

Historiae Adversus Orosium: A Translation of the *Kitab Hurushiyush*

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Abstract: *Historiae Adversus Orosium: A Translation of the Kitab Hurushiyush*" is a scholarly paper that presents a translation and analysis of the first part of Book One of the *Kitab Hurushiyush (KH)*, a 10-century "translation" or Orosius' *Historiae Adversus Paganos*. The paper explores the enigmatic origins of this translation and its sole surviving manuscript, believed to date back to the Almohad period of 14th century Iberia or North Africa. who were the individuals responsible for translating and copying Orosius into Arabic and producing editions of the translation for the Almohads, and what motivations drove their efforts.

Drawing upon the positions of various scholars, in this paper I set out to investigate the potential identities of the original translators, where scholarship often suggests the involvement of a Mozareb or a collaboration between a Muslim and a Christian. Additionally, I challenge common assumptions about the Almohad climate, positing that it was more accommodating of a text that glorified Christian history than commonly believed. By researching and discussing the historical context, linguistic analysis, and cultural dynamics surrounding the *Kitab Hurushiyush*, I intend to shed light on the intricate circumstances that led to its translation and subsequent copying under Almohad rule. This paper and accompanying translation are intended to begin the process of rigorous analysis of the *KH* and its translation, and I introduce theories and scholarship from writers such as Ann Christys and Christian Sahner that shed light on the culture of translation in Islamic Iberia and North Africa.

Part I: Orosius and the *Kitab Hurushiyush*

Paulus Orosius' magnum opus, the *Historiae Adversus Paganos* (the Histories Against the Pagans), had an impact on scholarship far beyond the scope of its original context. It was written at the direction of Orosius' teacher St. Augustine of Hippo, and according to most sources, was drafted sometime between 416 and 417 CE.¹ Augustine wanted Orosius to write a text that would accompany his own *De Civitate Dei*, or *On the City of God Against the Pagans*. In this book, Augustine laid out an argument for why the sack of Rome in 410 was not the result of Rome's recent adoption of Christianity, but rather that Christianity was the cause for Rome's success up until that point. Orosius' text was an attempt to show that the world – and Rome – had improved since the advent of Christianity, and that the calamities that the Roman Christians faced were much less severe than the disasters that had befallen humanity pre-Christianity.

The work is a universal history of humanity, attempting to catalog the various disasters and miseries that have afflicted humanity, with an emphasis (At least in the sections I have translated) on the periods of history left unwritten about by other histories – namely, the period between the Beginning and the birth of Ninus son of Belus (and the birth of the patriarch Abraham) – a period of more than three thousand years.

¹ Pedro Martínez Cavero, "El Pensamiento Histórico y Antropológico De Orosio," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*, no. 19 (January 20, 2002), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.6018/ayc>.

The “translation” I am working from is conventionally titled *Kitab Hurushiyyush* (the Book of Orosius) - a medieval Arabic translation of the *Historiae Adversus Paganos*.² The translator/author of this manuscript is unknown, though there are hypotheses about who could have been responsible. The translation is notable for not being a “faithful” or exact rendering of Orosius’ words into Arabic, but rather includes many interpolations, additions, abbreviation, omissions, and disclaimers. There are also, according to Ann Christys, “Muslim influences on the text [with] the clearest example [being the] Arabicizing.”³ Christian Sahner takes this theory further, drawing from sources that indicate that while the text was rendered into Arabic primarily by a Christian author, a Muslim collaborated on the project and is responsible for its Islamic elements. Mayte Penelas, in a popular opinion, posits that a nobleman named Hafs ibn Albar “al-Qūṭī” (“the Gothic”) was responsible for the translation. Hafs was a Visigothic Christian theologian and translator, and he is commonly believed to have collaborated with a Muslim “man of letters connected to the court”.⁴ My research did bring up doubts surrounding the timeline of these two men’s lives, the nominally-Umayyad government, and when the text is purported to have been written; that is a subject for further research.

The existence of this text sparked my curiosity; Orosius and Augustine were grappling with the fall of the Roman Empire and what that would mean for them, both

² Throughout this paper, I will be referring to the *Kitab Hurushiyyush* as “the KH”.

³ Christys, Ann. Essay. In *Christians in Al-Andalus: (711-1000)*, 149. Routledge, 2007.

⁴ Christian C. Sahner, “From Augustine to Islam: Translation and History in the Arabic Orosius,” *Speculum* 88, no. 4 (2013): pp. 905-931.

as inhabitants of former Roman land and also Christians. Is this in some way analogous to what Muslims would want to explore in later centuries, with the legacy of the Roman empire still alive and well (in the East, and through the effect the Byzantines had on early Islam. The Muslims came to inhabit North Africa and Europe were similarly from lands previously ruled by Romans, which provides context for why a Christian Western Roman Empire collapse-era text would be significant in Umayyad Iberia. I decided to tackle this translation to bring forth more information that could indicate who wrote the book and for whom it was written, the latter unknown being intriguing given the liberties taken with the translation into Arabic.⁵ I don't believe that this will provide groundwork for any *theories* on how Muslims in the post-Roman Mediterranean thought about Rome, but simply as an example of a kind of academic interest patronized at the time.

According to Christian Sahner in his 2013 essay “From Augustine to Islam: Translation and History in the Arabic Orosius”, the conclusion of the *KH* with the Muslim incursions into Spain in the early 8th century may indicate that the (Christian) translators saw what followed that incursion as no longer a part of their own history.⁶ If the *KH* and earlier Orosius source were focused on the positive (or at least not-negative) social and spiritual impact of government-adopted Christianity on a previously-pagan world, then the Muslim conquest of Iberia could have been an end to their

⁵ There seems to be a similar project underway – Horizon 2020 funded a project to have the *Kitab Hurishiyush translated* to English by Marco Di Branco, but I cannot find any evidence that the project was published.

⁶ Sahner, (2013): 907

Christiendom. In this reality, the Christian translators of this text in the 10th century may have seen themselves in a new age.

However, according to this Sahner, the existence of a text like the *KH* shows that there were people at that age who were interested in the ancient past – “What is more, it signals that they must have felt a sense of connection between their world and that of the Greeks and the Romans they followed. Why else would the assumed translators of this text have invested such time and energy in making a fifth-century Latin book linguistically and culturally accessible to tenth-century Arabic-speakers?”⁷

In my estimation, Sahner’s position is one of several that make sense. Given my own interest in this text (not as relevant to my own identity but as a part of an academic passion), I posit that perhaps events and thoughts of people in the past with whom there is a shared geography or investment in certain events do seem naturally interesting to later investigators. It is entirely possible that there is something theoretical on a large scale to be inferred, but until I have translated enough of the *KH* I am comfortable considering that this could also have been a history project for a noble with the means to invest in their passion.

It will be helpful here to provide some brief context about the surviving manuscript of the *KH*. Ann Christys’ preeminent analysis of the manuscript points out that the lemmas for both Books 7 and 14 indicate that they contain accounts of the events of the Romans, “up to the time when this book was written, and what was added

⁷ Sahner, (2013): 931

to it afterwards about the Kingdom of the Goths in al-Andalus up to the arrival of Tariq.”⁸ This is the first significant gap in the lineage of our manuscript, with about 400 years separating Orosius and the translator/author of the *KH*. The surviving Columbia manuscript, Christys notes, was dated to 712 AH (1312 CE), but this date is unconfirmed by the manuscript or its premodern commentators. It contains “features which locate the script in the Almohad or Almoravid periods”, though scholars face significant difficulty in dating Arabic manuscripts of this period, and the *KH* manuscript could have originated in Iberia or North Africa.⁹ While it is unlikely that any conclusive answers about the origins of the Columbia manuscript will come to light soon, it is worthwhile pondering the implications of a text like this being written in Almohad or Almoravid North Africa. The Almohad Caliphate relatively notable for two ideological movements: the embrace of Classical Greek philosophy (which some authors describe as a movement towards Mu’tazilism) and a stricter definition of monotheism, which forced many non-Muslims to convert or emigrate. In the context of Almohad ideology, Orosius’ writings’ similarities to the histories of the ancient Greeks could have contributed to its relevance to Almohad scholarship, which could explain how a markedly more anti-Christian Muslim polity supported in an official capacity the copying of a text glorifying Christian history. Secondly, if anti-anthropomorphism and a rejection of pre-Islamic

⁸ Christys, Ann. *Christians in Al-Andalus: (711-1000)* p.148. Routledge, 2007.

⁹ Christys (2007) p.150

animistic practices was a goal of Almohad ideology, then a text dedicated to showing the calamities that befall humans living in ignorance could have been in line with religious literary trends at the time.¹⁰

On this last point, it is notable that Orosius' original *Historiae* followed in a Graeco-Roman tradition in its historiographical style. This manifested in the original in a lack of attacks directed towards pagans, and instead used a relatively neutral lens when portraying non-Christians as people.¹¹ If Almohad patrons and religious authorities embraced a Classically philosophical approach to understanding *tawhid*, then perhaps there was a level of reverence for Hellenistic and Roman "philosophical" religious and historiographical works as well.

In addition to this, there is scholarship that suggests that the Almohad polities were not as anti-Christian as they may seem. A. Fromherz writes about how in the late Almohad period, there was potentially incentive from figures like the Caliph al-Ma'mun to appease the growing influence of a Christian populace:

One of the most extraordinary periods of Almohad and Christian interaction was the reign of the Caliph 'Abd Alla Idris al-Mamun bin Ya'qub al-Mansur from 1228 to 1232. His reign saw the stationing of 12,000 Christian troops in the Maghreb, the creation of a North African bishopric, and the ringing of church bells from a

¹⁰ Fletcher, Madeleine. "The Almohad Tawhid: Theology Which Relies on Logic." *Numen* 38, no. 1 (1991): 120.

¹¹ García Fernández, Francisco José. "La Imagen de Hispania y Los Hispanos a Finales de La Antigüedad: Las *Historiae Adversum Paganos* de Paulo Orosio." *Conimbriga: Revista de Arqueologia* 44 (2005): 286.

cathedran in Marrakech, the very heart of what was once the uncompromising Almohad Empire. (Fromherz, (2009) p. 50)¹²

Sahner also indicates that a section omitted from the Arabic translation were sections detailing how the Roman empire was blessed with prosperity even though they were persecuting Christians – which was counter to Orosius’ original argument. He said that the translator may have been trying to keep the audience/Arabic patrons in the dark about a dangerous historical precedent for mistreating Christians. Again, I find Sahner’s position worthy of further study and will keep it in mind as I translate, and want to simultaneously consider another explanation: that in a religiously-heterogeneous society such as the Umayyad Iberia, the relationship of Islamic rulerships with Abrahamic religions versus their views on paganism could mean that Muslim scholars had no problems embracing the glory of Christian history. In fact, the Roman adoption of Christianity over paganism could have been celebrated by some Muslims. This is a theory that I have developed from an understanding of Islamic theology in medieval Iberia, with humanistic policies incorporating Christianity into political apparati.[find citation for this].

Sahner mentions a couple examples in his essay of the parts of the original that were omitted in the Arabic edition: “the celebrations in Rome following the destruction

¹² Fromherz, Allen. “North Africa and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Christian Europe and the Almohad Islamic Empire.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20, no. 1 (2009): 43–59.

of the Jewish Temple,²³ the suppression of civil war under the emperor Claudius,²⁴ the emperor Hadrian's study of Christian texts,²⁵ and the civil wars that came after Constantine's death.”¹³ These events, as Sahner says, are likely not “part of a coherent editorial scheme”. He suggests that a corrupted or altered source text could be responsible for the omissions, but allows that a number of the omitted passages share a number of characteristics, such as the theme of rivalry between Christians and pagans and the “culpability for the sufferings of the Roman empire”. Given the lack of *KH* primary source material, this will be a difficult question to satisfactorily address, but I want to follow the thread of these common themes, particularly as they concern inter-religious rivalry. One of the omitted passages is a dialogue between Orosius and a fictional critic, who argues that persecution of Christians happened during a time of prosperity for the empire. Sahner posits (ambitiously) that the translator was omitting passages that could be used as justification to persecute Christians in the later medieval period. By keeping the original goal of proving Christians weren't responsible for the collapse out of readers' minds, readers would not be able to poke holes in the logic and redirect the blame onto Christians.

In holding off conclusive opining until I feel comfortable with the translation, I will offer another parallel theory to accompany Sahner's. The governments of the Iberian Emirates/Caliphates did not need another justification to persecute Christians if they wanted to, it seemed that interreligious cooperation was genuinely a

¹³ Sahner (2013): pp. 911

goal, or at least preventing sectarian conflict within the empire. The previously-mentioned omitted passages do, perhaps, follow a common theme. In the case of the celebrations in Rome following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, the city of Rome threw a celebration of the triumph, erecting the Arch of Titus in honor of emperor Titus Caesar Vespasianus' victory over the Jews in the revolt of Judea.¹⁴ This celebration of the defeat of Jews would not work well with the culture of cooperation fostered at the time in the Caliphate in Spain.

Secondly, Claudius was an emperor notorious for his harsh stances against religion. He was hard on “fringe” groups and was also opposed to any practices not deemed compatible with the Roman state religion. In the case of Claudius, perhaps looking at the imposition of a state religion is the most compelling reason that he would be kept out of the new edition; this is simply postulation.

Hadrian provides a fascinating study. His proposed “study of Christian texts” is, as I can find, a reference to the rescript he issued following being addressed in Greek Christian authors Aristides' and Quadratus' apologies in 124/25. To put this situation in context, Hadrian was a was an inductee into and lifelong devotee to the Eleusinian Mysteries, which could have opened the emperor to recognizing non-mainstream religious practices.¹⁵ During Hadrian's induction into Eleusis and his visit to Greece in 124, he received an apology from the Christian author Aristides, who argued to the king

¹⁴ J. C. Edmondson et al., “Flavian Religious Policy and the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 145-166, 113.

¹⁵ Marco Rizzi and Alessandro Galimberti, “Hadrian, Eleusis, and the Beginning of Christian Apologetics,” in *Hadrian and the Christians* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 71-84.

that Christianity was both separate from and superior to Judaism. This was shortly after Jewish rebellions in Judea were quelled by the Romans, and was followed by Hadrian's imperial rescript to the proconsul of Asia in 124/25. In it, Hadrian extended what many believe to be expanded rights for Christians, protecting them against false accusations. Alessandro Galimberti points to a piece of contextualizing Hadrian's aims with the rescript, writing on how Rabbi Bar Kokhba, leader of an eponymous Jewish rebellion in 132 CE, reportedly tortured Christians for not aiding his cause against the Romans. Hadrian's established relationship with a fringe religious movement; his issuing of the rescript; and the general relationship between Christianity, Judaism, and the Roman political apparatus gives us reason to believe Hadrian inaugurated a "new course" of religious policy.¹⁶ Hadrian also built temples with sacred Christian images, potentially a part of this new religious policy and his own fascination with Christianity. The sections on Hadrian could have been omitted from the KH because it shows a Roman emperor showing outright favor to what would become one of the main constituent religions of the Umayyad state, and also would have been perhaps a tacit endorsement of the argument that Christians deserved better treatment because they were saliently differentiated from Jews.

In this take, the goal of the translator could be to provide a text that stood as a rebuke of religious persecution. The section added that told of Pliny being stopped from killing Christians by God or the inclusion of the detail in the account of Athanaric's

¹⁶ Rizzi, Galimberti (2010): 83.

attack of Christians: calling them “Catholic Christians, and they are the people (who profess God's) unity (*al-Naṣārā al-Kathūliqīyīn wa-hum ahl al-tawḥīd*).”¹⁷ Sahner expresses confusion over why the translator would make a point to describe the Catholic nature of those persecuted Christians, but if this is being read by a contemporary audience (many of whom, as Christians in medieval Iberia, would be Catholics), then this is a reassurance that these Catholics are also part of the band of believers in God, and is an expression of sympathy and commonality with them.

Sahner attempts to parse out the identity of the people referenced in the preface to book 7. He posits that the pagans who “allege that the world is eternal and never ceases to exist”, which, for lack of better term, I will refer to as “materialist atheists”, could be the adherents of Dahrism, another term for those who ascribe to the Zurvanite doctrine, originally a fatalistic religious movement within Zoroastrianism.^{18,19} Sahner points out that this group was not necessarily the only one that fit the description in the preface, and that there is a wide selection of groups, both within and outside of Islam, that posed intellectual challenges to the “immutability” of God.

Alongside this claim, I posit that it also seems likely that the description of Christian concepts in “Islamic” language, such as referring to temples as “mihrab” or “Jahiliya” to describe the setting of Orosius’ pagan opponents, are not part of a conscious effort to make Christian concepts “Islamicized” but rather a product of using

¹⁷ Sahner (2013): 917

¹⁸ Sahner (2013): 917

¹⁹ Shaki Mansour, “DAHRĪ,” RSS (Encyclopaedia Iranica, December 15, 1993), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/dahri-ar>.

literary Arabic which, throughout its history, is tied with Quranic writing. It could be that this is what writing about Christianity in an Islamicate context may look like.

To summarize, Sahner introduces ambiguities in the religious affiliation/essence of the language in the KH. Using Islamic-associated language to speak of Christian history, and subtle separation of Christianity from the essential virtue being extolled - the singularity and true nature of God. However, scholars like Penelas and Sahner see the Muslim elements as evidence of mixed authorship - that the KH was written (primarily) by a Christian seems to be a given. I do not possess the knowledge of scholarship in the era to raise this point for contest, but I do believe that the authorship of this text can be used to re-evaluate the the formation and usage of Islamic and ecclesiastical language. The language associated with foundational texts becoming culturally cemented in the meaning of their most famous context must influence how this text is perceived today. It also has implications on what kind of relationship the audience has with the subject matter - in this case, Muslims of the 10th-century Iberian Caliphates with the history and legacy of Christianity and the Roman Empire.

In his conclusion, Sahner suggests that the audience of the KH may have partially seen themselves as part of a new world, post-Roman collapse, post-arrival of Islam, and not of the ancient world anymore, or of their own history.²⁰ However, the history of the people who wrote and read the KH should not be tied so closely to sectarian divides, in my opinion. The Muslim audience of the KH are just as much a part of the post-Roman

²⁰ Sahner (2013): 930

world as European Christians are, and the history of Rome with its presence across the Mediterranean and southwestern Asian lands part of their lives just as much as their Christian European counterparts. In addition to this, the religious affiliation of the people who read/wrote the KH are not the same as their ethnic background; Muslim Iberians are no less Iberian than their Christian countrymen, nor are they necessarily part of a different historical perspective. In fact, the blurred lines between Islam and Christianity in everyday practice indicate that a blended presentation, with elements of traditionally Christian and Muslim rhetoric, could just have been a normal part of religious writing at the time, when the two religions were entwined in both their history but also the culture of their practice.

The Arabic version of Orosius' *Seven Histories Against the Pagans*, in its first book, is mostly a faithful adaptation of the original. There are references to God in Arabic, different from references to the Messiah, which suggest a Muslim translator through's interpolations. There are also a few additions when it comes to the history outlined in the Latin text.

The first of these I want to touch upon is the distinction of who claimed dominion over the continents of the Old World – in the translation, there is specific reference to religious origin stories (references to Ham, Sam, Japheth), which are tied to stories of how various racial groups came to be. In the story of Ham, the son of Noah was cursed for his disobedience towards his father and God, and cursed (through his descendants)

to be enslaved. This story was a justification for the “rightful” enslavement of Black people for over a thousand years.

In a Christian context, this story is met with some scholarly debate; namely, that the curse laid by Noah was not upon Ham, but Ham’s son (and Noah’s grandson) Canaan. Despite this, popular interpretations consider Ham cursed, and his children, including Canaan but also the people of Egypt, Kush, and the rest of Africa – are also cursed.

The topic of race is one that may seem inconsequential in this text, but I am curious about the influence of religiously-based narratives informing a geographical and historical worldview. Ann Christys notes that “some of the biblical characters were given the forms of their names as they appear in the Qur’an.”²¹ During my reading, I found many examples of words in Arabic that when transliterated didn’t correspond to any known location, but when I cross-referenced the English translation found that they had meanings that I could at least trace back to the Latin text – words such as بغداديين (Baghdadiin) which was translated as “Bactrians” – when the Arabic word for Bactria is بختار (Bakhtar). There are several instances of words in Latin and English that do not, upon initial research, seem to correspond to any actual location. The ‘Ottogorra River’ and the ‘city of Ottogorra’ only seem to exist in Orosius’ accounts, and yet the translator did not simply transliterate them into Arabic but had words that suggest an Arabic etymological base. This seems to suggest there was a historical and geographical

framework understood between the two authors that is more lost to a contemporary reader.

Another interesting point is that while Orosius attributes the lack of “accurate” history-telling during the period between Adam and the Ninus of the Assyrians to ignorance or simple disregard, the translator seems to indicate either a malintended negligence or some sort of moral failing – at the very least, the translator chastises previous historians, wondering if they come from a people without books or records. The Arabic translator also refers to these previous scholars as having “lied”, “violated” a contemporary audience. This raises the question to me about methods of historiography; it is mentioned that Orosius remains true to Greco-Roman historiographical tradition and does not disparage the Pagans before Christianity. Is there any credence to the notion that the Arabic translator does not follow such a tradition?

The Arabic translator seems to separate themselves from the words of Orosius in a few instances in the sections I have translated: Both are sections in the dedication/first part of Book I (there is no separate dedication in the Arabic). These are when Orosius gets to talking about the failures of previous generations of scholars in not including histories of calamities between the time of Adam and Abraham, and his musings on why calamities happen/the nature of sin and good and evil. In Islamic traditions, calamities are often the direct result of people turning their back on the message delivered to them by God, usually through scripture or a prophet or messenger.

Stories about the people of ‘Ad, Thamud, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Midian, to name a few, are stories of people who rejected the messages delivered to them and continued to act upon their evil instincts: sexual assault, robbery, cheating, torture, and inhospitableness. It was not a general condition of being non-Muslim (As the advent of Islam was not till centuries later and Quranic narratives clearly demonstrate that there was true righteousness before and outside of Islam. It would stand to reason, then, that a Muslim translating Orosius would not want to align themselves with the notion that calamities befell humanity before a specific religious tradition started, especially Christianity.

As for my translation of the *KH*, I intend on tackling the text in its entirety and found it fitting to present my translation of the prologue and first part of the first book of the *KH*. I intend this to be a transparent approach, showing that there are sections that do not necessarily conform or refute claims made by myself or the scholars I cite. The text is rather opaque, with many obvious difficulties presented on the part of the initial translators. My guiding approach is to translate as literally as possible, given the dearth of data on both the origins of the manuscript and the translating and copying parties. Once I make my way through the rest of the text translating as literally as I can with explanations of my word choice, I will revise the translation with a more critical analysis of the cultural translation that likely happened at the text’s various stages of creation. I anticipate using the Skopos lens developed by Hans Vermeer, which holds that the function and purpose of a translation is inexorably aimed at incorporating the audience’s knowledge, expectation, and held values and guide how the source text is

adapted. given the extensive changes made to the Latin text by its translators, it seems that both an effort to preserve the literalness of the manuscript for this third translation and the use of Skopos to understand the motivations and methods of the original translators is prudent.²²

For further research, I would work on translating more of Book 7 and address some of the intriguing questions posed by Christian Sahner, particularly with my idea of reading the Arabic with the assumption that it was for a poly-religious audience.

²² Kussmaul, Paul. "Pragmatic Analysis." Essay. In *Training the Translator*, 55–83. AMSTERDAM: JOHN BENJAMINS, 1997.

Part II: Translation of the Prologue and Part 1 of Book 1

I obeyed your command, virtuous father, Augustine. If my sufficiency equals my obedience, I do not know whether I will do what you desire or be unable to achieve it, except that you know and have decreed what I am capable of from what you commanded me to do.

It is as if you are one of the most humble of those put before than a lord of a great dominion of many blessings and beasts , and naturally among these are the dogs that are prepared to do for him what he commands without being forced , and if someone approaches in service to her to owners, she remains out of sight and waits until summoned to do what he wants of her.

And if she has guidance and the powers of differentiation to love the lord and be jealous of him and watches over him, not because it is her nature to stay awake but the love of the lords provokes her to guard and protect what is valuable to them. For what is the right given to her by the Gospel when it says: Indeed, dogs eat crumbs that fall off their master's table.²³ And the blessed Tobias, as evidence, a king, stood with a dog as his companion.

And I have extolled upon you the particularities of how vast my love is for you, and my needs are your needs, and all I have accomplished is a fruit of what you have given me. It is the result of what you have bestowed upon me, and I do not count for myself a single characteristic other than my keenness to fulfill the costs of your favor.

²³ This is a reference to Biblical scripture present in both the Arabic and Latin texts.

And after, you have commanded me to reply to those of ignorance; [the pagans and] their perversion of the way of the souls that are the domain of God,²⁴ and to uncover for them the origins of where their putrid dreams emerge, and what their opinions are that have gone astray when they stopped considering what has passed for their predecessors. Instead, they claim that the times they witnessing are times of aggravated calamities directly resulting in their worship of Christ and God, in contract to what afflicted them in their time of ignorance, and that these contemporary calamities befall them due to their negligence towards their idols. These *Histories* are annals of old times and what calamities befell their predecessors, from the ravages of war, the horror of disease and plague, the dread of famine, of (the breath of the cities?) earthquakes and heavenly torrents, great wild blazes and the bleeding of rivers, the disobedience of children, the treachery of steeds towards their masters, revolutions of the masses against their kings and queens, and every kind of chaos and upheaval beset upon times past.

And you bade me to discover and compile all of this into a book, this narrative of judgments and rhetoric into a short volume, my trifling work not worthy of standing alongside the ten treatises you have already composed for the purpose of responding to the falsehoods of t these very pagans, and so the purpose of my work is nothing but to celebrate the refinement of your own and for me to gather knowledge to support your judgements...ad your son, the honorable and holy Julian of Carthage, insisted that I

²⁴ In Latin, the phrase used here is “qui alieni a ciuitate Dei ex locorum agrestium conpitis et pagis pagani”. Here, “pagis”, which literally means “village” or “rural area”. “Pagani” is the term used to describe the people of this place, people from rural or underdeveloped areas.

carry out his request in this work in a way that I may deserve his confidence in asking me.

When I began this endeavor I became lost, caught in disparaging my own time and thinking that the calamities I have witnessed surely must have exceeded all like them in the past. But now I know that the days of ignorance, those days before light and knowledge came to men, were days that saw far worse disasters and were far more wretched the further removed they were from the safe harbor of true religion. My investigations into the past have demonstrated to me that, due to my own devotion to uncovering the truth, that death, with its insatiable thirst for blood exerted its dominion upon the progeny of the world for their ignorance of laws that prohibit bloodshed, and when the light of faith cut into this darkness and the covenant of this new religion cast a cloud [for all days] except those last ones, when time has unfurled the last of its threads and the Dajjal (antichrist) comes forth, a calamity like nobody has seen before as was prophesized by the divine texts and promised to us by the Messiah.²⁵ And I say that every calamity and plight exists for two reasons: Either upon the recommendation of Good or as a punishment by Evil.

[interpolation] Orosius, God have mercy on him, said: “And we have found a philosophies of the magi that were compiled into books from those of the Latin Roman

²⁵ The *Dajjal* is a figure in Islam who, similar to the Antichrist, will appear as the world nears its end. He will lead a majority of the population astray, before ultimately being defeated by a returned Jesus. In the Christian text, the word ‘antichrist’ is used to describe the figure. Scholarship on these two figures points to them being functionally identical in the role they will play on earth, with a fundamental distinction: The antichrist in Christian eschatology is a liar who is pretending to be *Jesus himself*, whereas in Islam, the *Dajjal* (often called *al-Massih ad-Dajjal*, or “the Deceitful Messiah”) pretends to be a *Messih* and a prophet – not impersonating one specific person. It is possible that *Dajjal* was simply the term used to describe the Antichrist in Arabic in that time, but another Arabic term (*Adou al-Massih*, lit. “Anti Messiah”) is also used to describe the Christian antichrist. The usage of the term *Dajjal* could be a subtle indication that the translator/editor is shifting this work to place it in an Islamic context and removing it from its Christian one.

and Greek tongues²⁶, and in them they started their catalogue of the stories of kings and rulers with that of Ninus, son of Belus, king of the Assyrians. We were amazed by them in their establishment of the world and their denial of what really happened, for how do you believe that wars, epics, tales, and news written about in these books only happened in this world after [Belus]...and how do we read the telling of these events of the world after their willful ignorance of the true account of history; they claimed that before that time [when they claim history started], people were like wild, neglected beasts; brutish animals, and from that day intelligence spawned in them and consciousness and awareness were given to them.

[interpolation] the translator said: [lost]

[interpolation] *Orosius, God have mercy on him, said*: I have made it my mission to catalogue the calamities that have befallen humanity from the very beginning of our existence, with as much detail as I can and as accurately as I can manage. For from the time of Adam to the time of Ninus son of Belus, in whose time the prophet Abraham was born, were three thousand and a hundred and eighty-four years, and yet nobody who writes books or compiles stories from these years gives of the calamities that occurred, either out of a willful denial for what those years truly wrought, or out of ignorance, perhaps if they come from a people without books or records. As for several years from the time of this king Ninus son of Belus to the time of Caesar Augustus, greatest Emperor of the Romans, in whose time the Messiah was born (in the forty-second year of Ceasar's rule) when the gates of Janus were closed and peace with the Persians

²⁶ It says *Yunani Ghareeqi* both words literally mean Greek, with *Yunani* coming from the name of the Ionian Sea and *Ghareeqi* from the Latin *Graecia*, a name for Greeks in the Iron Age Mediterranean. *Ghareeqi* seems to be a word that specifically refers to Ancient Greeks.

concluded, wars all over the world came to an end – this period was two thousand and fifteen years. And in these years all men of letters and philosophy expended extensive efforts to write a wide variety of books and collect much knowledge and catalogued the issues of the past and lied about the issues of the future.

He [Orosius] said: So we take from their travels the accounts they agreed upon and provided evidence for without imitating their views and without endorsing their doctrines, but with the intent to generalize their stories and the most pertinent news to create a catalogue [this was outlined in the margins] – this is an admonition for the believers and a disciplining for those who hold onto truth, for humanity is created with the power to allow himself to repent. He is to accept guidance just as he accepts his own corruption, as he accepts he is weak and disobedient by the duplicity of humanity and

his own ambition, for giving guidance to the misguided and responding to the pleas of the hungry with food is obligatory.²⁸²⁷ .

27

فإن الانسان خلق أعطي من الاستطاعة ما سبب له به سبيل إلى التوبة فهو يقبل الإصلاح كما يقبل الفساد وإنه لمريض طموح و ضعيف منوع و غياث العاصي بالموعظة واجب و جوب غياث الجائع بالمطعم).

This was a tricky passage, written above in the Arabic from ‘for humanity’ to ‘obligatory’. The last word used in the Arabic is (مطعم) *mat’am*, which by conventional standards means “restaurant”. I did a bit of research on the etymology of the word and found that there were instances where it used to mean ‘vaccinated’ or ‘treated with a graft’. I assumed this may be the meaning, but it did not make sense in the context of the passage. After further research on some particularly difficult terms in the Arabic, such as (غياث) *giyaath* and (عاصي) *‘aasi*, I found that the second was a Qur’anic term: *Ghiyaath*, in the context of Verse 29 in the Chapter of the Cave, means to “plead” or “beseech”. *‘Aasi*, the second word, originally seemed to mean the Orontes River in Syria, but as it happens, that particular river flows from south to north, and *‘Aasi* means “insubordinate” or “obstinate”. The next word, (موعظة) *mou’idha* translates to “sermon” or “admonition”. I translate this phrase altogether as “it is obligatory to give admonition to the obstinate”, which means “try and advise the misguided”. The next phrase again tricked me – I thought the first word was (وجوب) *wujoob* which most accurately translates to “must be” or “mandatory”. But that did not make sense grammatically, any start to the dependent clause would have to start with a conjunction. Then I realized that the word was not in fact one word, but two: *wa joub*. *Wa* is the conjunction “and”; I did not recognize it at first because it is often typed without a space before the following word, and, since Arabic is an abjad script, *wa* and *wu(joob)* are indistinguishable. *Joub* is a word that does not have many recorded usages, so this is where I am going to make an assumption that it is a variant of the root ج-و-ب (j – w -b), which means “responded”. The last word of this clause is (مطعم) *mat’am*, which, by contemporary definition means “restaurant” but in this context I am translating it as “a place where one eats”.

Another interesting aspect of this passage is how vastly different it is from the Latin. The same passage, this time in Orosius’ original Latin:

primum quia, si diuina prouidentia, quae sicut bona ita et iusta est, agitur mundus et homo, hominem autem, qui conuertibilitate naturae et libertate licentiae et infirmus et contumax est, sicut pie gubernari egenum opis oportet ita iuste corripere inmoderatum libertatis necesse est.

The Latin offers no parables or examples of how people should be governed, and also includes mention of a *diuina prouidentia*, or “Divine Providence”. This is not mentioned in the Arabic at all, and seems to have been replaced with the same word I translate as “sermon” or “admonition” – as in there being an “admonition” for the believers. This does seem to shift the onus of good acts onto the person, and not part of divine will or guidance. The use of the word *wajib* (واجب), which means “mandated”, indicates that this is the responsibility of the person more than God’s.

Nobody who understands in himself the essence of humanity can deny that the world, from its genesis, only punishes the sins of its people, and even if we understand the point from which all sin sprang and the punishments handed down in kind, from the time of Adam, these philosophers have violated us and started recording annals of history from the middle of time and left themselves and us ignorant of what happened before. For they were ignorant of it or forgot about it, as they did not talk about what they described from the ills of the world other than wars, news, and great calamities that are the worst of people's relations with one another.

And as such, we will discuss the head of the issue of which they only approach the body, and we will start with the creation of the universe to the time of the birth of the City of Rome and then on the period extending to the rule of Octavian, who named himself Caesar, and the birth of Christ, from which time until now dominion over the world has remained in the hands of the City of Rome.

And it is paramount that I begin describing the world itself, and how it is divided by borders and countries by our ancestors, into three regions. Such, those of sight will be able to find in our writings descriptions of the wars in their times and the calamities of their locations, if God wills it.

Part II of Book I

The scholars of previous times divided the world into three, which is surrounded on its edges by the ocean: There is a division called "Asia", the share of Sam, son of Noah. There is "Europe", the share of Japeth, son of Noah. And there is "Africa", share of Ham, son of Noah.

Asia is surrounded by the Eastern ocean on three sides and its western edge abuts a section of Europe; on the right, it stretches west and touches Europe and on its left it extends all the way to Africa, where it is below Egypt and Syria and the Mediterranean sea.

Europe begins at the Hollow of the North at the Tanais River²⁹, where the Riphean Mountains, facing the Sarmatian Sea, pour forth the Tanais flood. This river flows past the dominions of Alexander the Great and the war plains of Caesar to the territories of the Rhobacsi, where it floods the Motadesh [Palus Maeotis], and these waters cause a great flood at the city of Theodosia. It then swells its banks into the sea near Euxine and then extends in a narrow path, stretching along Palestine until it reaches our Middle Sea, the one we call Mediterranean. And the last section of Europe is in the west, the land of the Andalusians and the ocean.³⁰ Its most extreme point is at Cádiz Islands at the idols [Pillars] of Hercules, where lies the door to Mediterranean sea from the ocean.

As for Africa, it is the share of Ham and its starting point is in the territories of Egypt at the city of Alexandria. It extends to the city of Paraetonium along the sea we call Mediterranean, the center of all the lands and territories of the world. And upon it, the continent continues along the region known as Catabathmon, not far from the camp of

²⁹ From the Latin-English version

³⁰ In the Latin, Orosius uses the word *Hispania* where I have written *Andalusia* (the term used in Arabic). In Arabic, *al-Andalus* is first attested as inscriptions on coins minted by the Umayyad rulers of Iberia in the mid-8th century. There is no definitive etymological origin for the word, but it certainly would not have been used, especially in Latin, by Orosius or anyone in his time. The word entered the Spanish language in the 13th century and was used to refer to the areas of the peninsula still under Muslim control. The word has a distinctly Muslim connotation, and even though it would have been used by those speaking Arabic in the region from the 8th century onward, it does demonstrate a relationship to the area that is not a part of Roman heritage. In the KH, the historical narrative is extended from the fall of the Roman empire to the invasion of the Iberian Peninsula by Moorish forces in 711. It is possible that the translator/editor of the KH is working under the patronage of someone who is part of the Muslim rulership, and is thus referencing the conquest in even the simplest terms.

Alexander along the lake of Chalearzus, and from there to the land whose people call it Avasitae, to the deserts of Abyssinia to the Southern Ocean. And its boundaries to the west are like those of Europe, the exit from the Mediterranean sea into the ocean. And at its extremities are the Atlas mountains the islands (Al-jaza'ir, aka Algiers).³¹

This...claims for Asia and it is the land of Sam and the western portion is divided by the ocean between the lands of Ham and Japheth; the south is the division of Ham and this is Africa, and the north is the land of Japheth, which is Europe.

And the land of Asia has at the center of its eastern periphery the Eastern Ocean where Adam's place is opposite the exit [mouth] of the River Ganges and it is Sehan³² and from the direction of the north if you turn west, the mountains called Calshethermana³³, and under them is the island that we call Thibriyana³⁴, and from this point the Eastern Ocean is called the Indian Ocean. There exists a hollow at the end of the Caucasus Mountains and all of it is by the ocean, and there is the end of the river Ottorogorra – and from this point the ocean is called the Serian Ocean.³⁵³⁶

³¹ This means Fortunate, from what I can tell

³² Ceylon?

³³ Promotory of Caligardamana

³⁴ Taprobane

³⁵ The Latin given is *Sericus*: “ad aquilonem subiacent ostia fluminis Ottorogorae, ex quo oceanus Sericus appellatur.” *Ex quo* means “from that point”, or “emanating from there”, and the word *apellatur* means *to be called*. *Sericus* is a Latin word deriving from the Ancient Greek *Sêres*, meaning China or of China. It is curious that the translator/editor did not use the Arabic words for China deriving from *sin-*, but it is also possible that the Greek and Latin terms (*Sericus*) refer specifically to the northwest region of China. This could be the source of some confusion, as this region of Chins is landlocked, but it is also possible that misconceptions about the Indian Ocean being a closed basin could be part of why it was associated with Western China; it is also possible that the term *Sericus* was not analogous to China, and could have referred to vast swaths of territory east of the Pamir Mountains and South of the Altai mountains. In any case, using the transliteration of *Sericus* shows affinity for the Roman and Greek tradition.

³⁶ Schoff, Wilfred H. “The Eastern Iron Trade of the Roman Empire.” *The Eastern Iron Trade of the Roman Empire*, 2010, 224–39.

The land of India is here. And this land of Asia has its western boundary at the Indus River which empties into the Sea of Qulzum³⁷ along the hollow of the Caucasus Mountains. And the Land of India is surrounded by seas, the Eastern and Indian Oceans. In this land are forty-four races, not including those who dwell on the island of Taprobane, on which are ten cities, or those who live on the other heavily-populated islands. And these lands, without access to the Indus River in the lands of Asia, west of the Indus River and east of the Dajla (Tigris) River, are the lands of Arachosia, and Parthia – the lands of the Persians – and Assyria, and Persida, and Media, and other lands mountainous and rough. All of these lands in the hollow south of the Caucasus and north of the Red Sea and the Gulf of the Lands of Persia and in the middle are the principal rivers, the Hydaspes and the Arbis, and in these lands are twenty-three races. It is commonly said that this entire region is called Parthia, though the Prophetic Scripture refers to the area as Media.³⁸³⁹⁴⁰

And as for what is between the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates, it is a land called Mesopotamia, which begins in the north between the Caucasus and Taurian mountains. To the south are, in order, Babylonia, then the lands of the Chaldeans, and then the

³⁷ The Red Sea

³⁸ The Scriptures here (*Scripturae Sanctae* in the Latin) were slightly ambiguous, but previous references to the scripture in the text: “exceptis uidelicet semotisque illis diebus nouissimis sub fine saeculi et sub apparitione Antichristi uel etiam sub conclusione iudicii, quibus futuras angustias, quales ante non fuerint, dominus Christus per scripturas sanctas sua etiam contestatione praedixit[.]” Here, Scripture is the medium through which Jesus Christ foretells the coming of the Antichrist. Interestingly, the Latin word used is “*Antichristi*” is used, which is only used four times in the New Testament (in the Epistles of John). Therefore, I am operating under the assumption that the Scriptures Orosius mentions in this book are the New Testament, and Media is mentioned many times in it (the Books of Tobit, the Maccabees, Isaiah, Hester, and others). In Arabic, the word used was

³⁹ “Bible Gateway Passage: KATA IQANNHN 1:1-5 - SBL Greek New Testament.” [Bible Gateway.](#)

⁴⁰ “Bible Browser.” oremus Bible Browser : [1 John 2:18–22.](#)

lands of the Arabs and Yemen to the end of the Persian Gulf and Arab Gulf, narrow and rectangular and facing east, and in these lands are twenty-eight races.

And between the Euphrates River on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west, in that space is a city that we call Dagusa that is in the boundary between Armenia and Cappadocia near the place where rises the River Euphrates towards the direction of Egypt and the end of the Arabian peninsula towards the south...we call this land Syria, and the gulf stretches in a westerly direction from the Red Sea. The largest provinces of Syria are Commagene, and Phoenicia, and Homs,⁴¹⁴² and Palestine of the Arabs...there are here twelve races.

And at the head of Syria is the land of Cappadocia, bounded on the east by Armenia and on the west by Asia Minor, on the northeastern side it meets the Themiscyrian Plains and the Cimmerian Sea, and falls into the Taurian Mountains in the south. Below these mountains are Cilicia and Isauria, stretching to the Cilician Gulf that meets with the island of Cyprus.

⁴¹ An addition in the Arabic. When thinking about why Homs may have been included in the Arabic but not in the Latin, I discovered that in the mid- to late-4th century, Christianity did not have a solid foothold in the Homs region, as it was the site for the veneration of the Arab-Roman sun deity Elagabalus (a Latinization of the Arabic إله الجبل, or the “God of the Mountain”). The cult of Elagabalus gained prominence in the 3rd century under the reign of Marcus Aurelius Antonius, who was often referred to as ‘Elagabalus’ and had a hereditary position as the high priest of the cult in Emesa (Homs). In the Latin, after mentioning Commagene, Phoenicia, and Palestine, Orosius refers to the other areas: *absque Saracenis et Nabathaeis*, or *apart the Saracens and the Nabataeans*. “Saracens” is a term used in Late Antiquity to mean “tribes of Northern Arabs”, and were often understood as opponents of the Romans. Perhaps Homs would have simply been part of the lands of the Saracens to Orosius, and when the KH came along Homs was nominally controlled by the Abbasids but was often subject to rebel rule and raiding from the Byzantines.

⁴² Ball, Warwick. “The Princely States: Near Eastern Kingdoms under Roman Protection.” Essay. In *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, 30–105. London, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

And Asia Minor is surrounded by water on all sides except for the eastern side where it touches Cappadocia and Syria. North of it is the Euxine Sea, and to its west is the Propontis Sea and to its south is our ocean⁴³. Here is Mount Olympus.

As for Lower Egypt, to its east is the land of Syria and Palestine and to its west is the land of Libya and to its north is our sea (the Mediterranean) and the mountain called Climax, and to the south are Upper Egypt and the Nile, whose exit seems to be along the Red Sea coast at a place called Mossylon. From there it flows west and in its middle is an island called Myron ⁴⁴, then turning north where it swells with seasonal floods. It waters the Egyptian fields, and some say that it rises near Mount Atlas and gradually sinks into the desert briefly before flows out east towards the desert in Ehiopia and towards the ocean, and then turns left and flows into Egypt. It is confirmed that there is a great river such as this one with such an origin and runs such a course and is the progenitor of all the great rivers. The Berber people⁴⁵⁴⁶ call this river where it begins at a spring “Dara”, but the other inhabitants in the area call it “Tabel”⁴⁷. This river, however, in the lands of the people called Copt-Libyans, goes into a large lake not far from the other river which, as previously mentioned, flows from the Red Sea, unless, as it may be true, it comes up from a spring in the earth to the bottom of the river which flows west.

⁴³ The Mediterranean

⁴⁴ Meroe

⁴⁵ In the Latin, this word is *barbari*, and in Arabic is it (بربر), or “Berber”. The word in its original Greek meant a “non-Greek speaker” or a “foreigner”, with a negative connotation, and the word was used after Arab conquests of North Africa as a name for its indigenous inhabitants.

⁴⁶ Ramzi Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers: History and Ideology in the Maghrib* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁴⁷ Nuhul

Upper Egypt stretches reaches out to the east on its own, to its north is the Arabian Gulf and to the south is the ocean and to its west starts Lower Egypt and to the east it is bounded by the Red Sea. This land is home to twenty-four races.

And thus, we have described the southern half of the lands of Asia⁴⁸ and now we will describe the northern half, starting in the East. The Caucasus mountains rises in the between the lands of the people known as “Balshee”⁴⁹ that live on the shores of the Caspian sea and the Mediterranean [fragmented here, taken from the Latin-English: these are the lands of the Colchi, who live above the Cimmerian Sea...as far as the eastern extremity it seems to be a continuous spine of mountains, though it has several names...some consider these mountains part of the Taurian range, because in truth the Parochatras Range of Armenia in the hollow of the Taurian and Caucasian mountains may form an unbroken link between the other two ranges. The Euphrates River proves that this is not the case, however, for it begins from the foot of the Parochatras Mountains and bends southward, veering constantly to the left but keeping the Taurian Range to the right. The Caucasus in the territories of the Colchi and the Albani are called the Caucasian Mountains, and from the Caspian passes to the Armenian gates], and the mountains pass on to a land called Bilas and to the source of the Tigris River, between Armenia and Iberia – here, the mountains are called the Acroceraunian. And from the source of the Tigris to the city of Carrhae, between the Massagetae and the Parthi, the mountains are called Ariobarzanes. And from the city of Carrhae to the city of Cathippus between the lands of the Hyrcani and the Bactrians⁵⁰, the mountains are called the

⁴⁸ Egypt as a part of Asia; the divisions between the continents does not follow conventional continental divides

⁴⁹ Albanni, I think

⁵⁰ In Arabic they are referred to as *Baghdadiin*

Memarmalian. And from the city of Cathippus to the city of Saphrithe mountains are called the Oscobares. There rises the River Ganges and it is the Sihaan⁵¹, and from the Sihaan to the source of the Ottorogorra River are the Taurian Mountains. And from the source of the Ottorogorra River to the city of Ottorogorra between the Chini Scythians and the Gandaridae are the Caucasian Mountains. Their end is between the lands of the Eoae and the Passyadrae, and here the mountain called Damanu [Imavus] where the Chrysorhoas River meets the East Ocean, between the Imavus Mountains. And in the lands that extend from here and (the last of the Caucasus mountains) and from the right division of the East at the Boreum River forms the Scythian Sea to the north, the Caspian sea to the west, and the Caucasian Mountains to the south. Here there are forty-two peoples belonging to the Hyrcanians and Scythians who, due to the vastness and emptiness of their homelands, wander endlessly across it.

The Caspian Sea has its rise from the ocean in the northeast, and the lands alongside the sea near the ocean are barren and not suitable for making a livelihood. The Sea extends south in a narrow stretch until it spreads out at the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. And from the Caspian Sea on the east, along the shore of the Northern Ocean to the Tanais River and the Palus Maeotis on the west to the shores of the Cimmerian Sea which is on the southwest side, and to the passes of Caucasus mountains at the south there are thirty-five peoples here.⁵² And all of these lands are close to the region called Albania, and what lies beyond that land is the Caspian Sea and

⁵¹ I could find no translation for *Sihaan*; it seems to be another name for the Ganges

⁵² The English translation lists thirty-four

its mountains, and the lands of the Amazons. And here end the boundaries of Asia on the north side.

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