *History* escaped being the victim of Christian bigotry is less surprising than that the troubled circumstances of its composition allowed it to survive at all. Obviously, Zosimus had friends and an audience, who cared enough for him and what he wrote to publish his *Nachlass* in spite of the imperfect state in which he left it. That in itself is not uninteresting.

Zosimus depended closely on literary sources. The outstanding illustration is his treatment of Stilicho. While his first pages are fiercely hostile, the account of Stilicho's execution is followed by a thoroughly favorable judgment upon the man.<sup>33</sup> The explanation for the discrepancy is that Zosimus came to the end of the *History* of Eunapius and turned to that of Olympiodorus without doing anything to efface the glaring contrast in their respective views of Stilicho.<sup>34</sup> In assessing Zosimus, Photius went so far as to say that he did not write a history so much as a transcription of Eunapius, from whom he differed only in concision. Photius had the advantage we lack of knowing Eunapius in full, and, although his opinion is not scientific *Quellenforschung*, it attests to the impression made by the *Recent History* upon a reader of Eunapius: Photius felt he had seen it all already.<sup>35</sup> His appraisal should be a continuous warning against our ascribing particular views to Zosimus unless we have specific reasons to suppose they are his own. On the other hand, Zosimus is more assertive than Photius allows. He frequently steps out from behind his sources to draw attention to some deplorable thing or another, such as the closing of the temples in Oriens and Egypt: "What befell the Roman Empire as a result from that time until this will be shown subsequently, item by item, in my narrative of events" (4. 38. 1).<sup>36</sup> In such passages, we know whom we are dealing with. But even this is only a beginning to an analysis that must be painstakingly conducted by someone qualified to do so; Zosimus should be carefully disentangled from his sources.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The result is that Pierre Courcelle (*Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* [Paris, 1948], 30 n.1 [on p. 217]) calls Zosimus a great admirer of Stilicho, whereas Wilhelm Christ, Wilhelm Schmid, and Otto Stählin (*Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur* [Munich, 1924], 1038) assert that Zosimus hated him. Kaegi (*Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 119, 122, 127-28) also disregards the problem of sources.

<sup>34</sup> Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: 707, explains the contradiction and calls it the most flagrant weakness of the *Recent History*, an "unforgivable piece of negligence," unless one recalls that the work remained a draft rather than a finished edition.

<sup>35</sup> Photius *Bibliotheca*, cod. 98. Mendelssohn (*Zosimi Historia nova*, xiv)—followed by Buchanan-Davis, ix-x—deprecated the comment of Photius and stressed the use of other sources in addition to Eunapius. But B. Rappaport ("Hat Zosimus 1, c. 1-46 die Chronik des Dexippus benutzt," *Klio: Beiträge zur alten Geschichte*, 1 [1901]: 427-42) and W. R. Chalmers ("Eunapius, Ammianus Marcellinus, and Zosimus on Julian's Persian Expedition," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 10 [1960]: 155-56) suggest that Mendelssohn was hypercritical.

<sup>36</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 170. For a demonstration of more subtle originality in Zosimus vis-à-vis Olympiodorus, see Guilhem de Sainte-Croix, "Observations sur Zosime," *Académie des Inscriptions, Histoire*, 49 (1808): 497. The paper was delivered in 1792.

<sup>37</sup> J. Rosenstein, "Kritische Untersuchungen über das Verhältniss zwischen Olympiodor, Zosimus und Sozomenos," *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte*, 1 (1862): 165-204; F. Graebner, "Eine Zosimosquelle," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 14 [1905]: 87-159 (so excessively subtle that he denies Zosimus' use of Eunapius); W. Haedicke, "Olympiodorus von Theben," in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, vol. 18, pt. 1 (Stuttgart, 1939), cols. 201-07; E. A. Thompson, "Olympiodorus of Thebes," *Classical Quarterly*, 38 (1944): 43-52; A. F. Norman, "Magnus in Ammianus, Eunapius, and Zosimus: New Evidence," *ibid.*, n.s. 7 (1957): 129-33; and L. Dillemann, "Ammien

When was the *Recent History* written? The casual researcher will get just about the right answer if he consults the repertory of Moravcsik or Stein's *Histoire du Bas-Empire*.<sup>38</sup> If he looks almost anywhere else, he will be misinformed. The new English translation offers the vague termini 450–503.<sup>39</sup> A special study of Zosimus suggests “toward the middle of the fifth century,” and so does a repertory of Byzantine historians (1956).<sup>40</sup> The broader consensus is that Zosimus belongs to the second half of the fifth century. This approximation, which errs by a generation, is widely repeated and seems to meet with general approval.<sup>41</sup>

The confusion is of long standing. Gibbon assigned Zosimus to the generation following Ammianus, that is, to the reign of Theodosius II (408–50). Wittingly or not, he repeated the error of Evagrius (ca. 590), who supposed that Zosimus wrote immediately after the last events he recorded.<sup>42</sup> Evagrius could not know better, but Gibbon could, since Valesius and Tillemont, with whose works he was familiar, had already established that Zosimus lived long after 410.<sup>43</sup> The problem was complicated by the question, first raised by Valesius, whether the historian should be identified with one of the Zosimi listed in the *Souda*, s.v. “Zosimus of Gaza or Ascalon,” the first of whom was put to death in 489, while the second lived under the emperor Anastasius (491–518).<sup>44</sup> Mendelssohn came close to a solution, which

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Marcellin et les pays de l'Euphrate et du Tigre,” *Syria*, 38 (1961): 87–158. See also studies cited above, n.34, and in Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 1: 578–79.

<sup>38</sup> Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 1: 577 (a different date was given in the 1st ed.; Budapest, 1942); Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: 707, 708 n.1. See also Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien*, vii. My study went to press before I had seen Alan Cameron, “The Date of Zosimus' New History,” *Philologus*, 113 (1969): 106–10. I endorse Cameron's results except as noted below in nn.49 and 53.

<sup>39</sup> Buchanan-Davis, viii–ix, following Mendelssohn, for whose view see also p. 421 below.

<sup>40</sup> Condurachi, “Idées politiques,” 116 (citing Evagrius, as below, n.42); M. E. Colonna, *Gli storici bizantini dal IV al XV secolo*, vol. 1: *Storici profani* (Naples, [1956]), 142; and Glanville Downey, “The Perspective of the Early Church Historians,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 6 (1965): 68. Harold Mattingly, in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1949), 968, dates the *Recent History* to the reign of Theodosius II (408–50), as do Naphthali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization. Sourcebook*, vol. 2: *The Empire* (New York, 1955), 475 n.116. The *History* was written in the late fourth or early fifth century, according to Léon Feugère, “Zosime,” *Le Correspondant*, 36 (1855): 922–23; and Rubin, *Zeitalter Justinians*, 27, turns Zosimus into a contemporary of Theodosius I.

<sup>41</sup> Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division*, 575, states flatly “entre 450 et 480,” citing no authority, but perhaps from Thomas Hodgkin, *Italy and Her Invaders*, vol. 1 (2d ed.; Oxford, 1892), 234; the same by Gilbert Dagron, “L'empire romain d'Orient au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle et les traditions politiques de l'hellénisme,” *Travaux et mémoires*, 3 (1968): 76 n.244. Most other authors follow the termini 450–502 laid down by Mendelssohn.

<sup>42</sup> Evagrius 3. 41, in *History of the Church*, 380–81. Gibbon (*Decline and Fall*, ed. Bury, 3: 207 n.71) says that Zosimus “reviles . . . even the father of his sovereign,” i.e., Arcadius, who died in 408. Bury, 2: 538, corrects Gibbon's dating in line with Mendelssohn.

<sup>43</sup> Henri de Valois (Valesius), *Theodoret, ep. Cyri, et Evagrii scholastici Historia ecclesiastica* (Amsterdam ed., 1695), “Annotations,” 96–97 (to p. 372 of the text); Le Nain de Tillemont, *Histoire des empereurs*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1738), 594–96. Tillemont improved on de Valois, whose reasoning was sharply criticized by Reitemeier, *Zosimi Historiae*, xvi–xvii.

<sup>44</sup> Mendelssohn, *Zosimi Historia nova*, xi–xii, inaccurately reproduced by Buchanan-Davis, viii. Colonna, *Storici bizantini*, 142, still considers the identification with Zosimus of Gaza very likely. Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: 708 n.1, endorsed Mendelssohn. Since our Zosimus lived later than Zeno, he cannot be Zosimus of Gaza (Tillemont did not altogether trust the report of his execution); the surviving work of Zosimus of Ascalon bears no resemblance to that of the historian.

he saw as hinging upon two things: first, the passage in which Zosimus reports that Constantine imposed three unjust taxes, namely the *folllis senatorius*, the praetorship, and the *auri lustralis collatio*, and mentions them as though they were no longer in existence (2. 38); secondly, the use of Zosimus by Eustatius of Epiphania, a historian of the early sixth century. Mendelssohn's understanding that the *History* of Eustatius was published in 502 made him shrink from the conclusion that Zosimus wrote only after the last of the three taxes was abolished. He contented himself with the rather broad termini 450 (abolition of the *folllis* and the praetorship) and 502 (publication of Eustatius' *History*).<sup>45</sup> But this could hardly be mistaken for a final statement.

The solution was supplied shortly afterward by Rühl and Mommsen, who showed that the *terminus ante quem* of 502 did not apply. The *History* of Eustatius comes to an end in 502 but was not published in that year; its publication probably occurred in the reign of Justin I, that is, after 518. The plain implication of Zosimus 2. 38, which Mendelssohn had thought it impossible to accept, may then become the principal base line for dating the *Recent History*. Anastasius abolished the *auri lustralis collatio* in 498; Zosimus presupposes its abolition and, as Mommsen remarked, he does not allude to the event as though it were the latest news. As a result, the writing of the *History* almost certainly took place in the early sixth century, between 498 and 518.<sup>46</sup>

The limits may be narrowed further. Another contemporary touch in Zosimus suggests a relation with the disappointing Persian War of Anastasius (502–07). Like the earlier historians Eutropius, Ammianus, and Eunapius (the last of whom is almost certainly the direct source),<sup>47</sup> Zosimus paused at the peace of Jovian (363) to make some general observations:

When I had reached this point in the history it occurred to me to revert to former times and to ascertain whether the Romans had ever consented to delivering over to the other side any acquisition of theirs, or, generally speaking, had permitted the other side to hold anything whatever of theirs, once it had come under their sovereignty. [Various incidents are related.] . . . [N]ot even then did [Valerian] grant the Persians freedom to appropriate these regions, for the loss of which the Emperor Julian's death alone sufficed. And, indeed, until this day the Roman Emperors have been unable to recover any of them, but have gradually lost even more peoples besides, some becoming autonomous, others

<sup>45</sup> Ludwig Mendelssohn ("De Zosimi aetate disputatio," *Rheinisches Museum*, 42 [1887]: 525–30) reprints the corresponding section (pp. v–xii) of the introduction to his edition.

<sup>46</sup> Franz Rühl, "Wan schrieb Zosimos?," *Rheinisches Museum*, 46 (1891): 146–47; Theodor Mommsen, "Zosimus," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 12 (1903): 533 (unaware of Rühl's article). As Stein points out, the exact date of the abolition of the *collatio lustralis* was only established in 1904. *Bas-Empire*, 2: 708, n.1.

<sup>47</sup> Eutropius, *Breviarium* 10. 17. 1–2; Ammianus 25. 9. 9–11. The corresponding part of Eunapius is lost; on the latter as Zosimus' source, see Norman, "Magnus . . . New Evidence," and Chalmers, "Julian's Persian Expedition." It is curious that discussions on interdependence among the historians of Julian's Persian War never extend to this point. For a different view of the event, see Augustine, *De civit. dei* 5. 21, 29, and especially 4. 29, with its polemic against the pro-Julian, anti-Christian interpretation.

surrendering to barbarians, while yet others [were] reduced to utter desolation. As our history progresses these matters will be pointed out in due course (3. 32. 1).<sup>48</sup>

Eunapius launched Zosimus into this gloomy (and inaccurate) meditation, but Zosimus himself brought it to a close with the characteristic promise to carry the story down to his own days. His assessment of contemporary conditions in the East may well have been colored by current events. The war that broke out with Persia in 502, after two generations of peace, began with a series of disasters, notably the loss of the city of Amida. The effects were intensified by the natural calamities—locusts, crop failure, famine, and pestilence—that had preceded its outbreak. In spite of costly preparations, the generals of Anastasius accomplished little more in the next years than to prevent a further deterioration of the situation.<sup>49</sup> It would not be surprising if Zosimus wrote in the midst of war, which recalled the peace of Jovian to other historians than himself.<sup>50</sup>

The contemporary touches in Zosimus' *History* are a valuable resource. In May 502 Anastasius abolished representations of the mine, regarded as a depraved spectacle.<sup>51</sup> The subject does not go unnoticed in the *Recent History*, for Zosimus identified paganism, that is, the traditional culture, with the utmost puritanism. The first step toward disaster for Rome, he tells us, was the passage from Republic to Empire. The reasons given for this judgment are chiefly that a single man, even if zealous, cannot look after everything, so that affairs are bound to deteriorate: "Indeed, that these results are the case experience of events has clearly shown in itself. These events began in Octavian's reign, when the pantomimes' dance was introduced for the first time . . . as well as other things which have been responsible for much mischief right up to the present" (1. 6. 1).<sup>52</sup> To us, the illustration is sur-

<sup>48</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 130–32.

<sup>49</sup> Joshua the Stylite *Chronicle* (ed. and tr. William Wright [Cambridge, 1882]), an admirable piece of history, is virtually a monograph on this war. Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: 92–101. Since Byzantine affairs took a turn for the better in 504 and the peace treaty was satisfactory, the war looks minor from a distance. But contemporaneously it caused profound discouragement. Compare P. J. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek* (Washington, 1967), 111, and below, n.80. Admittedly, the passage quoted does not prove a chronological relation between the war and the writing of the *Recent History*; it allows only a conjecture. On the other hand, I disagree with Cameron, "Date of Zosimus' New History," 108, who infers from this passage that Zosimus wrote before the war. Zosimus' remarks seem entirely compatible with the conclusion that he wrote during the early, disastrous phase of the war, that is, up to 504.

<sup>50</sup> Joshua chs. 7–8 (ed. Wright), 7; John Lydus *De magistratibus populi Romani* 3. 52–53.

<sup>51</sup> Joshua ch. 46 (ed. Wright), 35–36. Also, *ibid.*, chs. 27, 30, 33, pp. 16, 20–21, 23, in which Joshua somberly notes the introduction at Edessa in 496 of a pagan festival with mimes. It is particularly interesting that in this matter, the pagan Zosimus shares the opinion of his Christian contemporary.

<sup>52</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 5. Rather than being referred to a theoretical "republicanism" (see above, n.13), Zosimus' radical doubts about the capacity of one man to fill so large an office as the emperors should be set in the context of contemporary doubts about the administrative capacities of individual men. For example, the key measure in Justinian's reorganization of Egypt in 538–39 (*Edict*. 13) consisted in stripping the Augustal prefect of his authority over the whole Egyptian diocese and confining him to a narrower competence, "For the mind of one man cannot be equal to so many cares. . . ." Additional evidence of the same kind is available and deserves to be collected.

prising, not to say laughable; but Zosimus brings home the point by twice associating Theodosius I, his chief villain, with "dancers totally depraved" (4. 33. 4, 50. 1) and ascribing Stilicho's inactivity to absorption with "ludicrous mimes" (5. 7. 2).<sup>53</sup> The mime was a live issue in this reign, and Zosimus felt bound to comment upon it. Its suppression came too late; the mischief had been done.

Zosimus is particularly striking in the ways he anticipates the treatise "On the Magistrates of the Roman State" by John Lydus, a much younger contemporary, whose literary activity falls late in the reign of Justinian.<sup>54</sup> Zosimus libels the first Christian emperor with the allegation that Constantine opened the way to the barbarians by withdrawing the troops from the frontiers and garrisoning them in cities (2. 34); Lydus, no pagan, tells a similar story in much more circumstantial terms.<sup>55</sup> The occasional glosses supplied by Zosimus to clarify the attributions or origins of various officials put us in mind of what Lydus would spin out at much greater length.<sup>56</sup> Like Zosimus, Lydus also thought that he could discern here and there where the mistakes had been made, when the rot had set in. A case in point was the abandonment of Latin. An oracle "delivered by Romulus" apparently said "that Fortune would desert the Romans when they forgot their native speech," and the prophecy was fulfilled when Cyrus of Egypt, who knew nothing but poetry, was elevated to the praetorian prefecture (439-41): "Thereupon he dared transgress the ancient practice and issue his decrees in the Greek language, and along with the Roman language the empire lost its fortune also."<sup>57</sup>

A whole book of Lydus' treatise is devoted to lamenting the gradual disintegration of the once mighty office of praetorian prefect, which Justinian, "our generous emperor, did not suffer to be completely snuffed out."<sup>58</sup> A half century earlier, similar thoughts had been in Zosimus' mind. In relating the administrative innovations of Constantine, he dwells at length upon the emperor's transformation of the collegiate praetorian prefecture into four

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-66, 183-84, 199. See also Priscus Frag. 20 (Ardaburius under Marcian); Lydus *De magistr.* 3. 53 (Areobindus in the Persian war of Anastasius); and Zosimus 5. 16. 5 (Leo) and 5. 25. 3 (Arbazacius). For a fuller discussion, see Cameron, "Date of Zosimus New History," 108-10. I disagree with Cameron's conclusion that Zosimus must "surely" have written prior to the ban of 502. It was not part of Zosimus' plan to celebrate the wise laws of his age; even the abolition of the *lustralis collatio* is only implied, not stated.

<sup>54</sup> Stein, "Remarques sur la chronologie de la carrière de Lydus et de son activité littéraire," in *Bas-Empire*, 2: 838-40. Lydus entered the prefecture in 511, but wrote in the 550s. I have not seen T. F. Carney's translation of the *De Magistratibus* (Sidney, Australia, 1965); a book on Lydus by Professor Carney, including this translation, is in press.

<sup>55</sup> Lydus *De magistr.* 2. 10, 3. 31, 33, 40. One of the striking traits of the treatise is that this story is repeated four times in almost identical words.

<sup>56</sup> Zosimus 2. 25, 43, 3. 29 (*magister officiorum*), 2. 39. 2 (*nobilissimi*), 2. 40. 2 (*patricius*), 5. 2. 2 (*comes Orientis*), 5. 32. 6 (*quaestor palatii*). The literary convention calling for such glosses is discussed in Cameron, *Agathias*, 76-79.

<sup>57</sup> Lydus *De magistr.* 3. 32, quoted in P. N. Ure, *Justinian and His Age* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1951), 119. On Cyrus as poet, see Alan Cameron, "Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt," *Historia*, 14 (1965): 473-74, 497-98; on Cyrus as an enormously popular prefect, see Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 80-81, and Rubin, *Zeitalter Justinians*, 32.

<sup>58</sup> Lydus *De magistr.* 3. 1.

regional prefectures and his institution of *magistri* as supreme generals, taking over the prefect's military attributions. He goes on:

In this way did he detract from the prefects' authority, thereby doing harm to the affairs of both peace and war, as I shall immediately explain. For while the prefects had exacted the revenues everywhere through their agents and paid for their military expenses out of these; and while they had had the soldiery under control, submitting to punishment for whatever seemed to them to be an offense; naturally the soldiers, realizing that he who supplied their provisions was also he who punished delinquents, would not dare do anything contrary to duty, out of fear partly that their rations would be cut off, and partly that they would be punished forthwith. But at the present time, with one man as paymaster and another as arbiter of discipline, the soldiers act as they please in all respects, and to boot the greater part of the provisions falls to the gain of the general and his agents (2. 33. 3).<sup>59</sup>

Regardless of whether Zosimus correctly reported the administrative reorganization of Constantine, the passage reflects the preoccupation of sixth-century Byzantium with understanding the relations between past measures and present problems. A parallel to his thinking appears in a Novel of Justinian instituting a new official, the praetor of Thrace (535):

We know that two men have their sees at the Long Wall and are both called vicars, the one commanding the military cohorts (for there are many in that place), the other supervising civil affairs; each one, moreover, bears a vicariate, the one of the most glorious prefects, the other of the very brave *magistri militum*. Neither, indeed, do they ever agree among themselves; but the fisc supplies a salary to each one and gives them the other rewards, while their one continual and unending business is to quarrel with each other eternally.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, the division of civil and military powers, exemplified here by the vicar of the prefect and that of the *magistri* in Thrace, was a source of sterile bickering. Justinian abolished the two offices and replaced them with a single official with combined functions, as he also did elsewhere.<sup>61</sup> What bearing such reforms had upon Zosimus is sufficiently clear. The sort of administrative problems remedied by Justinian were already being discussed in the time of Anastasius, and seen then, at least by one historian, as resulting from the errors of Constantine.

There is more than pedantic concern with accuracy in insisting that Zosimus be assigned his correct date, for the value of the *Recent History* is scarcely exhausted when it has been mined for information on the third and fourth centuries. The subject matter of his narrative and its terminal date, along with the tendency to think of Zosimus as a pagan die-hard, reminiscent of Libanius and Symmachus, have all contributed to obscuring the great distance

<sup>59</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 75-76.

<sup>60</sup> *Novel*. 26, *praefatio*, Rudolf Schoell and Wilhelm Kroll, eds., *Corpus iuris civilis* (6th ed.; Berlin, 1954), 3: 203; compare Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 280; and Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: 466. Stein is struck by the presence of humor in this law.

<sup>61</sup> Notably the laws of 535-36, *Novel*. 24-31; see Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: 463-75; and Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 278-83.

between him and the age about which he wrote. How alien he was to his subject matter is touchingly illustrated by the following passage: "Indeed Constantine, wishing to contrive something really painful for the men of conspicuous wealth, would name each to the office of praetor and, using this honor as a blind, would dun each of a great weight of silver" (2. 38. 3).<sup>62</sup> Throughout classical antiquity, and well after Constantine, men of wealth had willingly shouldered the expensive burdens of the state, regarding their public generosity as just compensation for their unequal share of the riches of the community. The honor of a magistracy went hand in hand with its heavy cost. A whole structure of law had grown up to institutionalize these practices and surround them with necessary safeguards.<sup>63</sup> As late as 401 Symmachus would disburse two thousand pounds of gold to celebrate his son's praetorship and pester all sorts of people about the animals needed to make his games memorable, without its occurring to him that the burden was an unjust tax on his wealth.<sup>64</sup> A continuous line led back from Symmachus to Marcus Crassus and his remark that a truly rich man should be able to maintain an army out of his private resources, and further still to the *choregoi* and gymnasiarchs of ancient Athens.<sup>65</sup> All this was hidden from Zosimus.

<sup>62</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 79. The same style of history appears in certain Novels of Justinian, for example, 536 *Novel*. 38, *praefatio*, on the origins of municipal *curiae*: "Those who formerly established our state decided, in imitation of the royal city, to gather noble men in each city and to give a senate to each one, by which both public instruments might be drafted and everything might be done in a legal and orderly fashion." Similarly, in 537 *Novel*. 62, *praefatio*, the current role of the Senate is anachronistically projected into the whole imperial past.

<sup>63</sup> For a sketch of the system, see E. M. Steyermaier, "Programmes politiques à l'époque de la crise du III<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, 4 (1957-58): 313. On voluntary contributions as preferable to direct taxes, see A. M. Andreades, *A History of Greek Public Finance*, vol. 1, tr. C. N. Brown (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), 129-33. A. H. M. Jones (*The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* [Oxford, 1940], 166-69, 174-76, 179-80) is instructive but deprecates the practice. On legal regulation, see F. F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson, *Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire* (Princeton, 1926), 94-97; and Jones, *Greek City*, 179-91.

<sup>64</sup> Symmachus' total expenses are given in Olympiodorus Frag. 44; his correspondence on the subject is surveyed by J. A. McGeachy, *Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Aristocracy of the West* (Chicago, 1942), 101ff. Other contemporary examples of approval for these practices are Claudian *Paneg. Probino et Olybrio CC.* 42-54 and *De cons. Stilich.* 3. 223-25. The problem of the praetorship as seen by Symmachus, by the government (384 *CTh* 15. 9. 1), and by the *Scriptores historiae Augustae* (*Aurel.* 15. 4-6; *Carus* 20. 3-21. 1), was not imperial greed but the mutual rivalry that led to ever costlier displays; compare Ronald Syme, *Amianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford, 1968), 194-95. The antecedent of Zosimus' attitude should perhaps be sought in such measures as 452 *CJ* 12. 3. 2, which decrees that consuls are to stop showering money upon the crowds and instead contribute a lump sum to the maintenance of the aqueducts. Compare 537 *Novel*. 105, *praefatio*. An indication of the same trend is that, since the early fifth century (for example, 407 *CTh* 6. 26. 13, 416 *CTh* 6. 24. 8-9, and others), elevations to the Senate as a reward for meritorious service had included immunity from *senatoriae functiones*, such as the praetorship and the *foliis*.

<sup>65</sup> Plutarch *V. Crassi* 2. 7 (Crassus had a state army in mind, not a private retinue). For Roman practices under the Republic, see Matthias Gelzer, *The Roman Nobility*, tr. Robin Seager (Oxford, 1969), 18-27, 110-23. Gelzer sets the public obligations of the rich within the broader context of profit as well as expense. On Greece, see Andreades, *Public Finance*, 130-33, 291-94, 322-26, *passim*; W. S. Ferguson, *Hellenistic Athens* (London, 1911), 55-58, 99-100; Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf and Benedictus Niese, *Staat und Gesellschaft der Griechen und Römer* (Berlin-Leipzig, 1910), 109-111, 126. One of the curiosities in modern treatments of the subject has been the tendency to regard taxes with equanimity while strongly disapproving of the system of Greek "liturgies" and Roman *munera*, as though they could be qualitatively distinguished. See Willy Liebenam, *Städteverwaltung im römischen Kaiserreiche* (Leipzig, 1900),

Continuity had snapped: in the new age, public charges were simply taxes, in principle iniquitous, and rulers were supposed to live of their own.<sup>66</sup>

Zosimus had good sources about the third and fourth centuries, but he experienced that past only through his books, as though it were distant and hazy, which of course it was. We would not be surprised to encounter in his pages the sort of ridiculous anecdote about the Emperor Honorius that we later find in Procopius.<sup>67</sup> The same remoteness has already been observed in Zosimus' paganism. There is no regret for the deities themselves, only blame for the innovative act of abandoning their cult. The atmosphere is already reminiscent of the age of Justinian, and that is where the analogues to Zosimus are to be sought. Not his least value is as witness to his own age, which, while not that of Justinian, fell in the decades immediately preceding Justinian's accession.

At a distance of more than a millennium from the events, Gibbon sat on the steps of the Ara Coeli, gazing upon the ruins of Rome, and wondered how the fall had come about. By contrast, Zosimus sat in Constantinople, amidst the most physically visible achievement of the later Roman Empire, the city of Constantine, whose ascent as a seat of power, a fortress, and an emporium had been uninterrupted since its foundation. Yet Zosimus in his mind saw just what Gibbon saw, an empire fallen, lost not only in part or in the West, but departed, a thing of the past.<sup>68</sup> Even if Zosimus had borne witness only to this, his personal attitude to the world about him, he would have done enough to merit the gratitude of historians of Rome's fall.

How does a world empire fall? Or rather, how does a historian measure its passing? Zosimus thought he knew. One reviews the events and finds the follies and crimes that led to disaster. Justinian also thought he knew: his

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430; Ernst Kornemann, "Das Problem des Untergangs der antiken Welt," *Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, 12 (1922): 242-46; and Abbott and Johnson, *Municipal Administration*, 114-15. Steyerman, "Programmes politiques," offers an excellent corrective.

<sup>66</sup> See Evagrius 4. 30, on Justinian and his ambitious building program: this would have been a good work if only the emperor had carried it out with his own money. There remains to explain how, within a century, tradition could be so completely forgotten. For an important clue, see the outburst in 441 *NValent.* 10. 1. 3: "An forte contumeliosum putandum est inventum contra rationem nomen munerum sordidorum . . . per quae ad splendorem defensionis publicae pervenitur, prava appellatione censentur? . . . sine quibus nihil necessarii operis effici potest?"

<sup>67</sup> Procopius *B. Vandal.* 3. 2. 25-26. Even more startling is *ibid.* 3. 4. 29, where Aetius is said to have been murdered prior to Attila's devastation of "Europe." Compare the absurd definitions of Roman technical terms by Zosimus' contemporary, Hesychius of Miletus *Frag.* 2 (the *indictio* as a feast instituted by Augustus to celebrate the battle of Actium) and *Frag.* 3 (the Kalends, Nones, and Ides derive from the names of three rich men who, during a siege in the time of Antoninus, fed the people of Rome for fifteen, seven, and eight days respectively).

<sup>68</sup> Zosimus never says this in so many words, and his various statements on the decline of the Empire are not so categorical as to exclude the interpretation that he merely thought the Empire to be suffering grave misfortunes. Nevertheless, the implication of fallen empire follows directly from the Polybian frame of reference (*Zosimus* 1. 57. 1). To be sure, Rome existed before it became an empire, and so does New Rome exist after the Empire falls; but just as Polybius charted the acquisition of the imperial dimension, so does Zosimus chart its loss. The presupposition that the Empire or imperial dimension has disappeared is just as strong in Zosimus as in Gibbon, though not so self-evident to us.

predecessors had lost the empire “by their indolence.”<sup>69</sup> The “causes” for the fall of the empire had begun to be assembled. Doing so was an emphatic way to assert the accessibility of historical process to the powers of educated human reason. A recent author has observed that “in an age when the weight of ‘divine judgment’ already began to burden consciences, [Zosimus] affirmed the natural, human character of history, envisaged as an evolutionary process governed by objective laws.”<sup>70</sup> Empire ended because of the mistakes of human agents; ordinary common sense, drawing occasionally upon its knowledge of “objective laws,” could survey the events and grasp what errors had been made, thus establishing the rationality of what had happened. Whether this precisely describes the mentality of Zosimus is doubtful. He had a sense of the supernatural quality of empire and of the supernatural dimension of its loss; to him, although not to Justinian, the process of degradation was irreversible. Perhaps that is why he allowed his narrative of events to be as careless as it is. From the fifteenth century on, men with greater faith than Zosimus in the rationality of history would resume the task of probing the events in search of the soft spots, the follies, crimes, indolence that occasioned the fall of Rome’s empire. The work has gone on uninterruptedly since then.

Has study of the events proved a fruitful method for measuring the passing of the Empire? After experience as lengthy as ours, the answer must surely be negative. The events are better known now than they were to Zosimus, but, as suggested before, their arrangement into a widely acceptable *histoire raisonnée* of the fall of Rome shows little improvement over the first essay in the genre. When the last massive attempt to improve upon Zosimus or Gibbon—namely, that of Otto Seeck—was published, it was dismissed by Matthias Gelzer with the remark that, while “its technical utility is beyond question,” the “narrative and conception” are utterly tendentious.<sup>71</sup> By the 1920s, the events and institutions of the later Empire had made their point against the historians who professed to represent them as errors, follies, iniquities, and causes of decline and fall. Although the tradition of Zosimus and Gibbon has continued to be perpetuated in many derivative works, the scholars most intimately involved with the later Roman Empire have turned to writing of their subject in positive terms, no longer supposing that persons, institutions, and events are simply patches in an inexorable pattern; it was realized that doing justice to the events required abandoning the supposition that they

<sup>69</sup> 536 *Novel*, 30. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Zoe Petre, “La pensée historique de Zosime,” *Studi clasice*, 7 (1965): 271. She is alluding to what Mazzarino calls “The judgments of God as an historical category” (*End of the Ancient World*, ch. 4), as conceived by Augustine and others (she does not mention Eusebius). Of course, Zosimus cannot be contrasted to Augustine in this respect except by minimizing the importance he attaches to the abandonment of the ancient gods, a trait that Petre attempts to attribute chiefly to the influence of Eunapius (pp. 264–67).

<sup>71</sup> Matthias Gelzer, “Altertumswissenschaft und Spätantike,” *Historische Zeitschrift*, 135 (1927): 173–74 and n.1. This is altogether a remarkable article in pointing the way toward reassessment of late antiquity.

"led to" decline and fall.<sup>72</sup> The events are neutral or equivocal. Historians may draw upon them with equal success, and inconclusiveness, to support or to refute a pattern of decline.

The ambiguity of words being what it is, the end of an empire eludes one's grasp in a way that the bankruptcy and dissolution of a business enterprise do not. No superior court or financial newspaper assists at the termination of an empire's affairs; only the historian observes, and he is obliged to weigh ostensible change against unmistakable continuity. "The essence of empire is control," and a developed empire extends control in such a variety of directions that it presents the many-headed image of a hydra.<sup>73</sup> Changing patterns of artistic, literary, and religious taste; alterations in the institutions and personnel of government; the withdrawal of troops from a few provinces; the repeated sack of a city: none of these and the like add up in themselves to the end of empire. Since the life of a society is continuous at the level of events, since there have always been survivors, one may hardly fix the end of anything on a scale of happenings. From the perspective of a distant future, when events long past have a decisiveness proportional to their remoteness, nothing is so easy to proclaim as the end of an empire that, obviously, is no longer present. Rome's fall is an absolute certainty to the layman. The situation is altogether more difficult for the historian of the later Empire, who, somehow, in full awareness of discrete phenomena, has to pronounce on when, specifically, Rome's empire may be said to have ended. To him, the end of empire is a matter of time and accumulated changes, none of which is in itself terminal. Pressed to give a definite reply, the historian of today may say that the Roman Empire ended in 476 in the West and that it never ended in the East, short of 1453; but both answers are equally disputable and unsatisfactory, and so are the other definite answers.<sup>74</sup> Events have a continuous flow; it is not in them that so broad a question as the end of empire can possibly be found.

Yet empire does end, and it continues to be legitimate to ask how its end may be established and measured. Rather than in the events, an answer might be sought at the level that has just been mentioned: that of the layman to whom Rome's fall is most certain because the Empire surely does not exist

<sup>72</sup> Notably in the major works of synthesis, Stein's *Bas-Empire* (German ed. of vol. 1; Vienna, 1928); Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien*; and Jones, *Later Roman Empire*. A personal "conversion" to this point of view is documented by H. I. Marrou's *Retractatio* (Paris, 1949), a supplement to his *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938). From a different standpoint and indicating work that remains to be done is Fritz Schultz, *Principles of Roman Law*, tr. Marguerite Wolf (Oxford, 1936), 136-39, and *History of Roman Legal Science* (Oxford, 1946), 265-66.

<sup>73</sup> The quoted phrase appears, in different contexts, in A. P. Thornton, "Colonialism," *International Journal*, 17 (1961-62): 338, "Decolonisation," *ibid.*, 19 (1963-64): 22, and *Doctrines of Imperialism* (New York, 1965), 36. I am grateful to Professor Thornton for the third reference.

<sup>74</sup> K. F. Strohecker, "Um die Grenze zwischen Antike und abendländischen Mittelalter," *Saeculum*, 1 (1950): 433-65. See also Johannes Straub, "Die christliche Geschichtsapologetik in der Krisis des römischen Reiches," *Historia*, 1 (1950): 52-55 (with reference to Burckhardt); Léon Levillain, review of *Menschen die Geschichte machten*, P. R. Rohden and George Ostrogorsky, eds., *Le Moyen Âge*, 42 (1932): 154 (commenting on the then raging controversy inspired by the theses of Dopsch and Pirenne); and, on the East, Paul Lemerle, "La notion de décadence, à propos de l'empire byzantin," in *Classicisme et déclin culturel dans l'histoire de l'Islam*, ed. Robert Brunschwig and G. E. von Grunebaum (Paris, 1957), 263-72.

today. That awareness of empire lost, which is in the nature of a meditation upon the past and a sense of the observer's present, is the real source for the problem of Roman decadence. Accordingly, the passing of empire should be sought and measured in the minds of those whose notion of the events is perhaps indistinct but whose sense of their significance is clear as a conclusion that does not strictly depend on the evidence on which it is based. So considered, the end of empire—elusive and ambiguous as it is at the level of events—becomes a concrete datum of intellectual history. It happens or may be said to have happened when thoughtful men believe that it has and express this thought in terms that may be recognized as something other than momentary discouragement in the face of a local reverse.

This brings us back to Zosimus. For if the end of empire is measured by what people thought, then his affirmation that the Roman Empire had fallen acquires an importance that it has never been supposed to have. On the contrary, one of the major theses in recent historical writing about the later Empire is that the categories of decline and fall are alien to the eastern part of the Empire. Since at least the days of Ernst Stein, it has been maintained that *spät-römisch* is equivalent in the East to *frühbyzantinisch*; one flows into the other not only without breach of continuity but even as though the later situation were the desired, projected outcome of the earlier, as one might say that Constantine leads to Justinian.<sup>75</sup> Certain incidents of fifth-century history are marked as particularly crucial in bringing about this result, notably the anti-German movements at Constantinople under Arcadius (400–01) and Leo (471). The latter movement especially, which culminated in the destruction of the *magister militum* Aspar and his family, has been interpreted as saving the East from the fate suffered by Italy at the hands of the *magister militum* Odoacer, for Leo's successor Zeno and his Isaurians, although a fine lot of thieves, at least came from within the Empire.<sup>76</sup> In this perspective, the prudent, economical, and civilian reign of Zeno's successor Anastasius, who effected the "financial rehabilitation of the empire," takes on the warm colors of ancient values preserved from degradation.<sup>77</sup> Saved and consolidated in this way after decades of barbarian menace, Byzantium launched

<sup>75</sup> On Stein's periodization, see J.-R. Palanque, preface to Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: xi–xii, referring to an article of 1925; along the same lines, see George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, tr. Joan Hussey (Oxford, 1956), 26; for a strong and influential statement, see Norman Baynes, "The Decline of the Roman Power in Western Europe: Some Modern Explanations," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 33 (1943): 29–35. See also below, n.78.

<sup>76</sup> E. W. Brooks, "The Emperor Zenon and the Isaurians," *English Historical Review*, 8 (1893): 208–38; J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to the Death of Justinian* (London, 1923), 1: 126–35, 316–21, 389–402, 433. Bury wrote that the ascendancy of the Isaurians "had served the purpose of averting the far more serious peril of a German ascendancy, which might have brought upon the East the fate of Italy" (p. 433). Since the "fate" of Italy was the benevolent rule of Odoacer and Theodoric, one wonders why Germans were a "far more serious peril." Ostrogorsky (*Byzantine State*, 50–51, 56–58, 63) stresses the solution of Byzantium's "racial problems" as the condition for expansionism under Justinian.

<sup>77</sup> The quoted phrase is from Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 235. See also Bury, 1: 429–52; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, 59–62; and Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, 95–97. Alexander defends Anastasius against a very unflattering contemporary assessment of his financial policy (pp. 27–28). Modern approval of Anastasius is usually tempered by consideration of his not-so-wise religious policies.

into the adventures and achievements of the age of Justinian, which provide Byzantium with its greatest claim to being the lineal descendant of Rome's empire. This brief outline overdramatically sums up the current doctrine regarding the East. The idea that the Empire ended is relegated to the West alone.<sup>78</sup>

On the plane of ideas, Zosimus makes a shambles of such doctrine. To him, the reign of Anastasius was "the unhappy state that currently oppresses us" (2. 7. 2),<sup>79</sup> and he was by no means alone in thinking so. The moment seemed so far from encouraging that a Christian author was moved to write an apocalyptic prophecy, and Joshua the Stylite reported how he and his fellow Edessenes were within an inch of supposing, in 502, that the end of the world had come.<sup>80</sup> It need hardly be pointed out that these authors were not preoccupied with Western affairs or expressing dismay at the deposition of Romulus Augustulus. Zosimus' long chapters on the West stem from his sources, especially Olympiodorus, rather than from personal concern.<sup>81</sup> When adverting to a "devastated state of affairs," Zosimus had in mind the one he lived amidst, with its "excessively great city" populated by "an unnecessarily large throng gathering from all parts of the world," where "dwellings [are permitted] to be chockablock, so that the city's inhabitants . . . are pressed for space and proceed at risk owing to the plethora of men and animals" (2. 34-35)—not an empire but an island of survivors, piled up one on top of the other, in a sea of barbarism.<sup>82</sup> When St. Ambrose said, "We are in a declining age," and when St. Jerome said, "The Roman world is falling," they were alluding to the current misfortunes of a still subsisting empire; Ammianus, for all his brooding pessimism, had faith enough in the Empire to ridicule those "men ignorant of ancient records" (*antiquitatum ignari*) who reacted to every passing calamity as if it were the end of time.<sup>83</sup> At a

<sup>78</sup> See above, n.75. Montesquieu is apparently the originator of this thesis; see Saunders, "Debate," 4. It is the premise of Bury, 1: 308-309, as well as of Friedrich Vittinghof, "Der Übergang von der 'Antike' zum 'Mittelalter' und die Problematik des modernen Revolutionsbegriffes," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 9 (1958): 457-74. See also Marrou, *Retractatio*, 701 and n.2. Marrou suggests that the real problem for historians of "the fall" is to establish the differences between the *partes imperii* that account for their contrasting fates. Interestingly enough, this has not proved a fruitful line of investigation.

<sup>79</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 54. "State" should be understood in the sense of "condition."

<sup>80</sup> Alexander, *Oracle of Baalbek*, and "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources," *AHR*, 73 (1968): 999-1008. In the latter article, he indicates that, in addition to the work he edited, two more apocalypses were written at this time. See also Joshua ch. 49 (ed. Wright), 38. Another significant indicator of the contemporary mental climate is the surge of dualist (Marcionite and Manichaean) beliefs documented by Jacques Jarry, "Hérésies et factions à Constantinople du v<sup>e</sup> au vii<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Syria*, 37 (1960): 364-70.

<sup>81</sup> Compare the view of Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 113-14, 141-42, who refers Zosimus' pessimism to the West and overlooks that he makes exception for Constantinople only, not for the East in general.

<sup>82</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 77. Elsewhere in the chapter *strateia*, the equivalent of *militia*, is erroneously translated as "military service." The idea is "government service" of many kinds; compare, for example, Lydus *De Magistr.* 3. 28. In the same passage Zosimus disparages building in Constantinople on plots reclaimed from the sea, much as does Procopius *Anecd.* 8.

<sup>83</sup> Ambrose *Expos. in Lucam* 10. 10, quoted by Piganol, *L'Empire chrétien*, 169; Jerome *Epist.* 60. 16; Ammianus 31. 5. 11: "Falluntur malorum recentium stupore confixi." It is an interesting contrast between one age and another that Procopius does not hesitate to advertise the calamities of Justinian's reign as unequalled in world history (*Anecd.* 6. 19, 8. 30, 36-37).

century's distance from them, Zosimus regarded himself as inhabiting a successor state, in relation to which the Empire was a thing of the past. If we read the *Recent History* correctly, Anastasius was cast as the Eastern equivalent of Theodoric, Clovis, Thrasamund, and the other barbarian kings of the West.

What gives weight to the utterances of Zosimus is that those following him were hardly alien to his point of view. We have already encountered John Lydus suggesting that fortune abandoned the Empire once a praetorian prefect stopped using Latin. He deserves to be heard from again, as he juxtaposes gratitude toward the reigning emperor with melancholy consideration of the disasters falling upon his special world, the secretariat of the praetorian prefecture:

But time, being by nature destructive, has entirely stifled or to so great an extent altered the majority of the perquisites of the office-staff attending upon the prefect that what remains survives only as a faint trace of what was formerly admired. Although the [prefectoral] magistracy is secure in its own power, the office-staff is near the point of falling into total collapse, beset as it is at one time by upheavals from without and, at another, by negligence within—if God and this utterly noble emperor were not supporting it.<sup>84</sup>

Lydus' abstract terminology allows us, here as elsewhere, to envision the fate of the prefect's office as a microcosm of the fate of the Empire; the degradation of the *officium* mirrors that of the state—a state, as he tells us, heading rapidly toward utter ruin.<sup>85</sup> The idea he expresses is also found in the Novels of Justinian and in Procopius, and all three are almost identical to Zosimus, at least in their premises.<sup>86</sup> They affirm that their present is different from the old Empire and by far inferior to it; this is a statement of belief, for they have little sense of that old Empire or grasp of what it was. In the *Secret History* Procopius repeatedly accuses Justinian of causing the Empire to fall.<sup>87</sup> The allegation is of course absurd, since Anastasius and his predecessors may hardly be regarded as presiding over a golden age of felicity and power; probably no such implication is intended. Procopius counted on his

<sup>84</sup> Lydus *De magistr.* 3. 39. I am much indebted to my colleague, Professor Bernard Barman, for this translation. The very different rendering of Kaegi (*Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 212–13) illustrates the abstract terminology of the treatise. In Lydus' usage, the words Kaegi translates as "Empire" and "order" mean, respectively, "the magistrate (i.e., praetorian prefect)" and "the office-staff."

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 3. 76; see also 2. 5, 3. 43, 46, 54, 56. I find it difficult to accept the label of *naïve* *Jasager* that Rubin, *Zeitalter Justinians*, 168–71, pins upon Lydus. Lydus often approves and sounds consistently naïve—Stein, *Bas-Empire*, 2: 734, taxes him with "senile clumsiness and negligence"—but there are discernible undercurrents. It is suggestive that, though he wrote in the later 550s and specifically described a Syrian campaign of Chosroes (540), he chose to end the treatise, on a note of high but obviously disappointed hope, with the advent of Phocas to the prefecture (532)—a prefecture that lasted less than a year (compare the praise of Phocas by Procopius *Anecd.* 21. 6). Can one entertain the possibility that Lydus was crafty and ironical rather than naïve? The account of his own career, together with what Procopius says of men like him (*Anecd.* 24. 30–33), suggests that he too had reason to hate the regime.

<sup>86</sup> Lydus on the destructive effects of time echoes 535 *Novel.* 7. 2; 538 *Novel.* 69. 4. 1; 539 *Novel.* 84, *praefatio*. For the other thematic parallels, see nn. 87–88.

<sup>87</sup> *Anecd.* 6. 1, 25; 7. 1; 9. 1; 13. 39; 14. 19; 15. 17. Throughout the book Procopius appears to assume that all was well with the Empire until Justinian came along.

audience to agree that the present world was one of fallen empire; provided this premise were accepted—and Procopius hardly doubted that it would be—the audience would also be glad to be told who was responsible, what was the cause, for the currently lamentable state of affairs.

Perhaps Justinian himself is the best proof of all that Zosimus had voiced what was commonly believed. Justinian shared the premise of fallen empire. His allegation was that laziness was the cause—a charge that also occurs in Zosimus and, emphatically, in Lydus.<sup>88</sup> That humbled condition of the Empire was why the situation had to be retrieved. True religion, manifested by the repression of heterodoxy and unbelievers; the application of incessant personal labor by day and by night; collecting “formerly confused” laws and revising them; the exploitation of diplomatic advantage by military means—these and other remedies would bring back lost greatness. Where Zosimus had pointed to past errors, Justinian could point, after a few years, to present achievements:

For after the Parthian wars were abated with an eternal peace, after the Vandal people was put down, and Carthage, or rather all Lybia, was again joined to the Roman Empire, [Providence] also granted that the ancient laws, disfigured by age, should by our watchfulness attain new beauty and manageable size: something which no emperor before us had hoped [to do] or even considered at all possible for human skill [to accomplish].<sup>89</sup>

Although the achievements were real enough, it remained to be seen whether the industry of one emperor could offset the indolence of his predecessors. For was empire really a matter of events, lost by foolishness or negligence, and gained by wise actions? Trusting to God and his favor, Justinian came close to affirming that it was. With God’s help, the Empire was necessarily destined now to a greatness exceeding that of the old Romans. Such had been the Christian theory of progress elaborated by Eusebius and expressed by the other Church historians.<sup>90</sup> Elevated to the plane of action, it was also Justinian’s reply—the Christian reply, as he believed—to the conclusion that Zosi-

<sup>88</sup> 536 *Novel*. 30. 11 and 539 *Novel*. 80. 10; Zosimus 4. 50. 2 (about Theodosius I, perhaps from Eunapius Frag. 49); and Lydus *De magistr.* 2. 15, 3. 55 (former emperors), 2. 11 (sons of Theodosius I). In the passage of Lydus quoted at n.84, negligence or sloth (*rathumia*, the operative word in all these passages) and disasters are mentioned as perhaps a standard pattern of internal and external causation. Zosimus features the element of negligence, but using another word, in 1. 23. 1, 26, 28. 3, 73; 2. 49. 1; and 4. 28. On the legal aspect of Justinian and the Roman past, see K. H. Schindler, *Justinians Haltung zur Klassik* (Cologne-Graz, 1966), 6–11.

<sup>89</sup> 533 Const. *Tanta, praefatio*, in *Digesta* (Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krueger, eds. *Corpus iuris civilis*, vol. 1 [12th ed.; Berlin, 1911]), 13. In 535 *Novel*. 1, *praefatio*, the subjection of the Tzani is similarly celebrated as an unprecedented divine gift to the Roman state. See also 534 *CJ* 1. 27. 1. 5–6, celebrating the reconquest of Africa as an act of divine favor, a boon that was never merited by his predecessors, who not only were not allowed to liberate Africa but even saw Rome itself sacked by the Vandals.

<sup>90</sup> Its development is traced in T. E. Mommsen, “St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12 (1951): 356–63; and Michel Meslin, “Nationalisme, état et religions à la fin du iv<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Archives de sociologie des religions*, 18 (1964): 3–20. For the successors of Eusebius, see Downey, “Early Church Historians,” 57–70; and Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 176–206. See also R. A. Markus, “The Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography,” *Downside Review*, 81 (1963): 340–54.

mus had drawn from the abandonment of the ancient gods. Long ago, in the West, St. Augustine had known better.

St. Augustine has an obvious place in this discussion, for he epitomizes how, in the western part of the Empire, a single disastrous event was so transmuted on the plane of ideas as to bring about a fundamental change in outlook. The fourth-century West had been as open as the East to acceptance of the Christian theory of progress. As late as 403 the poet Prudentius had stressed that the Christianized Empire enjoyed greater temporal felicity than had pagan Rome.<sup>91</sup> When the Visigoths sacked Rome seven years later, Christians were severely shaken in their faith, since they instinctively shared the premise of paganism that right worship ensured earthly prosperity.<sup>92</sup> How could such a calamity befall a Christian Empire?

In restoring calm to troubled souls, Augustine did not limit himself to the conventional answer that the Romans were sinful and in need of exemplary correction. He directly challenged the premise on which the anguish of the faithful was based and broke through the facile disguise of a pagan outlook in Christian dress. What Christ had brought was not success but salvation:

They had hitherto wished to see the eternity of their city and Empire secured by the protection of the true God; they had wished to enjoy the old security in the *Pax Romana* and now had to realize that God lets his sun shine on the good and the wicked, and allows rain to fall on the just and the unjust . . . [They had to recall] that the righteous had much to suffer, that after [Adam's sin] no eternal realm of peace could again arise, that all states are fated to fall.<sup>93</sup>

Assisted by the shattering impact of the event of 410, Augustine was able to bring home to his audience that the eternal salvation given by God was wholly different from the temporal salvation offered by the state and other human institutions. Enjoining Christians to cut loose from the inveterate materialism of pagan religion, he divorced their future from any particular political structure. Whether the Empire fell or not remained a matter of deep concern to the Christian as sentient human being; Augustine had no desire to see its passing. Nevertheless the Christian as believer was freed from dependence upon the Empire. He could be at peace with any successor that offered him the liberty to practice his religion.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> *Contra Symm.* 1. 538-43. For further analysis of Prudentius along the same lines as Mommsen, see Manfred Fuhrmann, "Die Romidee der Spätantike," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 207 (1968): 556-59.

<sup>92</sup> In addition to the works cited in nn.90, 91, and 93, see Straub, "Geschichtsapologetik," 52-81; Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire*, 19-55; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1967), 287-329; F. G. Maier, *Augustin und das antike Rom* (Stuttgart, 1965); Friedrich Vittinghof, "Zum geschichtlichen Selbstverständnis der Spätantike," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 98 (1964): 529-74; and Paolo Brezzi, "Romani e barbari nel giudizio degli scrittori cristiani dei secoli iv-vi," *Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto medioevo, Settimane di studi*, 9 (1962): 565-93. This is a fraction of the constantly growing bibliography.

<sup>93</sup> Johannes Straub, "Augustins Sorge um die *regeneratio imperii*," *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 73 (1954): 49.

<sup>94</sup> *De civit. dei* 5. 17: "quid interest sub cuius imperio vivat homo periturus, si illi qui imperant ad impia et iniqua non cogant" (and, in general, *ibid.*, bks. 4-5). Straub ("Augustins

It seems hardly coincidental that, from then on, quite regardless of the continuity of emperors to 476, we encounter personalities in the West expressing ideas that are altogether relevant to a post-imperial world: the pagan Rutilius Namatianus transfiguring the Roman past into a pure *mission civilisatrice*; Salvian setting Romans and barbarians on a plane of moral equality; Leo the Great assimilating the glory of Rome to that of Saints Peter and Paul; Sidonius Apollinaris exemplifying a perhaps unconscious Augustinianism by remarking, "[Euric] imagines that [his] success . . . comes from the genuine orthodoxy of his religion, where it would be truer to say that he achieves it by earthly good fortune."<sup>95</sup> By the time Theodoric the Ostrogoth was in possession of Italy, Cassiodorus would express the essence of the Roman way of life in the secular term *civilitas*, a quality of law-abidingness accessible to barbarians and Romans alike that, superficially at least, had nothing to do with power and domination.<sup>96</sup>

As events contemporary to ourselves suggest, a polity need not be the worse for losing its empire or another the more fortunate for retaining the one it has. The fifth-century West was no doubt overrun by barbarians, but it also witnessed one of the wonders of history, the abandonment of a traditional outlook and the acceptance of a genuinely novel conception of man and God and their mutual relations. On the day-to-day level, the usual struggle for security, wealth, and power went on, and these mundane affairs had something to do with the Roman Empire. But the misanthropic illusion of empire—that a specific slice of humanity and its bag of tricks was endowed by Providence with eternity—had been shed long before 476. Westerners learned to live in a world where men were in principle helpless and certain power resided only with God, who exercised it in accordance with his hidden designs. Although men of letters were sufficiently numerous, no author presumed to relate the decline and fall of the Empire.<sup>97</sup> The movement of ideas

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Sorge," 40–60) stresses Augustine's continuing concern for the Empire, though at a subordinate level of importance. Gerhard Ladner (*The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* [Cambridge, Mass., 1959]) allows one to see these ideological developments in a setting encompassing more themes than merely the Christian idea of progress.

<sup>95</sup> Rutilius *De reditu suo* 47–164, esp. 55–66, with which compare Claudian *De consul. Stil.* 3. 136–49. Salvian *De gubernatione dei* 4. 12–14, 17; 5. 2–5, 10–11; 6. 2, 6–9; Emilienne Demougeot ("L'idéalisation de Rome face aux barbares," *Revue des études anciennes*, 70 [1968]: 401–02) interprets Salvian as saying that the barbarians were not equal to the Romans of old, but sin had so corrupted the Romans of his time as to allow the Germans to triumph over them. Leo I *Sermo* 82, and more extensively, Czesław Bartnik, "L'Interprétation théologique de la crise de l'Empire romain par Léon le Grand," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 63 (1968): 745–84, esp. 760. Sidonius *Epist.* 7. 6. 6 (tr. W. B. Anderson [London, 1965]), 319.

<sup>96</sup> On *civilitas*, see Wilhelm Ensslin, *Theodorich der Grosse* (Munich, 1947), 223–26; and Fuhrmann, "Die Romidec," 547–48 n.51. Equally significant is Cassiodorus' usage of the word *imperium*, notably in *Variae* 2. 12 (ed. Mommsen), p. 52 l. 27, and 3. 51, p. 105 l. 12. Heinz Löwe ("Von Theodorich dem Grosse zu Karl dem Grosse," *Deutsches Archiv*, 9 [1952]: 353–79) gives an illuminating portrayal of the loosening of emotional ties to Rome in the fifth- and sixth-century West.

<sup>97</sup> The lost *Historia Romana* of the later Symmachus (father-in-law of Boethius) may have been an exception to this; at least it appears to have originated the idea that the year 476 marked the end of the Empire in the West. See M. A. Wes, *Das Ende des Kaisertum im Westen*

had stripped that particular question of the absorbing interest with which it was formerly, and might still have been, endowed by the course of events.

By applying the old schema of *translatio imperii* to the phenomena of intellectual history, one might say that the ideological burden of empire migrated to Constantinople in company with its "felicity." Along with an intensified sense of being privileged by Providence, there came the nagging question whether control over earthly affairs was growing or diminishing and the eschatological anxiety that accompanied all current successes and setbacks. The disaster that allowed the West to shake itself loose from the belief that Providence was necessarily committed to the Empire had an opposite effect upon the East. Strengthened rather than jeopardized by storms and turmoil experienced chiefly by the western provinces, the Christian theory of progress became more comfortably seated in the general consciousness. The Huns might grind the Balkans underfoot, but the laws of Theodosius II still mouthed traditional hypocrisies and even amplified them:

Thus does it profit barbarian peoples to surrender to the empire of our divine authority, thus will our victories seem fruitful to the obedient. . . .

In the most felicitous times of our empire. . . .

We indeed always take counsel for individual and collective matters with that majesty of forethought by which the Roman state [*res Romana*] gradually advances to empire over the whole terrestrial globe. . . .

When account is taken as much for the security of the provincials and the felicity of our empire. . . .

Since we strive with the greatest attention and all our strength that the cities subject to our rule remain in perpetual felicity. . . .

In proportion with the greatness of the benefits by which, by unique benevolence toward ourselves, the Supreme Majesty has increased the empire of the Romans. . . .<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, the lawyers who wrote Church history in the footsteps of Eusebius drew the lesson suggested by the security of the new Rome: ". . . an emperor through diligent performance of good works and recourse to prayer might successfully intercede with God for divine favor and protection against all enemies, internal and external."<sup>99</sup> A doctrine sanctioned by Christian opinion as well as the imperial court turned the felicity, the breadth, and the eternity of the Empire into matters of faith divorced from fact. Joshua the

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*des römischen Reiches* (The Hague, 1967). But this was a defense of the Roman past, rather than an inquiry into Rome's fall. Compare Arnaldo Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography*, 185-86.

<sup>98</sup> The passages are drawn from the preambles of the following laws: 439 *NTh* 16, *NTh* 17. 1, 440 *NTh* 7. 3, 441 *NTh* 5. 3, 443 *NTh* 23, 444 *NTh* 7. 2. A chronicle of contemporary events may be drawn from E. A. Thompson, *The History of Attila and the Huns* (Oxford, 1948), 77-94: October 439, Carthage falls to the Vandals; 440, great fears of Vandal raids, an expedition against them, and a raid by Persians into Armenia; 440-41, serious troubles with the Huns; 443, major Hunnic raid followed by an ignominious peace, after which Theodosius returned from refuge in Asia.

<sup>99</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 206; Downey, "Early Church Historians."

Stylite wrote a monograph about some recent calamities, but he could nevertheless say that "believing emperors have always reigned from that time [ca. 363] until the present day [ca. 507], and by the help of Heaven their power has been strengthened."<sup>100</sup> Current disasters fell upon sinners for their chastisement and correction; they had no bearing upon the Empire, whose present, with God's help, was as victorious and felicitous as its past.

The pretensions of the court and Church historians, who treated blind luck as the favor of Providence, aroused corresponding extremes of pessimism from the secular historians, who could hardly avoid contrasting the felicity of a receding past with the miseries of current events. Nostalgia for the ancient gods as such was not the motivating factor of this dissent; we find it in all the secular historians, of whom Zosimus alone disparages Christianity. The almost total loss of the extensive contemporary histories by Priscus, Malchus, and Candidus reduces the evidence prior to the sixth century to the merest fragments. Nevertheless, the famous dialogue reported by Priscus between himself and a Greek merchant prospering as a refugee in Attila's kingdom affords a rare glimpse into an Eastern Empire where the contrast between sanctified appearance and sordid reality weighed on the consciences of thinking men.<sup>101</sup>

Recent authors have severely judged Priscus for his part in this dialogue, which, in the words of E. A. Thompson, reveals him to be so "complacent and content with the *status quo*" as to cast "a sinister light on his ability to record with understanding the history of his age."<sup>102</sup> It has also been said that Priscus cannot have believed the merchant's fierce criticism of conditions in the Empire, for if he had he could easily have sought asylum among the Huns.<sup>103</sup> Such commentators overlook that, regardless of whether the encounter actually took place or not, the reported conversation flowed entirely from Priscus' pen and is not a transcript by a third party. The merchant's side of the dialogue, full of seriousness and conviction and without a trace of satire, is as much Priscus' work as his own reply, of whose artificiality he was no doubt as aware as we are.

Other works of the age mention the Roman subject who flees to freedom among the barbarians;<sup>104</sup> uniquely, Priscus introduces us directly to such a person—not even a renegade, but a formerly enslaved captive who has risen from nothing among the Huns—and makes him explain why life in a bar-

<sup>100</sup> Joshua ch. 8 (ed. Wright), 7. Compare Cosmas Indicopleustes, as quoted by Kaegi: "I declare confidently that although hostile barbarians may rise briefly against the Roman Empire to correct us for our sins, yet through the strength of him who maintains us the empire will remain undefeated . . ." (p. 212).

<sup>101</sup> Priscus Frag. 8; for translations, see Bury, *Later Roman Empire*, 1: 284–85; and C. D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila* (Ann Arbor, 1960), 85–89.

<sup>102</sup> Thompson, *Attila*, 186–87; see also Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, ed. Bury, 3: 429. Bury's comment (*Later Roman Empire*, 1: 285 n.1) is astonishingly weak.

<sup>103</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, 209. For a better understanding of the passage, see Impellizzeri, *Letteratura bizantina*, 147–48.

<sup>104</sup> Ammianus 31. 6. 6; Salvian *De gub. dei* 5. 5, 7, 8; Zosimus 5. 42. 3 (slaves). Lydus *De magistr.* 3. 70, mentions provincials who prefer barbarians to the state's tax collectors.

barian land is preferable by far to the defenselessness, oppression, and chicanery of life in the Empire. The merchant's speech is at least as convincing as Salvian's impassioned explanation of why a Roman would take flight; Priscus worked hard at making it a circumstantial indictment. As for the historian's reply, its appeal to abstract theory and progressive jurisprudence was just as truthful as the indictment it was meant to counter. There was one side of reality; here, the other. They kept uncomfortable company. In the end, the merchant, shedding tears, was left to draw the moral of the dialogue: "The laws are beautiful and the polity of the Romans is excellent; but the rulers are not like-minded with the men of old, and are pulling down the state into ruin."<sup>105</sup> We are already close to Zosimus' allegory of the Empire as a horribly mutilated, moribund corpse whose eyes alone show life (4. 21. 2).<sup>106</sup> A few years later Malchus, writing of a military mutiny, had the participants cry out against "a faintheartedness that was utterly destroying all cities and all the strength of the Roman people, because everyone with power was cutting off whatever he wished."<sup>107</sup> The premise of Zosimus—that the Empire was at an end—was already in circulation. It only remained for him to spell it out.

Seconded by the Church historians, the Eastern emperors had shackled Providence to the ongoing fortunes of their state, setting the everyday injustices and failings of the administration under God's aegis together with the occasional success. What could an honest historian reply? Zosimus said, "The doctrine of the Christians could wash away any crime," just as it had cleansed Constantine of the guilt of murdering his son and wife (2. 29. 3).<sup>108</sup> In place of the promised progress, the clear-sighted observer saw only innovations, departures from the old, good ways of fighting wars and conducting government. If current events were a fair sample of imperial felicity with God's blessing, then the real Roman Empire, which ruled the world and gave it just laws, must be a thing of the past. Somewhere in the course of time it had perished, trodden under the feet of the lesser men of recent times. To expect its revival was as illusory as to ask pygmies to perform the tasks of full-grown men.<sup>109</sup> In this way, as a meditation upon the past and a judgment upon the present, the first history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire came into existence.

<sup>105</sup> Translation by Hodgkin, *Italy and Her Invaders*, 2: 80. Hodgkin is also hard on Priscus for his answer (p. 79).

<sup>106</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 154: "The body of a man was seen lying on the road, like one who has been lashed from top to toe, altogether immobile save that his eyes were open and looked out upon those who approached him. . . . He was reckoned neither as alive (because his entire body was motionless) nor yet as wholly dead (because his sight appeared unimpaired) . . . . The portent bespoke the condition of the State, which would continue to suffer beatings and lashings, like a person breathing out his last, until it was completely destroyed by the wickedness of its magistrates and rulers. And indeed it will appear, as we survey events one by one, that this prediction was true." Zosimus set the incident in 378, as Valens went to meet the Visigoths. Was the passage inspired by Eunapius?

<sup>107</sup> Frag. 16, tr. by Bernard Barman, to whom I am much obliged.

<sup>108</sup> Buchanan-Davis, 71.

<sup>109</sup> Lydus *De magistr.* 3. 53 (about Arrian) clearly indicates the sense of himself and his contemporaries as a lesser breed.

The value of Zosimus is not exhausted when one has catalogued him as a representative of debased Greek literature, remarked upon his rarity as a reader of Polybius, absorbed his disparagement of Constantine and praise of Julian, mined his pages for details of third- and fourth-century history, or pigeonholed him among the apologists of paganism.<sup>110</sup> Zosimus speaks for a definable moment in the life of the Eastern Empire, and in doing so, he casts a light on his past, present, and future that we very much need to clarify our own ideas of Rome's fall.

To begin with, his work allows us to appreciate the futility of that genre of history of which it was the first representative. His collection of events represented as "causes" for the fall suffices to discredit any attempt to relate "the history of a great epoch" as a series of mistakes leading to a foreknown result. Zosimus, Gibbon, and all the others were wrong. Events, when treated seriatim, with due attention to the very limited consequences of each one, explain neither the growth nor the decline of empires—hence the remark that Rome's empire, like Britain's, was created in a fit of absence of mind, and the temptation, at the other end of the time spectrum, to suppose that Rome's fall is a myth.<sup>111</sup> Though certainly related to events and external realities, empire is a phenomenon of intellectual history. In investigating questions as abstract as the rise and fall of empires, the subject of inquiry should be what contemporaries thought, not only what they did.

That Zosimus regarded the Roman Empire as fallen is therefore the invaluable contribution of his *History*. Moreover, his outlook directly refutes the conclusion offered by the modern historians of the later Empire who have accredited the general proposition that the Empire fell in the West only while surviving integrally in the East. Their conclusion is based above all on an assessment of the events rather than of contemporary opinion. But should it be? Are even the events suitably interpreted when they are divorced from what contemporaries thought of them? That Anastasius defended the frontiers and piled up gold in the treasury may well be outweighed by the fact that, in his reign, a historian bade farewell to a vanished supremacy.

In the West as well as the East, what men thought bore something else than a direct relationship to the course of events. Within a few months after the disaster of 410 it became clear that the sack of Rome had been no more decisive than the defeat of Adrianople.<sup>112</sup> But where Ammianus had countered Adrianople with a reference to *antiquitatum ignari*, St. Augustine

<sup>110</sup> For the relations of Zosimus to Polybius, see Fritz Taeger, *Charisma* (Stuttgart, 1960), 2: 641.

<sup>111</sup> For imperialism by absent-mindedness, see Max Cary, *History of Rome* (2d ed.; London, 1954), 226. Cary is not, I am told, quite faithful to what Sir John Seeley meant about the British Empire. For Rome's fall as a myth, see R. M. Haywood, *The Myth of Rome's Fall* (New York, 1958). Haywood actually means the "myths," that is, erroneous opinions, about the subject. Nevertheless, impatience with the idea that Rome fell, in the sense that the phrase is a gross oversimplification for a phenomenon of uncertain length and great elusiveness, is an understandable reaction in the student of the period.

<sup>112</sup> Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire*, 80–89; Johannes Straub, "Die Wirkung der Niederlage bei Adrianople," *Philologus*, 95 (1941): 255–86.

responded to the later disaster by distinguishing the Providence-guided course of history from the transitory course of empire. Rather than give comfort for Rome's future, the disasters of Rome's past (like that of its present) illustrated the merely temporal dimension of human institutions. The Christian participated in these institutions, but, regardless of what Eusebius, Prudentius, and even Orosius implied, the aspect of his life that mattered did not depend on mortal kingdoms (*peritura regna*).<sup>113</sup> After this, the question whether the Western Empire revived or passed away dwindled to the subordinate level of mundane concerns. The Christian could accommodate himself to either eventuality, for, whatever happened, the old Empire, exemplifying God's will in its acts, was a thing of the past.<sup>114</sup>

The course of events in the fifth-century East was neither outstandingly fortunate nor especially calamitous. It has never been proved that holding barbarians at bay was necessarily preferable to learning to live with them, or that Zeno was any more "Roman" than Odoacer, or that religious dissidence in Egypt and Syria was less divisive than the political fragmentation of the West.<sup>115</sup> What is clear is that the supposedly "surviving" East produced a historian of the fall of the Empire, whereas the "fallen" West, though not bereft of historians, produced none. In other words, there is a marked contrast in the manner in which the two *partes* interpreted the course of events. While Westerners observed the fate of the Empire with relative equanimity and were soon to write with praise of barbarian kings,<sup>116</sup> the Easterners continued to face the problem of reconciling the Christian theory of progress with occasional disasters, the headlong pace of legal change, everyday corruption, and ineradicable human weakness. Wedded to the ordinary failings of the government, the theory degenerated into a shallow rhetoric of success that the secular historians could not reconcile with the tradition of truthfulness that was their heritage.<sup>117</sup> The answer they gradually evolved was that the Roman Empire had fallen, that the present disclosed only "a faint trace of what was formerly admired."<sup>118</sup> Zosimus, the outstanding spokesman for this point of view, is hardly alone. From Malchus to Procopius the fall of the Empire was a common premise, the conceptual link between a glorius past and a present regarded as sordid.

That this point in intellectual history should have been reached on the

<sup>113</sup> Orosius, though writing after 410 and ostensibly inspired by Augustine, returned to a naive conception of imperial progress under the aegis of Christianity. Compare Brown, *Augustine*, 295-96. For some sensitive words about Orosius, see Demougeot, "Idéalisation," 401.

<sup>114</sup> In the wake of all that has recently been written about 410 and Augustine's response to the event (see above, nn. 90-94), general histories might do worse than recognize that the "end of Rome" in the West should, for all practical purposes, be dated from that time—a return to Biondo, after many detours.

<sup>115</sup> Kilian Lechner, "Byzanz und die Barbaren," *Saeculum*, 6 (1955): 292-306; Endre von Ivánka, "Der Zerfall der antiken Kulturwelt als geistesgeschichtlicher Vorgang," *ibid.*, 3 (1952): 237-54. Ivánka makes a comparison between East and West, with the former, for a change, seen as relatively poorer.

<sup>116</sup> Most notably, Cassiodorus, Gregory of Tours, and Isidore of Seville.

<sup>117</sup> On truthfulness, see Eunapius Frag. 28.

<sup>118</sup> Lydus *De magistr.* 3. 39, as above, n.84; compare 2. 5.

eve of the age of Justinian casts a particularly interesting light upon the great enterprises of that reign. In relation to the view of the past that Zosimus represents, Justinian appears to have made deliberate efforts, motivated by religious sentiment, to restore the credibility of the Eusebian conception of history. While in agreement with the secular historians about the recent condition of the Empire, Justinian nevertheless believed in the possibility of renewed greatness, with God's help, through the activity of a zealous, energetic emperor. He would complete what the Christian emperors had begun, repair what negligent emperors had allowed to become disfigured, and accomplish some tasks, such as the compilation of the Digest, that no earlier emperor had deemed possible. In these terms, the renewal of the Empire did not call for any sort of imperial vocation among the subjects;<sup>119</sup> it was simply a matter for the emperor, confident in the historical proof that God would waft the Empire to greater victories if he were properly worshipped. Little wonder, then, that the neo-imperialism of Justinian was without tomorrows. The idea that the greatness of a state was ensured by a pact between God and its ruler was as sterile as the belief of Zosimus that the Empire had been upheld by the flawless performance of certain ritual acts. Far from awakening a sense of imperial mission among the Byzantines, Justinian so thoroughly discredited energy in emperors that, eventually, Phocas would be preferable to Maurice, and Heraclius would spend the larger part of his reign as though paralyzed.<sup>120</sup>

The question finally deserves to be asked: Should we not abandon the current thesis that the two parts of the later Empire had contrasting fates, and instead endorse the conclusion of Zosimus and his contemporaries that, not long before them, the Empire, all of it, had indeed fallen? The events do not bear out this conclusion any more or less than they support another thesis, but the data of intellectual history offer a sufficiently concrete basis. In addition to the help this might bring to the perennially debatable matter of periodization, there is reason to suppose that the detailed study and interpretation of the period would also benefit from such a revision. The contrast between East and West, though not without basis, is in many respects misleading. Among other things, acceptance of this contrast overlooks the possibility that one polity may choose to "fall" to the same extent that another chooses to "survive"; it presupposes that life with barbarians is less desirable than a ceaseless, barbarizing struggle to keep them at bay; it cannot assess religious division in one sphere as at least comparable in its effects to political

<sup>119</sup> For example, 535 *Novel*. 8. 10. 2, a little sermon indicating that the subjects' role is to pay taxes promptly, the magistrates' to collect them, and the emperor's to spend the proceeds on great enterprises agreeable to God, such as the subjection of the Vandals, and even greater conquests to come: "Wherefore if you promptly obey the magistrates, they indeed render us an easy and expeditious account of the tributes, and we shall praise the magistrates for their zeal and approve you for your intentions, and on all sides a single harmonious concord will exist between the governors and the governed."

<sup>120</sup> Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 313-17; P. Lemerle, "Quelques remarques sur le règne d'Héraclius," *Studi medievali*, 3d ser., 1 (1960): 347-61.

division in the other; it assumes an intellectual superiority of the East that is hardly proved; most of all, it obscures a parallelism in the economic, social, and institutional developments of East and West that has yet to be seriously brought forth from the evidence.<sup>121</sup>

The idea that Rome in the East prolonged its existence through the fifth century without breach in continuity may well have outlived its usefulness. Zosimus wrote on the Roman Empire just as Justinian would soon write on Roman law and John Lydus on the Roman magistrates; in doing so, they wrote about things they knew from books and other monuments, much as we grope in even a quite recent past for the "origins" of a contemporary world that bears the dimmest resemblance to its progenitor. Their object was not primarily to write about themselves; and yet, when their sources are set to one side, is not that post-Roman self-revelation their most precious contribution?

<sup>121</sup> See above, n.115. On socioeconomic developments, see D. S. Angelov, "Byzance et l'Europe occidentale," *Études historiques*, vol. 2: *à l'occasion du XII<sup>e</sup> Congrès international des sciences historiques—Vienne* (Sofia, 1965), 47–61. Angelov, proceeding from Marxist premises, concludes, "Il s'agit d'une seule et même voie," and criticizes Western historians for insisting on a contrast. From different premises, H. J. Scheltema (*An den Wurzeln der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft*, pt. 2: *Das oströmische Reich* [Oslo, 1958], 85–152) points in the same direction.

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<sup>35</sup> **Eunapius, Ammianus Marcellinus, and Zosimus on Julian's Persian Expedition**

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<sup>37</sup> **Olympiodorus of Thebes**

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<sup>47</sup> **Olympiodorus of Thebes**

E. A. Thompson

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<sup>90</sup> **St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the City of God**

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