

A NEW EYEWITNESS OF THE BARBARIAN IMPACT ON SPAIN, 409-419

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SUMMARY

The recently discovered Divjak letters of St. Augustine have thrown new light on conditions in Tarragona in the early years of the barbarian invasions. While Hydatius and Paulus Orosius portray the horror of those times, a letter from a certain Consentius, resident in Minorca to Augustine (letter 11) leaves a different impression. Consentius had sent a monk, Fronto to the province to report on the activities of the priscillianists there. From Fronto's report it is clear that by 417 the interest of the populace was being stirred by religious faction. The barbarians though still feared had become little more than a nuisance, one more danger travellers must guard against. The return of relative peace provides a background to Orosius' optimistic hopes for a romano-gothic commonwealth that would restore the imperial grandeur of Rome. Consentius is an excellent witness to this interlude of hope before the final collapse of the empire in the west in the 430.

The 30 new letters and memoranda (commonitoria) discovered and published by Professor Johannes Divjak, written to or by St. Augustinae, nearly all concern the religious situation in North Africa between 417 and 426¹. Two, however, Letters 11 and 12, were written by Consentius, a learned and articulate Christian layman living on one of the Balearic Islands (probably Minorca)². His main concern was Priscillianism which he abominated, along with other deviations,

1 Edited and published by J. Divjak in *CSEL* 88, Vienna 1981. Divjak's dating of the letters has been accepted by scholars with some modifications. See pp. LIV-LXIX of his edition.

2 For the strong probability of Minorca as Consentius' home see WANKENNE, J.: «Lettres de Consentius à S. Augustin», (pp. 225-242 of ed. LEPELLEY, C.: *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak*, Paris, Etudes augustiniennes, 1983) at p. 228. The decisive evidence is the mention of bishop Severus with whom Consentius was on good terms. Severus was Bishop of Minorca. (Letter 12.13).

such as Origenism, Pelagianism and even Donatism, and he record show he persuaded a Spanish monk from Tarragona, named Fronto, to try to infiltrate Priscillianist groups so as to expose them and bring them to justice³. The year, however, is 418, and in the background stand barbarian invaders⁴. What Consentius and Fronto record concerning these barbarians contrasts and at the same time fills out the picture of the barbarian impact on Spain derived from two other Christian eyewitnesses, Hydatius and Paulus Orosius.

The crossing of the frozen Rhine near Mainz on 31 December 406 and the days following by great numbers of Vandals and Alans, Germanic tribesmen, remains a landmark in European history. Henceforth, in the western provinces of the empire Roman provincial administration would cede progressively to Germanic kingdoms whose influence on the future development of Europe would be permanent. Between 407-409 the invaders moved steadily across Gaul leaving destruction and terror in their wake, until by the late summer of 409 they reached the Pyrenees. Then on a day long remembered, Tuesday either 28 September or 12 October 409, they forced or had betrayed to them, passes probably in the western section of the range and arrived in Spain⁵. The period of the Germanic kingdoms in the Iberian peninsula was to last just three centuries.

Evidence from Gaul indicates that the invasions were so sudden and unexpected that the first reaction was simply that of shock. Down to the very moment of impact the minds of those whose personal testimony has survived had been fixed on peaceful, agricultural and even theological matters. Victricius, Paulinus of Nola's disciple, supervising the building of chapels on his estate at Primulacum⁶, or the presbyter Vigilantius annoyed at the abuse of relics and over-use of candles in the liturgy, may have been typical concerns of individuals in Gaul in the year 406⁷.

Over much of the Roman West Christianity had displaced the traditional worship of the gods as the religion of the people. Cult and religious attitudes were beginning to anticipate those of mediaeval Europe. This intense but hum-drum life was now rudely invaded.

In Spain three eyewitnesses record the impact of the first decade of the Barbarian invasion. First, Hydatius, Bishop of Aquae Flaviae (Chaves) in Galicia (c. 395-470), writing his Chronicle under the domination of the Suevi in Galicia (c. 469-470) records vivid memories of his youth fifty years before⁸. Paulus Orosius, slightly older than Hydatius (born c. 385), originating probably in Tarragona, was also a cleric. He shared Hydatius patriotism as regards the empire, especially to the Theodosian house, but also significantly, he wrote from the point of view of Spain emphasising former gallant resistance of his countrymen to the armies of pagan Rome⁹. He

3 Letter 11. i. 4.

4 The letter may have been written late in 418 or early 419. It was a year before Augustine wrote his *De Mendacio* in response in 420. See Divjak op. cit. LIX and Wankenne, art. cit. p. 227.

5 HYDATIUS: *Chronica*, (ed. TRANOY, A.: *Sources chrétiennes*, 218, Paris, 1974) 62. Date discussed by Tranoy, op. cit. 35-6. For the suspicion of treachery, see OROSIUS, Paulus: *Historia adv. paganos libri vii*, (ed. ZANGEMEISTER, C.: *CSEL* V. Vienna 1882). Vii. 40. 9.

6 PAULINUS OF NOLA: *Ep.* 32 (ed. HARTEL, W.: *CSEL*, XXIX). Two basilicas and a chapel were built by Victricius on his estate c. 402.

7 JEROME: *Contra Vigilantium*, i.

8 For Hydatius' career, see Tranoy, op. cit. 9-17 and the study by MOLE, C.: *Uno storico del V Secolo, il Vescovo Idazio*, Catania, 1978, Ch. i. An old but still useful account of Roman views of the barbarians is to be found in DILL, S.: *Roman Society in the last century of the Western Empire*. London MacMillan 1919, pp. 303-345.

9 Thus, his enthusiastic description of the defence of Numantia against the Romans under Scipio, *Historia*, v. 7.

had been forced to flee by the invaders and early in 415 arrived «by chance»¹⁰, as he claimed, in Augustine's see of Hippo. The third witness is Consentius whose home in the Balearic Islands had not yet felt the force of barbarian raiders. His record of what his friend Fronto had told him about the interests and attitudes of the inhabitants of some towns in north-east Spain fills most of Letter II in the Divjak collection, and is a valuable corrective to the accounts given by the other two witnesses.

Both Hydatius and Orosius leave the same impression of shock, confusion and breakdown of law and order that accompanied the barbarian invasion. Hydatius speaks of «barbarians rampaging through Spain, killing without mercy», and the added evils of pestilence, famine, extortions by tax-collectors at the expense of the city community's stocks of provisions, and oppression by soldiers who should have been defending the inhabitants against the invaders¹¹. This could be reminiscence of the woes represented by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to which Hydatius alludes, but bitter complaint against soldiers and tax-collectors are echoed elsewhere, not least by Salvian of Marseilles in 439¹². The lurid description of cannibalism, disease, and of animals devouring unburied corpses indicates either vivid memory and/or first-hand information, suggesting complete if temporary catastrophe¹³. In addition, he suggests that even in the first years of their invasion the barbarians intended to stay permanently. Spain was divided up between Alans, Vandals and Suevi and to all intents and purposes was a conquered territory¹⁴.

The Visigoths however, he treats differently. First, they are not mentioned among the peoples engaged in the partition of the Spanish provinces. Secondly, they are regarded in this period as allies of Rome¹⁵. Thus, they deal out punishment to the Vandals settled in south-east Spain (Baetica) «in the Hame of Rome»¹⁶. Fifteen years later in c. 437 Hydatius describes them as destroying the Bagaudae insurgents in the Ebro valley, also «under the authority of the Romans», and he underlines the alliance between Aetius and the visigothic king Theodoric that defeated Attila on the Catalaunian Fields on 20 June 451¹⁷.

Orosius, as is well known, handles the Visigoths similarly. He combines this favour with some forward-looking ideas which mark the year 417 as among the last when an educated provincial could look to the future of the empire in the west with optimism. His outlook is all

10 Orosius in his *Commonitorium ad Augustinum* (PL. XLII. col. 566), explains how he had reached the shores of Africa, «sine voluntate» but intent on consulting Augustine on both Priscillianism and Origenism which were attracting some of his friends.

11 HYDATIUS: *Chron.* 48, «Debacchantibus per Hispanias barbaris et saeviente nihilominus pestilentiae malo opes et conditam in urbibus substantiam tyrannicus exactor diripit et miles exhaurit: fames dira grassatur, adeo ut humanae carnes ab humano genere vi famis fuerint devoratae: matres quoque necatis vel coctiis per se natorum suorum sint pastae corporibus. Bestiae occisorum gladio fame pestilencia cadaveribus adsuetae quosque hominum fortiores interimunt eorumque carnibus pastae passim in humani generis efferantur interitum, et ita quattuor plagis ferri famis pestilentiae besitarum ubique in toto orbe saevientibus praedictae a domino per prophetas suos audentiationes implentur».

12 SALVIAN: *De Gubernatione Dei* (ed. F. Pauly, CSEL VIII, Vienna 1883, V. 5-6).

13 HYDATIUS: *Chron.* 48, cited in n. 11.

14 *Ibid.* 49. See also BURY, J. B.: *A History of the later Roman Empire*, (Dover edition, 1958) Vol. I. p. 203.

15 *Ibid.* 63, though this does not exclude his condemnation of them as deceitful and marauders, *ibid.*, 186.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.* 158, «Per Fredericum Theuderici regis fratrem Bacaudae Terraconenses caeduntur ex auctoritate Romanorum», and for Aetius and Theodori as allies against the Huns, *ibid.* 150. Aetius rule in Gaul strongly Favoured the interest of the great landowners.

the more remarkable in view of his experiences at the hands of barbarian invaders. As he meditated in writing the *Historia adversus Paganos* at Augustine's behest in 417, he stated in connection with the death of Alexander the Great and the evils of his time, «And yet if I may speak of my own story, how for the first time I saw the strange barbarians, and I had to avoid them because they could do damage, and to flatter them as they were the masters, to pray for them because they were infidels, and to flee from those who lay in wait for me...»¹⁸. This was in 414 when the Visigoths under King Ataulphys first entered Tarraconensis with Ataulph's imperial bride, Galla Placidia, and Spain was becoming a cockpit of warring Germanic tribes.

The *Historia adversus paganos* suggests, however, that Orosius' more positive attitude towards the Goths may not have been a sudden whim. One has the impression that it had matured over a period. It may be that they were Christians, and he is prepared to excuse even their Arianism on the grounds that they were deceived by the emperor Valens' missionaries¹⁹. He contrasts in 401-402 the fate of Radagaisius, the pagan invader of Italy in 401-402 with Alaric's successful career which had begun as the ally of the Spaniard, Theodosius²⁰. Even the sack of Rome in 410 is played down as a disaster, and the respectful behaviour of the Goths towards Christian captives is emphasised²¹. The city was looted but few lives were lost. In this respect we find Orosius at odds with Jerome, who had a truer if more distant perception of the scale of the disaster²².

A clue, however, towards understanding Orosius' underplaying the fall of Rome to Alaric and his aspiration towards a future Romano-Gothic commonwealth, may perhaps be found in his social outlook. Like Augustine on the one hand²³, and Hydatius on the other²⁴, he feared the lower orders of society, whether in the army or on the land. Thus he is critical of both Carausius (the usurper in Britain, 286-293)²⁵ and Constantine III²⁶, as being sprung from the lower ranks of the soldiery, and therefore unworthy to claim imperial rule, even if they were able individuals. The Bagaudae, when they first appear on the scene without sympathy in 286, are described without sympathy as a «disorderly company of peasants stirring up pernicious tumults»²⁷. They were to be a threat to peace and social order in north-east Spain for the next 30 years. In this context he sees the Goths as a force for stability, and accepts the marriage of Galla Placidia to Ataulph and the conversion of his supplanter Wallia from an anti —to a pro— Roman standpoint²⁸ as evidence for this. He may have been right when he wrote, for the suggestion has been made

18 PAULUS OROSIUS: *Historia*, iii. 20. 5-6, writing from the perspective of a peaceful North Africa.

19 *Historia*, vii. 33. 19.

20 *Ibid.* vii. 37. 8-16. Alaric is described as «mitis in caede» contrasting with Radagaisius' «inexsaturabile crudelitate ipsam caedem amaret in caede».

21 *Ibid.*, vii. 39.

22 JEROME: *Ep.*, 127, 11 and 12.

23 AUGUSTINE: *Ep.*, 108. 18, where he castigates peasant discontent in Numidia as, «audacia rusticana». The social order like the political order in the empire was sacrosanct.

24 HYDATIUS: *Chron.* 125, 128. («insolentiam Bacaudarum»), 158, 179. See Mole, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-82.

25 *Historia*, vii. 25. 3, «Carausius quidam, genere quidem infimus sed consilio et manu promptus», a good ruler if he had not been of such lowly birth!

26 *Ibid.*, vii. 40. 4. «C. ex infimi militia propter solam spem nominis sine merito virtutis eligitur».

27 *Ibid.*, vii. 25. 2. See THOMPSON, E. A.: «Peasant revolts in late Roman Gaul and Spain» in FINLEY, M. (ed): *Studies in Ancient History*. London 1976, pp. 304-320.

28 *Historia*, vii. 43, 10-14. Wallia's outlook and his exertions on behalf of the empire against the Vandals, Alans and Suevi.

with some force, that the recall of the Goths from Spain and their settlement in Aquitaine in 418 was connected with a move by the emperor's government to contain the Vagaudae there who were threatening to control all Armorica (Brittany) to the north²⁹. Historians have remarked how little social change, especially in the power of the wealthy took place with the settlement later of the Visigoths in Spain³⁰.

The emergence of serious social discontent at this moment is indicated further by Orosius' summing up of the Goths' relation with the provincials. «While at first», he says, the Visigoths caused slaughter and devastation when they invaded Spain this phase soon passed. Spain «was no more harshly treated by the barbarians than she had suffered under the Romans for two hundred years»³¹. Soon, «the barbarians came to detest their swords and betake themselves to the plough and are (note the present tense) treating the Romans as comrades and friends, so that now among them may be found some Romans who, living with the barbarians prefer freedom with poverty to tribute-paying with anxiety among their own people»³². He was the first western chronicler to admit that social and administrative pressures were becoming too much for some provincials to bear. Desertion to the barbarians was the way of escape. Political alliance with the Visigoths was therefore necessary to underpin the tottering internal structures of the Spanish provinces. Some barbarians, especially the Goths, could be regarded as positive force for the future.

Orosius' political hopes for a Romano-Gothic commonwealth³³ proved fanciful, but they make sense in the light of the evidence for conditions in north-eastern Spain in 417-419 provided by Fronto, Consentius' aide and informant. Orosius and Consentius were united in their fear of Priscillianism. The two men may have met during Orosius' brief stop in the Balearic Islands on his way home in 416 bearing relics of St. Stephen³⁴, which he had secured in Palestine. The effect of his sudden appearance was to stimulate Consentius into rabid action against the Priscillianists resulting eventually in Fronto's mission of deceit in 418³⁵. Consentius himself is

29 THOMPSON, E. A.: «The Settlement of the Barbarians in southern Gaul», *Journ. Rom. Stud.*, 46, 1956, 65-75 especially p. 70, «Constantius was afraid of the Bacaudae». For serious peasant (?) uprisings in Armonica c. 415, see RUTILIUS NAMATIANS (ed. Keene): *De Reditu Suo*, lines 1. 213-216, Exuperantius... leges restituit liberatamque reducit/ et servos famulis non sinit esse suis.

30 MOLE, Thus: op. cit., 68-70 and STROHEKER, K. F.: «Spanien im spätrömischen Reich» (284-475) *AEA*, 45-7 (1912-14) regarding the senatorial aristocracy in the period of transition.

31 *Historia*, vii. 40, 1-2.

32 *Ibid.*, 7.

33 *Ibid.*, vii. 42, 6-7. Here, Orosius seems to foreshadow similar hopes on the part of Theodoric the Ostrogoth regarding a possible coalescence between the Goths and Italians. His long reign (493-526), however, left the two communities as divided as ever. For similar optimism in the east regarding the Visigoths 414-417 see Olympiodoros frag. 24 (Marriage of Ataulph and Galla Placidia).

34 In fact, he did not return to Spain at this time, put off by rumours of continuing troubles there. He left some of his relics of St. Stephen in Minorca and returned to North Africa.

35 VAN DAM, R.: «Sheep in Wolves Clothing; the letters of Consentius to Augustine», *Journ. Eccles. Hist.* 37. 4, 1986, 515-535 at pp. 528-9. This informative article is unfortunately flawed by the author's unwillingness to accept that Priscillianism was the heresy rampant in Tarragonensis at the time. However, it can hardly be any other. Consentius shows (*Letter* 11. 1) that his concern was Priscillianism and he mentions no other form of heresy prevalent in the province.

Similarly, Augustine writing his *De Mendacio* to Consentius in reply assumes that he is commenting on tactics used against the Priscillianists. A more likely account of the situation is given by la BONNADIÈRE, A. M.: «Du nouveau sur le priscillianisme», (Ep. 11*), pp. 205-214 of *Les lettres de St. Augustin*.

interesting. As his most recent critic, Raymond Van Dam describes him, «he was one who thought and wrote a bit, and his learning or at least his boldness made him into a local adviser of Christians»³⁶. He was, indeed, fairly typical of the now christianised majority of educated provincials in Spain and southern Gaul. He was, on the one hand, proud of his knowledge of the classics, with a reasonably sure acquaintance of Terence, Ovid, Horace, Vergil and Juvenal, and a good if idiosyncratic Latin style³⁷. On the other hand, he lacked the tolerance of some earlier western Christians such as Ausonius a generation before, suspicious of his friend Paulinus' zealous dedication to the cause of Christianity. Paganism as such had been left behind. It does not Figure Consentius' letters and though he retained something of the traditional literary refinement of the provincial landed gentry, he combined this with a new unbending orthodoxy that found its outlet in heresyhunting and harassment of the Jews³⁸. Christian culture of the early fifth century was foreshadowing in these intolerant attitudes popular religious ideas of the Middle Ages.

Minorca, however, was a cultural backwater, and Consentius had some right to complain of his lot³⁹. Consolation, however, had come through literary exchanges with Augustine, extending back as far as 407, but these were now coupled with astringent criticisms of the style and even the tone of the *Confessions*⁴⁰. A literary name-dropper, his essays into the realm of Trinitarian doctrine were scarcely penetrating, while his ferocity against any and every heretic accompanied a real mental laziness and hankering after a leisured and privileged existence⁴¹. He was unwilling to read and digest serious theological wool he hoped his friend, Fronto, was prepared to do his work for him. A monk probably (*famulus Christi*) rather than a presbyter⁴², Fronto had founded a monastery in Tarragona, and knew the area and its inhabitants well. He shared Consentius' Zeal for orthodoxy directed against the Priscillianists, and he returned to his native province in 418 intent on exposing these nests of heretics.

The Tarraconensis that Fronto describes, however, bears little resemblance to the war-torn territory conjured up by Hydatius and implied by Orosius. Though the military commander, Count Asterius, was making his preparations for battle, presumably against the Vandals, which he fought successfully in 419⁴³, the main interest of the inhabitants was not war but religion. The strife which Fronto records as breaking out in Tarragona itself was caused by fears inspired by rival religious factions. Priscillianism aroused hostility among the orthodox not simply because its teaching concerning the origins of souls (namely, that these were not divine) among other tenets was regarded as wrong, but because it was suspected of magical practices and secret rites damaging to the community as a whole. The same fears that had inspired persecution of the

36 VAN DAM, art. cit., 528.

37 As outlined by WANKENNE, J.: art. cit. (233-39).

38 *Letter* 12. 13. 7 «(ut) aliqua adversus Iudaeos quorum proeliis urgebamur duci nostro (i. e. Bishop Severus) arma producerem».

39 *Letter* 12. 4. 1. «insularum Balearium, in quibus non dicam doctum sed vel fideliter christianum invenire rarissimum est».

40 He admits failing to have read beyond «two or three folios» of Augustine's *Confessions* after four years, and he seems to prefer Lactantius (*Letter* 12. 1-2) though he does not seem to have read much of his writings.

41 Thus, *Letter* 12. 7. 2., admission of «segnitia» and (12. 13. 2) desire to embrace «leisure» (*otium*) as soon as he could. Complaints about reading seriously, see 12. 13. 4. 2-3.

42 I accept van Dam's interpretation of «monk» against Divjak's view that Fronto was a presbyter (op. cit. *CSEL* LIX).

43 *Letter* 11. 12. 2. He asks for Fronto's prayer for his success.

Christians in previous centuries were now being aroused against heretics. They seem to have outweighed worries with regard to the barbarians. Bishops from many parts of the province assembled in two separate councils to examine charges of heresy (Priscillianism) brought by Fronto against the presbyter, Severus. While some roads were regarded as unsafe, they came nevertheless. Townspeople went about their business, without apparent fear of barbarians, their anger being vented at the monk who had tried, they claimed, by fraudulent means to bring a respected citizen to trial on the charge of heresy. He had thereby tarnished the reputation of others and by his actions threatened the existing social order based on aristocratic lineage and wealth⁴⁴. Even so, the barbarian presence remained strongly in the background. Consentius at home in Minorca was angry because «they (the barbarians) appeared to do nothing» against the Priscillianists, as though they had the power to act if they wanted to do so⁴⁵. It had been because of this inaction that he had decided on his own campaign against the heretics. The scheme involved raud and pretence which elicited a stinging rejoinder from Augustine in *De Mendacio* written in 420. Even if the Priscillianists made a virtue of concealing their real views there was no excuse for Catholics to imitate their methods⁴⁶.

This is what Fronto had done. On his arrival at Tarragona he ingratiated himself with a certain aristocratic lady, Severa. He had been told already by Consentius that she was a heretic. Unsuspecting, Severa had put him in touch with the presbyter Severus of Huesca (Osca), also a rich and powerful individual who was pointed out to him as the leader of the heretics in the area⁴⁷. He had acquired three large tomes containing magical writings under the will of his mother. In 417 (*superiore anno*) Severus «believing that the barbarians were now far from» the area had betaken himself to his late mother's castle (*castellum*)⁴⁸, but on the way had been ambushed and robbed by barbarians⁴⁹. These, believing the books valuable, went on to the neighbouring town of Lerida (Ilerda) in the hope of selling them for a good price. When, however, the contents were made known to them they willingly handed them to Sagittius, the town's bishop. He himself proved to be a secret Priscillianist supporter, for he cut out the most exciting magical passages for his own use and sent on one volume to the metropolitan of Tarragona. He explained to the latter that three volumes had been captured by the barbarians but handed over to him. The one which «caused him most displeasure» he was forwarding to the metropolitan, the others. He was keeping in the archives of his church⁵⁰.

What followed was an almost unbelievably dramatic succession of events, whose record is a priceless document for social conditions and attitudes in this now Christianised society. Fronto accused Severus and Severa before the ecclesiastical authorities, but it soon became clear that many of the clergy of the province had Priscillianist sympathies, and were prepared to perjure themselves before lay and church tribunals. They were supported by an active and articulate body of the townspeople. When Severus and Bishop Sagittius of Lerida lied about the whereabouts

44 Letter 11. 8. 3-4. Fronto was denounced by Severus' supporters as one «substantia egenum, mendacis locupletum», who dared tarnish the reputation of the «tam sanctum et tam nobilem virum».

45 *Ibid.* 1. 4.

46 AUGUSTINE: *De Mendacio* 3. 5, 19, 38-39 and 20. 40. See de Bonnadière art. cit. 211.

47 Letter 11. 2. 2-3.

48 *Ibid.* 2. 4. «Severus aestimans barbaros longius abscessisse».

49 *Ibid.* The books themselves are interesting suggesting that the Priscillianists like the Manichees laid much store on their teaching being set out in the finest available manuscripts.

50 *Ibid.*, 2. 5-8.

of the suspect books they actually swore on the Gospels⁵¹. At no time did Fronto have any general support in his attempts to unmask Severa and Severus, while the latter could call on a network of influential connections, including close relatives of the Comes Asterius. Soon he himself was regarded as a trouble-maker. Several times he was threatened with stoning, denounced to his face as a «barking dog» who ought to be slain⁵². His efforts to bring his accusations before properly constituted episcopal courts were frustrated, and though he was given a courteous hearing by Count Asterius himself⁵³, he was able to achieve little. In the end, aided by the sudden deaths of two opponents and an ill dream afflicting another, he was able to escape with some credit restored. He eventually returned to Minorca via Arles where Bisnop Patroclus was also a vigorous anti-Priscillianist⁵⁴. His enemy Bishop Sagittius was compelled to flee «beyond the bounds of the city», though he retained his episcopal orders and a part of his congregation⁵⁵.

The offending magical books, having at first been restored to Severus were finally burnt along with all record of episcopal proceedings concerning them. Honour was salvaged. The clergy had the last word against the monk.

What of the barbarians in all this commotion? They remained apparently on the sidelines. They were regarded as marauders, ready to rob travellers and ambush ecclesiastics⁵⁶ on their journeys, but they would then enter the towns to trade and try to sell the proceeds of their crimes⁵⁷. They could also be on reasonably good terms with the urban clergy. They would be blamed for robberies that had occurred, but though «enemies»⁵⁸. Fronto does not give the impression that they acted like the bloodthirsty assassins —«*barbaris saevientibus*»⁵⁹— of the chroniclers. Life in north-eastern Spain in 417-418 had resumed something approaching normality. It was now a Christian society but violent, feud-ridden, caste-conscious, with no love lost between the clergy and monks, but there was no daily dread of the barbarians. It may be that the horrors described by Hydatius and Orosius had taken place, but time had passed. War against the Vandals in Baetica was a long way off. Priscillianism and perhaps other heresies were the issue. The barbarians had become little worse than nuisances.

This record may induce a note of caution when reading accounts of other writers of the time, such as Orientius and even from so contemporary a document as the *Acta* of the Council of Ephesus in 431⁶⁰ concerning the effects of the Vandal invasion of North Africa, and of other barbarian invasions. Where there really only three major churches standing in North Africa after the Vandals had passed through?⁶¹. And of Roman Britain, how often did «crackling flames»

51 *Ibid.* 20. 3-4, and compare 16. 4.

52 *Ibid.* 6. 1, 13. 1, 16. 3, 17. 3.

53 *Ibid.* 12.

54 *Ibid.* 23.

55 *Ibid.* 20. 3.

56 *Ibid.* 2. 4 and 15. 3.

57 *Ibid.* 2. 5.

58 *Ibid.* 2. 8.

59 OROSIUS: *Historia* vii. 22. 9.

60 Orientius. *Commonitorium* II. 184: *Uno fumavit Gallia tota rogo*. The Council of Ephesus heard how the sea routes from North Africa had been disrupted and that all was chaos and confusion with clergy scattered or killed in the North African provinces. (*PL*. LIII col. 845). Compare Augustin. Ep. 228, 6.

61 POSSIDIUS: *Vita Augustini*, 28.

destroy the Roman villas there?⁶² Was not slow decline, the evidence of broken tiles on patched mosaic floors more indicative of how the end of Roman civilisation came⁶³. Meantime, the letters of Consentius to Augustine, discovered by Johannes Divjak, provide some enlightening new evidence. how ordinary provincials in north-eastern Spain were adapting themselves to the presence of the Germanic invaders ten years after their first arrival.

62 As shown in regard to Lullingstone in Kent, though the cause of the fire is unknown. See MEATES, G. W.: *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone, Kent*, Kent Archaeological Society, 1979, p. 72 ff.

63 As reported for Bignor in Sussex, see FRERE, S. S.: *Britannia*, London, 1977, p. 374.

(In these notes «Letter» is used for the Divjak letter and *Ep.* (epistola) for Augustine's previous correspondence).