

ZOSIMUS 6. 10. 2 AND THE LETTERS OF HONORIUS

Zosimus is speaking in this passage of the activities of Alaric in Aemilia as he tried to win Italian support for his puppet emperor, Priscus Attalus. 'The other cities he won over with no trouble; but Bologna he besieged, and when it held out for many days and he was unable to take it, he went to the Ligurians, forcing them, too, to accept Attalus as emperor. And Honorius, having written letters to the cities in Britain ordering them [or 'recommending', 'exhorting' them] to guard themselves, 'Ὀνωρίου δὲ γράμματασι πρὸς τὰς ἐν Βρεττανία χρησαμένου πόλεις φυλάττεσθαι παραγγέλλουσι, and having rewarded the soldiers with gifts from the moneys sent by Heraclian, Honorius was completely at ease, having won the goodwill of the soldiers everywhere.' In his critical note to this passage L. Mendelssohn records that the conjecture ἐν Βρουτία for ἐν Βρεττανία was suggested by Gothofredus (1587–1652) in his great commentary on the Theodosian Code, vol. iv, p. 212 [leg. 201], where he is commenting on *Cod. Theodos.*, 11. 28. 7.¹ The conjecture would make Zosimus say that Honorius wrote, not to the cities of Britain, but to those of Bruttium. There are signs that this conjecture of Gothofredus or something like it is winning increased acceptance among students of Roman Britain, so that the reading deserves examination. I propose to discuss (i) the text of the passage, (ii) the date of the letters, (iii) the Italian context, (iv)–(v) the British context in which the letters were written, and (vi) after 410.

I. THE TEXT OF ZOSIMUS

Zosimus' *History* survives in a single manuscript, the interesting *Vaticanus Graecus* 156,² and there is no trace in that manuscript of any textual variation in this passage. On the face of it *Βρεττανία* is not in itself a likely corruption of *Βρουτία*. But the matter is not so simple as it might seem at first sight. What in fact is the Greek for 'Bruttium'? See Boissevain's critical note on Dio Cassius, vol. i, p. 232: it turns out that *Βρουτία* is rare and that the normal term is either *Βρυτία* or *Βρετία*. The Greek historians of the Later Roman Empire mention Bruttium occasionally. Indeed, Procopius does so several times and always refers to the place by the name of the inhabitants, οἱ *Βρίττιοι*, though his manuscript L tends to have *Βρύτιοι*. Procopius' successor Agathias has *Βρετία*.³ Zosimus himself does not refer to Bruttium unless we suppose that he does so here. But his source in Book 6 is Olympiodorus of Egyptian Thebes, and we fortunately possess a fragment of Olympiodorus himself where he mentions Bruttium. He does so in his frg. 15, and he calls it ἡ *Βρετία*. Olympiodorus' fragments are preserved for us by Photius, and it is of sinister interest to find that while Photius'

¹ Gothofredus' commentary was not accessible to me when I began to write this paper, and I am deeply indebted to Dr John Martindale (Cambridge), author of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (hereafter *PLRE*), who transcribed the relevant passage for me and added valuable comments. In the meantime I have seen the edition of Gothofredus which appeared at Mantua in 1748, where the passage will be found on p. 173.

² On this manuscript see F. Paschoud, *Zosime, Histoire nouvelle*, 1 (Paris, 1971), p. lxxvii ff.

³ See Haury's text of Procopius, *Bell. Goth.*, 5. 8. 4, 7. 6. 5, 18. 20 ff., 28. 7; Agathias, *Hist.* II. 1, ed. Dindorf, p. 179 *init.*, ed. R. Keydell, p. 40. 17. Keydell reports some minor manuscript variations, but none of any significance for the present discussion.

manuscript A has *Βρετίας* in this fragment, his manuscript M has *Βρετταβίας*.⁴ In other authors, too, there are examples of this corruption. There is one at Dio Cassius, 16 = Zonaras, 9. 9. 12, where *Βρετίαν* has been corrupted into *Βρετταβίαν* in our manuscripts.⁵ Again, in Dio, 42. 25. 3, Xylander rightly wrote *Βρετίαν* for the *Βρετταβίαν* of the manuscript L. In Athenaeus 5. 208 F, *Βρετίας* is Casaubon's correction of the manuscript *Βρεταβίας* (sic).⁶ I have not been able to find any passage where 'Britain' has been corrupted into 'Bruttium'.

So if Gothofredus had suggested *Βρεττία* instead of *Βρουτία*, as perhaps he ought to have done, we should have to concede that there could be little objection to his proposal from the palaeographical point of view.

Zosimus has an unsurpassable claim to be regarded as the worst of all the extant Greek historians of the Roman Empire. For example, anyone who thinks that his extensive account of the battle of Mursa in Book 2. 45–53 allows us to reconstruct the course of that disastrous campaign with accuracy would do well to read the deflating remarks of Norman H. Baynes, 'A Note of Interrogation', *Byzantion* 2 (1925), 149–51, which will put an end to his illusions. The mistakes and confusions in what remains of Book six outdo anything even in the rest of the work. They are so extensive that Seeck thought that Zosimus was trying – without much success – to combine some other source with the text of his basic authority, Olympiodorus, in these pages.⁷ But there is no evidence or need for such a theory: Zosimus, at any rate the Zosimus of Book six, is all too capable of such monstrous blunders without any outside help. His sixth book so swarms with errors and confusions that Mendelssohn (on 6. 7. 6) is inclined to believe that, when the historian had written a first draft of the dozen or so pages which are all of it that survive, he instantly fell dead and so was hardly in a position to revise or correct this preliminary sketch. (With a first draft as inaccurate as this, one might think that even a dozen revisions would hardly have rescued it.) Accordingly, the Justin and Neobigastes of Olympiodorus, frg. 12, become Justinian and Nebiogastes in Zosimus 6. 2. 2. Boulogne is a city of Gaul or Galatia in Olympiodorus, loc. cit., and in Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* 9. 11. 3 (who also used Olympiodorus as his source here), but it is a city of Germany in Zosimus, loc. cit., who even makes Paris a city of Germany in 3. 9. 1. In Zosimus, vi. 4. 2, Constantine's general, Gerontius, is transmogrified into Terentius, and Constantine's son, Constans, becomes Constantius at 6. 5. 1 and 7. 6. The Jovianus of Olympiodorus, frg. 13, is Jovius in Zosimus 6. 8. 1. And so on. It would be tedious to catalogue all the cases where the historian has falsely transcribed names, to say nothing of his confusion of events, in these chapters. Mendelssohn's critical notes give a fuller list of his blunders. Most assuredly, it would be well within Zosimus' powers to change *Βρεττία* into *Βρετταβία* in 6. 10. 2 without the aid of any mediaeval scribe. Thus, if it should turn out that the text must be altered, we might equally well suppose *either* that

⁴ See R. Henry, *Photius, bibliothèque*, Collection byzantine, 1 (Paris, 1959), p. 171. On Olympiodorus see now B. Baldwin, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes', *L'antiquité classique* 49 (1980), 212–31, with bibliography in the footnotes.

⁵ See Boissvain's edition of Dio, vol. 1, p. 249 n. 10.

⁶ See the Loeb edition, vol. II, p. 442.

⁷ O. Seeck, *Untergang*, v, p. 598 n. on p. 410. 21, followed by C. E. Stevens, 'Marcus, Gratian, Constantine', *Athenaeum* 35 (1957), 316–47, at 330, and E. Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire Romain* (Paris, 1951), p. 457 n. 90, but not by F. Paschoud, P.-W., XA, 824, or by John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364–425* (Oxford, 1975), p. 298 n. 3. Seeck's reason for making his suggestion is that Zosimus, vi. 9. 1 and 12. 1, reports two expeditions to Africa, and, according to Seeck, the second is a doublet of the first. This seems inadequate. See p. 451 below.

Zosimus' scribes have foisted a mistake on to him, as scribes have done, or have tried to do, in those passages of Dio Cassius, Athenaeus, and Olympiodorus which I have cited above, *or* that he himself has added one more to the catalogue of his blunders. We are certainly not short of explanations of how the change of Bruttium to Britain might have come to be made – if it was made.

And yet, in my opinion, it would be a mistake in method to make even this minor change – to omit those two letters *av* – unless we have some sound historical or other reason for doing so. It would be arbitrary to alter the manuscript reading merely in order to bolster up some historical theory of our own, or in order to ascribe to Zosimus a consistency for which in fact he cared nothing. To say that, since the rest of the sentence in question deals with places in Italy, *therefore* this clause must do likewise, would be to foist upon Zosimus an interest in logic with which he never burdened himself or a stylistic ambition of which he was never guilty. In the case of the other examples of the corruption which are cited on p. 446 above – those from Dio Cassius and Athenaeus – the change from 'Britain' to 'Bruttium' was not simply desirable: without it the texts would have been laughable. Thus, in the first passage of Dio (vol. I, p. 249, Boissevain), Hannibal on hearing the result of the battle of the River Metaurus retreated into Bruttium: it would have been a striking case of over-reacting to bad news if he had retreated into Britain! In Dio 42. 25. 3, we are told that when Milo was driven from Campania and had perished in Apulia, his supporter, Caelius, who had hoped to join forces with him, went to Bruttium instead. In the passage of Athenaeus that writer is describing the famous ship of Hiero of Syracuse which was built under the direction of Archimedes: the tree for the foremast, we are told, was discovered in the mountains of Bruttium. Few will believe that Archimedes visited Britain in search of a foremast. In all three cases the manuscript reading makes the sense not merely wrong but comically wrong. But that is not true of the manuscript text of Zosimus 6. 10. 2. No one has argued that, if we make Honorius write to the cities of Britain rather than to those of Bruttium, we are perpetrating a joke or introducing an element of comedy into the Dark Ages.

It is our business to explain the text of Zosimus, not to 'improve' it or 'correct' it. The only serious objection, so far as I can see, that can be raised against a mention of Britain here is that it is out of context. But if it is said, as it must be said, that the reference to Britain has no context and comes in as something of a surprise, we have next to ask whether a reference to Bruttium would not be equally or even more surprising. Now, as a mere matter of geography London is hardly further away as the crow flies from Liguria than is Bruttian Reggio on the Straits of Messina. From the activities of Alaric and Attalus in Liguria Britain and Bruttium alike are almost at the end of the earth.

If Honorius told the British cities to defend themselves in 410, he doubtless had it in mind that they should defend themselves against certain rebels in the island, as I believe,⁸ or, as others might have it, against the Saxon invaders whose incursion into their land in 408–9 is reported in the *Galic Chronicle of A.D. 452*, 62 (*Chron. Min.* I, p. 654). The invaders had been defeated in 409, but perhaps enough of them survived to form a threat in 410 or perhaps they returned to Britain in strength in that year. We may choose between rebels and invaders: but what enemy was threatening Bruttium in 410? There is little point in telling the cities of a province to defend themselves if in fact there is nobody to defend themselves against. If Honorius had

⁸ The matter is discussed in *Britannia* 8 (1977), 303–18, esp. 310 ff.

written in these terms to the cities of Liguria we could well understand his action: Alaric and the Goths were rampaging in that province. But Bruttium is the whole length of peninsular Italy from Liguria. So far as Bruttium was concerned in 410 there was no very obvious enemy on the near side of the horizon. The law upon which Gothofredus was commenting when he put forward his conjectural reading is one in which Honorius grants tax-relief in 413 to Campania, Tuscia, Picenum, Samnium, Apulia, Calabria, Bruttium (*Brittiis*), and Lucania, no doubt because of the devastation caused by the Visigoths during their presence in those provinces in 410 and, in the case of the more northerly of them, in earlier years. But Zosimus cannot be referring to the arrival of the Visigoths in southern Italy immediately after the fall of Rome in August 410, for it is not in dispute that his narrative stops short with the events of the middle of that year – no doubt July or early August, as we shall see – and does not reach the fall of Rome. The City had fallen on 24 August, and it was only after they left Rome that the Visigoths marched to the south of the peninsula. Now, if Honorius had some reason early in the year to think that the Goths would soon menace southern Italy – and it is out of the question that he could have done so – it is not clear why he should thereupon have written to the cities of Bruttium alone, leaving those of Lucania, Calabria, Apulia, and the rest without warning and without permission to take up arms in their own defence. Gothofredus was misled, I think, by his belief that the Visigoths invaded southern Italy before as well as after the fall of Rome in August, and that they did so especially during their invasion of Italy in 409. But for an invasion of Italy south of Rome in 409 and early in 410 there is no evidence whatever.

Can it be, then, that those scholars who follow Gothofredus here believe Bruttium to have been threatened, not by the Goths, but by Heraclian in Africa? Was Honorius telling the Bruttians to defend themselves against Heraclian? Heraclian, however, was Honorius' nominee and remained actively loyal to the Emperor, though he eventually rebelled in 413. In 410 he is explicitly said to have been on Honorius' side.⁹ There was no question of his invading Italy in 410. An African threat to the cities of Bruttium at that time did not exist. On the contrary, Alaric's puppet emperor, Attalus, had some designs on Africa and feebly tried to put them into effect, as Zosimus and Sozomen tell us;¹⁰ but there is no hint in what our authorities say that Bruttium was affected in the least. Bruttium is not even mentioned in this connexion. I conclude that history, if not palaeography, is decidedly against Gothofredus' conjectural reading.

Again, Zosimus clearly tells us that in 409 the Imperial administration had been driven out of Britain, so that if the Emperor wished to communicate with the island he was obliged to communicate direct with the *civitates*: there was no higher official with whom he could correspond. But the administration had not been expelled from Bruttium. Why then did Honorius not write to the governor? Why did he write to the cities individually? The governor was known as the *corrector Lucaniae et Bruttiorum*. If we accept Gothofredus' reading we shall have to explain why the Emperor wrote to one part of the corrector's province but not to the other. Did the enemy who threatened Bruttium form no menace to Lucania?

In discussions of this question scholars have not adequately stressed the fact that Zosimus' statement about the letters of Honorius to Britain is supported in a strange way by another author, an author who is wholly independent of Zosimus and of

⁹ See the references in *PLRE* II, p. 539 f.

¹⁰ Zosimus 6. 7. 5 f., 8. 3 and 12; Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* 9. 8. 3 f., 7 f., who both drew on Olympiodorus. See p. 451 below.

Zosimus' source, Olympiodorus of Thebes, and therefore represents a completely different tradition. This author is Gildas, who tells us how the Romans at approximately this time, that is to say, some time after the fall of Magnus Maximus in 388 – Gildas' chronology is notoriously imprecise –, instructed the Britons to undertake their own defence: they could expect no more help to come to them from Rome.¹¹ It is impossible to believe that Gildas wrote this passage by coincidence or that he invented by sheer accident a message from the Roman government to the Britons which Honorius as a matter of fact did send to them. Indeed, that two writers, Gildas and Zosimus, living at opposite ends of the earth, should have independently invented this one incident, that one of those writers (or his scribes) should have done so by mistake – by misreading 'Bruttium' as 'Britain' – and that both authors should have given this incident approximately the same date and the same historical context, is out of the question. What Gildas reports is a tradition which survived in Britain itself. I believe that it goes a long way towards confirming the reading of Zosimus' manuscript in 6. 10. 2, and virtually proves that that reading must be retained.

II. THE DATE OF THE LETTERS

If we agree, then, that Honorius wrote to the cities of Britain, can we make the chronology more precise? If we can do so, we shall be better able to understand the plight in which Honorius found himself. Zosimus begins his narrative of the events of A.D. 409 at Book 5. 42. 3, where he tells us that Honorius at Ravenna entered upon his ninth consulship with Theodosius, who was holding the office for the third time, as his colleague. At the end of Book five the historian has brought his narrative of the events of 409 down to the point where Alaric's moderate demands were rejected by Honorius' ministers. At the opening of Book six, therefore, Alaric begins his second march on Rome with a view to resuming the siege of the previous year, 408. Leaving him on the march Zosimus now turns to discuss the career of the usurper Constantine, whose envoy Jovius was negotiating with Honorius.¹² But the historian feels that he has not described events in Gaul as adequately or in as much detail as he ought to have done. He therefore gives us a flash-back: 'When Arcadius was still reigning' [he had died on 1 May 408], the consuls being Honorius for the seventh time and Theodosius for the second [i.e. A.D. 407], the troops in Britain rebelled and elevated Marcus to the throne', 6. 2. 1. (This electrifying display of chronological precision is in fact misleading, as one might expect when dealing with Zosimus. We know that his source, Olympiodorus of Thebes, declared explicitly that Marcus was elevated *before* Honorius entered on his seventh consulship.)¹³ The flash-back continues until the end of chapter five, and then at the beginning of chapter six Zosimus returns to Alaric in Italy, still where we left him on the march to Rome late in the year 409. The *retour en arrière* accordingly covers the years 407, 408, and much of 409; and the last

¹¹ Gildas, *De Excidio* 18, p. 34. 19 ff., Mommsen; p. 94, Winterbottom. E. A. Freeman, *Western Europe in the Fifth Century* (London, 1904), p. 152 f., saw something of the connexion between Zosimus and Gildas here.

¹² Students of the Roman army in Britain should note for what it is worth – and it is the tendentious remark of a slippery diplomat, reported by an unreliable historian – Jovius' statement implying that there were still Roman troops in Britain even when Constantine had crossed to Gaul: Zosimus 6. 1. 2.

¹³ Olympiodorus, frg. 12. That Zosimus is mistaken here was pointed out by Freeman, *op. cit.* 45 n. *, and by Norman H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), p. 339. These two passages ought to have been cited in *Britannia* 8 (1977), 304 n. 1.

event reported in it is the rebellion of the Britons and, imitating them, the Armoricans. Since Alaric's march on Rome and the second siege of the City certainly took place late in 409, these revolts in the far north-west of the Roman Empire can be dated beyond all reasonable doubt to the summer or autumn of 409.¹⁴ So far the chronology is fairly clear.

Unfortunately, Zosimus does not tell us formally and explicitly at what point his narrative passes from the events of 409 and begins on those of 410, though this is a matter to which we shall return (p. 451 below). As we have seen, he marks the beginning of 409 with extreme clarity, but he does not mark the beginning of 410 similarly. And yet Bury is somewhat too pessimistic when he writes, 'the chronology of the events between spring 409 and August 410 cannot be determined with any precision'.¹⁵ There are one or two relatively fixed points within that period.

Zosimus' narrative does not reach the fall of Rome on 24 August 410 but stops short a little while before that terrible event. His last surviving chapter deals with the actions of the barbarian Sarus which, as we know from Sozomen,¹⁶ caused Alaric in fear and anger to march instantly on Rome for the third and final siege, which ended successfully when he entered the City on 24 August. The last chapter of Zosimus, then, narrates events which happened beyond reasonable doubt in July, perhaps late July or even the first days of August, 410. That is to say, the narrative of Book six (exclusive of the digression in chapters two to five) covers the period from the last months of 409 to July 410. Our problem is to decide the date of the events narrated in chapter ten, the chapter in which Zosimus mentions the letters of Honorius. Between the reference to Britain in chapter ten and the narrative about Sarus in chapter thirteen the historian tells how the embargo on exports from Africa, imposed by Heraclian, caused a famine in Rome (chapter eleven), how Attalus visited Rome, and how he was deposed by Alaric at Ariminum (chapter twelve).¹⁷ It is impossible to be precise as we do not know when or in what circumstances Attalus moved from Rome to Ariminum, but the events which culminated in this journey and his deposition will hardly have filled more than a month. I would guess, therefore – but it is no more than a guess –, that the events of chapter ten took place about the month of June.

Let us approach the question from the other direction, that is to say, from the events recorded by Zosimus which *precede* the despatch of the letters. I said that the historian does not formally mark in his narrative the end of the year 409 and the beginning of 410. But there is a passage where he undoubtedly does so incidentally.¹⁸ In 6. 7. 4, having just mentioned the elevation of Priscus Attalus at Rome and his appointment of his senior ministers, Zosimus remarks that the inhabitants of the capital (apart from

¹⁴ It is not clear to me why Stephen Johnson, *Later Roman Britain* (London, 1980), p. 105 f., puts them in 408. If that were correct, it would follow that Zosimus has omitted from his *Rückblick* all the events that occurred in 409.

¹⁵ J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* 1 (London, 1923), p. 183 n. 2.

¹⁶ Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* 9. 9. 3 f., cf. Philostorgius, *Hist. Eccles.* 12. 3 (p. 142, ed. Bidez), Zosimus 6. 13. 2. Olympiodorus admired the courage of Sarus: see his frs. 3 and 17.

¹⁷ At the beginning of Chapter thirteen Zosimus makes an abortive attempt to leave the affairs of Italy and to narrate events in Gaul, where Constantine elevated his son Constans from the rank of Caesar to that of Augustus. But after no more than three lines of the printed text he abruptly, arbitrarily, and characteristically grows weary of Gaul and returns to Italy, Alaric, and Sarus. But no doubt in his own incompetent way he was following Olympiodorus, for it was Olympiodorus' practice to add to his account of Italian affairs digressions on events in Gaul and Spain: see J. F. Matthews, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes and the History of the West (A.D. 407–425)', *JRS* 60 (1970), 79–97, at 82, 87.

¹⁸ So, e.g., F. Paschoud, *Cinq études sur Zosime* (Paris, 1975), p. 180 n. 5; cf. J. F. Matthews, art. cit., 87.

the Anician family) were overjoyed at the appointment of men who were good administrators and that they were particularly pleased at the consulate given to Tertullus. Now, Tertullus was recognized in the West (though not certainly in the East) as the consul of 410.¹⁹ He doubtless took office on 1 January, and this passage has suggested to several scholars that the date of his appointment was the last days of 409.²⁰ If so, it is relevant to ask what events intervened between the elevation of Attalus in the last days of 409 and the writing of Honorius' letters to the British cities.

The first recorded action of the usurper's reign after the appointment of his officials was the despatch of his first expeditionary force to Africa. The expedition will hardly have sailed until navigation opened in March. While the outcome of this action was still unknown, Attalus marched to Ravenna.²¹ Honorius was terrified and offered to share his empire with the usurper. He even planned to flee to the East, but changed his mind when 4,000 Eastern soldiers arrived in Ravenna. The outcome of events in Africa was still unknown. Strengthened by his Eastern reinforcements, the Emperor decided that, if it should turn out that Heraclian had defeated the invading force, he would himself attack Attalus and Alaric.²² But he did not do so when the news at last came through that Attalus' force in Africa had in fact been defeated. The usurper thereupon sent out his second expedition to Africa. It included no barbarians,²³ and so Alaric lost confidence in his puppet. Then came the news of the defeat of the second African expedition,²⁴ followed by Alaric's activities in Aemilia and Liguria, and the sending of the letters.

At first sight it might seem impossible to assign dates to any of these events, but fortunately we appear to have one fixed point: news reached Ravenna before the end of June that the troubles in Africa were over, for on 25 June 410 Honorius remitted the African taxes as a reward for the inhabitants' loyalty.²⁵ Presumably Honorius had to study the reports from Africa and estimate the damage done there by the fighting, and only then could he form the decision to remit taxes before he eventually published his remission. It follows that the events narrated in Zosimus, vi. 8, probably took place about May. And so, once again, it would seem that June could well be the date of Honorius' letters. Whether we work backwards from Sarus in chapter thirteen or forwards from the appointment of Tertullus in chapter seven we seem to reach the month of June. It is obvious that there is plenty of room for error in these calculations, but we may at least conclude that it would not be inconsistent with the evidence to suppose that Honorius wrote to the British cities in June, though May and even early July are not impossible. It is absolutely certain that we know of no reason why he should have written to the cities of Bruttium at that date or at any other date in the vicinity of June 410.

It is worth noting incidentally that we can fix approximately the date of Attalus' deposition. Bury and Schmidt remark simply that the deposition must have been later

¹⁹ On Tertullus see *PLRE* II, p. 1059, s.v. 'Tertullus i'; cf. p. 1149, s.v. 'Varanes i'.

²⁰ E. Stein, *Histoire du bas-empire* I (Paris, 1959), p. 258, dates the elevation of Attalus to 'novembre 409 environ', though I would prefer to follow L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme: die Ostgermanen* (reprinted Munich, 1969), p. 445, 'Ende 409', or Demougeot, op. cit., 449, 'sans doute en décembre 409'.

²¹ Zosimus 6. 7. 5-6.

²² *idem* 6. 8. On the Eastern troops who came to help Honorius on this occasion see A. H. M. Jones, *Later Roman Empire, A.D. 284-602* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1964), p. 682.

²³ Zosimus 6. 9. 2.

²⁴ *idem* 6. 9. 3.

²⁵ *Cod. Theodos.* 9. 28. 6.

than the beginning of April, for it was not known at Constantinople on 24 April.²⁶ But Zosimus narrates it almost immediately before he turns to describe those activities of Sarus which caused Alaric's final march on Rome. We have seen that these activities occurred during the month of July or early August, and so the deposition of the usurper may safely be dated to July, since no one doubts that in this part of his work Zosimus is reporting events in chronological order. What clinches this argument, I think, is a law of 6 August 410 preserved in the Theodosian Code in which Honorius grants an amnesty to criminals 'now that the State has been freed from the outrage of usurpation'. This law is addressed to a certain Palladius, the proconsul of Africa, and shows the government restoring normal life after the deposition of Attalus.²⁷

III. THE ITALIAN CONTEXT

Throughout the entire reign of Honorius (395–423) the Britons could not have found a more unfortunate time at which to expect military help from Ravenna (if that is what they did). We have seen that the Imperial letters were probably sent in or about June of that year. This was a time when the outcome of the African campaign was still unknown, and it may have seemed not impossible that the government in Italy would be faced with the loss of Africa. Alaric had not yet lost confidence in his puppet, Attalus; and indeed Attalus was marching or was about to march on Ravenna itself. The Emperor is explicitly said to have been terrified, and he was in no way cheered up by the threats of the Praetorian Prefect, Jovius, to depose him and not merely exile him to an island but actually to mutilate his body.²⁸ Nor was he exhilarated by the sight of his loyal and powerful minister, Eusebius, *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, being clubbed to death before his very eyes.²⁹ This brutal murder had been organized by Allobichus, *magister equitum*, who was already suspected of treachery. Shortly after the murder of Eusebius, Honorius in his turn managed to arrange the murder of Allobichus.³⁰ His court was riddled with treachery. At this very time Alaric and Attalus, though they failed to take Bologna, were masters of northern Italy. It would not be too much to say that Honorius' back was to the wall. If someone had asked him in these early summer months of 410 what were his chances of continuing to reign for another thirteen years (as in fact he did), his reply might have shown some lack of optimism.

²⁶ Bury op. cit. I, 183 n. 2, following Schmidt, op. cit., 446 n. 4, points out that in *Cod. Theodos.* 7. 16. 2 (of 24 April), the words *tyrannici furoris et barbaricae feritatis* refer to Attalus and Alaric. For the reason stated in the text I would prefer to follow *PLRE* II, p. 181, s.v. 'Priscus Attalus 2', in dating the deposition to 'summer 410', or, better still, Schmidt, op. cit., 447, who dates it to July 410. Stein, op. cit. I, 259, also dates the deposition to 'juillet 410 environ': cf. Demougeot op. cit., 462. But deserters from Attalus were coming over to Honorius as early as February: *Cod. Theodos.* 9. 38. 11.

²⁷ *Cod. Theodos.* 9. 38. 12. On this Palladius see *PLRE* II, p. 819, s.v. 'Palladius 2'.

²⁸ Zosimus 6. 8. 1. Notice Honorius' changes of mood in these weeks. From terror he passes to a rather over-confident plan to attack Alaric (Zosimus 6. 8. 3), but fails – perhaps wisely – to carry it out. (I say 'perhaps wisely' because in 409 he had sent 6,000 crack troops from Dalmatia against Alaric with the result that they were all but annihilated.) We next find that when money reaches him from Heraclian he is in a state of euphoria (*ibid.* 10. 2). We have no such psychological touches in our descriptions (such as they are) of the other fifth-century emperors; and they make us realize more than ever the catastrophe we have suffered in losing the work of Olympiodorus. For his powers of characterization note especially his pen-portrait of Constantius (later Constantius III) in frg. 23.

²⁹ Olympiodorus, frg. 13.

³⁰ *idem*, frg. 14, cf. Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* 9. 12. 5.

IV. THE SAXON INVASION OF 409

What was the British context of the letters? An attempt was made in *Britannia* 8 (1977), 303–18, to interpret in outline the sources for British history in the years 406–10. It is not in dispute that Constantine and his army left the island in 407 – I believe, in or after May of that year. But there is some doubt about the chronology of what happened next. In either 408 or 409 came an incursion of the Saxons. Evidence for this incursion may be found in an entry in the *Gallic Chronicle of A.D. 452*, 62 (*Chronica Minora* 1, p. 654), *Britanniae Saxonum incursione devastatae*. The chronology of this chronicle as a whole is a matter of some obscurity. The incursion is placed in Olympiad 297, i.e. the four-year period beginning with A.D. 409.³¹ But the murder of Stilicho, which was perpetrated on 22 August 408, is dated to the first year of this Olympiad, 409; and the fall of Rome, which the Goths entered on 24 August 410, is placed in the third year of this Olympiad, i.e. 411. That is to say, both these events – both the murder of Stilicho and the fall of Rome – are dated one year too late. Between these two events the writer mentions the Saxon incursion into Britain, placing it, like the fall of Rome, in the third year of the Olympiad, 411. At first sight the chronicler seems to confirm this date by putting the incursion in the XVI regnal year of Honorius, i.e. 411 (counting from 396, not 395).³² This suggests that the incursion, like the fall of the City, ought to be placed in 410. But the chronological methods of this writer deserve more study than they have received,³³ and they are certainly too complex to be elucidated simply by ante-dating each of the entries by one year. The weakness of the chronicler's dating may be judged from the fact that he places the death of Radagaisus (which occurred on 23 August 406) in the same year as the death of the Emperor Arcadius, which came about on 1 May 408, though it must be admitted that that error is well below his normal standard of accuracy, which is not despicable.

Some day perhaps scholars will find a more exact method of interpreting the data of the *Gallic Chronicle of A.D. 452*. In the meantime, our best course is to discard its Olympiad and regnal dates alike; they are incorrect on any showing. In his very next entry following that concerning the Saxon incursion into Britain, but still in the third year of the Olympiad, the chronicler mentions that the Vandals and Alans were still devastating Gaul, which we know that they left in the autumn of 409.³⁴ In the following entry he speaks of the barbarians, whom he now strangely refers to as the 'Suevi', as ravaging Spain and then goes on to mention the fall of Rome.³⁵ In this one Olympiad, therefore, A.D. 409–12, he places the death of Stilicho (which occurred in August 408), the devastation of a part of Gaul by the Vandals and Alans (before autumn 409), the occupation of a part of Spain by the Suevi (after autumn 409), the fall of Rome to the Visigoths (August 410), and finally the death of the usurper Constantine (September 411). So the events which he lists and which can be securely dated do indeed fall within a period of four years, but these four years do not coincide

³¹ For a convenient method of converting Olympiad dates into the corresponding years of the Christian era see C. Courtois, *Byzantion* 21 (1951), 31. The magic formula for this transmutation is: $(x-1)4 - (776-1)$, where x is the number of the Olympiad.

³² See Mommsen, *Chron. Min.*, 1, 618 *ad fin.*

³³ A good start in coming to grips with this work has been made by M. Miller, 'The Last British Entry in the "Gallic Chronicle"', *Britannia* 9 (1978), 315–18, and P. J. Casey, 'Magnus Maximus in Britain: A Re-Appraisal', *The End of Roman Britain*, ed. P. J. Casey, BAR British Series No. 71 (1979), 66–79.

³⁴ *Chron. Gall. a. CCCCLII*, 63 (i, 654). For the date of the entry of the invaders into Spain see Hydatius, 42 (ii, 17).

³⁵ *Chron. Gall. a. CCCCLII*, 64.

exactly with the four years of Olympiad 297. On the other hand, so far as we can tell, the chronicler has placed all these events in their correct chronological order relatively to one another; and this fact suggests our best method of proceeding. The Saxon incursion into Britain is placed between the murder of Stilicho, which we know to have been perpetrated in August 408, and the devastation of Gaul by the Vandals and Alans, which ended when the marauders crossed the Pyrenees into Spain in September or October 409. If the events are indeed in the correct relative order – and we have no reason to doubt that they are –, the Saxon incursion fell either late in 408 or in the first three quarters of 409.

It is unfortunate that we cannot date the lynching of John, Count of Africa, which the chronicler records *inter alia* between the death of Stilicho and the Saxon incursion. If we could date that event, we could narrow somewhat the period within which the incursion probably took place. But John's murder seems to be an insoluble mystery. Zosimus 5. 37. 6 explicitly records that Bathanarius, who had been Count of Africa since at least 401, was directly replaced in 408 by Heraclian, who was in this office when he supported Honorius so effectively against Attalus throughout 409 and 410. We can fit in John's tenure of the post only if we ascribe a crass mistake to Zosimus and suppose that John held the office for a short period between Bathanarius and Heraclian. But it is illegitimate to ascribe a blunder even to so poor an historian as Zosimus merely because he does not tell us what we think (without evidence) that he ought to have told us.³⁶

For the year 409 as the date of the defeat of the Saxon incursion there is another source of information. We have seen that Zosimus interrupts his narrative of Alaric's march on Rome in late 409 in order to give a résumé of events in Gaul and Spain from 407 to 409 (p. 449 above). At the very end of this résumé, and therefore in reference to 409, the historian speaks of Britain. He tells us that the barbarians beyond the Rhine forced the Britons and some of the peoples of Gaul to revolt, to secede from the Roman Empire, and to live in independence.³⁷ Having stated this fact in general terms he goes on to explain it and to give a more specific description of what happened.³⁸ The Britons took up arms, he says, faced danger on their own account, and freed the *poleis* from the barbarians who were attacking them. The actions of the Britons, he goes on, included the expulsion of the Roman officials and the establishment of a sovereign constitution.³⁹ No doubt the highest strata of the Imperial administrators in Britain, both civil and military, in so far as they still survived, were now thrown out. With this revolt we must date the end of the Roman occupation of Britain, though Zosimus does not say that. Freeman quaintly phrased it, 'Terminus had withdrawn within the lands on his own side of the stream of Ocean'.⁴⁰ But what concerns us is that, according to this account, the Saxon incursion was defeated in 409. We do not know whether it had begun in 409 or whether the Saxons had over-wintered in the island in 408–9.

³⁶ For an attempt to explain how the chronicler's mistake about this John, if it is a mistake, might have arisen, see *PLRE* II, p. 594, s.v. 'Joannes 5'.

³⁷ Zosimus 6. 5. 2. I cannot think of any reason that would justify Stephen Johnson, *op. cit.* (in n. 14), 109 *fin.*, in asserting that 'Britain declared her independence from Rome in 406' or that 'the necessity of dissociating themselves from Rome's rule may have been as clear for the Britons in 406 as Zosimus says it was in 408 (sic), and may have resulted therefore in the choice of Marcus as British Emperor'. The only indication that we have of the Britons' motives in 406–7 is given by Sozomen, *HE* 9. 11. 2, of which a translation will be found in *Britannia* 8 (1977), 318.

³⁸ Zosimus 6. 5. 3.

³⁹ *Britannia* 8 (1977), 310 f.

⁴⁰ Freeman, *op. cit.* (in n. 11 above), 148.

V. THE REBELLION OF 409

It will be worth our while to linger over this passage in which Zosimus tells us of the end of the Saxon incursion. When Zosimus speaks here of 'the barbarians from beyond the Rhine', he is confusing the Saxons with the barbarians who were devastating Gaul at that time, the Vandals and their associates. But that is a small matter, a very pardonable offence in comparison with what Zosimus is capable of when he is at the top of his form and the height of his powers. On the other hand, Zosimus is not so bad an historian that we must discard *all* his statements, though scholars sometimes write as though that were the case. A startling example of what some readers are prepared to do with his words can be found in the very passage under discussion (6. 5. 2 f.), where he tells us that the Armoricans and other Gauls, imitating the Britons in 409, expelled the Roman officials and began to live in independence. The inescapable inference from his words is that the Britons seceded from the Roman Empire, lived in independence, and no longer submitted to the rule of Roman law. The Armoricans, too, expelled the Roman officials and set up a state of their own. Yet I do not know how many scholars maintain that the Britons did nothing of the sort. What they did (so we are told) was to expel, *not* the officials of the Romans (which is what Zosimus says that they did), but the officials of the usurper Constantine. These scholars go on to assert (as Zosimus does not) that the Britons then returned to their allegiance to Honorius and accepted *his* officials, having never even dreamed of such a wicked action as secession from the Roman Empire. The revolt, it is held, was the work of a party of legitimists who aimed at nothing more heinous than to restore the lawful officials of Honorius. But none of those who swallow these fictions is audacious enough to go on to maintain that the Armoricans, too, rebelled in order to return to their allegiance to Honorius. If that were the case, Armorican history in the following decade would present something of a problem to the historian!

But let us admit – since all things are possible – that scholars are right to take up such a position. What they allege may be exactly what the Britons did in 409. The trouble is that there is no evidence to support such an opinion. It is certainly not what Zosimus tells us. Of Constantine, Honorius, and a return to allegiance Zosimus in this passage says not a syllable. There is no hint in his words of a return to allegiance to Honorius or to any other Roman emperor or usurper. The procedure of practically all recent writers on the matter involves ascribing views to Zosimus which Zosimus does not express. It amounts to a re-writing of what he tells us. Zosimus' sins are many: you need look no further than the harsh judgement of his editor, Mendelssohn, on p. xlviii of his edition. But Zosimus has done nothing to deserve the treatment which scholars deal out to him on this matter of the British revolt of 409. Indeed, there is a strong indication in the history of the times that the Britons did precisely what Zosimus here says that they did; for when Honorius came to write to Britain in 410, the year after the revolt, there was no high official in the island, no *vicarius*, no *Comes Britanniarum*, to whom he could address his letters. The letters were addressed to the *poleis*, the *civitates*. But if the Britons had just displayed their loyalty to Honorius and if Honorius was in no position to send military forces to Britain at the time, why had he not at least appointed provincial governors and a *vicarius* to rule over his loyal subjects? One might have expected that, if the Britons had proclaimed their allegiance to him, he would have responded by re-incorporating them in his empire. I believe that he did not do so because he could not do so. The Britons would not allow him to do so. They were subject neither to him nor to Constantine. They had done what Zosimus says that they had done: they had thrown the Roman administration out of their island.

Let us make the unpopular assumption, then, that Zosimus meant what he said and that on at least this occasion he knew what he was talking about. Let us assume that the Britons seceded from the Empire. It still remains the case that in spite of the forcible expulsion of the Roman administration, civil and military, by the Britons in 409, it was Britons in 410 who may have appealed to Honorius for military help. Or if Britons had not appealed to the Emperor for help in 410 and if Honorius' letter was not a rescript, there were certainly Britons to whom Honorius thought it worth his while to write – men who would have some interest in what he said and in what attitude he had taken up towards the defence of British *civitates*. Is there a contradiction here or a paradox? If the Britons had thrown out his administration in 409, why did he think that in 410 they would be interested in his opinions on the defence of their cities? In fact, there is no contradiction and no paradox. The Britons who successfully rebelled in 409 were not necessarily identical with the Britons who may have appealed for help to Ravenna in 410 or who in any case were interested in the Emperor's attitude towards their own defence of the cities. When Zosimus says that 'the Britons' rebelled it goes without saying that he may well have meant that 'some of the Britons' rebelled, not that all of them did so. Now, this is not at all ascribing a mistake to Zosimus in the same way or on the same scale as those scholars do whom I criticized above, those who declare that when the historian says that the Britons rebelled against Rome, what he meant was that the Britons did not really rebel against Rome but simply transferred their allegiance from Constantine to Honorius. The two assumptions are not at all comparable. The latter assumption entails a basic alteration of the historian's meaning, whereas the former ascribes to the historian a minor looseness of expression such as we ourselves are guilty of when we say, for example, that 'the Americans' revolted from the British Empire in 1776, when in fact we mean that about one third of the colonists rose. A unanimous rebellion, whether in 409 or in 1642 or in 1776 or in 1916, is an unlikely phenomenon. Those who rejected Roman law (as Zosimus says that they did), expelled the Roman administration, and set up an independent state, must have consisted of the dissatisfied and oppressed elements of the population: had they not been dissatisfied and had they not felt themselves to be oppressed they would not have rebelled. Armed rebellion against the professional armed forces of the State is not to be undertaken lightly. But when Rutilius Namatianus describes the society of the Armoricans at a later stage of the revolt (in 417) – those very same Armoricans who had 'imitated' the Britons – he adds a point of capital interest. He implies not only that the rebels there had done away with Roman law (as Zosimus, too, says that they had done) but also that the slaves there had enslaved their own masters.⁴¹ That is to say, the Armorican revolt had a very decided social character. It was carried out in part by the slaves. It was not a movement aiming simply at political freedom: it included a re-distribution of landed property. In addition, it was an imitation of what had happened in Britain.

The late Professor A. H. M. Jones in an uncharacteristic passage argued that the Britons and Armoricans alike expelled the Roman magistrates and set up governments of their own choice, and to that extent the Armoricans 'imitated' the Britons. But (he goes on) there was a sequel in Armorica. The Armoricans alone – without the Britons and no longer imitating them – went on to stage a rising of the *coloni* and slaves

⁴¹ Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu Suo* 1, 213–6. The word *oras* there does not necessarily imply that only the coastal regions of Armorica were being suppressed by Exuperantius. For the date of the *De Reditu Suo* see Alan Cameron, 'Rutilius Namatianus, St Augustine, and the Date of the *De Reditu*', *JRS* 57 (1967), 31–9.

against their landlords and owners.⁴² According to this theory, therefore, there was a radical difference between the two revolts: the Britons aimed at political freedom alone, whereas the Armoricans aimed not only at political freedom but also at a re-distribution of the land. But if that is what happened, it is not easy to see why Zosimus says that the Armoricans 'imitated' the Britons. He distinctly implies that the revolts in the two places were of the same general character. But if there was in the one case an ordinary, commonplace political revolt and in the other an almost unique social revolution, Zosimus would hardly be likely to call one an imitation of the other. It is improbable that even he would have believed that black is an imitation of white or that chalk is a replica of cheese.

In any event, it is inconceivable that such a revolt as Zosimus describes would have been carried out by the large landowners, the magnates, as has recently been suggested in words of Delphic obscurity.⁴³ It is true that British landowners might well have rebelled. They might well have set up an emperor of their own in opposition to Constantine and Honorius alike. But it is incredible that they would have seceded from the Roman Empire and that they would have abolished the use of Roman law. Such men had everything to lose and nothing to gain by leaving the Empire. The very idea of leaving it would never have occurred to them. But it would be downright absurd to suppose that the large landowners would have initiated a movement that aimed at a re-distribution of the land!

I have used the phrase 'an ordinary, commonplace political revolt'. But we must be careful in the use of such terms. A revolt of provincials aimed simply and solely at winning political freedom as such from the Western Roman Empire was impossible and even inconceivable in the fifth century A.D. It has been suggested elsewhere that men at that date did not feel themselves to be Gauls or Britons or Spaniards or the like.⁴⁴ They felt themselves to be Romans or freemen or Christians or Catholics or the like as against barbarians or slaves or pagans or heretics, and so on. There was no national feeling in the various provinces. The idea of nationality did not exist. There was no sense of provincial loyalty or unity. The provincial boundaries were imposed upon the natives from above. A man was not committed emotionally to his province. That is why there was no such thing as provincial history. There was no demand for the history of any one province except perhaps from an occasional freak. As a matter of fact, we have a nice illustration of these matters in a letter of Symmachus (*Ep.* 4. 18): a certain Protadius, evidently a freak, had written to Symmachus to ask for 'ancient histories of the Gauls', *priscas Gallorum memorias*. Symmachus cannot suggest any history of Gaul which Protadius might read – for the good reason that none existed; and it does not seem to have occurred to him that such a thing *could* exist. Instead, he recommends his correspondent to read the later books of Livy (those dealing with Julius Caesar), the *ephemeris* of Caesar himself, and the elder Pliny's *Bella Germanica*. Did it occur to Symmachus that these books, if Protadius had read them, would give him the Roman and not the Gallic point of view on the events? Did it

⁴² Jones, *op. cit.*, 187, cf. 1023. For a possibly even more exotic opinion see A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 73, who, appealing to Zosimus 6. 5. 3 remarks that 'Celtic self-awareness may be traced in the popular rebellions of the fifth century, especially in Armorica'.

⁴³ J. P. C. Kent, 'The End of Roman Britain: The Literary and Numismatic Evidence Reviewed', *apud* P. J. Casey, *op. cit.*, (in n. 33 above), 15–27, at 18, writes, 'They were imitated by the Armoricans and others. So there is no question here of Bagaude, but of magnates'. If that word 'so' means 'therefore' – and even if it does not – I find the connexion of thought in this quotation incomprehensible.

⁴⁴ *Britannia* 10 (1979), 208 f.

even occur to him that two attitudes on such events were possible? Of course not. And with no collective national consciousness in any of the Western provinces, there could be no movement of national liberation from Rome. There could be a revolt which aimed at supplanting the reigning emperor by some local worthy (like Gratian, the *municeps*, in 407) or by some army malcontent (like Magnus Maximus in 383); but a purely political movement of secession, a movement of Home Rule, as it were, was out of the question. It would be wholly wrong to speak of 'a nationalist revolution' in Britain in 409. The only possible movement involving secession was one in which the objective of political freedom was combined with a movement to overthrow Roman society as such. That was a rare event in Imperial history, but it is what our sources of information record as happening in Armorica in 409–17 in imitation of what had happened in Britain. The slaves enslaved their masters, the landowners; they abandoned the use of Roman law and put in its place some other kind of law, and they drove out the Imperial officials and judges. The revolt of 409 cannot possibly have been a revolt of the united Britons. The events of 409 in Armorica and in Britain are only intelligible if we consider *all* the evidence – the evidence of Rutilius Namatianus as well as that of Zosimus. The rebellion in both areas alike was a movement of social reform, not of political independence alone. There is no trace of nationalism here, still less of 'Celtic self-awareness' (n. 42 above).

This does not mean that there was no such thing as patriotism in the Dark Ages. For evidence of such a feeling we need go no further than Carmarthen Museum, where lies the tombstone of Paulinus, who is described as *patrie amator* (= *patriae amator*). It would be of more than ordinary interest to know what Paulinus understood to be his *patria*. Since the stone dates from about the year 550, no one will believe that Paulinus wanted to be remembered as a lover of the diocese of Britannia, a term which he might well have had some difficulty in understanding. Nor did he wish himself to be thought of as a Welshman, for that concept had not yet come into existence. He was probably referring to no more than his own locality, the tiny district of what is now Wales where he had been born and brought up – perhaps the kingdom in which he lived, though Gildas' description of the squalid rulers of the western kingdoms about the middle of the sixth century hardly suggests that they inspired much patriotic feeling. Whether Paulinus would have called himself a Roman I do not know.⁴⁵

I conclude that those Britons who remained loyal to the Emperor will have included the threatened landowners and that it was doubtless they and their supporters, dependants, hangers-on, dupes, lackeys, flunkies, and so forth, who would now undertake the defence of the cities and who appealed to Honorius for help (if indeed there was an appeal). If they appealed to him for help against the rebels, they wanted him to send someone who would do for them what Exuperantius was to do in 417 for the Armorican landowners, that is, someone who would free the enslaved landowners, restore to them their estates, and bring back Roman law and Imperial rule.⁴⁶ But no Exuperantius ever came to Britain and so presumably the landowners with the Emperor's blessing undertook their own defence. At all events, some eight years elapsed after the outbreak in Armorica in 409 before the central government was in a position to send forces to the far north-west of Gaul to recover the lost provinces. But they never had the strength to make a similar attempt in Britain.

It is essential to observe that Roman power in Britain collapsed before any

⁴⁵ V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 107, no. 139.

⁴⁶ Rutilius Namatianus, 213–16.

substantial part of the island, so far as we know, was permanently conquered by invading barbarians. True, archaeologists have suggested that even before the close of the fourth century there were extensive settlements of Saxons in Britain, whether *laeti* or *federates* or the like. That may be, but I incline to accept the position of S. Johnson, who writes, 'the Saxons were treated with such distrust and unscrupulousness that no emperor would have dared settle them within the empire. Unless the sources fall into the error of failing to distinguish one Germanic tribe from another, there is no literary record of their settlement anywhere in the Roman world, at least in the fourth century'.⁴⁷

It would be a mistake, for example, to think that the Saxon Shore defences were so called because Saxons were settled in and around them so as to defend the coast from sea-raiders of other peoples or of other Saxons: the forts were given this name because their purpose was to keep out the Saxon raiders.⁴⁸ Roman Imperial power in Britain was overthrown, not by barbarians, but by the Britons themselves or at any rate by some of them; and the Imperial administration was eliminated so effectively that when Honorius thought it necessary to write to Britain, as we have seen, there was no high civilian or military official in the island to whom he could address his letters. He was obliged to send them direct to the *civitates*.

VI. ROMAN AUTHORS AND BRITAIN AFTER A.D. 410

The narrative of the ecclesiastical historian Sozomen is disappointing. His source of information in most of his ninth book is Olympiodorus. Like Zosimus, Sozomen, too, includes a résumé of events in the Gallic Prefecture; but his procedure is somewhat different from that of Zosimus (p. 449 above). He sets out the history of Italy in one unbroken narrative down to and including the capture of Rome in 410. Then at 9. 11. 1 he turns back to the tyrants of the far West and immediately specifies Marcus, Gratian, and Constantine in Britain. He devotes the rest of his book to the affairs of the Gallic Prefecture. He does not tell his readers the history of Italy after 410 except for two or three sentences in which he catalogues the deaths of Constantine and his son Julian, and of Jovian and Maximus and Sarus (9. 15. 3); and he adds a few words on the career and death of Constantine III (9. 16. 2). He had already given a vivid account of the death of Gerontius and his wife (9. 13. 5 f.). In fact, after the end of his narrative in 410 he merely gives us a number of obituary notices.

But this procedure was not satisfactory. Sozomen could not bring the narrative of Italian history down to 410 intelligibly without making any reference to the usurpation of Constantine; and so he is obliged to mention at 9. 4. 6 that there was a usurper at Arles called Constantine, though he gives no indication that this usurper was identical with the Constantine who, seven chapters later, rebels in Britain. Robert Hussey, who published his useful edition of Sozomen at Oxford in 1860, accordingly listed in his index (vol. II, p. 940) an otherwise unknown usurper, Constantine, at Arles who was a different person from the British Constantine!

It can hardly be a coincidence that Zosimus also begins his *Rückblick* with the proclamation of Marcus, Gratian, and Constantine (p. 449 above). In fact, it is clear

⁴⁷ Stephen Johnson, 'Channel Commands in the Notitia', *apud* R. Goodburn and P. Bartholomew, *Aspects of the Notitia Dignitatum*, BAR Supplementary Series 15 (1976), 81-102, at 82, citing Amm. Marc., 27. 8. 5, 28. 2. 12, 5, 7.

⁴⁸ See J. G. F. Hind, 'Litus Saxonicum - The Meaning of the "Saxon Shore"', *apud* W. S. Hanson and L. J. F. Keppie (eds.), *Roman Frontier Studies*, BAR International Series 71 (1980), 317-24.

that at the appropriate part of his work Olympiodorus, too, must have begun a digression on Gallic history with these same proclamations. But what is lamentable from our point of view is that although Sozomen carries his narrative in some sense down to the death of Constantine III in September 411, he never again refers to Britain. So far as he is concerned, British history ended with the three usurpations of 406–7. What makes his omission doubly regrettable is that, if he had chosen to tell us some further details over and above what Zosimus tells us, we might have been able to infer the attitude of Olympiodorus himself to these events in Britain; and the judgement of so interesting an historian would undoubtedly have been of exceptional value. As it is, we know that he outlined what happened and what the objectives of the rebels were, but we do not know whether he passed any comment on them or told of any aftermath.

In the West Orosius mentions the elevation of Constantine and his departure from Britain in 407,⁴⁹ but, although he was writing in 417, he never refers to Britain again. If we were to infer from his silence that no event of major importance had happened in Britain in the period 408–17 we should illustrate very nicely the dangers of the *argumentum ex silentio*, for at least two events of far-reaching consequence occurred there in those years: (i) a Saxon invasion took place which was of such dimensions as to gain a place in the works of two fifth-century Continental authors, Olympiodorus (whence Zosimus' account) and the *Gallic Chronicle of A.D. 452*; and (ii) a revolt of the British provincials which led to the secession of the island from the Roman Empire. Did Orosius never hear of these happenings? Or did he consider them irrelevant to his theme? We know that in the 420s communications between Britain and the Continent were easy enough. It was at this time that the Pelagian missionary Agricola won his striking successes in Britain at the expense of the Catholics, who appealed to Gaul for a Catholic propagandist to come over and counteract Agricola's work.⁵⁰ Indeed, the Church on the Continent was even in touch – fairly close touch – with the Catholic communities in Ireland and was sufficiently well informed about their condition to send out in 431 the first bishop to minister to the Irish Christians.⁵¹ There is good evidence even in the 440s for communications between Britain and Europe.⁵² It is all but incredible, then, that Orosius in 417 was wholly cut off from knowledge of British affairs. It is rather the case that for some reason he felt that what he knew of events in Britain was not of importance to his theme and so could be safely omitted. Perhaps he could not score over the pagans by citing the case of Britain.

Writing about 414 St Jerome describes Britain as 'a province fertile in usurpers', *Britannia fertilis provincia tyrannorum*. Can it be that the Saint is providing here evidence to support Procopius' statement that after 410 Britain was ruled by 'tyrants'?⁵³ Had this crop of 'tyrants' made its appearance, and was its existence already known on the Continent, before Jerome wrote this letter c. 414? It seems unlikely, and we cannot safely draw any such conclusions. Consider what a number of usurpers Britain produced in the period 383–410. From the elevation of Magnus Maximus in 383 to the date when Jerome was writing Britain produced no fewer than seven usurping Augusti. Besides Magnus Maximus himself these included his son

⁴⁹ Orosius, *Hist.* 7. 40. 4.

⁵⁰ Prosper, *Chron.* 1301 (*Chron. Min.*, 1, 472), referring to the year 429.

⁵¹ *ibid.* 1307.

⁵² *Britannia* 10 (1979), 217 f. I cannot account for the fact that Salvian never mentions Britain. For a suggestion see R. P. C. Hanson, 'The Reaction of the Church to the Collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the Fifth Century', *Vigiliae Christianae* 26 (1972), 272–87, at 274, cf. 282.

⁵³ Jerome, *Ep.* 133; cf. Procopius, *Bell. Vandal.*, 3. 2. 31.

Victor, the three rebels of 406–7 (Marcus, Gratian, and Constantine) as well as Constantine's son Constans, and the son of Gerontius, Constantine's general, who was a Briton: his son was called Maximus.⁵⁴ These seven Augusti are sufficient to justify Jerome's description of Britain without calling in the help of Procopius' tyrants. Jerome, in fact, does not help us in trying to understand the period after 410. He is speaking of the years which preceded immediately the loss of the province in 409.⁵⁵

But two ancient writers were in no doubt about the importance of what had happened in Britain in 409–10. The author of the short work called *Narratio de Imperatoribus Domus Valentinianae et Theodosianae* wrote after the death of Honorius in 423 but before the death of Theodosius II in 450.⁵⁶ He groups the loss of Britain side by side with the fall of Rome to the Goths in 410, the Goths' capture of the Emperor's sister Placidia, and the devastation of Gaul and Spain by the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves among the 'grievous wounds of the Republic' suffered in the reign of Honorius: *Brittaniae* (sic) *Romano nomini in perpetuum sublatae*. All four events were on a par: they were the outstanding catastrophes of that catastrophic time. He is thinking of the years around 410. For him the loss of Britain about that date was permanent. There was no reoccupation, no recovery. The province was gone for ever.

The other writer who did not fail to see the significance of this period of British history is Procopius. He says that 'the island of Britain rebelled from the Romans and the soldiers there chose Constantine as their emperor'.⁵⁷ It is true that he is guilty of a confusion which has been far from unknown among more recent students of the subject. He has confused the revolt of 409 with the movement which led to the elevation of Constantine in 407, for the latter event could certainly not be described as a revolt 'from the Romans'.⁵⁸ Both these authors, then, were in no doubt about the meaning of events in that island at that time. This was the end of Roman rule in Britain. But it does not follow that Honorius saw the events in this way. When he wrote to the cities exhorting them to defend themselves, he was by no means renouncing the British provinces. It is wholly mistaken to suppose that in 410 the emperor Honorius resigned the government of Britain to native hands. He was not at all declaring that Britain was no longer part of the empire. He did not possess the hindsight of the author of the *Narratio* or of Procopius; and in fact his assumption that Roman rule would one day be restored was mistaken. In spite of various modern theories, there was no return of the legions. Freeman was right: in 409 Terminus did indeed withdraw within the lands on his own side of the stream of Ocean.

But many of my arguments and speculations will fall to the ground if it should turn out that Honorius wrote those letters to the cities of Bruttium and not to those of Britain. Those students of the period who hold the 'Bruttian' position are faced with the somewhat discouraging task of answering three unanswerable questions: Why did the Emperor decide to go over the head of the *corrector Lucaniae et Bruttiorum* and write to the *civitates* direct? Why did he give the cities of Bruttium the right to

⁵⁴ On Maximus see *PLRE* II, 744 f., s.n. 'Maximus 4'. It is not quite certain that he was Gerontius' son.

⁵⁵ St Augustine does not appear to have been interested in the fate of the British provinces. More credit to Olympiodorus, far away in Egypt, for finding out the facts and reporting them.

⁵⁶ The text will be found in Mommsen, *Chron. Min.*, I, 629 f. See Mommsen's remarks *ibid.* 617.

⁵⁷ Procopius, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁸ cf. *Britannia* 8 (1977), 306. For a new and interesting interpretation of Honorius' letters, though one which I cannot accept, see M. Miller, 'Stilicho's Pictish War', *Britannia* 6 (1975), 141–5, at 145 n. 20, who goes on to ask (*ibid.* n. 22), why Bede adds *tempore autumni* to Gildas' narrative. For the answer to this question see Freeman, *op. cit.* (in n. 11 above), 151 n.

defend themselves but refrain from giving this right to the cities of Lucania? Who was the enemy who so menaced Bruttium while forming no threat to Lucania? Trying to find answers to these questions is work which even Sisyphus might find uphill.

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ADDENDUM

Addendum to n. 13 above: Since these pages were written Anthony R. Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 341–44, has discussed British events in 406–7, but not, I fear, very effectively. After citing Zosimus 6. 3. 1, where Zosimus dates the invasion of Gaul and the three British usurpations with great precision to 406, Birley remarks, ‘it would be foolish to reject the evidence of Zosimus, derived from a sound historian like Olympiodorus of Thebes, in favour of a wretched chronicler’ (i.e. Prosper, who in fact is a very valuable chronicler.) The first person who was foolish enough to reject the evidence of Zosimus 6. 3. 1 was Zosimus himself, for at 6. 2. 1 f., he dates the three usurpations with equal precision to 407. Birley has failed to see that both passages alike are incorrect as they stand, a fact that will come as no shock to students of Zosimus’ sixth book. And yet both passages alike are derived from that sound historian, Olympiodorus of Thebes!

Here are three certainties. We know from Olympiodorus, frag. 12, that Marcus was elevated in 406, and from Prosper, *Chron.* 1230 (*Chron. Min.*, I, 465), that the invasion of Gaul began on 31 December 406, and from Orosius 7. 40. 4 that Gratian was elevated in Britain after the invasion of Gaul had started. If you bear these three facts in mind, you will agree, I think, that the best chronology of these events is that which is set out in *Britannia* 8 (1977), 303 f.