Metanarratives of History: Eusebian and Augustinian Perceptions of History in Orosius, Bede and the Old English Translations

Thesis booklet

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The present dissertation has a twofold aim. I will analyse four historiographical works: two Latin texts, Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem* and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, and their respective Old English translations. The analysis will reveal the texts' historiographical metanarratives: their 'global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.'[1] My focus will be narrower than complete epistemology: by historiographical metanarrative I understand the explanation provided for historical causation. This, of course, touches on broad issues, such as the question of power, legitimacy, free will, obedience to the authority, group and personal identity, and, due to the religious perception of the world, theology and salvation. At the same time, the dissertation will also tell a story of cultural and ideological change and adaptation: of how particular societies and individuals respond to crises, and define themselves in the face of the threat of extinction.

Humans are storytelling and 'meaning-seeking creatures'[2]; humans simply cannot view events without a story of causation. Our attribution of agency and animacy not only to other humans, but animals, plants, natural phenomena, and even simply moving objects is hard-wired into our brains.[3] 'We are prone to alter our perception of causality so as to protect or enhance our self-esteem. We attribute success to our own dispositions and failure to external forces.'[4] Our imaginative narratives explain our relationship with the surrounding world, including the supernatural.

A metanarrative is understood in philosophy, historiography, and theology as a 'master narrative'[5] or a 'philosophy of history',[6] which, by using an 'overriding truth'[7] explains historical causation. It concerns itself with human and divine deeds, historical and temporal actions, about which *rational* enquiry can be made.

The term 'metanarrative' gained prominence during the 1980s, as the result of postmodernist socio-cultural and literary theory. Lyotard's starting point was that metanarratives were the means of oppression in the past, especially by the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century; he consequently defined postmodernism as 'incredulity

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[1] Stephen, *Retelling Stories, Shaping Culture*, p. 76.
[2] Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 2.
[3] Buren & Scholl, 'Who's Chasing Whom?', *passim.*
[4] Hastorf, Schneider, & Polefka, *Person perception*, p. 73, quoted in Miller and Ross, 'Self-Serving Biases', p. 213.
[5] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.
[6] Breisach, *On the Future of History*, p. 122.
[7] Ayres, 'Meta-narrative', p. 510.

towards metanarratives.'[8] In Lyotard's concept, metanarratives posit progress towards a certain ethico-political end as inherently good, and thus perforce legitimise and delegitimise specific kinds of knowledge, attitude, and action.[9] Teleological by nature, metanarratives predicate the effective and final causes of all actions. As cultural artefacts, they enarrate a society's shared values and ethics. They propose examples to be followed or shunned by providing a narrative framework of historical interpretation. By moralising history and subordinating human (and divine) action to a single *telos*, metanarratives empower their narrators, enabling them to control language and knowledge, the complete *episteme* and human experience of the world.

Metanarratives have quickly come under the analysis of scholars of various fields. Indeed, Lyotard's postmodernism itself has been criticised as a metanarrative,[10] but the concept has ultimately been accepted by the scholarly community. Elaborating on Lyotard in a historiographical context, Breisach defines metanarratives as concepts which reduce 'complex [historical] matters to the working of one or a few basic forces,' relying 'on a metaphysics of permanent forces and patterns for achieving continuity in history.'[11] They depict history as 'an entity that had some inherent meaning that could be found rather than constructed.'[12] In Berkhofer's discourse on the philosophy of history a metanarrative, 'a Great Story,' tells the story of the 'Great Past,' the supposed totality of history, 'to make sense of the grand sweep of history and illuminate human destiny itself.' It offers a 'device for embedding partial (hi)stories in their larger context in order to show their significance or lessons or meaning.'[13] Lastly, in McGrath's analysis of historical theology, metanarratives are authoritarian, 'generalizing narratives which claimed to provide universal frameworks for the discernment of meaning.'[14]

In the present dissertation I will use the word in a sense that includes all of the above: in my definition, a metanarrative is the ethico-political cultural narrative which orders and explains historical knowledge, human and divine behaviour, and

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[8] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p xxiv.
[9] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. xxiv–xxv.
[10] Breisach, *On the Future of History*, pp. 126–128.
[11] Breisach, *On the Future of History*, p. 124.
[12] Breisach, *On the Future of History*, p. 138.
[13] Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story*, pp. 39–40.
[14] McGrath, *Historical Theology*, p. 191.

teleologically predicates a *telos* towards which individuals and communities must strive.[15]

Breisach delineates three major strands of metanarratives. Chronologically the first, 'the prevalent metanarrative in the ancient period relied for its unity on the perception of an inherent tendency of states and cultures to follow the cycle of ascendancy, acme of power and prosperity, and decadence.'[16] Later came the late ancient and medieval Christian view of 'the governance of history by Divine Providence and the ultimate permanence in a different ontological sphere.'[17] The third and last metanarrative is that of worldly progress, prevalent in the 19th and 20th centuries, towards which Postmodernism's disbelief was directed.

The central thesis of the first half of the present dissertation is that neither the Antique nor the Christian metanarratives were without progressive elements, and the differences between the three metanarratives are not at all as clear-cut as Breisach depicts them. In fact, he himself subverts this point by demonstrating that the Theory of the Four Monarchies, a prominent teleological ideology in Antiquity, 'was fully revived in the Renaissance period, shaped into a complex system by Giambattista Vico, and given new prominence in the twentieth century by Spengler, Toynbee, and others.'[18] The Theory of the Four Monarchies was a central element in Late Antique Christian historiographical thought, and as we will see, Orosius built his own metanarrative around it, while Augustine attempted to deconstruct it. The Orosian and Augustinian visions of history resurfaced time and again in various periods after the collapse of Roman Empire, and it is their particular Anglo-Saxon, Bedan and Alfredian reformulations, that will be analysed in depth in second half of the dissertation.

Major catastrophes and political, social, and economic upheavals, such as the collapse of states, bring the necessity to explain suffering and death sharply to the fore. The resulting cultural transformation produces a new perception and narrative of the

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[15] 'Metanarrative' has been employed as a technical term in textual and discourse analysis to refer to the various topoi, markers, asides, etc., with which authors (often historiographers) glue their texts together, achieving coherence. These textual tools, of course, also by their very nature serve to construct a particular mode of enarration and construct a framework of reference, coming close to the first meaning of 'metanarrative' (Munson, *Telling Wonders: Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus*, pp. 20–4). I will not use the expression in this technical sense.

[16] Breisach, *On the Future of History*, p. 124.

[17] Breisach, *On the Future of History*, p. 125.

[18] Breisach, *On the Future of History*, p. 125.

world. As I will recount in Chapter 1, a comparable series of events occurred in the Mediterranean Basin between the third and ninth centuries AD: the Migration Period threw the established order of the Roman Empire into chaos. The decades of bloody civil wars surrounding the rise and fall of each barracks emperor, economic collapse, and the seemingly unstoppable expansion of the barbarian tribes, culminating in the Gothic Sack of Rome in 410, seemed to the citizens of the Empire to herald the end of the world.[19] To the contemporaries the unthinkable happened, as St Jerome described:

> [H]aeret vox, et singultus intercipiunt verba dictantis. Capitur urbs, quae totum cepit orbem: immo fame perit antequam gladio, et vix pauci qui caperentur, inventi sunt. Ad nefandos cibos erupit esurientium rabies, et sua invicem membra laniarunt, dum mater non parcit lactanti infantiae.

> (My voice sticks in my throat; and, as I dictate, sobs choke my utterance. The City which had taken the whole world was itself taken; nay more famine was beforehand with the sword and but few citizens were left to be made captives. In their frenzy the starving people had recourse to hideous food; and tore each other limb from limb that they might have flesh to eat. Even the mother did not spare the babe at her breast.)[20]

Pagans and Christians blamed each other for the catastrophes, following a long tradition of political and theological thought. The first chapter of my dissertation will explore the two Christian responses to the crisis and the pagans' attacks, and the ideological backgrounds of these replies. The two metanarratives, the Eusebian and the Augustinian, are based on the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, the *Historia ecclesiastica* and the *Vita Constantini*, and Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. Both metanarratives aim to explain the relationship between the world and the individual, the Creator and His creatures, group and individual identity, history and divine judgement. The two narrative schemata have a firm foundation in their starkly disparate perception of God, whence all of their views are logically derived. For Eusebius, the world was emphatically a subject to God, its omnipotent monarch; for Augustine, the cause of creation is

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[19] Cline, *1177 BC: The Year Civilization Collapsed*, p. 172.
[20] Jerome, 'Letter CXXVII, To Principia', p. 459 (translation by Freemantle, Lewis, and Martley).

unknowable without learning to know God Himself, an intimate process achievable only through charity, clear conscience, and faith.[21]

Eusebius worked in the fourth century and his perception of Christianity and the Roman Empire, the Church and the State, became the mainstream Christian narrative during the reign of Constantine the Great and beyond. Eusebius experienced decades of bloody warfare before the reign of Constantine ushered in a few decades of relative stability, and the emperor's explicit preference of Christianity. The emperor was, as it is apparent from Eusebius' writings, his personal hero and terrestrial saviour. As I will show, Eusebius' explanation of past events having taken place exactly as they did is an unambiguously moral one. For Eusebius the triumph of Christianity during the reign of Constantine was historical inevitability: it was foreordained by God from the beginning of times. History for him is telic: its single purpose was the establishment of a Christian world empire. Eusebius' narrative is deeply traditional, stemming from Semitic and Graeco-Roman historiography and was influenced by the imperial cult of the Roman emperors. For Eusebius morality and the corresponding judgment of God depended solely upon the individual's choice to convert to Christianity or worship the pagan gods. Christians thrive in the face of all opposition and will conquer the face of the earth; pagans will be - indeed, were - obliterated, and will die ignominiously. Constantine, the Christian World Emperor, is recast after the Platonic *nomos empsychos*, the philosopher king who is the living divine law: his will is that of God, and so are his friends and enemies. The *salus* of the Empire is dependent upon unwaveringly obeying the commands of the almost God-Emperor.

In contrast, Augustine's metanarrative of history is more or less an anti-metanarrative, as I will demonstrate. Augustine argues that history cannot be interpreted any way. While acknowledging that history has an end, Judgement Day, Augustine denies that the series of events along the way can be understood or evaluated by humans morally, because it is only God who truly knows an individual's intentions, and it is solely the intent of an action which defines its morality. Starting from the Book of Job, Augustine proves that the welfare or misery of any person or community is not indicative of divine favour or displeasure. Famously, he negates the legitimacy of any state by claiming that they all stem from sin, and therefore lack the most basic criterion

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[21] Augustine, *On Genesis*, Chapter 2.

a state should possess: justice. To Augustine, the City of God is a supernatural entity comprising individuals, not communities; he even goes as far as saying that the Church itself is a part of the terrestrial city. No-one can be sure of anyone's salvation, apart from God: this is hidden in the individual's soul, which only God can read. Rome to Augustine is just another terrestrial city, destined ultimately to fall prey to its own discord and the conflicting interests of her citizens. The Community of the Saints in the afterlife is the only city a Christian should strive to be member of. Augustine's verbosely elaborated reply to the crisis of the Roman Empire was that we should place our trust not in worldly things, but strive to reach communion with God in the afterlife.

After the discussion of the theoretical background, in Chapter 2 the textual analyses proper will begin. Since the texts I shall analyse have not been compared to each other in the way this paper will pursue, a customary review of secondary literature cannot be made at the beginning of the thesis. Instead, I shall review the scholarly works that deal with the historical perception of a particular work at the beginning of the respective chapter. Taking these reviews as the starting point of my analysis, I shall continue with the discussion of the texts, with especial attention to four aspects of the works: historical causation, salvation history, the interaction of grace and free will, and the history of the Church as community. At the same time, the idiosyncratic properties of the works will also be analysed in order to present as comprehensive a view as possible of their historical metanarratives and the changes between the texts.

Chapter 2 will take up the textual and metanarratological analysis of the first historiographical work proper, Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem* (henceforth LH). This text was written in response to the political and military disruption of the Empire under the reign of Honorius, and specifically as an explanation for the Gothic Sack of Rome in 410 AD, at the behest of Augustine himself. Orosius' work is entirely Eusebian in its metanarrative. Often dismissed by modern historians as a worthless piece of propaganda, it nonetheless proved to be extremely influential, partly because it was the first prose world history ever composed. Hundreds of manuscripts survive from the Middle Ages, and its data and metanarrative shaped historiography for centuries to come.

As I will demonstrate, through a close reading of the text, Orosius' answer to the Christian crisis was an elaborate affirmation of the Eusebian explanation of history and

power. Firstly I will show how LH appropriates the Ciceronian categories of *historia,* *argumentum,* and *fabula* in order to subvert the credibility of previous pagan historians and to prove that his Nicene Christian perception of history is the only truth, and that his Eusebian metanarrative is the sole possible reading of history. Secondly, LH posits its own systematisation of history: Orosius presents an intricate framework of numerological, typological, and figurative correspondences which he uses to argue that Rome is the promised Christian World Empire, and has been so from the dawn of history. Orosius was deeply influenced by the so-called Theory of the Four Monarchies: for him, the empires on which history is centred are Assyria, Macedon, Carthage, and finally Rome as the last and everlasting kingdom. God specially elected Rome to be the vessel of salvation, and despite the centuries-long resistance of the pagans it shall be so, even at the cost of the pagans' lives. Orosius in his episodic and selective account of history unabashedly delights in recounting the horrors suffered by pagans as the punishments for their sins, and does not shun from falsifying his data to prove his point, creating a closed loop of argumentation. For him the Gothic capture of Rome was the just punishment of pagans, directly effected by God, but mercifully ameliorated in consideration of the merits of the Christians in the Empire. His personal hero is Honorius, under whose Nicene Christian reign even barbarians are ostensibly converted, and they submit themselves peacefully to Roman rule - those who do not are, of course, completely destroyed.

Next I will show Orosius' creative mythopoesis, through which he rewrote imperial Roman history in a way that turned every good emperor before Constantine into a secret Christian, and every bad one a conscious enemy of Christianity. Despite the evil emperors' efforts, the final triumph of Christianity is imminent; the only thing to retard it is the obstinacy of some Romans, still hanging onto the tatters of their pagan worship. These pagans dare to blaspheme, says Orosius, and claim that Christianity is the cause of Rome's downfall and destruction. LH attempts to convince us that it is quite the opposite: through careful selection and fabrication of historical data, it argues that Rome's lot was never better, and it will only continue to improve, provided that paganism ceases to exist. The Orosian response to the crisis of the Late Empire is an audacious and creative reaffirmation of the Eusebian metanarrative; a triumphant apology which reverberated throughout history.

My next text, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (henceforth: HEGA) is based on Orosius' text and its metanarrative for a large part. Bede, as the title suggests, was writing about the origins and history of the Anglo-Saxon Church. His basic perception of the world, as I will argue in Chapter 3, and his explanations of the successful conquest of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons and the ousting of the Britons from their homeland are Eusebian. Through a textual analysis of HEGA, I will show that in Bede's depiction the Britons had been offered Catholicism time and again only to cast it off, and turn to Pelagianism. These lapses are first punished by God through invasions and natural catastrophes, offering a chance for the Britons to repent, which they do only to shortly fall into heresy again. This cyclicity of British faith and fortune replaces in the Bedan narrative the cyclicity of the fate of the pagan Romans. The third and final chance is offered to the Britons during the Anglo-Saxon invasion, when by converting the newcomers the Britons could include them in the Christian *oikumene* and thus pacify them. They refuse, and the wage of their sin is death and the permanent loss of their lands. The *positive* Eusebian metanarrative is transposed to the Anglo-Saxons, which Bede parallels with the supersession of Israel by Christianity. The Anglo-Saxons are speedily converted, with minor setbacks only which, with the assistance of 'a muscular and active God,'[22] are quickly overcome.

As I will demonstrate, for Bede the Anglo-Saxons cannot have anything but an ecclesiastical history: the fortunes of their kingdoms are bound up from the very beginning with that of the Church, and their political existence and prosperity depends upon their Christianity. Bede takes the Eusebian perfection of the Roman Church as a starting point and shows the maturation of the Anglo-Saxon Church into full communion with it. The anecdotal nature of Bede's work constructs this maturation as a process of ever-increasing holiness, with the boundaries between this world and the next becoming ever more permeable, as my analysis of the fifth book of HEGA shows. As the narrative progresses, miracles and visions of the otherworld constitute an increasing volume of the text. While telling the story of English salvation, however, Bede also tells us the story of Briton perdition: in fact, the two stories could not exist without each other, and it is the Britons' self-destruction that makes the triumph of the Anglo-Saxons possible.

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[22] Higham, *Re-reading Bede*, p. 148.

Yet for all its triumphalist and theocratic overtones, I will demonstrate that Bede's work is not entirely Eusebian. A central question in HEGA is the correct exercise of free will and the relationship between individual salvation and divine grace, which I will analyse through Bede's use of *gratia* in HEGA, and his handling of the Paschal controversy. For example, although the Britons are inherently and communally heretical, Bede grudgingly acknowledges that sometimes they do correct their ways; and he also recounts instances of Anglo-Saxons falling from grace. The narrative described in OEH has a moral conclusion dissimilar from that of Orosius, and closer to that of Augustine. As I will show, Bede presents a fairly balanced picture of the characters of HEGA: he records not only episodes of sanctity, but of depravity and damnation as well. His depiction of the Anglo-Saxons is nuanced, with careful attention to individual faults. In Bede's view, salvation is not predestined; it can be lost. The Britons are proof positive of this, and the text itself expressly serves as a warning and instruction to the English. By following the good examples presented by Bede and avoiding the evil ones, they *must* ensure their salvation and *may* ensure their prosperity.

Britain changed a great deal in the 150 years dividing Bede and King Alfred. Chapter 4 of this dissertation will show how the Viking invasions left the non-occupied parts of England impoverished and a great deal of Danelaw destroyed. Although for a long time it was assumed that well-nigh complete destruction of England at the hands of the Vikings was merely a literary *topos* in contemporary Old English texts, I will demonstrate that archaeological, material, and textual evidence proves that the framework of society completely unravelled in the 9th century, and that the constant warfare hurt the ecclesiastical infrastructure especially badly, churches and monasteries being easy targets for the Vikings. However, as a novel development, the crisis also forged a temporary alliance between the English and the Welsh.

From the very onset of the Scandinavian attacks we have Alcuin's letter to Higbald, which portrays the incursions in Eusebian terms as God's vengeance for the sins of the English, and this interpretation was prevalent even many centuries later. However, during the reign and cultural programme of King Alfred, a new, more Augustinian, metanarrative of history emerged, as I will show through the analyses of the two extant historiographical pieces: the Old English translations of Bede and Orosius. King Alfred saw the decline of the transmission of knowledge and wisdom in

England as the cause of the Viking ravages, not divine vengeance. His program of scholarly renascence aimed at resurrecting the intellectual life of England, and presenting the new *literati* with models whose examples ought to be emulated or shunned. Yet both translations deviate significantly from their source texts in their content and their presentation of history. They both employ the characteristically Alfredian translation strategies: interpolation, alteration, omission. These strategies are crucial in our understating of the translators' operation in order to correctly evaluate the changes effected in the target texts.

It is likely on textual and metanarratological grounds that the *Old English Bede* (henceforth: OEHE) was translated earlier. Therefore this will be the first Anglo-Saxon text to be examined in Chapter 5. Although the translation follows the original quite closely for the most part, it removes several key chapters and passages from the Bedan text, severely toning down Bede's metanarrative. Such a crucial alteration is the omission of the passages accusing the Britons of heresy and portraying them as inherently damned - a change which in my analysis puts the *adventus Anglo-Saxonum* into a quite different light. As I will demonstrate through close comparison of the translation with the original, instead of divine punishment for sins (mentioned only once in the translation), the conquest of Britain is recast to be the result of extremely ill-advised political decisions. Through careful modifications of the text, the Britons are portrayed as irrationally obstinate in their fear of Rome, who abandoned them to the depredations of the heathens in 410 AD only to reappear supporting the hated invaders two centuries later, and claiming superiority over British Christianity. The translator also significantly distanced Roman authority in the Old English text: many of the passages dealing with information about Rome were omitted, and half of the papal letters were completely removed. These letters served in Bede as proofs of his credibility and focalised Roman authority; their dramatic reduction in the translation re-focuses the narrative on Britain. Through the manipulation of both the lexical level and on the level of chapters, the translation recast Christianity in general as the medium of peace and salvation instead of advocating unity as only achievable through the Roman Church. This new image of Christianity also includes the Britons – to the unravelling of Bede's semi-Eusebian metanarrative, which conversely made the Augustinian elements in OEH much more conspicuous.

As I will demonstrate, this can be explained precisely by the ideological background of Alfred's program of cultural restoration. I will argue that a literal translation of HEGA would have left the reader wondering whether the fate of the Anglo-Saxons will be the same as that of the Britons; only in this case it was pagans conquering orthodox Christians, a complete reversal of the Bedan roles. Such a text would have condemned the achievements of English Christianity, even their missions to spread Christianity on the Continent. This would have been subversive both to the Alfredian programme and the Church. In order to transmit the wisdom of HEGA, it therefore had to be adapted to the changed circumstances.

In the final chapter, I will go on to demonstrate that the same is also true about OEH. It is rather a paraphrase than a translation: in this case the omissions are so vast that a little over one fifth of the original text was retained, and without the *cwaeþ Orosius* insertions its source would hardly be recognizable. The remaining loci were also extensively altered: the translator frequently gave elaborate (and false) explanations for events and customs which were so distant from ninth-century England that they were likely incomprehensible to the English. I will demonstrate that at the same time, however, he also completely dismantled Orosius' carefully structured lattice of numerological and typological correspondences, obliterating LH's claims of Roman foreordainment. Typological readings are retained and expounded, but as I will show through lexical analysis, they are recast into foreshadowing a spiritual salvation history instead of the history of Rome. Whereas Orosius argues that Rome is the peak of human achievement, in a deeply Augustinian move the translator remoulds the image of Rome into the same as any other state in LH: a power-hungry state lacking justice and wreaking misery externally and internally.

The imperial Christianity of LH is also deconstructed: the good emperors are no longer privy to the counsels of God, nor are they hand-picked by Christ. OEH depicts them instead in an Augustinian, neutral light, acknowledging both their virtues and vices. Correspondingly, the Eusebian system of theocratic Christianity and imperial *salus* equalling spiritual salvation also disappears. As I will demonstrate, what is retained is the bare data Orosius was working with, in effect what Augustine originally wanted him to write: a narrative proving that the advent of Christianity did not affect Rome adversely. Nothing more; no claims that life is actually better under Christianity, or that

God specially elected Rome for anything. Instead, the Old English text is a bleak catalogue of the miseries of this world, both before and after the coming and death of Christ. The Incarnation and the Cross, curiously neglected in Orosius, are much more prominent in the translation, and I will show that there are frequent interpolations which reorient the reader's attention to the next world. In fact, Orosius' claims about the improved welfare of the Romans are appropriated by the translator and transposed to the afterlife both lexically and by ample additions to the text. Peace and happiness are explicitly not to be found in this world, where strife and transience rule. Instead, they are only available in the community of the saints. Grace and mercy are central in OEH, and are employed in ways resembling Augustine's doctrines, as my analysis of the Old English words relating the idea of grace will show. Much like Augustine, the translator denied the legitimacy of human power unless governed by justice, and urged the audience to seek the heavenly city instead of enmeshing themselves in the conflicts of the terrestrial one.

At the same time, OEH devotes special attention to the Goths, Orosius' hated barbarians. The translator profoundly transformed Orosius' idea of the Roman Empire as the Christian *oikumene* by depicting the Goths as the Romans' peers, equally participating in salvation and historical agency. Through the removal of Orosius' disparaging remarks about the barbarians and by the careful rearrangement of LH's data, I will demonstrate that the translator elevated the Goths onto the same plane as Christian nations, among whom Rome is but one. The inclusion of the barbarian into the Christian would surely have resonated in the contemporaries of Alfred who saw the baptism of Guthrum as the surety of peaceful relations with the Danes – a situation very much like the relationship between the Romans and the barbarians under the reign of Honorius.

As I will show, the Anglo-Saxons of Alfred's times experienced a catastrophe and threat comparable to that of Bede's Britons and Orosius' Romans. All three peoples were facing the possible extinction of their ways of life by an unstoppable foe that, according to their own logic and self-perception, should not have existed. Following the Eusebian logic, every single Roman, Briton, and Anglo-Saxon must have committed sins grave enough to be gruesomely punished by God. Our four authors employed different coping strategies. Orosius slightly restated the Eusebian metanarrative and cranked it up

several orders of magnitude, attempting to alter our perception of causality so as to protect or enhance Roman self-esteem, and attributed Roman success Christianity, and Roman failure to external forces. Bede was in an easier position: his people were the beneficiaries of his world's Eusebian *modus operandi*, and the Britons were a sinful people only receiving their just deserts. When however over a hundred years later the Anglo-Saxons found themselves on the wrong end of God's supposed stick, and Eusebian explanations no longer sufficed, Alfred and his intellectual companions turned to Augustine as their guide to history and life, changing their perception of the world, power, and history.