The Account of Perseus in Orosius: Sources and Precedents

Benjamin Garstad
Professor of Classics, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Arts and Science
MacEwan University, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
garstadb@macewan.ca

Abstract

Orosius includes a note on the hero Perseus that neglects the usually prominent features of his myth, saying little more than that Perseus led an expedition into Asia and, once victorious, named the people he conquered there Persians after himself. He is the earliest of the surviving Latin authors to say either of these things about Perseus. And he is apparently the first author to combine these pieces of information – until, that is, John Malalas, who says much the same things about Perseus not once, but twice. This paper will survey Orosius’ usual sources for possible influences, trace the development of the notions that Perseus invaded Asia and that the Persians were named for him, and explore the possibility that Orosius and Malalas might have shared a source on Perseus and the history of Assyria.

Keywords

Orosius – Perseus – John Malalas – Persians – Assyrian history

Orosius, it is recognized, was adept at manipulating the material at his disposal to support his overall thesis of the unbearable violence and suffering of the world before the Advent of Christ, but the sources he worked on are understood to be the standard histories available in his day – and often still available to us. And his acknowledged sources are almost entirely Latin works, since Orosius is one of those later authors who represent the breakdown of ancient Roman bilingualism. So, it comes as something of a surprise to find him including a note on the hero Perseus that does not correspond to the information provided by any of his known sources and consists of claims made nowhere
else in the surviving corpus of Latin literature before Orosius. He says little more than that Perseus led an expedition into Asia and gave his name to the people he conquered there. We can observe both components of Orosius’ statement developing over a lengthy period in Greek, if not Latin literature. We do not find them combined, however, as in Orosius’ early fifth-century history, until the sixth-century Chronicle of John Malalas, in which the basic elements of Orosius’ account of Perseus appear not once, but twice. The relation between these two texts will ultimately remain indeterminate, but by querying it we may come to a new appreciation of Orosius’ capacity either to accumulate abstruse sources or to cultivate the material available to him.

Up to the providentially coordinated watershed of the establishment of the Augustan Peace and the Nativity of Christ, which ends the sixth and begins the seventh and last book of his work, Orosius’ Seven Books of History against the Pagans may be fairly described as a wearying catalogue of the deadly warfare, internecine conflict, and natural disasters endemic to a world without Christianity, with polemical notes on the falsity of pagan gods and religion for good measure. It comes as no surprise, then, to find Orosius including brief accounts of the most embarrassingly unsavoury and bloody myths as history in his first book. A few recount the stories of Danaus’ plot to have his fifty daughters murder their grooms and his usurpation of his host Sthenelas, of the Egyptian king Busiris sacrificing strangers to the gods, and of the relations between Tereus, Procne, and Philomela sullied as they are by incestuous rape, the murder of a child by his own mother, and cannibalism. And in each case the historicity of these characters and the episodes associated with them was at least signaled by Jerome’s Latin translation of the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea, even if Orosius embellished these brief notices from the store of mythological knowledge all literate people in Antiquity had at their disposal.

These stories of mythological figures are followed, however, by an odd account of the career of Perseus:

1 Oros., Hist. 1.11.1–3.
2 Jer., Ab Abr. DXXX, DL, DLVIII, DCXLIV. As M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, Orose, Histoires (Contre les païens), 2nd ed. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003) 1:58, says in regard to all of the mythological accounts in Hist. 1.11, “Il n’y a pas de sources précises identifiables pour le traitement de ces anecdotes: Orose y a utilisé des connaissances mythologiques qui font partie de la culture classique.” As we shall see, the apparent unidentifiability of Orosius’ sources is particularly true of what he says about Perseus. I assume that a certain amount of searching through Ovid’s Metamorphoses and other common Latin texts would disclose the sources for the other accounts.
Isdem temporibus, Perseus a Graecia in Asiam transuectus est: ibi barbaras gentes graui diuturnoque bello domuit et nouissime victor nomen subiectae genti dedit: namque a Perseo Persae sunt uocitat.

In these same times Perseus crossed over from Greece into Asia; there he subdued the barbarian tribes in violent and protracted war and as soon as he was the victor, he gave his name to the conquered people; for, to be sure, it is from Perseus that the Persians are so called.

Orosius’ account of Perseus is odd not merely because it makes no mention of Medusa or Andromeda, but also because it seems impossible to identify Orosius’ source for it. His usual authorities say no such thing. Indeed, it appears that no Latin source preceding Orosius details Perseus leading an invasion of Asia or giving his name to the people he conquered. We may point to a late Greek source that seems to parallel what Orosius says about Perseus, but this analogue presents problems of its own. The sixth-century Chronicle of John Malalas does say, not once but twice, that Perseus led a campaign of conquest into Asia and, victorious, named the people he came to rule Persians after himself. How these statements might be related to what Orosius has to say, though, is a difficult and frustratingly indefinite problem.

1 Orosius’ Latin Sources

The authorities that Orosius usually cites or quotes or otherwise obviously exploits would seem to be the natural place to go looking for his source on Perseus. Among these authorities Tacitus, Justin’s Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus, and Jerome’s translation of the Chronicle predominate in Orosius’ first book, but none of these sources offers an account of Perseus anything like what we find in Orosius.

Twice in his first book Orosius quotes at length from the excursus on the origin and the country of the Jews with which Tacitus opens Book Five of his Histories. In the first instance he shows that Tacitus attests to the destruction of

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3 Oros., Hist. 1.11.4, ed. Arnaud-Lindet (2003) 1:59. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are the author’s own.

4 The most thorough and incisive examination of the sources employed by Orosius remains the third – and by far the longest – chapter of Theodore de Mörner’s De Orosii Vita eiusque Historiarum Libris Septem adversus Paganos (Berlin: sumptibus auctoris, 1844) 49–165.

5 Tac., Hist. 5.2–9. On Tacitus’ Jewish excursus as a whole, see C. Thiaucourt, “Ce que Tacite dit des Juifs au commencement du livre v des Histoires,” Revue des Études Juives 19 (1889)
of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the second to the Exodus, but in both he demonstrates that Tacitus’ report is deficient in comparison with the Scriptural account. It is clear, at any rate, that Orosius was familiar with this passage in the Histories, and would have known that one version of Jewish origins offered by Tacitus held that they were “descendants of the Ethiopians, whom fear and hate compelled to change their habitation in the time of Cepheus” (plerique Aethiopum prolem, quos rege Cepheo metus atque odium mutare sedis perpulerit). Cepheus, of course, has a role in the story of Perseus, but Tacitus does not take this opportunity to name Perseus, or even Cepheus’ daughter Andromeda, who provides the connection between Cepheus and Perseus. This reference to the time of Cepheus is as close as Tacitus comes to a mention of Perseus, and there is no way that it could be construed as a source for Orosius’ account of Perseus.

Justin’s Epitome is a far more important source than Tacitus for Orosius – certainly far more passages in the Histories can be shown to be based on the Epitome than the Tacitean corpus – and Justin makes no mention at all of the Perseus saga. Perhaps this is unsurprising, since unlike Pompeius Trogus’ contemporary Diodorus Siculus, who devoted whole books to full and continuous narratives of the mythical period, Justin’s treatment of myth is rather more


spotty. Myth tends to come up in Justin in the form of brief asides, or when he is tracing various cities, nations, and royal houses back to their mythical progenitors. So, for example, in his discussion of Spain he says that the forests frequented by the inhabitants of Tartessus (saltus Tartessiorum) are where the Titans waged war against the gods and explains that Geryon did not have a triple body, but there were three brothers who ruled the land in complete concord. He also identifies, with practically no elaboration, the heroes of the Trojan War who are reputed to have founded many of the cities of Magna Graecia, as well as the Gallaecian people of Asia Minor. He likewise claims that the royal dynasty of Epirus sprang from Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles. It is not clear whether Justin is giving credence to mythological explanations, or a nod to the polite fictions of Hellenistic diplomacy when he notes that the Roman Senate claimed to base their alliance with them on the Acarnanians’ ancient refusal to join the expedition against Troy, the ancestral home of the Romans, and that at Ilium during Scipio Africanus’ campaign against Antiochus III there was mutual recognition of the Romans’ descent from the Trojans. In one instance, however, Justin does report a version of a myth at some length and in terms that are not only historical, but also remarkably similar to Orosius’ note on Perseus. In explaining the origins of the Armenians Justin gives an account of Jason and the Argonauts from which the fantastic elements have been pared away and which is drastically altered from the familiar

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8 Diodorus’ treatment of myth is chiefly found in Books 4 and 5, but mythical topics are also discussed in the account of Egypt in Book 1, in Book 3.49–74, and in the fragments of Books 6–8. Myth in Diodorus has been the topic of considerable recent discussion; see I. Sulimani, Diodorus’ Mythistory and the Pagan Mission: Historiography and Culture-Heroes in the First Pentad of the Bibliothek (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011); C. Muntz, Diodorus Siculus and the World of the Late Roman Republic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

9 Just., Epit. 44.4.1, 15–16, ed. O. Seel, M. Iuniani Iustini Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1985) 299, 301.

10 Just., Epit. 20.1.5–2.2, 44.3.2. Specifically, in regard to Magna Graecia, he says that Antenor founded the nation of the Veneti (20.1.8), Diomedes the city of Arpi (1.10), Pilocetes Thurii (1.16), and Epeos, who built the Trojan Horse, Metapontum (2.1). The Gallaecians claimed to be descended from Teucer, the brother of Telamonic Ajax (44.3.2).

11 Just., Epit. 17.3.2–8. Justin (Epit. 7.1.1–11) similarly sets the beginnings of the Macedonian kingdom and its constituent parts in the mythical period.

Greek hero tale.\textsuperscript{13} The quest for the Golden Fleece becomes a military expedition (\textit{denuntiata militia}) and a war deep in barbarian territory.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, Jason is reconciled to Medea and he and his mighty host return to Colchis and restore Aeëtes to his lost throne.\textsuperscript{15} Jason conquers the neighbouring peoples and grants the rule of some to Aeëtes, by way of making amends, and of others to his companions.\textsuperscript{16} Jason is accounted the first after Hercules and Father Liber to conquer the East and revered as a founder (\textit{ut conditori}) throughout the East until the time of Alexander the Great.\textsuperscript{17} Armenius, one of Jason’s generals (\textit{ unus de numero ducum Iasonis}) and a Thessalian like him, moreover, founded Armenia and Jason’s stepson, Medus – the son of Medea and Aegeus, the king of Athens – founded “the city of Media” (\textit{Medium urblem}) in honour of his mother and established the kingdom of the Medes after his own name (\textit{regnumque ex nomine suo Medorum}).\textsuperscript{18} Since Strabo also speaks of an Armenus the Thessalian, a companion of Jason, as the founder of Armenia and points to a number of similarities between the customs of Thessaly and Armenia, it seems clear that the account of Armenian origins preserved by Justin did not originate with Justin’s source Pompeius Trogus, still less with Justin himself, and Jacoby assigned it as a whole to an anonymous Armenian history.\textsuperscript{19} In any case, this version of the story of Jason renders the hero’s quest as the campaign of an army, and what’s more an invasion of the Orient launched from Greece, and identifies certain Greek figures, Armenius and Medus, who founded not one, but two eastern peoples and gave their names to them. On these two counts, Justin might have provided a model, even if he was not the source, for Orosius’ handling of Perseus as the conqueror of Asia and the eponymous founder of the Persians.

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Just., \textit{Epit.} 42.2.7–3.8.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Just., \textit{Epit.} 42.2.10, ed. Seel (1985) 284. Pelias is said to have ordered Jason to undertake the expedition in hopes that he would die “either on account of the dangers of such a long sea voyage or on account of a war so deep in barbarian country” (\textit{aut ex periculis tam longae navigationis aut ex bello tam profundae barbariae}).
\item \textsuperscript{15} Just., \textit{Epit.} 42.2.12.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Just., \textit{Epit.} 42.3.1.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Just., \textit{Epit.} 42.3.2–5, ed. Seel (1985) 285.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Just., \textit{Epit.} 42.2.10, 12, 3.6, 8, ed. Seel (1985) 285.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Strabo, 11.14.12–16 = \textit{FGrH} 679 F 1. Jacoby gives the passage from Justin (\textit{Epit.} 42.2.6–3.9) as F 2b. Other fragments on the relations between Arsaces the king of the Armenians and Pacuriius the king of the Persians and on the so-called Prison of Oblivion (F 3 = Procop., \textit{Bell. Pers.} 1.5.7–40) and on the history of the exercise of Roman and Persian influence over Armenia (F 4 = Procop., \textit{Aed.} 3.1.4–15) have less in common than the first two and all of them should not be assumed to have come from the same work.
\end{itemize}}
In treating the stories of myth as the events of the earliest period of history, rather than the starting points of discrete accounts of various nations, Orosius took his cue from the *Chronicle* of Eusebius, as he knew it in Jerome's Latin translation. Rather than simply exploiting myth pruned of its fabulous elements as a historical source, making history of myth serves an apologetic purpose in the *Chronicle*. Moses, the first prophet and the legislator of the Hebrew nation, is shown to be older not only than all the heroes of Greek myth, but also than Jupiter and all his progeny, and so the whole pantheon of Graeco-Roman gods. Drawing on the long tradition in Christian literature of pointing out the scandalous and morally opprobrious aspects of myth, Orosius had little difficulty adapting these narratives drawn from myth to his own apologetic purpose, that is, demonstrating that far from the world becoming worse with the neglect of the rites of the pagan gods and the rise of Christianity, history has from the first been one long record of blood-soaked horrors, only ameliorated by the Advent of Christ. And this seems to be what Orosius is doing, if not in the case of Perseus, then with the renditions of myth which immediately precede his account of Perseus.

Unlike Tacitus and Justin, Jerome does mention Perseus in the *Chronicle*. In fact, several of the notices in the *spatium historicum*, the space between the parallel columns of running king-lists, as well as a passage in the preface that lays out the plan and intention of the *Chronicle*, refer to Perseus. They read as follows:

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20 See de Mörner (1844) 56–66.
21 Jerome, *Chron.*, praeaf., ed. J. Fotheringham, *Evsebii Pamphili Chronici Canones Latine vertit, ad veritatem et ad sua temporam prodvit S. Evsebius Hieronymus* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1923) 7, 14: *nam Moyses licet iunior supra dictis sit, ab omnibus tamen quos Graeci antiquissimos putant senior depraehenditur, Homero scilicet et Hesiodo Troianoque bello ac multo superius Hercule Museo Lino Chirone Orfeo Castore Polluce Aesculapio Libero Mercurio Apolline et ceteris diis gentium sacrisque uel uatibus ipsius quoque Iouis gestis quem Graecia in arce diuinitatis conlocauit* (For while Moses may be younger than those mentioned above, he is found to be older than all those the Greeks consider most ancient, Homer and Hesiod, to be sure, but also the Trojan War and by a considerable degree Hercules, Musaeus, Linus, Cheiron, Orpheus, Castor, Pollux, Aesculapius, Liber, Mercury, Apollo, and the rest of the gods of the nations, as well as the sacred rites and oracles of Jupiter himself, whom Greece set on the summit of godhead), … *facilis praebatur inventio cuius Graeci aetate uel barbari prophetae et reges et sacerdotes fuerint Hebraeorum, item qui diversarum gentium falsa crediti dii (it should prove easy to discover in the age of which Greek or Barbarian were the prophets and kings and priests of the Hebrews, likewise those who were falsely believed to be the gods of various nations).*
22 Orosius introduces this thesis in his initial preface (*Hist.* 1.praef. 9–16) and expounds it repeatedly throughout his *History* (2.4.2, 4, 8, 14.1–3, 3.8.3–8, 14.8–9, 20.5–7, 11–13, 4.praef.1–10, 6.34–42, 23.9–10, 5.1.1–2.8, 11.6, 22.5–15, 24.9–21, 6.22.1–9, 7.1.11, 5.3–5, 26.2–8).
Praef.: Porro Liber et reliqui quos mox inferemus post CC annum Cecropis fuerunt, Linus scilicet et Zetus et Amphion Museus Orpheus Minos Perseus Aescolapius gemini Castores Hercules, cum quo Apollo seruiuit Admeto, post quos facta est Troianae urbis euersio, ...

Preface: Moreover, Liber and the rest whom we just mentioned were after the two-hundredth year of Cecrops, as well as, of course, Linus and Zethus and Amphion, Musaeus, Orpheus, Minos, Perseus, Asclepius, the twin Castors, Hercules, with whom Apollo served Admetus, after whom the toppling of the Trojan city was accomplished, ...


Year from Abraham 530: Sthenelus [king] of the Argives. On the Princes of the Argives of Castor: when Danaus drove out Sthenelus, he held Argos and his descendants continued up to Eurystheus, the son of Sthenelus, the grandson of Perseus, after whom the descendants of Pelops took up the rule, with Atreus the first to reign.

Ab Abr. dcv: Ea quae de Demetra quam aiunt esse Isidem et Danae ex qua Perseus nascitur dicuntur his sunt gesta temporibus.

Year from Abraham 605: Those things which are said concerning Demeter, whom they say is Isis, and Danae, from whom Perseus was born, took place in these times.

Ab Abr. dclxxi: Perseus aduersum Persas dimicauit Gorgonae meretricis capite desecto, quae propter eximiam pulchritudinem ita spectatores sui

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23 Jer., Ab Abr. praefer., ed. Fotheringham (1923) 10.
24 Jer., Ab Abr. dxxx, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 66.
25 Jer., Ab Abr. dcv, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 73.
26 Jer., Ab Abr. dclxxi, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 77.
mentis impotes reddebat, ut uertere eos putaretur in lapides: Didymus scribit in peregrina historia et praebet scriptorem eius.²⁷

Year from Abraham 671: Perseus fought against the Persians with the severed head of the harlot Gorgona, who because of her exceptional beauty rendered those who set eyes on her powerless of mind, so that she was thought to turn them to stones: Didymus writes this in his Foreign History and supplies his authority.

Ab Abr. DCLXXXVI: Gesta Persei.²⁸

Year from Abraham 686: The deeds of Perseus.

Ab Abr. DCCIV: Post Acrisium in Mycenas Argiuorum imperio translato hi reges fuerunt: Perseus Sthenelus Eurystheus Atreus Thyestes Agamemnon Aegistus Orestes et Tisamenes et Penthilus et Cometes usque ad Heraclidarum descensum.²⁹

Year from Abraham 704: After Acrisius the rule of the Argives was transferred to Mycenae and these were the kings: Perseus, Sthenelus, Eurystheus, Atreus, Thyestes, Agamemnon, Aegisthus, Orestes, and Tisamenes, and Penthilus, and Cometes, up to the descent of the Heraclidae.

Ab Abr. DCCX: Perseus Acrisio non sponte interfecto migrauit ab Argis atque regnauit.³⁰

Year from Abraham 710: After Acrisius was inadvertently killed, Perseus moved away from Argos and ruled.

Ab Abr. DCCXIX: Quidam his temporibus uindicant gesta Liberi patris et ea quae de Indis Lycurgo Acteone et Pentheo memorantur, quo modo aduersum Persem consistens occidatur in proelio: ait Dinarchus poeta non rhetor: qui autem uoluerit, potest inspicere ipsius Liberi patris apud Delphos sepulcrum iuxta Apollinem aureum: pingitur uero Liber

²⁷ Jer., Ab Abr. DCLXXI, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 81.
²⁸ Jer., Ab Abr. DCLXXXVI, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 81.
²⁹ Jer., Ab Abr. DCCIV, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 83.
³⁰ Jer., Ab Abr. DCCX, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 85.
muliebri et delicato corpore propter mulieres in suo exercitu militantes, nam pariter ad arma viris feminas alligabat ut Filochorus loquitur in secundo.31

Year from Abraham 719: Some claim that in these times were the deeds of Liber Pater and those things which are recalled concerning the Indians, Lycurgus, Actaeon, and Pentheus, [and] how he was killed standing against Perses [Perseus] in battle; so says Dinarchus, the poet, not the orator, who maintains moreover that it is possible to examine the tomb of this very Liber Pater at Delphi beside the golden Apollo; indeed Liber is depicted with a feminine and delicate body because women served as soldiers in his army, for he obliged females to arms on an equal basis with men as Philochorus says in his second [book].

Any one of these passages from Jerome’s *Chronicle* would have justified Orosius, at the very least, in treating Perseus as an historical figure; taken together they make such a treatment almost inevitable. None of them, however, provides a precedent for just what Orosius has to say about Perseus. Jerome does not say that Perseus invaded Asia from Greece and provides no indication that the Persians were named for Perseus. Indeed, the notice in Jerome’s *Chronicle* that seems to come closest to what Orosius does say about Perseus, the one in which Perseus contends with the Persians using Medusa’s head as a weapon (*Ab Abr. DCLXXI*), is precluded as the source for Orosius since its wording (*Perseus aduersam Persas dimicauit*) seems to imply that the Persians already went by that name when Perseus made war on them, not only after he had conquered them. If this were his source, it would be odd, moreover, for Orosius to make no mention of Medusa or her head, which figure so prominently in Jerome’s notice.

Orosius may have written his *Seven Books of History* in order to complement one of the principal arguments of Augustine of Hippo’s *City of God*, but there is no sign that Augustine or his works had an influence on Orosius in the particular instance we are discussing. Perseus seems to appear only once in the *City of God*, indeed, in the entirety of the Augustinian corpus. This is in Book Eighteen of the *City of God*, which begins with a sketch of ancient history, especially the mythological period, based almost entirely on Jerome’s translation of the *Chronicle* of Eusebius.32

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31 Jer., *Ab Abr. DCCXIX*, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 85.
Aliqui sane et victum scribunt istum Liberum et vinctum; nonnulli et occisum in pugna a Perseo, nec ubi fuerit sepultus tacent; ... Per ea tempora Perseus et uxor eius Andromeda postea quam sunt mortui, sic eos in caelum receptos esse crediderunt, ut imagines eorum stellis designare eorumque appellare nominibus non erubesce rerunt, non timenter. 33

There are some, of course, who write that this same Liber was defeated and bound; and not a few that he was killed in battle by Perseus, nor are they silent as to where he is buried; ... In these same times, after Perseus and Andromeda were dead, people were so convinced that they had been caught up into heaven that they did not hesitate from shame or fear to trace their images in the stars and to call them by their names.

The story of Perseus, as Augustine presents it, is confined to Argos, where he is supposed to have done battle with Dionysus, and makes no mention of an expedition to Asia. Perseus gives his name to a constellation, but not to the Persian people. And Augustine mentions Andromeda, while Orosius does not. Moreover, Augustine seems to have completed Book Eighteen of the City of God only in 425, some time after Orosius brought out his History in 416/417 34 – although it is always possible that Orosius might have been made familiar before he wrote with what would be the content of Book Eighteen through the library or conversation of Augustine. Nevertheless, on the grounds either of date or of content, or both, the City of God does not seem to have informed Orosius’ treatment of Perseus.

2 Orosius’ Distinct Account of Perseus

Immediately after his account of Perseus, Orosius sums up much mythological material in a lengthy recusatio, denying that the pressing demands of his subject, the evils of this age, allow him time or space to discuss them all and at the

The story of Perseus is listed amongst these neglected subjects:

Illa quoque praetereo, quae de Perseo, Cadmo, Thebanis Spartanisque per inextricabiles alternantium malorum recursus Palaefato scribente referentur.\(^{36}\)

I omit, as well, those things which are reported by the writer Palaephatus concerning Perseus, Cadmus, the Thebans and Spartans through a snarled back and forth of alternating evils.

If Orosius is here attempting to assume a posture of disinterest in Perseus with this cursory dismissal, it is not a very convincing effort. We have already seen that Orosius took enough interest in Perseus either to dig up a special source on this character, one that cannot be identified with his usual authorities, or to piece together a remarkably distinct account of the hero. His account of Perseus as a general and the conqueror of the barbarian peoples of Asia after a long and drawn-out war, and the implication of heavy casualties, furthermore, contributes to his overall presentation of history. Other historians may write of wars, Orosius said, but his subject is the miseries of war (bellorum miserias) and he rarely describes a famous battle or campaign without ending with an awful and sobering body count.\(^{37}\) The example of Perseus the conqueror of Asia makes the heroes of myth not merely the perpetrators of melodramatic evils remembered from school lessons, but real historical figures with no less blood on their hands than more recent kings and generals.

We may understand why this presentation of Perseus was attractive to Orosius, given the overall intention of his \textit{History}, but we still have to determine where he found it. Orosius’ account of Perseus is essentially comprised of two separate elements. On the one hand, rather than undertaking a lone hero’s quest, Perseus leads an invasion of Asia and conquers the barbarians there. On the other, Perseus renamed the peoples he conquered Persians after himself.

\(^{35}\) Oros., \textit{Hist.} 1.12.1–10.

\(^{36}\) Oros., \textit{Hist.} 1.12.7, ed. Arnaud-Lindet (2003) 160. Palaephatus was almost certainly known to Orosius only at second-hand, and so for this reason could not have informed his account of Perseus. Moreover, the remains of Palaephatus (\textit{De incred.} 31) indicate that he discussed Perseus not as an invader and conqueror, but as a pirate raiding the coastlands and islands, and that the most famous target of his pillaging was not Asia, but – at the opposite geographical extreme – the island of Cerne, outside of the Pillars of Hercules; see J. Stern, \textit{Palaephatus, ἹΕΡΗ ΑΠΙΣΤΩΝ/On Unbelievable Tales} (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1996) 62–64, 134–35. Palaephatus, then, is a most unlikely source, at any remove, for what Orosius does have to say about Perseus.

It is possible to trace the development of these two different components through the course of many centuries before we find them in Orosius. Their combination, however, was apparently a long time coming and, apart from Orosius, is first found in the sixth-century Chronicle of John Malalas. The relation of this text to Orosius’ Seven Books will ultimately demand our attention.

3 Perseus, Invader of Asia and Conquering General

We may begin, however, by identifying the precedents for the presentation of Perseus as a general and leader of armies. From as early as the sixth century B.C. we have evidence for a myth relating that when Dionysus marched on Greece with his Bacchants he encountered Perseus in battle and was killed by him.38 This tradition was substantiated by a tomb of Dionysus to be found close to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi.39 Eusebius, via Jerome, is referring to

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this tradition when he speaks of Dionysus falling in battle against Perseus and of his grave at Delphi in the Chronicle.\textsuperscript{40} This is, likewise, what Augustine is discussing when he speaks of Liber Pater’s death at the hands of Perseus and the evidence of his tomb.\textsuperscript{41} The Greek epic poet Nonnus of Panopolis, roughly a contemporary of Orosius, presented the encounter of Dionysus and Perseus as a full-scale battle and while he does not allow that Perseus managed to kill Dionysus he does have Perseus acquit himself well against Dionysus’ forces by employing the petrifying power of Medusa’s severed head.\textsuperscript{42} Just so, Jerome, or rather his source Dinarchus of Delos, speaks of Perseus using the severed head of the hussy Gorgona (Gorgonae meretricis capite desecto) as a weapon in his fight with the Persians.\textsuperscript{43} The battle in which he faces Dionysus’ invasion of Argos may make Perseus the leader of an army, but, as this is clearly a defensive action, it does not make him the leader of an offensive expedition, as we see him in Orosius. Perseus is, however, presented as the general of an invading army in other sources.

Diodorus Siculus, the first-century B.C. universal historian, related in his Bibliotheca the sprawling, novel rendition of mythological themes penned by the third-century Alexandrian author Dionysius, who had won the sobriquet Scytobrachion, or ‘Leather Arm’, by his assiduous application to the writer’s craft.\textsuperscript{44} According to Dionysius, there were many races of warrior women in Libya, the Greek name for the African continent, and although the Amazons were the chief amongst them, there were also the Gorgons, against whom the Amazons fought vicious wars.\textsuperscript{45} Perseus, he says, also led an expedition against these Gorgons (τὴν ἐπὶ ταύτας στρατείαν) when Medusa reigned as queen over them and that they were only subdued by a son of Zeus, the best of the Greeks in his day (τῶν δὲ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν Ἑλλήνων ἄριστον), and that this was counted his greatest Labour (μέγιστον ἆθλον) may be taken as evidence of their prowess.\textsuperscript{46} There is a mixture here of the language of history and of myth, but leading an expedition does make Perseus more of a general than a hero embarking on a lonely quest. In pointing out the mound in Argos where the head of the Gorgon Medusa is said to be buried, the second-century A.D. traveler and

\textsuperscript{40} Je\textsubscript{r.}, Ab Abr. DCCXIX.
\textsuperscript{41} August., De civ. D. 18.13.
\textsuperscript{42} Nonnus, Dion. 47.567–741.
\textsuperscript{43} Je\textsubscript{r.}, Ab Abr. DCLXXI.
\textsuperscript{44} On Dionysius Scytobrachion, see P. Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 1:296–7, 2457–58 (n. 844); J. Rusten, Dionysius Scytobrachion (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982).
\textsuperscript{45} Diod. Sic. 3:52–55.
\textsuperscript{46} Diod. Sic., 3:52.4. 55.3.
writer Pausanias gives an account from which myth is explicitly shorn away (ἀπόντος δὲ τοῦ μύθου).\textsuperscript{47} Succeeding her father Phorcus, he says, Medusa ruled those living about Lake Tritonis and used to ride out to the hunt and battles at the head of her Libyan subjects. Then once, when she was camped with her army opposite the forces of Perseus made up of the chosen warriors of the Peloponnese, she was treacherously slain in the night, but Perseus was so struck by her beauty, even in death, that he cut off her head to display it to the Greeks.

Erich Bethe maintained that the account offered by Pausanias was taken from Dionysius Scytobrachion, and Rusten has cautiously concurred in this appraisal, but while Frazer granted the possibility that Pausanias drew upon Dionysius he thought that “the supposed resemblance seems far too slight to warrant the inference.”\textsuperscript{48} Our evidence for both narratives, however, is so slight that any suggestions about their relationship will necessarily be tentative. On the one hand, in support of Bethe’s case, we have in Pausanias not only Perseus making war on the Gorgons under Medusa, but also the location of her realm on Lake Tritonis, which also features prominently in Dionysius Scytobrachion’s account of the Amazons.\textsuperscript{49} On the other hand, if the laws and customs of the Gorgons are supposed to be anything like those Dionysius attributes to the Amazons, it seems impossible that he could have had Medusa’s father, Phorcus, ruling before her.\textsuperscript{50} Whether it comes from Dionysius or not, Pausanias’ description of the encounter between Perseus and Medusa seems to have contributed something to the notice in Eusebius’ \textit{Chronicle} that calls Medusa Gorgona (perhaps ‘the Gorgon’ in the original) and speaks of her tremendous beauty.\textsuperscript{51} Nevertheless, the accounts of Perseus in both Dionysius

\textsuperscript{47} Paus., 2.21.5. Although Rusten (1982) 87, suggests that Procles the Carthaginian was the intermediary between Dionysius Scytobrachion and Pausanias for this narrative, Pausanias seems rather to contrast the version offered by Procles with this one. See G. Hawes, \textit{Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 199–200.


\textsuperscript{49} Diod. Sic., 3.53.4–6, 54.1, 3.

\textsuperscript{50} Dionysius Scytobrachion (Diod. Sic., 3.53.1–2) related that it was customary amongst the people ruled by women at the ends of the earth in the western part of Libya (τῆς Λιβύης ἐν τοῖς πρὸς ἑσπέραν μέρεσι ἐπὶ τοῖς πέρασι τῆς οἰκουμένης ἔθνος γυναικερατούμενον), whom he later names Amazons, for the women to engage in military service and to hold the magistracies, the reins of government, and the franchise, while the men occupied themselves with domestic chores – namely, the inverse of a properly ordered Greek society.

\textsuperscript{51} Jer., \textit{Ab Abr. DCLXXI}. The Greek of George the Syncellus seems to correspond very closely to the Latin of Jerome’s \textit{Chronicle} and provide a parallel witness to Eusebius’ original; George Syn., \textit{Chron.} 305–306, ed. A. Mosshammer, \textit{Georgii Syncelli ecloga chronographica}. 
Scytobrachion and Pausanias, as part of their rationalization of myth, make him the leader of a military expedition and an invader of foreign territory, as we find him in Orosius. But neither of them has Perseus invading Asia, as he does in Orosius, but rather his campaign is directed against Africa.

Perseus is eventually depicted mounting a military expedition into Asia by the historian Cephalion. In the reign of Hadrian (117–138) Cephalion wrote a history of the world covering the period from Ninus and Semiramis up to Alexander the Great; he wrote on the model of Herodotus, employing the Ionic dialect and naming each of his nine books after one of the Muses, and, to judge by the fragments that have come down to us, accorded a certain prominence to mythological matters. We have a snippet of what Cephalion is supposed to have said about Perseus:

πρὸς οἷς ἐπάγει τὰ περὶ τῶν ἐτῶν αὐτῶν· ἐτέων δὲ ὄντων ἀπὸ Νίνου τεσσαράκοντα πού καὶ χ’ Βέλιμος ἐβασίλευσεν Ἀσσυρίων, καὶ ἀφικνεῖται Περσεὺς ὁ Δανάης εἰς τὴν χώραν αὐτοῦ, ναῦς ἄγων ρ’. ἔφευγε δὲ Περσεὺς Διόνυσον τὸν Σεμέλης υἱόν.

In addition to the preceding he introduces these things concerning their [the Assyrian kings’] times: About six hundred and forty years after Ninus, Belimos ruled the Assyrians. And Perseus the son of Danaë came to his country, leading 100 ships. Perseus was fleeing from Dionysus the son of Semele.

George the Syncellus preserves the Greek text of this fragment, but it was obviously taken from the first part of Eusebius’ *Chronicle*, where he laid out his source material and which survives only in Armenian translation, since it corresponds in all particulars to a passage in the Armenian text. So, Eusebius


54 A German translation of the Armenian text is provided by J. Karst, *Die Chronik aus dem Armenischen übersetzt mit textkritischem Commentar (Eusebius Werke Band V)* (Leipzig:
definitely knew what Cephalion had to say about Perseus and it is hard to think it did not somehow inform his assertion that Perseus fought against the Persians (*Perseus aduersum Persas dimicauit*), even if it was not his only source for this statement. Cephalion, after all, speaks of Perseus attacking the land of the Assyrians, not the Persians; while Cephalion speaks of a fleet, Eusebius does not, and Cephalion does not seem to have mentioned Medusa’s head, while Eusebius does, quite prominently. Cephalion, moreover, seems to have been following a rather different version of the encounter between Perseus and Dionysus than the one in which Dionysus is slain. If Orosius had had direct knowledge of this passage, we should be surprised that he had neglected the specific number of Perseus’ armament, one hundred ships, as he seems to be careful to include such indications of the scale of human conflict whenever he can. It is, nevertheless, clear that the notion that Perseus led an army to invade Asia had some currency by the time Orosius began collecting material for his *Seven Books*.

The tradition that Perseus was the leader of a military campaign, rather than simply a lone hero on a quest, we may observe, developed over several centuries. In the history of Cephalion in the second century A.D. we have our earliest evidence that the expedition Perseus led was supposed to be an invasion of Asia, as Orosius maintained in his brief note. It is also worth noting that, as far as we can tell, this tradition developed entirely within the sphere of Greek literature and only came to impinge on the world of Latin learning with Jerome’s translation of Eusebius’ *Chronicle*. And what Jerome’s *Chronicle* says about Perseus fighting against the Persians does not correspond to what Orosius says about Perseus’ invasion of Asia. That is to say, the only source apparently available to Orosius is not a sufficient source for his material.

### 4 Perseus, the Eponymous Hero of the Persians

The other principal component of Orosius’ account of Perseus, that he gave his name to the Persians, has a pedigree almost as old as the hero’s presentation as a general, but does not need to be ferreted out of obscure sources, rather

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55 Jeir., *Ab Abr. DCLXXI*.
it was enshrined in the work of the very Father of History.\textsuperscript{56} According to Herodotus, the Persians were originally known as Cephenes to the Greeks and called themselves Artaioi, but then Perseus came to Cepheus and married his daughter Andromeda; she bore him a son, Perses – obviously named after his father – whom Perseus left as an heir for Cepheus, and the Persians are named after him (ἐπὶ τούτου δὴ τὴν ἐπωνυμίην ἔσχον).\textsuperscript{57} Although he expresses some reservations about the event itself and what was said, Herodotus also reports that the herald Xerxes sent to Argos proclaimed the Persian belief that they were descended from Perses, son of Perseus, which would make the Argives ancestors of the Persians, and proposed these ties of kinship as a compelling argument in favour of Argos remaining neutral in the ensuing conflict.\textsuperscript{58} All of this implies – contrary to all reason and likelihood – that the story of the Persians’ descent from Perseus was not some Greek imposition, but the tradition of the Persians themselves. As is only to be expected in Herodotus, there are variants. According to one, it seems that not all of the Persians, but only the Achaemenids, the royal house of the Persians, were descended from Perseus.\textsuperscript{59} Another, supposedly maintained by the Persians, held that Perseus, the most remotely traceable ancestor of the Spartan kings, was himself an Assyrian who became a Greek (αὐτὸς ὁ Περσεύς, ἐὼν Ἀσσύριος, ἐγένετο Ἕλλην), but his own ancestors were not Greek at all.\textsuperscript{60} Whatever doubts Herodotus might have had or variant versions he entertained, the descent of the Persians from Perseus seems to be confirmed for him and his audience by no less an authority than Apollo’s Oracle at Delphi, who predicted to the Spartans that:

\textsuperscript{56} On the notion that the Persians were named for Perseus, or the relation between the hero and the people, in general, see R. Drews, \textit{The Greek Accounts of Eastern History} (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1973) 9, 16, 147 n.25, 151 n. 58; K. Schefold & F. Jung, \textit{Die Urkönige Perseus, Bellerophon, Herakles and Theseus in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst} (München: Hirmer Verlag, 1988) 14; E. Hall, \textit{Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 141–42, 172; D. Ogden, \textit{Perseus} (London & New York: Routledge, 2008) 101, 109–12. Herodotus may have been a source to which Orosius had direct access; see de Mörner (1844) 103–4.


\textsuperscript{58} Hdt., 7.150.2, 152.1.

\textsuperscript{59} Hdt., 1.125.4, ed. Hude (1927): τούτων Πασαργάδαι εἰσί ἄριστοι, ἐν τοῖσι καὶ Ἀχαμενίδαι εἰσί φρήτηρ, ἐνθεν οἱ βασιλεῖς οἱ Περσεῖδαι γεγόνασι (the most noble of these [Persian tribes] are the Pasargadae, amongst whom the family of the Achaemenians is numbered, whence the kings, the descendants of Perseus, arise).

\textsuperscript{60} Hdt., 6.54, ed. Hude (1927).
Either the great and famous city by men descended from Perseus
Will be sacked, or that will not be, but the Lacedaemonian bounds
Will mourn a perished king descended from Heracles.

But the identification of Perseus as the progenitor of the Persians seems to
have been current well before Herodotus wrote.

Already in Athens in 472 B.C., when Aeschylus first put on The Persians, his
audience was expected to understand that Perseus was the ancestor of the
Persians. The chorus hails Xerxes as the scion of a “gold-born lineage” (χρυσογό-
νου γενεάς).62 This could hardly be taken as anything but a reference to Perseus
as the founder of the line, either of the Persians as a whole or of the Achaemenid
house, and to his conception when Zeus visited Danaë in the form of a shower
of gold, and this is how the term χρυσογόνου is explained by the scholiast.63
Shortly thereafter the chorus of Persian elders also speaks of “our race named for
its forefather” (τὸ πατρωνύμιον γένος ἡμέτερον).64 Once again, the interpretation
is inevitable; the race must be that of the Persians and the ancestor for whom
they are named Perseus. The authenticity of this latter line has been doubted for
some time, but the usual explanation for the corruption, that a marginal gloss
has intruded itself into the text of the play itself, as well as the acceptance of
the supposedly corrupt line, themselves insist on the prevalence of the notion
that the Persians traced their ancestry back to Perseus.65 At any rate, the fact
that Aeschylus was able to rely – in even one instance – on allusion rather than
an explicit and deliberate statement suggests that the idea of Perseus being the
eponymous founder of the Persian people was already well established in his day.

65 Broadhead (1960) 67, essentially follows the explanation of D. Robertson, “Aeschylea,”
   Classical Review 38 (1924) 110, that a marginal gloss has worked its way into the text and
   insists that this line (146) is spurious. Although rejected by Broadhead, the more slight
   and conservative adjustments offered by A. Housman, “On Certain Corruptions in the
   Persae of Aeschylus,” American Journal of Philology 9 (1888) 317, insisting that the phrase
   πατρωνύμιον γένος ἡμέτερον refers to the Persian people not Xerxes alone, account for
   the problems quite adequately and preserve the line.
The belief that the Persians were named for Perseus is not only attested rather early, it also seems to have been quite persistent. In the third century B.C., for instance, one Deinias wrote an *Argolica*, and hoping to demonstrate the influence the city of Argos and her citizens had exerted far and wide, he not only recalled that Perseus had given his name to the Persians through a descendant of his, but also invented another son for Perseus, Erythras, who is supposed to have given his name to the Erythraean, or Red, Sea. The universal historian Nicolaus of Damascus, a contemporary of Augustus and protégé of Herod the Great, offered a recognizable variant, according to which Achaemenes, the eponymous ancestor of the Persian Achaemenids, was also a son of Perseus and so named because his father was an Achaean.

Not all ancient authorities, however, concurred with the etymology that derived the name of the Persians from Perseus. Agatharchides of Cnidos, who wrote on the Red Sea in the second century B.C., strenuously objected to the suggestion, especially as voiced by Deinias, that the Persians took their name from one of the descendants of Perseus. He did so principally on historiographic grounds. For Agatharchides, Perseus was chiefly a character of tragedy, setting out on campaign in a mask with his prop scimitar (πλὴν εἰ μὲν τραγικῶς ὁ Περσεὺς ἐστράτευται τὸ πρόσωπον περιθέμενος καὶ τὴν ἅρπην λαβών), and tragedy, indeed all poetry which took myth as its subject, was not a sound basis for making historical assertions, since, he says, paraphrasing Eratosthenes, every poet aims for amusement rather than truth (δὴ πᾶς ποιητὴς ψυχαγωγίας μᾶλλον ή ἀληθείας ἐστὶ στοχαστής).

Even so, Photius, who offers a précis of Agatharchides’ discussion, notes a linguistic point in favour of the derivation the Persians’ name from Perseus, perhaps a concession made by Agatharchides.

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himself, namely that the Persians themselves do not pronounce their name with the accent on the first syllable (Πέρσαι) as the Greeks usually do, but rather with a circumflex on the final syllable (Περσαῖ), just as the name of Perseus is accented on the final syllable (ὁ Περσεύς). Agatharchides is the only ancient scholar we know to have formulated his objections to the proposition that the Persians were named for Perseus, but there is every possibility that he was not the only one who did so.

If there was an ongoing debate over the matter, it was surely conducted in Greek, just as the tradition that the Persians took their name from Perseus was propagated and maintained, to all appearances, exclusively by Greek authors. Once again, as with the development of the suggestion that Perseus led an army to invade Asia, the elements of Orosius’ report on Perseus seem to be the preserve of Greek, rather than Latin, literature. I can point to no Latin source predating Orosius that conveys the notion that the Persians were named for Perseus. The Elder Pliny, for instance, who might be expected to retail such information, notes that arrows were invented either by Scythes, the son of Jupiter, or by Perses, the son of Perseus, and while both putative inventors’ names obviously belong to eponymous ethnic progenitors, Pliny does not say so and fails to name either the Scythians or Persians here. He also mentions that the city of Ardea in Latium was founded by Danaë, the mother of Perseus, but says nothing of the foundations of cities or peoples by her son.

5 Perseus in Orosius and Perseus in the Chronicle of John Malalas

That is not to say that this etymology of the Persian ethnonym must have been unknown in the Latin linguistic sphere, but it does suggest that it was available to those who could derive it directly from some source in Greek. Indeed, its repeated appearance in such a prominent source as Herodotus suggests it would have been reasonably well known amongst the bilingual intelligentsia.

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70 Photius, *Bibl. Cod.* 250.6, ed. Henry (2003) 138. We are left to wonder just how familiar these authorities were with the Persians and their language, but we might surmise that they derived some fodder for their argument from the fact that both forms of the adjective ‘Persian’ in Greek, Περσικός and Περσίς, were accented on the final syllable, as was the latter form when used as a substantive for Persia or the land of the Persians.

71 Plin., *HN* 7.56 (201).

72 Plin., *HN* 3.5 (56). Otherwise in the *Natural History*, Perseus is mentioned as performing labours in the region of Mt. Atlas, as did Hercules (5.1 [7]), planting the *persea* tree at Memphis (15.13 [46]), and being the subject of a statue by Myron of Eleutherae (34.19 [57]) and a painting by Parrhesius of Ephesus (35.36 [69]).
of the Roman world. But the apparent absence of the etymology from the surviving body of Latin literature does bring us back rather insistently to the question of just where Orosius might have picked it up. Orosius is one of those later authors who mark the decay of the Greek and Latin bilingualism once common amongst literate Romans.\textsuperscript{73} He seems to depend almost exclusively upon Latin sources.\textsuperscript{74} So, how did he come by an account of Perseus whose elements are only to be found percolating or established in Greek sources?

It is not just that the constituent parts of Orosius’ account of Perseus were not readily available to him, but also that the composite whole so peculiarly concentrates on the peripheral and ignores the central aspects of the myth of Perseus. For Orosius, Perseus is the conqueror of Asia and the eponymous progenitor of the Persians, but not the slayer of Medusa or the saviour of Andromeda. What Orosius has to say about Perseus may be odd and make for a distinctive narrative, but it is not unique or without parallel. The sixth-century Chronicle of John Malalas not once, but twice reports much the same thing about Perseus, first at the conclusion of its narration of the line of Assyrian kings, and again at the climax of its account of the career of Perseus.\textsuperscript{75} The dynasty of Assyrian kings is founded by Cronos and includes his sons, ‘Picus, who is also Zeus’ and Ninus, who marries his mother, Rhea or Semiramis, then Thouras, also known as Ares, as well as a few lesser figures, and ends with Sardanapalus; it is thus an idiosyncratic amalgam of a euhemerized version of the Graeco-Roman gods and the thoroughly fictional Assyrian history of Ctesias of Cnidos.\textsuperscript{76} In this rendering, however, Sardanapalus does not fall victim to a revolt of the Assyrians’ subjects, but to the assault of Perseus:

\textsuperscript{74} For his part, de Mörner (1844) 101–4 contends that Orosius’ claims far outstripped his facility with Greek sources and shows that practically all of those he cites have come to him at second hand, although he does cite a number of passages derived from Herodotus that adhere remarkably closely to the Greek text.
\textsuperscript{75} On the account of Perseus in Malalas, see B. Garstad, “Perseus and the Foundation of Tarsus in the Chronicle of John Malalas,” \textit{Byzantion 84} (2014) 171–83.
καὶ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν Ἀρεώς ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ Λάμης καὶ μετὰ Λάμην ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ Σαρδανάπαλος ὁ μέγας, ὁ Ὀστίνα Περσεύς ὁ Δανάης ἐφονευσεν καὶ ἀφείλατο τὴν βασιλείαν ἀπὸ Λαμῆν. καὶ βασιλεύσας αὐτῶν εἰς τὸ ἱδίον αὐτοῦ ὄνομα ἐπεκάλεσεν αὐτοὺς Πέρσας.Τοῦτο ὁμοίοιο μετὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ πατρὸς Πίκου τελείας γενόμενος ἐπεθύμησεν τῆς τῶν Ασσυρίων βασιλείας, διαφθονούμενος τοῖς τέκνοις τοῦ Νίνου, τοῦ θείου αὐτοῦ, τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ (after the death of his father Picus having become a mature man he coveted the kingdom of the Assyrians and envied the children of Ninus, his uncle, the brother of his father).

And after the death of Ares Lames reigned and after Lames Sardanapalus the Great ruled the Assyrians, whom Perseus the son of Danaë slew and took the kingdom away from the Assyrians. And having become their king he called them Persians after his own name.

This note might seem vague and rather random, but shortly afterward Malalas gives an account of Perseus and relates that, as a son born to ‘Picus, who is also Zeus’ after he left Assyria and headed for the West, Perseus was from the first motivated by envy of his Assyrian cousins and he was propelled by a desire to acquire their kingdom. Employing the magical arts he was taught by his father to make an invincible weapon out of the severed head of a poor peasant girl he encountered, he marched through Asia Minor, defeating his opponents and founding cities, from Lycaonia to Isauria and Cilicia,

καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ὥρμησεν ἐκεῖθεν διὰ τοῦ Ἀργαίου ὄρους κατὰ Ασσυρίων καὶ νικήσας αὐτούς καὶ φονεύσας τὸν Σαρδανάπαλον, βασιλεύσας αὐτῶν, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ γένους αὐτοῦ καταγόμενον, ὑπέταξεν αὐτούς, καὶ ἐφονευσεν αὐτῶν ἅγια τῇ γνώμῃ, καὶ ἐπὶ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτοὺς Πέρσας, ἀφελόμενος ἀπὸ Λαμῆν τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα. And he gave thanks and proceeded from there by Mount Argaeus against the Assyrians. And after he conquered them and slew Sardanapalus their king, who was descended from his own family, he made them his subjects and ruled as their king for fifty-three years, and he called them Persians after his own name, depriving the Assyrians of the kingdom and their name for his own sake.

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78 Malalas, Chron. 2.11, ed. Thurn (2000) 26: μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν τοῦ αὐτοῦ πατρὸς Πίκου τελείας ἡλικίας γενόμενος ἐπεθύμησεν τῆς τῶν Ασσυρίων βασιλείας, διαφθονούμενος τοῖς τέκνοις τοῦ Νίνου, τοῦ θείου αὐτοῦ, τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ (after the death of his father Picus having become a mature man he coveted the kingdom of the Assyrians and envied the children of Ninus, his uncle, the brother of his father).
79 Malalas, Chron. 2.11, ed. Thurn (2000) 27.
What we find in Malalas is neither the standard history of Assyria nor the usual story of Perseus, but it is remarkable that at critical points of each he agrees with what Orosius says about Perseus invading Asia and giving his name to the Persians, itself a rather eccentric account of the hero.

If we are trying to trace the sources of a work written in 417, though, the contents of a chronicle written a century and a half or so later might seem utterly irrelevant. Both the account of the gods as Assyrian kings and the account of Perseus in Malalas, however, may be more than plausibly attributed to an earlier source. The narrative of the god-kings in ancient Assyria is clearly not an original composition of Malalas, since a parallel version also appears in the somewhat earlier Excerpta Latina Barbari, and both must be derived from a shared source. The account of the gods is one of the few fuller narrative expansions on the spare chronological frame of the Excerpta, which consists mostly of series of dates and events, king-lists, and computations of the year since Adam. Another such narrative expansion is a relation on Alexander that corresponds in several particulars to Malalas’ account of Alexander. A lost historian by the name of Bouttios is the only source Malalas gives for this account. Malalas also cites Bouttios at the opening of his narration on Perseus. Malalas cites Bouttios a third and final time in regard to Domitian’s persecution of the Christians. This Bouttios seems identifiable with the ‘Bruttius’ who is given as a source for the persecution of Christians.

80 Although the surviving ms of John Malalas covers events up to the death of Justinian in 565, the actual date of Malalas’ composition is a matter of some dispute, and at least two editions are usually posited; see B. Croke, “Malalas, the Man and His Work,” in Studies in John Malalas, ed. E. Jeffreys, B. Croke, and R. Scott (Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1999) 17–25; W. Treadgold, The Early Byzantine Historians (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 236–40, 245. There is agreement, however, that all forms of the Chronicle of John Malalas were composed in the sixth century.


83 ELB 1.6.6, 8.4–6, 2.6.4, ed. Garstad (2012) 194–95, 214–21, 264–65; Malalas, Chron. 7.17–8.4.

84 Malalas, Chron. 8.1, ed. Thurn (2000) 146: ... καθὼς Βόττιος ὁ σοφώτατος συνεγράψατο ... (... as the most learned Bouttios has written ...).

85 Malalas, Chron. 2.11, ed. Thurn (2000) 25: ὁ δὲ σοφώτατος Βούττιος, ιστορικὸς χρονογράφος, ἐξέθετο ὡς ... (The exceeding wise Bouttios, the historical chronographer, however, set out that ...).

86 Malalas, Chron. 10.48, ed. Thurn (2000) 199: ... καθὼς Βόττιος ὁ σοφὸς χρονογράφος συνεγράψατο κατ᾿ ἀυτῶν (... just as the wise chronographer Bottios has written concerning them).
under Domitian in the *Chronicle* of Jerome. That he is not cited in the passage on the same material in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius suggests that this citation does not belong to Eusebius’ original composition of the *Chronicle*. The passages in Malalas on the history of Assyria and on Perseus, then, appear to be derived from a single, earlier source: the historian Bouttios, who wrote some time before the translation of Jerome’s *Chronicle* in 380/381 and so might have been known to Orosius.

If Orosius was aware of Malalas’ source, he gives very little indication of it and leaves unexploited a surprising amount of material we might be inclined to consider eminently suitable to his purposes of anti-pagan polemic. But we can see that Orosius might have had reasons of his own for neglecting much of the material offered by Malalas’ source on the Assyrian kings and Perseus. The Assyrian king-list in Malalas is also, as we have seen, a catalogue of human rulers who connived at being taken for gods by their subjects and are remembered as such. We might assume that such a narrative would be useful to Orosius as he made his case against the religion of the pagans. But apart from noting Liber Pater’s campaign against the Indians – and Dionysus was an ambiguous case, anyway – Orosius does not refute the divinity of the pagan gods by saying that they were dead men who had been improperly deified in the remote past – men who may be dead now, but once had a very substantial reality. And he does not neglect this line of argument because he was unaware of it. There is plenty of material relating that the so-called gods were historical figures in Jerome’s *Chronicle*, practically all of which Orosius purposefully rejects. Rather, he presents the pagan gods as vain imaginings inspired by stark terror or the delusions of demons. For him, the essence of the gods is

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87  Jer., *Ab Abr.* MMCXII, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 274: *scribit Bruttius plurimos Christianorum sub Domitiano fecisse martyrium* (Bruttius writes that very many Christians bore witness under Domitian).

88  Euseb., *HE* 3.18.4.


90  E.g., Jer., *Ab Abr.* LVI I: Jupiter hidden by the Curetes on Crete, CCXXVI: Jupiter coupled with Niobe, CXXVIII: appearance of Minerva, CCCCLXXVIII: judgement of the contest between Neptune and Minerva, CCCCLXXVIII: Jupiter coupled with Io, DLXXII: Jupiter coupled with Europa, DCXX: the myth of Proserpina, DCLXV: Latona, the mother of Apollo.

revealed by the dying appeal of that most religiously superstitious of polytheists, Mithridates of Pontus, “You gods of my fathers, if you exist, I entreat you ...” (uos, si estis, dii patrii, precor ...), who at the last realized that the gods he had prayed to so faithfully throughout his long life were false.92 Such an approach did not require – indeed, it might find itself compromised by – an account of the gods as ancient human kings, who were in some sense real and substantial.

We might also consider the denunciation of a pagan hero like Perseus as a necromancer who won wars with black magic pertinent to an anti-pagan argument, but Orosius appears to think otherwise. Perseus’ preparation of Medusa’s severed head by occult means and his use of this skyphos as a battle talisman to defeat his opponents figure prominently in Malalas’ description of the campaign that leads up to Perseus’ conquest of Assyria and his giving his name to the Persians.93 There is none of this in Orosius. But we know that Perseus using Medea’s severed head against his enemies was another detail Orosius must have been acquainted with from Jerome’s Chronicle, but chose not to repeat in his own notice on Perseus.94 Perhaps the thought of someone defeating his foes by displaying a severed head to them struck him as incomprehensible or repugnant; perhaps he was unwilling to grant any place in his history to efficacious magic.95 At any rate, Orosius’ discriminating use of one possible source is consistent with his demonstrable exploitation of another recognized source.

93 Malalas (Chron. 2.11) describes in detail how Perseus met Medusa, decapitated her, performed mystical rites over her severed head to make it weapon potent, as well as the effects this weapon had on its victims. He also emphasizes that it was on account of this ‘Gorgon’ that Perseus won each of his victories as he advanced on Assyria through Lycaonia, Isauria, and Cilicia, and that the monument he raised in memory of his first victory bore an image of the Gorgon. When Perseus was finally defeated by his father-in-law Cepheus, Malalas says (Chron. 2.13), it is because Cepheus was blind and so unaffected when Perseus showed him the Gorgon’s head; thinking it had lost its power, Perseus turned the head toward himself and looked at it, consequently he was paralyzed and killed. Altogether, Medusa’s head and Perseus’ dependence on it are allotted a conspicuous and repeatedly accentuated place in a relatively brief account of Perseus.

94 Jer., Ab Abr. dclxxi, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 8: Perseus aduersum Persas dimicauit Gorgonae meretricis capite desecto (Perseus fought against the Persians with the severed head of the harlot Gorgona); cf. Oros., Hist. 1.11.4.

95 Orosius has very little to say of magic in his History. Parroting Justin (Epit. 1.1.9), Orosius (Hist. 1.4.3) does say that Zoroaster, the last opponent Ninus defeated before his death, was reputed to be the inventor of the art of magic; cf. Plin., HN 30.2 (3–4, 8). Orosius does not say whether or not this art was effective, but Zoroaster’s defeat by Ninus would suggest not – and so makes it safe for Orosius to mention that Zoroaster was a practitioner of magic; cf. August., De civ. D. 21.14. Perseus’ successful use of a magical talisman against his enemies might have given a very different impression.
Orosius may have been further reticent about taking too much material from Malalas’ source because of an obvious chronological discrepancy. He had received from Justin and from Eusebius, by way of Jerome, an established Assyrian chronology, which gave a duration of more than a thousand years to the Assyrian kingdom, under nearly fifty kings.\textsuperscript{96} And he may not have wished to disturb this recognizable figure by trying to adapt it to the arresting short Assyrian king-list found in Malalas. From Cronos to Sardanapalus the Assyrian kingdom persists for no more than four generations under only seven kings.\textsuperscript{97} Such insurmountable disagreements would make a judicious selection of only a few apposite details more than understandable. It may also be that lack of facility in Greek, the supposed language of this source, or limited access to the text forced Orosius to grab what few details he could.

The suggestion that Orosius was acquainted with Malalas’ source on Assyria and Perseus may raise a number of difficulties, but it does seem to offer an explanation for at least one discrepancy between Orosius and his recognized sources. Orosius states that he will refrain from giving a detailed account of Assyria since throughout its long history of more than a millennium under nearly fifty kings the Assyrian kingdom was almost constantly at war, either attacking others or fending off assaults (\textit{et numquam paene uel inferendis uel excipiendis usque in id tempus bellis quieuerit}), and the description would be

\textsuperscript{96} Orosius (\textit{Hist.} 1.12.2) gives a duration of 1,160 years for the Assyrian kingdom or (2.3.2) 1,164 years for the kingdom of Babylon, but calculating from the dates before the foundation of Rome that he gives for Ninus (1.4.1: 1,300 years) and Sardanapalus (1.19.1: 64 years) the figure would be closer to 1,236 years. Augustine (\textit{De civ. D.} 4.6, 12.11, 18.21) concurs with the figure of 1,240 or 1,305 years for the duration of the Assyrian kingdom. The former, more precise figure seems to be taken from Jerome’s translation of Eusebius’ \textit{Chronicle}; Jer., \\
\textit{Ab Abr. MCCCXI}, ed. Fotheringham (1923) 142: \textit{Vsque ad id tempus fuisse reges Assyriorum historia refert et fiant simul an. MCCCXI}; \textit{omnes autem anni regni Assyriorum a primo anno Nini supputantur MCCCXL} (Up to this time the history relates that there were kings of the Assyrians and altogether the years are 1,197; but all of the years of the Assyrians from the first year of Ninus are counted up as 1,240). The round figure of 1,300 is offered by Justin (\textit{Epit.} 1.2.13) and is also found in Diodorus Siculus (2.28.8), who ultimately derived it from Ctesias of Cnidus; see D. Lenfant, \textit{Ctésias de Cnide: La Perse, L’Inde, Autres Fragments} (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004) 62, 244–45; cf. J. Boncquet, “\textit{Ctesias’ Assyrian King-List and his Chronology of Mesopotamian History},” \textit{Ancient Society} 21 (1990) 5–16.

\textsuperscript{97} The succession of Assyrian kings described by Malalas (\textit{Chron.} 1.8–12) is more tangled and difficult to keep track of than the neat tables of Jerome’s \textit{Chronicle}, but works out as follows: Cronos establishes the kingdom and there is a father-to-son succession from Cronos to Picus-Zeus to Belus; on the death of Belus, the throne reverts to his uncle Ninus, the brother of Picus-Zeus; Ninus is succeeded by his cousin Thouras-Ares, the son of his mother’s brother; Lames succeeds Thouras-Ares and Sardanapalus, under whom the kingdom falls, succeeds Lames.
interminable. Justin, however, says that after the wars and conquests of Ninus and Semiramis, their son Ninyas, content with the empire acquired by his parents, set aside the pursuit of war (filius eius Ninias contentus elaborato a parentibus imperio belli studia deposuit) and sequestered himself in his palace. His example, Justin continues, was followed by his successors (posteri quoque eius id exemplum securti), who gave responses to the peoples of their empire through intermediaries. Justin’s view of the unwarlike lethargy of the Assyrian kings was the preponderant one in Antiquity, no doubt due to the presentation of Ctesias of Cnidos. Diodorus Siculus echoes Justin when he relates that Ninyas set aside his mother’s bellicose and adventurous ways and had a peaceful reign, hidden away in his palace and indulging in opulence and indolence, and that the rest of the kings of Assyria in succession conducted themselves in much the same way, with the result that nothing remarkable was done by any of them. Cephalion explained the relatively lengthy reigns of each of the Assyrian kings by saying that they were without exception averse to war and danger and effeminate; he further registers his disgust by refusing to give the names of such a pack of cowardly, worthless tyrants and womanly barbarians.

The picture of continual warfare is more in keeping with Orosius’s general presentation of the past, at least before the Advent of Christ, as an unrelenting storm of war, but it is still worth asking what the basis of Orosius’ unusual notion of Assyrian history might have been. It does seem rather consistent with the impression that might be derived from the history of Assyria found in Malalas. This account is not only drastically abbreviated by comparison, but punctuated throughout with intimations of warfare. Cronos established the kingdom by subjugating men and territory with his bellicosity and then went off to the West with a band of nobles, Thouras-Ares, the fourth in line made war on the lands to the north and died on campaign in Thrace, and Sardanapalus and the kingdom fell before the assault of Perseus. This version of Assyrian history, much more than that taken from Ctesias, seems to be an account of unremitting offensive and defensive warfare, and might have conveyed such an sense to Orosius.

99 Just., Epit. 1.2.11, ed. Seel (1985) 5.
100 Just., Epit. 1.2.12, ed. Seel (1985) 5.
102 Diod. Sic., 2.21.1–2, 8, 22.1. Diodorus (2.23.1) likewise speaks of Sardanapalus outdoing all of his predecessors in luxury and sluggishness.
104 Malalas, Chron. 1.8, 9, 12.
This is not the first time a connection between Orosius and the account of the gods as Assyrian kings in Malalas has been suggested. W. R. Halliday, in dispelling some of the more outlandish theories that had attached themselves to Picus-Zeus and his ilk, proposed that this narrative should be read in the context of a "subsidiary but favourite feature" of the scheme of translatio imperii or the succession of four world empires, that is, "the synchronising of the fall of the Assyrian empire with the foundation of Rome." Halliday seems to have taken his cue from a footnote in Conrad Trieber's seminal study of the tradition of translatio imperii. This theory, however, founders on the fact that in the account given by Malalas, at any rate, the Assyrian kingdom does not end with the departure of Picus-Zeus for the West, but continues on under his heirs and when Cronos and Picus-Zeus arrive there they establish not the city of Rome, but kingship and rule in the West. It is true that Orosius, and Augustine along with him, maintained that the decline and fall of the Assyrian kingdom and its capital Babylon saw the rise of Rome and traced intricate correspondences between the histories of Rome and Babylon. But whatever his inspiration for this scheme might have been, it does not seem possible that it could have been derived from or even bolstered by the Assyrian history in Malalas.

If we propose that Orosius was acquainted with Malalas' source on a strange version of Assyrian history and Perseus, we may well ask how he might have come to know it. We can see that, come the sixth century, this source was exploited in Antioch, where Malalas wrote, and in Alexandria, where the Excerpta Latina Barbari was compiled. This distribution suggests that the source text, or texts under its immediate influence, did not travel far beyond the Levant. We are

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105 W. Halliday, “Picus-Who-Is-Also-Zeus,” Classical Review 36 (1922) 112. As Halliday puts it, “Euhemerism enabled the scheme to be worked out in a single whole by means of identifications justified by the existing practice of polytheism as regards the identification of foreign with native gods.”


107 Garstad (2002) 266. If, moreover, we are correct in identifying the author of this account of the god-kings with the Bouttios who is cited as Malalas’ source for his account of Alexander, that account (Malalas, Chron. 8.1.3) presents the Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Parthians not as a series of world kingdoms, but as a conglomerate mass, which would suggest that translatio imperii was a foreign concept to the author of both narratives.

108 Oros., Hist. 2.1.4–3.7, 7.2.1–3, 13–14; August., De civ. D. 18.2, 22, 27; see Martínez Cavero (2002) 193–97. Isidore of Seville’s mention of this putative relation in his Etymologiae (9.3.2–3) ensured that it was an item in the common stock of knowledge in the Latin Middle Ages.

probably not far wrong in assuming that, if Orosius knew this text, this was the locale where he found it. This might have happened during Orosius’ sojourn in Palestine, which occurred over 415 and 416, or on his travels there from the province of Africa or back.\textsuperscript{110} This trip seems to have been more than a pilgrimage or an undertaking to consult Jerome, but also something of a book hunt. Orosius himself informs us that he took the trouble to investigate the library resources of Alexandria and it has been suggested that it was on his visit to Jerome that Orosius came by a copy of his Chronicle, one of the principal sources for his own History.\textsuperscript{111} It is hardly inconceivable that he also browsed other books and picked up stray bits of information as he went along.

The source that made Perseus the conqueror of Asia who gave his name to the Persians was obviously not as significant to Orosius as his readily identifiable sources. There are various ways to explain how a source might inform a single point in his History without exerting a broader, more easily recognizable influence on his work. Orosius gives no sign of being fluent in Greek and, as suggested above, his limited language skills may have allowed him to do no more than recognize only the simplest statements and most prominent points in a text written in Greek. Perhaps Orosius had access to the text in question for only a short time and so had to depend on a cursory reading only and the capacity of his memory, rather than writing with the text to hand, as he plainly did with other sources. It is also possible that Orosius had no access to this text at all, but was informed of its contents at second hand and by word of mouth.

6 Conclusion

There is a parallel for the distinctive combination of elements unattested in surviving Latin literature that constitutes Orosius’ account of Perseus; it is found, not once, but twice, in the Chronicle of John Malalas. But Orosius seems to exhibit a knowledge of this analogue only in this one passage. It is, therefore, difficult to establish a connection between Orosius and this possible source. The assertion that Orosius and Malalas shared a common source must remain indefinite, even if we can explain why Orosius might have rejected much of the

\textsuperscript{111} Oros., Hist. 6.15.32: see A. Fear, Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) 4.
information in this source and point to other possible points of influence.\textsuperscript{112} Nevertheless, our appreciation of Orosius and his sources is deepened simply by investigating the matter. When we try to trace its sources and precedents, his account of Perseus compels us to grant that Orosius had an awareness of a greater number and wider variety of sources than has so far been identified. Or we must allow that he had not merely an ability to manipulate his sources in order to support the overall contentions of his History, but also a greater capacity to access, reconceive, and rearrange sources to express new – and largely disinterested – understandings of the events of the past than has heretofore been conceded to him.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his thanks to Dr. Victoria Leonard of Royal Holloway, University of London and the Institute of Classical Studies, whose advice was as generous as it was salutary, and to the anonymous reviewers for Vigiliae Christianae for their helpful criticisms. I realize, however, that some of the points raised in this article have been occupying my mind since I was a doctoral student, and so I am happy to acknowledge my debt also to my Doktormutter, Prof. Karla Pollmann, and offer this paper to her in celebration of her installation as the Rektorin of the University of Tübingen.

\textsuperscript{112} We are not the first to detect the signs of an heretofore undetected lost source in Orosius’ History, but have been preceded by A. Pardini, “Una fonte perduta di Orosio? (Oros. hist. 1,21,1–3),” Orpheus 9 (1988) 332–37. As Pardini makes clear, the traces of such sources, unlike those of the acknowledged sources of Orosius, can be so faint as to be almost unrecognizable.