



Orosius and the Rhetoric of History (Oxford Early Christian Studies)

Peter Van Nuffelen

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The Histories Against the Pagans of Orosius, written in 416/7, has been one of the most influential works in the history of Western historiography. Often read as a theology of history, it has been rarely been set against the background of ancient historiography and rhetorical practice in the time of Orosius. Arguing for the closeness of rhetoric and historiography in Antiquity, this book shows how Orosius situates himself consciously in the classical tradition and draws on a variety of rhetorical tools to shape his narrative: a subtle web of intertextual allusions, a critical engagement with traditional exempla, a creative rewriting of the sources, and a skilled deployment of the rhetoric of pathos. In this way, Orosius aims at opening the eyes of his adversaries; instead of remaining blinded by the traditional, glorious view of the past, he wishes his readers to see the past and the present in their true colours. The book paints a more complex picture of the *Histories*, and argues against the tendency to see Orosius as a naive apologist of the Roman empire. In fact, he can be shown to put the Church at the heart of view of Roman history. Setting Orosius in the context of contemporary historiography and literature, it sheds new light on the intellectual life in the early fifth century AD.

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