

OLYMPIODORUS OF THEBES AND THE HISTORY OF THE WEST (A.D. 407-425)

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The varied talents of Olympiodorus of Thebes, which made him a significant personality of his own age, deserve also to have made him, more than he seems to have become, a figure of interest to students of his age.¹ By origin and education, he represents the surviving vigour of the late 'Hellenistic' culture of the Roman empire; in his political services to the court of Constantinople, he can be recognized as the first of a distinctive profession—of Byzantine diplomats; as a man who travelled to Syene and the distant Blemmyes 'ἰστορίας ἕνεκα', he subscribes to a tradition of educated tourism reaching back to Herodotus;² while in the inseparable company, which he kept for more than twenty years, of a pet parrot that could 'dance, sing, call its owner's name, and do many other tricks',³ Olympiodorus even cuts, to modern eyes, an eccentrically buccaneering figure. And above all, as a historian he claims a central place in a continuous tradition of Greek writing on Roman affairs—a tradition notoriously lacking in western historiography.⁴

Without his historical work in which he mentioned them, Olympiodorus' other activities, even his existence, would have been entirely unknown to us. Yet his historical achievement is best understood in relation to his other interests; and so he may be first introduced as an intellectual and political figure of the late Roman society of the eastern provinces.

I

Olympiodorus' first personal appearance in his history comes in about 412, on an embassy to the Huns; his last, in 425 or soon after, on a visit to Rome. If his active life fell, as we might presume, in his thirties and forties, then he would have been born not far from the year 380. The Egyptian Thebaid, where he was brought up and educated, was flourishing in these years, to a more spectacular extent than ever before, as a centre of traditional Greek literary learning and as a cradle of politicians and public figures.⁵ Olympiodorus described himself as a 'poet by profession' (ποιητῆς τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα). That he was regarded by the Byzantine patriarch Photius as a 'pagan' ('Ἕλληνας τὴν θρησκείαν)⁶ illustrates the extent to which 'paganism' might be interpreted less as a specifically religious commitment than as an integral part of a still dynamic cultural tradition; while Olympiodorus' own success illustrates equally how even the self-consciously Christian court of Constantinople of the fifth century was able to waive its religious principles, in order still to be able to recruit supporters and political agents possessing a classical literary education.⁷

Like many others, then, Olympiodorus found that the Classical education offered access to a career in public life; and in about 412, he appears at the head of his embassy to the court of the Hunnish king Donatus. His arrival was succeeded, the same night, by the murder of Donatus; and Olympiodorus was able, using resources which he had provisionally taken with him from Constantinople, to placate and win over the king's successor.

* An earlier version of this paper was read to the Oxford Philological Society in March 1969. I am most grateful to members of that audience for their comments and criticisms; especially to two, Professor Arnaldo Momigliano and Mr. Alan Cameron, whose remarks have provoked me to re-consider some of the main arguments of that version (cf. below, note 108). I wish in addition to express my gratitude to Dr. Fergus Millar's recent paper, 'P. Herennius Dexippus: The Greek World and the Third-Century Invasions', *JRS* LIX (1969), 12-29, as a splendid example of the reconstruction of a historian's experience against his contemporary background.

¹ I can only cite, as general studies, W. Haedicke, *RE* xviii, 1 (1939), 201-7, and the excellent article, to which I owe much, by E. A. Thompson, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes', *CQ* xxxviii (1944), 43-52.

² Olympiodorus, Fragment 37 (cf. C. Müller,

Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum iv, 57-68; cited henceforth as 'Frag.' simply).

³ Frag. 36.

⁴ Cf. the remarks of Sir R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (1968), esp. 104 f.

⁵ Alan Cameron, 'Wandering Poets; a literary movement in Byzantine Egypt', *Historia* xiv (1965), 470-509. For a glimpse of Olympiodorus' cultural range cf. below, notes 102-3.

⁶ Cf. Photius' introduction to Olympiodorus, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 80 (*FHG* iv, 58 or in the recent edition of P. Henry, *Collection Byzantine* (Budé 1959), I, 166 f.)

⁷ Cameron, o.c. esp. 471 f. For the converse of the argument—a continuing class of Byzantine bureaucrats as the patrons of traditional culture—cf. G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (1963), 69 f.

The suggestion of Alan Cameron, that 'the intrepid Olympiodorus had been entrusted with the delicate mission of bringing precisely this chain of circumstances to pass', perhaps errs only on the side of tact.⁸

Soon, in about 415, Olympiodorus is found in very different circumstances—at Athens, where his influence secured a chair of rhetoric for one Leontius.⁹ Olympiodorus also described student life at Athens and some of its customs; and he mentioned his friend the grammarian Philtadius, whose expertise in colometry, an essential aspect of the preparation of new editions of Classical prose works, was rewarded by the erection at Athens of a public statue in his honour.¹⁰ This was perhaps a more significant episode than first appearances may suggest; for it can be convincingly argued that the work of re-copying Classical texts—and so perhaps also the appointment of new professors of rhetoric—can be connected with an officially supported programme of restoration at Athens in the years after the Visigothic invasions of the later 390's.¹¹

Soon after his visit to Athens, the historian emerges in his role as traveller and tourist. He visited the 'Oasis', describing the fossils found there, and the fertility which had provoked Herodotus to identify the place with the 'Land of the Blessed'.¹² Olympiodorus also travelled to the remote parts of Upper Egypt, now occupied by the barbarian Blemmyes. Here the local priests attempted, although without success, to get permission from their king to show the visitor the emerald mines which had once supplied the Pharaohs.¹³

A few years after this exotic excursion, evidently described by him at some length, Olympiodorus makes his final appearance in his history, and his only known visit to the west. He came to Rome; in the history, he expressed his amazement at the colossal size of some of the monuments and private buildings of the city in the form of a well-turned epigram, the only surviving illustration of his renown as a poet: Εἰς δόμος ἄστῳ πέλει πόλις ἄστρα μυρία κεύθει.¹⁴ Further, in describing, in a famous passage, the enormous expenditures of some senators on public games at Rome, he referred to the usurpation of Johannes (423–5).¹⁵ It does not strain the imagination to suppose that Olympiodorus' visit to the west was somehow connected with the restoration by Theodosius II of the Emperor Valentinian III on the western throne in 425; if so, then once again Olympiodorus can be seen to have played a central role in the political events of his day.

II

According to Photius, who excerpted Olympiodorus' history for his *Bibliotheca*, the work covered the years 407 to 425, in twenty-two books. Photius states that Book x described Olympiodorus' visit to the Huns, and that the second decad began with events in Gaul which can be ascribed to the year 412.¹⁶ It is not known on what scale the individual books were conceived, but it must be clear, even from this information, that the work was of generous proportions. It was dedicated to the Emperor Theodosius II (died 450), and perhaps composed quite soon after its own terminal point.¹⁷

The history itself, in its original form, is lost, but the outlines of its contents can be reconstructed from a variety of sources. First, there is Photius' summary of the work, known as the 46 Fragments of Olympiodorus, and printed as such in standard collections.¹⁸

⁸ Frag. 18; Cameron, o.c. 497.

⁹ Frag. 28.

¹⁰ Frag. 32; cf. Alison Frantz, 'Honors to a Librarian', *Hesperia* xxxv (1966), 377–80.

¹¹ Frantz, o.c. 379 f.; cf. Homer Thompson, 'Athenian Twilight', *JRS* XLIX (1959), at 66 f. For the praetorian prefect of Illyricum Herculus, connected with the restorations (*IG* III, 2, 4224–5), cf. Frantz, *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Christliche Archäologie, Trier 1965* (1969), 527–30; and for the sophist Plutarchos, associated with Herculus in *IG* III, 2, 4224, cf. 3818, where he finances a Panathenaic procession.

¹² Frag. 33.

¹³ Frag. 37: σμαράγδου μέταλλα . . . ἐξ ὧν τοῖς Αἰγυπτίῳ βασιλεῦσιν ἡ σμαράγδος ἐπιτέοναξε.

¹⁴ Frag. 43; for the possible circumstances of the visit, cf. below, p. 88 f.

¹⁵ Frag. 44; cf. the acclamation to Johannes reported at Frag. 41.

¹⁶ Photius, at Frags. 18/19: ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡ πρώτη τῆς ἱστορίας δεκάλογος. (19) Ἀρχεται δὲ ἡ δευτέρα ὧδε κτλ.

¹⁷ It was used by Sozomen (published c. 443–4) and Philostorgius (c. 440); cf. below, nn. 20, 25. Thompson, o.c. (n. 1), suggests tentatively an early date of publication, c. 427, because of the favourable view expressed of Bonifatius (Frag. 21, 40, 42).

¹⁸ I.e. Müller, *FHG* and Dindorf, *Historici Graeci Minores* 1 (Teubner, 1870), 450–70. The recent edition of P. Henry (above, n. 6) does not use the traditional numeration. The *Fragments* are translated with interlinked commentary by C. D. Gordon *The Age of Attila* (1960), esp. 25 f.

These Fragments are of very great importance, both for their intrinsic value—in particular, they span the whole, and not merely a part, of the period originally covered by Olympiodorus—and as confirmation of certain of the qualities of his work; but it is possible to approach closer to the structure of the history, and to its spirit, by exploiting other writers' use of it. Two in particular, who made extensive use of Olympiodorus, were Zosimus and Sozomen.

Zosimus, writing in all probability within the space of a few years at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries,¹⁹ employed Olympiodorus as his source from the last completed portion of his own 'New History'; that is, for the chapters (v, 26–vi, 13) describing the period from 407 to the first half of 410, but not reaching the sack of Rome in August 410. Zosimus' version of Olympiodorus is by far the fullest in our possession, and must form the basis of any further investigation; yet the briefer epitome provided by Sozomen presents certain advantages over it. Sozomen wrote earlier than Zosimus, concluding his church history in or very soon after 443, and so not many years after the appearance of Olympiodorus' work;²⁰ he preserves valuable details which are not in Zosimus; and he sometimes gives a version which seems distinctly closer to Olympiodorus than that of Zosimus.²¹ Sozomen, moreover, extends in continuous narrative beyond the end of Zosimus' account, to the sack of Rome and, in his description of Gallic affairs, as far as the year 412.²²

In addition to these writers, use was made of Olympiodorus by another ecclesiastical historian, Philostorgius, whose chapters for the relevant period again, regrettably, survive only in a fragmentary abridgement by Photius.²³ Philostorgius' use of Olympiodorus, although questioned, is reasonably sure.²⁴ His final book (Book XII) covered the same ground, and in the same manner, as Olympiodorus; he concluded his work with the same episode, and preserves occasional details which would fit very well into Olympiodorus' narrative as we otherwise have it. Philostorgius must have completed his history by about 440, possibly even closer than Sozomen to the appearance of Olympiodorus' work.²⁵

Any attempt to discover the character of Olympiodorus' history must, however, concern primarily the use made of it by Zosimus and Sozomen, since only they provide an integral narrative version. The Fragments and Philostorgius, for all their value in certain matters, cannot be expected to provide any hint of the narrative and other artistic qualities which may have been possessed by the historian.

That Zosimus turned to Olympiodorus as his source from 407 until the end of the completed portion of his work has been generally recognized and never, to my knowledge, called into question (which is not to say that it has been sufficiently appreciated);²⁶ it will be necessary here merely to summarize the chief arguments.

The most obvious indication is the abrupt shift in the focus of Zosimus' narrative from eastern to western affairs. The shift reflects, not a sudden change in Zosimus' own interests, but in his source. To this point, he had been using the history of Eunapius, which in its revised edition covered the period from the end of the reign of Claudius Gothicus to the exile of John Chrysostom in 404,²⁷ being predominantly—and it appears exclusively

¹⁹ c. 498–502, as argued convincingly by Alan Cameron, *Philologus* cxiii (1969), 106–10.

²⁰ His preface, to Theodosius II, refers (13) to an imperial visit to Heraclea Pontica as 'recent' (πρόσθεν); cf. *Nov. Theod.* xxiii (12 May, 443). For this and other indications, cf. the introduction by G. C. Hansen to the edition of Sozomen in *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Jahrhunderte* (1960), p. Lxv f. G. Downey, 'The Perspective of the Early Church Historians', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* vi (1965), 57–70, esp. at 66, is imprecise and fails to appreciate Sozomen's use of Olympiodorus.

²¹ Cf. below, p. 82 and note 33.

²² I.e. his continuous narrative is carried to this point. Nevertheless, he gave a very compressed summary of later events (ix, 16), mentioning the marriage of Constantius and Galla Placidia (417),

Constantius' elevation (421), and the installation (425) of Valentinian III.

²³ Best published by J. Bidez, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* (1913), 140–50.

²⁴ I accept the arguments of L. Jeep, *Jahrb. f. Class. Phil.*, Supp. xiv (1884), 73 f., against those of L. Mendelssohn, ed. of Zosimus (Teubner, 1887), XLVII f.

²⁵ He was born c. 368; J. Bidez, o.c. p. cvii f.

²⁶ Cf. the edition of Mendelssohn p. xlvi, and on v, 26. Failure to acknowledge Zosimus' (and Sozomen's) use of Olympiodorus badly undermines the value of W. E. Kaegi's excellently entitled *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (1968).

²⁷ For the facts, W. R. Chalmers, *CQ* n.s. III (1953), 165–70. The difficult problem of the interpretation of the *νέα ἑκδοσις* of Eunapius' history is not here germane.

in the period after 395—concerned with events in the eastern empire.²⁸ By contrast, the Fragments of Olympiodorus confirm, for the entire period covered by the history, a fact evident from Zosimus for the first part of it: a dominating interest in the western theatre of events.

Zosimus' change of source is visible also in the transitional passage describing the advance of Alaric from Pannonia to the borders of Italy in 407 (v, 26, 1). Here, to bridge the gap since his last reference to Alaric (in 397, cf. v, 6), Zosimus contrives a few sentences to account for his movements in the intervening period, and produces uninformed nonsense; in particular, he omits completely the serious invasion of Italy by Alaric in 401–2.²⁹

Equally blatant is the transformation in the sheer quality of Zosimus' work. In place of Eunapius' literary effusions and vagueness in detail,³⁰ we now find precision and technical accuracy—again as they appear in the Fragments of Olympiodorus—extending to points of personal detail, designations of offices and institutions, and a carefully measured chronology.

As significant as any of these indications in Zosimus is the reversal of attitudes to Stilicho evident in his account. As long as he had exploited Eunapius, Zosimus faithfully reproduced a violently hostile opinion of the policies and character of Stilicho; transferring his allegiance to Olympiodorus, he suddenly reveals comprehension of Stilicho's policies, and a sympathetic interpretation of his personal motivation.³¹ That the transition is made with such transparent naivety does not merely prove this point; it suggests also that in Zosimus' narrative we may be able to approach very close to Olympiodorus himself.

Similar qualities characterize Sozomen's use of Olympiodorus. From the point at which he takes up his new source (ix, 4, 1), Sozomen almost completely ignores eastern events in favour of western, and seems entirely to forget that he is writing an ecclesiastical history.³² The same precision and technical accuracy that are so prominent in Zosimus and the Fragments now appear also in Sozomen. Significant details are present in him which are not in Zosimus, but are clearly integral to the events described by him; while certain episodes, included by both writers, are presented by Sozomen in a style evidently closer to the original version.³³ The structure of Sozomen's narrative, also, indicates use of the same source as that of Zosimus. In both authors, the foundation of their narratives is a detailed, well-integrated account of Italian affairs, events in Gaul and Spain being described in structurally independent digressions. This was clearly the presentation of Olympiodorus; Zosimus and Sozomen preserve it, but insert their digressions at different points in their accounts of Italian politics.³⁴

For the more detailed investigation which follows, Sozomen's version is reserved for use on one important point, bearing on the introductory setting of Olympiodorus' history.³⁵ For the moment, however, attention will be devoted to the use made by Zosimus of Olympiodorus' work, in order to establish more fully the qualities of Olympiodorus' writing. It will repay the trouble to select a group of episodes described by Zosimus from a period of about six months, extending from the death of Stilicho in August 408 to the first siege of Rome by Alaric, and the subsequent diplomatic activity between Rome and Ravenna (early 409). This was a time both of great historical significance, and of intricately related political events and individual experiences which it would have been very easy to misunderstand and confuse. An account which displayed both historical understanding, and accuracy and fluency of narrative, would clearly deserve respect and careful evaluation.

²⁸ Cf. the balance of emphasis of the *Fragments* (Müller, *FHG* iv, 7–56), esp. Frags. 62 f., with Eunapius' own comments on the difficulty of getting western information after 395, Frag. 74; cited by Thompson, *CQ* xxxviii (1944), 46.

²⁹ Zosimus v, 26, 1. The account of Alaric's journey is used by Thompson, *o.c.* 50, to establish Olympiodorus' geographical accuracy. But apart from the other considerations, his language here is literary, not technical; cf. below, p. 86.

³⁰ Cf. again Eunapius' remarks in self-defence, Frag. 1.

³¹ Below, p. 90 f.; cf. Mendelssohn on v, 26: 'iudicium cum fonte mutavit'.

³² The following passages are clear insertions: ix,

5 (barbarian incursions in east); 6, 6 (Alaric and Rome, cf. note 152); 10 (an anecdote on the sack of Rome).

³³ E.g. ix, 4, 3, cf. viii, 25, 38 ~ Zosimus v, 26, 2 (appointment of Jovius, cf. below, p. 87 f.); ix, 6, 3 ~ Zosimus v, 42, 3 (desertion of barbarian slaves); ix, 8, 2–3 ~ Zosimus vi, 7, 2 f. (supporters of Attalus); ix, 8, 2 ~ Zosimus vi, 7, 3 (speech of Attalus); ix, 8, 5 (Frag. 13) ~ Zosimus vi, 8, 1 (embassy to Attalus). For Sozomen and Latin, cf. below, p. 85 f.

³⁴ Zosimus vi, 1–6, 1 (in 409); Sozomen ix, 11–16 (after the sack of Rome). Cf. Frags. 12, 16–17, 19, etc., devoted to Gallic affairs.

³⁵ Below, p. 87 f.

III

The execution of Stilicho was a crucial turning point in the years after the death of Theodosius; just as his entire regime had been a critical phase in the history of the Roman empire.³⁶ Stilicho's political aims had, ever since 395, brought the western government into conflict with that of the east; while in particular, his policy, developed since 405, of bringing under the control of the western government the entire prefecture of Illyricum, was clearly prejudicial to the interests of the eastern court.³⁷ In addition, the collaboration of Alaric the Visigoth, crucial to the success of the policy, would inevitably lay Stilicho open, in the event of its failure, to accusations of lack of patriotism and pro-barbarian sympathies.³⁸

By the end of the year 407, indeed, the policy had collapsed, mainly as the result of the distractions caused by the invasion of Italy by the Goths of Radagaisus in 405-6,³⁹ and the establishment in Gaul, in 407, of the usurping regime of Constantine. Alaric, brought to a rendezvous near Emona for an abortive campaign into Illyricum, claimed compensation from the Roman government.⁴⁰ At a tense meeting of the senate at Rome, attended in person by Stilicho and the Emperor Honorius, a ransom of 4,000 pounds of gold was voted, against opposition, to be paid to Alaric; but the request had provoked bitter hostility, both in senatorial and in court political circles, and throughout the summer of 408 Stilicho's position was being attacked by suspicion and plotting, and his support undermined.

The events of these months are described by Zosimus with clarity and dramatic impetus; and the immediate background to the death of Stilicho is presented in particularly sharp detail.

By August 408, Honorius was visiting Ticinum to encourage the army for its imminent campaign against the usurper Constantine in Gaul.⁴¹ The Emperor had been at Ticinum for four days when a mutiny broke out among the troops, provoked by Stilicho's chief opponent, Olympius. The riot rapidly spread, and several of the foremost supporters of Stilicho were massacred by the soldiers. Among them are named by Zosimus, Limenius, praetorian prefect of Gaul, and Chariobaudes, *magister militum* in the same province. These two officials had, as Zosimus states, been driven from Gaul by the invasion of Constantine in 407;⁴² and Limenius is known, from an earlier court post in 401, and from letters of Symmachus of the period after 395, as a supporter of the regime of Stilicho.⁴³

In addition, a number of officials of the Italian court fell in the riot; including Longinianus, praetorian prefect of Italy, Patruinus, *comes sacrarum largitionum*, Naemorius, *magister officiorum*, and Salvius, *quaestor sacri palatii*. Three of these men, also, can be identified from other sources as supporters of Stilicho. Salvius had earlier been addressed by Symmachus as a courtier enjoying access to Stilicho.⁴⁴ Patruinus, also addressed by Symmachus between 395 and 402, with his brother Petronius, is recorded as *comes sacrarum largitionum* in 401, as the predecessor of Limenius.⁴⁵ Finally, Fl. Macrobius Longinianus, the recipient of a series of letters from Symmachus, was successively *comes sacrarum largitionum* (399), prefect of Rome during the first invasion of Alaric (401-2) and praetorian prefect, either of Italy or of Gaul, in 406.⁴⁶

When news of the revolt at Ticinum reached him, Stilicho was at Bononia, which he

³⁶ See the very different accounts of S. Mazzarino, *Stilicone* (1942); E. Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire romain* (1951); and in particular Alan Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (1970).

³⁷ Following N. H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies* (1954), 330 f., against Mommsen, *Ges. Schrift.* IV, 517 f.; the policy does not go back to the beginning of Stilicho's regime.

³⁸ See esp. L. Cracco Ruggini, "De Morte Persecutorum" e polemica antibarbarica nella storiografia pagana e cristiana', *Riv. di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* IV (1968), 433-47.

³⁹ Zosimus v, 26, 2-5; the dating 405-6 is chosen, against the arguments of Baynes, *Byzantine Studies*, 339 f. The argument is not developed here, but cf. Zosimus VI, 3, 2—a confused reminiscence of the defeat of Radagaisus, but dated clearly to 406.

⁴⁰ Zosimus v, 29, 1 f.

⁴¹ v, 32.

⁴² v, 32, 4.

⁴³ I.e. *comes sacrarum largitionum*, *CTh* I, 10, 7 (27 Feb., 401); cf. Symmachus, *Epp.* v, 74-5.

⁴⁴ *Ep.* VIII, 29 (of 399).

⁴⁵ *CTh* VI, 2, 22 (pp 26 Feb., 401); emended by O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste* (1919), 102, to give a tenure succeeding, rather than preceding, that of Limenius (cf. note 43). But a repeated tenure is as likely as a continuous tenure of 7 years. Cf. Symmachus, *Epp.* VII, 102-28 to Petronius and Patruinus; and for their careers under Stilicho, Seeck's ed. of Symmachus (*MGH* auct. ant. VI, 1), CLXXXIX f.

⁴⁶ A. Chastagnol, *Les Fastes de la Préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (1962), 255-7 gives his career; cf. Symmachus, *Epp.* VII, 93-101.

now left for Ravenna. But as he approached, he was encountered by the Emperor's agents, sent to arrest him, and took refuge in a Christian church. Next morning, in the presence of the bishop of Ravenna, he received promises of safe conduct, and left his sanctuary; but the same official who had brought the orders for Stilicho's arrest now produced second instructions for his immediate death. Stilicho prevented his personal retainers from offering resistance and submitted to his execution. This was performed by one Heraclianus, who was appointed *comes Africae* in succession to a relative of Stilicho.⁴⁷ The execution of Stilicho is formally dated by Zosimus in Roman annalistic language: ὥστε δὲ μηδὲ τὸν χρόνον ἀγνοῆσαι τοὺς φιλομαθοῦντας τῆς αὐτοῦ τελευτῆς, Βάσσου μὲν ἦν ὑπατεία καὶ Φιλίππου, καθ' ἣν καὶ Ἀρκάδιος ὁ βασιλεὺς ἔτυχε τῆς εἰμαρμένης, τῇ πρὸ δέκα καλανδῶν Σεπτεμβρίου ἡμέρᾳ.⁴⁸

The death of Stilicho was followed by the desertion to Alaric of thousands of barbarians living in north Italy; and Zosimus' narrative passes, with a stroke of neat elegance, to the frustrated attempts of Alaric to negotiate with Ravenna, and then to his movements from the region of Emona into north Italy. His journey is described with precision, as he moves past Aquileia, through Concordia, Altinum and Cremona (specified as the cities beyond the river Po), and down to a fort near Bononia known as Oecubaria. From there, he crossed the province of Aemilia, leaving Ravenna behind him, and entered Ariminum in Flaminia. Then, advancing into Picenum, Alaric approached Rome and commenced the first siege of the city.⁴⁹

Thus, to the accuracy of personal detail and of official positions demonstrated in his account of the mutiny of Ticinum, Olympiodorus appears to have added an acquaintance with Italian topography, as relevant to the march of Alaric. The narrative of the first siege of Rome and its aftermath displays, in addition, the ability to absorb intricate detail into a fluent narrative.

A first embassy sent by the senate to the besieging camp outside the city returned to Rome without success.⁵⁰ Its failure is followed, in Zosimus' account, by the abortive attempt to revive the pagan cults made by the prefect of Rome, Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus (a location of the episode not contradicted by the other surviving account of Pompeianus' prefecture, the *Vita Sanctae Melaniae*).⁵¹ After this episode, a second embassy was sent to Alaric and returned with harsh terms which were necessarily accepted. An official was appointed to supervise the collection of the ransom from the impoverished senators; this was Palladius, known otherwise as Fl. Iunius Quartus Palladius, later praetorian prefect (416-421) and consul (416).⁵² After describing Palladius' problems, as he was confronted with senators who were either unable, or unwilling,⁵³ to produce the required resources, and the lifting of the blockade by Alaric, Zosimus gives a consular dating indicating the opening of the year 409, and mentions the arrival at Ravenna, at this precise moment, of an embassy from the usurper Constantine.⁵⁴

As 409 opened, the conclusion of peace with Alaric was delayed by the court of Ravenna, now influenced by the anti-barbarian stance of Olympius, and ambassadors were sent from Rome to urge ratification. The ambassadors are named—Caecilianus, Attalus and Maximilianus—and their separate experiences, after their arrival at Ravenna, recorded. Caecilianus was appointed by Honorius praetorian prefect of Italy in succession to Theodorus. In the *Codex Theodosianus*, the last of the laws addressed to Theodorus are dated January 15 and 23, 409; the first to Caecilianus, January 21 and 25.⁵⁵ If correction is

⁴⁷ As emerges from Zosimus v, 37, 6.

⁴⁸ v, 34, 7. The date of the mutiny at Ticinum was 13 August: *Chron. Min.* I, 300.

⁴⁹ Zosimus v, 37, 2-3. The mention of Cremona, far to the west, raises a slight problem, which is not eased by the suggestion Οὐηρόνα (by the Veronese Maffei). The question is relevant to the precise siting of Oecubaria.

⁵⁰ Zosimus v, 40, 1 f.; it consisted of Basilius, an ex-prefect (he was *praefectus urbi* in 395; Chastagnol, *Fastes* 246-7), and Johannes, a client of Alaric and later his *magister officiorum* (Sozomen IX, 8, 3; below, n. 153).

⁵¹ Zosimus v, 41, cf. *Vita Melaniae* 19 (ed. D.

Gorce, *Sources chrétiennes* 90 (1962), 166). The full sequence may be: (1) siege, (2) pagan revival (Zosimus), (3) terms of Alaric and exactions of Palladius (Zosimus), proposal to requisition property of Melania (*V. Mel.*), (4) corn riot and death of Pompeianus (*V. Mel.*).

⁵² For his career, L. Cantarelli, *Bull. Com. Arch. di Roma*, LIV (1926), 35-41.

⁵³ Zosimus v, 41, 5: ἡ τῶν κεκτημένων μέρος τι τῶν ὄντων ἀποκρυψάντων ἢ καὶ ἄλλως πῶς εἰς πείναν τῆς πόλεως ἐλθούσης.

⁵⁴ v, 43.

⁵⁵ To Theodorus, *CTh* XVI, 2, 31; 5, 46; III, 10, 1. To Caecilianus, *CTh* IX, 2, 5; 3, 7.

needed here, it is clearly to the precise dates of the laws; otherwise, the accuracy of Zosimus' account is fully confirmed. The second of the three ambassadors, Priscus Attalus, was appointed *comes sacrarum largitionum* by Honorius, and travelled back to Rome in the company of a substantial detachment of troops. This action was, however, a blatant transgression of the terms of peace agreed with Alaric, and on their journey to Rome the detachment was attacked by the Visigoths, Attalus and their commander Valens being among the few to escape.⁵⁶ The third ambassador, safely identified from an inscription as Tarrutenius Maximilianus, *consularis* of Picenum a few years before at the age of 19, was captured by the Goths and ransomed from them by his father, Marcianus, for the sum of 30,000 *solidi*.⁵⁷

To conclude this selective group of episodes, the embassy to Ravenna was succeeded by the entry into Italy of Athaulf, the brother-in-law of Alaric. Athaulf is said to have left Pannonia and to have crossed the province of Venetia, penetrating as far as Pisa before being indecisively beaten by a Roman force under Olympius, the *magister officiorum*—an event shortly followed by the downfall of Olympius, and his flight to Dalmatia.⁵⁸

IV

It would be extravagant to claim that these chapters of Zosimus' narrative are entirely free from errors, and without problems of interpretation.⁵⁹ What is more important is that their positive qualities should be appreciated. Essentially, these are the qualities of accuracy and precision on a wide variety of matters.

To summarize: firstly, there is accuracy of personal detail. A single item, added to those presented above, will confirm this, to striking effect. Olympius, who inspired the movement against Stilicho, is known both from Zosimus and from the Fragments of Olympiodorus to have become *magister officiorum* immediately after Stilicho's downfall; ⁶⁰ and Zosimus adds, with undisguised prejudice (whether the prejudice is his own or not, certainly the information is Olympiodorus'), that he was a pious Christian.⁶¹ Confirmation is provided, in a most unexpected manner, by Augustine of Hippo. Writing late in 408, Augustine addressed Olympius in two letters as a devout Christian, news of whose promotion had reached north Africa, and requested the maintenance of legislation against the Donatists.⁶²

Secondly, geographical accuracy. This quality is most clearly illustrated in the narrative of the march of Alaric from Pannonia to Rome late in 407; but it is present throughout Zosimus' version of Olympiodorus, and most of its constituent factors are present also in the Fragments and in the version of Sozomen.⁶³

Similarly, as to the designations of official ranks and positions, the Fragments confirm the impression given by Zosimus; but here there is a significant difference between Zosimus on the one hand, and the Fragments on the other. In the Fragments particularly, but also in Sozomen, details of titles and offices, distances and the names of provinces, tend to be given in a form closer to the Latin, frequently as a direct transcription of Latin into Greek characters.⁶⁴ In this respect the Fragments and Sozomen must be closer to Olympiodorus himself; and so it follows that Olympiodorus must have preserved a strong 'Latin' element in his writing.

It was above all an aspect of his interest in technical accuracy, and to the admitted detriment of literary style,⁶⁵ that Olympiodorus gave such details in their Latin form. Thus, for the office of *magister officiorum*, the Fragments offer almost a straight transliteration,

⁵⁶ Zosimus v, 45, 2; for the career of Priscus Attalus, see Chastagnol, *Fastes* 266–8.

⁵⁷ Zosimus v, 45, 4, cf. *ILS* 1282; 'legato amplissimi senatus secundo'. For the identification (involving some slight emendations in Zosimus), cf. Chastagnol, *Historia* iv (1955), 178–9, and for a further detail on Tarrutenius Maximilianus, below, n. 128.

⁵⁸ Zosimus v, 45, 6–46, 1; cf. Frag. 8.

⁵⁹ E.g., Stilicho's arrival at Rome in 408 is mentioned twice (v, 27, 3; 29, 5).

⁶⁰ Zosimus v, 35, 1; Frag. 8.

⁶¹ Zosimus v, 32, 1: ἐν δὲ τῇ φαινομένη τῶν Χριστιανῶν εὐλαβείᾳ πολλὴν ἀποκρύπτων ἐν ἑαυτῷ ποιηρίαν.

⁶² Augustine, *Epp.* 96–7, cf. esp. 97, 1: '... ecclesiam Dei, cuius te veraciter filium esse gaudemus'.

⁶³ For instances, see below, p. 86.

⁶⁴ Noted by Thompson, *CQ* xxxviii (1944), 48.

⁶⁵ According to Photius, Olympiodorus styled his work ὕλην συγγραφῆς, —i.e. he regarded it as the 'raw material' for a history, rather than the finished production. For Cassius Dio's similar use of συγγραφεῖν, see F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (1964), 33.

‘ μάγιστρος ὀφικίων ’; for which Zosimus presented a less obtrusive Greek equivalent, τῶν ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ τάξεων μάγιστρος.⁶⁶ *Quaestor (sacri palatii)* becomes, in the Fragments, ‘ κουαίστωρ ’; again, Zosimus apologizes and explains: ὄν κουαίστωρα καλεῖν οἱ ἄπὸ Κωνσταντίνου δεδώκασι χρόνοι.⁶⁷ A direct transliteration of *tribunus* appears both in the Fragments and in Zosimus and once, in the Fragments, πριμικήριος τῶν νοταρίων; again Zosimus glosses: τῶν βασιλικῶν ὑπογραφέων, οὓς τριβούνους καλοῦσιν, ἄρχων.⁶⁸ Putting aside Zosimus, an exotically prosaic word-list of such ‘ officialese ’ can be got from the Fragments: πραιπόσιτον (13, 14), δισίγνατος ὑπατος (23), κουράτορος (40, contrast 15, διοικητής), ὀπτιμάτοι (9), βουκελλάριος (7, 11), φοιδεράτων (7).⁶⁹

Another category is that of names and designations of provinces. In this matter, Sozomen stands with the Fragments in presenting such terms in a form nearer to a Latin original. So for instance, ‘ Παννονία ’ in Sozomen becomes ‘ Παιονία ’ in Zosimus;⁷⁰ ‘ Ἰσπανία ’ or ‘ Σπανία ’ in Sozomen becomes ‘ Ἰβηρία ’ in Zosimus;⁷¹ while ‘ Ἀφρική ’ in the Fragments and in Sozomen (and once, in Sozomen, ‘ τοὺς Ἀφρούς ’) is changed by Zosimus to ‘ Λιβύη ’.⁷² The harbour of Rome, ‘ Πόρτον ’ in Sozomen, is translated as ‘ τὸν λίμενα ’ by Zosimus.⁷³

The significance of these ‘ Latinisms ’ should not be misunderstood. Some were not avoidable—as for instance the names of some of the provinces of Italy or Spain, which possessed no literary Greek equivalent.⁷⁴ In this and other respects, the presence of such expressions reflects Olympiodorus’ care for accuracy rather than any specifically ‘ Latin ’ influences. Latin was still, and was to remain for many years yet, the official language of the eastern administration;⁷⁵ Olympiodorus was using the jargon of court circles, as it is known from the many other sources that preserve documentary and official language. Compare, among many instances, the protocol of the acts of the Council of Chalcedon (451).⁷⁶

The same observation applies to a further group of ‘ Latinisms ’ which do not fall so directly under the category of ‘ officialese ’. Distances are given, both in the Fragments and in Zosimus, in Roman miles, ‘ μίλια ’;⁷⁷ and monetary measures in gold weight are given in the Fragments in *centenaria* (‘ κεντηνάρια ’). Zosimus regularly changes such measurements into Greek λίτραι.⁷⁸

Especially distinctive, and standing somewhat apart from the other categories, are the examples of a final group of ‘ Latin ’ expressions: a mixed group of phrases in the form of acclamations and inscriptions, given by Zosimus in Latin, and in Roman letters, with a Greek translation. So Stilicho’s request for 4,000 pounds of gold (40 *centenaria*) to pay to Alaric was denounced in the senate with the words, ‘ non est ista pax, sed pactio servitutis ’, translated by Zosimus: ‘ ὁ δηλοῖ δουλείαν μᾶλλον ἢ περ εἰρήνην εἶναι τὸ πραττόμενον ’.⁷⁹ Shortly after this episode, and as a result of the need to pay Alaric, the entrance gates of the

⁶⁶ Frag. 8, cf. 46; Zosimus v, 32, 6; 35, 1, where τῶν ὀφικίων is supplied by Mendelssohn, perhaps unnecessarily.

⁶⁷ Frag. 13; Zosimus v, 32, 6.

⁶⁸ Frag. 13; Zosimus v, 40, 2, cf. 35, 1; 34, 7.

⁶⁹ Note also Frags. 12, 13, 46, νοβελίσσιμος; 44, πραιτώρες, πραιτούρα; 16, 17, δομέστικοι; 18, 26, ῥήξ. One should not omit Sozomen ix, 4, 6, θάτερον δὲ τῶν σκήπτρων ὁ Λάβωρον Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσι, καὶ γράμματα βασιλέως λαβόν (sc. Constantine in Gaul). But φόρους (Frag. 43) is a significant error, translating ‘ fora ’; contrast Zosimus v, 41, 3, ἐν ταῖς τῆς πόλεως ἀγοραῖς.

⁷⁰ Sozomen ix, 4, 4; Zosimus v, 29, 1; 36, 1; 37, 1 (τῆς ἀνωτάτω Παιονίας), etc.

⁷¹ Sozomen ix, 12, 6–7 (Ἰσπανία), 12, 2 (Σπανία); Zosimus vi, 1, 2; 4, 5; 5, 1, etc.

⁷² Frags. 40, 42; Sozomen ix, 8, 3, 7, etc. (but Λιβύη at 8, 3, 4); Zosimus v, 37, 6; vi, 7, 5; 8, 3, etc.; ‘ τοὺς Ἀφρούς ’ at Sozomen ix, 8, 4.

⁷³ Sozomen ix, 6, 2; 8, 1; Zosimus v, 39, 1; vi, 6, 2, etc.

⁷⁴ Zosimus v, 31, 1; 33, 1 (Αἰμίλια); 37, 3 (Αἰμίλια, Φλαμινία, Πίκηνον); 45, 5 (Οὐενετία); 41, 3 (Τουσκία, cf. Sozomen ix, 6, 4); 37, 5 (Γενοῦς, Λιγυστική πόλει, cf. Sozomen ix, 12, 4, Λιγούρια); vi,

4, 3 (Λυσιτανία, cf. Sozomen ix, 11, 4). Zosimus vi, 2, 2 has ‘ Γερμανίας τῆς κάτω ’ (the position of Bononia); and note especially Frag. 17, ἐν Μουνδιακῶ τῆς ἐτέρας Γερμανίας—i.e. Germania Secunda, thus raising an unresolved puzzle about (?) Moguntiacum; cf. A. W. Byvanck, *Mnemosyne* III, vi (1938), 380–1.

⁷⁵ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (1964) II, 988 f. Again, the case of Cassius Dio is instructive, cf. F. Millar, o.c. (n. 65), 41 f.

⁷⁶ Mansi, *Sacr. Conc. nova et amplissima collectio*, vi, (e.g.) 563 f. Many of Olympiodorus’ expressions can be paralleled from Du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae graecitatis* (1688, repr. 1958).

⁷⁷ Zosimus v, 31, 1, τοῖς καλουμένοις μίλοις ἑβδομήκοντα (Bononia from Ravenna); 48, 2, μίλοις τριάκοντα (Ariminum from Ravenna); cf. Sozomen ix, 7, 1, δέκα καὶ διακοσίους σταδίους; Frag. 16, πρὸ τριάκοντα τῆς Ῥαβέννης μιλίων. For stades cf. also Sozomen ix, 9, 2 and (in an anecdotal context) Frag. 42.

⁷⁸ Frag. 5, τεσσαράκοντα κεντηνάρια; cf. Zosimus v, 29, 9, 4,000 λίτραι (cf. v, 41, 4); Frag. 23, 20 κεντηνάρια, plus 2,000 λίτραι; Frag. 44, many sums in κεντηνάρια.

⁷⁹ Zosimus v, 29, 9.

Capitol were stripped of their precious decorative panels to reveal, inscribed beneath, the words, 'misero regi servantur': 'ὅπερ ἔστιν, ἀθλίῳ τυράννῳ φυλάττονται'—words which were interpreted, of course, as an omen of the death of Stilicho.⁸⁰ Then again, Zosimus relates the melting down of pagan statues at Rome in order to raise the money demanded by Alaric to lift the siege of Rome. Among the despoiled monuments was the statue of Virtus: 'τὸ τῆς ἀνδρείας, ἣν καλοῦσι Ῥωμαῖοι Virtutem'.⁸¹

Finally, in the winter of 409–10, the starving populace of Rome, faced with blockade from Africa and the exploitation of corn merchants at a time of famine, uttered in the Circus Maximus ('ἵπποδρόμια' in Zosimus) the spine-chilling acclamation, 'pretium pone carni humanae': 'ὄρισὸν τῷ ἀνθρωπείῳ κρέει τιμὴν'.⁸² That this practice of citing such expressions persisted into the later books of Olympiodorus' history is suggested by a Fragment, preserving only the Greek version of an acclamation made at Rome in the time of the usurper Johannes.⁸³

But the history of Olympiodorus was not a mere compendium of technical facts or 'officialese'. It was also, as we can see from the use made of it by Zosimus, a work of considerable narrative coherence and fluency, in which a wide variety of technical and personal detail was assimilated. It is an impressive display of practical virtues in a historian; can anything further be said of the structure and presentation adopted by Olympiodorus? Again, Zosimus and Sozomen provide the basis of an enquiry.

In the first place, the work was composed in the annalistic form, dated by the consuls of the year. As we saw, the death of Stilicho was dated in this manner;⁸⁴ and both of the succeeding years included in Zosimus' narrative (409 and 410) were introduced by the names of the new consuls.⁸⁵ Similarly, the origins of the usurpation of Constantine in Britain were placed in 406, the year 'before the seventh consulship of Honorius and the second of Theodosius'.⁸⁶ At the same time, it is clear that in the earlier books at least, the annalistic treatment was applied most systematically to the narrative of the Italian political scene; those in Gaul and Spain were presented in the form of digressions in themselves independent of the Italian narrative. That this structure, which is that of Zosimus, derives from Olympiodorus is proved, as we saw, by comparison with Sozomen, who similarly relates events in Gaul as a digression but inserts them at a different point of his Italian narrative.⁸⁷

As a result of this structure, the chronology of Zosimus' narrative of events in Gaul is best determined by reference to their impact on Italian politics. The arrival of Constantine in Gaul and the establishment during 407 of his regime at Arles, for example, are mentioned where they are relevant to the Italian narrative, and anticipate the main digression on the usurpation itself.⁸⁸ The preparations for the campaign against Constantine in 408 are presented as the background to the mutiny at Ticinum and downfall of Stilicho;⁸⁹ and the acceptance at Ravenna of an embassy sent by Constantine is located in the Italian narrative precisely at the beginning of 409.⁹⁰

The starting point of Olympiodorus' history, as stated by Photius, was the year 407; and it is at this point that Zosimus' narrative, derived from Olympiodorus, also begins. It is clear, however, that an introductory section took the account back to 405. This is implied by Zosimus, who mentions the invasion of Radagaisus of 405–6,⁹¹ but is confirmed by an additional fact preserved by Sozomen: the appointment in 405 of Jovius as praetorian prefect of Illyricum.⁹² This item, which is unknown from any other source, matches perfectly both the project to annex Illyricum that was formed in that year, and Jovius' relationship of *clientela* with Alaric, which is mentioned by Zosimus;⁹³ and it is also consistent with the extremely complicated diplomatic role later played by Jovius in relations

⁸⁰ V, 38, 5.

⁸¹ V, 41, 7.

⁸² VI, 11, 2.

⁸³ Frag. 41.

⁸⁴ Zosimus V, 34, 7; above, p. 84.

⁸⁵ V, 42, 3; VI, 7, 4.

⁸⁶ Frag. 12.

⁸⁷ Above, p. 82.

⁸⁸ Zosimus V, 31, 4; the regime of Constantine is narrated at VI, 1–5.

⁸⁹ V, 32, 3.

⁹⁰ V, 42, 3–43, 1.

⁹¹ V, 26, 3 f. and also at VI, 3, 2 (above, n. 39).

⁹² Sozomen IX, 4, 3, cf. VII, 25, 3.

⁹³ Zosimus V, 48, 2: ἄτε ἐν ταῖς Ἠπείροις πρόξενος καὶ φίλος Ἀλλαρίχῳ γεγενημένος.

between Alaric and Ravenna during the year 410.⁹⁴ But the main significance of the item is this: it suggests that Olympiodorus was not, after all, content to begin his work abruptly in 407. Perceiving that the origins of Stilicho's fall from power were to be traced to the breakdown of his relations with Alaric, the historian took his narrative back to 405, to the critical point in this relationship; and so he was able to set the decline of Stilicho's position intelligibly in its political and strategic context.

If the opening of Olympiodorus' history demonstrates such acumen, so also, it appears, was its conclusion contrived with considerable dramatic skill. A work that began with the collapse of the regime of Stilicho, and went on to describe the sack of Rome and the crisis of the western empire, could scarcely have concluded more appropriately, for Olympiodorus and his Greek readers, than with the imposition of a western Roman emperor by a Byzantine army. From the eastern point of view, it was the successful climax of a story of crisis and recovery, and a pointed assertion of the ascendancy of the eastern empire over the western—an issue which had been raised in its acute form, precisely by Stilicho himself. It was with this last phase, moreover, that Olympiodorus was able effectively to combine the functions of historian and man of affairs. His final book at least, and perhaps more, narrated the expedition to the west of Ardaburius and Aspar in which Olympiodorus himself (as suggested earlier) took part, recounted their defeat of the usurper Johannes, and the triumphant installation of Valentinian III by his cousin: ⁹⁵ a highly satisfactory conclusion for the emperor to whom the history was dedicated.

There was no other occasion on which Olympiodorus the historian and the political events in which he was engaged coincided so precisely. Otherwise, his personal experiences took him far from the main theme of his history: to the Hunnish court, to Athens, to Egypt. And it is unlikely that these were minor digressions, which could have been inserted without seriously interrupting the progress of the history. The embassy to the Huns, the subject of Book x of the history (where it interrupted a continuous narrative of events in Gaul of the years 411–12),⁹⁶ would no doubt provide the opportunity for the inclusion of the speeches with which, according to Photius, Olympiodorus decked out his work.⁹⁷ There was surely an excursus on the origins and habits of the Hunnish people—just as the visit to Athens was made the occasion for observations on student rituals of the university city,⁹⁸ and the tour of Egypt the occasion for digressions upon points of literary, geographical and antiquarian interest.⁹⁹ Then there was the highly coloured narrative of a dangerous sea journey, and the appearance of a meteor; and of course, the talents of Olympiodorus' parrot, probably in the form of an obituary notice.¹⁰⁰

All this was within the accepted canons of ancient historiography.¹⁰¹ The digressions only appear alien in Olympiodorus because of the otherwise unusually prosaic and technical flavour of his central narrative. Equally admissible, by the normal standards of relevance, were certain other digressions in which Olympiodorus allowed himself to depart from the central events of history. Very near the beginning of his work, Olympiodorus interrupted his account of the journey of Alaric to Italy late in 407, in order to insert an erudite discussion of the connection of the Argonauts with the foundation of Emona, with reference to the epic poet Peisander who, according to Olympiodorus, 'wrote about the matter in his book on *The Marriages of Heroes and Goddesses*'.¹⁰² If this diversion well illustrates the profession of Olympiodorus as literary connoisseur, another equally abstruse antiquarian speculation is, perhaps, more directly relevant to the political situation of the early fifth century: debate on the origins of Ravenna. On this point, Zosimus makes a parade of independent judgement, preferring the opinion of Asinius Quadratus to that of Olympiodorus himself. But there can be little doubt that the version of Asinius Quadratus, as known to Zosimus, was itself presented by Olympiodorus; and if so, then this was a

⁹⁴ Below, p. 94.

⁹⁵ Frag. 46.

⁹⁶ Frags. 17–19.

⁹⁷ cf. Photius's introduction: ὕλην δὲ αὐτὸς ἱστορίας ταῦτα καλῶν ὁμῶς καὶ λόγους διαιρεῖ, καὶ προοιμίῳις πειρᾶται κοσμεῖν.

⁹⁸ Frag. 28, cf. 31.

⁹⁹ Frags. 33, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Frag. 36.

¹⁰¹ Compare the cases of Ammianus Marcellinus (R. Syme, o.c. (n. 4), 131 f.) and Cassius Dio (F. Millar, o.c. (n. 65), 45). For Olympiodorus, the prime precedent was of course that of Herodotus.

¹⁰² Zosimus v, 29, 1–4. On Peisandros of Laranda, who wrote in the early third century A.D., see R. Keydell, 'Peisandros 12', *RE* xix, 1 (1937), 145–6. (The place in question should of course have been not Emona, but Nauportus.)

contemporary debate.¹⁰³ Olympiodorus believed that Ravenna was founded by Remus, the brother of Romulus. The derivation was appropriate at a moment when Ravenna had recently become the court capital of Italy and the west—and so in a sense the sister city of Rome herself.

V

If Olympiodorus' history did possess the qualities suggested by the arguments presented above, then his achievement was a remarkable one. As we have seen, his personal appearances in the history were all in the eastern part of the empire until his last, in 425. As far as we can tell, he was not in the position to travel widely in the west, in order to collect detailed information from first-hand sources throughout the period described in his history. The narrative of Zosimus summarized earlier, covering the last months of 408 and the opening months of 409, was packed with detail on a variety of topics; yet it concerned events which had taken place nearly twenty years before Olympiodorus' visit to the west—earlier, even, than his first recorded appearance in public life.

The achievement should not be taken for granted. The elaboration of such a work of history would require the use of a wide range of source materials, and of a wide variety of techniques of research. Personal enquiry of witnesses and participants had to be confirmed and supplemented by documentary sources, such as provincial and geographical handbooks.¹⁰⁴ Different versions of events needed to be set in order, discordant attitudes harmonized; and Olympiodorus must be supposed to have performed such research from the distance of the eastern empire, acquiring his material—presumably—from visitors to the east from western political circles.

Further, the assembling of information, although difficult enough, was only the beginning of Olympiodorus' task. What remained was still more exacting: the presentation of details acquired from such disparate sources within a coherent narrative framework. The months of late 408 and early 409, as we saw, had been occupied by complex political activity which would have been extremely difficult to reconstruct and co-ordinate from diverse sources of information, unless this had been done within a very short time after the occurrence of the events. In Olympiodorus' account, as represented by Zosimus and Sozomen, circumstantial detail is tightly woven into the texture of the narrative; his information must surely derive from sources near the centre of political events in the west, and it must have been collected by him at a short distance of time from those events, while the circumstantial detail was still fresh and an integral part of them.

Thus, to summarize: if the assumption is to be acceptable that Olympiodorus was his own researcher throughout, he must be supposed to have been engaged in assembling his material from the very beginning of the period covered by his history, and to have used sources very close to the making of it; and he must be supposed, also, to have done this from the distance of the eastern empire, performing the feat amid the pre-occupations of his own travels and diplomatic career.

It is a formidable, but not an impossible, assumption. Olympiodorus may, after all, happen to have been the man of such high talents as would be required; and in practical terms, the years after 408 saw an easing of relations between east and west which must have ensured a renewed intensity of diplomatic activity, and a greater frequency of visitors to the east from western political circles.¹⁰⁵ Apart from the politicians, there were the refugees. After the sack of Rome, some made their way to Africa and the Holy Land; it would be perverse to assume that none reached Constantinople.¹⁰⁶

It may be possible to identify one of Olympiodorus' sources of information. One Justinianus, a professor of rhetoric chosen by Stilicho as intimate and adviser, is mentioned

¹⁰³ Zosimus v, 27 (he calls him Ῥώμιος). Asinius Quadratus was a near-contemporary of Peisander, cf. F. Jacoby, *FGH* 97; *PIR*³ A 1245 etc. One is tempted also to infer that Olympiodorus' speculations as to the wanderings of Odysseus, οὐ κατὰ Σικελίαν . . . ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰ πέρατα τῆς Ἰταλίας, belong, as their placing (*Frag.* 45) suggests, to the context of the historian's own visit to Italy; thus, to *north* Italy.

¹⁰⁴ E.g., for the narrative of Alaric's journey in 408; above, p. 84.

¹⁰⁵ For brief indications, see W. E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (1968), 16 f.

¹⁰⁶ North Africa, *Vita Melaniae* 20-1 (ed. Gorce, 169 f.); Holy Land, Jerome, *Comm. on Ezekiel*, pref. to Book III (*PL* xxv, 75) and to Book VII: 'occidentalium fuga et sanctorum locorum constipatio'; cf. *Ep.* 126, 2.

as having proffered shrewd advice at a point in the critical summer of 408, but upon its rejection to have left his patron, so as to avoid becoming involved in his downfall which he saw to be imminent.¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to resist the inference that Justinianus was Olympiodorus' source, not only for the nature of the advice offered, but for the description that precedes it of Stilicho's motivation; and why not for much else besides?

All this rests on the assumption that Olympiodorus himself performed the research for his history. It might, nevertheless, be appropriate to entertain an alternative possibility, that Olympiodorus used, not the wide variety of sources and techniques so far postulated, but a limited number of written sources. To state such a hypothesis baldly and in its extreme form: why not suppose a narrative history already composed, in Latin, by a westerner, a man personally involved in the events of his time, whom Olympiodorus closely followed?¹⁰⁸

Such a hypothesis would possess certain attractions. It would reduce the stature of Olympiodorus as an original historian to somewhat less formidable proportions; it would account for the impressive accuracy and range of detail presented by Olympiodorus, which otherwise could only have been achieved by personal enquiry at a considerable distance from events; it could explain the presence of so many Latin expressions and official terminology (although, as we saw, it is not necessary to invent such a predecessor to explain this material).¹⁰⁹ Above all, the most remarkable feature of Olympiodorus' interpretation of contemporary history—his favourable view of Stilicho, which is unique among writers of his time—might be more readily understood if Olympiodorus adopted it uncritically from a historian closer to Stilicho himself. On this point there is more to be said. But a preliminary argument may be offered against the hypothesis that Olympiodorus used an extensive written source for his western narrative.

Paradoxically, this concerns the personal digressions in his history. Ancient historians did not conceive of such digressions as alien from political history, but as an integral part of it; political history could readily, as in the case of Ammianus Marcellinus, shade into personal memoir. So, if Olympiodorus' digressions pick up episodes in his own career as far back as 412 and 416, it is natural to presume that he was already, at that time, recording them with a view to a full-scale history.¹¹⁰ The only reasonable explanation of the digressions, under the alternative hypothesis, seems by far the less likely: that Olympiodorus had used an extensive written source, but inserted the digressions into a narrative structure already provided by it, composing them from memory some years after their occurrence.

That Olympiodorus, if he did not use such a written source, was from an early stage engaged in assembling, and probably also in writing up, his material, is implied particularly by an attitude expressed in the history, to which one would expect him and his eastern environment to have been hostile: his attitude to Stilicho. The strong favour shown to Stilicho is unique, whether among eastern or western writers.¹¹¹ His contemporaries, from Eunapius in the east to Orosius, Rutilius Namatianus and Jerome in the west (in the case of Jerome, writing in the east but reflecting western opinion), unanimously denounced Stilicho for his 'philo-barbarism', and for his political ambition in conspiring to place his own son Eucherius on the eastern imperial throne.¹¹² These accusations were explicitly refuted by Olympiodorus, who presented Stilicho as a disinterested servant of the Roman state, a man above corruption and personal ambition: πάντων ὡς εἶπεῖν τῶν ἐν ἐκείνῳ δυναστευσάντων τῷ χρόνῳ γεγωνῶς μετριώτερος.¹¹³

The same independence of judgement is present, as we should expect, in Olympiodorus'

¹⁰⁷ Zosimus v, 30, 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ The suggestion has not to my knowledge been made before; to explore it was one of the aims of the original version of this paper.

¹⁰⁹ Above, p. 86.

¹¹⁰ He must, presumably, have interviewed the former governor of Thrace, Valerius (under Valens, not Constantius: cf. n. 180), at a time nearer the beginning than the end of the period covered by the history; Frag. 27.

¹¹¹ Cf. the anthology of hostile opinions collected by L. Cracco Ruggini, *Riv. di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* IV (1968), 433 f.

¹¹² Eunapius, cf. n. 116, with Frags. 62-3, 88; Orosius, *Hist. adv. paganos* VII, 38, 4 f.; Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu* II, 41 f. Jerome's opinion was most clearly expressed at *Ep.* 123, 16 (to a Gallic lady), 'scelere semibarbari proditoris'. For Jerome as in touch with western opinion and information, see *ibid.* 15 (invasions of Gaul), *Ep.* 127 (sack of Rome); Orosius VII 43, 4 (a distinguished visitor from Narbonne).

¹¹³ Zosimus v, 34, 5; note also Sozomen IX, 4, 8: ἀνὴρ εἶπερ τις ἄλλος πώποτε ἐν πολλῇ δυνάμει γενόμενος καὶ πάντας, ὡς εἶπεῖν, βαρβάρους τε καὶ Ῥωμαίους πειθομένους ἔχων.

attitude to Stilicho's enemy, Olympius. Current eastern opinion seems to have viewed Olympius as a public benefactor who had warned the emperor, barely in time, of Stilicho's plots against him;¹¹⁴ for Olympiodorus, on the other hand, Olympius was a traitor to Stilicho, his patron and friend, and rightly punished by his exile and, later, by his violent death.¹¹⁵

These are remarkable attitudes to find expressed, above all by an eastern writer. Eunapius had bitterly attacked Stilicho for his pretensions over the eastern empire, and for complaisancy in his treatment of Alaric.¹¹⁶ Philostorgius, despite his use of Olympiodorus as the source for the last part of his history, nevertheless felt obliged to support the alternative interpretation of Stilicho and Olympius, adding Olympiodorus' view as one that was held by some.¹¹⁷ The hostility of such writers is fully intelligible: we have already seen how Stilicho's policy of allying with Alaric to annex the prefecture of Illyricum had brought the western court into conflict with that of Constantinople. During the later part of the regime of Stilicho, in fact, eastern and western governments had been reduced to a state of cold war; a blockade, which had been imposed upon ships sailing from the eastern empire to exclude them from western harbours, was cancelled soon after the fall of Stilicho.¹¹⁸

Olympiodorus' defence of Stilicho against another accusation, that he was conspiring to place his son Eucherius upon the eastern throne, is still more acutely surprising; for the emperor whom Stilicho, on this view, was intending to supplant was none other than Theodosius II, the dedicatee of Olympiodorus' history.¹¹⁹

Olympiodorus then, not only preserves an outright 'western' view of the political history of the first decade of the fifth century, but a view which, even in the west, was not at all likely to have been widely held at the time that Olympiodorus' history was moving towards completion. Indeed, I would suggest that there can be no other source for Olympiodorus' attitude than among the political supporters of Stilicho. Its survival in Olympiodorus is to be explained by the assumption that he formed it while collecting his information on the regime of Stilicho, composed the portion of the history at an early stage, and saw thereafter no reason to modify it.

This is an attitude taken from the beginning of the period described by Olympiodorus. A comparable instance from the last part of the period can be presented, in which the historian also displays traces of western political opinion; this is his attitude to Fl. Constantius.

Eastern opinions on Constantius would inevitably be ambiguous. It was of course impossible to deny the sheer usefulness of Constantius to the western empire. Rising to ascendancy in 411, he had put an end to the phase of political disunity which had succeeded the fall of Stilicho and had guided a political revival of the western government; he had suppressed rebellions in Gaul and Africa, and in 416 had paraded the Visigothic puppet emperor Attalus in triumph at Rome.¹²⁰ In addition to these services, Constantius was the father, by Galla Placidia in 421, of the baby Valentinian, who in 425 was imposed on the western throne by Theodosius. On the other hand, Constantius' elevation to the throne by Honorius in 421, and correspondingly the titles of Augusta given to Placidia and of 'nobilissimus' to their baby son, were not recognized in the east; and contemporary opinion held that Constantius, resentful at this snub by Theodosius, harboured the project of a campaign to the east to unseat him.¹²¹

Olympiodorus' view of Constantius is suitably ambivalent. He clearly acknowledged Constantius' effectiveness, and mentions his affable personal manners, but at the same time reports the saying that he had a 'tyrant's look';¹²² and he states that Constantius regretted his acceptance of empire, since it deprived him of freedom of movement, and of the opportunity, which he had enjoyed as a private man, to be frivolous.¹²³ So far so good; but Olympiodorus' assessment of Constantius possesses an unexpected refinement. Constantius, he states, was by nature open-handed and generous, and remained so until his marriage to

¹¹⁴ Cf. Philostorgius XII, 1.

¹¹⁵ Frags. 2, 8.

¹¹⁶ n. 112, cf. Zosimus V, 1, 1 f.; 4, 2 f.; 7, 2 f.

¹¹⁷ Philostorgius XII, 1.

¹¹⁸ *CTh* VII, 16, 1 (10 Dec., 408).

¹¹⁹ Zosimus V, 32, 1; 34, 7; cf. Sozomen IX, 4, 7.

¹²⁰ The most recent account is that of S. I. Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta* (1968), Ch. 4.

¹²¹ Frag. 34; Philostorgius XII, 12.

¹²² Frag. 23: εἶδος ἀξιῶν τυραννίδος.

¹²³ Frag. 34, cf. 23.

Galla Placidia; after which he became parsimonious and rapacious. The proof of this was that, after his death in 421, the court of Ravenna was flooded by financial claims from aggrieved citizens—which were (Olympiodorus states, in an evidently critical spirit) turned away by Placidia and Honorius.¹²⁴

This is scarcely an 'eastern' view of Galla Placidia. Until her arrival from Ravenna in 423, the princess was a stranger to eastern court circles; and in 425, receiving (this time officially) the title Augusta, she was sent with her little son to assert the control of the Theodosian dynasty over the western empire. In the east, there can have been little held against her except her marriage to Constantius, which in any case she was supposed to have undertaken unwillingly.¹²⁵ In the west, by contrast, Galla Placidia is known to have had enemies; her 'exile' to the east after Constantius' death followed riots at Ravenna, and her only reliable supporter at this time was (so Olympiodorus states), Bonifatius, *comes Africae*.¹²⁶

I would suggest, then, that Olympiodorus' critical opinion of Galla Placidia, no less than his support of Stilicho, points to his acceptance of western sources in political opinions as well as facts; and if this probability is accepted, the precise nature of his sources, written or verbal, becomes a matter of secondary importance. In either case, he gives access to the views held in western political circles; an asset which may justify, in conclusion, a survey of other judgements by Olympiodorus on the politics of his day, in order to define more clearly the political circles whose views he may reflect.

VI

The last years of the fourth and the earliest years of the fifth centuries saw an intensification of the role of the senate in political life.¹²⁷ The senate, and a court now permanently resident in north Italy, were confronted by a political crisis which affected them both. This development was accompanied by the emergence of new positive relationships—for instance, in terms of an increased frequency of contacts between the two, and of reciprocal office-holding by senators at court and courtiers at Rome¹²⁸—and by the appearance of new points of tension. The senate formed its own views, and frequently expressed them, on matters of great importance: notably over the issues of military conscription, on which it resisted the government's attempts to recruit labourers from senatorial estates,¹²⁹ and of finance, on which it differed from the government over the raising of taxes and special contributions to meet the ever-mounting costs of diplomacy.¹³⁰ This mutual involvement in politics of senate and court is the background of the situation described by Olympiodorus; we have already seen the dramatic occasion on which the senator Lampadius denounced Stilicho's request for 4,000 pounds of gold to pay Alaric as the 'price of slavery'.¹³¹ Lampadius was expressing the silent opinion of many other senators.

It is natural, therefore, initially to survey Olympiodorus' political attitudes in terms of his sensitivity to 'senatorial' opinion. Nor is this to invoke that mythical creature in this late age of historiography, the 'senatorial historian';¹³² in fact, although Olympiodorus

¹²⁴ Frag. 39.

¹²⁵ Frag. 34: πολλά μὲν αὐτῇ ἀνανεύσα.

¹²⁶ Frag. 40.

¹²⁷ See, e.g., Seeck, *Symmachus* (above, n. 45), LXVI f.; S. Mazzarino, *Stilicone* (1942), Ch. VI; and perhaps I may be permitted a reference to Chaps. X–XI of my Oxford D.Phil. thesis (1969) on the western governing classes (c. 365–425), which I am currently revising for publication.

¹²⁸ Senators at court: Valerius Messala, *PP Italiae* 399–400, cf. Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu* I 267 f.; Caecina Decius Albinus, cf. Symmachus, *Epp.* VII, 40; 45–7; Tarrutenius Maximilianus, *ILS* 1282, the holder of an 'honor aulicus' in Symmachus, *Ep.* VIII, 48. Courtiers at Rome, e.g. Fl. Macrobius Longinianus, *praefectus urbi* 401–2, cf. *CIL* VI, 1188–90 (*ILS* 797); Fl. Peregrinus Saturninus, *praefectus urbi* 402/7, cf. *ILS* 1275: 'a primis adulescentiae suae annis pace belloque in republica desudanti'. On these and others, see Chastagnol, *Fastes* 246 f.

¹²⁹ *CTh* VII, 13, 12–14 (June–Nov., 397), cf. Symmachus, *Epp.* VI, 58, 62, 64, etc. cf. Seeck, *Symmachus*, LXX.

¹³⁰ On the financial imbalance between court and senators, see esp. J. Sundwall, *Weströmische Studien* (1915), 150 f.

¹³¹ Zosimus V, 29, 9.

¹³² Ammianus Marcellinus can no longer be claimed as such, cf. Alan Cameron, *JRS* LIV (1964), 15–28; nor the *Historia Augusta*, R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, esp. Ch. xxvii. The *Annales* of Nicomachus Flavianus (*ILS* 2948, cf. 2947) remain, despite much modern speculation, totally unknown. A more typical case may be Symmachus' correspondent Naucellius, cf. *Ep.* III, 11; 'opusculi tui, quo priscam rem publicam . . . ex libro Graeco in Latium transtulisti'. Symmachus and his friend occupied themselves with the early books of Livy, cf. *Ep.* IX, 13, and the subscriptions, most conveniently assembled by J. Bayet, *Tite-Live*, ed. Budé, I (1947), p. xcii f.

represents a number of typically 'senatorial' attitudes, he does so without at any point identifying himself with them.

At least, as should now be clear, Olympiodorus possessed an impressive knowledge of the facts of senatorial participation in contemporary politics. He can narrate critical senatorial debates; on the occasion of Stilicho's demand, he vividly conveys the dissension among the senators, giving some indication of senatorial procedure, specifying a point made in a speech by Stilicho, and concluding the meeting with the direct citation, in Latin, of Lampadius' denunciation.¹³³ Later, meetings held during Alaric's first siege of Rome are recorded with their outcome.¹³⁴ The embassy to court of Caecilianus, Attalus and Maximilianus is precisely located at its correct point of time at the opening of 409, and the entirely separate subsequent experiences of the ambassadors related.¹³⁵ Successive speeches made in the course of 410 by Jovius, praetorian prefect of the Visigothic puppet Attalus, and by Attalus himself, are convincingly reported in their context;¹³⁶ not to mention Attalus' accession speech, which was (to cite Sozomen's version of Olympiodorus) 'long and elaborate'.¹³⁷

Olympiodorus reproduces expected senatorial attitudes. To buy peace with Alaric is stigmatized as a disgrace to Roman dignity (ἐπ' αἰσχυνῆ τοῦ Ῥωμαίων ἀξιώματος);¹³⁸ the proposal to send barbarian troops to Africa to suppress the *comes Africae* Heraclianus is 'scandalous' (ἀπρεπῆ . . . ῥήματα).¹³⁹ The besieger of Rome late in 408 is thought by the senate to be Alaric or else 'some other sympathizer of Stilicho' (a curious point of doubt, rapidly dispelled in the outcome).¹⁴⁰ In a different connection, the senate is described as financially exhausted by the 'continuous exactions of the government'.¹⁴¹ An imperial official, Heliocrates, is praised since, entrusted with the task of reclaiming for public funds money distributed by Stilicho, he held back and even assisted senators by giving them advice—an act of collaboration for which he was obliged to take refuge in a church; and the arrival of Heliocrates' successor, with the most rigorous instructions to recall public debts, is greeted as a crowning calamity.¹⁴²

Olympiodorus also expressed more specific prejudices. Under the regime of Attalus the discontent of the family of the Anicii was conspicuous, since they alone, 'the possessors of practically all the wealth left in Rome, resented the general good fortune'.¹⁴³ Yet hostility to the Anicii is not so surprising in a 'senatorial' or any other context, especially if Olympiodorus, as is possible, believed that a member of the Anicii admitted Alaric to Rome in August 410.¹⁴⁴

Despite his assimilation of 'senatorial' attitudes, however, Olympiodorus seems to have been in no way committed to them. On close inspection, he can be seen to have expressed such attitudes only in the context in which they actually occurred; that is to say, he narrated them as a historian, as part of the events which he described, but at no point identified himself with them. Indeed, he sometimes did precisely the reverse. His attitude to Stilicho is a case in point; support for Stilicho was directly at variance with the senatorial hostility that contributed largely to his downfall. Further, while Olympiodorus welcomed some aspects of the regime of Attalus (in particular, the appointment of the consul Tertullus),¹⁴⁵ he was critical of the grandiloquence with which Attalus promised to bring the entire Roman empire, including Egypt, under the control of the Italians (that is to say, of the senate);¹⁴⁶ and Attalus' persistent refusal to send out barbarians to suppress Heraclianus is characterized as futile obstinacy, the contrary advice of Alaric being approved as 'correct' (ὀρθῶς).¹⁴⁷

¹³³ Zosimus v, 29, 6 f.; note the two votes taken by the senate, the second after Stilicho's forceful intervention.

¹³⁴ v, 38; 40-41.

¹³⁵ Above, p. 84.

¹³⁶ Zosimus vi, 9, 1; 12, 1. Not in my view a 'doublet', but cf. C. E. Stevens, *Athenaeum* xxv (1957), at 330 f.

¹³⁷ Sozomen ix, 8, 2; cf. Zosimus vi, 7, 3.

¹³⁸ Zosimus v, 29, 7.

¹³⁹ vi, 9, 1.

¹⁴⁰ v, 40, 2: φήμης, ὡς ἕτερος εἶη τῶν τὰ Στελιχωνος φρονούντων [αὐτὸν] (Mendelssohn ὁ τὸν στρατὸν) ἐπαγαγῶν τῆ πόλει.

¹⁴¹ v, 41, 5: διὰ τὰς ἐπαλλήλους τῶν κρατούντων πλεονεξίας.

¹⁴² v, 45, 3: κακῶν δὲ μειζόνων αἰεὶ τοῖς οὐσι προστιθεμένων.

¹⁴³ vi, 7, 4: μόνοι τῶν πάντων ὡς εἰπεῖν ἔχοντες πλοῦτον ἐπὶ ταῖς κοιναῖς ἐδυσχέριστον εὐπραγίαις.

¹⁴⁴ This depends on the possibility that Olympiodorus was the source of Procopius, *Bell. Vand.* 1, 2, 27—which is far from clear.

¹⁴⁵ Zosimus vi, 7, 4.

¹⁴⁶ vi, 7, 3; cf. Sozomen ix, 8, 2.

¹⁴⁷ vi, 7, 5; cf. the praise of the barbarian general Druma, vi, 12, 1.

It is, perhaps, in his attitude to Alaric that Olympiodorus most clearly shows himself independent of senatorial prejudice. Indeed, from this point of view, the entire portrait of Alaric offered by Olympiodorus is of great interest. Alaric appears as liable to fits of arrogance, as in his reception of the first senatorial embassy sent to him late in 408,¹⁴⁸ and to sudden bursts of anger which disturb his sense of proportion; at one moment, in 409, upon hearing a snub delivered to him in an imperial letter read out in his presence, he immediately broke off negotiations and began to march on Rome.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, on the first of these occasions, his demands were quickly modified,¹⁵⁰ and on the second he soon repented, sending the bishops of Italian towns to court in an attempt to resume negotiations.¹⁵¹ On all occasions but these, Alaric appears in Olympiodorus as far more composed, a shrewd politician conscious of his own weakness, a man anxious above all to negotiate terms of peace and to win a place of settlement and recognition in return for service to Rome. Such, of course, was the view taken by Stilicho; in consequence of it, Alaric is far from being the barbarian megalomaniac, filling the role of divine scourge of Rome which some contemporary opinion attributed to him.¹⁵² In Olympiodorus' presentation, the threat to take Rome is merely the most powerful diplomatic weapon in Alaric's possession.

The historian is equally discriminating in describing the strategic and political background of the barbarians in Italy. He fully appreciates the diplomatic importance of clients (πρόξενοι) of Alaric—such as Johannes and Jovius—in the conduct of relations with him; ¹⁵³ on more than one occasion, he mentions the actual or suggested exchange of hostages, Roman for Visigothic notables.¹⁵⁴ He is conscious of the effects on contemporary politics of individual Gothic war-bands, whether in the service of Goths or of Romans.¹⁵⁵ Olympiodorus also possessed a passing knowledge (if no more) of barbarian tribal structure and custom, and some acquaintance with their vocabulary, technical and colloquial—such as might naturally be possessed in court circles.¹⁵⁶

In his attitudes, again, Olympiodorus stops short of prejudice, and does not depart from the factual context of prejudice when he reports it. The view is attributed to Stilicho that it would be 'impious and unwise' to set barbarians on the Roman armies in north Italy (in this and other matters, he restrained the more aggressive instincts of some of his supporters, and as a result was abandoned by them).¹⁵⁷ And Olympiodorus mentions atrocities suffered by both sides, Roman and Gothic—and the more appalling by the Goths.¹⁵⁸

Olympiodorus' knowledge of contemporary court politics is no less impressive than his awareness of senatorial affairs. His sources of information were able to enlighten him about conferences between Alaric and the Roman authorities.¹⁵⁹ He can cite the content of a series of imperial letters passing between Honorius and Alaric—in one of which he defines the technical competence of a praetorian prefect.¹⁶⁰ He knows the personnel of an embassy sent from Ravenna to the camp of Alaric and Attalus.¹⁶¹ Moreover, he traces as convincingly as seems possible the motivation of some of the politicians of this complex period. There is the case of the client of Alaric, Jovius, who displaced Olympius as head of a 'peace party' at Ravenna, but, having caused offence to Alaric, was obliged by Honorius to swear eternal enmity to the barbarians. Later, deserting Honorius—and doing so with considerable panache¹⁶²—Jovius became praetorian prefect of the usurper Attalus, yet finally encouraged Alaric to depose him. It is a complex role, but intelligible as Olympiodorus presented it, in constantly changing political circumstances.

¹⁴⁸ v, 40, 3 f.

¹⁴⁹ v, 49, 1.

¹⁵⁰ v, 41, 4: 5,000 pounds of gold, 30,000 of silver, with tunics, skins and pepper.

¹⁵¹ v, 50, 2: εἰς μετόμελον ἑθῶν, cf. Sozomen IX, 7, 5-8, 1, μετομεληθεῖς.

¹⁵² Cf. Claudian, *De Bello Gothico* (of 402), 546 f. ('penetrabis ad urbem'), and the obvious insertion at Sozomen IX, 6, 6. Contrast, for instance, the praise of Alaric's μετριότης at Zosimus v, 51, 1.

¹⁵³ Zosimus v, 40, 2 and Sozomen IX, 8, 3 (Johannes). Zosimus v, 48, 2 and Sozomen IX, 4, 3 (cf. VIII, 25, 3); IX, 6, 3 f. (Jovius).

¹⁵⁴ Zosimus v, 36, 1 (Aetius and Iason); cf. 42, 1; 44, 1; VI, 6, 1.

¹⁵⁵ v, 34, 1; VI, 2, 3 f.; 13, 2 (cf. Sozomen IX,

9, 3; Philostorgius XII, 3); Frag. 17 (Sarus). Frag. 40 (Gothic retainers of Galla Placidia).

¹⁵⁶ Frags. 7, 9, 11, 29; cf. Thompson, *CQ* xxxviii (1944), 47.

¹⁵⁷ Zosimus v, 33, 2.

¹⁵⁸ v, 35, 5 (massacre of Goths in late 408); v, 42, 3 (Gothic attack on Romans during truce).

¹⁵⁹ cf. esp. Zosimus v, 48-9.

¹⁶⁰ v, 48, 4; cf. Sozomen IX, 7, 3.

¹⁶¹ Frag. 13: Iovi[an]us, praefectus praetorio; Potamius, quaestor sacri palatii; Iulianus, primicerius notariorum; Valens, magister utriusque militiae. The last-named had evidently been promoted since *CTh* xvi, 5, 42 (14 Nov., 408, comes domesticorum).

¹⁶² Zosimus VI, 8, 1; Frag. 13.

Olympiodorus is informed of court gossip: the rumour that Honorius was given a potion by Serena to make him impotent and secure the succession for her own son Eucherius;¹⁶³ the effusive devotion of Honorius for his sister, which gave rise to certain suspicions;¹⁶⁴ the dislike of Placidia for her husband Constantius, and at one point her threat to divorce him.¹⁶⁵ More seriously, he makes Stilicho dissuade Honorius from making a journey to the east, on the grounds that he could not afford the expense (a remarkable glimpse of the extent of imperial bankruptcy),¹⁶⁶ and comments that the proceeds from the property of the suppressed Heraclianus, which had been earmarked for the consular celebrations of Constantius in 414, were less than had been anticipated.¹⁶⁷ Olympiodorus' knowledge of a *relatio* submitted to court by the *praefectus urbi*, Caecina Decius Aginatus Albinus, may derive from court as readily as from senatorial circles.¹⁶⁸

Not surprisingly, Olympiodorus is hostile to the traditional abuses of the court administration: bribery and corruption, and particularly embezzlement of *annona* (σιτήσεις) intended for the soldiers.¹⁶⁹ And it is tempting to suppose that, in describing the enormous fortunes possessed by leading senatorial houses at Rome and their correspondingly extravagant expenditure on public games, he was at least aware of the contrast with imperial bankruptcy.¹⁷⁰

Other attitudes expressed by Olympiodorus were doubtless more specific to himself, and not representative of the political circles from which he gained his information. Such may be his attitude to religious matters. Here also he is well equipped with information. Christian institutions make frequent appearances, in what should perhaps be regarded as secondary (although in this age highly important) functions—churches as places of refuge for political criminals or victims;¹⁷¹ bishops as envoys and diplomats.¹⁷² Olympiodorus knew of the Gothic bishop Sigisarius, who baptised Attalus into Arian Christianity and tried in vain to save the children of Athaulf from murder after their father's assassination.¹⁷³ It is less certain that Sozomen's allusion to the large expanse of territory occupied by St. Peter's at Rome derived from Olympiodorus.¹⁷⁴

Olympiodorus' own religious attitudes were decidedly pagan in sympathy. It was, perhaps, for this reason that he praised Attalus' consul, Tertullus;¹⁷⁵ and although his hostility may have been exaggerated by Zosimus, there is little doubt that Olympiodorus disapproved of the Christian piety of Olympius—or rather (a somewhat different question) regarded his devout professions as incompatible with his public actions.¹⁷⁶ He applauded the stand on a point of principle successfully taken by a pagan general, Generidus;¹⁷⁷ while he deplored the stripping of pagan temples and statues in 409 to pay the ransom due to Alaric—especially so, when some senators concealed the true extent of their own possessions.¹⁷⁸ With a touch of nice malice, Olympiodorus seems to have claimed that the bishop of Rome, Innocentius, connived at the restoration of pagan rituals by Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus;¹⁷⁹ it was, at least, some consolation for the total failure of the revival to produce any results.

¹⁶³ Zosimus v, 28, 2; cf. Philostorgius XII, 2.

¹⁶⁴ Frag. 40.

¹⁶⁵ Frags. 34, 38.

¹⁶⁶ Zosimus v, 31, 4: τὸν ὄγκον τῶν περὶ τὴν ὁδὸν ἐσομένων δαπανημάτων ἄγων εἰς μέσον ἀποτρέπει τὸν βασιλέα.

¹⁶⁷ Frag. 23.

¹⁶⁸ Frag. 25. Albinus was *praefectus urbi* in 414 (Chastagnol, *Fastes* 273 f.). For interpretation of the *relatio* (repopulation of Rome since 410), cf. Chastagnol, *La Préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-Empire* (1960), 292; cf. Sozomen, IX, 9, 5: οἱ γὰρ ἐνθάδε διασωθέντες, πολλοὶ δὲ ἦσαν, πάλιν τὴν πόλιν φκίσαν.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. esp. Zosimus v, 34, 6; 46, 2.

¹⁷⁰ Frag. 44. This is a highly speculative suggestion; with regret, I cannot accept the view of E. A. Thompson that the passage reveals Olympiodorus' sense of social injustice at inequalities of wealth at Rome; *CQ* xxxviii (1944), 50 f.

¹⁷¹ Zosimus v, 29, 9 (Lampadius); 34, 3 (Stilicho); 35, 4 (Eucherius); 45, 4 (Heliocrates). Note esp. v, 35, 4, διὰ τὴν τοῦ τόπου τιμὴν.

¹⁷² v, 45, 5, cf. Sozomen IX, 6, 1 (Innocentius); v, 50, 2 (Italian bishops used by Alaric).

¹⁷³ Sozomen IX, 9, 1 (Sigisarius and Attalus); Frag. 26 (at Barcelona).

¹⁷⁴ Sozomen IX, 9, 4: μεγάλην τε καὶ πολὺν χῶρον περιέχουσαν (as asylum in 410); but this could clearly be Sozomen's own addition.

¹⁷⁵ Zosimus vi, 7, 4. Orosius, at least, thought he was a pagan, cf. *Hist. adv. paganos* vii, 42, 8, claiming to cite from a speech to the senate of 'ille umbratilis consul'; 'loquar vobis, p.c., consul et pontifex, quorum alterum teneo, alterum spero'.

¹⁷⁶ Zosimus v, 32, 1; cf. above, nn. 61–2.

¹⁷⁷ v, 46, 2 f. Generidus resigned his appointment in protest against a law prohibiting pagans (and others) from holding office; cf. *CTh* xvi, 5, 42 (14 Nov., 408): 'eos, qui catholicae sectae sunt inimici, intra palatium militare prohibemus', etc. The law was addressed to Olympius and Valens, *comes domesticorum* (cf. above, n. 161).

¹⁷⁸ Zosimus v, 38, 5; 41, 7; cf. 41, 5 (above, n. 53).

¹⁷⁹ v, 41, 2.

At one point Olympiodorus invokes archaeology to support his pagan sympathies. He reports an occasion told to him by a personal acquaintance, Valerius, who had governed Thrace many years before; this was the discovery of three silver statues which came to light in the course of a hunt for buried treasure. The statues were figures dressed in barbarian clothing, and had been found facing the north; no sooner were they excavated and carried away than the three barbarian peoples, Goths, Huns, and Sarmatians, forced their way into the Roman empire.¹⁸⁰ Another such occasion had occurred in Olympiodorus' own time. There had stood in Sicily, opposite the crossing from Rhegium, an ancient statue the function of which was to repel the flow of lava from Mount Etna. The statue, it was said, had prevented Alaric from crossing to Sicily; some years later, however, it was taken down by the orders of Galla Placidia and Constantius, and its removal was immediately followed by volcanic eruptions and barbarian attacks on Sicily.¹⁸¹

Such were Olympiodorus' religious attitudes: clearly defined and boldly expressed, but not approaching such intensity of prejudice as to undermine his understanding of contemporary affairs. His work was not a religious tract or a work of religious propaganda. In one case, indeed, it is possible that he came out against one, admittedly dubious, aspect of pagan tastes. An Asiatic magician, Libanius, appeared at Ravenna in 421, promising by his magic arts to render armies superfluous and restore Roman supremacy over barbarians. Libanius was executed by the orders of Constantius acting, so it was believed, under the influence of his wife. Olympiodorus does not appear to have been very sympathetic to this fraudulent character.¹⁸²

VII

In conclusion, a brief assessment is due of Olympiodorus' interpretation of contemporary history. As a diplomat who had successfully negotiated with the Huns, Olympiodorus took the practical view that events could be determined, favourably or adversely, by political judgement and calculation. For him, the collapse of the western imperial system followed directly upon the death of its protagonist, Stilicho, and the fall of Stilicho was directly attributable to the failure of his diplomatic relations with Alaric. This failure need not have occurred, had it not been for the intervention of external factors.

Olympiodorus, conscious of the importance of correct political management, was also aware of the importance of individuals in politics. An instance, briefly discussed above, was the case of the praetorian prefect Jovius, who for a short period had played a crucial individual role in high politics. Olympiodorus also believed that the personal influence of Olympius had been malignant and profound. Olympius was not merely a traitor to Stilicho; by his own subsequent mismanagement of affairs, he was 'responsible for the disasters which overcame the state'.¹⁸³

Finally, the historian duly—and, it cannot be denied, correctly—emphasized the influence of chance, τύχη, as a determinant factor in events. The invasion of Radagaisus and usurpation of Constantine were cases in point: unexpected events falling in rapid succession, they had prevented the fulfilment of Stilicho's alliance with Alaric, and so produced the immediate crisis which led to Stilicho's fall. But the importance of chance is made especially clear by Zosimus at the very end of his version of Olympiodorus. Alaric, after fruitless attempts to bring Honorius to the table, was at last summoned to a conference near Ravenna; meanwhile the Goth Sarus, having abandoned Stilicho with his small band of retainers, was maintaining himself in Picenum and was there attacked by Athaulf in pursuance of some private feud. In revenge, Sarus marched to Ravenna and attacked the forces of Alaric, when an agreement was just on the point of achievement between him and Honorius. Alaric immediately broke off negotiations; and in August 410, he marched on Rome and sacked the city. The episode was ascribed, and no other interpretation is more

¹⁸⁰ Frag. 27. Valerius cannot however have held his office under Constantius; rather under Valens, c. 375.

¹⁸¹ Frag. 15. An inscription, *CIL* x, 6950 (*ILS* 23), of 132 B.C., mentions a statue 'ad fretum' near Rhegium (on the Italian side of the strait).

¹⁸² Frag. 38.

¹⁸³ Zosimus v, 36, 3: τοσοῦτων αἴτιος . . . τῷ πολιτεύματι συμφορῶν; cf. v, 46, 1: αἴτιον τῶν οὐ δεξιῶς συμβεβηκότων (the opinion of court eunuchs).

appropriate, to chance : ἕτερόν τι παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐμπόδιον εὔρεν ἢ τύχη, πρὸς τὰ συμβησόμενα τοῖς τῆς πολιτείας πράγμασιν ὁδῶν προῖοῦσα.¹⁸⁴

For Olympiodorus, then, the fall of the western empire was a contemporary event, subject like any other to the consequences of political incompetence and the operations of chance. He spoke for the classes in whose hands it had rested to influence events, by choosing between practical alternatives. That they had failed was a contingent, not a pre-ordained, matter; they had failed, through a combination of ill-luck, prejudice (not always their own), political ineptitude and dissension.

Yet it is right to re-emphasize that, for Olympiodorus at the moment when he brought out his history, the story had ended not with tragedy but with triumph. The imposition of Valentinian by Theodosius II had restored political unity to an empire in which this unity had so often been in question; and it had done so on the basis of an eastern political ascendancy over the west. This ascendancy had been implicit in the designs of Constantine, and clearly intended to survive his own death by Theodosius I, founder of the dynasty, and grandfather of the emperor to whom Olympiodorus dedicated his history.¹⁸⁵

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¹⁸⁴ VI, 13, 1.

¹⁸⁵ Alan Cameron, 'Theodosius the Great and the

Regency of Stilicho', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* LXXIII (1968), at 267 f.