

Not Much Happened: 410 and All That*

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- A. DI BERARDINO, G. PILARA and L. SPERA (EDS), *ROMA E IL SACCO DEL 410: REALTÀ, INTERPRETAZIONE, MITO. ATTI DELLA GIORNATA DI STUDIO (ROMA, 6 DICEMBRE 2010)* (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 131). Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2012. Pp. 326, illus. ISBN 9788879611091. €35.00.
- H. HARICH-SCHWARZBAUER and K. POLLMANN (EDS), *DER FALL ROMS UND SEINE WIEDERAUFERSTEHUNGEN IN ANTIKE UND MITTELALTER* (Millenium-Studien zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr. 40). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013. Pp. vi + 323. ISBN 9783110286984. €109.95.
- J. LIPPS, C. MACHADO and P. VON RUMMEL (EDS), *THE SACK OF ROME IN 410 AD: THE EVENT, ITS CONTEXT AND ITS IMPACT: PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD AT THE GERMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE AT ROME, 4-6 NOVEMBER 2010* (Palilia 28). Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2013. Pp. 455, illus. ISBN 9783895009440. €49.00.

Even in these unclassical times, the sack of Rome by the Goths in A.D. 410 remains entrenched in Western collective memory as a 'key date' in history. For a scholarly audience, its sixteen-hundredth anniversary in 2010 was commemorated by no fewer than three conferences in Rome.¹ The resulting volumes illustrate the ambivalent relationship historical scholarship entertains with commemoration. While the conferences draw their appeal from the construction, in late ancient and modern tradition, of the sack as an event of world historical importance, the three volumes collectively lead one to conclude that nothing much really happened between 24 and 27 August 410. The schizophrenic situation is summed up in the following two statements by Philipp von Rummel, the organizer of the conference held by the German Archaeological Institute. In an interview with the BBC, he is quoted as saying: 'I don't know if people will still be talking about 9/11 in 2,000 years time, but the events of that August day still influence our contemporary view of history.'² In the introduction to his volume, co-edited with J. Lipps and C. Machado, he approvingly notes that scholars 'have moved away from the traditional narrative of collapse with which the sack was associated' (11), and his own contribution opens by stating that, without lapsing into 'historical instrumentalization and projections', one cannot say much more than that an army under the leadership of Alaric plundered the city of Rome for three days (17: 'Diese drei Sätze geben präzise das wieder, was abseits historischer Instrumentalisierungen und Projektionen über das Ereignis gesagt werden kann'). Even if the two statements need not be contradictory, they convey two rather different views of the events: a hyperbolic one highlighting long-term repercussions and a rather terse one that remains strictly within the bounds of the factual. It is a phenomenon that can be observed elsewhere:

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¹ The year 2010 also saw the publication of a number of commemorative volumes: Ghilardi and Pilari 2010, Grossi and Ronzani 2010, Meier and Patzold 2010, Moorhead and Stuttard 2010.

² D. Willey on the BBC news-site, 24.8.2010: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11066461>.

critical scholarship seeks to undermine traditional historical narrative, while at the same time failing to escape entirely the story it rejects.³

None of the volumes under review has any chance of being read by a lay audience and we can, therefore, revert to the safe territory of scholarship. Sources for the sack are literary and archaeological. The former have, traditionally, guided the interpretation of the latter: archaeologists have often tried to find evidence for the dramatic narrative that was distilled from the literary sources. The interpretation of the literary sources has, in turn, been inspired by the sobbing, choking voice of Jerome: ‘The city which had taken the whole world, is taken’ (‘capitur urbs, quae totum cepit orbem’).⁴ Hence the often repeated assertion that the sack sent shock waves through the Mediterranean.

Literature is a bad seismograph, especially if it is supposed to measure the destruction wrought by the Goths. None of the accounts of the sack is written by an eyewitness, and all are short on factual detail. We know that the Goths entered the city through the Salarian Gate, looted the city and burned some buildings.⁵ A few of these buildings are named: the Horti Sallustiani, the house of the Valerii, those of Marcella and Anicia Proba, and a church called the Basilica Iulii.⁶ A meticulous survey by H. Brandenburg (*Roma e il Sacco*) demonstrates that there are hardly any archaeological traces of the sack. In the Horti Sallustiani, buried statues have been found, which could indeed be evidence for the safeguarding of treasures in the face of a looming sack, even if they could belong to any of the other sacks of the fifth century.⁷ Brandenburg counsels against seeing restorations in the years and decades after 410, for example of the Curia and of the Basilica Aemiliana,⁸ as evidence for destruction and points out that one cannot distinguish ruin due to natural catastrophes from man-made destruction. He also argues that church building in Rome does not seem to suffer a dip after the sack, which suggests that the event did not harm funding for the Church.⁹ Some of the evidence is further critically scrutinized in other papers: for the Basilica Aemiliana by Lipps (*The Sack of Rome*), admitting the possibility but remaining doubtful; for the Forum of Caesar by A. Corsaro, A. Delfino, I. de Luca and R. Meneghini (*The Sack of Rome*), who wish to propose a link with the sack, but admit to not having evidence for that;¹⁰ for the forum in Ostia, by A. Gering (*The Sack of Rome*), who demonstrates that the collapse is due to natural catastrophes; for portable objects by F. Baratte (*The Sack of Rome*), showing that there is no proof that particular deposits of precious objects can be linked to the sack; for the destruction of the Basilica Iulii by F. A. Bauer (*The Sack of Rome*), who argues that the phrasing of the *Liber Pontificalis* implies looting but not destruction (262). Bauer indeed suggests that to the late ancient mind, looting equalled destruction and was described as such, because the value of a house lay in the objects that it contained and not in the structure itself. The suggestion is appealing, even if Bauer does not succeed in offering any strong evidence for this attitude: one can, in fact, also observe this gradual distinction in modern accounts of urban violence. Generally, contributors to these three volumes situate the sack within a context of urban decline in Rome, which started at the end of the fourth century and

³ Meier and Patzold 2010 — perhaps the most insightful book published on 410 — therefore sensibly opt for narrating the event as a series of receptions from antiquity to twentieth-century scholarship.

⁴ Jer., *Ep.* 127.12. See also Jer., *Comment. in Ezechielem prophetam*, pr.: ‘in una urbe totus orbis interiit’.

⁵ August., *De civ. D.* 1.1; Oros. 7.39; Sozom., *Hist. eccl.* 9.9.4–5; Marcellinus, *Chron.* a. 410; Jord., *Get.* 156.

⁶ Procop., *Goth.* 3.2.22–4; Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae* 14.3; Jer., *Ep.* 127.13, 130.7; *Liber Pontificalis* 1.230–3.

⁷ Brandenburg (*Roma e il Sacco*): 244. On statues in general, see Ambrogi (*Roma e il Sacco*).

⁸ Further doubts are raised by Lipps (*The Sack of Rome*).

⁹ See further Liverani (*The Sack of Rome*).

¹⁰ See also Meneghini (*The Sack of Rome*), who notes that there is no archaeological evidence for the vast numbers of dead due to illness and starvation claimed by Zos. 5.39.2–3.

was primarily caused by natural disasters.¹¹ The sack may have accelerated this decline, but is itself hardly attested.

The picture that emerges is consistent and convincing: the Goths looted the city but did not cause systematic damage to urban structure and buildings. They seized spoils, but did not destroy the city.¹² Some contributors to the various volumes resist this conclusion. The maximalist case is set out by L. Spera (*Roma e il Sacco*), who takes evidence for reconstruction in the decades after 410 as proof of actual damage due to the sack. S. Fogagnolo (*The Sack of Rome*) dates the halt in the construction of a house in Trastevere to the sack, but, as far as I can see, she offers no argument for the date (158). C. Pavolini (*The Sack of Rome*) finds plenty of traces of the sack on the Caelian Hill, and even insists on finding evidence in the house of the Valerii, whereas others have demonstrated the absence of destruction there.¹³ S. Orlandi (*The Sack of Rome*) takes a maximalist view on inscriptions mentioning reconstruction and takes them to imply destruction in 410, but admits to not getting beyond the merely possible (343).¹⁴ R. Santangeli Valenzani (*The Sack of Rome*) suggests that the sack must have been terrible, but that the traces have been lost. Moreover, he notes, archaeology cannot narrate an event. This is true, and maybe some archaeologists are too keen to be able to tell the story. His most important remark is, however, a different one: archaeologists of the nineteenth century saw traces of the sack everywhere, whereas their twenty-first-century colleagues have become much more sceptical (38). This is not just a matter of improved archaeological methods: it also reflects the fact that an earlier generation of archaeologists followed more closely the account of the narrative sources. The modern sceptical reading of the archaeological evidence offered by H. Brandenburg and others may, then, also reflect the gradual parting of the ways of archaeology and history — which, in this case, has had a beneficial outcome.

Yet material and narrative sources may concur more than the preceding paragraph might seem to suggest. The archaeological picture is remarkably consistent with the dominant narrative in the literary sources, which stresses that the sack was a rather genteel affair — to use Ralph Mathisen's phrase (*The Sack of Rome*).¹⁵ Zosimus (not writing about the sack itself but the build-up towards it) states that Alaric did not want to destroy the city, which chimes with the idea noted in a string of Christian sources that the Goths exercised clemency: they looted property, raped women, but did not systematically burn down the city and respected asylum in churches.¹⁶ Preceded by a triple siege that caused famine, this was terrible enough, but significantly less than the destruction the Goths wreaked on other Italian cities and regions.¹⁷ The image of a genteel sack already occurs in Augustine and Orosius, who wrote shortly after the event and whose intended audiences, in all likelihood, included Romans who had fled to

¹¹ Filippi (*The Sack of Rome*), Quaranta, Pardi, Ciarrocchi, and Capodiferro (*The Sack of Rome*), Santangeli Valenzani (*Roma e il Sacco*).

¹² For the wealth still left (or again available) for Geiseric to plunder: see Procop., *Vand.* 3.5.1–8 and 4.9.1–14.

¹³ Hillner 2003: 143, Brandenburg (*Roma e il Sacco*): 234.

¹⁴ Ambrogio (*Roma e il Sacco*): 162 also argues for a link between the restorations and the sack of 410.

¹⁵ For further overviews of the literary evidence, see Di Bernardino (*Roma e il Sacco*) and Pilara (*Roma e il Sacco*).

¹⁶ Zos. 5.41.4–7; Prosper Tiro, *Chron.* a. 410 = Cassiod., *Chron.* a. 410; Oros. 7.39.15–17; cf. Jord., *Get.* 156; August., *De civ. D.* 1.7, 1.28; Sozom., *Hist. eccl.* 9.9. For these texts see the overview by Mathisen (*The Sack of Rome*). Further sources are reviewed in U. Roberto (*Der Fall Roms*) and U. Roberto (*Roma e il Sacco*). I do not think that the hypothesis proposed in the second paper, that Orosius and Zosimus used a common source, is warranted (69, 73). Both authors indeed offer a similar interpretation, but this cannot count as sufficient evidence for a shared source.

An author little mentioned in this context is Philostorgius (*Hist. eccl.* 12.3), whose value is hard to estimate. The summary by Photius suggests a detached and factual narrative (Wirbelauer 2011), whilst the event is part of a series of calamities befalling the Empire and can thus be interpreted in the light of eschatological concerns (Bleckmann 2007).

¹⁷ Procop., *Goth.* 6.16.24. Cf. Lehmann 1998.

North Africa. It cannot, therefore, have been completely outlandish. Massive destruction and slaughter is only invoked by authors distant from the events, either geographically (Jerome and Socrates¹⁸) or in temporal terms, in particular Procopius — in whose narrative the sack by Alaric functions as a foil against which to judge the contemporary conflict between Romans and Goths.¹⁹ The concurrence of archaeology and literary evidence is bound to cause some disquiet. Indeed, it was noted a long time ago that the idea of a genteel sack serves a particular ideological purpose: to demonstrate that the sack does not vitiate the positive effects on humanity of its conversion to Christianity. In different ways, this is the argument pursued by Orosius and Augustine. Although we moderns tend to assume that ideology and truthfulness rule each other out, we must accept that this particular ideological interpretation of 410 by and large hits the mark. In this light, my title, derived from Orosius' dictum *nihil factum*, is more justified than one might think at first sight.²⁰

As was noted by Meier and Patzold, the sack of 410 functioned in Late Antiquity as a *Projektionsfläche*; around the sack contemporary worries and convictions crystallized. The volume edited by H. Harich-Schwarzbauer and K. Pollmann helps us to understand why the sack rapidly turned into a symbol, by situating the event within the context of late antique debates about the status and meaning of Rome. The sack is often understood as shaking the belief in the Vergilian *Roma perennis*, but the decline and fall of the city was as much part of the Roman *imaginaire social* (a term I use in the sense developed by Cornelius Castoriadis as self-images of a particular society that determine its perception of the world).²¹ The fall was present in multiple ways: through the idea of Troy as the ancestor and prefiguration of Rome;²² through commemoration of historical episodes, such as the sack of 387 B.C. and the threat of Hannibal; through the interpretation of particular rulers as refounders of Rome, most prominently Augustus; through the projection of a life cycle onto the history of Rome, hinting at a decline that was to be overcome by a rejuvenation.²³ The importance of the theme of decline at the end of the fourth century becomes tangible in the panegyric poems of Claudian. They are addressed to the ruling élite of the Western Empire and performed on public occasions, yet, as H. Harich-Schwarzbauer (*Der Fall Roms*) shows, they do not only celebrate the powers that be, but also repeatedly evoke how Rome feared her own fall and imagine how a sack would take place.²⁴ One can also think of Ammianus Marcellinus' decision to stop his history with the defeat at Adrianople — not to suggest that it marks the end of the Empire, but to highlight a moment of profound crisis needing rejuvenation. Notwithstanding a recognition of the facilitating rôle played by the Roman Empire in the history of salvation, the focus of ecclesiastical authors was primarily on the Church as the locus of salvation and the focus of God's intentions.

¹⁸ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 7.10, on which see Meier and Patzold 2010: 85–6. The event is more dramatized in August., *Sermo* 296 than in his other depictions. The Syriac poet Isaac of Amida is said to have composed poems on the destruction of Rome: *Chronicle of Zuqnin* a. 729 (J. B. Chabot (ed.), CSCO 121 (1949), text p. 193; transl. p. 143–4).

¹⁹ Procop., *Goth.* 3.2. One can detect a number of allusions to Alaric and parallels with the sack of 410 in Procopius' account of the struggle between Romans and Goths: 5.16.2, 5.18.14, 5.25.18, 6.4.9, 7.20.30–1. Roberto (*Der Fall Roms*): 123 notices the parallel between Totila and Alaric. Meier and Patzold 2010: 95–6 under-estimate the rôle played by Alaric in Procopius' narrative.

²⁰ Oros. 7.40.1.

²¹ Castoriadis 1975. The term is also used, in a less specific sense, by Pilara (*Roma e il Sacco*). For images of Rome, see Pollmann (*Der Fall Roms*), with ample reference to the studies on the perception of Rome in Late Antiquity.

²² As detected by McLynn (*The Sack of Rome*): 325 in Oros. 1.17.3 and 7.43.14.

²³ For example, Amm. Marc. 14.6.4–5.

²⁴ For example, Claud., *De bello Gildonico* 1.17–128.

They could, therefore, easily imagine the demise of human institutions.²⁵ Against this background, one can safely state that the sack had already been imagined more than once before it actually happened.

Responses to the sack harken back, by and large, to well established modes of thought, such as the assertion of the renewal of Rome and its revitalized claim to eternity in Rutilius Namatianus and others.²⁶ In a more pessimistic tone, the fall of Rome becomes a symbol for the general decline of mankind for Gregory the Great, thus maintaining the identification of *urbs* and *orbis*.²⁷ The best-known responses start out from the idea that divine favour and displeasure express themselves in historical events. The sack thus produced pagan incriminations against Christians, as well as worries among Christians about the fruits of Christianization.²⁸ Indeed, responses, pagan and Christian, focus mainly on internal agency in the form of moral decline of the Romans (underlined by U. Roberto (*Der Fall Roms*: 188)), rather than on external agency — the Goths themselves — an attitude that is in line with ancient understanding of action as rooted in human virtue. To such arguments and sentiments, Augustine offered the best-known response in the *City of God*, refocusing his reader's attention onto the spiritual side of life. One should note in passing that Augustine is largely absent from all three volumes, an omission that is all the more striking as it is the association with the *City of God* which may have done most to turn 410 into an event at the forefront of the Western mind.²⁹

For some responses, more individual reasons can be suggested. Neil McLynn and Cristiana Ricci do a good job contextualizing the dramatic language of Jerome. McLynn (*The Fall of Rome*) focuses on the social dynamics of Jerome's position in Jerusalem, and suggests that Jerome may have styled pilgrims from Rome as refugees in order to obtain or to consolidate Roman patronage (330). Starting out from a more literary analysis, Ricci (*Der Fall Roms*) shows that Jerome modelled himself on Ezechiel in his commentary on this biblical book and thus, by imitation, had to insist on the dramatic nature of the sack when he mentioned it in the prefaces (213–17). We should therefore avoid reading the events through the lens of the self-presentation of Jerome. Another crucial author is Orosius, discussed in no less than three papers. M. Formisano (*Der Fall Roms*) and N. McLynn (*The Sack of Rome*) argue that for Orosius the sack was not very important, Formisano by suggesting that Orosius locks the event up in a past that has become purely textual, McLynn by proposing that when Orosius wrote in 417/418, the events of 410 had sufficiently receded in contemporary minds to become a spring-board for the development of his argument rather than the dominant theme. Mischa Meier (*The Sack of Rome*), by contrast, argues that the work does focus on the events of 410, and that Orosius fails to give a coherent interpretation of the event because too little time had elapsed for him to understand its significance.³⁰ Nevertheless, Meier also concludes that Orosius did not see a grand future for Rome anymore. I have myself argued that Orosius does recall the fall of Rome throughout his narrative, but

²⁵ See, for example, August., *Sermo* 81.9, 105.8; Oros. 2.6.13. This sentence marks an opposition to an important strand in scholarship, which identifies 'eusebianism' as a strong and important current in Christian thought of the fourth and fifth centuries. It is supposed to indicate a group of writers who, like Eusebius, identified the Empire as an essential vehicle for the history of salvation. Yet it has been argued that such an interpretation ill fits Eusebius himself (Johnson 2006: 153–97) as well as Orosius, supposedly one of the high points of late ancient eusebianism (Van Nuffelen 2012). We need a more carefully calibrated account of the 'political' thought of late ancient Christian authors.

²⁶ P. Schierl (*Der Fall Roms*); C. O. Tommasi (*Der Fall Roms*).

²⁷ C. Ricci (*Der Fall Roms*): 226 and 234.

²⁸ M. Kahlos (*The Sack of Rome*), M. R. Salzman (*The Sack of Rome*).

²⁹ T. Fuhrer (*Der Fall Roms*) is an exception, but she focuses on Augustine's perception of the physical aspects of Rome.

³⁰ The essay is best consulted in the longer, German version: Meier 2011.

with the aim of drawing attention to the fact that Rome's survival is conditional on a virtuous life of the inhabitants. This allows us to accept both that the sack is the starting point of Orosius' reflection and that the historian transcends the focus on material Rome: what matters, ultimately, is virtue and, hence, salvation.³¹ In this way, Orosius is closer to Augustine than often thought and, moreover, can be seen adopting a traditional mode of interpretation.

If the *imaginaire social* was one factor in conditioning responses to the event, it also conditioned the sack itself. This may seem, at first sight, a counter-intuitive suggestion. M. Meier and S. Patzold have argued that one of the consequences of the sack was that Rome became an 'idea' and, as such, that the concept of Rome was dissociated from the actual city.³² This could be read into a passage in Orosius, where he argues that the inhabitants of the Empire are now much better off than in the past, for, if they are harrassed by raiding barbarians, they can flee to a safe part of the Empire.³³ Yet, as the essay by K. Pollmann (*Der Fall Roms*) shows, the real Rome had always been somewhat at odds with the ideals projected onto it, leading to what she calls the 'transportability' of Rome. In a different way, the political institutions had separated city from empire in the fourth century: the foundation of Constantinople had provided a new focus in the East, whereas in the West, emperors rarely resided in Rome, but preferred Milan and Ravenna. If Rome remained at the symbolic heart of empire, it was far less its actual nerve centre. As demonstrated by Julian, occupying Rome was not a priority for a fourth-century usurper. Such changed perceptions become clear in the strategic choices leading up to the sack. Alaric tried to strike a deal with the emperor Honorius between 408 and 410, but the chaos at the court of Ravenna after the death of Stilicho made any settlement hard to achieve. In order to put pressure on Honorius, Alaric consciously chose to attack the symbol of empire, without having to take on the much bigger military forces that surrounded the emperor in Ravenna, including recent reinforcements from the East.³⁴ If symbolic status drew Alaric to Rome, it also guaranteed a gentle treatment, which lesser towns on the way were not so lucky to receive. Indeed, the more disciplined way in which Alaric dealt with Rome ensured that he could use Rome as an alternative power base against Ravenna, through the creation of his own emperor, Attalus,³⁵ and it also helped to keep lines of communication open with Honorius.³⁶ As M. Kulikowski (*The Sack of Rome*) rightly underscores, decisions by historical actors always remain contingent. But I would suggest that such decisions are influenced by their perception of the world — including the topography of status that is projected on the Empire. In other words, the sack was also rendered possible by the changed position Rome occupied in the *imaginaire social* of the early fifth century. Further sacks, like the one of 455, would only confirm the separation of the city of Rome and the Roman Empire.

Really, then, did not much happen? Various papers try to assess the impact of the sack in the longer term, but, again, establishing a causal relationship is very difficult. E. Lo Cascio (*The Fall of Rome*) entertains the possibility that the sack caused a small dip in the population, which was part of a long-term decline that started earlier and was much more pronounced later in the fifth century. Firmer conclusions are offered by B. Ward-Perkins and C. Machado (*The Fall of Rome*), who, drawing on the *Last*

³¹ Van Nuffelen 2012. For a similar focus on virtue, see Pelagius, *Epistula ad Demetriadem* 30.

³² Meier and Patzold 2010: 82.

³³ Oros. 5.1, 7.41.

³⁴ Zos. 5.29.9.

³⁵ R. Lizzi Testa (*Roma e il Sacco*): 96 argues for the rôle played by paganism in generating support for Alaric and the counter-emperor Attalus. The argument that there still were pagans is undoubtedly right, but there is no proof that allegiance to paganism determined political choices: see further Machado (*The Sack of Rome*).

³⁶ B. Näf (*Der Fall Roms*) offers an elegant defence of the reasonableness of Honorius' actions.

Statues of Antiquity database, demonstrate that the statue habit in Rome itself was hit by the sack, but recovered, even if more attention was paid to the restoration and relocation of existing statues. In southern Italy, however, the events of 408–412 ‘suddenly, and definitively, killed off the practice of erecting statues’ (356): the events deflated the ‘bubble of civic self-confidence’ that was the basis for the statue habit. V. Fiocchi Nicolai (*Roma e il Sacco*) argues that the sack may have accelerated the shift away from burial in catacombs towards burial at churches and martyria: churches offered real protection during the sack, and this may have enhanced them being perceived as true places of salvation. In both cases, the effects of the sack are to be felt through their impact on perception and cultural habits, rather than in terms of material destruction, which supports the overall interpretation offered here.

The sack of Rome of 410 seems to sum up the decline characterizing Late Antiquity — and its repetition later in the fifth and sixth century only underscores that impression. Since the Renaissance, the event has marked, in some interpretations, the beginning of a new epoch: the Middle Ages.³⁷ It is this heritage that helps to explain the persistent understanding of 410 as a key event in world history — and for that reason it is regrettable that none of the volumes really integrates the history of scholarship in its discussions.³⁸ They are, however, effective in doing away with a catastrophist reading of the event, both in terms of material destruction and psychological shock. My title (and its original in Orosius) should, therefore, not be understood in a literal sense. Yet the sack was not as horrible as it could have been, and contemporaries could reduce it to an ordinary event. This shows how much things had changed in the fifth century. Shifts in the perception of the world and the position of the city of Rome in it — coupled with, and related to, a changing political order — rendered the sack possible. It was conceivable that the integrity of the symbolic capital of the Empire could be imperilled without the Empire itself being shaken to its very foundations. Similarly, whatever shock the sack may have caused in some quarters, it could be explained with the categories at hand and did not cause a fundamental revision of the world view. Indeed, authors as different as Orosius, Olympiodorus of Thebes and Rutilius Namatianus seem to suggest that life took on its normal course again after 27 August. Later judgements would be starkly different, highlight the drama, and insert the event into a convincing narrative of decline — judgements to which our own modern understanding of the sack is still too greatly in debt.

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³⁷ Meier and Patzold 2010: 147–57.

³⁸ An exception is P. Siniscalco (*Roma e il Sacco*).

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