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THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

—◆—
A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK



AGUSTIN V. STARTARI

—◆—
MAAT

AGUSTIN V.

STARTARI

Agustin V. Startari, born in 1982, is a Uruguayan author, thinker, and researcher trained in Historical Sciences and Linguistics at the University of the Republic (UDELAR). His work spans multiple fields of knowledge, from historical research and Buddhism to fiction and critical essays on power and culture.

Among his most significant titles are *Creation of an Empire: The Ancient Egyptian Empire*, which examines the consolidation of one of antiquity's most influential civilizations; *Propaganda Machinery: National Socialism*, an incisive study of the mechanisms of totalitarian legitimation; *Evangelization in the Pen of Fray Bartolomé*, centered on the discursive violence of the evangelizing process; and *Ukraine and Russia: An Ongoing Conflict*, an analysis of a contemporary geopolitical conflict.

This volume forms part of the *Working Papers* series, a collection of independent studies on ideology, legitimacy, and power across history. Each instalment—autonomous yet interconnected—reveals a common thread extending from pharaonic Egypt to the regimes of the twentieth century, combining a cross-disciplinary approach with an inescapable critical commitment.

Startari is distinguished by his willingness to advance bold hypotheses where the documentary record falls silent, turning archival lacunae into fertile ground for structural reflection. The series does not seek merely to repeat what is already known, but to interrogate its foundations.

In *The Early Middle Ages: A Historiographical Framework*, the reader encounters a study of the transformation of historical writing in the Latin West between the fifth and eleventh centuries. The work begins with its late antique Christian antecedents and examines how providence, ecclesiastical memory, and new political formations altered the selection and explanation of the past. Later developments are included only as reception or contrast, outside the study's central chronological frame.

AGUSTIN V. STARTARI

THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK



This document was written by Agustin V. Startari, an author and researcher trained at UDELAR's Faculty of Humanities. It forms part of the *Working Papers* series, a project intended to promote historical research and knowledge. The views expressed in this document are solely the responsibility of the author.

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SUMMARY

This study examines the transformation of historical writing in the Latin West between the fifth and eleventh centuries. Its object is not the events of the period, but the operations through which authors and communities selected, ordered, and explained the past. It argues that early medieval Christian historiography did not represent a degradation of classical models, but rather a reorganisation of historical writing: it retained techniques, authorities, and materials inherited from Antiquity and subordinated them to new conceptions of time, community, and legitimacy. The corpus is examined along five axes—conceptions of time, models of causality, selection of sources, narrative genre, and institutional function—applied to Eusebius of Caesarea, Augustine of Hippo, and Orosius as late antique antecedents; to the historians of the post-Roman kingdoms; to Bede; and to the annalistic, chronicle, and hagiographical production of monastic milieux. The Asturian chronicles and selected Andalusí testimonies make it possible to incorporate the specificity of the Iberian Peninsula without subordinating it to Latin periodisation. The study distinguishes three temporal levels and explicitly separates modern interpretive categories from the early medieval corpus.

KEYWORDS

Early medieval historiography; Latin West; providence; historical causality; historiographical genres; hagiography; monastic memory; post-Roman kingdoms; al-Andalus.

ABSTRACT

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1. INTRODUCTION

OBJECT, HYPOTHESIS, AND SCOPE

The object of this study is the transformation of historical writing in the Latin West during the Early Middle Ages. It does not seek to reconstruct in general terms the political, religious, or economic events of the period, but rather to analyse the ways in which particular authors and communities selected, ordered, and explained the past. The investigation therefore focuses on historiographical production, its genres, its criteria of causality, and its functions of legitimation.

The central chronological frame extends from the fifth to the eleventh century, from the dissolution of Roman imperial authority in the West to the political, monastic, and cultural transformations associated with the period around the year 1000. The principal spatial framework is the Latin West, with particular attention to Gaul, Italy, the British Isles, and the Iberian Peninsula. Byzantine and Islamic historiography is incorporated only where it helps to explain contacts, differences, or zones of interaction relevant to that space.

The study distinguishes three temporal levels. The first comprises the late antique antecedents of the fourth and fifth centuries, which are indispensable for understanding the formation of Christian historiography. The second constitutes the central early medieval corpus, situated between the fifth and eleventh centuries. The third brings together later receptions and developments, used comparatively rather than as direct evidence for the Early Middle Ages. This distinction avoids treating texts produced in different historical contexts as though they were contemporaneous.

The central question is how the Christianisation of written culture altered the criteria by which the past was narrated and endowed with meaning. Four problems follow from this question: which events were considered worthy of remembrance; what relationship was established between human causality and providence; how ecclesiastical and political institutions intervened in the production of narratives; and what functions were performed by chronicles, annals, ecclesiastical history, hagiography, and genealogy.¹

The hypothesis is that early medieval Christian historiography was neither a simple degradation of classical models nor an undifferentiated accumulation of pious narratives. It constituted a reorganisation of historical writing: it preserved techniques, authorities, and materials inherited from Antiquity, but subordinated them to new conceptions of time, community, and legitimacy. Providence did not necessarily eliminate political or documentary observation; rather, it altered the framework within which such observations acquired meaning.

This hypothesis is formulated within a debate involving identifiable positions, and it is useful to situate it before presenting the corpus. The model most directly challenged by this study is W. J. Brandt's account of the medieval mentality as discontinuous and governed by divine causality, examined in Chapter Nine. By contrast, this study aligns with a line of analysis that examines early medieval texts in terms of their political and institutional functions rather than primarily by their distance from modern historiography: Goffart for the Latin narrators, Halsall for the critique of migration and invasion narratives, McKitterick for the relationship between history and memory in the Carolingian world, and Wickham for the general framework of the period. More specifically, in the history of historiography, Momigliano's work on the

Spiegel, *The Past as Text*, 3–28; Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique*, 13–44.1

pagan-Christian transition, Guenée's study of medieval historical culture, and Spiegel's analysis of the theory and practice of historiography provide the principal analytical categories; Linehan fulfils this role for the Iberian case.²

A contemporary objection to this line of interpretation comes from a different direction and must also be stated here because it determines the scope of the present argument. Since the beginning of this century, Ward-Perkins and Heather have challenged readings of the end of Roman order as a peaceful transformation, arguing on the basis of material and archaeological evidence that it entailed demonstrable economic and technical deterioration. This study neither examines nor contradicts that evidence. Its claim is limited to literate practices and is compatible with material decline: the continuity of a craft and the prosperity of a society are distinct questions. The delimitation that follows should be read with that restriction in mind.³

The principal corpus includes works and traditions associated with Eusebius of Caesarea, Augustine of Hippo, and Orosius as late antique antecedents; Gregory of Tours, Jordanes, John of Biclaro, and Isidore of Seville for the post-Roman kingdoms; Bede for ecclesiastical history; and the annalistic, chronicle, and hagiographical production of monastic milieux. The Asturian chronicles and selected Andalusí testimonies make it possible to incorporate the specificity of the Iberian

Brandt, *Shape of Medieval History*, 27–63. For the line of analysis within which this study is situated, see Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, 1–19; Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 10–34; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 1–28; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, 3–49. For the analytical categories, see Momigliano, “Pagan and Christian Historiography,” 79–99; Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique*, 13–44; Spiegel, *Past as Text*, 3–28; and, for the Iberian case, Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*.²

Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*; Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*.³

Peninsula within the established chronological limit. Deliberately excluded from the corpus are the Chronicle of Fredegar, Gildas's *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, the *Liber Pontificalis*, and the Irish insular annalistic and hagiographical tradition: their inclusion would require expanding the study into documentary and linguistic frameworks not covered by the present approach, and their absence does not condition the conclusions, which rest solely on the cases actually analysed.⁴

The analysis is organised around five axes: conception of time, model of causality, selection of sources, narrative genre, and institutional function. These axes make it possible to compare different texts without imposing the criteria of contemporary historiography upon them. The study attends both to what the narratives preserve and to the operations through which they construct continuity, authority, sanctity, political identity, or communal memory.⁵

Works from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, the development of the universities, humanism, and late medieval debates fall outside the central corpus. When they appear, their function is to show the later reception, expansion, or transformation of models configured during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. They are not used to define the period retrospectively, nor is medieval historiography presented as a uniform block extending without rupture to the Renaissance.⁶

Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*; Noble and Smith, eds., *Cambridge History of Christianity*, 3.4

On the use of comparative axes in the analysis of medieval historiography, see Spiegel, *Past as Text*, 83–102; Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique*, 295–357.⁵

For the late medieval development excluded here from the central corpus, see Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique*, 295–357; on the later reception of prophetic materials, Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 1–59.⁶

The intended contribution is to provide a framework of interpretation capable of relating authors, genres, and contexts without reducing early medieval historiography to an opposition between classical reason and religious credulity. Following this introduction, the study moves from the transition between classical and Christian models to conceptions of time and providence; it then examines the post-Roman kingdoms, the principal historiographical genres, Bede's work, and monastic manuscript culture; finally, it separates modern historiographical debates and later receptions from the corpus spanning the fifth to the eleventh centuries.

NOTE ON SOURCES, EDITIONS, AND TRANSLATIONS

The corpus has been studied through modern editions and translations rather than through the manuscript tradition. Some works are cited from bilingual editions that reproduce the original text alongside a translation, principally the *Loeb Classical Library*; others are cited from standard annotated translations, especially the *Translated Texts for Historians* series and editions published by Oxford University Press and *Penguin Classics*. Iberian material is cited from Spanish editions, and Andalusí testimonies from translations into Spanish. The bibliography identifies the edition used in each case.

This decision follows from the level of analysis adopted. The five axes identified above operate on the argumentative and narrative organisation of the texts: what is selected as memorable, how causes are linked, which authorities are invoked, the genre within which the account is inscribed, and the institution it serves. This level can be reconstructed reliably from critical editions and annotated translations. The study is therefore not a philological investigation: it does not examine vocabulary, syntax, compositional formulae, textual variants, or

copying practices, all of which would require direct work with the originals and with manuscript witnesses.

Two explicit limitations follow. First, no conclusion in this study rests on a linguistic argument concerning the vocabulary or form of the texts; where a distinction depends on a technical term, that term is given in its original language. The second limitation concerns Arabic and Byzantine sources, which are read through the additional mediation of an intermediate language and are used, in accordance with the criterion already stated, to identify contacts, differences, and zones of interaction, not as the basis for claims about the textual tradition from which they derive. References follow each work's internal divisions—book, chapter, paragraph—where these are preserved, and otherwise the pagination of the edition consulted.

SYNOPSIS: THE FIVE AXES BY AUTHOR

The following synopsis summarises the application of the five axes to the authors and textual groupings examined. It does not replace the analysis in each chapter: rather, it establishes the terms of comparison and makes it possible to verify that the same set of questions has been applied to Latin, insular, and Arabic materials.

Eusebius of Caesarea. Time: synchronous universal chronology. Causality: providence and imperial order. Sources: documents quoted verbatim. Genre: ecclesiastical history. Function: legitimating the imperial Church.

Augustine of Hippo. Time: interior and eschatological. Causality: the two cities, not politics. Sources: personal memory and Scripture. Genre: *confession* and treatise. Function: establishing the theological framework.

Orosius. Time: ages and succession of empires. Causality: providence as punishment. Sources: earlier compendia. Genre: apologetic history. Function: refuting the pagan accusation.

Jordanes. Time: genealogical. Causality: destiny of the lineage. Sources: an abridged Cassiodorus. Genre: *historia gentis*. Function: Gothic memory after the kingdom.

Victor of Vita. Time: typological, through repetition. Causality: providential persecution. Sources: edicts and conciliar acts. Genre: hybrid, with apologetic elements. Function: substantiating the Nicene grievance.

Gregory of Tours. Time: annual and episcopal. Causality: immediate divine judgement. Sources: personal testimony. Genre: history of the Franks. Function: episcopal authority.

Isidore of Seville. Time: ages and regnal chronology. Causality: providential order. Sources: encyclopaedic compilation. Genre: history and encyclopaedia. Function: Visigothic legitimacy.

Paul the Deacon. Time: a reused Roman framework. Causality: succession of peoples. Sources: Eutropius and oral tradition. Genre: *historia gentis*. Function: retrospective Lombard memory.

Bede. Time: computus and the six ages. Causality: verifiable providence. Sources: named informants and archives. Genre: ecclesiastical history and chronicle. Function: unity of the English Church.

Asturian chronicles. Time: prophetic computus. Causality: a promise fulfilled within a fixed term. Sources: Visigothic tradition. Genre: chronicle and prophecy. Function: Neo-Gothic continuity.

Ibn Hayyan. Time: annalistic, organised by reigns. Causality: *fitna* and internal discord. Sources: *isnād* and *amplificatio*. Genre: chronicle compilation. Function: Umayyad legitimacy.

2. FROM CLASSICAL TO CHRISTIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Eusebius of Caesarea and the Formation of the Christian Model

During the fourth century, the relationship between Christianity and imperial power changed decisively. The agreement of Milan of 313, associated with Constantine and Licinius, established religious toleration and restored property confiscated from Christian communities; it did not yet make Christianity the official religion. The imperial definition of Nicene orthodoxy came later, most notably with the edict *Cunctos populos*, promulgated at Thessalonica by Theodosius I, Gratian, and Valentinian II in 380. This process of imperial recognition, patronage, and regulation altered the conditions under which the history of the Church was written.⁷

Eusebius of Caesarea composed the *Historia ecclesiastica* in several stages and gave it its final form, divided into ten books, during Constantine's reign, around 324–325. The work traces the history of the Church from its apostolic origins to Constantine's victory and preserves numerous extracts from documents, letters, and authors whose texts have not survived through other channels. Its compilatory method makes the work an indispensable source, but it requires a distinction between the documents quoted, Eusebius's selection of them, and his apologetic interpretation.⁸

Eusebius brought political events, doctrinal controversies, persecutions, martyrdoms, and episcopal successions together within a providential narrative. This framework did not eliminate his interest in documentation: the accumulation of testimony and the theological

Codex Theodosianus 16.1.2; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 210–44.7

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.1–10.9.8

construction of the narrative formed part of a single strategy intended to demonstrate the antiquity, continuity, and legitimacy of the Church.⁹

The *Historia ecclesiastica* shifted the centre of attention away from much of ancient political historiography, although it did not completely abandon its procedures. Eusebius organised lists, chronologies, brief biographies, speeches, and documents in order to narrate the history of a religious community extending across different regions of the Empire. The novelty lies less in the absence of secular matters than in their subordination to Christianity's institutional and doctrinal history.

The work's apologetic purpose determines both its inclusions and its silences. Eusebius presents the survival of the Church, the defeat of its persecutors, and Constantine's favour as episodes in a sequence rendered intelligible by providence. This model of ecclesiastical history enjoyed an enduring reception and gave medieval authors a means of articulating archive, institutional succession, and theological explanation.

The inclusion of acts, episcopal letters, succession lists, and fragments of earlier authors gave Christian historiography a strong documentary dimension. These materials, however, should not be treated as neutral transcriptions: they were selected, abridged, and arranged for polemical and apologetic purposes. The biblical precedent offered a framework for linking the history of a religious community to divine action, but Eusebius also drew upon the chronographic and scholarly techniques of Greco-Roman Antiquity.

From its earliest formulations, Christianity situated the Incarnation within a determinate historical time: the life of Jesus Christ. This event linked the divine and the human within a chronology and made salva-

Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography," 79–99.9

tion history a framework for ordering the past. Christian historiography thus developed a conception of time oriented by creation, the Incarnation, and judgement, without thereby dispensing with events, institutions, and human agents.

Orosius developed another apologetic response. His seven books of *Historiae adversus paganos*, completed around 416–417, argue that the calamities preceding Christianity had been as severe as, or more severe than, those of the present. Orosius was not narrating an alleged fall of the Empire that had already been completed; rather, he was responding to the accusation that the new religion had caused the disasters of his own time, including the sack of Rome in 410.¹⁰

Augustine of Hippo, in *De civitate Dei*, written between 413 and 426, distinguished two cities defined by opposing loves, not two political institutions simply identifiable with Church and Empire. The two remain intermingled throughout history and are fully separated only at the Last Judgement. This conception influenced medieval reflection on temporality, community, and the limits of all earthly power.¹¹

Eusebius, Orosius, and Augustine formulated different models of temporality, causality, and community that were reworked throughout the Middle Ages. Their importance lies not in having established a single historiographical doctrine, but in having provided genres, problems, and repertoires of authority for Christian writing about the past.

From Imperial Order to Post-Roman Communities

The disappearance of imperial authority in the West during the fifth century did not produce a uniform cultural rupture. Educational, administrative, and aristocratic networks changed unevenly from region

Orosius, *Seven Books*, 1.1–14 and 7.39–43.10

Augustine, *City of God*, 14.28 and 19.17; Markus, *Saeculum*, 55–71.11

to region, while bishoprics, royal courts, and monasteries assumed increasingly important roles in the preservation and production of texts. Historiography adapted to these new centres of patronage and authority.¹²

The best-documented example of this adaptation is not a new genre but a text that does not break off. Eusebius's chronological table, translated into Latin and continued by Jerome to 379, was successively extended by Orosius, by Prosper of Aquitaine to 455, by Victor of Tunnuna to 566, and by John of Biclaro to 590; Isidore of Seville later epitomised this chain and added entries of his own. Four of these authors are examined in separate chapters of this study, and it is important to state what that separation conceals: these are not parallel works on a common subject, but successive segments of the same textual object.

The complete series includes links not examined separately in this study but worth enumerating because they indicate the density of the practice. Jerome covered the years 326 to 378; Sulpicius Severus extended the series to 403; Orosius to 417; Prosper of Aquitaine to 455; Hydatius to 468; Marcellinus Comes to 534; Victor of Tunnuna to 566; and John of Biclaro to 590. Isidore of Seville subsequently epitomised the chain running from Jerome through Victor and John and added his own entries to 626. Eight continuators across three centuries, distributed among Gaul, Hispania, Africa, Italy, and Constantinople, do not constitute a residual practice.¹³

Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 105–224; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome*, 3–49.¹²

For the Latin continuators of the table of Eusebius and Jerome, see Mommsen's editions in *Chronica Minora*; Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon*; John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*; Isidore, *Historia*.¹³

The inherited instrument also possessed a precise architecture. Eusebius's table, in Jerome's Latin version, synchronised entries from different historical traditions in parallel columns, encompassing as many as nine peoples at once, including the Assyrians, Hebrews, and Greeks. This arrangement is not merely a matter of presentation: it requires every event to be dated twice, once within its own series and once in relation to the others, thereby producing a comparative history by design. Early medieval continuators inherited this demand for synchronisation even when they reduced the number of columns, and from it came the habit of dating local reigns by simultaneous reference to the emperors of the East, a practice clearly visible in John of Biclaro.

The consequence for the hypothesis is direct. Between Jerome's translation and John of Biclaro's continuation lie the disappearance of imperial authority in the West, the formation of the Germanic kingdoms, and the consolidation of the Visigothic monarchy; throughout this trajectory, however, the chronological grid, the procedure of annual entry, and the practice of continuing a predecessor's work remain in place. What changes is not the technique but who exercises it and for which community: a translator in Constantinople, a Gallic cleric, an exiled African bishop, a Gothic abbot trained in Byzantium. This continuity can be verified in the text itself and does not depend on an interpretation of the spirit of the age.

A technical detail sharpens the argument further by showing what does change. Each continuator dated events according to the system available within his own institutional horizon. Jerome counted from the birth of Abraham and used Olympiads alongside regnal and imperial years; Hydatius incorporated the Hispanic era; Prosper dated by consuls; Marcellinus Comes retained consular dating; Victor of Tununa followed it until 563 and thereafter shifted, with errors, to imperial years. The abandonment of consular dating does not indicate a loss

of technical capacity: it reflects the disappearance of the consulship as an institution of reference. When the political framework that supplied the unit of reckoning ceased to exist, the chronicler replaced the unit while preserving the procedure.¹⁴

This detail is what separates the hypothesis of the present study from a general claim about cultural continuity. What persists is neither a content nor a mentality, but an operation: arranging events in a dated series capable of being continued by another writer. What changes is the reference system, and it changes according to which institutions remain in existence. Measured in these terms, the transition from classical to Christian historiography is accurately described as a reorganisation of the conditions under which a technique was practised—which is precisely what the hypothesis proposes.

The continuators were conscious that they were intervening in the work of others. John of Biclaro opens his continuation by naming Eusebius, Jerome, Prosper, and Victor of Tunnuna as those who had covered the period before his own, thereby explicitly declaring the series into which he was inserting himself. Nor did the chain transmit data alone: it also transmitted a number. The date of creation established by Eusebius and Jerome was the one Bede revised in his own computus; his disagreement with it, examined in Chapter Seven, earned him an accusation of heresy. The same tradition that ensured the continuity of the instrument produced, two centuries later, the technical controversy that called it into question.¹⁵

The dating systems used by each continuator can be read in the editions of *Chronica Minora*: Olympiads and regnal and imperial years in Jerome, the Hispanic era in Hydatius, consular dating in Prosper and Marcellinus, and Victor of Tunnuna's shift to imperial years from 563 onward.¹⁴

John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, preface, where he names Eusebius, Jerome, Prosper, and Victor of Tunnuna; on the creation date transmitted by this tradition, Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, chap. 66.¹⁵

The transmission of written culture combined Roman continuities, simplifications, losses, and new forms of selection. For much of the period, Latin remained the principal language of Western historiography; vernacular production acquired importance gradually and at different rates in different regions. Authors such as Gregory of Tours do not represent a return to the classical model, but rather a reworking of ancient resources within episcopal and Christian frameworks.

3. TIME, PROVIDENCE, AND CAUSALITY IN AUGUSTINE AND OROSIUS

Augustine of Hippo: Conversion, Memory, and Time

Augustine's *Confessions*, written around 397–400 and divided into thirteen books, combine autobiography, prayer, exegesis, and philosophical reflection. The first nine books reconstruct episodes from his life up to the death of Monica; the tenth examines memory and the author's present condition; the final three concentrate on time, creation, and the interpretation of Genesis. Its historical value lies both in the events narrated and in the retrospective form through which Augustine organises his spiritual itinerary.¹⁶

The work reflects the religious and intellectual plurality of the late Roman Empire. Augustine passed through Manichaeism, approached Academic scepticism, and read Platonic texts before his Christian baptism in Milan in 387. These stages do not form a mechanical succession: the narrative reorders them from the standpoint of the bishop who confesses and explains his past.

Manichaeism offered Augustine a dualist explanation of evil through the opposition of two principles. In the *Confessions*, his most developed critique of this conception appears not in the episode of the theft of the pears in Book II, but especially in Book VII, where he revisits his earlier difficulty in conceiving incorporeal reality and explaining the origin of evil.

In *Confessions* VII, Augustine rejects the idea that evil is a substance opposed to God. Every being, insofar as it exists, proceeds from the

Augustine, *Confessions*, books 1–13.16

Creator and is good; evil is understood as corruption or the privation of a due good and is associated with the disorder of the created will.¹⁷

This shift was both intellectual and religious. Reading Platonic authors enabled Augustine to conceive non-corporeal realities, but he maintained that the mediation of Christ and grace—absent from those texts—were necessary to transform the will. The conversion narrated in the *Confessions* cannot therefore be reduced to the replacement of one doctrine by another.

The episode in the Milan garden is narrated in *Confessions* VIII.12. Augustine hears a child's voice repeating *tolle lege*, “take and read”; he interprets the words as a command, opens the codex of Paul's letters, and reads Romans 13:13–14. The narrative presents this act as the resolution of a crisis of will and as the moment in which his hesitation is dispelled.¹⁸

After reading the Pauline passage, Augustine states that the darkness of doubt vanishes. The episode marks his decision to abandon his plans for marriage and his rhetorical career in order to adopt a Christian way of life, a decision that would culminate in his baptism in 387.

The term *confessio* has a broader semantic range in the work than the admission of wrongdoing. It includes acknowledgement of sin, profession of faith, and praise of God. The autobiographical narrative is therefore constantly addressed to a divine interlocutor and is constructed simultaneously as examination of the past, prayer, and thanksgiving.¹⁹

Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.1–16.17

Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.12.28–30.18

Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1 and 10.1.1; Chadwick, introduction, ix–xxvii.¹⁹

The *confessional* dimension thus organises the interpretation of the past: Augustine acknowledges his errors while at the same time presenting his itinerary as testimony to divine mercy. The narrative does not merely report what happened; it assigns retrospective meaning to each stage.

Scripture structures the narrative through prayers, quotations, and commentary that connect individual experience to a theological framework. This intertextuality is not ornamental: it guides the selection of episodes, the vocabulary of conversion, and the retrospective interpretation of the narrated life.

The *Confessions* make it possible to analyse how Christian autobiography transforms personal experience into theological argument. The path from error through searching to conversion links memory, will, and grace, and shows how an individual life could be presented as a legitimate object of historical and spiritual inquiry.

The work therefore combines conversion narrative, philosophical reflection, biblical exegesis, and the examination of memory. Its historiographical significance does not depend on its offering a general chronicle of the Empire, but on the way it organises the personal past from a present standpoint and attributes causality and meaning to it.

Reasons for Studying Augustine's *Confessions*

The first reason for studying the *Confessions* is their place within the religious transformation of the fourth and fifth centuries. The Milan agreement of 313 granted toleration to Christians; Nicene Christianity acquired imperial normative status with the Edict of Thessalonica in 380. Augustine therefore lived in a society in which Christianity already enjoyed institutional support while still competing with traditional cults and other Christian currents.

The second reason is the relationship between personal experience and doctrinal controversy. The *Confessions* address sin, grace, will, memory, and the interpretation of Scripture, but they should not be used as a complete exposition of Augustine's later polemics. The Pelagian controversy began after the work had been written; nor is it appropriate to explain the political fragmentation of the Roman Empire solely through those disputes.

The work allows us to study how an intellectual trained in Latin rhetoric reinterpreted his classical education from within a Christian identity. It does not provide a general chronicle of the end of the Empire, but a situated testimony whose interpretation should be combined with letters, sermons, treatises, and other late antique sources.

Among the central problems of the *Confessions* are the origin of evil, the relationship between body and soul, the disorder of the will, sin, and the operation of grace. These themes appear within a narrative of searching and conversion rather than in the form of a systematic treatise.

In Book VII, Augustine abandons the Manichaean explanation of evil as a substance. Under the influence of Latin Platonism, he argues that everything that exists is good insofar as it exists, and that evil consists in corruption or the privation of a due good. Moral responsibility is also linked to the created will, although the mature formulation of his doctrine of grace develops in other works and controversies.

Augustine does not regard the body as evil by nature. Body and soul are good creatures, even though the human person experiences disorder, mortality, and conflict as consequences of sin. The *Confessions* narrate the struggle with desire without adopting the Manichaean ontological dualism that Augustine himself rejects.

The conversion of Book VIII displays the inability of a divided will, by its own power, to perform the good it recognises. Augustine interprets the outcome as the action of grace, but he does not claim that baptism removes every consequence of original sin in the present life. His later reflections on grace, freedom, and predestination must also be situated within the context of the Donatist and Pelagian controversies.

The problem of evil, the relationship between body and soul, and the understanding of sin and redemption form an interconnected whole. In the *Confessions*, Augustine examines them through autobiographical episodes and philosophical arguments; the work should therefore be read as a situated narrative construction, not as a systematic and definitive exposition of his entire theology.

A third reason for interest lies in the relationship between Christianity and classical culture. Augustine was a grammarian and rhetorician, knew the Latin tradition, and read translations of Platonic authors. His trajectory does not describe a simple abandonment of ancient culture, but its critical appropriation within a new theological framework.

Augustine lived under Christian emperors and pursued his career in an environment in which diverse religious traditions coexisted. Constantine did not make Christianity the official religion through the Milan agreement; the imperial definition of Nicene orthodoxy is associated with the Edict of Thessalonica of 380. Augustine's withdrawal from the teaching of rhetoric, narrated in Book IX, followed from his conversion and his state of health; it did not amount to a wholesale rejection of the classical intellectual inheritance.

Manichaeism and the Platonic books perform different functions in the narrative. The former had given Augustine a material and dualist explanation of evil; the latter helped him to conceive the incorporeal

and the hierarchy of being. Augustine reworked these conceptual instruments, but emphasised their limits in relation to the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, humility, and grace.

From Book X onward, the *Confessions* cease primarily to follow a biographical sequence. Book X examines memory, desire, and the author's present condition; Book XI develops a reflection on time through commentary on the opening of Genesis. This distinction is necessary in order not to attribute to Book X the analysis of temporality that belongs chiefly to Book XI.²⁰

In Book XI, Augustine relates creation to time and argues that God does not create within a pre-existing temporality. Past and future do not exist as present objects in the same way as the now; they become accessible through memory and expectation. His concept of *distentio animi* describes the extension or distension of the mind between recollection, attention, and anticipation.²¹

The final structure of the *Confessions* confirms this shift. Book X is devoted principally to memory; Book XI to time and creation; Books XII and XIII continue the exegesis of Genesis 1. The work thus unites autobiography, philosophy, and biblical commentary without turning these fields into separate disciplines according to modern criteria.

Orosius and the Providential Interpretation of the Past

Paulus Orosius, a Hispanic presbyter of the early fifth century and an associate of Augustine, wrote the seven books of the *Historiae adversus paganos* around 416–417. The work surveys universal history from creation to his own present with an apologetic purpose: to refute the accusation that Christianity had caused the calamities of the Empire. His

Augustine, *Confessions*, books 10–13.²⁰

Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.14–31.²¹

treatment of the Goths and other peoples must be read within this comparison between pagan and Christian disasters, not as a specific history of the Visigoths or as an account of an imperial fall already completed.²²

Universal Chronology, Divine Causality, and Allegory

Providential explanation acquired great importance in Christian historiography, but it did not uniformly displace human causes. Different authors and genres combined political decisions, wars, dynastic rivalries, sins, punishments, and divine signs in varying proportions. Documentary review requires these combinations to be studied case by case rather than assigning a single mentality to all medieval centuries.

Biblical authority supplied models of causality, chronology, and exemplarity. Kings, bishops, saints, and communities could appear as agents within a providential design, but this did not make them passive figures: the sources also record alliances, failures of government, military strategies, and institutional conflicts. Punishment and intercession are recurrent motifs, not exclusive explanations.

Universal chronicles ordered the past from creation to the compiler's present through ages, kingdoms, genealogies, and synchronisms. The tradition of Eusebius and Jerome was decisive for this genre, which articulated biblical, imperial, and ecclesiastical history. Its theological purpose coexisted with the preservation of chronological and political data drawn from earlier sources.²³

Some narratives attribute victories, defeats, or deliverances to the intervention of saints and relics. These episodes should be examined as constructions specific to particular cults, communities, and contexts,

Orosius, *Seven Books*, 1.1–14 and 7.43.22

Bede, *Reckoning of Time*, 157–237.23

not as evidence of a uniform medieval belief. Their analysis makes it possible to study the relationship among military memory, heavenly patronage, and political legitimation.

Christianity fostered a universal history oriented by creation, the Incarnation, and the Last Judgement, but Greco-Roman historiography was neither simply reductive nor devoid of universal aspirations. The Christian innovation consisted in integrating peoples and events within a sacred chronology of universal scope and in situating the Incarnation as an unrepeatable event.

Scripture functioned as an authority for interpreting the ultimate meaning of time, although Christian historians also used archives, episcopal lists, oral testimony, classical texts, and royal documents. The relationship between revelation and historical evidence was hierarchical, but it did not eliminate the diversity of sources or the procedures of compilation.

In *De civitate Dei*, the two cities are not directly equivalent to virtue and sin embodied in two visible states. They are defined by opposing loves and remain intermingled throughout historical time. Reducing them to the Church and secular power erases the complexity of Augustine's argument and of its medieval receptions.²⁴

Christian history was frequently organised through the sequence of creation, fall, Incarnation, redemption, and judgement, but authors did not apply a single scheme to every event. Eschatological interpretations varied and coexisted with chronologies of empires, peoples, and institutions. It is therefore more accurate to speak of shared theological repertoires than of a monolithic reading of the past.

Models of the ages of the world—including the six-age model—made it possible to relate sacred history to universal chronology. Not

Augustine, *City of God*, 14.28 and 19.17; Markus, *Saeculum*, 55–71.24

all authors regarded the fall of the Western Empire as the beginning of an autonomous phase governed by the Church, nor did they await the end of time with equal intensity. Eschatological expectations varied according to period, genre, and community.

Allegorical interpretation was applied above all to Scripture and, by extension, to figures, events, and natural realities. Its presence in chronicles, encyclopaedias, and exegetical works was uneven. Later *specula* and totalising compilations should not be projected without qualification onto the entire period between the fifth and eleventh centuries.

In sum, providence was one of the principal frameworks of intelligibility in Christian historiography, but it operated alongside forms of political, moral, and institutional causality. This qualification makes it possible to assess sources in terms of their concrete operations—selecting, dating, comparing, legitimating, and remembering—and avoids describing them as an inferior stage whose sole purpose was to prepare the way for later humanism.

4. POST-ROMAN KINGDOMS: MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND LEGITIMACY

The Transition from Rome to the Germanic Kingdoms

The historiography of the fifth and sixth centuries survives unevenly and raises problems of chronology, terminology, and perspective. Migrations, negotiated settlements, Roman civil wars, and the formation of post-Roman kingdoms did not constitute a single process called the “barbarian invasions”. The sources emerge from different imperial, episcopal, and courtly positions and must be analysed in light of their interests.²⁵

Roman authors used the term *barbarus* flexibly to designate peoples situated outside or on the margins of Roman order. Goths, Vandals, Suebi, Burgundians, and Franks participated both in conflicts against the Empire and in its armies, alliances, and administrative structures. Their intervention contributed to the fragmentation of Western power, but it does not by itself explain the disappearance of imperial authority.

The Visigoths first established themselves in Gaul through agreements and conflicts with Rome and, after their defeat at Vouillé in 507, progressively consolidated their political centre in Hispania. Their history cannot be reduced to a cause of imperial collapse: it includes military integration, legal negotiation, dynastic competition, and the construction of a post-Roman monarchy. The sources are partial, but not so scarce as to make critical comparison impossible.

Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 10–34 and 417–63.²⁵

Prosper of Aquitaine and the Interpretation of the Imperial Crisis

Prosper of Aquitaine, a fifth-century Christian writer associated with the defence of Augustine's doctrine of grace, continued Jerome's Chronicle. His *Epitoma Chronicon* extends the narrative from 379 and, in its successive recensions, reaches 455. The text is an important source for political and ecclesiastical events in the first half of the fifth century, although its annalistic form limits the breadth of its explanations.²⁶

Prosper's entries record usurpations, campaigns, ecclesiastical disputes, and movements of peoples within an imperial and consular chronology. Rather than describing the birth of an entirely new political system, they document the instability of Roman order from the perspective of a Christian contemporary. Modern interpretations of their significance must be distinguished from the words actually preserved in the chronicle.

The religious dimension of the work appears in its selection of doctrinal controversies, ecclesiastical authorities, and calamities, but this does not justify attributing to every entry an explicit explanation in terms of divine punishment. Prosper should be read as both chronicler and Augustinian polemicist, without retrospectively turning him into a general theorist of the fall of Rome.

The Vandal capture of Carthage in 439 occupies a central place in Prosper's chronology. The brevity of the entry makes it possible to date the event, but does not warrant attributing to it a developed theory according to which the Germanic kingdoms constituted a general punishment for the sins of Rome.

Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon*, 341–499.26

The historiographical value of the chronicle lies in its temporal proximity, the sequence of its notices, and the possibility of comparing them with other sources. Its brevity requires caution against inferring motivations or moral judgements that the text does not express.

Jordanes and the Memory of the Goths

Jordanes was an author of Gothic origin and a former official or secretary who wrote in Latin in the Eastern Roman Empire during the sixth century; he is not known as a poet. Around 551 he composed two works conventionally known as the *Romana* and the *Getica*, devoted respectively to Roman history and the history of the Goths.

The *Getica*, whose full title is *De origine actibusque Getarum*, states that it abridges Cassiodorus's lost *Historia Gothorum*, although Jordanes also used other sources and reorganised the material. The work combines ethnography, genealogy, biblical tradition, Roman history, and Gothic memory. It is indispensable because it preserves otherwise unattested information, but its narratives of origins should not be treated as the direct memory of the Goths themselves.²⁷

Jordanes locates the origin of the Goths on the island of Scandza and then narrates their migration to Gothiscandza. These traditions form part of an erudite and aetiological construction and do not constitute a verifiable account of an ancestor named Gothus or of a uniform departure from north of the Danube.

The passages on Scandza, the genealogies, and ancient Gothic deeds connect the Goths to a prestigious antiquity. Modern criticism examines these chapters as a combination of material from Cassiodorus, classical ethnography, and Jordanes's own elaboration. Jordanes's

Jordanes, *Getica* 1–4; Goffart, *Narrators*, 20–111; Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, 3–18.27

ethnic affiliation is not, by itself, sufficient to determine the reliability or bias of each section.

The *Getica* was written after the sack of Rome in 410 and while the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy was fighting its final war against Justinian. Jordanes places the Goths within Roman history, at times as adversaries and at others as participants in imperial order. He does not narrate 410 as the “fall of Rome”, since the city was sacked by Alaric while the Western Empire continued to exist until 476.

The work makes it possible to study how a sixth-century author constructed a Gothic past that was simultaneously compatible with and conflictual toward Roman history. Modern scholarship debates the extent of Jordanes's dependence on Cassiodorus and cautions that the *Getica* does not directly transmit a collective ethnic consciousness.

The *Romana* offers a synthesis of universal and Roman history extending to the reign of Justinian. Read alongside the *Getica*, it shows that Jordanes did not write from a world alien to Rome, but from within the political and intellectual horizon of the Eastern Empire.

The historical use of Jordanes requires the separation of the strata of his sources, his anachronisms, and his context of composition. His testimony is essential, but it does not provide a transparent collective voice of the Goths or a complete account of their history.

Sidonius Apollinaris: Roman Identity and Germanic Otherness

Sidonius Apollinaris was a fifth-century Gallo-Roman aristocrat, poet, senior official, and, from approximately 469–470, bishop of Clermont. His nine books of letters and his poems document the aristocratic networks of Gaul, relations with emperors and post-Roman kings, and

the resistance of Auvergne to Visigothic expansion. His work is a situated source, conditioned by epistolary rhetoric and by the interests of his social group.²⁸

Sidonius's letters reveal a Roman identity negotiated within a setting of alliances, court service, warfare, and episcopal government. His portrayals of Goths, Burgundians, and other groups vary according to the recipient and purpose of each piece; they cannot be reduced to a constant opposition between civilised Romans and immutable barbarians.

In *Epistulae* VII.9, Sidonius protests to several bishops about the agreement that ceded Auvergne to the Visigoths in exchange for peace. The letter documents a specific political position and the sense of abandonment felt by the Arvernian aristocracy; it does not formulate a general characterisation of the barbarians as Romans in disguise.

Sidonius allows us to observe the tensions experienced by a Roman elite subjected to new powers, but also its mechanisms of adaptation. Criticism of his testimony must attend to genre, the chronology of each letter, and the literary construction of the interlocutor.

John of Biclaro and Isidore on Visigothic Identity

John of Biclaro, or John of Bicular, was a sixth-century chronicler who had studied in Constantinople and later became bishop of Girona. His *Chronicle* continues that of Victor of Tunnuna and covers approximately the years 567–590. It does not recount the origins or early migrations of the Visigoths; instead, it concentrates on events of the author's own time, especially the reigns of Justin II, Tiberius II, Maurice, Leovigild, and Reccared.²⁹

Sidonius Apollinaris, *Poems and Letters*, *Epistulae* 7.7 and 7.9.28

John of Biclaro, *Chronicon*, 57–77.29

The work combines news from the eastern Mediterranean with information about the Visigothic kingdom. Its treatment of Hermenegild's rebellion, Leovigild's campaigns, and the Third Council of Toledo makes it a central, though brief, source for the second half of the sixth century. It must be compared with Gregory of Tours, Isidore, and conciliar documentation.

Isidore of Seville composed the *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum* in two principal recensions: a shorter version around 619–620 and a longer one around 624. The work links material from Jerome, Orosius, Hydatius, Prosper, Victor of Tunnuna, and John of Biclaro with information from Isidore's own time, constructing a memory favourable to the Catholic Visigothic monarchy.³⁰

The longer recension incorporates the *Laus Spaniae* and the *Laus Gothorum* and presents the Gothic kingdom as the legitimate heir to the Hispanic realm after the royal conversion to Nicene Christianity in 589. Religion functions as a foundation of unity and legitimacy, not as a description of an essential transformation of the Gothic people.

Isidore was not an eyewitness to all the events he narrates. For earlier centuries he compiled late antique authorities; for the period after 590 he is a more proximate source and, in some episodes, the only one. This internal distinction must guide the evaluation of his information.

The work functions simultaneously as royal chronicle, history of peoples, and discourse of legitimation. Its defence of unity between monarchy and Catholicism does not amount to a complete fusion of Goths and Romans, but to an ecclesiastical-political programme developed after Reccared's conversion.

Isidore, *Historia*, 79–110; Collins, *Visigothic Spain*, 66–92; Wood, *Politics of Identity*.³⁰

Passages on religion and power must be read according to the numbering of a critical edition. The *Historia* circulated in different recensions and cannot reliably be organised through the generic division into “Book I, chapter 5” used in some modern references.

Isidore presents the Catholic Visigothic kingdom as a political community favoured by its religious unity and its rule over Hispania. This formulation synthesises the programme of the work, but it does not reproduce a literal statement by the author.

This construction is historiographically valuable precisely because it is not neutral. It makes it possible to study how a seventh-century bishop selected the past in order to legitimate a monarchy and a collective identity undergoing transformation.

Vandals: Persecution, War, and the Partiality of the Sources

The sources for the Vandal kingdom in Africa are fragmentary and reflect opposing positions. Nicene narratives of persecution, legislation, inscriptions, correspondence, and *Procopius's* later account must be read together. Religious opposition between the Arian Vandal monarchy and Nicene groups was important, but it does not exhaust the kingdom's political and social history.

The Vandals and Alans crossed from Hispania into North Africa in 429 under the leadership of Geiseric and captured Carthage in 439. Victor of Vita wrote the *Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae* toward the end of the fifth century, focusing on the persecution of Nicene Christians under the Vandal kings. His testimony is fundamental and openly partisan.³¹

This is the point in the corpus at which the hypothesis of the present study is most exposed, and the objection should be stated without

Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*.³¹

qualification. The *Historia persecutionis* is constructed typologically: it presents the Vandal persecution as a repetition of earlier persecutions, especially that of Diocletian, so that events acquire meaning through correspondence with a prior model rather than through the sequence of their own causes. The genre is hybrid—historiography, hagiography, and apology at once—and its purpose is partisan: within the logic of the scheme, the Vandals are persecutors by definition, prior to any examination. If providential causality displaces documentary observation rather than framing it anywhere in the corpus, this is where one would expect it to happen.

Examination of the text reveals something different. The typological framework does not suppress documentary material; it requires it. Victor inserts royal edicts and transmits the *confession* of faith drawn up by Eugenius of Carthage for the Nicene bishops and presented to Huneric at the conference of 484, a document preserved nowhere else. The manuscript tradition also appended to the text the *Notitia provinciarum et civitatum Africae*, a list of the bishops summoned to that same conference, arranged by province, which constitutes one of the principal sources for the ecclesiastical geography of Africa at the time. The procedure of inserting literal documents within a providential narrative is itself inherited: the recognisable model is Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, which Victor knew. Here the evidence operates in the direction most difficult for the opposing argument, because the text in which providence acts most forcefully is also the one that preserves the greatest quantity of archival material: it needs documents in order to substantiate the grievance it denounces.

The conclusion must nevertheless be formulated more precisely than the general hypothesis. The typological framework does not prevent documentary insertion, but it does govern evaluation: the magnitude attributed to the persecution, the imputation of intentions, and

the characterisation of the Vandal monarchy as uniformly hostile are judgements produced by the scheme and cannot be verified from the text alone. On these points Victor cannot be used without external corroboration, and legislation, epigraphy, numismatics, and archaeology have indeed required corrections to his account. The exact formulation is therefore this: providence determines what is selected and how it is evaluated while at the same time compelling documentation; what is compromised is not the recording of events, but the estimation of their scope and motivation. This is the limit acknowledged by the present study, and it corresponds to the conditions of falsification stated in the conclusions.³²

Procopius of Caesarea narrated the Vandal War in Books III and IV of *De bellis* during the sixth century. As Belisarius's secretary, he constructed a detailed account of the expedition ordered by Justinian, the capture of Carthage in 533, the defeat of Gelimer, and the end of the Vandal kingdom in 534. His perspective is that of the Eastern Roman Empire and must be compared with African sources.³³

Belisarius occupied Carthage in 533 after the victory at Ad Decimum. Gelimer's defeat and surrender in 534 brought the war and the independent Vandal kingdom to an end, although the imperial reorganisation of Africa subsequently encountered resistance.

Procopius presents the campaign as an imperial restoration and a victory of Justinian and Belisarius. This standpoint explains part of his

Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae*, books 2–3, for the conference of 484 and the *confession* of faith of Eugenius of Carthage; the *Notitia provinciarum et civitatum Africae* is transmitted alongside the text in the manuscript tradition and appears in printed editions, although it was probably not written by Victor. On the correction of the inherited image through legislation, epigraphy, numismatics, and archaeology, see Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*.³²

Procopius, History of the Wars, books 3–4; Cameron, *Procopius*, 149–88.³³

narrative selection, but it does not render useless his information on logistics, diplomacy, internal conflict, and military operations.

The account also includes traditions concerning Vandal origins, customs, and government, although its social information is less systematic than its military narrative. The sack of Rome in 455 appears within a retrospective account written roughly a century later.

Procopius must be read as both a literary author and a participant in the Justinianic world. His organisation of speeches, episodes, and portraits reflects an interpretation of the war rather than the neutral reproduction of a military record.

Victor of Vita and *Procopius* offer different perspectives: the former organises the past around the suffering of the African Nicene Church; the latter around the Eastern war of reconquest. Comparing them shows how religion, political memory, and imperial legitimacy shaped representations of the Vandals.³⁴

The documentation is incomplete, but it is not limited to two narratives. Laws, coins, inscriptions, letters, and archaeological evidence make it possible to correct the image inherited from hostile sources and to study institutions, economy, and material culture.

The Vandal kingdom should therefore be studied as a post-Roman formation of the western Mediterranean, not merely as an agent of destruction or a religious antagonist. The partiality of the sources is itself a historical fact to be explained, not a reason to abandon critical analysis of them.

Merrills and Miles, *The Vandals*, 1–26 and 229–57.³⁴

Ostrogoths: Monastic Chronicle and Political Memory

The Ostrogothic history of Italy is documented by sources of diverse kinds: administrative letters, war histories, chronicles, hagiographical texts, legislation, and inscriptions. The kingdom of *Theoderic* was established in Italy after the defeat of Odoacer in 493 and ended during the Gothic War in 553. The Lombards, whose invasion of Italy began in 568, should not be included among its contemporary relations.

The so-called *Anonymus Valesianus* or *Excerpta Valesiana* is not a single monastic chronicle. The name designates two anonymous Latin fragments preserved and edited together; the second, also known as the *Pars posterior* or *Chronica Theodericiana*, deals principally with the reign of *Theoderic* and was composed after his death in 526, probably around the middle of the sixth century.³⁵

Italian chronology also draws on annalistic texts transmitted under various modern designations, among them the *Fasti Vindobonenses*. The expression “Annals of Ravenna” may suggest a single, stable work and should therefore be accompanied by precise identification of the text and edition being used.

These sources make it possible to reconstruct political events, but their brevity and manuscript transmission raise problems of authorship, date, and perspective. The *Pars posterior* of the *Anonymus Valesianus* is especially valuable because it combines an initially favourable image of *Theoderic* with a hostile account of his final years.

Anonymus Valesianus, *Pars posterior*, 526–69; Amory, *People and Identity*, 3–33; Arnold, *Theoderic*, 7–31.³⁵

Paul the Deacon and the Memory of the Lombards

Paul the Deacon, born around 720 and dead around 799, a monk of Montecassino associated with the Carolingian cultural milieu, composed the *Historia Langobardorum* in the late eighth century, narrating the past of the Lombards from their appearance in the West to the middle of that century. Before writing this work, he had reworked Eutropius's ten-book breviary into a sixteen-book *Historia Romana*. That sequence matters for the argument pursued here: the author who fixes the memory of a post-Roman people first works upon a compendium of Roman history, so that the relationship with ancient materials operates not as stylistic imitation but as the reuse of an already available chronological and narrative framework.³⁶

The *Historia Langobardorum* was written after the Lombard kingdom had been absorbed into Carolingian power. This places the text in the same retrospective position occupied by Jordanes in relation to the Goths and by the Asturian chronicles in relation to the Visigothic monarchy: the memory of a people is written after the disappearance of the political structure that had sustained it. The work also preserves origin narratives, traditions transmitted orally, and materials now lost, whose presence requires a distinction between the recording of events and the construction of a shared past. By date, authorship, and function, it belongs squarely within the group of narratives examined in this study.³⁷

Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards*; Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, whose fourth study is devoted to Paul the Deacon.³⁶

Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, argues that the four narratives respond to specific audiences and socio-political occasions rather than serving as primary sources for the history of their peoples.³⁷

Gregory of Tours and the Memory of the Franks

Gregory of Tours and Paul the Deacon inherited resources from ancient historiography, but there is insufficient basis for presenting their works as direct imitations of Tacitus. Gregory entitled his work *Historiae*, also transmitted as *Decem libri historiarum*; the designation *Historia Francorum* is traditional, although it may unduly narrow a narrative that includes universal, ecclesiastical, political, and local history.³⁸

Gregory begins with creation and organises much of the narrative through a Christian chronology, but he also uses documents, oral testimony, personal experience, and political reports. Miracles do not replace all human causality: they coexist with dynastic conflicts, episcopal decisions, aristocratic violence, and social negotiation.

Isidore of Seville: History, Memory, and Compilation

Isidore of Seville was born around 560, probably in Cartagena, although the place cannot be established with absolute certainty, and died in 636. He served as bishop of Seville from the beginning of the seventh century and was one of the most influential compilers of the early medieval West. His writings encompass exegesis, theology, history, grammar, natural science, and ecclesiastical discipline.

The image of a culturally empty Europe must be replaced by a regional framework. Isidore worked in the Catholic Visigothic kingdom, where episcopal schools, libraries, and Roman legal and literary traditions survived. His project consisted in selecting and reorganising that body of knowledge for the needs of the clergy and the monarchy.

As bishop, Isidore participated in the institutional consolidation that followed Reccared's conversion in 589. He was not the direct

Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*; Goffart, *Narrators*, 112–234; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 1–32.³⁸

agent of that conversion, which occurred before his episcopate. His influence operated through councils, clerical formation, preaching, and writing within a programme of Catholic unity that also included coercive measures against dissenters and Jews.

The *Etymologiae*, or *Origines*, assemble in twenty books material drawn from numerous ancient and Christian authorities. Isidore compiled them approximately between 615 and the early 630s; the work was left without a complete final revision and was organised and disseminated with the involvement of Braulio of Zaragoza.³⁹

Isidore presided over the Second Council of Seville in 619 and played a leading role at the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633. The latter regulated clerical education and ordered that young men destined for ministry be educated under episcopal supervision. To speak of “seminaries in every diocese” is anachronistic if the phrase is understood in its modern institutional sense; it is more accurate to refer to schools or communities for clerical formation.⁴⁰

Isidore of Seville's production shows how compilation and ecclesiastical teaching reorganised ancient knowledge within the institutions of the Visigothic kingdom. Its later reception made several of his works instruments of consultation, education, and cultural transmission throughout the Middle Ages.

Historiographical and Encyclopaedic Works

Isidore's *Chronica* offers a universal history organised according to the ages of the world and, depending on the recension, extends into the early seventh century. Its purpose is chronological and providential, but it also depends upon the Eusebius-Jerome compilation and late

Isidore, *Etymologies*, 3–28.³⁹

Vives, ed., *Concilios visigóticos*, 186–225, especially canon 24.⁴⁰

antique continuators. The date 615 corresponds to one stage of composition, not to an invariant endpoint for all versions.

The *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum* survives in a shorter recension, dating to around 619–620, and a longer one, dating to around 624. It is not a general account of all Germanic migrations: it organises the histories of the Goths, Vandals, and Suebi with particular attention to the legitimacy of the Visigothic kingdom of Hispania.

The *Etymologiae*, divided into twenty books, constitute a thematic encyclopaedia based on the explanation of names and terms. They bring together grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, medicine, law, Scripture, the Church, languages, peoples, nature, geography, agriculture, warfare, architecture, and everyday life. Their purpose was not to “save everything” from Roman learning, but to offer a usable synthesis through a Christian selection of authorities.

The *Sententiae* form a theological and moral treatise in three books, not two. The first sets out doctrinal themes; the second addresses conversion and the virtues; the third treats responsibilities, vices, monastic life, clergy, and government. The work depends extensively on Gregory the Great and enjoyed considerable reception in the Middle Ages.⁴¹

De fide catholica contra Iudaeos, dedicated to Isidore's sister Florentina, interprets prophecies and biblical passages as arguments in favour of the Christian faith. It must also be analysed within the history of Christian anti-Judaism, rather than described as a simple response to supposed “Judeo-Christian currents” of the seventh century.

De ecclesiasticis officiis, written at the request of his brother Fulgentius, bishop of Astigi, explains ecclesiastical offices, liturgy, and ministries. It is a relevant source for Hispanic liturgical practice, although it should

Isidore, *Sententiae*, three books; Knoebel, trans., *Isidore of Seville: Sententiae*.⁴¹

not be presented as a single code that by itself structured every rite of the kingdom.

Among Isidore's exegetical works are the *Prooemia* and *De ortu et obitu patrum*. The authorship and transmission of some Isidorian texts raise problems, and exact counts of figures vary according to the edition; any quantification must therefore rest on a critical text. The *Liber numerorum* offers a symbolic interpretation of biblical numbers.

The *Collectio Hispana* was one of the most influential canonical collections of the medieval West and is traditionally associated with the Isidorian milieu. Direct attribution of its original compilation to Isidore is disputed, however; it is more accurate to speak of a collection linked to the Hispanic canonical tradition than of a work securely authored by the bishop.⁴²

Isidore's writings selected, compiled, and adapted ancient knowledge for exegetical, educational, liturgical, and political uses. His influence on medieval culture depended as much on this method of organisation as on the wide manuscript circulation of his works.

Vives, *Concilios visigóticos*; Wood, *Politics of Identity*, 69–99.⁴²

5. THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PLURALITY FROM THE FIFTH TO THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

Asturian Chronicles and Visigothic Continuity

Christian historiographical production in the Iberian Peninsula included chronicles, royal histories, and genealogical texts. The so-called *Chronicle of Alfonso III* was composed in the environment of the Asturian court in the late ninth century and survives in different recensions. It narrates the kingdom's past down to the reign of Ordoño I and constructs a political continuity with the Visigothic monarchy; it is not a biography of Alfonso III.⁴³

The Asturian corpus is not limited to that work. It comprises three Latin texts written in the final third of the ninth century: the *Chronicle of Albelda*, whose main body closes in 881 and subsequently received additions for the years 882 and 883; the *Prophetic Chronicle*, dated 11 April 883 and incorporated into the Albeldensian tradition; and the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, preserved in two recensions. The first is called the Rotense after the Roda codex that transmits it; the second, known as the *ad Sebastianum*, Ovetense, or learned recension, is preceded by a letter from Alfonso III to a certain Sebastian whose identification remains disputed. None of the three survives in a manuscript contemporary with its composition: the available text derives from later copies.⁴⁴

Gil Fernández, Moralejo, and Ruiz de la Peña, eds., *Crónicas asturianas*, 113–49.⁴³

Gil Fernández, Moralejo, and Ruiz de la Peña, eds., *Crónicas asturianas*, 114–149 (*ad Sebastianum* recension) and 151–188 (Rotense recension). Critical edition with facing Latin text and French translation in Bonnaz, ed., *Chroniques asturiennes*.⁴⁴

The relationship between the two recensions of the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* remains unresolved, and the debate is relevant to the argument pursued here. The hypothesis proposed by Gómez Moreno in 1932, accepted by most scholars without having been demonstrated, holds that the Rotense is earlier and that Alfonso III sent it to Sebastian so that he might correct what was judged to be rough Latin, thereby producing the learned recension. The difference between the two is not merely stylistic. The Rotense preserves passages stated in the first-person singular that the *ad Sebastianum* reformulates in impersonal constructions, and this shift is a historiographical datum rather than an ornamental feature: it expresses two different decisions about the voice that authorises the narrative, that of the witness who claims to have known the event and that of an impersonal instance that speaks without presenting itself.⁴⁵

The *Chronicle of Albelda* serves a different purpose. It is a miscellany with encyclopaedic ambitions that embeds the history of the Iberian kingdoms within a sequence beginning in biblical time and ending in the reign of Alfonso III; it also incorporates a compendium of Roman history, another of Arabic history, a description of the world and of Hispania, and lists of episcopal sees and bishops. This architecture corresponds to the model of universal chronicle examined in the preceding chapters: the local past acquires meaning by being inserted into a chronology that precedes and exceeds it.

The inventory of its contents can be described in greater detail, and analysis by the five axes renders that detail significant. In addition to the history of the Goths and of their successors, the kings of Oviedo, the work includes a compendium of Roman history, a summary of

The hypothesis derives from Gómez Moreno, “Las primeras crónicas de la Reconquista: el ciclo de Alfonso III” (1932), discussed in Gil Fernández, *Crónicas astorianas*, 119 ff.⁴⁵

Arabic history, a description of the world and of Hispania, an account of the seven wonders, a characterisation of the qualities of different peoples, and a list of bishops with their sees. The codex that gives the chronicle its name was completed in 976 by the monk Vigila at the monastery of Albelda, almost a century after the text itself was composed.

This composition is not a disorderly miscellany. Along the axis of institutional function, the episcopal list plays a role equivalent to royal genealogy: it fixes the ecclesiastical structure of the kingdom at a given moment and makes it available as a claim. The description of the world and of Hispania situates the kingdom within a geography inherited from ancient scholarship. And the summary of Arabic history, incorporated into a work written at the Asturian court, shows that the neighbouring tradition was not treated as an indifferent exteriority but as material worthy of record. All three elements point in the same direction: the chronicle not only narrates a past; it describes a world and locates its community within it.⁴⁶

The *Prophetic Chronicle* provides the clearest example of the articulation between computus and providence. It interprets Ezekiel's prophecy by identifying Gog with the Goths—an identification already found in Isidore of Seville—and Ishmael with the Arabs, and from this deduces that Muslim rule would end once one hundred and seventy years had elapsed. The text is dated 11 April 883, when seven months remained before that period would be complete. The operation is instructive for the hypothesis of the present study: the providential announcement does not replace calculation; it requires it. It is

Gil Fernández, Moralejo, and Ruiz de la Peña, eds., *Crónicas asturianas*; the codex that gives the chronicle its name was completed in 976 by the monk Vigila at the monastery of Albelda. Critical edition with French translation in Bonnaz, ed., *Chroniques asturiennes*.⁴⁶

the inherited chronological technique that makes it possible to establish the date on which the promise should be fulfilled, and that dating gives the text its immediate political efficacy at the court of Alfonso III.

Its editorial history deserves notice because it illustrates the problem of transmission identified among this study's limitations. For a long time the text was known only in part, because the prophecy had been incorporated into the Albeldensian tradition and was published together with it in Flórez's edition. The independent version derives from the Roda codex, which was lost for years and recovered for the Real Academia de la *Historia* in 1930; Gómez Moreno edited it for the first time in 1932. A central piece of the Alfonso III cycle thus remained beyond the reach of historians until the twentieth century, and earlier readings of the corpus were made without it. The case confirms the argument advanced in Chapter Eight concerning the mediation of transmission: what is analysed is the corpus that losses and discoveries have made available.⁴⁷

The three works share a Neo-Gothic ideal that links the Asturian monarchy to the Visigothic kingdom of Toledo, and in all three providentialism operates as a framework of intelligibility. The scope of this observation must be specified. The continuity asserted by the texts is a historiographical construction produced at a particular court for purposes of legitimation, not a description of an effective institutional succession. Recognising this does not, however, require treating Neo-

Gil Fernández, Moralejo, and Ruiz de la Peña, eds., *Crónicas asturianas*. The *Prophetic Chronicle* was first edited by Gómez Moreno in 1932 from the Roda codex, recovered for the Real Academia de la *Historia* in 1930.⁴⁷

Gothicism as a late invention or an imported ideology: later scholarship has defended its status as an ideological framework operating within the period itself.⁴⁸

The Andalusí Historiographical Tradition

An Arabic historiographical tradition of its own developed in al-Andalus. Ibn Hayyan of Córdoba, who died in 1076, compiled in the *Muqtabis* earlier materials on Umayyad history and the first centuries of al-Andalus. His work is fundamental, although it survives only in part and must be studied within Islamic practices of compilation, not as a mere external influence upon a unitary Spanish historiography.⁴⁹

The compilatory character of the *Muqtabis* does not amount to an absence of authorship. Analysis of the passages Ibn Hayyan reproduced from earlier authors has shown that he rhetorically amplified and reworked them, so that his intervention goes beyond that of an editor of other people's material. Determining whether a passage transmitted by him literally reproduces its source or constitutes his own elaboration is not a question of ancillary erudition: it is a necessary step in understanding how the Andalusí historiographical system functioned. This is precisely the distinction that the source-selection axis seeks to establish in the present study, and the result here is that compilation operates as a technique of composition rather than as a deficiency.⁵⁰

Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*.⁴⁸

Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabis* V. On its compilatory character and fragmentary transmission, see Molina, "Técnicas de *amplificatio*," 55–79, and Penelas and Molina, "Dos fragmentos inéditos," 229–41; on authority and legitimacy in the work, Soravia, "Une histoire de la *fitna*," 81–90. For Islamic practices of compilation, see Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, part III.⁴⁹

Molina, "Técnicas de *amplificatio* en el *Muqtabis* de Ibn Hayyan," 55–79, based on the transmission of three texts derived from biographical dictionaries.⁵⁰

The transmission of the *Muqtabis* also illustrates the material dimension addressed in this study's chapter on manuscript culture. The two surviving fragments of its second volume, one in the Real Academia de la *Historia* in Madrid and the other in the Qarawiyyin Library in Fez, belong to the same codex, copied collaboratively by several scribes—as many as fourteen according to the count of its scholars—who divided among themselves the work's seventeen quires, so that a change of hand generally coincides with a change of quire. Fragmentary survival is therefore not an accident devoid of historical depth: it is the result of an organised copying process and later dispersal that codicological analysis makes it possible to reconstruct, and which determines the state in which the source reaches the historian.⁵¹

Around 1022 Ibn Hazm composed *Tanq al-hamama*, known in Spanish as *El collar de la paloma*. It is not a chronicle but a literary treatise on love containing autobiographical and social observations useful for the cultural history of eleventh-century Córdoba. Its use as a source requires those testimonies to be distinguished from historiographical narrative proper.⁵²

Comparison with the Latin tradition requires the criteria proper to Arabic historiography to be specified. During its formative period, the elementary unit of narration was the pair formed by the *isnad* and the *khabar*: a chain of transmitting authorities followed by the report whose reliability that chain guarantees, a procedure inherited from

Penelas and Molina, “Dos fragmentos inéditos del volumen II del *Muqtabis* de Ibn Hayyan,” 229–41; on the codicological reconstruction of the codex and the distribution of quires among copyists, see Molina and Penelas, “The Codex Unicus of the Second Volume of Ibn Hayyan’s *Muqtabis*: An Example of Cooperative Copying,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 6, no. 2–3 (2015), from p. 260 onward.⁵¹

Ibn Hazm, *El collar de la paloma*. On the distinction between literary testimony and historiographical narrative in the Arabic tradition, see Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, part I.⁵²

hadith scholarship. The authority of the account therefore rests on the verifiable quality of its transmission, not on the institutional position of the narrator or on the inscription of the event within a providential plan; later authors departed from this model by suppressing the chains and adding rhetorical elaboration. The methodological consequence is precise: applying to these texts the question of providence, which is pertinent to Orosius or the Asturian chronicles, would create a false equivalence, because the axis of causality here operates upon a different foundation for the legitimation of knowledge.⁵³

This difference does not imply that Andalusī historical writing lacked a political function. Study of the *Muqtabis* has shown that the work articulates authority and legitimacy around the narrative of *fitna*, the internal discord that threatens the community. The analogy with the Latin West therefore lies not in providential content but in function: in both spheres, narration of the past intervenes in the construction of the legitimacy of a particular power, although the resources that sustain it differ. It is on this plane—the axis of institutional function, not doctrinal content—that the comparison becomes pertinent.⁵⁴

‘Abd Allah ibn Buluggin, the last Zirid emir of Granada, ruled from 1073 to 1090 and later wrote his memoirs, known as the *Kitāb al-Tibyān*. The Spanish edition *El siglo XI en primera persona* transmits a retrospective testimony on the taifa kingdoms and Almoravid intervention. The

Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, parts I and III, on the *isnad-khabar* pair, its origin in hadith scholarship, and its later abandonment.⁵³

Soravia, “Une histoire de la *fitna*: Autorité et légitimité dans le *Muqtabis* d’Ibn Hayyan,” 81–90.⁵⁴

modern title should not be confused with the original title of the work.⁵⁵

The *Kitab al-Tibyan* shares with works examined in the preceding chapter a recognisable position of enunciation. Written by a deposed ruler after the loss of his kingdom, it occupies in relation to Zirid Granada the position Jordanes occupies in relation to the Goths, Paul the Deacon in relation to the Lombards, and the Asturian chronicles in relation to the Visigothic monarchy: the memory of a political community is written once the structure that sustained it has disappeared. The coincidence is formal rather than doctrinal and is significant for precisely that reason: it shows that the narrator's retrospective position is a feature of the historiographical craft of the period, not a peculiarity of the Latin tradition. Its testimonial value, by contrast, is inseparable from the author's involvement in the conflict he narrates, which requires it to be read as the account of an interested party in disputes between Andalus and Berbers and in the face of the advance of the Christian kingdoms.⁵⁶

Plurality of Traditions within the Iberian Framework

Within the chronological limits of the fifth to the eleventh centuries, historiographical production in the Iberian Peninsula presents Christian and Islamic traditions that should not be reduced to a single linear development. In the Visigothic and Astur-Leonese spheres, Roman and Christian forms were reworked; in al-Andalus, chronicle practices

⁵⁵‘Abd Allah ibn Buluggin, *El siglo XI en primera persona*. Annotated English edition with introductory study in Tibi, *The Tibyan*. For the political framework of the taifa kingdoms and Almoravid intervention, see Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings*.⁵⁵

Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings*, for the political framework of the taifa kingdoms and Almoravid intervention; annotated English edition of the text in Tibi, *The Tibyan*.⁵⁶

developed in connection with Arabic and Islamic traditions. The two responded to different political, linguistic, and documentary frameworks.

The Iberian case is therefore incorporated as a zone of historiographical plurality within the general framework of the early medieval West. Its value lies in showing that Latin Christian production coexisted with Islamic traditions and with processes of translation, conflict, and exchange. This diversity does not alter the study's chronological boundary: materials later than the eleventh century function only as reception or contrast.

6. GENRES OF HISTORICAL WRITING: ANNALS, CHRONICLES, AND HAGIOGRAPHY

Hagiography as Memory and Legitimation

Medieval hagiography constructed the memory of saints, communities, and places through accounts of virtues, miracles, martyrdoms, and translations of relics. It is not appropriate to define the entire genre as ahistorical: Possidius of Calama's *Life of Augustine* and Sulpicius Severus's *Life of Martin of Tours* contain historical information, but select it according to edifying and cultic purposes.⁵⁷

The dating of the *Vita prima Samsonis* is disputed. Proposals range from the seventh to the ninth century, and some studies distinguish a first life from later reworkings. It cannot be asserted as established fact that the surviving text was composed in its entirety in the ninth century in order to justify the metropolitan claims of Dol.⁵⁸

The *Vita prima Samsonis* can be used to study models of sanctity, monastic mobility, and Breton memory, but its social data are not a direct and precise representation of all social classes. Analysis must distinguish the possible early core, hagiographical conventions, and the interests of successive stages of transmission.⁵⁹

Ermentarius and the Miracles of Saint Philibert

Around 862 Ermentarius of Noirmoutier wrote *De translationibus et miraculis sancti Filiberti*, a two-book work on the movements of his community and the miracles of Saint Philibert. The text is both

Possidius, *Life of Saint Augustine*, Sulpicius Severus, *Complete Works*; Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, xiii–xxxviii.⁵⁷

Olson, *St Samson of Dol*, 1–44.⁵⁸

Olson, ed. and trans., *St Samson of Dol*, 1–44, on dating and successive reworkings.⁵⁹

hagiographical and chronicle-like: it documents the impact of Viking raids while organising that experience around the relics and the saint's protection.⁶⁰

The community permanently left Noirmoutier in 836 and moved the relics to Déas, now Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu. In 847 it moved to Cunault and in 862 to Messais. Ermentarius died in the mid-860s and therefore could not have narrated as an eyewitness the final establishment at Tournus in 875. The beginning of the community's peregrination must therefore be distinguished from the transfer carried out in 847.⁶¹

Ermentarius describes the raids as a consequence of sin and denounces the inability of the Franks to resist. His observations on tribute, flight, and devastation express the position of a displaced community; they do not demonstrate a general passivity among populations or the absence of military responses in the Carolingian world.

The work shows that the boundary between hagiography and historiography is not always sharp. Miracles authenticate the saint's power, while dates, itineraries, and names preserve institutional memory. Criticism must evaluate each type of claim according to its function and its susceptibility to corroboration.⁶²

Chronology is not irrelevant to hagiography: translations of relics, anniversaries, and foundations were dated precisely in order to sustain rights and cults. What is distinctive is that temporal order is subordinated to the demonstration of sanctity and protection, not that all concern with dates and places disappears.

Ermentarius, *De translationibus et miraculis sancti Filiberti*, 1–67.⁶⁰

Ermentarius, *De translationibus et miraculis sancti Filiberti*, books 1–2, for the transfers of 836, 847, and 862.⁶¹

Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography*, xiii–xxxviii, on standards of evidence specific to the genre.⁶²

Providence, Time, and Evidence in Narrative Genres

Comparing these works with modern historiography makes it possible to recognise differences in standards of evidence and purpose, but it does not justify attributing an identical idea of predestination to all medieval authors. Providence, contingency, and human action are combined differently in each narrative.

The reception of Augustine supplied a vocabulary for thinking about providence and the limits of earthly powers. *De civitate Dei*, however, does not describe a continuous progression from an earthly city to a heavenly one: the two cities coexist in a mixed condition throughout history and are defined by opposing loves.⁶³

Christian temporality was predominantly linear in relation to creation, the Incarnation, and the Last Judgement, but the Greco-Roman tradition likewise cannot be reduced to eternal recurrence. Ancient chronologies, imperial histories, and biographies already articulated irreversible changes. The Christian innovation consisted in integrating historical time within a universal economy of salvation.

Hagiographies, annals, and chronicles shared materials and purposes, but preserved distinct conventions. Analysing them together makes it possible to observe how a community produced truth, memory, and legitimacy without erasing generic differences.

Annals, Calendars, and Chronicles

Annals record events under successive years and are often more concise than narrative chronicles, but not all were anonymous or exclusively monastic. The *Annales regni Francorum*, for example, were connected to the Carolingian court and constructed a political version

Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, 14.28 and 19.17; Markus, *Saeculum*, 55–71.⁶³

of the reigns they covered. Formal brevity is not equivalent to neutrality.⁶⁴

Part of the annalistic tradition developed alongside Easter tables, in whose margins notices were added. Other series were composed and revised as autonomous texts. Their relationship with liturgical computus helps to explain annual organisation, but it does not permit all annals to be derived from a single material origin.

This connection merits greater precision because it explains a formal feature without reducing the genre to its origin. Easter tables established year by year the date of Easter calculated according to the lunar cycle, and their layout left space beside each year. Notices entered in that margin—a royal death, a battle, an eclipse, a famine—thus inherited the annual grid of liturgical calculation rather than originating in a prior narrative decision. The next chapter shows the other side of the same procedure: Bede devoted an entire treatise to the technique of this calculation and incorporated a universal chronicle into it. Computus and historiography were not merely neighbouring activities; they were operations that shared a medium, a unit of measurement, and personnel.

Recognising this has a consequence for the axis of genre. The brevity of the annalistic entry does not express poverty of narrative resources or lack of interest in explanation: in its origins, it reflects the space available in the margin of a table. When the series separates from that support and is composed as an autonomous text—as in the *Annales regni Francorum*, connected with the Carolingian court—the entry becomes longer and can accommodate explicit political evaluation. Here the form of the genre follows the material conditions of writing

Annales regni Francorum, 35–126.⁶⁴

before it follows a conception of time, and the order of explanation should not be reversed.⁶⁵

Annals and chronicles could record local, royal, ecclesiastical, and international events. Annual division and concision are common, not universal; moreover, many collections were continued by several hands, so that their interests changed over time.

The religious framework was not identical in every chronicle either. Some incorporate prodigies and providential judgements; others concentrate on campaigns, successions, tribute, or natural phenomena. Comparison must begin with each text, not with an assumed common “spirit”.

Biography, Autobiography, and Religious Experience

Augustine's *Confessions* are a late antique antecedent of Christian autobiographical writing. Peter Abelard's *Historia calamitatum* belongs to the twelfth century and falls outside the central corpus; it is mentioned only as a later comparison. Neither work derives directly from Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, although both participate in ancient traditions of biography, self-representation, and exemplarity.

The decisive case for the biographical genre within the corpus is neither of these works, but Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, composed around 830–833 after the emperor's death in 814. Einhard had served at court for twenty-three years and also worked with the royal annals. His work explicitly follows the model of Suetonius, particularly the *Life of Augustus*: thirty-three chapters covering Merovingian genealogy, the rise of the Carolingians, campaigns, administration of the

Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, chaps. 65–66; *Annales regni Francorum*, for the series associated with the Carolingian court.⁶⁵

kingdom, personal habits, and death, and concluding with a copy of the imperial testament and a description of the tomb.⁶⁶

The earlier statement must therefore be qualified. Direct dependence on the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* is not demonstrable in the *Confessions* or the *Historia calamitatum*, but it is demonstrable in Einhard, who belongs fully within the early medieval corpus. Pagan imperial biography functioned as a template for the life of a Christian emperor, not merely as an authoritative citation or stylistic exercise, but as a scheme for organising the material. In this case, the genre axis records a technical reuse of the same kind that this study documents in chronology and computus.

The contrast with Augustine also allows two models of authorial presence to be distinguished. The *Confessions* construct the narrative in the first person and make the narrator's experience the very object of the text. Einhard does the opposite: except in the preface, he does not refer to himself and does not mention his own involvement when discussing the construction of the palace at Aachen, for which he was responsible. Two works indebted to ancient traditions of self-representation thus resolve the question of who speaks and by what authority in opposite ways, and that divergence is a fact about genre rather than about the temperaments of the authors.⁶⁷

Continuity and Transformation of Ancient Genres

Christian genres adapted chronography, biography, universal history, lists, and political narrative inherited from Antiquity. The presence of myths, miracles, or prophecies should be explained in terms of their

Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*, in *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, trans. Thorpe; on its dependence on the Suetonian model, especially the Life of Augustus, see the introduction to that edition.⁶⁶

Augustine, *Confessions*, books 1–13.⁶⁷

specific documentary and rhetorical functions, not as a general limitation that prevented authors from responding to contemporary problems.

The result of this chapter can be formulated in terms of the genre axis. Christian genres neither replaced ancient genres nor merely imitated them: they reused them selectively, and the selection can be described precisely case by case. From chronography, the annual grid was retained; in the annalistic tradition, this derived materially from the margins of Easter tables. From imperial biography, the scheme of thematic arrangement was retained, which Einhard applied to a Christian emperor. From ecclesiastical history, the procedure of inserting literal documents was retained, which Victor of Vita used in a persecution narrative and Bede in a history of conversion. And from hagiography came the requirement to fix dates, itineraries, and names, because translations of relics and foundations sustained verifiable rights.⁶⁸

In all four cases the operation is the same: an ancient procedure persists because it continues to solve a problem, while the community for which it solves that problem changes. To describe this process simply as continuity would be as inaccurate as to describe it simply as rupture. The appropriate formulation is the one proposed by this study and verified through the genre axis in each text: the reorganisation of a technique under new institutional conditions.⁶⁹

For the four cases discussed, see Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, chaps. 65–66; Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*; Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae*; and Ermentarius, *De translationibus et miraculis sancti Filiberti*.⁶⁸

Momigliano, “Pagan and Christian Historiography,” 79–99; Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique*, 13–44.⁶⁹

7. BEDE AND ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

Ecclesiastical history and political history did not constitute wholly separate spheres. From Late Antiquity onward, wars, governments, church finances, and doctrinal controversies appeared within the same narrative field, although they were ordered according to different hierarchies of value.

Ecclesiastical authors wrote about political communities: Gregory of Tours on Gaul and the Frankish kings; Paul the Deacon, in the eighth century, on the Lombards; Bede on the peoples of Britain and the conversion of the Angles; and Widukind of Corvey, in the tenth century, on the Saxons. These works combine political memory, collective identity, and Christian interpretation.

The Universal Chronicle and the Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum

Bede composed two universal chronicles: a brief one in *De temporibus*, around 703, and a longer version, commonly called the *Chronica maiora*, incorporated into *De temporum ratione*, completed in 725. He did not continue a work to 746, a date after his death in 735. The *Chronica maiora* extends and reorganises the tradition of Eusebius and Jerome within the scheme of the six ages of the world.⁷⁰

For Bede, computus was not an auxiliary technique but a field of controversy. His chronology placed the birth of Christ in the year 3952 of the world rather than 5199, the date transmitted by the tradition derived from Eusebius; this shifted the Incarnation from the sixth age to an earlier one and earned him, around 708, an accusation of heresy. Bede responded with the *Letter to Plegwin*, in which he argued that the

Bede, *Reckoning of Time*, 157–237.⁷⁰

ages of the world were not each one thousand years long and defended the Old Testament chronology established by Jerome's Vulgate, the *hebraica veritas*. *De temporum ratione*, written some twenty years later, functions to a considerable extent as an extended justification of the universal chronicle that constitutes its chapter 66.

The episode matters for this study's argument for two reasons. First, providential chronology was not passively accepted but technically contested: the dispute concerned the calculation of the ages and which version of the biblical text should serve as its basis. Second, Bede's defence did not consist in the invocation of authority, but in a philological argument concerning the original language of the Old Testament. A historiography often described as indifferent to verification here generated a dispute whose criterion of resolution was examination of the sources.⁷¹

Bede was born around 672–673 in lands associated with the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow and spent almost his entire life there; it cannot simply be asserted that he was born at Jarrow. His *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, completed in 731 and divided into five books, narrates above all the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and the development of the Church in Britain.⁷²

The *Historia ecclesiastica* was completed in 731 at the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow. At the end of the work, Bede lists his biblical commentaries, works on computus, didactic texts, poems, and historical writings, among them the histories of the abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow. The exact list of titles should follow the nomenclature of a critical edition.

Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, chap. 66, and Wallis's introduction to that edition on the accusation of heresy and the *Letter to Plegwin* of 708.⁷¹

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 566–71.⁷²

It is useful to describe the distribution of material across the five books because the criterion of selection can be read from it. The first opens with a geographical description of Britain and surveys the island's past from Caesar's campaign, includes Christianity in Roman Britain and the martyrdom of Saint Alban, and culminates in Augustine of Canterbury's mission of 597. The second begins with the death of Gregory the Great in 604, follows the progress of conversion in Kent and the first attempts in Northumbria, and ends in disaster: Penda, the pagan king of Mercia, kills Edwin of Northumbria at Hatfield Chase. The third narrates the second establishment of Christianity in Northumbria, this time from Ireland, and its growth under Oswald and Oswiu. The final two books extend the series to the author's own present, and the close of the work incorporates a chronological summary and a list of Bede's own writings.

Chapter twenty-five of the third book concentrates the problem examined by this study. It narrates the Synod of Whitby of 664, which settled for the English Church the question of the date of Easter, with Wilfrid defending the Roman computus; the opposing party withdraws or submits. Bede thus devotes the decisive passage in his history of conversion to a dispute over calendrical calculation. He does so without denigrating the defeated side: he explicitly praises the austerity and devotion of the Celtic missionaries. This double movement—resolving the controversy in favour of one computational technique while acknowledging the merit of the defeated—is the clearest summary of the operation of all five axes in a single author: time is organised through Easter reckoning; providential causality does not prevent a distinction between technical error and personal virtue; sources are

declared; the genre is ecclesiastical history; and the institutional function is the unification of the English Church under a common practice.⁷³

The work also introduced a dating decision with enduring consequences. Reckoning years from the Incarnation had been formulated by Dionysius Exiguus around 525 in the context of his Easter tables; Bede used it in *De temporum ratione* and applied it systematically throughout the *Historia ecclesiastica*, and it was this application that disseminated the system in the Latin West. He did not use abbreviations: he writes “in the year of the Incarnation of the Lord”. The detail matters for the axis of time. Dating from the Incarnation is not a neutral numbering convention: it places the founding event of the Christian narrative at the point of origin of the series and requires everything else to be measured by its distance from that event. Once again, the operation is technical before it is doctrinal, because the system originates in Easter calculation and moves from the tables into narrative. The providential chronology that the declinist model attributes to a mentality is more precisely described as the product of a computational instrument that came to organise historical writing.⁷⁴

The *Historia ecclesiastica* survives in eighth-century manuscripts very close to the date of composition, among them the so-called Moore Bede. Its insular and continental diffusion was early and was connected with Anglo-Saxon monastic and missionary networks. This manuscript tradition makes it possible to study variants, circulation, and reception without assuming immutable textual transmission.

Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, books 1–5; the Synod of Whitby at 3.25.⁷³

Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, and *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, passim; reckoning from the Incarnation derives from Dionysius Exiguus, around 525.⁷⁴

The evidence permits greater precision. Around 140 manuscripts of the work survive in England and on the Continent, and four of them belong to the eighth century—that is, the same century in which Bede died: the so-called Moore Bede, now in Cambridge University Library; two codices from the Cotton collection; and the Namur manuscript. Of these, the Moore Bede and one of the Cotton manuscripts derive from a common exemplar that cannot have been far removed from the autograph. The Moore Bede is written on parchment, comprises 128 folios, and is laid out in a single column of thirty to thirty-three lines.

These details are not incidental to the argument. They show that the work circulated early and widely, that its text can be reconstructed from witnesses very close to its composition, and that its diffusion was not a late effect of the author's reputation but a contemporary process linked to Anglo-Saxon monastic and missionary networks. They also provide the contrast that makes visible the problem posed by the Asturian chronicles examined in Chapter Five, for which no contemporary witness survives: the state of transmission varies enormously within a single corpus, and that state conditions what each axis can establish in each case.⁷⁵

Truth, Providence, and Ecclesiastical Memory

Ecclesiastical history presents the development of the Church as a subject worthy of historical narration and uses providence as a principle of meaning. In Bede, this framework coexists with documents, papal letters, lists, oral traditions, and identified witnesses. Miracles form part

On the four eighth-century manuscripts and their relationship to the autograph, see the introduction by Colgrave and Mynors to *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, xliii–xliv.⁷⁵

of his concept of evidence, but they do not eliminate concern for the provenance of information.

The preface to the *Historia ecclesiastica* documents this procedure with unusual precision for the period. Addressed to King Ceolwulf, it identifies informants by name and subject: Abbot Albinus of Canterbury as the principal authority for Kent, the priest Nothelm as intermediary, and, for the remaining provinces, bishops and communities identified one by one. Bede also records that Nothelm travelled to Rome and examined the papal archives, from which came the papal letters reproduced in the work. He further states explicitly that he has added nothing from his own knowledge without the authority of those who either wrote down the events or witnessed them.

This declaration does not guarantee the accuracy of the result and should not be read as the equivalent of a modern critical apparatus. It does, however, establish a chain of responsibility for the provenance of each item of information, distinguish what is known through direct testimony from what is received by tradition, and make that distinction something that can be declared to the reader. It is the most explicit testimony in the corpus examined against the image of historical writing as indifferent to verification.⁷⁶

Christian temporality introduced a universal origin and end, although it should not simply be equated with the modern idea of progress. Bede relates the ages of the world, Easter computus, and the history of conversion, but he also recognises setbacks, conflicts, and corrections. Hagiography and ecclesiastical history overlap in some materials without being identical genres.

Both genres seek to preserve memorable events and support their authenticity through authorities, witnesses, and traditions. They differ,

Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, preface.⁷⁶

however, in scale, organisation, and object: the saint's life centres on virtue and cult, while ecclesiastical history articulates communities, institutions, and broader sequences.

8. MONASTIC MEMORY AND MANUSCRIPT CULTURE

Monasteries, Education, and the Preservation of Knowledge

After the fifth century, education and written culture were reorganised unevenly. Clergy and monasteries played a central, but not exclusive, role: royal courts, chanceries, cities, and lay elites also produced and preserved documents. Chronicles and annals were not necessarily anonymous, devoid of reflection, or merely neutral records.⁷⁷

Gregory of Tours, bishop of Tours from 573 to 594, composed the ten books of *Historiae* from an episcopal position. The work relates universal history, conflicts among Frankish kings, the cult of saints, and contemporary experience. It does not represent an isolated revival of the Roman tradition, but an adaptation of late antique forms to Merovingian Gaul.⁷⁸

Latin remained the principal written language of the early medieval West, with regional variations and different registers. Vernacular historiographies developed gradually—for example, in Old English—but one cannot speak of chronicles in “Vulgar Latin” as though this were a separate historiographical language, nor project Old French and medieval German indiscriminately across the entire period.

Political fragmentation altered networks of education and circulation, but did not produce a uniform cultural vacuum. Preservation depended on institutional choices, the availability of exemplars, liturgical or educational usefulness, and material conditions. These selections explain both survivals and losses.

Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 15–53; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 1–28.⁷⁷

Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*; Wood, *Merovingian Kingdoms*, 1–32.⁷⁸

The codex was the principal medium of early medieval written culture. Some monasteries maintained libraries and spaces for copying, but the image of a permanent *scriptorium* with numerous monks working communally cannot be applied to every centre. Production might be undertaken by only a few scribes, and not every manuscript was illuminated nor did every copyist act as a conscious interpreter of the text.⁷⁹

Saint-Martial of Limoges became an important book-producing and musical centre, especially from the tenth and eleventh centuries onward. Writing tools included parchment, quills, inks, and implements for preparing and correcting the surface; the use of gold and decoration depended on the type and cost of the manuscript and was not a general feature of copying.

The best-documented case of early medieval book production comes from the same monastery as Bede. Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth and Jarrow and Bede's teacher, commissioned around 692 three complete Bibles in a single volume—pandects—according to Jerome's translation. Two remained in the twin churches of Wearmouth and Jarrow; the third was intended for the pope. In 716, at the age of seventy-four, Ceolfrith set out for Rome carrying it with him and died on the journey, in Burgundy, on 29 September of that year; the codex continued onward. It is the present-day *Codex Amiatinus*, the oldest surviving complete witness to the Vulgate.

The scale of the undertaking makes it possible to measure what such an operation required. The volume contains 1,030 folios measuring roughly 505 by 340 millimetres and weighs about thirty-four kilograms. The parchment required a dedicated herd: the monastery received an additional land grant to raise the two thousand head of

Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 1–45; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 134–55.79

livestock needed, and approximately fifteen hundred animals have been estimated for the three copies together. At least seven hands participated in the writing.⁸⁰

These data correct the image of the *scriptorium* questioned by this chapter, and they do so in two directions at once. On the one hand, production was not the work of a solitary copyist: labour was divided among several scribes, materials were planned years in advance, and an institutional decision was made about the use of land. On the other hand, it was not an ordinary practice either: an undertaking on this scale was exceptional and presupposed property, abbatial authority, and a library project. In the monastic world, preserving and producing books were not routine activities that could simply be taken for granted, but investments that competed with other uses of available resources.⁸¹

Memory, Education, and Cultural Authority

Memory was essential to education, liturgy, preaching, and oral transmission. Reading, memorisation, recitation, and writing nevertheless functioned complementarily: manuscripts supported oral practices, while memory organised the reception of texts.

The relationship between memory and verification requires precision because it is often presented as an opposition. Educational and devotional practices of the period treated memory as an organised technique, involving schemes, divisions, and mental itineraries, not as a substitute for consultation. Bede's preface, examined in the preceding chapter, shows this in operation: it distinguishes what he knows from direct testimony from what he received by tradition, names his informants by province, and refers to documents that another person consulted in the papal archives. Memory organised the reception of texts;

The *Codex Amiatinus* is held in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence; the surviving leaves of another of Ceolfrith's pandects are in the British Library. On the library of Wearmouth-Jarrow, see Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*.⁸⁰
Grier, *Musical World of a Medieval Monk*, 1–30.⁸¹

declaration of provenance answered a different requirement. Their coexistence in the same author indicates that early medieval culture did not operate with a simple alternative between remembering and checking.⁸²

Copying, Selection, and Intercultural Transmission

Monasteries produced records for liturgical, legal, patrimonial, and commemorative purposes, in addition to moral ones. Cartularies, necrologies, annals, and chronicles served different uses. It is more precise to regard them as mediators of memory than to attribute to them a single intention of directing all narrative toward salvation.

Copying practices can be documented precisely when the codex survives. The case of the second volume of Ibn Hayyan's *Muqtabis*, examined in Chapter Five, allows an organised operation to be reconstructed: the two surviving fragments, now in Madrid and Fez, come from the same codex, copied collaboratively by as many as fourteen scribes, each generally responsible for one of the seventeen quires, so that a change of hand coincides with a change of quire. The evidence corrects two assumptions at once. Against the image of a uniform *scriptorium*, it shows division of labour rather than continuous individual execution. And against the attribution of organised copying to Latin monasticism as a characteristic practice, it shows the same procedure in an Andalusí context at a time when—according to the differentiated chronology maintained in this section—Latin centres did not have regular access to such materials.

Intercultural transmission likewise requires a differentiated chronology. Monasteries preserved a selection of Latin authors; Western recovery of large Greek and Arabic corpora intensified above all from

Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 1–55.⁸²

the eleventh and twelfth centuries through zones of contact and translation. Arabic and Judeo-Arabic learning was not uniformly available to Latin *scriptoria* throughout the Early Middle Ages.

Loss can be treated by the same method as preservation. The Asturian chronicles examined in Chapter Five survive in no manuscript contemporary with their composition: the available text comes from later copies, and one recension takes its name from the codex that transmitted it. The methodological consequence extends to the entire corpus of this study. What is analysed is not the work exactly as it was composed, but the state in which institutional decisions about copying, selection, and discard have left it. This mediation does not invalidate examination of the five axes, but it delimits its scope and must be declared alongside the other limitations stated in the introduction.

The later fate of Ceolfrith's pandects documents a different phenomenon central to this chapter: transmission not only preserves, it also rewrites. Of the three volumes, only the Amiatinus survives complete; of another, detached leaves survive, once reused as book covers. In the surviving copy, moreover, the dedication was altered: where it had named Ceolfrith, of the English, it was changed to Peter, of the Lombards. In 1036, in the inventory of relics of the Tuscan abbey where the codex had come to rest, it was described as an Old and New Testament written by the hand of the blessed Pope Gregory.

The object survived; its attribution did not. This discrepancy matters to the source axis as much as any textual variant, because it shows that the chain of custody can reverse the meaning of a witness without altering a single word of the text it transmits. A codex produced in

Northumbria at the commission of an English abbot ended up recorded as the autograph of a Roman pope, and it was that attribution, not the true one, that circulated for centuries.⁸³

A further connection offered by the same case should be noted. The illustrated pages of the Amiatinus depend on Cassiodorus's *Codex Grandior*, which Ceolfrith had brought to Northumbria in 678 and which is now lost. The library of Vivarium, formed in Italy in the sixth century, thus functions as a concrete antecedent rather than a generic reference: one of its manuscripts travelled north, served as a model, and disappeared, while the copy that imitated it survives. The transmission examined in this study is not a continuous flow, but a sequence of transfers, losses, and substitutions in which the copy, rather than the original, frequently survives.⁸⁴

The altered dedication and the description of the codex as written in the hand of Pope Gregory are recorded in the 1036 inventory of relics of the abbey of San Salvatore at Monte Amiata.⁸³

Cassiodorus's *Codex Grandior*, brought to Northumbria by Ceolfrith in 678, has not survived.⁸⁴

9. HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DEBATES AND LATER RECEPTIONS

Interpretive Models and Inherited Categories

The interpretive model most directly challenged by this study is that formulated by W. J. Brandt, who described the medieval mentality as discontinuous and dominated by divine causality. The observations that follow are organised as a response to that model and to the declinist reading that accompanies it, and they situate this study within the line of scholarship represented by Goffart, Halsall, McKitterick, and Wickham, which examines early medieval texts in terms of their political and institutional functions before judging them by their distance from modern historiography. Brandt's proposal is useful as an interpretive model, not as a direct description of every author.

That model, however, belongs to an older debate, and the contemporary objection to the approach adopted here comes from elsewhere. It should be stated explicitly, because it is the objection a present-day reader is likely to have in mind. Since the beginning of this century, works such as those of Ward-Perkins and Heather have reacted against readings of the end of Roman order as a peaceful and culturally positive transformation and, on the basis of material and archaeological evidence, have argued that the end of that order entailed demonstrable economic and technical deterioration. Their criticism of the opposing position is precise: by describing the period as transformation, everything that went wrong is smoothed away.

The response of the present study is not to deny that deterioration, but to delimit the field of its own claim. What is argued here is that the writing of history did not deteriorate: it retained chronological techniques, practices of compilation, procedures for documentary citation, and criteria of authority, and reorganised them under new forms of

patronage. This thesis is compatible with a decline in ceramic production, monetary circulation, or stone construction, because it concerns neither material well-being nor the technical capacity of an economy, but a set of literate practices sustained by institutions that survived the disappearance of imperial power. To confuse these two planes—the continuity of a craft and the prosperity of a society—is to produce debates without a common object. The chain of continuators examined in Chapter Two illustrates the distinction: the chronological instrument passes from hand to hand without interruption while the political structure that had housed it disappears. The corpus shows providential explanations alongside political sequences, personal responsibilities, and observable causal relationships.⁸⁵

The objections directed at the period by the declinist model can be grouped into five families, and they are examined below in that order. The first attributes to medieval authors a single interpretation guaranteed by ecclesiastical authority. The second reduces their values to religious virtue and their sensibility to a generalised ascetic pessimism. The third equates miracle with credulity and typology with indifference to facts. The fourth denies the existence of material means of verification and also attributes the loss of books to monastic neglect. The fifth treats the chronicle as the only form and brevity as a deficiency. Each is answered through cases drawn from the corpus, not through a general assertion of the opposite.

Orthodoxy and ecclesiastical authority conditioned historical writing, but they did not produce a single closed interpretation. Doctrinal controversies, regional differences, and conflicts among churches, monarchies, and aristocracies generated competing narratives. The terms “tyrannical” and “oppressive” belong to modern judgements

Brandt, *Shape of Medieval History*, 27–63.85

and are useful only if they are defined and applied to documented cases.

Hagiography privileges Christian virtues and models of sanctity, but medieval historiography also values prudence, justice, lineage, loyalty, courage, generosity, and capacity for government. Not all human values are reducible to faith, nor does every narrative thereby lose its attention to individuals and conflicts.

The formation of doctrines and norms delimited what some institutions regarded as true, but those boundaries were disputed and changed. Historical works reflect controversies over Easter, Christology, discipline, episcopal authority, and royal legitimacy. To speak of a uniform progressive “solidification” obscures this diversity.

Ascetic ideals influenced certain saints' lives, rules, and monastic narratives, but they do not by themselves define all historiography. Augustine and Orosius belong to Late Antiquity; Otto of Freising is a twelfth-century author and falls outside the central corpus. Representations of suffering must be studied according to genre and context rather than attributed to a universal medieval pessimism.

Miracles, prodigies, and legendary traditions should not be explained simply as credulity or the domination of fantasy. They perform functions in authenticating cults, interpreting crises, and defining communities. Historical criticism can assess their factuality while at the same time analysing why they were regarded as true testimony by particular authors and audiences.⁸⁶

The scarcity and cost of manuscripts limited access to information, but authors were not always without means of verification. Eusebius, Bede, Gregory of Tours, and Isidore identified authorities, compared

Spiegel, *Past as Text*, 83–102; Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, xiii–xxxviii.⁸⁶

versions, or drew on witnesses to varying degrees. Orality and writing were not mutually exclusive alternatives.⁸⁷

There is no basis for claiming that asceticism caused the careless dispersal of books. Losses are explained by wars, damp, the reuse of materials, changing interests, and institutional fragility, while numerous monasteries contributed precisely to the copying and preservation of texts. The relationship between religion and the natural sciences was likewise varied, as works on computus and encyclopaedias demonstrate.

Typology and exemplarity could reduce nuance, but many chronicles individualise actors, places, and circumstances in considerable detail. Forged documents and interpolations exist and must be studied through diplomatic criticism; they cannot be attributed wholesale to a medieval imagination indifferent to facts.

The chronicle was a widely diffused genre, not the only form. Some series are brief and annual; others contain extended narratives, speeches, and causal explanations. As they approach the author's own time, they often provide more detailed information, but they also reflect immediate political interests. The absence of modern analysis is not equivalent to the absence of ideological structure.

The scope of this chapter must be specified, because cumulative refutation is not equivalent to demonstration. The five families of objections are answered case by case, and from this it follows that the declinist model does not adequately describe the corpus examined. It does not follow, however, that the hypothesis of this study is thereby proved: showing that one description is inaccurate does not establish which description is correct. The positive evidence lies in the preceding chapters, especially in the chain of continuators in Chapter Two,

Goffart, *Narrators*, 1–19; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 1–28.⁸⁷

the Synod of Whitby and dating system in Chapter Seven, Ceolfrith's pandects in Chapter Eight, and the dispute surrounding the *Letter to Plegwin*. This chapter clears the ground; it does not occupy it.

A methodological consequence also remains. The categories discussed here—barbarism, credulity, immobility, cultural loss—are not mistaken because they are negative, but because they are global: they describe an entire period through a single feature and are therefore resistant to testing. The alternative adopted in this study is not to replace them with positive categories of the same scale, but to replace the scale itself: five axes applied to individual texts, each verifiable or refutable in its own case. This is the difference between debating a period and debating documents.

Later Receptions and Chronological Limits

As an external limit of the study, it must be noted that the renewed interest in Antiquity that developed from the twelfth century onward belongs to a later phase. That process extended and transformed practices of preserving, commenting upon, and reusing classical learning, but it does not form part of the early medieval corpus examined here. It is mentioned only to show that the transmission carried out during the preceding centuries had consequences beyond the chronological framework of this investigation.⁸⁸

As a later projection, and not as part of the central corpus, the work of Alfonso X the Wise in the thirteenth century must be mentioned. The *Grande e General Estoria* and the *Estoria de España* display a scale of compilation and an articulation among Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions specific to a context different from that of the Early Middle Ages. Their usefulness here is comparative: they make it possible to

Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique*, 295–357.88

observe the later expansion of chronicle and universalist practices developed during the preceding centuries.

The same qualification applies to Ibn Khaldun, a fourteenth-century author. The *Muqaddimah* belongs to another intellectual horizon and cannot be used as direct testimony for historiography between the fifth and eleventh centuries or as a specific expression of the early medieval Hispano-Muslim tradition. It is retained here solely as a comparative reference marking the distance between the narrative models of the corpus and a later historical reflection on politics, society, and civilisational change.⁸⁹

Developments of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries do not constitute a second stage of the Early Middle Ages. They represent later receptions and transformations that require their own categories. This chronological separation makes it possible to study the chronicles of Alfonso III, Ibn Hayyan, Ibn Hazm, and the memoirs of ‘Abd Allah within their immediate contexts without projecting upon them models consolidated several centuries later.

Universal chronicles do not represent a linear progression from religion toward humanism. From their beginnings they combined biblical, imperial, ecclesiastical, and political history. Their expansion during the High and Late Middle Ages belongs to later contexts and does not by itself demonstrate an early secular idea of progress.

Joachim of Fiore, a theologian of the late twelfth century, developed a Trinitarian interpretation of history associated with the ages of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine should not be attributed to vaguely defined “monks of Joachim of Flora”, nor should

Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal.⁸⁹

it be included in the early medieval corpus. Its presence here is exclusively comparative and belongs to later reception.⁹⁰

The historiographical transformations of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—urban growth, schools and universities, new translations, archives, and conflicts among powers—require analysis in their own right. They do not constitute the inevitable culmination of the Early Middle Ages or a linear march toward modern historiography.

Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 1–59.90

10. CONCLUSIONS

This study argues that historical writing in the Latin West between the fifth and eleventh centuries was not a decline from classical historiography, but a reorganisation of its conditions of production, authorities, and purposes. This claim opposes readings that interpret providential causality as a symptom of diminished explanatory capacity. Ancient practices of compilation, chronology, biography, and political narration did not disappear; they were selected and reorganised within Christian and post-Roman frameworks.

The late antique antecedents are decisive for understanding this transformation. Eusebius, Augustine, and Orosius formulated different ways of relating time, providence, and Christian community. Their works do not strictly belong to the entirety of the early medieval core, but they provided concepts, narrative models, and repertoires of authority that later authors would reuse.

Within the corpus of the fifth to eleventh centuries, providence operates as a principle of historical intelligibility, though not uniformly. It can order universal chronologies, explain victories and defeats, legitimate political communities, interpret calamities, or authenticate sanctity. Its presence does not automatically eliminate documentary information or human causality; rather, it determines the horizon within which both are selected and evaluated.

Four cases concentrate the evidence and should be brought together because each answers a different objection. The chain of continuators extending from Eusebius and Jerome to John of Biclaro and Isidore shows the same textual object passing through the disappearance of imperial power in the West: the procedure—a dated series, annual entries, continuation of a predecessor's work—is preserved, while the system of reference changes according to which institutions

remain standing. The Synod of Whitby, placed at the decisive point in the history of English conversion, resolves a dispute over calendrical calculation without denigrating the defeated party. The three pandects commissioned by Ceolfrið make it possible to measure what book production demanded in land, livestock, and labour. And the second volume of the *Muqtabis* documents a copying process divided among fourteen scribes and seventeen quires in an Andalusí, rather than Latin monastic, setting.

A fifth case operates in the opposite direction and therefore carries greater weight than the preceding ones. Victor of Vita's *Historia persecutionis* is constructed typologically, with the Vandal persecution presented as a repetition of that of Diocletian, and it is the text in the corpus where the hypothesis was most exposed. Examination showed that this framework does not suppress documentary material but requires it—edicts, conciliar acts, the *confession* of faith of Eugenius of Carthage—while also revealing its limit: the scheme governs the evaluation of scale and intention, neither of which the text can verify by itself. Hence the restricted formulation adopted by this study. Providence determines what is selected and how it is evaluated while at the same time compelling documentation; what is compromised is not the recording of events, but the estimation of their scope and motivation.

The genres examined perform differentiated functions. Annals stabilise temporal sequences; chronicles relate communities to an ordered past; ecclesiastical history constructs institutional continuity; genealogies organise legitimacy; and hagiography turns the memory of saints, miracles, and relics into instruments of cohesion and authority. They should not be measured solely by their proximity to modern historiography.

Authors such as Gregory of Tours, Jordanes, John of Biclaro, Isidore of Seville, and Bede show that early medieval historiography combined Roman inheritances, emerging political identities, and Christian purposes. Their differences make it impossible to speak of a single medieval mentality. Each work responds to a particular institutional position, audience, and problem of memory.

The Iberian Peninsula confirms this plurality. Visigothic, Astur-Leonese, and Andalusí traditions do not form a homogeneous sequence, but distinct spaces of production with different languages, archives, and models of authority. Comparing them broadens the Western framework without turning it into an artificial unity or subordinating Islamic sources to the periodisation of Latin Christendom.

Materials later than the eleventh century have been considered only as reception or contrast. Alfonso X, Ibn Khaldun, the universities, and late medieval debates belong to contexts beyond the central corpus. Separating them from early medieval analysis avoids extending the period into the fourteenth century and makes it possible to recognise historical transformations that require independent investigation.

Historiographical review also requires inherited categories to be questioned, especially those that describe these centuries through general notions of barbarism, irrationality, immobility, or simple cultural loss. Such categories can obscure the concrete procedures through which texts preserved information, produced legitimacy, and adapted earlier traditions to new political and religious communities.

Finally, two planes that the debate often confuses must be separated. To argue that historical writing did not deteriorate is not to claim that the end of Roman order was painless or materially neutral. Archaeological and economic research in recent decades has documented demonstrable regressions in production, circulation, and construction, and this study neither examines nor contradicts that evidence. Its claim

is narrower and therefore more defensible: a set of literate practices—*computus*, compilation, documentary citation, declaration of authorities—remained in operation, sustained by institutions that survived the disappearance of imperial power, and changed patronage without losing procedure. The continuity of a craft and the prosperity of a society are distinct questions, and confusing them produces debates without a common object.

The result is an analytical framework centred on five variables: time, causality, sources, genre, and institutional function. This framework does not exhaust early medieval historiographical production, but it makes it possible to delimit it more precisely and compare its manifestations without confusing antecedents, corpus, and receptions. The notes and bibliography identify the editions and studies used and allow the principal historical and historiographical claims to be checked.

The contribution of this study does not lie in the discovery of unpublished sources, but in applying the same set of axes to materials that scholarship often treats separately. The line of inquiry opened by Goffart examined four Latin narrators; here those axes are extended to the annalistic and hagiographical production of monastic milieux and, above all, to Andalusí testimonies, analysed according to their own criteria of authority and compilation rather than as an external influence upon a unitary Iberian historiography. This is the point at which the proposed framework departs from treatments that subordinate Islamic sources to the periodisation of Latin Christendom.

The thesis is falsifiable, and the terms of its refutation should be specified. It would be disproved if it could be shown that, in a significant proportion of the texts examined, providential explanation displaces documentary information and human causality rather than

framing them; or if the practices of compilation, computus, and verification documented here proved exceptional rather than recurrent within the production of the period. The assembled corpus warrants no claim beyond this: the cases analysed support the hypothesis for the spheres and genres they cover, but do not permit it to be generalised to the whole of early medieval historical writing.

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