Graeme Ward

# Exegesis, Empire and Eschatology: Reading Orosius' *Histories Against the Pagans* in the Carolingian World

*This essay seeks to uncover nuggets of eschatological thought in three Carolingian commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew. It does so by examining the different ways that Hrabanus Maurus, Paschasius Radbertus and Christian of Stavelot read and interpreted Orosius'* Seven Books of Histories Against the Pagans*, a work of Christian apologetic history composed c. 417. Orosius'* Histories*, which were hugely influential throughout the whole of the Middle Ages, typically have been seen as expressing a distinctly eschatological understanding of the Roman Empire, an understanding that is frequently contrasted with that of Orosius' teacher and dedicatee: Augustine of Hippo. The exegetical reception of Orosius, which has not yet been subject to close scrutiny, reveals that some ninth-century intellectuals did not use Orosius to show that the duration of the world was bound to the lifespan of the Roman Empire. Rather, they employed the* Histories *as an authoritative account of the beginnings of the* ecclesia*, the Christian Church. These biblical exegetes fashioned close intertextual bonds between Orosius' narrative and Matthew's account of the birth of Christ. By bringing Orosius into dialogue with the central narrative of Christianity, they invested the* Histories *with eschatological meaning.*

## 1 Introduction

Eschatological thought permeated all forms of Christian practice and belief in the Middle Ages, not least because it was written into the scriptural core of Christianity: the books of the Old and New Testaments.[1] Consequently, biblical exegesis – that is, the interpretation of the various books of the Bible – comprised a particularly important medium through which ideas about Last Things were communicated to medieval monks and clerics, and perhaps also lay people too. Through the critical lens of exegesis, Old Testament prophecies were shown to have been fulfilled in the

**1** Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise Apocalypticism;" Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Ancient World;" Rowland, "Eschatology of the New Testament Church," and Daley, "Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers."

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New, while the prophecies of the New Testament would be fulfilled in the future, when the events foretold by Jesus were to be realised at the end of time.[2]

An example of this can be seen in the commentary on the Gospel of Matthew produced by a monk named Christian in the 860s to help guide inexperienced students within the monastic community of Stavelot-Malmedy (in modern-day Belgium) through the first book of the New Testament.[3] Chapter 70 of this commentary, titled "On the Signs of God's Judgment", was keyed to the "Little Apocalypse" of Matthew 24. The latter is also known as the "Synoptic Apocalypse", as different versions of it are also found in the Gospels of Mark (Book 13) and Luke (Book 21). In this episode, Jesus's disciples gathered around him outside of the temple on Mount Olivet in c. A.D. 30 and asked him: "[W]hat will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" (Mt. 24:3) Jesus explained that before waves of violence, natural disasters, persecutions and false prophets would afflict them, they "will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed". He added: "Such things must happen, but the end is still to come." (Mt. 24:6) Glossing this latter expression, Christian of Stavelot addressed his young readers: "He who reads the words which Orosius collected about wars from histories might become frightened because of such tribulations. On account of this, the Lord safeguarded his followers lest they become troubled and think that the end of the world is at hand."[4]

In this passage, Christian of Stavelot, writing in the Carolingian empire of the ninth century, evoked the dominant strand of anti-apocalyptic eschatology in the early Middle Ages.[5] First developed in the Christian Roman Empire of the fourth and fifth centuries, this view held that although the world's end was inevitable it was not to be considered imminent. He did so, however, with reference to a late antique text not usually used in this context: Orosius' *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (hereafter: *Histories*).[6] Orosius wrote his *Histories* c. 417 to argue that the Roman Empire's conversion to Christianity had in no way contributed to the sack of

**2** Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*. On early medieval exegesis, see Contreni, "The Patristic Legacy to c. 1000;" Chazelle and Van Edwards, *Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*; Spijker, *Multiple Meaning of Scripture*. More generally on early medieval eschatology, see Baun, "Last Things," and for various definitions Landes, "Millenarianism/Millennialism, Eschatology, Apocalypticism, Utopianism."

**3** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis*, ed. Huygens. A clear introduction to the text is provided in Ponesse, "Instruction of Monks in Christian of Stavelot's Commentary;" concerning eschatology, see Meter, "Christian of Stavelot on Matthew 24:42." On Matthew's Gospel itself, see Kermode, "Matthew;" Bornkamm, "Enderwartung und Kirche im Matthäus-Evangelium;" Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*.

**4** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis* 24, ed. Huygens, 434: *Qui legit verba quae Orosius de bellis collegit per istorias, expauescere poterit pro tantis tribulationibus. Ob hoc muniebat dominus suos, ne turbarentur et ne putarent instare finem mundi.*

**5** Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*. See also Heil, "Nos nescientes de hoc velle manere – We Wish to Remain Ignorant about This." The best introduction to Carolingian history is Costambeys, Innes and MacLean, *The Carolingian World*.

**6** Orosius, *Histories*, ed. Arnaud-Lindet; English translation: *Histories*, trans. Fear.

Rome seven years previously in 410.[7] Orosius explained in his work's prologue that Augustine of Hippo, his teacher, had commissioned him to "set out in a book [...] all the troubles caused by wars [...] that [he] could discover in all the records of the histories and annals".[8] The *Histories* dwelt on the ubiquity of human conflict, but they were shot through with a message of hope. Orosius discovered that the woes of the present paled in comparison to those of the past: Christianity had tempered, though not eradicated, the endemic wretchedness that had stained the world through sin as a result of Adam's fall from grace.

Christian of Stavelot's use of Orosius reflects the *Histories*' emphasis on war, yet nevertheless the comment appears somewhat at odds with Orosius' general apologetic – even anti-apocalyptic – tenor. Since things were worse in the past, present conflict ought to be stripped of apocalyptic significance: the *Histories* were intended to defuse expectations of the imminent End, not generate them.[9] Christian's phrasing not only clashes with one of the main purposes of the *Histories* but implies an almost atemporal link between past and present.[10] Almost half a millennium separated his world from that of Orosius, during which the western Roman Empire had collapsed in the later fifth century and had been re-established in 800 under Charlemagne, the first Carolingian emperor; even greater was the temporal distance between Stavelot in the 860s and the time of Christ. Yet these three levels were collapsed into one other: ninth-century monks might fear the end of the world is nigh while reading a history written 450 years previously, which itself covered wars and other calamities from even deeper in the past. To allay such fears, Christ's words, initially spoken to his own disciples (who lived long before Orosius wrote), still spoke directly to Carolingian monks (who lived long after).

This brief yet puzzling appeal to the authority of Orosius serves to introduce the key texts and themes that I wish to address in this essay: the intimate relationship between the *Histories Against the Pagans* and the Gospel of Matthew, as seen through the critical lens of Carolingian biblical commentary. This relationship was to some extent already present in Orosius' work. As part of his rhetorical strategy to convince those not wholly committed to Christianity of the religion's worth, Orosius made little use of the various books that comprised the Old and New Testaments.[11] One of the very few exceptions corresponds precisely to the passage from Matthew 24 on which Christian of Stavelot commented, and it speaks to one of the central

**7** For two recent studies with full bibliographies, see Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History* and Formisano, "Orosius' *Historiae adversus paganos* or the Subversion of History." See also Leonard, *In Defiance of History*. On the sack of Rome, see the review article by Nuffelen, "Not Much Happened: 410 and All That."

**8** Orosius, *Histories*, 1.1.10, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 1, 8; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 32.

**9** See Landes, "Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled," 160.

**10** On time in Carolingian exegesis, see Heil, "Nos nescientes de hoc velle manere – We Wish to Remain Ignorant about This," and Czock, "Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft."

**11** Orosius, *Histories*, 1.1.7–8, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 1, 11.

aspects of the *Histories* as a whole: that the establishment of world-wide peace under the Roman Emperor Augustus (ruled 27 B.C. until A.D. 14) was prepared by God for Christ's birth. It was, Orosius said, "when the world was enjoying the profoundest calm and a single peace lay over every people" that Christ's disciples asked him about "the end of days that was to come" (*de conclusione temporum subsequentium*).[12]

The unprecedented period of peace – the so-called *pax Augusta* – which interrupted otherwise incessant wars and was established on earth in preparation for the birth of Christ, was central to Orosius' argument. It later became a salient aspect of Carolingian exegesis of Matthew's Gospel, not least Matthew 2:1, which narrated the birth of Christ. In addition to Christian of Stavelot, two other ninth-century exegetes of Matthew made remarkable use of Orosius for their interpretations of this fundamental scriptural event: Hrabanus Maurus, abbot of the monastery of Fulda (in central Germany), whose Matthew commentary was written c. 821, and Paschasius Radbertus, abbot of Corbie (in northern France), whose more extensive and complex opus was written in various stages between the late 820s and early 850s. By taking these commentaries into account, I not only seek to address the vital exegetical context of the early medieval reception of Orosius' *Histories*, which so far has received little attention, but also to demonstrate that by studying how ninth-century scholars bound the *Histories* to the first Gospel, it becomes possible to catch unexpected glimpses of eschatological thought.

## 2 The Reception of Orosius: Empire, Eschatology and the "Shadow of Augustine"[13]

Orosius' *Histories Against the Pagans* were enormously influential throughout the whole of the Middle Ages, as testified by the c. 245 manuscripts and fragments preserved between the sixth and sixteenth centuries.[14] The broad shape of the text's reception has been sketched in important overviews of the work's influence,[15] as well as more focused analyses of the ways it was glossed,[16] abbreviated,[17] and even translated: it was rendered into Old English in the later ninth century, and into Ara-

**12** Orosius, *Histories*, 7.3.10–12, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 3, 22–23; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 324–325.
**13** Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, 3.
**14** Mortensen, "Diffusion of Roman Histories in the Middle Ages."
**15** Goetz, *Geschichtstheologie des Orosius*, 148–165; Hillgarth, "The *Historiae* of Orosius in the Early Middle Ages;" Eisenhut, *Die Glossen Ekkeharts IV*., 49–61. Coz, "Quelques interprétations des *Historiae adversus paganos* d'Orose."
**16** Eisenhut, *Die Glossen Ekkeharts IV*.
**17** McKitterick and Evans, "A Carolingian Epitome of Orosius from Tours."

bic in the tenth.[18] Scholars have shown how the *Histories* functioned both as a historiographical model for later writers of history to emulate and as a reservoir of historical material from which they could draw.[19] Closely connected to the text's influence upon historical writing, the *Histories* have also been considered an important source for shaping medieval perceptions of geographical knowledge.[20] The exegetical aspect of the reception of Orosius, by contrast, has not yet been properly studied.[21]

Furthermore, the influence of Orosius has been considered alongside, or even contrasted against, the reception of the dedicatee of his *Histories*, Augustine, namely his monumental *De civitate Dei* ("On the City of God") and his *Letter* 199, which he himself called "On the End of the World".[22] Orosius and Augustine have long been considered to have held diametrically opposed views on the crucial, interlinked topics of church and state, and history and eschatology, with the maturity and sophistication of the latter set in opposition to the naïve shallowness of the former.[23] Their differing views concerning the sacred significance of the Roman Empire have been seen as especially important, not only from a fifth-century perspective but also from ninth-century vantage points. For Orosius, the Roman Empire, the final political entity in a series of four successive hegemonic powers (after Babylon, Carthage, and Macedon), was pre-ordained to rule the world until its very end.[24] Moreover, the coincidence of Christ's birth and the reign of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, aligned the fates of church and empire, of the sacred and the secular. By making the Christian Roman Empire "the supreme, final phase of history", Orosius is considered to have "brought history writing into the realm of eschatology".[25] Andrew Fear, Orosius' most recent English translator, has characterised the work as "postmillenarian": Christ's birth was to usher in "a thousand-year reign of increasing peace and plenty as Christianity spreads across the world". "If not heaven on earth," Fear stated, Orosius' "views mean that Christian Rome will certainly bring heaven closer to earth as the last millennium progresses".[26]

**18** Old English Orosius: *Old English History of the World*, ed. and trans. Godden; Leneghan, "Old English Orosius and the Rise of Wessex," Arabic Orosius: Sahner, "From Augustine to Islam;" Christys, *Christians in Al-Andalus*, 135–157; Daiber, "Weltgeschichte als Unheilsgeschichte."

**19** Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*, 64–81; Werner, "Gott, Herrscher und Historiograph," 7–18.

**20** Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*; Lozovsky, "The Uses of Classical History and Geography in Medieval St Gall."

**21** Cf. Goetz, *Geschichtstheologie des Orosius*, 155.

**22** Hillgarth, "The *Historiae* of Orosius in the Early Middle Ages;" nuanced and developed by Brilli, "Entente entre Orose et saint Augustin."

**23** Markus, "The Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography," 252–253.

**24** Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, 50–64; Palmer, "The Ordering of Time," 612–613. More generally, Goez, *Translatio imperii*.

**25** Quotes from Zecchini, "Latin Historiography," 324 and Harris, "The Bible and the Meaning of History in the Middle Ages," 88.

**26** Fear, "Introduction", 10, 23.

According to Orosius, earthly peace and prosperity would grow as the world became steadily more Christian until at some undefined point in the future would come

> those final days at the end of the world when the Antichrist will appear and the Final Judgment is held. At that time, Christ the Lord has prophesied through His own words in the Holy Scriptures that there will come troubles the likes of which have never been seen before and then in the unbearable torments of that time, it will be not in the way which happens now and has always occurred in the past, but, through a much clearer and more serious judgment that the saints will receive their approbation and the wicked their damnation.[27]

The belief that at the end of time Antichrist would appear and the final reckoning would befall mankind was, by Orosius' day, enshrined orthodoxy and was shared by Augustine as by many others.[28] Orosius' teacher, however, came to radically reject the belief that the Christian Roman Empire could ensure peace and happiness on earth until the eschaton.[29] In his *On the City of God*, completed a decade after the *Histories Against the Pagans* in 427, Augustine secularised Rome, removing the empire from God's plans for human salvation.[30] The survival of the empire could therefore have no bearing on the felicity of the church or the duration of the world; Christian believers should not look to any political power, but to heaven and the afterlife. According to Robert Markus, arguably the most influential modern expert on Augustine, it is the "eschatological dimension of Christian hope", more than anything else, that "lies like a deep gulf between Augustine and Orosius".[31]

The perceived differences between Orosius' and Augustine's positions on the church, empire and eschatology are significant because they resonate well beyond the study of Late Antiquity. Modern perceptions of these fifth-century individuals have also informed the study of the Carolingian period. Alcuin, a scholar at the court of Charlemagne, read Augustine but was said to have modelled his understanding of Christian Empire on writers such as Orosius who failed to grasp Augustine's ideas.[32] In Paul Kershaw's study of peace in the early Middle Ages, one author's use of Orosius – "whose vision of history was the transformative triumph of Christianity and, with it, peace" – encapsulated the optimism and dynastic confi-

**27** Orosius, *Histories*, Prol. 15–16, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 1, 9; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 33. See also 7.27.14–16, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 3, 73–74.

**28** Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church,* 124–167.

**29** There is a vast literature on Augustine's eschatology. See for example Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 133–150; Corradini, "Augustine's Eschaton."

**30** Markus, *History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 22–71 and 157–166. For attempts to bridge the "deep gulf" between Augustine and Orosius, see Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, 153–156, 186–206 and Ward, "Frechulf of Lisieux, Augustine and Orosius."

**31** Markus, *History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 166. More fully on this theme: Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 131–150 on Augustine, 151–152 on Orosius.

**32** Blumenshine, "Alcuin's *Liber contra haeresim Felicis*," 227. On Alcuin, see also Alberi, "The Evolution of Alcuin's Concept of the *Imperium christianum*."

dence of the reign of Louis the Pious (ruled 813–840). A decade later, "the events of the middle years of the ninth century had in their turn driven [others] [...] into an Augustinian distance from the fallen world, and towards a focus upon the peace of the Heavenly Jerusalem".[33] In her study of the ninth-century exegete Haimo of Auxerre (roughly contemporary with Christian of Stavelot), Sumi Shimahara likewise characterised Haimo's historical outlook as being specifically "Augustinian".[34] Augustine radically broke with a tradition, encapsulated by Orosius, which understood that the Roman Empire was "destined to last until the end of the world".[35] Haimo, like Augustine, distinguished himself by suggesting the Roman Empire had already fallen, uncoupling the end of the world from the duration of Empire. By contrast, most other ninth-century exegetes seemingly believed that the Roman Empire "survived without disruption, from the Fathers until themselves".[36]

Haimo and several other authors produced commentaries on the Book of Daniel, 2 Thessalonians and John's Apocalypse, biblical texts in which the eschatological and apocalyptic character of Rome was especially pronounced.[37] Through these commentaries (and indeed a range of other texts), prophecies about Rome and the end of time were still told in the ninth century.[38] The Roman Empire and its duration, however, was only one element of Carolingian eschatological thought, and by no means the most important. The reception of Orosius in Carolingian Matthew commentaries, to which I now turn, allows us to shift attention away from the eschatological end of the Roman Empire and onto its historical inception. Looking back from the ninth century, the sacred significance of imperial Rome was most readily to be found at its very beginning.

**33** Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings*, 186 and 203.

**34** Shimahara, *Haymon d'Auxerre*, 227–299; Shimahara, "Haimo of Auxerre." See also Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 167–170.

**35** Shimahara, *Haymon d'Auxerre*, 233.

**36** Shimahara, *Haymon d'Auxerre*, 234.

**37** Generally, see Adamek, *Vom römischen Endreich der mittelalterlichen Bibelerklärung*, and Verhelst, "Conceptions d'Adson concernant l'Antichrist." On Daniel, see: Courtray, "Réception du *Commentaire sur Daniel* de Jérôme;" Shimahara, "Commentaire sur Daniel de Raban Maur." II Thessalonians: Hughes, *Constructing Antichrist*. Literature on the exegesis of the Apocalypse is considerably more substantial: Matter, "The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis;" Lobrichon, "Stalking the Sign;" Mégier, "Die Historisierung der Apokalypse oder von der globalen zur geschichtlichen Zeit der Kirche in lateinischen Apokalypsenkommentaren, von Tyconius bis Rupert von Deutz."

**38** McGinn, "Eriugena Confronts the End," 7–13; pertinent comments also in Nelson, "Kingship and Empire," 72–73.

## 3 Orosius and Carolingian Matthew Commentaries

There is a substantial body of Carolingian Matthew commentaries: around ten different commentaries are extant.[39] The eight authors whose names we know are a veritable who's who of ninth-century intellectual culture: Claudius of Turin, Hrabanus Maurus, Paschasius Radbertus, Christian of Stavelot, Otfrid of Weissenburg, Sedulius Scottus, John Scotus Eriugena and Remigius of Rheims. Conrad Leyser has even gone so far as to note that "from the reign of Louis the Pious onwards, Matthew commentary was one of [the] modes in which aspirant court intellectuals sought to establish their credentials".[40]

However, the intended audiences and motives for writing of the three authors that I shall consider – Christian of Stavelot, Hrabanus Maurus and Paschasius Radbertus – mean that we should approach them not only as court intellectuals but also as local teachers, first and foremost addressing the needs of specific religious communities. Education and spiritual enrichment lay at the heart of all three projects. We have already met Christian of Stavelot. The commentary of Hrabanus Maurus, abbot of the important monastery of Fulda, was completed c. 821 and dedicated to Archbishop Haistulf of Mainz.[41] Hrabanus aimed for utility and practicality, bringing together a diverse range of patristic sources in a single volume to offer the "disadvantaged reader" (*lector pauperculus*) without access to a decent library a range of authoritative interpretations.[42] The commentary of Paschasius Radbertus, on the other hand, served a more experienced audience.[43] It has been called "the most learned work of exegesis before the second half of the thirteenth century".[44] Sometime before 831, Radbertus, then abbot of Corbie, dedicated the first four books of his Matthew commentary to a certain Guntlandus, a monk at the nearby monastery of St. Riquier, where Radbertus had spent time as an exile; some two decades later, between Spring 849 and April 853, the next eight books were offered to the whole monastic community at St. Riquier.[45] According to David Ganz, it represented his "life's work", which "grew as he grew in age and understanding".[46]

**39** Schönbach, "Über einige Evangelienkommentare des Mittelalters;" Stoll, "Drei karolingische Matthäus-Kommentare."

**40** Leyser, "Royal Genealogy and Marian Devotion in the Ninth-Century West," 31.

**41** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum*, ed. Löfstedt. A copy was also sent to Fredurichus of Utrecht: Hrabanus, *Epistolae*, ed. Dümmler, 400. On Hrabanus, see de Jong, "Hrabanus Maurus and Biblical *Historia* for Rulers."

**42** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum*, Prol., ed. Löfstedt, 1. On Hrabanus and his exegesis.

**43** Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, ed. Paulus.

**44** Schönbach, "Über einige Evangelienkommentare des Mittelalters," 154.

**45** On Radbertus, de Jong, "For God, King and Country," and de Jong, "Paschasius Radbertus and his Epitaphium Arsenii."

**46** Ganz, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance*, 31, 32, 82–83; Schönbach, "Über einige Evangelienkommentare des Mittelalters," 144–150.

Unlike Christian's and Hrabanus' commentaries, it "responded not so much to the needs of the schoolroom as it did to the spiritual lives of monks".[47]

The three commentaries were pitched at different levels of readers, and not only did they use very different sources, they also used their sources very differently. All responded to the Matthew commentary written by Jerome c. 385, which laid the interpretative foundation for the exegesis of Matthew's Gospel in the Latin West. Jerome's work, however, was written hastily and was more concerned with the "historical" or "literal" interpretation of the Gospel; for Christian of Stavelot, Jerome was unsatisfactory even as literal commentary.[48] For Hrabanus and Radbertus, uncovering the deeper, hidden meaning of Scripture was paramount, that is, its "spiritual" interpretation. One aspect of spiritual exegesis, it should be noted, was known as anagogy and understood as the discussion of "future rewards and what the future life in heaven consists of".[49] In other words, anagogy was a medieval term used to denote the modern concept of eschatology.

Jerome, curiously, did not comment on Matthew 2:1, which marked the opening of the nativity narrative. Amongst the resources of the past available to ninth-century readers that helped contextualise the birth of Jesus, Orosius' *Histories* was arguably the most significant.[50] The birth of Christ during the reign of the Emperor Augustus was the hinge upon which the whole of Orosius' apologetic narrative hung.[51] It was above all for this reason that the three exegetes tapped into it as a means of shedding light on Matthew's Gospel, yet as we shall see, this could reflect both "historical" and "spiritual" modes of interpretation.

## 3.1 Christian of Stavelot

Christian of Stavelot's commentary is a good place to start, since his exegesis typically followed the historical, rather than the "spiritual", mode of interpretation. Unpacking Matthew 2:1, Christian noted that it was customary for historians to include the regnal years of rulers in their works, just as they were found in the *gesta* and

**47** Contreni, "The Patristic Legacy to c. 1000," 532.

**48** Jerome, *Commentariorum in Matheum*, Praefatio, ed. Hurst and Adriaen, 4–5; Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis*, Prol., ed. Huygens, 51–52. See also Mégier, "*Historia* and *Littera* in Carolingian Commentaries on St Matthew."

**49** Hrabanus, *Commentaria in Exodum*, PL 108, 148B; Hrabanus borrowed this passage from Bede, *On the Tabernacle*, from where I have taken the English translation: Bede, *On the Tabernacle*, trans. Holder, 26. For further examples, see Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis,* vol. 2, 179–226.

**50** Orosius was used by Paul the Deacon and Frechulf of Lisieux for precisely this purpose. On the latter, see Ward, "Frechulf of Lisieux, Augustine and Orosius."

**51** Orosius, *Histories*, 6.22.1–11, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 234–237; *Histories*, 7.1–2, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 3, 14–20.

charters of his own day.[52] Matthew situated Jesus's nativity in Herod's reign, whereas the Evangelist Luke, writing later and providing more detail, added that Christ was born during the reign of Augustus (r. 27 B.C.–A.D. 14), when a census was carried out in Judaea under the governor of Syria, Cyrinus (Lk. 2:1–3). Immediately after this, Christian added that Christ's birth and the Roman census took place in the forty-second year of the reign of Augustus (or Octavian, as Christian calls him), a fact derived from Orosius.[53] Within a single sentence, Christian started with Matthew, moved to Luke for further elaboration before turning – albeit silently – to Orosius. The bigger picture generated by exegesis was accumulative, taken from many sources together. Christian's combination of sources shows that information taken from the *Histories* could be seamlessly absorbed within the material drawn from the two gospel writers, blurring the boundaries between historiography and Scripture.

Using Orosius, Christian noted that on the day of Christ's birth, "many prodigies" were seen and recorded, "which revealed [that] Christ [was] the creator of the world".[54] Firstly, "a very large stream of oil flowed for a full day", the significance of which was to be found in the fact that "Christ" means "anointed by the spiritual oil".[55] The second sign was that on this day, angels announced the nativity by singing "Glory to God in the Highest, and on the Earth peace towards men of good will" (Lk. 2:14). Christian borrowed this from Orosius, but added his own flourishes: "so that that [angelic] voice might be fulfilled, so great a period of peace was established in the Roman world for twelve years such as no king could have made within a single province".[56] This fulfilled two additional prophecies not mentioned by Orosius: Isaiah 2:4 ("they shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears

**52** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis* 2, ed. Huygens, 91: *Usus fuit istoriographorum ut quando historiam scriberent tempus regis adnotarent, sicut etiam nunc fit non solum in Gestis sed etiam in cartis*. Cf. *Expositio super librum generationis*, 1, ed. Huygens, 80: *Et etiam consuetudo istoriographorum est sic istoriam scribere, sicut eo tempore putatur quando res agitur*.

**53** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis*, 2, ed. Huygens, 91: *Hac etiam de causa Mattheus tempus Herodis ponit qui in Iudea regnabat, Lucas vero, longuis et excelsius repetens, et nomen imperatoris et nomina consulum et tempus professionis census adnotavit, dicens exit edictum a Caesare Augusto videlicet ab Octaviano, quia quadragesimo secondo anno imperii Octaviani Christus est natus et census exactus*.

**54** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis*, 2, ed. Huygens, 91–92: *Et ipso die multa prodigia exstiterunt quae eum creatorem orbis ostenderunt*.

**55** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis*, 2, ed. Huygens, 92: *[…] ipso die fons olei largissimus de taberna meritoria per totum diem fluxit ut ostenderet quia is nascebatur qui Christus diceretur, id est unctus oleo spiritali*. Cf. Orosius, *Histories*, 6.18.34, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 222. Orosius said this happened before the nativity, not on the same day.

**56** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis*, 2, ed. Huygens, 92: *Eodem die angeli cantauerunt gloria in excelsis deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae uoluntatis* (Lk. 2:13–14), *et ut ista uox conpleretur tanta pax in orbe Romano facta est per XII annos, quantam nullus rex potuit facere in una prouintia, ita ut, sicut propheta dixit, conflarent gladios suos in uomeres et lanceas suas in falces* (Is. 2: 4), *et psalmista dixerat orietur in diebus eius abundantia pacis* (Ps. 71:7).

into sickles") and Psalm 71:7 ("In His days an abundance of peace shall arise"). A third story was copied from Orosius, which dealt with a decree of Augustus prohibiting him being called "master, since the True Master of all the human race was then born among men".[57] Christian's commentary shows how Orosius' narrative could be tied to the story of Christ, linking Matthew's and Luke's gospels; Christian was able, moreover, to embed further Old Testament texts into Orosius, working the *Histories against the Pagans* deeper into the textual fabric of Christianity. Hrabanus Maurus, in his explicit acknowledgment of Orosius' authority, went a step further.

## 3.2 Hrabanus Maurus

Hrabanus' exegesis was designed as a compilation of earlier commentary, and he often signalled to readers via marginal annotations the authorities from whom given passages were derived.[58] In his prologue to Haistulf, Hrabanus described the process of gathering together and examining the works of the authoritative experts on Matthew's Gospel. He name-checked Orosius, along with "Cyprian, Eusebius, Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Fulgentius, Victorinus, Fortunatianus, [...] Leo, Gregory of Nazianzus, Pope Gregory [I], John Chrysostom and other fathers, whose names are written in the Book of Life".[59] Turning from the prologue to the text itself, we can glean from Hrabanus' use of the *Histories against the Pagans* that Orosius' particular field of perceived expertise was Christ's birth. For his commentary on Matthew 2:1, Hrabanus extracted many of the same details as Christian of Stavelot: God's role in preparing peace in the Roman Empire, Augustus's reluctance to be called *dominus* and other miracles and prodigies that heralded the nativity. Hrabanus, however, went a step further: he not only excerpted directly from Orosius, but also subjected the *Histories*' narrative to allegorical exegesis.

Wherever possible, Hrabanus identified and analysed "signs" within the Bible, that is, symbols of hidden meaning to be uncovered. Such meaning could be found outside the canonical texts of Scripture. The eight-book structure of his Matthew commentary was itself subject to such a reading. The first seven books contained a narrative of Christ's life up until his crucifixion, while the eighth dealt with the pas-

**57** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis* 2, ed. Huygens, 92. Orosius, *Histories*, 6.22.4–5, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 235; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 315–316.

**58** Steckel, "Pragmatische und symbolische Dimensionen der Autorensiglen (*nomina auctorum*) bei Hrabanus Maurus."

**59** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum*, Prol., ed. Löfstedt, 2–3: *Adgregatis igitur hinc inde insignissimis sacrae lectionis atque dignissimis artificibus, quid in opusculis suis in beati Matthaei uerbis senserint, quid dixerint, diligentius inspicere curaui; Cyprianum dico atque Eusebium, Hilarium, Ambrosium, Hieronimum, Augustinum, Fulgentium, Victorinum, Fortunatianum, Orosium, Leonem, Gregorium Nazanzenum, Gregorium papam Romanum, Iohannemque Crisostomum et ceteros patres, quorum nomina sunt scripta in libro uitae*.

sion and resurrection. The first seven books thus represent the seven ages of the world, and, while Christ was resurrected on the eighth day, Hrabanus tells his readers that the Christian faithful, after the world has ended, will be resurrected and will live eternally alongside Christ in the eighth, eternal age.[60] Even organisation could evoke eschatology.

Similar signifiers were detected in the *Histories against the Pagans*. Orosius, himself keen on the symbolism of numbers, had compared the births of Abraham and Christ, noting that while the former was born in the forty-third year of the first secular ruler, Ninus of Assyria, the latter was born "almost at the end of the forty-second year of the rule of Augustus Caesar, the first of all Rome's emperors".[61] Hrabanus pushed Orosius' synchronisation further. Read within the framework of Matthew's gospel, the number forty-two – the year symbolising Abraham's and Christ's births respectively – possessed "mystery" (*mysterium*), for the regnal years in which both Abraham and Christ were born corresponded with the total number of generations within the genealogy of Christ.[62] Matthew 1:17 counted fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian captivity, and fourteen from the captivity to Christ, which taken together amount to forty-two generations. By comparing the sacred genealogy from Matthew's Gospel with Orosius' historical synchronisation, Hrabanus made a connection that Orosius himself had not envisaged. This connection, in turn, emphasises the significance of the *Histories*, not merely as a narrative about the past, but one which complements and confirms the perceived truths of Matthew's Gospel.

Hrabanus also drew on Orosius' reports of the "miraculous events" which occurred around Christ's birth.[63] Towards the end of his sixth book, Orosius described a series of events that occurred in Augustus's reign before Christ's birth, events which, Orosius argued, proved that "Caesar's rule had been ordained in advance entirely to prepare for the future coming of Christ".[64] One of these occurred after the

**60** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum* 8, ed. Löfstedt, 677. See also Hrabanus, *De computo*, ed. Stevens, c. 96, 321. On an important source dealing with the seven ages of the world and the eternal eighth, see Darby, "Bede's History of the Future," and Palmer, "The Ends and Futures of Bede's De temporum ratione."

**61** Orosius, *Histories* 7.2.13–15, ed. Arnaudt-Lindet, vol. 3, 19–20; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 322. Although Abraham was said to be born in the 43rd year, the exegetes silently dropped this in favour of the 42nd. Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis* 2, ed. Huygens, 91: *sicut Abraham, qui in figura domini precessit, quadragesimo secundo anno Nini, qui primus rex in mundo fuit, natus est, sic Christus quadragesimo secundo anno Octauiani, qui primus 'imperator' appellatus fuit, natus est*.

**62** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum*, 1 (2:1), ed. Löfstedt, 52: *Nec hoc uacat a mysterio; concordant enim in numero natiuitas patriarchae ac Saluatoris nostri et ordo genealogiae inter ipsos per Matthaeum euangelistam enumeratae*.

**63** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum* 1 (2:1), ed. Löfstedt, 52: *Nec onerosum debet esse lectori, si res mirandae, quae temporibus Augusti in testimonium adventus Salvatoris nostri existiterunt, breviter commemorentur*.

**64** Orosius, *Histories*, 6.20.4, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 227; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 309.

*triumvir* Lepidus capitulated to Augustus in Sicily. Orosius stated that Augustus "restored 30,000 slaves to their masters and crucified another 6000, whose masters could not be found".[65] Hrabanus not only reproduced these figures, but interpreted them too. The 30,000 slaves were invested with eschatological significance: those who surrendered themselves to Christ and who served the Holy Trinity and fulfilled the Ten Commandments would be rewarded with eternal life in heaven (30,000 symbolising the trinity and the commandments). The 6000 slaves with no masters signified those who in the first six ages of the world had sinned and who would be punished with perpetual torture in hell.[66] Orosius provided the numbers: the interpretation was entirely Hrabanus'. This is significant because such allegorising was typically reserved for the words of the Bible. Hrabanus thus seems to have treated the *Histories* as though they were an extra-biblical, or even a para-scriptural source.

Hrabanus similarly reframed another event in the *Histories* that attested to God's role in preparing Augustus's Empire, which Christian of Stavelot also mentioned. On the day that Augustus was given permanent tribunician power, a fountain of oil erupted and flowed for a full day.[67] "By this event", Hrabanus explained,

> what is more evidently signified than Christ's entrance into the world, about which it was written: 'may the earth sprout forth a Saviour' (Is. 45:8) and 'he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there shall be no end' (Lk. 1:32–33)? [This indicates that] Christians are made from Christ, that is those anointed by the anointed, and they themselves will march in great and inexhaustible numbers from the lodging house, that is from the welcome and bountiful Church, during the full period of the Roman Empire, or rather, up until the end of the world.[68]

Orosius linked the flowing oil and the ever growing church to the Roman Empire, equating the duration of Rome's empire with the lifespan of the world.[69] Hrabanus' addition of the adverb *immo* sets up an opposition, uncoupling the "end of the

**65** Orosius, *Histories*, 6.18.33, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 222; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 305.

**66** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum* 1 (2:1), ed. Löfstedt, 53.

**67** Orosius, *Histories*, 6.20.6–7, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 228–229.

**68** Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum*, I (2:1), ed. Löfstedt, 53*: Hoc uero, quod Augusto Vrbem ingresso in perpetuum illi tribunicia potestas manere a senatu decretum est, et his diebus trans Tiberim e taberna meritoria fontem olei terra exundauit ac per totum diem largissimo riuo fluxit, quid euidentius in eo significatur, quam quod Christo mundum intrante (de quo scriptum est: Terra germinet Saluatorem (Is. 45:8), et Regnabit in domo Iacob in aeternum, et regni eius non erit finis (Lk. 1:33), hoc est per omne tempus Romani imperii, immo usque ad finem mundi a Christo Christianos fieri, id est unctos ab uncto, et ipsos de meritoria taberna, hoc est de hospita largaque ecclesia, affluenter et incessabiliter processuros*. Adapted from *Histories*, trans. Fear, 310.

**69** Orosius, *Histories*, 6.20.7, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 228; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 310: *[…] sub principatu Caesaris Romanoque imperio per totum diem, hoc est per omne Romani tempus imperii, Christum et ex eo Christianos, id est unctum atque ex eo unctos, de meritoria taberna, hoc est de hospita largaque Ecclesia, affluenter atque incessabiliter processuros […]* ["They tell us that in the principate of Caesar in the Roman Empire – interpreted this means that as long as the Roman Empire endures – Christ and, after him, the Christians – that is oil and those anointed by it – will march from a

world" from "the full period of the Roman Empire". Hrabanus, moreover, looked beyond time and history: Christ's kingdom, which began on earth as the church, would forever endure in heaven. Looking back to the nativity inevitably meant thinking forward. Whether or not Orosius originally "brought history writing into the realm of eschatology",[70] key parts of his narrative became invested with eschatological meaning when read within the context of biblical exegesis.[71]

## 3.3 Paschasius Radbertus

Paschasius Radbertus, our final exegete, offers a further ninth-century snapshot of how the *Histories against the Pagans* were interpreted, which reveals both commonalities and contrasts with the previous two cases. Radbertus alone quoted what "*our* Paulus Orosius" (*Paulus Orosius noster*) said about the earthquake and solar eclipse that followed Christ's crucifixion.[72] As for Christ's nativity, Radbertus began by evoking those now familiar Orosian hallmarks: Jesus was born during "a most stable peace", which, "by divine power", had been established "all across the earth". This peace "was arranged not by the virtue of Caesar but by the grace of Christ". Augustus, in refusing to be called "lord", recognised that "then the True Lord of the human race was born amongst men".[73]

Radbertus worked at a more elevated level than either Hrabanus or Christian of Stavelot, engaging with a much wider range of texts and ideas. In terms of method, he tended less to excerpt directly from his sources; rather, he used them as the foundations on which his own reflections were based. We can see this in how he continued his analysis of Matthew 2:1:

> In this same year, moreover, men in each and every province were recorded by name and each professed in their own region, so that a slave, therefore, who had not returned to his proper master, was lawfully punished by death. The whole world is enlisted, which Luke recalled. This very clear statement marked out this same Caesar as ruler of all other men. Without

lodging house – that is the welcoming and bountiful church – in great and inexhaustible numbers…"]

**70** See above, n. 25.

**71** A summary of Hrabanus' analysis of Matthew 2:1 was included in Otfrid of Weissenburg's *Glossae in Matthaeum*, ed. Grifoni, 57–58.

**72** Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, 12 (27:45), ed. Paulus, 1381; cf. 1395 and 1415.

**73** Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, 2 (2:1), ed. Paulus, 143: *Quadragesimo siquidem regni Augusti quando Iesus natus est anno diuina ordinante potentia firmissima primum pax in omni terrarum parte mortalibus famulatur. Tunc igitur nempe hoc factum legitur quando angeli cecinerunt audientibus hominibus*: *Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bone uoluntatis* (Lk. 2:14). *Vnde liquido constat quia pax ista non uirtute Cesaris sed Christi gratia conponitur. Adeo ut idem Augustus ad quem rerum summa concurrerat in consistorio se Dominum appetlari non sit passus. Immo quia non ausus est diuino succensu eo quod uerus Dominus totius humani generis inter homines nascebatur.*

> doubt, Christ, who founded the whole of humankind, wished to be discovered and enrolled as a man amongst men by human laws, since through this act he enrolled his followers as eternal citizens of the heavenly fatherland. Through this same act Christ deemed it fitting to be a subject of the Roman Empire, because never since the beginning [of time] was there any ruler that obtained *imperium* over the entire world. The source of this [rule] is known most clearly by the inspection of our faith, because our Lord Jesus Christ came when He delivered to the world a most stable peace so that his preachers would have an unimpeded path to follow across the entire earth and so that the world, having accepted this peace, might extend the more tranquil word of preaching. Thus it is read that the sound of the apostles went forth into all the earth and it is revealed that the word of preaching flowed swiftly unto the ends of the earth.[74]

Christ's status as a Roman citizen was read, we could say, anagogically. The earthly citizens of the Roman Empire, once they accepted Christ's message, would become the heavenly citizens of the eternal kingdom. The Roman Empire was not just established to make space for Christ's nativity, but had a further function: to facilitate the preaching of the Gospel. Orosius himself had argued this, but of our three exegetes, only Radbertus deemed it relevant to utilise this argument.[75] Radbertus' point, however, seems slightly different from Orosius', who wanted to emphasise the workings of divine providence in history. The spreading of the Gospel was a central theme of Christian history. It was also an important facet of Christian eschatology, for the end of days would not begin until the world had been exposed to the message of the New Testament. In Matthew 24:14, after predicting wars, disasters and persecutions, Jesus prophesied that the "gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come".

In Radbertus' commentary, the birth of Christ in Matthew 2 and Christ's eschatological discourse in Matthew 24 were connected, even though these sections of his

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**74** Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, 2 (2:1), ed. Paulus, 143*: Eodem quoque anno singularum prouintiarum ubique homines censentur ex nomine et singuli suis profitentur in locis. Ita ut seruus qui proprium non redisset ad dominum iure plecteretur in mortem. Describitur autem uniuersus orbis quod Lucas meminit. Eundemque Cesarem clarissima illa professio cunctorum hominum principem designauit. Inter quos nimirum Christus qui uniuersum genus condidit inueniri atque conscribi homo inter homines humanis legibus uoluit quatinus per hoc suos conscriberet in aeternitate caelestis patriae ciues per quod idem Romano dignatus est subiacere imperio. Quod nusquam penitus ab exordio cuiusquam in regno fuit ut aliquis totius mundi potiretur imperio. Vnde fidei nostrae inspectioni manifestissime patet quia Dominus noster Iesus Christus cum uenit potissimam pacem ideo mundo reddidit ut sui praedicatores per orbem liberam intrandi uiam haberent et pace recepta mundus tranquillius uerbum praedicationis intenderet. Hinc igitur est quod in omnem terram sonus (Rm. 10:18) apostolorum exisse legitur et in fines orbis terrae uerbum (Ps. 18:5) praedicationis cucurrisse monstratur.*

**75** Orosius, *Histories*, 6.1.8, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 2, 164; *Histories*, trans. Fear, 262: "the glory of His New Name and news of Salvation that it proclaimed could spread swiftly and without hindrance in great silence over a land that was at peace far and wide and, indeed, so that his disciples as they travelled among the diverse peoples of the empire, freely offering all of them the gift of salvation, should have peace and freedom to meet with others and spread their message as Roman citizens among Roman citizens."

exegesis were written as much as twenty years apart. The theme of divinely realised peace on earth, as conveyed by Orosius, was re-deployed, but this time alongside an Augustinian source. Modern distinctions between Orosius and Augustine as rival proponents of empire and ecclesia do not therefore fit neatly onto this evidence.

As part of his analysis of Matthew's Little Apocalypse, Radbertus blended ideas from Orosius and Augustine. Commenting on Matthew 24:6 ("You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come."), Radbertus wrote:

> That sign (i.e. wars), therefore, is not a sign of the age to come, nor a sign of the [second] coming of Christ. Because before Christ's advent and soon afterwards there were innumerable types of fighting that were seen and heard, and many false prophets came then and afterwards. For this reason, one rightly cannot accept that the sign ought to be of things to come, since across time and space wars have never ceased, as a result of which the earth is now ground down and soaked with human blood. Albeit under Augustus Caesar, through the dispensation of God's providence, there was a cessation from war at the time of Christ's Advent and then a little later so that the Gospel could be preached freely throughout the whole world. Nevertheless, not long after barbarian nations frequently tore everywhere through the Roman provinces, just as the Romans themselves had first subjugated the whole world to themselves through war.[76]

The *Pax Augusta* opened up the world to Christ's disciples and the preachers of his message. This could be considered an *un*-Augustinian viewpoint, at least to the extent that Augustine never made a point of the providential co-incidence of Christ and Augustus.[77] Yet much of Radbertus's subsequent comments on Matthew 24 were derived from Augustine's *letter* 199 ("On the End of the World"), a classic statement of patristic eschatology.[78] By acknowledging the workings of divine providence for the birth of Christ and the spreading of his message while also drawing on Augustine's *Letter*, Radbertus combined views that have been deemed incompatible. If nothing else, this passage cautions against seeing "Augustinian" and "Orosian" as clear-cut categories. Hrabanus Maurus, it should be noted, also used

**76** Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, 11 (24:6), ed. Paulus, 1158: *Quod itaque signum non est signum futuri seculi neque signum aduentus Christi. Quia et ante aduentum Christi et postea mox fuerunt et audita sunt et uisa innumera proeliorum genera sicut et pseudochristi multi eo in tempore et deinceps uenerunt. Qua de causa iure queritur quod signum esse debeat futurorum cum numquam per diuersa temporum interualla et locorum cessauerint bella quibus iam terra contrita est et sanguine madefacta humano. Etsi in tempore aduentus Christi cessarunt dispensante Dei prouidentia sub Augusto Octauiano et deinceps paulo post ut Euangelium per orbem liberius predicaretur. Tamen non multum longe crebrius Romanas prouincias barbare nationes usque quaque peruaserunt sicut et Romani prius sibi bellando omnem orbem subiugarunt.*

**77** Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 3.30, ed. Dombart and Kalb, 96.

**78** Augustine, Letter 199 (*De fine saeculi*), ed. Goldbacher, 243–293. Bouhot, "Hesychius de Salone et Augustin."

Orosius' *Histories* and Augustine's *Letter* 199, though never fused together within the same passage.[79]

Radbertus often looked beyond his sources to his own world. He noted in relation to Matthew 24:7 that he and his contemporaries "continually sustain so much extermination of human life and the desolation of communities at the hands of barbarian and pagan enemies that every day, with a groan, we expect nothing but our end. And still, just as the Divine Word said, the end is not yet."[80] Wars were endemic to human history and therefore cannot be taken as signs of the imminence of the end: this was the same point that Christian of Stavelot drew attention to when he noted that readers of Orosius, being confronted by the wars of the past, might worry that the end is nigh. When Radbertus reached Matthew 24:14 on the preaching of the Gospel, a similar message was expressed, with Augustine's *Letter* 199 again functioning as his main source. The "consummation" was to come after the Gospel had been preached to all nations, but it could not be known how much time would remain after all had heard the word of God. Even in Augustine's day, Christianity had spread far and wide; Radbertus could add that by his time, even the Danes had begun to build churches and be baptised.[81] Christian of Stavelot later wrote that since the Khazar Turks had converted from Judaism and the Bulgarians had embraced Christianity, the faith was to be found within every "people under the sun".[82] Johannes Heil in his study of Carolingian eschatological expectation thought that Christian "failed to raise, or deliberately avoided" asking what the fulfilment of Matthew 24:14 might mean "for the question of how near the end was".[83] When discussing signs of the eschaton, it went against orthodoxy to ask questions that God alone could answer.

## 4 Conclusions

Central to Christian doctrine was the understanding that the world's end was preordained. The exact date of this, however, could and indeed should not be known, an agnostic position that has itself been styled "Augustinian".[84] It was not only the work of Augustine, but of a whole range of patristic thinkers that shaped the belief

**79** See especially Hrabanus, *Expositio in Matthaeum*, 7 (24:14), ed. Löfstedt, 617–620.

**80** Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, 11, ed. Paulus, 1159: *Tanta a barbaris et paganis hostibus exterminia hominum et desolationes ciuitatum iugiter sustinemus qui nihil aliud cotidie quam finem nostrum cum gemitu exspectamus. Et tamen sicut sermo diuinus ait nondum est finis*. For more Radbertian gloominess, see Matter, "The Lamentations Commentaries of Hrabanus Maurus and Paschasius Radbertus."

**81** Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, 11 (24:14), ed. Paulus, 1164–1165.

**82** Christian of Stavelot, *Expositio super librum generationis* 24, ed. Huygens, 436.

**83** Heil, "Nos nescientes de hoc velle manere – We Wish to Remain Ignorant about This," 91–92.

**84** Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000."

that the end must always be expected, even if the exact moment could not be known. James Palmer has noted that Carolingian libraries housed "many different apocalyptic and eschatological voices", a view "which complicates, without necessarily contradicting, arguments about the "Augustinian" tendencies of Carolingian intellectual life".[85] In this essay, I have sought to show that Carolingian exegesis prompts a similar conclusion. It offers insights into particular scholars at work in their libraries, utilising the various resources of their communities to help their monastic and clerical brethren learn about and reflect on the various books of the Bible and the vast amounts of authoritative commentary that had been produced on them from Late Antiquity onwards.

Within these resources of knowledge, examples of eschatological thinking are legion. This ought to come as no surprise, because eschatology is a core component of Christianity and as such is ubiquitous in the theological literature of the Middle Ages. The contexts in which commentaries were written, however, provide valuable clues to help us understand one of the reasons why Orosius' *Histories* were copied and read in the Carolingian period (and beyond). As a historian, Orosius was not particularly focused upon eschatological matters, and the exegetes surveyed here did not read him for his distinctive views on the End Times. Rather, they read him because his *Histories* shed light on the birth of Christ as it was reported in the Gospel of Matthew. Orosius was an invaluable authority on the beginnings of Christian history: he was the historian of the divinely-ordained peace, which, through Augustus, was engendered for Christ's birth and for his church to grow through preaching. This alone helps account for the work's enormous appeal.

Orosius appears not to have been read as an advocate of Roman imperial eschatology: Carolingian authors did not explicitly utilise his scheme of four successive empires culminating in Rome.[86] Orosius' Carolingian readers, especially those engaged in exegesis, inhabited the Church founded by Christ, not the empire established by Augustus. In monastic milieus, the *ecclesia*, not the empire, was the chief object of study.[87] The absorption of Orosius' apologetic history into scriptural commentary underscores this: in the *Histories against the Pagans*, Augustus is explicitly subordinate to Christ; in the commentaries, in turn, Orosius is implicitly subordinate to Matthew. This has implications for eschatology. The eschatological emphases which Hrabanus and Radbertus added to Orosius came from wider understandings of the past, present and future, the bases of which lay in the Bible and its interpretation. These emphases were read into, rather than derived from, the *Histories against the Pagans*. Even Christian of Stavelot, who did not seek to uncover alle-

**85** Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 162–163.

**86** Hugh of Fleury (twelfth century) appears to have been the only historian who followed Orosius' schema: Funkenstein, *Gegenwartsbestimmung im Geschichtsdenken des Mittelalters*, 91, 101.

**87** On the relationship between empire and ecclesia in Carolingian discourse (with greater emphasis on the imperial side of things), see de Jong, "The Empire that was always Decaying," and Kramer, "A Crowning Achievement."

gorical meaning when drawing on the *Histories*, still invested this work with eschatological value when he read the text in relation to Matthew's Gospel, a narrative, like all New Testament texts, that was predicated upon the expected end of the world, the Last Judgment and eternal salvation.

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## Abbreviations

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| CCCM | Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis |
| CCSL | Corpus Christianorum Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–. |
| CSEL | Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866–. |
| MGH | Monumenta Germaniae Historica. 1819–. |
| MGH Epp. | *Epistolae (in Quart)* |
| PL | Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols. Paris, 1844–1855, 1862–1865. |

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