Abundance, *Luxuria* and Sin in Late Antique Historiography

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<abs> This paper discusses the use by late antique Christian historiographers of the classical *topos* of corrupting abundance. Roman historians had understood that excessive abundance in any society caused decadence and intemperance, which in turn led to moral and physical decline. I will examine the work of three writers who interpreted this classical *topos* according to their understanding of history and retributive providence. Orosius used the notion to explain the moral decline of Sodom, but did not deploy it in a contemporary setting. Salvian of Marseilles explicitly rejected the idea, arguing that the sinfulness of the Christian Roman population of his day was unrelated to abundance. Finally, Gildas incorporated the idea into his depiction of the Britons’ corruption, for which they are punished by God. </abs>

In late antiquity, Christian writers—beginning with Eusebius in the fourth century—borrowed from scripture and from classical tradition to formulate a new way of understanding history. Recent years have seen welcome studies of the ways in which these Christian writers drew on classical rhetoric in the creation of this new genre.[[1]](#endnote-1) This paper will detail one particular way in which classical rhetoric was adapted and recontextualized in late antique historiography. Roman historians were of the opinion that abundance and wealth lead almost inevitably to *luxuria* (excess, extravagance), which in turn led to softness, femininity and military weakness. This mechanism was used to particularly explain the decline of Rome. The idea survived in some Christian histories, but it was subsumed into a different model of understanding historical causation—one in which sin and divine punishment were paramount. This paper will concentrate on three writers—Orosius, Salvian and Gildas—all of whom drew on both Christian historiographical models and on classical historians. Though these writers were concerned to advance a new Christian vision of history, they borrowed freely and purposefully from the rhetoric of Roman historiography in order to pursue this goal.

BACKGROUND: WRITING CHRISTIAN HISTORIES

Christianity brought a new perspective to the writing of history—one borrowed from the Bible. Old Testament narratives such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or the Tower of Babel suggested a historical model based on sin and punishment: peoples or polities that sinned against God were punished, those who followed God’s precepts flourished. The extent to which this scriptural model of historical causation could be applied to extra-biblical events was not universally agreed upon, however. Augustine, for instance, argued that this clear relationship between Israelite history and divine justice was a once-off, applicable only to this period of history but not generally.[[2]](#endnote-2) For him, God’s justice was to be expected not in this world but in the next; the disasters experienced by a people or nation cannot therefore be ascribed straightforwardly to punishment by God.[[3]](#endnote-3) Augustine was an exception, however, and other Christian writers were much less wary about reading divine justice into contemporary events. The influential *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius of Caesarea provides a striking example.[[4]](#endnote-4) For Eusebius, the conversion of Constantine, the end of state persecution of Christians, and the rise to power of the Church were convincing signs of the providentially guided vindication of his religion. Contemporary success, for him, proved the truth of Christianity. Rufinus, who provided a Latin adaptation and continuation of Eusebius’s history, made a number of changes to Eusebius’s narrative but he left in place the central assumption that divine favour could be clearly apprehended in contemporary events: pious emperors gained temporal advantage, the wicked were assuredly punished.[[5]](#endnote-5) Almost a century after Eusebius’s time of writing, his triumphalist interpretation of history was to be shaken to its core, but the straightforward link between God’s justice and contemporary events was not lost. The sack of Rome in 410 and subsequent incursions of barbarians were deeply shocking to contemporaries. Despite Augustine’s warnings, many Christian historians understood these events to have a clear and unambiguous correlation with God’s will, that God’s purpose in causing such catastrophes was intelligible to humans, that they were punishments like the punishments meted out to sinful peoples in the Old Testament. Orosius’s *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem*—though commissioned by Augustine—sought to set the sack of Rome in the context of Old Testament acts of divine admonishment against His people. Despite some lip service to the idea that God’s will was mysterious,[[6]](#endnote-6) Orosius was of the opinion that disastrous events were without doubt (*sine dubio*) either sins made manifest (*manifesta peccata*) or hidden punishments for sins (*occultae punitiones peccatorum*);[[7]](#endnote-7) and he was able to explain the events of the world up to his own time according to this model. Christian historians of the following two centuries, living through times of political turmoil and uncertainty, gravitated towards the historical viewpoint of Orosius, and more or less completely ignored Augustine’s opinion that history was opaque to human understanding.

The Bible sat—often uncomfortably—alongside traditional Roman views of history and its associated cultural world.[[8]](#endnote-8) Most Christian writers were possessed of a foundational education in grammar and rhetoric (of which the writing of history was an important part).[[9]](#endnote-9) The fifth-century audience for whom they were writing would have shared the same cultural touchstones—Vergil, Homer, Caesar, Cicero—and would thus have responded positively to the classical allusions scattered throughout their works.[[10]](#endnote-10) They were familiar with Roman rhetorical tradition and its *topoi*, and their writings must be read against this backdrop. We find them both accepting without question, and explicitly arguing against, ideas inherited from the authoritative historiographies of Sallust, Tacitus and Livy.

An exploration of the work of three of these writers provides three distinct vantage points on late antique Christian visions of history: Orosius, in the early fifth century, witnessed the sack of Rome in 410 but was confident that Rome would continue; Salvian, in the 440s, wrote bitterly about the collapse of many former Roman provinces and the barbarian invasions; Gildas, writing decades after the end of Roman Britain, bewailed the invasion of the Saxons and used it to chastise his contemporaries. All three understood these barbarian invasions similarly—as manifestations of God’s providence in history, as punishments for sin. All three texts spend considerable time moralising about the sins that lead to divine punishment. And, in doing so, all three texts draw on one particular traditional *topos*: the idea that *luxuria* arising from abundance causes moral degradation.

*LUXURIA* AND DECLINE IN CLASSICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

This concept of the enervating power of *luxuria* had a venerable lineage and its history has been explored in a number of studies.[[11]](#endnote-11) At its heart is a mistrust of abundance, a belief that life should be led within certain “natural” boundaries, and a certainty that excess (going beyond those boundaries) leads to corruption, perversion and effeminacy. The idea’s earliest expressions were in Greek: we find it in Platonic and Aristotelian texts but was by no means limited to these traditions. For Roman moralists, the same idea was expressed by the term *luxuria*,[[12]](#endnote-12) and continued to refer to a particular category of moral failing. *Luxuria* was linked with *libido*, *licentia*, *uoluptas* and *auaritia*, and opposed to *uirtus*. To fall into *luxuria* was to go beyond natural needs and to engage in superfluous activities that were only to do with pleasure.[[13]](#endnote-13) The idea was particularly developed in Stoic doctrine. It led one Stoic, Pliny the Elder, to denigrate as *luxuria* a whole series of things that he saw as going beyond nature: from mining and the use of poisons to perfume and iced drinks.[[14]](#endnote-14) This moral corruption was also depicted as an emasculation and an effeminisation. One of the things that went hand-in-hand with this idea was a negative view of sexual activities that were likewise seen to go “beyond” nature: in particular homosexual acts.[[15]](#endnote-15) This tradition also crossed over with the rhetorical depiction of tyrants (*tyranni*). Part of the negative portrayal of emperors such as Nero and Domitian lay in their implied corruption and sexual degeneracy.[[16]](#endnote-16)

This widespread understanding of the degenerative powers of *luxuria* was influential on the interpretation of moral corruption. In the Roman worldview, as Catherine Edwards has remarked, “money, pleasure and ruin are inextricably linked.”[[17]](#endnote-17) In Roman literature, individuals could be, and frequently were, corrupted by *luxuria*—such as Catiline in Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae*—but the idea also suggested a causational model that could be used to explain the rise and fall of polities. Increase in prosperity in any society resulted in an abundance of pleasures that would inevitably lead to *luxuria* and associated immoral behaviors—the society would be weakened as a result. Cicero implied just such a process at work in the cities of the Roman empire. In one speech he compares life in the city with life in the country, implying that the former is inherently corrupting. “In the city,” he explains, “*luxuria* is produced, from *luxuria* inevitably emerges greed (*auaritia*), and from *auaritia* bursts forth shamelessness (*audacia*).”[[18]](#endnote-18)

For Roman historians of the first century BCE onwards, the perceived moral and political decline of Rome could be explained by the luxurious lives of contemporary Romans, who had been corrupted by an abundance of goods and riches unavailable to previous generations. This was not the only theory to explain Roman decline, but it was an enduring one. The idea was particularly developed by Sallust and given a central role in his theory of history and decline.[[19]](#endnote-19) In his *Bellum Iugurthinum*,he claims that fear of Carthage had once preserved the upright character of Rome: “But when that dread departed from the minds of the people, there arose, of course, those vices which tend to be fostered by prosperity: promiscuity and arrogance.”[[20]](#endnote-20) In his *Bellum Catilinae*, Sallust set out a model of this degeneration that showed, in the words of Richard Southern, “the stages by which society degenerates from its primitive vigour and moral purity as a result of the growth of wealth and luxury.”[[21]](#endnote-21) The first stage is one of *ambitio*; this is followed by a second stage of *auaritia* and *luxuria*.[[22]](#endnote-22) Sallust’s model was influential. Livy, for instance, observed that Rome, in its earlier days, was free from *luxuria* and *auaritia* but that, more recently, an abundance of riches has led to excess and a craving “for luxury and wantonness” (*per luxum atque libidinem*) that has led to ruination.[[23]](#endnote-23)

This idea also influenced Roman writers’ depictions of barbarian peoples. The figure of the barbarian in the writings of Tacitus is revealing of Roman conceptions of the link between morality, self-restraint and political-martial power. Tacitus wrote that the Germans, unlike the Romans, were uncorrupted by vice. The soldiers of Rome were morally upright once but were corrupted in the days of Vitellius: “Their strength also was corrupted by luxury (*luxus*) in contrast to the ancient discipline and maxims of our forefathers, in whose day valour formed a better foundation for the Roman state than money.”[[24]](#endnote-24) The Britons, on the other hand, had been purposefully corrupted by the Romans and led “to the enticements of vices: the portico and the baths and elegant banquets.”[[25]](#endnote-25) The Germans—and those Britons who fight back—stand as a kind of mirror image of the Romans before their corruption: self-disciplined and spartan.[[26]](#endnote-26) At the same time, other peoples—notably the Greeks—were routinely portrayed as being particularly susceptible to *luxuria*.[[27]](#endnote-27)

In the first century CE, the Romanized Jewish writers, Philo and Josephus, applied Greek and Roman cultural ideas to their interpretation of biblical events. Philo is the earliest writer to link the Graeco-Roman theme of corruption with the biblical narrative of sin and punishment. The narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah lent itself in particular to this reading: the reason for this is a tradition, already present in the Old Testament, linking the area around Sodom with great natural fertility (Gen 13.10; Ezek 16.49). In this tradition, however, the sin of Sodom was not *caused* by its fecundity—its fertility served only as an ironic contrast to its later desolation. Philo had thoroughly internalized Graeco-Roman concepts such as distrust of over-abundance, and this coloured his reading of the Sodom narrative. Thus, he understood it as an example *par excellence* of the idea that abundance would inevitably lead to moral decline.[[28]](#endnote-28) The inhabitants of Sodom, he says, derived their licentiousness from the prosperity of the land, which was deep-soiled and well-watered, and always bore a fertile harvest.[[29]](#endnote-29) He even backs up his case by quoting two lines from the fourth-century BCE poet Menander that are typical of the Greek attitude towards luxury: “the chief beginning of evils, as one has aptly said, is goods in excess.”[[30]](#endnote-30) A few decades after Philo, Josephus would take a similar line in his *Antiquitates*. The Sodomites grew proud, he declared, because of their great wealth, and this led them into sin.[[31]](#endnote-31) Josephus also viewed other biblical events through the same lens: the decline that occurred during the period of the Judges was due, he thought, to the same factors.[[32]](#endnote-32) The Israelites grew effeminate, and applied themselves to the cultivation of the land, which saw a rise in riches. As a result, the Israelites indulged themselves in luxury and pleasure and neglected the upkeep of the country.[[33]](#endnote-33) This provoked the anger of God, who sent admonitions to rouse the Israelites from their sinful ways. For Philo and Josephus, the moral corruption of Old Testament peoples was easily explained with recourse to Graeco-Roman ideas about corrupting abundance. However, in grafting this reading onto biblical history, they adapted it. According to this version, ultimate ruination came not from an internal source (the effeminisation and weakening of the population through excessive behaviors) but from an external one (God’s wrath, in retaliation for sin). Philo and Josephus were extremely popular among late antique Christians.[[34]](#endnote-34) They provided a model for how to interpret biblical history through the lens of classical ideas about decline.

*LUXURIA* AND DECLINE IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Many of these classical ideas about corruption were retained in early Christianity.[[35]](#endnote-35) Indeed, Christianity brought with it a distrust of abundance and wealth that suited such an imagined connection.[[36]](#endnote-36) *Luxuria*, in later Christian teaching, would become a sin associated particularly with sexual immorality.[[37]](#endnote-37) In our period, however, *luxuria* still meant excess and extravagance—though it has become a Christian vice: excessive indulgence in earthly pleasures, set against the Christian virtues of abstinence and fasting. Christians, Ambrose advised in a sermon, were to renounce the world (*mundus*) with its *luxuria* and its pleasures (*uoluptates*).[[38]](#endnote-38) As was the case for classical moralists, there was a close connection between *luxuria* and *libido* (inordinate desire, wantonness).[[39]](#endnote-39) Indeed, as Ambrose would inform his readers, “*luxuria* is the mother of *libido*.”[[40]](#endnote-40) The idea that excessive wealth and abundance led to *luxuria* was also retained, as Lactantius would explain: “from prosperity (comes) *luxuria*, from *luxuria* all other vices assuredly spring forth, likewise impiety towards God.”[[41]](#endnote-41) As it had been for the classical writers, then, *luxuria* was seen both as a vice in and of itself and as a *cause* of further moral degradation, a stepping stone to ruin.

How, then, did the classical model of corruption and decline fare as a means by which to understand history in the Christian period? In an important study, Richard Southern noted with surprise the lack of influence enjoyed by Sallust’s theories of decay on later, medieval historians. He found that writers from Einhard onwards, although they knew and used Sallust, did not draw on his ‘overall theory of the development and decline of political societies’. As Southern notes, this indifference is striking, given the interest of medieval historians in ‘moral degeneration’ in general. Instead, these historians ‘frequently found an explanation of natural and political disasters in the obliquity of priests and people and in the sins of the ruler; but the explanation was not strictly historical—it was theological. It was God’s anger that caused the disasters; and it was sin that made Him angry. There was no historical machinery that intervened’.[[42]](#endnote-42) By the ninth century, then, Sallust’s model of historical causation had ceased to be influential, eclipsed as it was by a biblically derived understanding of a history guided by providential justice. For the historians of late antiquity, however, this change had not yet taken hold: the classical model of cultural decline used by the Roman historians still had some cachet.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, traditional ideas about *luxuria* and decline were still being used to make sense of contemporary events. They underlie many of the comments about Roman corruption made in the history of Ammianus Marcellinus, for instance.[[43]](#endnote-43) The continued eminence of the classical model in this period, even amongst Christians, is effectively illustrated by Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei*. Augustine drew particularly on Sallust and devotes a significant part of his *De ciuitate Dei* to discussing the decline of Rome, following the classical model.[[44]](#endnote-44) Augustine shares Sallust’s contempt for the moral corruption of Roman citizens, which he contrasts with Christian teachings about avarice and *luxuria.[[45]](#endnote-45)* Augustine’s use of this model is uncritical in one important respect: he accepts the idea that decline is a mechanism *internal* to a society. In other words, success and wealth breeds moral weakening, which then in turn brings about the weakening of political and social strength. Augustine is able to do this because, as noted above, he is an outlier among Christian historians of the period in that he avoids a straightforward providential interpretation of history; he therefore does not need to accommodate Sallustian ideas to the biblical model of divine retributive justice. For the authors to be surveyed in this study—Orosius, Salvian and Gildas—retributive justice was a central feature of history. Unlike Augustine, they understood that natural and political disasters were to be interpreted as manifestations of God’s justice. The Roman historical model of internal collapse therefore had to be modified. As we shall see, Orosius, Salvian and Gildas represent three different approaches to the use of this traditional model in late antiquity.

OROSIUS AND PROVIDENTIAL JUSTICE

In composing his *Historiae* in the early fifth century, Orosius drew on—and subverted—classical historiography.[[46]](#endnote-46) Though many scholars have traditionally regarded the *Historiae* as unoriginal and awkward—in the words of one scholar, Orosius was “a tendentious hack who tried to shoe-horn world and especially Roman history into a pre-conceived theological interpretation’[[47]](#endnote-47)—Peter Van Nuffelen has recently demonstrated that Orosius’s work was a skilful creation, designed to undermine received assumptions about Roman history by utilizing the techniques of classical rhetorical tradition.[[48]](#endnote-48) The *Historiae* are thus full of allusions to classical literature, works which would have been familiar to Orosius’s audience of educated contemporaries. He draws heavily on Vergil and his preface is a model of Roman rhetoric.[[49]](#endnote-49) He also shows a deft familiarity with the works of Tacitus, Sallust, Livy and Cicero—making explicit reference to their famous narratives of Roman history. He does not borrow their overall declensionist understanding of Roman history, however. In fact, he wrote the work to show that the popular notion of Rome’s decline was a mistaken one, and that Rome was no worse off than at any point in her long history.

One of the strands of traditional historiography upon which Orosius draws liberally is the *topos* of the dangers of abundance. He discusses, for instance, how Scipio Nasica blocked the construction of a theatre in Rome as it would encourage idleness (*desidia*) and wantonness (*lasciuia*).[[50]](#endnote-50) He explains in relation to this anecdote that the Romans of old were virtuous and frugal, unlike the corrupted current generation who sacrifice their virtue on the altar of *luxuria*.[[51]](#endnote-51) Orosius repeats Sallust’s idea that the destruction of Carthage was detrimental to Roman moral fibre. Some wise men advised at the time that Carthage be left standing, in order that Roman *uigor* not be allowed to decline into “feeble sluggishness” (*languida segnities*).[[52]](#endnote-52) The decision to destroy Carthage marks the beginning of a decline which some contemporaries mistakenly blame on Christianity.[[53]](#endnote-53) These examples show Orosius, like Augustine, accepting without modification the declensionist model of Sallust, Cicero and Livy. However, Orosius, unlike Augustine, interpreted many events as manifestations of God’s judgement.

Divine judgement for sin is the central historical paradigm of the *Historiae*. As the author himself puts it, the work is an account of “the lusts and punishments of sinful men, the conflicts of our age, and the judgments of God.”[[54]](#endnote-54) As part of this mission, Orosius incorporates the events of scriptural history into his narrative of the wider world. The Old Testament punishments of Sodom and Babylon are important parts of his argument—Rome is explicitly compared to both throughout the work. The *Historiae* are the earliest extant Christian work to link Old Testament punishment narratives with the classical model of societal decline. In his depiction of the destruction of Sodom, Orosius links the abundance of the land around Sodom directly with the sin that led to its destruction:

In confinio Arabiae et Palaestinae, qua dimissi altrinsecus montes subiectis campis excipiuntur, quinque ciuitates fuere: Sodoma, Gomorra, Adama, Seboin et Segor; sed Segor ex his parua, illae amplae et magnae quippe quibus et soli fecunditas suberat et Iordanes fluuius, per plana diffusus ac per oportuna diuisus, augmentis ubertatis inpendebatur. Huic uniuersae regioni, bonis male utenti, abundantia rerum causa malorum fuit. Ex abundantia enim luxuria, ex luxuria foedae libidines adoleuere, adeo ut "masculi in masculos operantes turpitudinem" ne consideratis quidem locis condicionibus aetatibus que proruerent.

On the borders of Arabia and Palestine where the mountains come down on both sides to the low-lying plains, there were five cities: Sodom, Gomorrah, Adama, Seboim, and Segor. Out of these Segor was only a small town, but the others were large and spacious, for the fecundity of the soil and the river Jordan, which ran through the plains and happily breaks up into streams here, helped increase their fertility. This abundance of things was the cause of evil for this entire region which put these goods to bad use. For from abundance came *luxuria*, and from *luxuria* came foul lusts (*libidines*), “men with men working that which is unseemly” without even giving thought to place, rank, or age.[[55]](#endnote-55)

There is no one literary source for this depiction; rather it draws on a number of late antique traditions. The idea that the fecundity of the region led to *luxuria* derives from Philo, as we have seen, rather than any biblical tradition. Orosius did not know Greek—in the late fourth century, many of Philo’s works were translated into Latin. Like Philo, Orosius understands the Sodomites to have engaged in homoerotic relations. Unlike the Jewish writer, however, Orosius seems to imply that this was their only sin—the other immoral activities associated with *luxuria* have disappeared. Orosius’s text is therefore an important node in the history of the development of the idea that the sin of Sodom was male-male sexual relations.[[56]](#endnote-56)

Orosius’s statement that *abundantia* led to *luxuria*, *luxuria* to *libidines* utilizes the rhetorical technique of *gradatio*—progressive elaboration in which the last word of the first syntactic word group is repeated as the first word of the second syntactic word group (and so on).[[57]](#endnote-57) It resonates with the kind of statements by Cicero and Lactantius (see above). Orosius’s linking of *luxuria* and *libido* is in keeping with both classical tradition and more recent Christian literature. This short extract, then, is representative of Orosius’s literacy in rhetorical technique, seamlessly weaving together both Roman and Christian traditions. The two complement each other, as has been noted: in Orosius’s work, “Sallust and Livy herald the corrupting forces of wealth and peace; Sodom and Gomorrah emphasize the salutary pertinence of the lesson.’[[58]](#endnote-58) More than that, each strand influences the other: Roman historiographical tradition is transformed into a record of sin and divine retribution while the Sodom narrative becomes a story about the corrupting influence of *luxuria*.

How does this episode relate to the wider purpose of the *Historiae*? Sodom, as mentioned, was compared to Rome throughout the work, and its destruction stands as an explicit warning to Orosius’s contemporaries: “Taking the demise of Sodom and Gomorrah as my example, I warn them that they can learn and understand in what ways God has punished sinners, in what ways He can punish them, and in what ways He will punish them.”[[59]](#endnote-59) For Orosius, the sin-and-punishment narratives of the Old Testament are perfectly applicable to the contemporary world: the exact same logic is at play. However, Orosius’s warning is mitigated by his belief that recent events have been much less catastrophic than in the past. He asks his hypothetical opponents to compare the punishments of Sodom and Rome respectively—they will see that the sack of 410 was simply a warning, not a complete destruction like Sodom. The sack *was* an explicitly providential event—an admonishment from God for the Roman populations’ slide back into pagan practices.[[60]](#endnote-60) But Orosius, unlike Sallust or Cicero, does not in fact perceive a decline in Roman fortune. Indeed, Orosius’s central argument is that the present era is happier than any previous one, and that those who think that Rome’s adoption of Christianity has led to temporal disaster are entirely wrong. His is not the view of Augustine, whose reaction to the sack of 410 was to separate once and for all the secular empire from the spiritual church. Orosius believes that Rome’s Christian faith has secured it a certain importance in history. The picture he paints of the situation at the time of writing sees the empire in a providentially guided state of renewal and peace.[[61]](#endnote-61)

So, while Rome bears comparison with Sodom because the sack of 410 was a providential punishment like the destruction of Sodom, Orosius’s Rome is not a corrupt and decadent society. The sin that necessitated punishment was the paganism of a section of the Roman populace.[[62]](#endnote-62) Unlike the sinful cities of the Old Testament that were destroyed outright, Rome was saved by dint of its Christian faith.[[63]](#endnote-63) As such, it is not surprising that we find no complaints about contemporary Romans falling into *luxuria* and excess. Unlike the two later works we will discuss in this paper, the purpose of the *Historiae* is not to berate the contemporary population for their sinfulness. Orosius’s Rome still stands strong. In just a few decades, however, we find a rather different picture.

SALVIAN (AND OTHERS) ON THE BARBARIANS

In the writings of Salvian of Marseilles we find a different approach to the classical understandings of history.[[64]](#endnote-64) Salvian’s view of history, as vocalized in his *De gubernatione Dei* (439x451), must be understood in the context in which it was composed.[[65]](#endnote-65) He wrote at a time of turbulence and political fragmentation that would have been unimaginable just a generation before. Over the course of the previous few decades, Roman rule in Gaul had collapsed; Salvian, writing from the much-diminished imperial rump in southern Gaul, looked out over a land now controlled by Goths, Alamans, Franks, or the ‘near-barbarian’ (*quasi barbari*) *bacaudae*. The Vandals, meanwhile, had swept into Roman Africa in 429 and had taken Carthage in 439. Salvian himself had come to Marseilles from the Rhine valley, where he says he had witnessed Trier being sacked, and corpses strewn about in the aftermath.[[66]](#endnote-66)

Like Orosius, he drew on biblical narratives of a sinful population who experience divine retribution for that sin. Orosius had argued that the calamities of the early fifth century were not divine reactions to the Christianization of the empire; for Salvian, the calamities of a few decades later *were* signs of divine disfavour, not because the empire had taken up Christianity, but because God was unhappy with the lax morals of the Christians who comprised its population. Salvian has most often been approached as a source of information for unfair and heavy taxation in late Roman Gaul, but his unique worldview has also been explored by some historians in recent years. His understanding of God’s judgement in the events of history has been fruitfully compared to Augustine’s very different take.[[67]](#endnote-67) *De gubernatione Dei* has been seen as an important text in the changing conceptualization of the categories of Roman and barbarian in late antiquity.[[68]](#endnote-68)

In the dedicatory epistle to his work, Salvian self-consciously rejects the tools of classical rhetoric.[[69]](#endnote-69) In the same spirit as many other critics of rhetoric, before and since, he declares that most historians routinely prioritize elegance and eloquence over unadorned truth. Salvian says that his work will be the opposite of this, that utility is preferable to applause.[[70]](#endnote-70) But in reacting in this way to established norms of history-writing, Salvian was, like Orosius, using the tools of the Roman historiographers against them. Rejection of other histories for their truth-distorting ornamentation was itself a *topos* of late antique rhetoric.[[71]](#endnote-71) In fact, Salvian, a contemporary tells us, was “learned in human and divine letters” (*humana et divina litteratura instructus*),[[72]](#endnote-72) which, in a fifth-century context, implies instruction in grammar and rhetoric. Unsurprisingly then, Salvian’s work, and its depiction of moral corruption, owes much to classical models even when it consciously rejects them.

Salvian’s understanding of history is clear from the opening lines of Book 1. Some men, he tells us, think that God is indifferent to human affairs, that He neither protects the good nor constrains the wicked. But, says Salvian, scripture should be proof enough for Christians that this is untrue.[[73]](#endnote-73) A central example for Salvian of this is the narrative of Sodom. It stands, as in Orosius’s writing, as a warning for the present. The story of Sodom is salutary because, when we read scripture and see how excessive were the crimes of the Sodomites, we understand that they destroyed themselves by inviting God’s just judgement.[[74]](#endnote-74) Salvian has often been compared to Augustine, as his reading of history is more or less the exact opposite of the bishop of Hippo. Indeed, at the start of Book 3, Salvian seems to echo Augustine when he asks why the barbarians are so much stronger than the Christian Romans, and why bad men do well while the good suffer. Salvian tells us that he could say quite reasonably (*rationabiliter*) that he does not know, that he cannot penetrate the secrets and counsels of God.[[75]](#endnote-75) But this is the easy way out for Salvian—instead, he concerns himself with demonstrating how divine justice *can* be apprehended in the calamities of recent history.[[76]](#endnote-76)

Salvian’s view of the Roman past was in many ways similar to that held by traditional Roman historians. He understood that the Romans of the past had been self-disciplined and frugal, and that they had fallen from these moral heights due to an increase in abundance. They were victims of their own success. In this, Salvian is in line with traditional Roman historiography. He was different however in that he understood the present tribulations of the empire in completely Christian terms. He understood that Rome’s fluctuations in fortune were to be understood with reference to the tribulations of Israel in the Old Testament. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Salvian did not separate church and state, but saw the Christian church and the Roman empire as indivisible—a “politico-religious entity of the same kind as Israel under Moses.”[[77]](#endnote-77) The barbarians, meanwhile, functioned as instruments of God’s wrath—they were, in the words of Peter Brown, “the travelling assizes of God.”[[78]](#endnote-78)

In Book 6, Salvian discusses the moral corruption of contemporary Romans. Unlike Orosius, who conscientiously separates the bad Romans from the good, Salvian’s tirade is aimed at the Romans as a whole. He rails against the excesses of Roman life, particularly its games and entertainments.[[79]](#endnote-79) “Everything that is wanton is cultivated in the theatres; every kind of *luxuria* in the gymnasia; everything immoderate in the circuses; everything lustful in the arena pits. Here there is immodesty, there lasciviousness, here intemperance, there insanity, everywhere the devil.”[[80]](#endnote-80) Salvian then continues to follow Orosius in marrying the classical idea of corruption through abundance with the biblical divine retributive model of history:

si quando … pacificos nobis dies, proventus uberes, divitem bonis omnibus tranquillitatem et abundantiam dederit super vota crescentem, tanta secundarum rerum prosperitate corrumpimur, tanta morum insolescentium pravitate vitiamur, ut et dei penitus obliviscamur et nostri. Et cum omnem fructum datae a deo pacis in hoc consistere apostolus dicat, ut quietam et tranquillam vitam agamus in omni pietate et castitate, ad hoc tantum data a deo quiete utimur, ut in ebrietate, ut in luxuria, ut in flagitiis, ut in rapinis, ut in omni scelere atque improbitate vivamus.

If at any time He grants us peaceful days and fertile produce, tranquility rich in all good things and abundance increasing beyond our prayers, we are ruined by the great prosperity that follows, we are corrupted by so great a depravity of insolent behavior, that we thoroughly forget God and ourselves. Even though the Apostle declares all the fruits of God-granted peace to depend upon this: that we lead a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and chastity [1 Tim 2.2]; we use the peace given by God for this only: that in drunkenness, that in *luxuria*, that in shameful acts, that in rapine, that in every kind of crime and wickedness we might live.[[81]](#endnote-81)

However, Salvian also purposefully and explicitly breaks with the standard historiographical models. In the very next section of Book 6 he rubbishes the idea that prosperity alone leads to immorality, and that the population will, during more trying times, inevitably return to a simple sobriety and self-restraint. “Have the people in the cities, who were shameless in prosperity, begun to be virtuous in adversity?” he asks sarcastically; “Has drunkenness, which thrived in times of peace and abundance, ceased even during the ravages of the enemy?.”[[82]](#endnote-82) Salvian knew his Sallust, his Tacitus, his Livy; their vision of history and decline is the unspoken target of his acerbic demolition. Orosius had seen in the sack of 410 a warning to the Romans and was cautiously optimistic that this warning would be heeded. Salvian has a less optimistic view: despite the sack, the Romans have not ceased to be blasphemous (*blasphemi*) and wild (*furiosi*). Neither have the inhabitants of Gaul and Spain become less sinful because of the onslaught of the barbarians.[[83]](#endnote-83) The relationship between moral corruption and times of peace and prosperity is categorically discarded.

Indeed, Salvian goes further and points to the Vandals as an example for his fellow citizens of a people who are not, in fact, corrupted by abundance.[[84]](#endnote-84) They take up much the same role that the Britons and Germans did for Tacitus—as mirrors for Roman immorality. North Africa was a productive and prosperous area, described by Martianus Capella soon before the Vandal invasion as awe-inspiring due to its great fertility.[[85]](#endnote-85) Salvian depicts it in scriptural terms as a “land flowing with milk and honey” (*terra lacte ac melle manans*), fertile (*fecunda*) and most wealthy (*opulentissima*), a region “inebriated, as it were, with the abundance of every kind of pleasure” (*omnium deliciarum copiis quasi ebria*).[[86]](#endnote-86) According to the logic of classical historiography, we would expect these barbarians to be overtaken by such abundance, to luxuriate (*luxuriare*) in a land where nature itself was so luxuriant (*luxurians*).[[87]](#endnote-87) Yet this was not the case, as Salvian reports with satisfaction: “In such a great abundance of things and such *luxuria*, not one of them was made effeminate.”[[88]](#endnote-88) Corruption from abundance is not inevitable in Salvian’s worldview. Salvian’s understanding of the enervating power of abundance and luxury is in some ways more traditional than that of Orosius. He does not link *luxuria* with sin—for him, *luxuria* and corruption are related to vigour and power, not morality. The Vandals could be sinful (they were, after all, heretical Arians) and, at the same time, possess the Roman characteristic of *uirtus* (martial prowess, manliness, uprightness). On the other hand, he rejects the link between abundance and inevitable moral corruption—a link accepted by so many writers of antiquity. In Salvian’s pessimistic view, while times of prosperity *could* certainly lead to an increase in excessive and immodest behavior, it was by no means the case that times of adversity would lead to the opposite.

Later in the same century, other writers would come to portray the Vandals. It is worth comparing these depictions with Salvian’s, as they are at odds with his presentation of an incorruptible and moderate people. Many Christians, writing in horror of the conquest of North Africa, were all too keen to ascribe moral degeneration to the Vandals. Where Salvian brashly questioned the traditional Roman historical mechanism of corruption through abundance, others embraced it to paint the Vandals in the worst possible light. In their writings, the Vandals were presented as “once-proud barbarians who collapsed into moral degradation and lost themselves in the decadent excesses of the later Roman Empire.”[[89]](#endnote-89) Procopius, in a famous passage, accused the Vandals of becoming enticed by decadent Roman pleasures like bathing, fine dining, gold and expensive clothing; they spend all their time in the theatres and hippodromes, or hunting; they throw banquets and indulge in all manner of sexual pleasures.[[90]](#endnote-90) Historians have often implicitly followed Procopius’s account; and his claims have tended to be read in light of the wider debate about the extent to which Vandal cultural identity was subsumed by Roman ways of life.[[91]](#endnote-91) But Procopius’s depiction of the Vandals’ slide into decadence cannot be taken at face value; it must be read in light of popular notions about the enervating effect of abundance. The targets of his scorn—the circus and the theatre—are not simply “Roman” pastimes but the traditional targets of Christian ascetic criticism, the same activities that are denounced by Augustine, Orosius and Salvian as luxurious and sinful.[[92]](#endnote-92) More than that, they are among the vices listed by Tacitus in his *Agricola*—vices that served to corrupt the Britons. The twinning of such a gluttonous and indulgent lifestyle with sexual excess is also part of this tradition, as we have seen. It is a classic example of the Sallustian *topos* of corruption and decline.

A comparison of Salvian with Procopius, therefore, demonstrates how the same Classical *topoi* could be employed by Christian historiographers to make opposing cases. Inherited ideas about how *luxuria* bred corruption but frugality promoted virtue were drawn on to pursue new aims in a new world. They were used by writers who still identified as Roman to decry the moral decline of their own people, or to paint the barbarians as corrupt, decadent and effete. Salvian’s rejection of classical historiographical models was clearly not widely influential—nearly a century later, Procopius could still draw on models of *luxuria* and decline to denigrate the Vandals. And elsewhere in the sixth century, as we shall, the *topos* retained some power.

GILDAS AND THE COMING OF THE SAXONS

For the final part of this discussion, I turn to the other end of the former empire, and the *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* of Gildas, written at some time between the late-fifth and mid-sixth century (though the dating remains a contentious issue).[[93]](#endnote-93) Gildas was once thought of as a unique and singular figure, detached from the wider late antique world, and his Latin style was seen as part of an idiosyncratic tradition of Insular Latin that emphasized obscure vocabulary. It is now clear that Gildas does not lie outside the mainstream of late antique culture. His prose, it has been shown, is of a piece with continental Latin writing of the fifth and sixth centuries—best compared with continental authors like Cassiodorus or Sulpicius Severus.[[94]](#endnote-94) In an important essay, Michael Lapidge has demonstrated that Gildas was the product of a traditional Roman education, thoroughly grounded in grammar and rhetoric.[[95]](#endnote-95) His writing reflects this—*De excidio* has been re-evaluated as a skilful piece of rhetoric, drawing on all the tools we would expect: the preface, the apostrophes to the five tyrants, the use of *clausulae*, the overall structure of the work—all have been shown to follow traditional rhetorical models.[[96]](#endnote-96) Finally, Gildas self-consciously draws on both classical and Christian *topoi* to create an allusive text with many implications below the surface level.[[97]](#endnote-97)

Chapters 1–26 of the *De excidio* provide a narrative of the history of Britain. Scholars have been apt to label the *De excidio* anything other than a history, but Gildas himself describes this section as a “tearful” (*flebilis*) *historia*.[[98]](#endnote-98) Writing in order to prove a particular rhetorical point does not disqualify Gildas from the position of historian any more than it does Orosius. It has long been noted that theview of history in *De excidio* is heavily inspired by scripture, particularly the Old Testament.[[99]](#endnote-99) What has been less certain has been the extent to which Gildas owed to the Christian historiography of late antiquity. Gildas’s range of reading has in the past often been deemed quite limited.[[100]](#endnote-100) Although his presentation of the history of Britain seems of a piece with the sin-and-punishment narratives of other late antique historiographers, scholars have been wary of making any direct links. Patrick Sims-Williams, writing in the early 1980s, was of the opinion that, seeing as how he showed no knowledge of their work, the thematic links between Gildas’s writings and those of Augustine, Orosius and Salvian could only be ascribed to “similar circumstances and biblical outlook, plus a strong gust of *Zeitgeist*.”[[101]](#endnote-101) The extent of Gildas’s library has since been explored in a number of revealing studies; and, although it remains frustratingly opaque, it is clear that Gildas was familiar with such important texts as Vergil’s *Aeneid*, the writings of John Cassian and Jerome and the histories of Rufinus-Eusebius and Orosius.[[102]](#endnote-102) Rather than being drawn up in an inexplicable *zeitgeist*, therefore, it is clear now that Gildas—like Orosius and Salvian—was purposefully drawing on particular tropes and images from Roman historiography in his construction of a narrative for post-Roman Britain.

We should be surprised therefore to find that Gildas’s view of history follows some well-established lines. Like Orosius and Salvian before him, he draws parallels between recents events and precedents from sacred history. In the preface, he explicitly sets up this biblical background, explaining that as he read about the events of the Old Testament, he felt that he was looking at “a kind of mirror of our own life” (*speculum quoddam vitae nostrae*).[[103]](#endnote-103) Not for Gildas Augustine’s insistence that the events of history remain opaque, that the sin-and-punishment logic of the Old Testament not be applied to the histories of other peoples: the Lord did not spare the Israelites when they strayed, Gildas notes, so what will he do with “this great black blot on our generation” (*talis huius atramentum aetatis*)?[[104]](#endnote-104) As in Orosius and Salvian, the barbarians are understood as instruments of God’s wrath. Gildas sees the invasion of the Saxons as a God-decreed event—an admonition to His people, the Britons. He does not expect a complete disaster, however: the invasion is a warning, not the kind of judgement delivered on Sodom and Gomorrah, but more like Orosius’s understanding of the punishment of Rome.[[105]](#endnote-105)

One particular episode in this narrative stands as an exemplary model of the type of thought I have been discussing in this paper. According to Gildas, after the Roman army had withdrawn from Britain, the Britons were subjected to ravaging attacks from the Scots and Picts. After a time, the Britons manage to fight back; the Irish pirates return home and the Picts are quiet for a time. For Gildas, however, what follows this violent period is even worse:

… fame alia virulentiore tacitus pullulante. Quiescente autem vastitate tantis abundantiarum copiis insula affluebat ut nulla habere tales retro aetas meminisset, cum quibus omnimodis et luxuria crescit. Crevit etenim germine praepollenti, ita ut competenter eodem tempore diceretur: “omnino talis auditur fornicatio qualis nec inter gentes.”

… a different, more virulent famine [was] sprouting in secret. While resting from devastation, the island was thronged with such an abundance of wealth as had never before been known; alongside this abundance *luxuria* arose. Indeed it increased with strong shoots so that it could aptly be said of that time: “such fornication is reported as not even among the Gentiles.”[[106]](#endnote-106)

Gildas’s use of this *topos* is similar to his approach in the rest of the work. Classical and Christian worldviews are seamlessly sewn together. His depiction of sudden abundance and the *luxuria* that appears alongside it would be perfectly at home in any work of Western historiography of the previous six centuries, from Sallust to Orosius.

In Gildas’s account, as in Orosius’s depiction of Sodom, the sin engendered by *luxuria* is implied to be sexual. As we have seen, classical and Christian writings implied a link between *luxuria* and sexual immorality. Gildas specifically connects the sin of the Britons with 1 Corinthians 5.1 (‘It is absolutely heard, that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as the like is not among the heathens; that one should have his father's wife’) though he leaves off the final part of the passage, so that the exact sexual sin is not named but remains ambiguous.[[107]](#endnote-107) In doing so he connects the kinds of social problems identified by Paul in a Christian community with the social problems most often identified by Classical historiographers and moralists.

This period of sin and moral turpitude functions as a mirror for the present.[[108]](#endnote-108) Gildas begins and ends this section of the *De excidio* with the phrase *sicut et nunc est*: “just as it is now.” The implication is clear: just as He did in the past, God will not hesitate to punish the Britons of the present day if they do not mend their ways. Like Orosius before him, Gildas is concerned that his historical account serve as a warning to contemporary society. Unsurprisingly, then, there are clear links between the historical decadence of the Britons and the contemporary sinfulness against which Gildas rails. This is particularly clear in Gildas’s diatribe against the five kings.[[109]](#endnote-109) In this section, Gildas draws on the Roman rhetorical image of the tyrant.[[110]](#endnote-110) The imagery he uses to depict these *tyranni* is of a piece with the rhetoric of Cicero, Livy, Tacitus and Suetonius, who depicted Roman emperors such as Nero in this way.[[111]](#endnote-111) Implications of sexual degeneracy were an important part of this portrayal. In Gildas’s descriptions of the five British tyrants, therefore, it is unsurprising to find him emphasizing sexual sins along with acts of cruelty and impiety. Bad rulership goes hand in hand with immorality. The first of these kings, Constantinus, is accused of being a serial adulterer who discarded his lawful wife; the second, Aurelius Caninus, of fornications (*fornicationes*) and adulteries (*adulteria*); the third, Vortiporius, of adulteries (*adulteria*) and of the rape of a daughter after the death of his wife; the fourth, Cuneglasus, of discarding his first wife in favour of her sister, a nun; the last, Maglocunus (a former monk), of leaving his first wife in favour of the wife of his nephew, then murdering the nephew and the first wife.[[112]](#endnote-112) Though some of these accusations contain specific details that point to a probable basis in reality, others are clearly generic, and point to the continuing power of the rhetorical image of the *tyrannus* in Gildas’s time.

The *De excidio* represents a complex web of scriptural and literary allusion, paraphrase and citation. Throughout the work there are a number of repeating images that serve to link contemporary events with scripture.[[113]](#endnote-113) One such image serves as an image of worldly excess, tying the enormities of the present to the biblical past: Sodom. This use of the image of Sodom led some later interpreters to assume that homosexual activity was implied,[[114]](#endnote-114) but, as we have seen, the implications for Gildas would have been of a more general type of excessive behavior. His references to Sodom in the diatribe against the five kings are particularly telling. Of Constantinus Gildas says: “he had planted in the soil of his heart a kind of shoot of unbelief and foolishness from the bitter vine of the men of Sodom.”[[115]](#endnote-115) The last and worst of these kings, Maglocunus, is “as if drunk on wine pressed from the vine of the men of the Sodom.”[[116]](#endnote-116) As shown by Nicholas Perkins, wine is used by Gildas throughout the work as an image of debauchery and sin;[[117]](#endnote-117) the image of drinking from wine pressed from the vine of the men of Sodom, therefore, was doubly indicative of excess and intemperance (as well as a reference to Deuteronomy 32.32). Gildas returns to the Sodom theme in the next part of the work, in which he discusses the words of the prophets, and positions himself as the successor to those Old Testament figures who criticized sinful rulers. He implies a connection between the rulers of contemporary Britain and, for instance, the “princes of Sodom” chastised in Isaiah 1.10. Both number among those earthly rulers “burdened with widespread riches and intent on the defilement of sin” (*cum latis divitiis onerati, sordibus peccatorum intenti*).[[118]](#endnote-118) It may well be that Gildas’s decision to address five kings is consciously modelled after the five kings mentioned in Genesis 14.18, in whose number were included the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah.[[119]](#endnote-119) The link between abundance and moral corruption is clear, as is the symbolism of Sodom in Gildas’s understanding—it is a symbol of worldly degeneracy, *luxuria* and sinful excess.

The Roman image of abundance and *luxuria* as precipitators of moral degeneracy is alive and well in Gildas, though it has been married to a Christian understanding of sin and divine retributive justice.. The history of the Britons is explained by one repeated pattern: abundance and wealth causes sin, sin is punished by God, the population reacts by reforming their morals and the period of punishment ceases. Gildas reinstates the Sallustian causative model to a central role in his history

CONCLUSION

In the narratives of Orosius, Salvian and Gildas we find a middle period between the Sallustian model of moral decline as a historical mechanism and Richard Southern’s characterization of medieval historiography. The link between abundance and *luxuria* had been maintained, but it was being detached from any sense of universal patterns. These historians drew on the classical model of decline but in a truncated form: abundance could lead to moral corruption, to be sure, but the ultimate destruction of a polity lay with providence, not with the internal problems of corruption and effeminacy identified by classical historians.

Orosius is the first Christian historian to apply the classical model of abundance and corruption to biblical history. In his vision, however, this model is no longer the main mechanism by which ruination comes about. Ruination comes, not as the inevitable result of the softness and effeminacy brought on by *luxuria*, but through the direct involvement of providence: God, in reaction to the sinfulness of the population, destroys Sodom. Ruination is still linked with *luxuria* but the mechanics through which it comes about are entirely different. The Christian concept of sin—and God’s resulting wrath—was centred. In other words, ruination comes not from internal forces (weakening of moral character leading to military vulnerability) but from external ones (a direct act of God). Orosius applies this model only to the destruction of Sodom, however. He falls short of applying it to contemporary world. Salvian follows a different interpretive tack. He understands that the process apprehended by Orosius in the narrative of Sodom is the same process at work in the contemporary Roman world. He sees the moral corruption of the Christian Romans as the result of wealth and abundance and the political and military disasters of recent years as a punishment from God. But he also rejected the classical model—or at least the part that implied that times of hardship would see morality and frugality return to the population. Instead, Salvian occupies a world of inexplicable sin and decadence that can only be fixed by listening to the admonitions of God. Gildas, like Salvian, applies the corruption-through-*luxuria* model to recent events. For him, the catastrophe of the Saxon arrival in Britain is a divine punishment for the Britons’ fall into sin, a fall engendered by abundance. Unlike Salvian, Gildas believes that, in times of struggle, the population does revert to correct behavior: it is this pattern of sin, punishment and moral renewal that powers his vision of history in the *De excidio*.

Gildas was one of the last of his breed—a Christian writer whose education had been classical rather than monastic, who knew and relied on scripture but who was also possessed of a deeply-ingrained knowledge of rhetoric and classical historiography. As the middle ages progressed, the word *luxuria* would lose many of its connotations and begin its slow shift towards a narrower meaning (becoming more specifically associated with sexual sin). The historiographical theme of *luxuria* and moral decline would begin to ebb as well: Sallust, Josephus and other classical authors were still known and often influential, but the monastic libraries of medieval Europe would be weighted towards Christian writings. The way in which late antique Church writers spoke of *luxuria* would shape its use in the medieval period, when it would become associated more and more with one of the seven deadly sins: sexual lust. Nevertheless, some shadow of the Sallustian idea of corruption proved an enduring notion; it would prove a tempting explanatory model for later historians from Bruni to Gibbon.

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25. Tacitus, *Agricola* 21 (LCL 35:66): “ad delenimenta vitiorum, porticus et balineas et conviviorum elegantiam”; Berry, *Luxury*, 69, n. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. On the Germans and Britons as images of ancient Romans, see C. Clarke, “An Island Nation: Re-reading Tacitus’ “Agricola”,” *JRS* 91 (2001): 94–112; E. O’Gorman, “No Place Like Rome: Identity and Difference in the Germania of Tacitus,” *Ramus* 22 (1993): 147–49. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Berry, *Luxury*, 68–69. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Cf. J. A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities: Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, Early Jewish and Early Christian Traditions* (Kampen: Kok, 1990), 88. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Philo, *De Abraham* 26 (LCL 289:68). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Philo, *De Abraham* 26 (LCL 289:70; trans. LCL 289:71): “μεγίστη δ᾿ ἀρχὴ κακῶν” ὡς εἶπέ τις οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ “τὰ λίαν ἀγαθά.” [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Josephus, *Ant*. 1.11.1 (LCL 242:94). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. L. H. Feldman, “The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah according to Philo, Pseudo-Philo and Josephus,” *Henoch* 23:2–3 (2001): 192. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Josephus, *Ant*. 5.2.7 (LCL 490:222). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Runia, *Philo*. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Berry, *Luxury*, 87–98. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. On Christian attitudes to wealth in this period, see P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. On the later history of *luxuria* as one of the capital sins, see C. Catalini, “*Luxuria* and its Branches,” in *Sex, Love and Marriage in Medieval Literature and Reality*, ed. D. Buschinger and W. Spiewok (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1996), 13–20; Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Ambrose *Myst*. 2.5 (CSEL 73:90). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. T. Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 15–58. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Ambrose *Ep. ex*. 14.26 (CSEL 82:249): “luxuria … mater libidinis est.” [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Lactantius *Inst*. 2.1 (CSEL 19:97): “ex rerum prosperitate luxuria, ex luxuria uero ut uitia omnia sic inpietas aduersus deum nascitur.” [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Southern, “Historical Writing,” 179–80. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 22.4.3–6, 22.12.3, 22.15.13, 31.5.14 (ed. W. Seyfarth, L. Jacob-Karau and I. Ulmann, *Ammiani Marcellini rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, 2 vols [Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1978], 1:254–55, 278, 284, 2: 173–74). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Aug. *Ciu*. 1.30–31 (CCL 47:46–49); C. Burns, “Augustine’s Use of Sallust in the City of God: The Role of Grammatical Tradition,” *AugSt* 30:2 (1999): 105–114. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Aug. *Ciu*. 2.19 (CCL 47:76–77). [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. On Orosius and the *Historiae*, see Van Nuffelen, *Orosius*; D. Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 135–49; Zecchini, “Latin Historiography: Jerome, Orosius and the Western Chronicles,” in *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity: Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. G. Marasco (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 317–45. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. R. W. Burgess, review of *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity*, ed. G. Marasco, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2004.03.49. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Van Nuffelen, *Orosius*. Cf. Eigler, *Lectiones uetustatis*, 222–24. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, 25–44. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Oros. *Hist*. 4.21.4 (Arnaud-Lindet 2:69). [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Oros. *Hist*. 4.21.5–7 (Arnaud-Lindet 2:70). [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Oros. *Hist*. 4.23.9 (Arnaud-Lindet 2:74). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Oros. *Hist*. 4.23.9–10 (Arnaud-Lindet 2:74–75). [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Oros. *Hist*. 7.43.19, Arnaud-Lindet 3:131; trans. A.T. Fear, *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 414: “cupiditates et punitiones hominum peccatorum, conflictationes seculi et iudicia Dei.” [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Oros. *Hist*. 1.5.6–8 (Arnaud-Lindet 1:46; trans. adapted from Fear 52–53). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. I will expand on this argument in a forthcoming publication, “The Sin of Sodom in Late Antiquity.” [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric:* *A Foundation for Literary Study*, trans. M. T. Bliss, A. Jansen and D. E. Orton (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 279–80; cf. the related technique, *reduplicatio*, at 277–78. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. M. Kempshall, review of P. Van Nuffelen, *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*, *JRS* 104 (2014): 363. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Oros. *Hist*. 1.6.6 (Arnaud-Lindet 1:48; trans. Fear 54): “Quos saltim de hoc ipso exitu Sodomorum et Gomorraeorum moneo, ut discere atque intellegere queant, qualiter Deus peccatores punierit, qualiter punire possit, qualiter puniturus sit.” [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Oros. *Hist*. 7.38.7, 7.39.2 (Arnaud-Lindet 3:113, 114). [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Oros. *Hist*. 7.43.17 (Arnaud-Lindet 3:131). [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Oros. *Hist*. 7.39.18 (Arnaud-Lindet 3:117). [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, 58–60. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. On Salvian and his view of history: D. Lambert, “The Uses of Decay: History in Salvian’s *De gubernatione dei*,” *AugSt* 30:2 (1999): 115–130; Brown, *Salvian of Marseilles: Theology and Social Criticism in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (Oxford: Dacre Lecture, 2010); J. Badewien, *Geschichtstheologie und Sozialkritik im Werk Salvians von Marseille* Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 32 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980);J. J. O’Donnell, “Salvian and Augustine,” *AugSt* 14 (1983): 25–34; R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 168–75; G. W. Olsen, “Reform after the Pattern of the Primitive Church in the Thought of Salvian of Marseilles,” *CHR* 68 (1982): 1–12. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Evocatively described in Brown, *Salvian*, 3–4; see also the essays in *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. J. Drinkwater and H. Eton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Salv. *Gub*. 6.15.84 (SC 220:416). [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Lambert, “The Uses of Decay.” [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. M. Maas, “Ethnicity, Orthodoxy and Community in Salvian of Marseilles,” in Drinkwater and Eton, *Fifth-Century Gaul*, 275–84. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Discussed in Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*, 447–48. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Salv. *Gub*. Praef. (SC 220:96–98). [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Van Nuffelen, *Orosius*, 74–75. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Gennad. *Vir*. 68 (*TU* 14:84). [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Salv. *Gub*. 1.1.1 (SC 220:100). [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Salv. *Gub*. 1.8.39 (SC 220:136). [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. O’Donnell, “Salvian and Augustine,” 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Lambert, “The Uses of Decay,” 116–21; Badewien, *Geschichtstheologie*, 31–50. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Lambert, “The Uses of Decay,” 128. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Brown, *Salvian*, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Badewien, *Geschichtstheologie*, 83–93. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Salv. *Gub*. 6.11.60–61 (SC 220:402): “quicquid immunditiarum est hoc exercetur in theatris, quicquid luxuriarum in palaestris, quicquid immoderationis in circis, quicquid furoris in caueis. Alibi est impudicitia, alibi lasciuia, alibi intemperantia, alibi insania, ubique daemon.” [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Salv. *Gub*. 6.11.63–64 (SC 220:402–4). [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Salv. *Gub*. 6.12.66 (SC 220:404): “Numquid populi ciuitatum, qui impudici rebus prosperis fuerant, asperis casti esse coeperunt? Numquid ebrietas, quae in tranquillitate et abundantia creuerat, hostili saltim depopulatione cessauit?.” [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Salv. *Gub*. 6.12.67 (SC 220:404–6). [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Salvian’s depiction of the Vandals and other barbarians has been discussed widely. See, for instance, M. Maas, “Ethnicity, Orthodoxy and Community in Salvian of Marseilles,” in Drinkwater and Eton, *Fifth-century Gaul*, 275–84; P. Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* (Paris: Hachette, 1948), 146–55. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Martianus Capella, *De Nupt.* 6.669 (ed. J. Willis, *Martianus Cappela* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1983], 237); A. Merrills and R. Miles, *The Vandals* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Salv. *Gub*. 7.20.85 (SC 220:492). [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Salv. *Gub*. 7.20.85 (SC 220:492). [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Salv. *Gub*. 7.20.87 (SC 220:492): “in tanta affluentia rerum atque luxuria nullus eorum mollis effectus est.” [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Procopius, *De bello Vandalico* 4.6 (LCL 81:256). [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. A. H. Merrills, “Introduction: Vandals, Romans and Berbers: Understanding Late Antique North Africa,” in *Vandals, Romans Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*, ed. A. H. Merrills (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 17–18; Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*, 101–2. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*, 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Attempts to provide a more precise date are numerous. A representative sample might include: Dumville, “The Chronology of *De excidio Britanniae*, Book I,” in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. M. Lapidge and D. Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1984), 61–84, (ca. 544); I. Wood, “The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels,” in Lapidge and Dumville, *Gildas: New Approaches*, 1–25 (485x520); N. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) (479x484). [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. M. Lapidge, “Gildas’s Education” in Lapidge and Dumville, *Gildas: New Approaches*, 27–50; Wright, “Gildas’s Prose Style and its Origin,” in Lapidge and Dumville, *Gildas: New Approaches*, 107–28; F. Kerlouégan, “Le Latin du *De excidio Britanniae* de Gildas,” in *Christianity in Britain, 300-700*, ed. M.W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969), 151–176. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Lapidge, “Gildas’s Education.” [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Winterbottom, “The Preface of Gildas’ *De Excidio*,” *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1974/1975): 277–87; Lapidge, “Gildas’s Education,” 41–46; G. Orlandi, “Clausulae in Gildas’s *De excidio Britanniae*,” in Lapidge and Dumville, *Gildas: New Approaches*, 129–49. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Kerlouégan, *Le De Excidio Britanniae de Gildas: Les destinées de la culture latine dans l’Île de Bretagne au Vle siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1987), 143–98; N. Perkins, “Biblical Allusion and Prophetic Authority in Gildas’s *De excidio Britanniae*,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 20 (2010): 78–112. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. T. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons: 350–1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Perkins, “Biblical Allusion”; T. O’Loughlin, *Gildas and the Scriptures: Observing the World through a Biblical Lens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. For instance, E.A. Thompson, “Gildas and the History of Britain,” *Britannia* 10 (1979): 203–26. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. P. Sims-Williams, “Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons,” *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 6 (1983): 2, n. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Wright, “Gildas’s Prose Style”; Wright, “Did Gildas Read Orosius?,” *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 9 (1985): 31–42; N. Wright, “Gildas’s Reading: A Survey,” *Sacris Erudiri* 32 (1991): 121–62; Kerlouégan, *Le De Excidio*, 71–100. The similarity between *De excidio* and *De gubernatione Dei* has often been remarked upon, though no direct borrowing has been shown thus far. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Gild. *Brit*. 1.7, ed. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (Chichester, 1978), 88. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Gild. *Brit*. 1.13 (Winterbottom, 88; trans. Winterbottom, 15). [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Cf. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the* Britons, 203: “Later writers knew that the Saxons (or English) did in the end succeed in conquering most of Britain, but such hindsight should be avoided in interpreting the text: for Gildas, the disaster of a more complete Saxon conquest threatens, but it has yet to happen.” [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. Gild. *Brit*. 21.2 (Winterbottom, 96). [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. R. Knight, “Procreative Sodomy: Textuality and the Construction of Ethnicities in Gerald of Wales's Descriptio Kambriæ,” *Exemplaria* 14 (2002): 71–72 argues that Gildas is specifically implying sodomy, but this seems to me a misreading coloured by later developments. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. Dumville, “Chronology,” 69–70. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. For the historical background to these kings, see K. H. Jackson, “Varia: 2. Gildas and the Names of the British Princes,” *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 3 (1982): 30–40. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Snyder, *An* *Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons, A.D. 400–600* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 90–108. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. Above, n. 16; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, 306, n. 110. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Gild. *Brit*. 28.3; 30.1; 31.1; 32.2; 35.2–3 (Winterbottom, 100–3). [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Perkins, “Biblical Allusion,” 78–112. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia regum* 11.183, ed. M. D. Reeve, *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of De gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae)* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 255; Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Cambriae* 7.21, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. F. Dimock and G. F. Warner, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* 8 vols (London: Rolls Series, 1861–91), 6:215; John Bale, *The Actes of Englysh Votaries* (London: John Tysdale, 1560), 20b–21a. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Gild. *Brit*. 28.4 (Winterbottom, 100): “amarissima enim quoddam de vite Sodomorum in cordis sui … gleba surculamen incredulitatis et insipientiae plantaverat.” [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. Gild. *Brit*. 33.1–2 (Winterbottom, 102): “veluti madidus vino de Sodomitana vite expresso.” [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. Perkins, “Biblical Allusion,” 91. [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. Gild. *Brit*. 42.3 (Winterbottom, 108). [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 211. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)