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The Historiographical Crisis of the Fifth Century: Towards a New Paradigm for Late Antique and Early Medieval Historiography

To Armin Eich on the occasion
of his 60th birthday

Abstract: A previous paper in *Millennium* 21 (2024) demonstrated the significance of a lost Reichenau codex for the transmission of late antique and early medieval chronicles. As a follow-up, this paper now presents the larger picture in which these findings can be integrated: 1) There was a golden age of Latin 'minor historiography' between 420/430 and 450/460 AD, which has not been recognised in its own right until now. 2) This golden age ended abruptly in the 450s – the 'historiographical crisis of the fifth century'. 3) Beyond the written word, this crisis was linked to a very real (political) crisis in the dissemination of imperial information and dating practice, for which consular dating is recognised as a central source. 4) A strained revival, with writers continuing or revising previous chronicles, did not occur until around 500 AD, but in a new, now distinctly post-imperial form. 5) The texts produced across these different phases and developments reached the Middle Ages in miscellanies such as the *Reichenauiensis*, all of which can only be fully understood against the background outlined here. 6) For disciplinary and editorial reasons, the texts and developments discussed here have been frequently under-researched and overlooked. At the same time, they are not only central to our image of the end of antiquity, but also to historiography in the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. The paper thus also serves as a general introduction to the texts discussed in the process of developing a new overall picture of late antique/early medieval 'minor historiography'.

It is a well-known fact, but one nonetheless often noted with some surprise, that the end of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century has found almost no explicit reflection in contemporary literature. In particular, what modern historiography regards as a canonical turning point – 476 AD and the fall of the 'last Roman emperor'

This study would never have been possible without Armin Eich's long-standing support and the equally scholarly and personally inspiring conversations we have had – some of which sowed the seeds for my earliest reflections on the 'historiographical crisis' discussed in this study.

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– is largely absent from our sources, which offer little to no commentary on the decline of the Western Empire in general.[1] In addition to ideological reasons for this lack of acknowledgment of the imperial decline, there exists a more fundamental explanation for the total absence of contemporary accounts of the Western Empire's fall: following Ammianus Marcellinus, who ended his *Res Gestae* with the aftermath of the disastrous Battle of Adrianople in 378 AD, Latin classicising historiography (at least its preserved specimens[2]) ceases altogether. For this reason, modern scholarship has traditionally viewed (and dramatically narrated) the Battle of Adrianople and its aftermath as marking both the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire and the conclusion of ancient Latin historiography. This picture is, of course, incomplete, to say the least, not only with regard to the historiographical works after Ammianus, which now survive only in fragments or have been lost entirely.

As Marc Vessey has pointed out, the same moment in time may also be regarded as the origin of a new historiographical tradition, one that came to define the landscape of (Latin) historical writing in the centuries that followed: in 380 AD, Jerome completed his Latin adaptation of Eusebius's *Chronicle* in Constantinople – and just like he reworked the *Chronicle* and continued it up to his own time, so too would later chroniclers adapt and continue his version into their respective presents.[3] The structural openness of the table-like, stylistically plain chronicles allowed for various forms of modification through abridgements, expansions and, of course, successive continuations – from full-fledged, authorial continuations to the simple addition of a few historical annotations, subsequent rulers or pairs of consuls. As a result, manuscripts featuring considerably varying texts and several genetic layers of authorial or anonymous continuations would soon be in circulation – 'chains of chronicles', as Ian Wood fittingly called this phenomenon.[4]

The chronicles discussed here by definition comprise a rather dry, list-like genre that reduces history to a continuous chronology combined with a (usually small number) of short, paratactic historical annotations.[5] Consequently, scholarship for the longest time considered them sub-literary, practical texts and paid them little to no attention in their own right, let alone in traditional literary histories.[6] It is only in more recent decades that researchers have begun to study in detail how, beneath the surface of rigid genre conventions, one can discern distinct tendencies and identifiable authors who employed the chronicle's seemingly objective format to advance their own worldviews and (e. g., apologetic or polemical) agendas. Even more: regardless of questions of authorial intent, every chronicle ultimately stands as a unique witness to a contemporary effort to construct historical meaning – through acts of recording, selecting and shaping the past.[7]

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[1] Eich (2015); cf. the collected evidence of the perception of the 'fall' of the Roman Empire (both ancient and later) by Demandt (2015).

[2] For a survey of fragmentary historiographical works, see Van Nuffelen/Van Hoof (2020).

[3] Vessey (2010).

[4] Wood (2010). For an extensive discussion of the nature of and challenges posed by those miscellanies and especially 'chains of chronicles', see Fröhlich (2025), 263–297, and Fröhlich (2024) (the previous case study of the *Reichenauiensis* and its chain of chronicles).

[5] For an introduction to the genre, see Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), esp. 1–62, and Fröhlich (2025), 29–66.

[6] For an overview, see Fröhlich (2025), 8–28 and 60–66.

In the case of the multitude of smaller supplements and adaptations, similar approaches have only just commenced, as it is certainly even more difficult to understand many of the compilations, reworkings or additions to be found in the highly variant chronicle chains of the manuscript tradition as 'works' with the dignity of 'authorship'. Consequently, since the extensive editions of the nineteenth century, they have often been mined for isolated historical data, but have hardly ever been interpreted as cultural products, witnesses to widespread, non-central literary activity, historical reflection and, in general, parts of the broader context of late antique (and early medieval) culture. Yet it is precisely in this regard that these complex, multi-layered compositions of chronicles deserve our careful attention, both as remnants of antiquity and as (usually) medieval manuscripts:[8] they preserve the only partially explored history of a textual tradition that, in contrast to classicising history, could be called 'minor historiography'.[9] Carefully analysed, the many (often anonymous) compilations, adaptations and continuations – along with the more substantial authorial works by known chroniclers – prove to be invaluable sources for modern scholarship.

Therefore, in an article published in the previous issue of *Millennium*, I undertook a detailed analysis of one such chain of late antique chronicles, preserved in two extant copies of a now lost codex from Reichenau.[10] To this *Reichenauiensis* alone we owe a considerable number of chronicles, additions and continuations – some of which survive exclusively within this textual tradition. Its significance, however, extends further: its multi-layered composition (as studied in detail before) provides rare insights into the crisis of the empire and the infrastructure of information in the fifth century. As I will demonstrate, this is a far from isolated case: the crisis is, in fact, reflected with remarkable clarity across a wide range of sources that can be categorised as belonging to what I called 'minor historiography' above. In the subsequent layers of the codex, we also see another phenomenon clearly emerging: a later revival of chronicle-writing that followed this rupture, a laborious revival that accentuates the preceding crisis even more and can, once again, only be fully understood when viewed against the backdrop of numerous parallel sources.

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[7] Examples of this new wave of scholarship on chronicles are (and most importantly) Croke (1983), Muhlberger (1990), and Burgess (1993). For a modern synthesis, see Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), Scardino (2019), and Fröhlich (2025).

[8] There exist only a few, but very insightful, studies of this topic from a medievalist perspective: see, e. g., Reimitz (2000), Reimitz (2009), and, of course, Wood (2010).

[9] This should not be understood as a value judgment, but simply as a formal description: chronicles consist of a chronological framework and simple historical annotations – surely some steps removed from full-blown rhetorical (or scholarly) historiography, even more so in the case of small, anonymous additions. The term is, of course, also drawing on Mommsen's *Chronica Minora* and refers both to the works of known chroniclers like Jerome or Prosper in general, as well as (and especially) to anonymous reworkings, continuations, compilations etc., including consularia (see below).

[10] Fröhlich (2024).

Both this crisis and the subsequent revival of (minor) historiography have, if I am not mistaken, not yet been observed and described in any way. Apart from their dismissal as sub-literary texts, there are very practical reasons for this: most of the sources discussed here are buried deeply in the major editions of the nineteenth century and their long (and Latin) prefaces – especially Mommsen's *Chronica Minora* – from where they must be excavated with painstaking effort. Only recently have many of these sources been re-examined, analysed and often edited and translated independently for the first time – or will be in the near future.[11] Many of the considerations presented here regarding individual manuscripts and textual traditions are only possible based on this foundation and, as the essay on the *Reichenauiensis* shows, much groundwork remains to be done.

A detailed discussion of all the edited texts and manuscripts (both of which are usually highly complex) cited in this article as well as their historical context of many centuries could, without question, easily fill several monographic studies – and perhaps will do so one day.[12] The present study, however, can offer only a preliminary overview of the phenomenon, presenting the principal surviving witnesses to 'minor historiography' in their fifth-century bloom, crisis, and eventual post-imperial revival in the sixth century.[13] In doing so, it proposes nothing more – but nothing less – than a provisional framework for rethinking our paradigms of late antique (and early medieval) historiography, one that deliberately incorporates the often overlooked, sub-literary category of 'minor historiography'.

1 'Minor Historiography' in Bloom

Many representatives of this 'minor historiography' are known only to a small group of scholars, and no comprehensive overview has yet been produced. It will thus prove useful to present most of the evidence comprehensively – and Jerome's chronicle may serve as a good starting point.

During Jerome's lifetime, his chronicle was utilised as an encyclopaedic and chronological-technical reference work: it was explicitly used and praised as such several times by Augustine, as well as being used intensively by Augustine's disciple Orosius (c. 416 – 418 AD[14]) as a source for his historical work.[15] At this time, the tabular work's open structure had already ensured that variant copies were in circulation, to which further notes had been added: one such manuscript with scholarly encyclopaedic and chronographical additions is still available to us today (as a copy) and, as nineteenth-century research has shown, Orosius must have used a similar version.[16]

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[11] Especially as part of the future volumes of Burgess and Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time* (forthcoming), and various editions in the series of the Kleine und Fragmentarische Historiker der Spätantike (KFHist).

[12] Burgess and Kulikowski (2013) are surely leading the way here with their multi-volume *Mosaics of Time*, of which, at the time of writing, only the first volume has been published.

[13] For this reason, I will keep the bibliography to a minimum and generally list only the editions and some important studies (if any exist). A full bibliography on all works and epochs discussed would easily fill a monograph by itself.

However, the reception of Jerome's chronicle only really flourished after his death (420 AD). In fact, the chronicle's oldest surviving manuscript, the famous *Bodleianus MS Auct. T 2 26*, dates back to the middle of the fifth century and was thus written only some decades after Jerome's passing. Almost every page of this manuscript is adorned with marginalia (over 390 in total) which created a kind of 'marginal index' for quick consultation. In this way, as a standard work to be consulted as a cultural and chronological compendium, the chronicle seems to have been widely copied: the supplemented supputation of the Bodleian manuscript itself already refers to the years 421, 435 and perhaps 442 as the dates of successive copies.[17]

At this time, the chronicle seems to have been widespread throughout the Latin-speaking world during this period, as can be seen from the various decentralised continuations of circulating copies that would be written in the years to follow: one copy was extended to 452 by a continuator (or several continuators?) anonymous to us, with an increasingly local focus on southern Gaul, for which reason we now refer to it as the *Gallic Chronicle of 452.*[18] Another copy had come into the hands of Hydatius, a man unknown to us aside from the chronicle, in the farthest outskirts of Hispania, the province of Gallaecia. This Hydatius, a lower aristocrat, had travelled the Mediterranean on pilgrimage as a child and met Jerome personally in Bethlehem. He later became a bishop himself, in 427, and must have decided at some point during this time to continue the chronicle of the church father he so admired – presumably with an original end point in the 450s (see below).[19] He later continued that chronicle up to the 460s. Indeed, Hydatius used part of his extensive preface to express surprise that Jerome had not continued his own chronicle, as he himself considered writing chronicle continuations to be a rather natural thing to do.[20]

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[14] In the course of this study, reference to AD is only used for singular historical dates (dates of death or historical events) or when confusion is possible (e. g., with page numbers, years BC, etc.). In general, all years are AD if not stated otherwise.

[15] For a more detailed documentation and discussion, see Fröhlich (2025), 144 – 155.

[16] The variants of the manuscript tradition are discussed and edited by Schöne (1866 – 75), xiv–xvi and 103 – 172. In the nineteenth century, some consensus was reached (based on little evidence) that the additions may be related to the lost chronography of Annianus and Panodoros. For a summary of these results (including the exemplar used by Orosius), see Von Gutschmidt (1867), Zangemeister (1882), xxiii, and Schöne (1900), 129 – 132.

[17] For a longer discussion, see Fröhlich (2025), 153 – 155 and 395 – 403. The supputation can be found on f. 145v and is discussed and edited by Mommsen (1892), 49. The Bodleian manuscript sadly breaks off rather abruptly, with the date 442 to be found only in its supposed copies; cf. also Fotheringham (1905), 21 – 24.

[18] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 615 – 666; Burgess (2010a); Kötter/Scardino (2017) (with commentary and German translation). Study: Muhlberger (1990), 136 – 192.

And he was not the only one to think this way: a copy must also have come into the hands of Prosper Tiro in Aquitania precisely when the Bodleian supputations were being written, and Hydatius and the Gallic Chronicler must have possessed and continued their chronicles as well. Also based in southern Gaul, possibly subsequently in Rome, Prosper wrote a continuation up to 433, which he later revised and continued at least twice, in 445 and 455. Prosper drastically condensed the *Chronicle* of Eusebius/Jerome into an epitome to make the massive volume more accessible, in a manner somewhat similar to (but, of course, more drastic than) the 'marginal index' of the Bodleian Manuscript. In doing so, he condensed the text's multiple columns into a single linear sequence while also emphasising the chronicle's Christian character by means of selection, addition of a new chronological starting point (beginning with Adam instead of Abraham) and use of consular years (instead of regnal years) from Christ's Passion onwards.[21]

The way Prosper's chronicle was transmitted once again testifies to the wide distribution and appreciation of Jerome's chronicle: unlike in other cases of epitomising,[22] the epitome was not able to assert itself in the textual tradition against the original and supplant it. Rather, in many cases only Prosper's independent continuation – without his abridged version of the preceding text – was appended to an existing, complete copy of Jerome's chronicle. This version ultimately became the most widely used, so that modern scholars now call it the '*chronicon vulgatum*'.[23] The 'complete' Prosper, including the epitome, the so-called '*chronicon integrum*', on the other hand, is only attested in four manuscripts, one of which presents an even further abridged version dating from the sixth century.[24] Another strand of transmission (the manuscripts labelled with the sigla AOR since Mommsen's edition) goes back to a copy in which the edition of 445 was obviously heavily edited shortly after its publication;[25] yet another one was supplemented (probably in North Africa) with some details on recent African events and Roman bishops – yet more evidence of the early circulation and vivid appropriation of copies of Prosper's chronicle.[26]

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[19] Ed. Mommsen (1894), 1–36; Burgess (1993) (with English translation); Kötter/Scardino 2019 (with commentary and German translation). Studies: Muhlberger (1990), 193–266; Cardelle de Hartmann (1994).

[20] Hyd. Chron. Praef. 2,5–2,6 (Kötter/Scardino 2017); cf. Fröhlich (2025), 168–169.

[21] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 341–499; Becker/Kötter (2016a) (with commentary and German translation).

[22] See, for example, Dubischar (2010).

[23] Mommsen (1892), 348–349; Becker in Becker/Kötter (2016a), 42–44; Muhlberger (1990), 55–60.

[24] The '*chronicon integrum*' is extant in Mommsen's A (lost, but witnessed by several copies), C (in an interpolated tradition), M, and V (the Vatican epitome discussed below).

[25] See Mommsen (1892), 376–378; Becker, in: Becker/Kötter (2016a), 51–54; Brook's (2001), 36–41. The variant readings of the recension attest to a surely intended, yet not always skilful reworking by some scribe. For unknown reasons, the exemplar came to some influence within the tradition of Prosper, as it is also the basis of the *Continuation of 451* and the *Reichenau Continuation* (see below) – the

In some cases, such additions include subsequent anonymous continuations on different levels of complexity: one copy of the chain of chronicles consisting of Eusebius/Jerome followed by Prosper's continuation (up to 445) was continued in an annalistic style by someone up to his own time around 451. This *Continuation of 451* offers a unique contemporary account of the events surrounding the Council of Chalcedon – interestingly, not yet so called – in a comparatively elaborate literary style, fitting in well with some of the longer annotations of Jerome or Prosper. This continuation, which I already discussed in my previous study, is preserved by the copies of the lost *Reichenauiensis* and by a seventh-century Ovetensian manuscript, both of which are obviously revised in some way compared to the common archetype.[27] In yet another manuscript that also contained the African additions mentioned above, Prosper's chronicle was, on the other hand, only very briefly supplemented after 445 with a list of the emperors up to the death of Majorian (461) and the reign of Libius Severus.[28]

Chronicles of this type were sometimes used as simple data mines to cull succinct historical information from them: Victorius of Aquitaine, for example, created his Easter cycle of 457 based on Prosper's consular chronology.[29] Showing greater interest in the historical annotations themselves, Polemius Silvius created a collection of various encyclopaedic material in 448, which he presented to Eucherius, Bishop of Lyon, as a gift. Part of this was an extremely concise *Breviarium temporum*, the early parts of which were based almost exclusively on Jerome's chronicle.[30] In North Africa, possibly Carthage, an anonymous author also used a chain of chronicles consisting of Jerome and Prosper for educational purposes: in combination with biblical material, excerpts from Rufinus's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and his own additions, he created a compilation of chronicles that was somewhat akin to (and inspired by?) Prosper's epitome and

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exemplar AOR are based on must therefore have been written between 445 and 451. The changes are often quite substantial if judged by the quantity of the variant readings, but much less so in quality, as they essentially paraphrase Prosper's text without adding any historical content on their own.

[26] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 486 under the title *Additamenta Africana a. 446–477, 1. Additamenta in Prosperi textum inserta.*

[27] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 488–490, under the title *Additamenta altera a. 446–457* in parallel print of the two diverging manuscript traditions. The *Continuation of 451* can be found in both traditions (in slightly variant reading) in c. 1–14. It is discussed in more detail in the previous paper (Fröhlich 2024), 155–159 and 178–179. A new edition with extensive commentary and a German translation is in preparation by Fröhlich/Kötter (KFHist G13).

[28] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 486–487, under the title *Additamenta Africana a. 446–455, 2. Continuatio Codicis Alcobaciensis.*

[29] Ed. Krusch (1938). This early use of Prosper's chronicle is emphasised and discussed by Markus (1986); cf. Mosshammer (2008), esp. 239–244.

[30] New edition and discussion of the complete *Laterculus*, including the *Breviarium*, by Paniagua (2018). Edition traditionally cited: Mommsen (1892), 547. Edition of the *Breviarium* alone along with German translation and commentary: Bleckmann/Song (2017), 198–201.

must have originally covered the period up to the capture of Carthage by the Vandals in 435. According to his own preface, he had thus created a handbook for young students (*parvuli*) to help them understand the path of (salvation) history up to the present day of Vandal occupation and persecution.[31]

Many of the texts mentioned above have come down to us in no more than a few manuscripts, the interpretation of which is in most cases quite challenging in many ways. These texts have usually passed through the bottleneck of the transmission of individual copies, and by their very nature they often began as nothing more than individual copies: even the chronicles of Hydatius and the Gallic Chronicler were originally little more than local manuscripts with local continuations by some otherwise unknown local clergymen, ultimately preserved by the coincidence of tradition. The (more or less) unabridged Hydatius is today only preserved in a single copy, as is the *Carthaginian Chronicle.*[32] The *Gallic Chronicle of 452,* meanwhile, is preserved in many copies, but they all go back to a single copy, wrongly attributing the text to Prosper.[33] The notion that many of these texts are to be understood as nothing but local additions is, of course, all the more true for the adaptations and brief continuations of Prosper's chronicle, which were simply copied along with this author's text as a kind of unrecognised adjunct. We might even, with all due caution, go one step further: it should be beyond doubt, given the surviving material outlined above, that there must have been numerous other copies with minor additions, reworkings and continuations, as well as numerous other educated continuators of greater ambition, such as Hydatius and the Gallic Chronicler. What is presented here are only the (still impressive) fragmentary remnants of a hitherto little-noticed flourishing of what might be called 'minor historiography' in the second third of the fifth century.

And this overview is not even complete, as the more literary, often authorial chronicles in the tradition of Eusebius/Jerome and Prosper were not the only genre of contemporary annalistic chronicles worthy of inclusion in this overview. Alongside those chronicles, there was also a form of annalistic chronicle based on consular lists (*fasti*) that followed a strict, even more jejune style: since the nineteenth century, they have been discussed under the name of consularia – a different term that we should not allow to prevent us from seeing them as an essential part of the genre of late antique chronicles.

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[31] Discussed (and edited in part) by Mommsen (1892), 492–497, as *Epitome Carthaginiensis.* The full text along with introduction and commentary will for the first time be edited as part of the KFHist (G17) under the name *Chronicon Carthaginense.* For now, see Fröhlich (2025), 179–182, 337–353 and App. 2.

[32] For the tradition of Hydatius, see Burgess (1993), 11–26, and Scardino in Kötter/Scardino 2017a, 47–57. The *Carthaginian Chronicle* is now preserved only in *Madrid, Universidad Complutense BH MSS 134* (f. 42r–47r), a Spanish miscellany from the thirteenth century that is amongst our most valuable manuscripts regarding late antique chronicles. Cf. below 191–192 with note 169.

[33] See Burgess (2001), 52–56; Scardino in Kötter/Scardino (2017a), 25–33.

The Romans traditionally referred to each single year by the names of that year's two consuls. This information had thus to be disseminated throughout the empire and was recorded locally in consular lists that would (like the calendar as a whole) be called *fasti.* It can reasonably be assumed that the imperial infrastructure was not only used to disseminate the names of the consuls, but that these were regularly accompanied by (and/or the same information channel used for) short historical notifications throughout the year to proclaim not least the death and elevation of new emperors, victories and empire-wide celebrations.[34] If such news would then be integrated into *fasti* kept as a non-central practice, we cross the line to what has been called 'proto-consularia'[35] and finally consularia proper: a genre of annalistic chronicles kept non-centrally (privately) based on consuls as their chronological framework and comprising a rather limited set of typical, imperial information.[36]

As consularia were kept and continued non-centrally, they were also often enriched by additional local or even personal information, information that certainly formed no part of, or was even based on, central dissemination. Moreover, they would be seen as sub-literary, functional texts and were freely appropriated by making additions, reformulating and leaving out certain parts, combining different copies and, most importantly, excerpting them to insert their information into more literary, authorial works in the style of, for example, the chronicles of Jerome or Prosper discussed above. For this reason, only a few more or less 'pure' representatives of the genre have survived, whereas most of our witnesses to this genre consist of hybrid forms, mixing consularia with other chronographic material, and/or are constituted by *Quellenforschung*, detecting typical formulations and information from consularia in other works. In consequence, there has been some debate regarding the existence of consularia as a proper 'genre'.[37] In any event, given the wide variety of textual variations and appropriation, we are well advised to distinguish clearly between individual textual witnesses and broader 'traditions' of consularia.

This can be demonstrated well using the example of the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, which were also the starting point for modern discussions about consularia. These consularia have come down to us in the copy of a personal exemplar that once belonged to the praetorian prefect Maternus Cynegius or someone in his entourage in the late fourth century AD. When he died in 388, his body was taken to Spain by his wife Achantia, all of which is reported in the very same exemplar in a style and length quite untypical for consularia.[38] This personal manuscript seems to have been brought to the West along with the dead prefect, as different genetic layers clearly show that it was continued at different places in the later fourth and fifth century – now again in the rather dry, annalistic formulations typical for the genre. At the same time, more exemplars of this tradition will have been in circulation, as the same material (obvious by many parallels) was also used, for example, by Jerome for his chronicle in 380, Marcellinus Comes (Count Marcellinus) in the sixth century and even later by the author of the *Chronicon Paschale* in the seventh century. All of these must have used different exemplars sharing a more or less common basic text extended to different endpoints.[39] But not all parallels necessarily suggest a direct dependency: Hydatius, for example, shares some formulations with the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, but can most certainly not have used it – these parallels must have originated not in this specific tradition of consularia, but in the centrally disseminated information that must have reached the author via some other route.[40] At the same time, another influential tradition of consularia was circulating in the West, of which – in contrast to the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* – no complete witness survives. And yet this tradition is clearly evident from similarities between later chronicles and consularia of the sixth century, the uncovering of which, incidentally, constitutes a good example of exploring the genre by means of *Quellenforschung.* These Western consularia were extensively and often overly self-confidently discussed in the nineteenth century under the name *Ravenna Annals*, now usually referred to as *Consularia Italica* since Theodor Mommsen’s edition in the *Chronica Minora.* These consularia had an early endpoint around the middle of the fifth century, possibly around 455, as all witnesses suggest.[41]

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[34] Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 46 – 48; cf. Burgess (2000).

[35] Burgess (2012), 349; Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 165 – 177. What such notifications or proclamations by local officials might have looked like can be seen in P.Oxy. VII 1021, a draft for the announcement of Nero's accession to the throne, cf. Nelis-Clément (2006). I would like to thank Armin Eich for this valuable suggestion.

[36] On consularia as a genre, see Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 35 – 57 and 133 – 187; Burgess and Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time* Vol. 2 (forthcoming); Muhlberger (1990), 23 – 46; Holder-Egger (1876).

[37] Cf. Croke (2001b); Becker in Becker/Nickbakht (2016), 4 – 7. The arguments are not convincing, see the bibliography in the previous notes and Fröhlich (2025), 325 – 337, for their refutation and/or the modern consensus.

As these examples show, consularia were not only contemporary with but also closely related to the more detailed chronicles of the Latin tradition beginning with Jerome discussed above. Eusebius, his translator and continuator Jerome, and some

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38 *Cons. Const.* ad ann. 388 (Burgess 1993).

39 Burgess (1993), 175 – 207; Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 175 – 182; cf. Becker in Becker/Nickbakht (2016), 10 – 13 and 17– 21. An extensive analysis is prepared by Burgess/Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time* Vol. 2 (forthcoming).

40 For the parallels between the *Cons. Const.* and Hydatius, see Burgess (1993), 199 – 202; Cardelle de Hartmann (1994), 24 – 38; Becker in Becker/Nickbakht (2016), 21 – 26. Earlier scholarship assumed a direct connection between the two texts (and even Hydatius as author of the *Cons. Const.*), a view that is now outdated.

41 For an introduction, see Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 177– 184, and Fröhlich (2025), 312 – 337. Note that Mommsen’s edition of *Consularia Italica* (1892, 248 – 339) only presents a select number of witnesses as compared to the (for now) seminal study of Holder-Egger (1876). On the very different edenda of those editions, see Fröhlich (forthcoming a). The forthcoming edition of Burgess/Kulikowski (*Mosaics of Time* Vol. 2) will (for the first time) present a complete paradosis of the witnesses for every year of the tradition and thus provide the new standard edition for any further research. There, Burgess will argue convincingly for an early recension of c. 455.

of the authors who continued this tradition – such as Hydatius and the author of the *Gallic Chronicle of 452* – used regnal years as their chronological framework. Given that the last year of any former ruler would usually also be the first year of his successor and that no regnal year would ever conform to the civic year of the solar calendar, ordering the past along the lines of consecutive 'regnal years' was as difficult as it was artificial. Essential sources for the difficult calibration of historical events, calendar years and ruler years were undoubtedly *fasti* and consularia.[42] Both these practices and the challenges connected to them will be of significant importance in the subsequent discussion of the crisis of fifth-century 'minor historiography'.

In any case, against this background it is easy to understand why Prosper changed to a chronology based on consuls in his chronicle (in his continuation as well as his epitome from Christ's Passion on) – it was simply the usual form of dating, which was also widespread as the basis of the related genre of consularia. This made it all the easier to mix the genres: an exemplar of Prosper's chronicle in the recension of 445 (a copy of which is now kept in the Vatican Library[43]), for example, was apparently continued as early as the fifth century by drawing on the tradition of *Consularia Italica*. This '*Vatican Continuation*' extends Prosper's chronicle into the 450s, at which point the parallels with the other witnesses to the *Consularia Italica* suddenly end – further evidence that a significant representative of the *Consularia Italica* circulating in this period had reached its conclusion. But even beyond this source, the chronicle was continued with very meagre entries, mainly mere consular pairs, until 466. It was thus kept up to date non-centrally, just as other consularia would be.[44] In another textual tradition (represented by two extant manuscripts) that since Mommsen has been traced back to a lost codex from Alcobaça (*Continuation of Alcobaça*), Prosper's chronicle was continued both with the names of consuls and two short, historical annotations from 446 to 455.[45]

It was also nothing extraordinary to expand on existing continuations: the *Continuation of 451* (already discussed above), which similarly to Prosper's chronicle had a strong focus on church history, apparently made its way to North Africa and was continued there for a few more years (also containing some local events) until 458 – the *Reichenau Continuation*, preserved today only in the two copies of the lost *Reichenauiensis*.[46] In this case, too, we can detect strong parallels to the *Consularia Italica* up to 455, possibly making this another instance of the *Consularia Italica*'s tradition being used to continue Prosper. However, some significant differences to the rest of the tradition could suggest that the chronology may simply have been continued successively in a parallel but independent manner within the typical form of non-centralised consularia, which is true in any case for the last few years.[47] Either way, the *Reichenau Continuation* is a decisive witness to the lively, dynamic combination of chronicles in the tradition of Jerome and consularia, both with regard to the textual tradition and to the practice of decentralised consular lists.

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[42] Croke (2001a), 170–181; Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 129–130 and 136–137.

[43] *Vat. Reg. Lat. 2077*, ff. 81v–98v.

[44] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 491–493, including some additions to the preceding chronicle of Prosper. The parallels to the tradition of *Cons. Italica* can easily be seen by comparison with Mommsen's edition (1892, 301–305) and will be even more clearly visible in the new edition of Burgess/Kulikowski (forthcoming).

[45] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 487, under the title of *Continuatio codicis Alcobaciensis*. On this lost codex, see Mommsen (1892), 367.

[46] Ed. (for now) Mommsen (1892), 490; new edition, translation, and commentary in preparation by Fröhlich/Kötter (KFHist G13); cf. Fröhlich (2024), 155–159 and 178–179.

In general, the chronicle chain of the lost *Reichenauiensis* discussed in detail in the previous paper is an almost perfect example of the lively flourishing of late antique chronicles in the second third of the fifth century: in the 420s or early 430s, a copy of Jerome's chronicle had come into the hands of Prosper Tiro in southern Gaul. The latter revised it into an epitome in 433 and continued it into his own time, editing and continuing it in 445 and 455. A copy of the 445-recension was then slightly revised in its wording by an unknown copyist, creating the archetype of the AOR-recension. This version must have soon come into the hands of someone who preferred Jerome's full chronicle over Prosper's abridged version: he performed a cut at the authorial border indicated in the text ('up to this point Jerome') and appended only Prosper's continuation from 380 to 445 to an existing copy of Jerome's chronicle. As shown in the previous paper, this chronicle chain was (probably in the same course) also harmonised to a certain extent in terms of chronology, so that the regnal years of Jerome's chronicle are carried on *in margine* as a secondary chronology (in addition to the framework of consular years) in Prosper's continuation.[48] This chain was then continued, perhaps in Italy, until 451 with a focus on church history that certainly fits in with Prosper's chronicle (*Continuation of 451*). Subsequently, a copy of this manuscript must have reached North Africa, where it was successively continued with an African perspective in the style of consularia until 458 (*Reichenau Continuation*).

As the preceding overview illustrates, the series of chronicles preserved in the *Reichenauiensis* does not constitute an isolated instance of the complex, multi-layered transmission of successively revised and continued chronicles. Rather, it can in many respects be seen as a typical representative of its cultural period – namely, the impressive yet seldom acknowledged flourishing of what might be termed 'minor historiography', culminating most visibly in the period from the 420s to the 450s.

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[47] Discussed in detail in Fröhlich/Kötter (KFHist G13, forthcoming) and Burgess/Kulikowski (*Mosaics of Time* Vol. 2, forthcoming). Burgess's new edition of the *Cons. Italica* will also list the evidence of the *Reichenau Continuation* as part of his paradosis, which will make the parallels easy to identify. For now, compare the years 451–455 with Mommsen's edition (1892), 301–304, of the *Cons. Italica.*

[48] Fröhlich (2024), 154–155.

2 Chronicles in 'Continual Succession'?

Yet the history of late antique chronicles did not conclude with this zenith, nor did that of minor continuations. Many of the texts mentioned above were not merely preserved through continued copying by later generations, but also (and rather) actively appropriated and extended at later points of time.

A new period of intense activity clearly began in the early sixth century. As early as the 490s, an anonymous continuator appears to have continued the *Consularia Italica*, which had previously ended in about 455, to cover some further four decades, until c. 493 AD. Providing little information about the period directly after 455 and focusing strongly on his own time, he describes in some detail the end of Odoacer's reign and the rise of the rule of the Ostrogoth Theodoric. It was this continuation of the *Consularia Italica* that gained a wide-reaching influence that is not easily explained: it became the basis of an anonymous adaptation around 530, the so-called *Fasti Vindobonenses/Consularia Vindobonensia*, which are our most significant witnesses to the *Consularia Italica.* They were written in the 530s, but later continued in different traditions to at least 539 and 572 AD.[49] The continued *Consularia Italica* also served as a source for a likewise (now) anonymous narrative account of Theodoric's reign, the so-called *Anonymus Valesianus (II)*, probably written roughly contemporaneously.[50] Just as earlier in the fifth century writers had continued chronicles in the tradition of Eusebius/Jerome by using the *Consularia Italica:* an anonymous continuator living in Ostrogothic-ruled Italy used said text to supplement a chronicle chain consisting of Jerome and Prosper and to continue it on until 523 (*Continuation of 523*).[51] Possibly as early as 503, someone had already appended a version of the *Consularia Italica* to the chronicle of Prosper containing the *Vatican Continuation*, also adding a list of emperors down to Anastasius (497–513).[52] At a later point (c. 560s), someone added Paschal dates from the Easter cycle of Victorius of Aquitaine, thus creating a compilation that modern scholars now refer to as the *Paschale Campanum*, due to the southern Italian focus evident in some of the historical annotations.[53]

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[49] See the bibliography in note 41. A consensus on a recension ending in the 490s has existed since the nineteenth century; see, e.g., Hille (1866) and Holder-Egger (1876), though both propose a break in 495. The year 493 is proposed by Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 178–179. It is systematically explained and made the basis of their edition in the forthcoming Vol. 2 of *Mosaics of Time*. The two (incomplete) surviving recensions of the *Fasti Vindobonenses* attest to a common archetype ending in the earlier 530s, but one of them (the *priores*) is continued to 539. The so-called *Excerpta Sangallensia* attest to another exemplar continued to at least 572.

[50] Ed. Moreau/Velkov (1968); edition with extensive commentary and German translation by König (1997).

[51] It would later be continued by the so-called 'Lombard (or Kopenhagen) Continuator' (*Continuator Prosperi Havniensis*) in the seventh century (see below, 163–164 with note 64). The surviving text is clearly composite and built on an earlier continuation in the style of consularia ending in 523, as was first demonstrated by Cessi (1922), whose attempts at reconstruction, however, certainly go too far.

[52] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 492, under the title *Index imperatorum.* For reasons that cannot be clearly determined, this list has ended up in the middle of the chain of chronicles after the year 385 AD. Cf. the following note and below, 193 with note 171.

Not all authors of these continuations remain anonymous. A notable continuator from the Roman aristocracy in the Gothic Empire can be found in Cassiodorus: in 518, he wrote a chronicle that is essentially structured like consularia, but with its content compiled almost exclusively based on an epitome of Livy and a chain of chronicles consisting of Jerome up to 378, Prosper up to 455 and finally the *Consularia Italica* up to 493. Perhaps all of these texts were already combined in a single codex, similarly to the *Continuation of 523* described above. For the years after 493, Cassiodorus must have used unknown sources and/or his own recollection.[54] Also at the beginning of the sixth century, a chronicle compiled from various Gallic and Spanish material (e.g., Hydatius) must have emerged in its original form, which ended in 511 and is preserved to us today only as a later epitome: since Mommsen's *Chronica Minora* it has been discussed as the *Gallic Chronicle of 511.*[55] At the same time, Latin chronicle chains were also circulating in the Eastern Empire: in about 515, someone named Bonifatius Crucicola (probably an ecclesiastical member of the court) made a gift to Marinus of Apamea (Praefectus Praetorio of the East [PPO]) consisting of a copy of the '*chronicon vulgatum*' (Jerome plus Prosper). This version was decorated in various colours and also contained a long didactic poem as a dedication, in which Boniface recommends the chronicle as an encyclopaedic textbook for the prefect's children. This chain of chronicles was also extended by an additional preface introducing early biblical history under the title *Exordium,* providing another example of the chronicle genre in lively adaptation.[56] A similar manuscript (perhaps even containing this *Exordium*) may have come into the hands of the Illyrian Marcellinus at the same time in the Eastern Empire. He composed a continuation up to 518, finally up to 534, and made a career at Justinian's court – we therefore know him as Marcellinus Comes.[57] Chronicles thus clearly circulated among the higher ranks of imperial (or post-imperial) society in the East and the West alike.

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[53] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 744 – 750. It is part of the chain of chronicles beginning with the Vatican epitome of Prosper discussed below, 164 with note 66, as *Chronicon Vivariense*. The *Paschale Campanum* is also one of the key witnesses of Victorius's *Cursus Paschalis* and serves as ms. N of Mommsen's edition (1892), 667 – 734. This Easter Cycle seems to have been superimposed on an earlier consular continuation ending in 503, as from 504 on, the *anni passionis* shift from an incorrect count (continued since Prosper every ten years) to a correct one, obviously based on the *Cursus* that also begins with the Passion of Christ. For a detailed discussion, see Burgess/Kulikowski (forthcoming) and my own forthcoming edition of the *Chronicon Vivariense* (KFHist G18).

[54] Ed. Mommsen (1894), 109 – 161; for an introduction, see Christensen (2002), 57 – 62. Further studies are mostly lacking, but see the sadly unpublished dissertation of Klaassen (2010).

[55] Ed. Burgess (2001b) and (with German translation and commentary) Kötter/Scardino (2017b). Both offer detailed discussions of the challenges of textual transmission and the heavily abridged nature of the text's form.

[56] Ed. Schöne (1866 – 75), App. 41 – 49; the dedication and accompanying poem are edited and discussed by Schöne (1864), 51 – 59. The identification of Marinus is based on a contribution by Theodor Mommsen in the latter publication. To this day, no modern study exists on either the *Exordium* or the poem, nor has modern prosopography taken any notice of Bonifatius or the two sons of Marinus mentioned here. A new edition of the diamerismos in the *Exordium* is prepared by N. Fröhlich for the *Geographi Latini Online.* Cf. Fröhlich (2025), 177 – 179, and Fröhlich (forthcoming b).

Meanwhile, smaller, anonymous continuations also flourished, supplementing existing chronicles with list-like material: around 500, someone must have compiled a consul list up to 497, based at least in part on North African material, then apparently on Italian material from the Ostrogothic era. These *Fasti Augustani* were then appended by someone to Jerome's chronicle so as to continue it from 378 to 497 – moving the *explicit* of Jerome's chronicle behind the *Fasti* and adding Jerome's chronology to the consular list in order to create a cohesive chronicle.[58] The chronicle of Cassiodorus was also supplemented by a mere sequence of consuls extending to 559.[59] In Vandal North Africa, Prosper's chronicle was continued by different means: a continuation based on a list of Vandal rulers (the *Laterculus Vandalorum* already discussed in the previous paper) – was written around 523, and continued at some later point down to the fall of the Vandal Empire (534, written in the late 530s?). One version of this *Laterculus* was used to continue the *Reichenau Continuation*, which had ended in 457/458. Another version was used to supplement the supputation of the *Carthaginian Chronicle* and to continue it until the end of Vandal rule (534).[60] Similarly, in the 570s, a copy of the chronicle of Hydatius was drastically abbreviated to an epitome (as in the case of the *Gallic Chronicle of 511*) and supplemented by a list of rulers along with an almost narrative conclusion.[61] In the 560s, Victor of Tunnuna, who was incarcerated in Constantinople, wrote a chronicle as a continuation and presumably a revision of Prosper's, which, in turn, was continued in Spain by John of Biclar up to 590.[62] Both chronicles were used by Isidore in 618, whose chronicle was soon continued anonymously in the Frankish kingdom in Gaul until 624.[63] In what is now Switzerland, Marius of Avenches wrote a chronicle continuation up to 581 and the so-called 'Lombard Chronicler' wrote a continuation of the chain of chronicles consisting of Jerome, Prosper, the anonymous *Continuation of 523* (see above), and some passages taken from Isidore, which he continued into the 620s in a rather prosaic style.[64]

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[57] Ed. Mommsen (1894), 27–108; translation and commentary by Croke (1995). Croke (2001a) undertook a comprehensive study of Marcellinus and his chronicle.

[58] This was discussed at length in the previous essay, along with a new edition of the *Fasti Augustani:* Fröhlich (2024), esp. 185–203.

[59] In his first edition of Cassiodorus's chronicle, Mommsen (1861), 571–572, included the appended list of consuls and even considered attributing it to a subsequent addition by Cassiodorus himself. Later, he attributed it to a recension of Victorius's Easter cycle (as is suggested by the end point of 559) and incorporated it into the apparatus of his edition of Victorius: Mommsen (1892), 675.

[60] Ed. Mommsen (1892–1898), 456–457; Becker/Kötter (2016b) offer the first edition with (German) translation and extensive commentary; Steinacher (2001) and Steinacher (2004) published a diplomatic edition of the texts as we find them in the manuscripts along with a useful introduction. He was the first to interpret the *Laterculus* as a continuation of Prosper's work, a view that has gained acceptance: it is now, for example, edited in the same volume as Prosper in the edition of the KFHist (Becker/Kötter). Cf. Fröhlich (2024), esp. 159–165, 179–181, and Fröhlich (2025), 232–248.

[61] Ed. Burgess (1993), 159–164. The additions were first edited by Mommsen (1892), 36, and were published for the first time in a commented edition by Kötter/Scardino (2019b), 385–398. For the character of the epitome, see Burgess (1993), 17–18, and Kötter/Scardino (2019b), 54–55 and 387–389.

[62] Both chronicles were edited in a single volume by Cardelle de Hartmann (2002), 1–55, John individually by Bleckmann/Court (2025a), both with extensive introductions and commentary, the latter with German translation. For a study on Victor of Tunnuna, see Klein (2023).

By the end of the sixth century, we once again encounter manuscripts that have survived to the present day: a version of the chronicle of Marcellinus Comes, for example, was appended to the manuscript of the *Bodleianus* discussed at the beginning of this study – including an anonymous continuation up to 548.[65] A manuscript of the tradition containing the *Vatican Continuation* was, quite certainly in Vivarium around 585, shortened to an epitome and, as described before, combined with the *Paschale Campanum* to form a continuous chronicle, which has been preserved physically to this day and is now held at the Vatican Library as *Vaticanus Reginae Latinus 2077.* It was continued by various hands until around 613 and has been the subject of my study under the title *Chronicon Vivariense.*[66] Perhaps the combination of various North African material (Jerome, *Fasti*, Prosper continued by the *Continuation of 451*/*Reichenau Continuation*, *Laterculus Vand.*), which later found its way to the north to form the *Reichenauiensis*, also originated in the sixth century.

In the 560s, Liberatus of Carthage quotes Prosper's chronicle, which was apparently still widely used in North Africa, but refers to it under the name 'Lucentius'. Either another chronicle compilation was indeed in circulation, incorporating and continuing Prosper's material, or there was an increasing difficulty in assigning authorship to the widespread, highly variant chronicle copies.[67] In any case, Cassiodorus, now retired to his monastery Vivarium, seems to have responded to perhaps precisely such challenges at about the same time by compiling a canon of chronicles.[68] To do so, he defines the genre, mentions Jerome, Prosper, and Marcellinus in particular and concludes:

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[63] Ed. Martín (2003); the continuation is edited by Mommsen (1894), 489–490.

[64] The so-called 'Kopenhagen Continuator' of Prosper (or, sometimes, 'Lombard Chronicler'), ed. by Mommsen (1892), 298–339, in selection as part of his edition of the *Consularia Italica.* Hille (1866) offers the full text from 455 AD onwards; Cessi's edition (1924) also includes some additions to Prosper's *Chronicle*, but restructures the text to reconstruct two supposed original texts of 523 and 641 AD. For a study, see Muhlberger (1990) and Fröhlich (2025), passim.

[65] Cf. Croke (2001a), 238–239. For the continuation, see Mommsen (1894), 104–108, cf. Croke (2001a), 216–236.

[66] I will edit this complete *Chronicon Vivariense* as part of the KFHist (G18); see there for detailed discussion. For now, see Fröhlich (2025), 287–297; cf. Mommsen (1892), 491–493.

[67] Liberatus, Brev. 2,3 (Schwartz 1936), quoting the text of Prosp., Chron. 1297 (Mommsen 1892). Cf. Kötter in Becker/Kötter (2016a), 245.

[68] Cf. Fröhlich (2025), 182–186.

> Perhaps you will find other continuators, inasmuch as there is no dearth of chroniclers as the ages follow one another in a continual succession.[69]

But did the ages and chronicles really follow one another in a "continual succession", as L. W. Jones once translated this passage from Cassiodorus? A graphic representation (fig. 1) of this brief tour de force through works attributed to specific authors (or edited under a major title) and anonymous minor continuations we can find in the textual traditions very clearly reveals a different picture: between the two periods of flourishing authorship and reception around 420/30 – 450/60 and from around 500 onwards, there lies a pronounced gap.

With the onset of the sixth century, a new phase of notable activity and reception emerged, which, though not equal to the zenith of 'minor historiography' around 430 – 460 AD, nonetheless assumed its legacy. All the more strikingly, this later phase of chronicles highlights how virtually complete the gap between these two phases is. It is thus impossible to interpret this next phase of late antique Latin chronicles from c. 500 onwards in terms of continuity: it is a revival, a resumption of an earlier tradition.

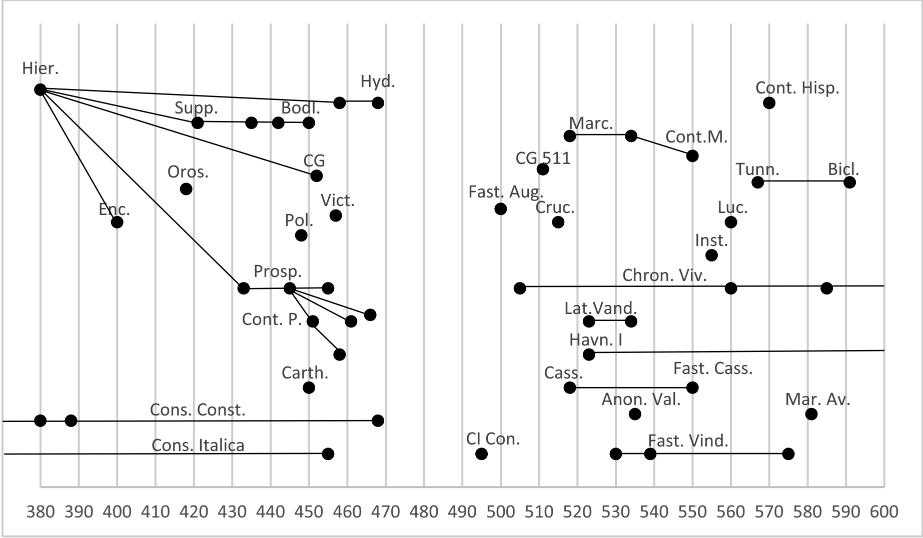

Fig. 1: Timeline of Latin chronicles (and their reception) c. 380 – 590

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69 Cass. Inst. 1,17,2 (Mynors 1937): *forte inveniatis et alios subsequentes, quia non desunt scriptores temporum, cum saecula sibi iugiter peracta succedant.* The translation is based on Jones (1969).

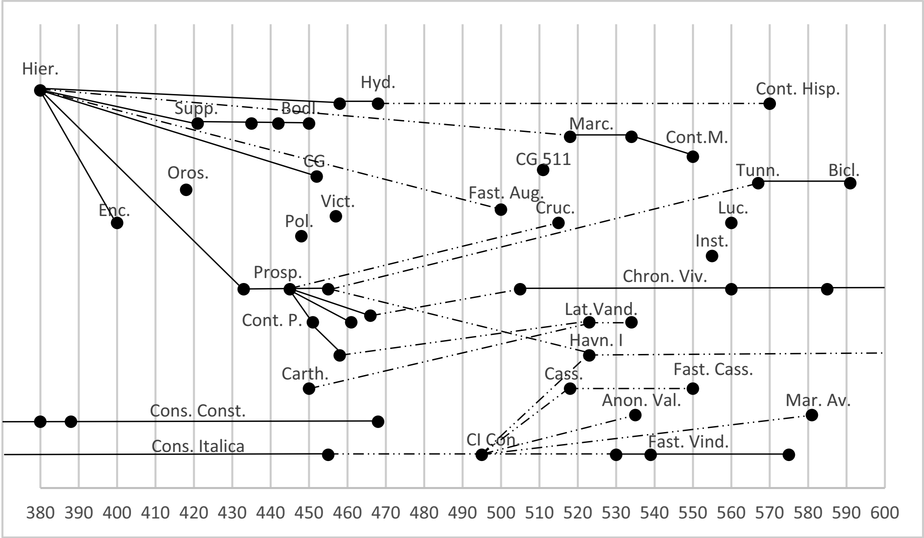

Fig. 2: Bridging the gap. Later continuations of the chronicles of the earlier 'golden age'

Commentary on/Explanation of the Two Figures

The two figures contain all previously discussed representatives of 'minor historiography' in the period from approximately 380 to 590. The positions on the y-axis serve only to present the data clearly. Where possible, multi-layered texts are divided into several dots in the figure and connected by lines, for example Prosper's chronicle (*Prosp.*) with its three recensions (of 433, 445, and 455) and various anonymous continuations of his chronicle (*Cont. P.*). Similarly, the Bodleian manuscript (*Bodl.*) contains the text of Jerome (*Hier.*) and the supputations (*Supp.*), just as the layers of the *Cons. Const.* are part of the same manuscript.

The lines of continued traditions that extend beyond the period depicted end at the edge of the figure. The *Chron. Viv.*, for example (see above, 161 – 162, 164), is continued down to at least 613, the *Havn. I* later served as the basis for the 'Lombard Chronicler' in the 620s, and the *Cons. Const.* and *Cons. Italica* had their beginnings before 380. Source dependencies, for example, that the author of the *Chron. Carth.* used Prosper, are not depicted. The dates are often approximations.

In order to highlight the gap identified in this analysis, no lines were drawn across it in Figure 1. For the sake of transparency and completeness, they are added in Figure 2 (as broken lines). In the case of the continued *Cons. Italica* (*CI Cont.*), the lines do, exceptionally, indicate a source dependency, as the *Cons. Italica* have not been preserved as a proper text, but are only evidenced by the texts indicated. It also serves to demonstrate the enormous influence of the *Cons. Italica* on the historiography that followed the gap.

Wherever possible, the years represent the exact year each individual witness concludes in or, if we have them, year of composition (see 'abbreviated witnesses'). In some cases, the dates can only be approximations.

Abbreviated Witnesses

Anon. Val.	*Anonymus Valesianus* (c. 535)
Bicl.	John of Biclar (concl. 492)
Bodl.	Bodleian manuscript of Jerome (c. 450)
Cass.	Chronicle of Cassiodorus (518)
CG	*Chronica Gallica* of 452 (concl. 452)
Carth.	*Carthaginian Chronicle* (c. 450?)
Chron. Viv.	*Ms. Vat. Reg. Lat. 2077* (c. 585), containing the *'Chronicon Vivariense'* incl. the *Vat. Cont.;* a cont. to c. 503; the *Pasch. Camp.* (c. 560); a cont. up to 613
CI Con.	Continuation of the *Cons. Italica* (c. 495)
Cons. Const.	*Cons. Constantinopolitana.* Used by Jerome (380); in the entourage of Cyn. Maternus (death 388); later continued in the ms. after it came to Spain (concl. 468)
Cons. Italica.	*Consularia Italica* (concl. c. 455)
Cont. P.	Continuations of Prosper's chronicle: *Cont. of 451*, *Reichenau Cont.* (c. 558), *Cont. of Alcobaça* (c. 455), *Cont. of 462, Vatican Cont.* (concl. 466)
Cont. Hisp.	Cont. of the Spanish epitome of Hyd. (c. 570)
Cont. M.	Cont. of the chronicle of Marcellinus (c. 550)
Cruc.	Bonifatius Crucicola gifts a decorated chain of chronicles to PPO Marinus
Enc.	Encyclopaedic add. to the chron. of Jerome (c. 400?)
Fast. Aug.	*Fasti Augustani* (c. 500)
Fast. Cass.	*Fasti* continuing the Chron. of Cass. (concl. 559)
Fasti. Vind.	*Fasti Vindobonenses* (c. 530), later rec. to at least 539 (*priores*) and 572 (*Exc. Sang.*, entered date: c. 575)
Havn. I.	Cont. of Prosper based on consularia up to 523 (*Continuation of 523*) as a first layer of what would become the *Havniensis* (*'Kopenhagen Cont.'*, *'Lombard Chronicler'*)
Hier.	Chronicle of Jerome (380)
Hyd.	Chronicle of Hydatius, first concl. in the 450s (entered: c. 455), later continued (concl. 468)
Supp.	Different endpoints of updated supputations in the Bodleian manuscript (421, 435, 442)
Inst.	Cass. creates a canon of chronicles in the *Institutiones*
Lat. Vand.	*Laterculus Vandalorum*, first compiled c. 523, continued up to 533/34
Luc.	Liberatus attributes the text of Prosper's chronicle to a 'Lucentius' (c. 560)
Mar. Av.	Marius of Avenches (concl. 581)
Marc.	Marcellinus Comes (concl. 518 and 534)
Oros.	Orosius uses Jerome for his *hist. adv. pag.* (c. 418)
Pol.	Polemius Silvius, *Breviarium temporum* (448)
Prosp.	Prosper Tiro of Aquitaine (concl. 433, 445, 455)
Tunn.	Victor of Tunnuna (concl. 567)
Vict.	Victorius of Aquitaine, *Cursus Paschalis* based on Prosper's chronology (457)

3 Crisis and Collapse: The Loss of Information and Historical Orientation

3.1 History Discontinued – the End of Chronicles in the 450s

The two flourishing phases discussed above are separated by a conspicuous lacuna of at least one, possibly two generations – amounting to a span of roughly 40 to 60 years. This lacuna certainly demands an explanation. A point not previously addressed explicitly in the overview of the fifth-century flourishing of chronicle continuations is their common endpoint: almost all of them come to a sudden halt in the 450s, or at the latest the 460s. The sudden end of this productive phase suggests more than chance, pointing instead to a significant disruption.

The political context offers an obvious reason for this disruption: the flourishing of chronicle writing in the fifth century aligned closely with the gradual dissolution of the Western Roman Empire. After the Rhine frontier had fallen in 406 AD, Gaul and Spain never again came firmly under control of the central Roman authority, with parts of these regions being governed directly by various ethnic and military groups. Britain disappeared out of the central government's sight. In the 430s, North Africa fell to the Vandals, while Attila's Huns invaded the already troubled Gaul in 451, only narrowly repelled by General Aetius, in whose hands de facto political power was concentrated. Emperor Valentinian III proved unwilling to tolerate this state of affairs: he assassinated Aetius, whose enraged followers shortly thereafter, in 455, retaliated by putting an end to the life of the emperor himself, and at the same time to the entire Theodosian dynasty. As if to seal an era, the Vandals plundered the city of Rome from North Africa shortly afterwards that same year. From this point onward, Italy was governed by a succession of emperors who often reigned briefly and exercised limited authority in the West, while their relations with the Eastern Roman Empire remained unstable – until, ultimately, the Western Empire came to an end at the close of the fifth century, with rule passing first to Odoacer and subsequently to the Ostrogothic king Theodoric.[70] In the 450s, something had been broken in the Roman West: and in a striking parallel, virtually all the aforementioned representatives of the flourishing late antique chronicles of that time also came to an end.

It is possible to read the final entries of these chronicles as a virtual cross-section of a catastrophic era: Prosper's chronicle in its final version ends exactly in 455 by describing the assassination of Valentinian III and the dramatic sacking of Rome by the Vandals in uncharacteristically long accounts. Subsequently, he attempts to underscore papal authority in matters of the Paschal date through a lengthy final entry, just as he styles most of fifth-century Roman history as a triumph of the bishop of Rome. None of this, however, can disguise the fact that Prosper's chronicle concludes as a witness to tragedy – and he would not continue it further.[71] Three years earlier, the *Gallic Chronicle of 452*, increasingly narrowed down to local events, had come to a pessimistic end in the wake of the Hunnic devastation of Gaul:[72]

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[70] This is certainly not the place for a bibliography on the end of the Western Roman Empire. See, for example, Halsall (2007), 186–283, or Demandt (2007), 169–216. For a more detailed study of the rulers after 455, see Henning (1999).

> At this time, the most deplorable condition of the state was made visible, as not a single province was free from barbarian inhabitants and the unspeakable heresy of the Arians, which has united with the barbarian tribes, has usurped the name of the Catholic faith, after it had spread over the whole world.[73]

This view was certainly shared on the other side of the Mediterranean. Probably around the same time, an anonymous North African author compiled the *Carthaginian Chronicle*, in which his perspective is similarly bleak: although he based his chronicle on Prosper, he consequently ended his compilation with the legal confirmation of the Vandal capture of Carthage in 442. He thus placed the rule of the heretical Vandals in a history of salvation marked by constant persecution and heroic martyrs – a kind of anti-Arian textbook for the present under Vandal persecution.[74] No light was seen on the horizon: after the long lamentation quoted above, the *Gallic Chronicle* reports very briefly on Attila's retreat from Gaul, mentions "a great many omens" and refers to the Hun's advance towards Italy, before eventually falling silent.[75]

The bishop Hydatius likewise repeatedly reported impending omens in Gallaecia, under Suebic rule since 411, but up until the 450s his chronicle maintains a composed tone as well as a broad view on the wider empire. It is only from this time onwards that the tone slowly shifts – one of several reasons why scholars have assumed the existence of distinct compositional phases within the chronicle.[76] The chronicle's horizon steadily shrinks and the information reported become more and more sparse, if not erratic,[77] while Hydatius turns increasingly toward apocalyptic expectations.[78] It finally closes in the year 468 with a downright cascade of omens: a bitter winter sets in; fish bearing inscriptions in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin descend from the heavens, foretelling the world's approaching end; strange grains follow, as well as "many other signs that would take a considerable time to mention".[79] Hydatius may indeed have had very specific ideas about the approaching apocalypse: the particular copy of the chronicle of Jerome which Hydatius continued contains a number of additions relating to the so-called *Pseudoevangelium of Thomas* and, by counting the Jewish jubilees, commences a kind of countdown to the Last Judgement, extending into the continuation of Hydatius. If this interpretation is correct, he may have expected the world to end in 482 AD.[80] In any case, the passage cited above, mentioning a multitude of further omens, is the last record we have from Hydatius.

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[71] Prosp. Chron. 1375–1376 (Mommsen 1892, 483–485).

[72] On the increasing limitation of the chronicle's scope and its pessimism, cf. Kötter in Kötter/Scardino (2017a), 12–25.

[73] Chron. Gall. ann. 452, 138 (Kötter/Scardino 2017a): *hac tempestate valde miserabilis rei publicae status apparuit, cum ne una quidem sit absque barbaro cultore provincia et infanda Arrianorum haeresis, quae se nationis barbaris miscuit, catholicae nomen fidei toto orbe infusa praesumat.*

[74] On this interpretation, see the forthcoming edition (Fröhlich, KFHist G17) and Fröhlich (2025), 179–182, 337–353, along with App. 2.

[75] Chron. Gall. ann. 452, 140: (Kötter/Scardino 2017a): *plurima hoc anno signa apparuerunt.*

[76] For the discussions about the date of the chronicle's composition (in the mid-450s) and possible later continuation, see Burgess (1993), 5–6; Cardelle de Hartmann (1994), 3–65; Kötter in Kötter/Scardino (2019a), 7–10. Cf. Gillett (2003), 47–49.

[77] On the 'provincial view of Hydatius', see the extensive study of Gillett (2003), 36–83, cf. also Börm (2014).

The *Continuation of 451*, as it is preserved in the Ovetensian manuscript, abruptly changes course following the reports on the Council of Chalcedon and concludes with the Hunnic crisis in Gaul:

> At this time Attila, king of the Huns, invaded Gaul. Against him the patricius Aetius rose, committing himself to the lord apostle Petrus, to fight with God's help.[81]

No one, it seems, took up his pen to continue the narrative and recount how Aetius would indeed save Gaul (and Italy) from the Huns, only to be murdered by his own emperor three years later. No one seems to have felt the urge to relate how these events culminated in the assassination of Valentinian by the supporters of Aetius, leaving the Western Empire leaderless – lacking general and emperor alike. If anyone had tried to portray these events, he would have found continuing the hopeful, even triumphant tone impossible.

Yet the chronicle eventually *was* continued, though in a very different style and tone: the *Reichenau Continuation* draws on the same foundation (the *Continuation of 451*), but the last entries, including the report about Aetius quoted above, are missing. Instead, the chronicle is continued in the simple style of plain consularia, presenting the war in Gaul and the subsequent political murders in easy, elliptic, passive sentences: "A battle (was) fought […]; Aetius and Boetius […] (were) killed; Valentinian himself (was) killed […]."[82] These entries are clearly parallel to the other witnesses to the *Consularia Italica*, so they are either taken from there directly or are based

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[78] Regarding the chronicle's overall apocalyptic character, see Kötter in Kötter/Scardino (2019a), 42–45; cf. also Kitchen (2012) esp. 649–653, whose interpretation, however, might go a little too far (as discussed by Kötter).

[79] Hyd. Chron. 253 (Kötter/Scardino 2019a), ending with the words: *et multa alia ostenta, quae memorare prolixum est.*

[80] First highlighted by Burgess (1993), 11–17 and 31–33; cf. Scardino in Kötter/Scardino (2019a), 48–52.

[81] *Cont. Ov.* 18 (Mommsen 1892, 490): *hoc tempore Attila Hunorum rex invadit Gallias. contra hunc commendans se domno Petro apostolo patricius Aetius perrexit dei auxilio pugnaturus.*

[82] *Cont. Reich.* 19, 24, 27 (Mommsen 1892, 490): *pugna facta in Galliis* (…)*; eo anno occisi sunt Aetius et Boetius* (…)*; Valentinianus ipse occisus* (…).

on the same central proclamations (see before). In both cases, they obviously gloss over reality with supposed objectivity, thus even leaving out any active part in both deaths. However, the depiction of the sack of Rome by the hands of the Vandals is peculiar:

> Geiseric entered Rome and, having made loot, returned to Carthage.[83]

One cannot help but gain the impression that the author is writing from a distanced, Carthaginian vantage point. The return of Geiseric – who, unlike Attila, does not have to be introduced as "king of the Vandals" – does not read like a sigh of relief at his departure from Rome, but rather like a warm welcome back to Carthage. In any case, this entry, like another local entry on the Carthaginian bishop Deogratias (454),[84] does not derive from any source known to us by means of *Quellenforschung.*[85] We may therefore, as previously suggested, indeed be dealing with a case of decentral composition of consularia – based on central proclamations (consular announcements and official news), but also shaped by local experience, in this instance from a North African perspective under Vandal rule. After 455, the continuator seems to have had no information at all but the consuls lending their names to the years: three pairs of consuls follow each other with no historical annotations. Without taking any notice of the deposition of the Emperor Avitus (455–456), the chronicle chain consisting of at least four layers of authorship (Jerome, Prosper, *Cont. 451*, *Cont. Reich.*)[86] finally comes to an end.

The absence of any record of Avitus's end in the *Reichenau Continuation* may well be a symptom of the profound instability in the West that followed it: Ricimer and Majorian, the military figures responsible for his deposition and death, were still waiting in Italy to make their move. It was probably not until the end of 457 that they officially designated Majorian as the new emperor, and he was apparently never fully recognised by the East (see below). In any case, the prevailing uncertainty is clearly echoed by the (chronologically) most far-reaching of the minor continuations of Prosper's chronicle in the fifth century.

The *Continuation of 462* briefly enumerates a succession of rulers following Prosper's conclusion in 445, explicitly noting that after Avitus, the throne remained vacant for fifteen months – a detail that serves as an important source for dating Majorian's late accession to power.[87] This sparse continuation, listing only emperors and the lengths of their reigns, ultimately terminates in 462, immediately after the emphatical-

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83 *Cont. Reich.* 29 (Mommsen 1892, 490): *Geisericus Romam ingressus praeda facta Carthaginem revertitur.*

84 *Cont. Reich.* 25 (Mommsen 1892, 490).

85 The parallel witnesses all do, of course, mention the sack of Rome, but in markedly different words.

86 Not taking into account Eusebius's Greek original, the reviser of the AOR-recension and similar small cases of scribal revision discussed above (note 25).

87 Ed. Mommsen (1892), 491: *post ipsum mensibus XV regnum vacavit.*

ly noted interregnum, with the accession of Libius Severus, and was never continued further.

The *Continuation of Alcobaça*, on the other hand, is an interesting parallel witness to the *Reichenau Continuation:* it likewise lists mostly consuls from 446 (continuing Prosper's 445-edition) to 455, containing only one added historical annotation in the style of consularia noting for 454 (in a clearly more blunt manner than the official style) that "in this year Aetius is killed by Emperor Valentinian".[88] The text concludes with the eighth consulship of Valentinian, without any reference to his assassination, so the continuation must have been originally finalised in early 455, which is also reflected in a subsequent supputation *usque ad consulatum Valentiniani VIII.*[89] Just like in the previous cases, no one then continued this chronicle with further pairs of consuls. However, the manuscript was obviously still in use: at a later point in time, someone, probably again in North Africa, must have inserted an addition (now to be found in the copies right after the year 455), stating that Geiseric had reigned for 21 years (dying in 477).[90] One can therefore easily imagine how an individual in North Africa initially recorded the names of Roman consuls and the death of Aetius according to the imperial tradition of the consularia, but ceased in 455 – approximately two decades after the Vandal conquest of Africa. It was only later that he or another person was willing to accept a new chronological reference point: that of the 'king of the Vandals and Alans', who was still ruling Africa some 20 years later.

3.2 Consuls, Chronology and the Collapse of a Reliable Information Structure

However, the discontinuation of the consular list may have had a further, more pragmatic reason: Theodosius II had died unexpectedly in the Eastern Empire in 450, prompting the rather hasty elevation of Marcian to the throne. In the West, Valentinian III (nephew of the deceased emperor) took offense, viewing the non-dynastic Marcian practically as a usurper. As a result, East and West entered a phase of occasional non-recognition, whereby the consuls designated by one side – usually both halves of the empire appointed one consul each – were at times not accepted by the other side (or even mutually). Thus, from 451 to 453 the West would, for example, exclusively use the respective Western consul for dating purposes.[91] For reasons that are not entirely clear, some consulates were apparently negotiated internally or between the halves for a longer period, causing the new consuls – and thus the year's official name – to be declared only midway or late in the year. As an example, Aetius was appointed consul together with Studius (as the Eastern candidate) in 454, the year he would be assassinated. For some reason, however, the announcement came rather late, even in Rome itself: until June 454, inscriptions continued to be dated in reference to the previous year's consuls (post-consulate), and a letter from Pope Leo as late as July 28 still employed dating by post-consulate. Perhaps the negotiations that were needed to finally arrive at the recognition of the Eastern consul had been lengthy. If so, this hard-won recognition proved short-lived: the following year (455), Valentinian III once again refused to accept any Eastern candidate and assumed the sole consulate in the West himself.[92] So, like Aetius, he too was assassinated during the year of his own consulate.

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[88] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 487: *hoc anno Aetius occiditur a Valentiniano imperatore.*

[89] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 487.

[90] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 487: *rex Vandalorum et Alanorum Geisericus regn. post mortem Valentiniani imperatoris annis XXI.* The reference to Valentinian and the fact that the supputation was not updated beyond 455 clearly demonstrate that this is a later addition.

[91] For an introduction to the end of the Theodosian dynasty (450 and 455) and its consequences for the relations of the empire's two halves, see Siebigs (2010), 55 – 58 et passim. Cf. Burgess (1994), 61 – 64, and, for the consuls, Bagnall et al. (1987), 443 – 441, with commentary. It seems as if Valentinian

Consistent with these circumstances, the *Continuation of Alcobaça* includes only the Western consuls for the years 451–453 and adds for 452, thereby betraying its uncertainty, *et qui de Oriente fuerit nuntiatus* ("and who will be reported from the East") – though the omission of the Eastern consul by the Western imperial court was surely not due to ignorance, but rather intentional non-recognition. For the year 454, as discussed above, both consuls initially appear to have been unknown, so the continuation records a post-consulate. Subsequently, someone added the consuls Aetius and Studius, resulting in the text containing two references to the same year – both a post-consulate and the consular pair announced later that year. The continuation concludes with the year 455, recorded, as previously noted, as 'the eighth consulate of Valentinian', thus again referencing only the Western consul and leaving out the Eastern consul.

The general problem of uncertainty in the recognition and dissemination of consuls that is attested in its early stages by the *Continuation of Alcobaça* only worsened after the death of Valentinian III: after the brief 75-day reign of Petronius Maximus, the Gallic aristocrat Avitus came to power and, as was customary, assumed the consulate. The situation had now reversed: the East refused to recognise the Western consul and appointed two Eastern consuls instead, so that in the West the year was dated exclusively with reference to Avitus alone. When Avitus was deposed in October of that same year, which bore his name (*Avito Aug. cons.*) in the West, and was soon after killed, his consulate was erased; from that point onward, the year was retrospectively designated as *Varane et Iohanne cos.*, after the two Eastern consuls.[93] The fifteen-month interregnum that followed Avitus's death also caused considerable uncertainty regarding the consulate, as it would traditionally be held by the new emperor upon his accession. As the situation in the West remained unsettled, both consuls for the year continued to be appointed by Leo in the East, who claimed sovereignty over the entire-

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recognised Marcian at some point in 452 but later reverted to non-recognition (at least of the Eastern consuls).

[92] For the evidence, see the documentation for the respective years in Bagnall et al. (1987).

[93] Bagnall et al. (1987), 446–447.

ty of the empire. When Majorian, one of the military leaders involved in the overthrow of Avitus, finally seized the crown, the Eastern emperor Leo I would recognise neither his consulate nor his rule. In a climate of fluctuating diplomatic relations, the West initially used only Majorian's consulate but soon adopted the formula of a joint consulship with Leo – likely as a calculated move towards reconciliation with (or rather: acceptance by) the East. The attempt failed: in the East, Leo's consulate alone was recognised for dating purposes, while Majorian was ignored. In 459, each side appointed its own consul, yet apparently recognised only its own respective candidate – and this was only the beginning of the political turmoil that was to follow.[94]

It requires little imagination to conclude that, amid this political turmoil and the continuing territorial disintegration of the Western Roman Empire, consul names often reached many regions of the former empire late (or not at all), resulting in multiple, concurrent designations of the years, sometimes based on nothing but hearsay.[95]

The *Consularia Constantinopolitana* are an ideal case study in this regard: they were continued on a local basis in Spain during this very period and indeed show every sign of increasingly scarce information and growing confusion.[96] Until 455, the consuls were, unsurprisingly, listed largely according to contemporary usage (i. e., often naming only the Western consuls). In 456, the consulate of Avitus (alone) is recorded, indicating that the brief consulate of this equally short-lived emperor was also recognised in Spain. After his fall, however, this date was not replaced by the pair of consuls from the East (*Varane et Iohanne*, see above), as is otherwise well documented. Instead, the list now falls into disorder amid the turmoil of the interregnum and the general political crisis: it is continued with *Rechimero et qui de Oriente* ("Ricimer and who [*sc.* will be appointed] by the East"), which is usually interpreted as 459,[97] the year in which the Western generalissimo Ricimer would in fact hold the consulate.[98] This is followed by the cryptic (otherwise unknown) consulate of *Mariano Aug. et Ariobindo*, usually identified as an erroneous representation of Majorian's consulship in 458. Yet the subsequent consular pair is *Magno et Apollonio* (460) – showing that the list is obviously confused, no matter which interpretation is correct.[99] In the 460s, the list continues to descend further into disorder, naming only one of the two consuls appointed by the East in 461 and combining the consuls of

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[94] Siebigs (2010), 261–269, 365–372, 558–560; Bagnall et al. (1987), 448–453.

[95] On 'unofficial dissemination' and some later examples of different parallel formulas, with some regions of Gaul obtaining their information from the East rather than from the remains of the Western central administration, see Burgess (1989), 150–152.

[96] It does, for this purpose, not matter if the consuls were added to the consularia themselves or at a later point (as Burgess 1993, 206, proposes) based on local *fasti* that, in turn, attest to the same lack of information.

[97] Both in the editions of Burgess (1993), 245, and Becker/Nickbakht (2016), 456.

[98] Bagnall et al. (1987), 452. This consulate was, as the sources demonstrate, not recognised by the East.

[99] The edition of Becker/Nickbakht (2016), 56, sadly corrects this disorder, thus confining the evidence examined here to the *apparatus criticus.* For this reason, all references refer to the more or less diplomatic edition of Burgess (1993), 245.

463 and 461 (probably through a later addition of the consul previously left out). The consular dates for 466 and 467 are missing entirely, but there are brief mentions of the elevation of Anthemius to emperorship (467) and the failed expedition against the Vandals (468). Only after (!) noting this event does this local Spanish continuation of the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* end abruptly with the correct consul for 468 – meaning that the news about the expedition may have reached the continuator earlier than the consular date, which was, in any case, added later.[100]

We encounter a similar situation in the *Reichenau Continuation* of Prosper: after the consuls of 456[101] and 457, exclusively Eastern candidates during the interregnum in the West, we once again encounter a peculiar consul pair, in this case *Ardabure et Maximiano*, before the continuation comes to its conclusion.[102] In his 1892 edition, Mommsen already suspected that this may be a pair "conveyed by false rumour".[103] However, this is not an isolated case: the *Fasti Augustani*, which likely also originated at least partly from North Africa (as discussed and reconstructed in the previous paper),[104] show a clear parallel in this regard. There, too, we similarly encounter the two consular couples *Ardabure et Maximiliano* and *Matorano et Ricimere* after the year 457, before the list continues more or less correctly. The *Fasti Augustani*, compiled around 500, are evidently multi-layered (as are all consular lists by their very nature), but in this case they almost certainly contain a stratum that documents the very same disorder in consular dating that already gained some momentum in the *Continuation of Alcobaça* and that is fully apparent in the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* as well as in the consularia-style *Reichenau Continuation.* In any case, it is clear that these parallels are no coincidence:

- *Cons. Const.*, after 456: *Rechimero et qui de Oriente / Mariano Aug. et Ariouindo*[105]
- *Cont. Reich.*, after 457: *Ardabure et Maximiano*[106]
- *Fast. Aug.*, after 457: *Ardabure et Maximiliano / Matorano et Ricimere*[107]

It is not possible to establish any direct connection between the three texts.[108] The explanation already proposed by Mommsen for the consular pair of the *Reichenau Continuation* thus remains the most plausible: in the turmoil following 455/6, when the

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[100] Cf. Burgess (1993), 206–207, and Becker/Nickbakht (2016), 155–158.

[101] This means that, unlike in Spain, the consulate of Avitus was not acknowledged in Africa.

[102] Possibly as early as 457.

[103] Mommsen (1892), 488: *ad huius continuationis auctorem delatum falso rumore.*

[104] Fröhlich (2024), 185–203.

[105] Ed. Burgess (1993), 245, there identified as the years 459 and 458.

[106] *Cont. Reich.* 33 (Mommsen 1892, 490).

[107] Ed. Fröhlich (2024), 202.

[108] The only obvious suspicion is a conflation of the *Reichenau Continuation* and the *Fasti Augustani*, as they are both part of the same tradition (the lost *Reichenauiensis*). However, there is no basis for this: the consular lists differ significantly from each other, so that it is unlikely that the *Reichenau Continuation* could have been supplemented on the basis of the *Fasti Augustani* and vice versa – unless one assumes that only this particular consular pair was transferred from one text to the other.

Western Roman Empire was left without an emperor for 15 months, the central dissemination of consuls and information collapsed, at least partially. Rumours emerged to fill the gap: a not entirely unfounded rumour circulated that Majorian or Ricimer, who had in fact jointly overthrown Avitus and were now holding power in Italy, had become emperor and/or consuls. As is typical of such unofficial dissemination, Majorian's name in particular may have been transmitted in various misspelled or distorted forms (*Mariano*, *Maximiano*, *Maximiliano*).[109] At the same time, rumours appear to have circulated that a general of equal status from the East had been designated as Majorian's Eastern counterpart. In this context, we encounter the names Ardaburius (twice) and Ariobindus (once) – both indeed belonging to an influential dynasty of *magistri militum* that produced numerous consuls in the Eastern Empire between the 430s and 460s.[110]

In short: these may have been rumours, but they were perhaps not entirely ill-informed, especially in relation to Majorian and Ricimer. And yet they heralded the beginning of the end. Without consuls and access to imperial information, there was little to no basis for the decentral compilation and continuation of consularia.[111] Indeed, the major recension of the *Consularia Italica* that underlies the later continuation that would be so impactful in the sixth century must have come to an end just around 455 – and there was, it seems, no major continuation for some four decades.[112] The *Continuation of Alcobaça* ended in 455 by listing only the Western consul, but at least correctly. The *Consularia Constantinopolitana*, "written by a Westerner who was extremely isolated",[113] fell into hearsay and disorder after 455/6. The *Reichenau Continuation* ends with a mere rumour about the year 458 – and then breaks off. The same rumours and disorder are similarly preserved in one of the multiple layers of the *Fasti Augustani.* The sudden discontinuation beginning in the middle of the 450s of practically all chronicles discussed above – although they had flourished in such diversity since the 430s – may thus have another, very plausible dimension: a crisis of the informational infrastructure that followed the political crisis of the time.

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[109] Although, of course, it cannot be ruled out that the variants originate from the later manuscript tradition – the *fasti* are full of such and similar errors.

[110] See, for example, Croke (2005) and McEvoy (2016). Ardaburius (cos. 447) was the father-in-law of Areobindus (cos. 434), whose son Dagalaifus was consul in 461. Dagalaifus was married to Godisthea, daughter of Ardaburius and granddaughter of Aspar, the consular colleague of Ardaburius in 447. Aspar was one of the most influential military leaders in the East for several decades, infamous as a maker of emperors. According to some sources, he himself rejected the imperial title in favour of Leo, but at least attempted to install his son Patricius as his successor. Patricius became consul in 459 (as unrecognised colleague of Ricimer), and Aspar's eldest son, also named Ardaburius, was *magister militum* in the late 450s, as his father had been before him. All this (and this overview is, of course, incomplete) certainly provides fertile ground for rumours about potential consuls.

[111] On the end of the tradition of consularia due to the end of their necessary conditions (consuls and imperial proclamations), cf. Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 180–183.

[112] See above, 158 with note 41.

[113] Burgess (1993), 199.

This crisis affecting the dissemination (or at least quality) of information proved fatal for the compilation of chronicles: as outlined above, the construction of a chronological framework based on regnal and/or consular years posed significant difficulties – challenges that were likely intensified by the rapid turnover of rulers and the uncertainty surrounding the designation of consuls. Let us take the events of Avitus's reign as an example: Avitus ruled for little more than a year from the summer of 455 to the fall of 456, after which there was no emperor in the West for 15 months. Paradoxically, much of his regency (455) would thus fall within the last year of the reign of the murdered Valentinian III. Counting 456 as the first full calendar year of his own rule, his reign would have already ended within that same year – after which no ruler held office between October 456 and late 457. As previously discussed, the year 456 in the West was initially dated according to the consulship of Avitus, who, following his deposition in October, was subjected to *damnatio memoriae* – causing a retrospective change of the consular dating. Given such conditions, how was a chronicler expected to create a reliable timeline and correctly assign to it the fragmentary information from scattered sources? Also, from a more ideological perspective: how would he turn these chaotic matters into a meaningful description of historical events?

For the *Reichenau Continuation*, the answer was obviously: not at all. It does not take up the narrative form of the earlier *Continuation of 451* and simply lists the consuls the compiler received, completely ignoring any political events after 455. The regnal years *in margine*[114] had already been dating by the Eastern emperor Marcian as the sole ruler since 451. The continuator of the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* in Spain reacted similarly: he records the consulship of Avitus in 456, without noting his death or subsequently correcting the record after his deposition, while from this point onward, the consular entries fall into confusion and appear increasingly influenced by unofficial dissemination, that is: rumour. Hydatius, also writing on the Iberian Peninsula, made a genuine effort to maintain the regnal years and succession of emperors he had continued from Jerome amid this turmoil. In his attempt to deal with the rapid succession of rulers and the interregnum, he assigned Avitus a full three years (455–457), which has stirred up some confusion among modern scholars.[115] In general, the chronology of Hydatius (but also of, for example, the *Gallic Chronicle*) is often somewhat ambiguous or simply incorrect, which has prompted some modern scholars to make extensive revisions to the text.[116] In any case, there is no question that establishing a functioning chronology for a meaningfully ordered presentation of historical events was never an easy task, and certainly less so from the 450s onwards.

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[114] See above, 160 with note 48.

[115] Mathisen (1985); Burgess (1987).

[116] Muhlberger (1990), 146–152, 200–204; Burgess (1993), 27–46; Burgess (1990); Kötter in Kötter/Scardino (2019a), 12–18. Substantial revisions of the chronology against the manuscript tradition had been proposed by Courtois (1951) and Tranoy (1974), but can now be considered superseded by the studies cited above. We must keep in mind, though, that even if we cannot correct the manuscript tradition's dating in most cases for several reasons, it is still obviously lacunose and corrupted – so any argument on the chronology of Hydatius is confronted with fundamental problems.

3.3 Chronology, History, and Historical Meaning – Explaining the End

The aforementioned flowering of chronicles in the fifth century thus broke off – across many individuals and textual witnesses – in a violent disruption. During the crisis of the empire, the dissemination of information in the provinces steadily declined. First the chronicles' perspectives became narrower, then their continuation ceased altogether. Researchers often assume that the end of Prosper's chronicle (455) or Hydatius's chronicle (468) roughly corresponds to the end of their lives: they were unable to continue their work because they may have died shortly after the last year recorded in their chronicles. This may, of course, be true, but we must also consider another possibility: Prosper's three recensions (433, 445, 455) clearly show that he continued his chronicle retrospectively roughly every ten years. The same can be said of Hydatius, who may not only have first concluded his chronicle in the 450s to continue it later up to the 460s, but also shows traces of obvious retrospective historical constructions – for example, the three regnal years of Avitus counted backwards from the accession of Leo/Majorian in retrospect.[117]

Events are singular and unconnected, and even the sober format of chronicles needed at least some distance from the confusing events of the time to turn them into cohesive (or at least chronologically organised) history. We can observe this later construction of history in the *Vatican Continuation*, which, as the most extensive of Prosper's minor continuations, extends as far as the year 466. Yet in doing so, it constructs a harmonious, coherent picture of these chaotic years in retrospective: in 456, it does not list Avitus, but rather the Eastern pair of consuls; in 458, it lists Majorian and Leo side by side rather than in conflict; in the subsequent years, too, it lists Eastern and Western consuls jointly instead of in mutual non-recognition – a picture of harmony between the two parts of the empire that never existed, with consular pairs that had never been used in contemporary sources for dating purposes. The source of this harmonising reconstruction is clearly Eastern rather than Western, as indicated by the consistent prioritisation of Eastern consular names.[118] Still, even this construction of harmony could not escape the general trend: the *Vatican Continuation* contains almost no historical annotations – quite literally nothing but: "Majorian dies; Severus is elevated; Severus dies"[119] – and ends abruptly in 466 without mentioning any subsequent Western emperor after the death of Severus. Just as the *Vatican*

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[117] On this, see Burgess (1987); for other inconsistencies, cf. Gillett (2003), 47–49.

[118] In the West, the Western consul would usually be named first.

[119] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 493, c. 14/19: *moritur Maiorianus. levatur Severus; Severus moritur.* This is the entirety of historical annotations covering a period of six years.

Continuation was appended around 466 with a retrospectively harmonising perspective to a manuscript that had previously concluded in 445 (or 453),[120] it is likewise conceivable that other continuators intended to delay their additions until a more stable political situation emerged. That they waited for rumours to turn into certainty, for a retrospectively meaningful order to take shape, so that at some point years could be turned into a clearly structured chronology and events could be turned into history. But this moment was never to come – at least not in their lifetime. Ideology may, as stressed in the case of the *Continuation of 451*, also have played an important role: any chronicler would not only face a sparsity of information, but also a sparsity of good news that could be integrated into a coherent picture of Roman history as they knew it.[121] In any event, the golden age of late antique chronicles in the fifth century began to fade in the late 450s and did not survive beyond the 460s. For half a century, 'minor historiography' fell silent.

4 Revival and Recollection in a Post-Imperial World

At the close of this half-century, around 500/510 AD, we witness a marked revival in both the production and reception of chronicles – making the preceding rupture all the more pronouncedly visible. However, the divide between these two phases is not merely temporal: it also marks a significant shift in the very nature of 'minor historiography'.

As discussed above, the political turmoil from the mid-450s onward had left a major void in reliable regnal and consular chronology, as well as in the general transmission of information in the Western Roman Empire, not to speak of the ideological void created by the fall of the Theodosian dynasty and the general disorder in the West – a void that proved hard to overcome. *The Fasti Augustani*, as noted, clearly demonstrate how even much later consular records could contain earlier layers that attest to the confusion and rumours that arose after 456. The *Vatican Continuation* of 466 already solved these problems by adopting a retroactively constructed list of consular pairs that were obviously drawn from Eastern sources and that (as contemporary inscriptions, papyri, and other continued chronicles demonstrate) had never been used for dating amidst the prevailing situation of mutual political non-recognition. Practically all of the Latin chronicles of the sixth century reflect such a retrospectively revised history: Victor of Tunnuna must, as evidenced by both the names and the sequence of the consuls, have relied exclusively on an Eastern consular list for the years 457–500 – exactly the period that marks the historiographical gap in the

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[120] See above, 159 with note 44: up to 455, the *Vatican Continuation* probably drew on the *Consularia Italica* – there is no way to know whether this layer was added by the same continuator as the layer of 456–466, or whether there were two (or more) compilers at different points of time.

[121] Cf. Eich 2015 for a summary of the ideological tendencies to deny any crisis in contemporary sources.

Western tradition. A shift back to mainly Western consuls is only visible from 501 onward.[122] Similarly, the list following the Spanish epitome of Hydatius lists only Eastern emperors, ignoring the Western emperors after the end of Hydatius's chronicle completely.[123] Indeed, anyone interested in a functional regnal chronology would have been better advised to follow the emperors of the East – and in fact, after the end of the Theodosian dynasty, virtually no Western continuation used regnal years as its main chronological framework, as Jerome, Hydatius or the Gallic Chronicler had laboured to maintain.

But even if a chronological structure based on consuls or emperors was established, it still needed to be provided with information. Here, too, we see that attempts to obtain information were severely limited: neither Victor of Tunnuna nor the Eastern continuator Marcellinus report much about events in the fifth-century West. The most detailed recollection of historical information – which is still sparse, especially for the period immediately after 455 – can be found in the continuation of the tradition of *Consularia Italica*, written in the 490s. This collection of basic historical data seems to have been pretty unique, because Cassiodorus, the *Consularia Vindobonensia* (*Fasti Vindobonenses*), the *Continuation of 523*, the *Anonymus Valesianus*, the continuation of Prosper that was later superseded by the *Paschale Campanum*, and Marius of Avenches all drew on the tradition of the *Consularia Italica* as their main source for the big gap from 455 to the 490s. This illustrates how little information was apparently available, forcing virtually all authors of the early sixth century – including some high-ranking aristocrats such as Cassiodorus – to cling to a single (!) thread of scant historical information in order to desperately fill the historical void that yawned behind them.

In general, the political reality after this historical void was fundamentally different than before: the authors of the aforementioned flourishing of 'minor historiography' between 430 and 460 were still embedded in the confident continuity of the Roman Empire – and, as Hydatius and some other minor continuations show, they fell into disorder or broke off after that confidence waned. Above, I suggested that a subsequent phase of continuations would thus only set in once a period of renewed stability had been achieved, a stability accompanied by a new sense of historical identity and the confidence to construct a new retrospective narrative. If this is correct, then this stability did not emerge in Italy during the turbulent final years of the Western Roman Empire, but only after the definitive establishment of Ostrogothic rule. The *Consularia Italica*, in particular, after providing only sparse details for the period directly following 455, focus primarily on the events involving Odoacer and the seizure of power by Theodoric and the Ostrogoths in 493. On the other hand, Romulus Augustulus – whom modern handbooks usually label the 'last emperor of the Western Roman Empire' – and his deposition in 476 receive virtually no attention. Similarly, the *Consularia Vindobonensia* and the *Continuation of 523* are firmly situated within the new political framework of Ostrogothic Italy – much like the *Anonymus Valesianus*, which effectively takes the form of a biography of Theodoric the Great.[124]

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[122] Mommsen (1894), 190; Bagnall et al. (1987), 52; Cardelle de Hartmann (2011), 111*. As Victor seems to have written his chronicle in Constantinople, his access to Eastern sources is unsurprising. And yet it is a clear indication of the scarcity of Western sources that Victor apparently had a Western list at hand without any problems *after* 500 – for the period before that, he only had an Eastern one, just as, almost a century earlier, the *Vatican Continuation* had to make use of Eastern information.

[123] Cf. Kötter in Kötter/Scardino (2019b), 388.

This is even more evident in the case of Cassiodorus's chronicle. Composed in the style of consularia, it presents a proud enumeration of Roman consuls from 521 BC to AD 519, at the same time drawing heavily on Jerome's chronicle to include a great number of past exempla, cultural innovators and imperial patrons of Rome's illustrious past.[125] Yet the entire composition ultimately serves a singular political purpose: to culminate in the year 519, when Eutharic, the Ostrogothic prince and designated heir of Theoderic to whom this work is dedicated, would take the consulate. The chronicle, in essence, functions as a panegyric, celebrating Eutharic's games, donations, and festivities as the crowning achievement of Roman tradition and positioning the Ostrogoths firmly within the historical narrative of an unbroken Roman past, presented within the concise and seemingly objective framework of consularia.[126]

In short, the revival of the chronicles takes place within what is now a markedly post-imperial world. This applies all the more to regions beyond Ostrogothic control: as previously noted, the *Continuation of Alcobaça*, written under Vandal rule, ended rather abruptly in 455 with the recording of the single consulate of Valentinian III, omitting the Eastern consul. A later marginal addition noted that now Geiseric reigned, probably followed by a second addition after Geiseric's death in 477: "for 21 years".[127] This much could be acknowledged with some unease, but it was still miles away from the adoption of the Vandal kings as a chronological framework for a further continuation of the chronicle. A generation later, this hesitation appears to have disappeared: in 523, later continued to 534, the *Laterculus Vandalorum* was composed as a continuation of Prosper's chronicle, now indeed based on the succession of Vandal rulers.[128] In any case, the adoption of Vandal kingship as the basis of chronological reckoning signals both an adjustment to new political realities and a redefinition of how historical time could be measured in a post-Roman world.

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[124] Consequently edited by Ingemar König (1997) under the title *Aus der Zeit Theoderichs des Großen.*

[125] It starts, for example, with Semiramis/Ninus, Prometheus, Cecrops, and Moses (Cass. Chron. 8, 18, 25, 27 [Mommsen 1892, 120–121]). The subsequent selection of annotations, drawn primarily from Jerome's chronicle, also repeatedly mentions large buildings, foundations etc. A detailed study of Cassiodorus's selection principles is lacking; for now, see Fröhlich (2025), 173–175.

[126] Amory (1997), 66–68; Croke (2003), 358–361; Fröhlich (2025), 173–175. Cf. the rather reserved assessment of Christensen (2002), 57–67.

[127] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 487: *rex Vandalorum et Alanorum Geisericus regn. post mortem Valentiniani imperatoris annis XXI.* This is (see above, 172) clearly a later addition, as the supputation that follows still ends with "the eighth consulate of Valentinian III". I would further propose – though with no proof – that the addition was made some time before Geiseric's death, with *anni XXI* only added to the sentence's end at a later point.

In Ostrogothic Italy, as previously discussed, a different path was taken: consular dating not only persisted, but flourished. Indeed, many of the texts now designated as consularia by modern research originate from this very period after the end of a Western Roman central authority. Somewhat paradoxically, the absence of a Western emperor created new opportunities for the Roman aristocracy, who now had greater access to the consulate, so that under Ostrogothic rule this office experienced a renaissance.[129] Yet it is difficult to avoid the interpretation that the prominence of consular chronology in 'minor historiography' was at least to some extent also an ideological compensation for the disappearance of the empire in the West. The Roman elite could not – or would not – adopt a chronology based on the new Ostrogothic rulers.[130] Instead, they clung to the age-old tradition of consular dating, even though ongoing tensions with the East meant that they would use only the Western consul for much of the Ostrogothic period, lending the *fasti* of the time a typically Ostrogothic appearance.[131]

This situation remained fundamentally unchanged even after the mid-sixth century, when the Ostrogothic kingdom was dismantled by the Eastern Roman Empire and Justinian abolished the ordinary consulate in 542 following the consulate of Basilius (541 AD): from now on, continuations of the consularia and *fasti* continued to use post-consular dating.[132] A particularly striking example of this persistence is found in Marius of Avenches, writing under Frankish rule in the Alpine region of Burgundia. Even as late as 566, he continued to date events as occurring in the "25th year after the consulate of Basilius", obviously reluctant to change to any other chronological system (such as the reigning Burgundian or Frankish monarchs).[133] Similarly, Victor of Tunnuna also maintained this post-consular system until 563. It was only with John of Biclar that a significant shift occurred – his chronicle, composed in Visigoth Spain, employed a hybrid model that included regnal years of both Eastern Roman emperors and Visigoth kings.[134] Isidore followed in these footsteps at the dawn of the early Middle Ages in the early seventh century, listing the reigns of Visigothic kings and Eastern Roman emperors alike.

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[128] The fact that King Hilderic – who distanced himself from Thrasamund's anti-Nicene stance – took the throne in 523 likely played a key role here, as was first proposed by Papencordt (1837), 358; cf. Steinacher (2004), 177–179.

[129] Cecconi (2007), esp. 119–123.

[130] They were, in the end, legally still citizens of the Roman Empire.

[131] Bagnall et al. (1987), 33–34. Cf., for example, the *Fasti Augustani* (Fröhlich 2024, 185–208, esp. 203) from the 480s onwards.

[132] For the evidence, see Bagnall et al. (1987) along with the introduction.

[133] Mar. Av. ad ann. 566 (Mommsen 1894, 238). In the subsequent year, Marius adopts a new chronological framework, counting the years from the honorary consulates held by Justin in 567 and later by Tiberius in 580.

[134] Cardelle de Hartmann (2001), 135*–139*.

In Gaul, too, the *Gallic Chronicle of 511* already clearly portrays a distinctly post-imperial reality in the early sixth century: while it continues to use emperors as its chronological anchor, it accords 'barbarian' kings and generals a level of importance equal to (or even exceeding) that of the emperors themselves.[135] When Gaul, now ruled by the Franks, was reached by one of the continuations of Isidore's chronicle in the seventh century, this development was apparently largely complete: a local continuation deals almost exclusively with the Frankish kings and concludes with a chronological supputation calculating to the "14th year of Heraclius and the 40th year of King Chlothar" (624).[136] At around the same time, the 'Lombard Chronicler' (or: 'Kopenhagen Continuator') sees the future as belonging to the Lombard kings – he regards the remnants of the (Eastern) Roman Empire in Italy as relics of the past, explicitly describing them as "not yet conquered".[137]

Meanwhile, the Roman Empire continued to exist in the East, where Marcellinus Comes wrote his chronicle in two phases (up to 518 and 534). Here, too, however, we observe not only the increasing disappearance of the West from his field of vision, especially since 455,[138] but also clearly Byzantine features shaping the work (making the work, once again, post-imperial in this respect).[139] Marcellinus also seems to have been acutely aware of the serious rupture in the fifth-century West. Scholars have much discussed the fact that Marcellinus was one of the few witnesses to name the year 476 as the end of the Western Roman Empire.[140] They have paid less attention to the fact that he presented this only as the formal completion of an earlier fall of Western Roman power and legitimacy. Thus, after the death of Aetius (454), even before the death of Valentinian, he writes:

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[135] Cf. Kötter in Kötter/Scardino (2017b), 184–188, esp. 187: "Die Geschichte des Weströmischen Reiches geht in dieser Phase sukzessive in der Geschichte der germanischen Nachfolgereiche auf […]" and 185–186: "Es ist also festzuhalten, dass die germanischen Völker eine weitgehend gleichberechtigte Rolle im Bericht spielen […]".

[136] Mommsen (1894), 489–490, 10: *fiunt igitur ab exordio mundi usque in heram presentem, id est XIIII Eracli et XL Clotharii regis annum, anni V milia DCCCXXII.* The previous chapters 6–9 deal exclusively with Frankish matters.

[137] Auct. Havn. Ext. 21 (Mommsen 1892, 339): (…) *partem, quam nondum Longobardi occupaverant.* Cf. Muhlberger (1983) and Muhlberger (1984), who first studied the worldview of this post-imperial chronicler under Lombard rule.

[138] Croke (2001a), 186–195.

[139] Croke (2001a), 257–265.

[140] Cf. Croke (1983).

> Aetius, the great hope of the Western Empire and terror of King Attila, is murdered by Emperor Valentinian in the palace together with his friend Boethius. With him, the Hesperian (Western) Empire fell – and to this day it was not able to be recovered.[141]

From then on, Marcellinus clearly takes a political stance that favours an Eastern interpretation of history in which practically all emperors in the West following Valentinian derive their legitimacy exclusively from recognition by the East. None of the Western rulers are given the title 'Augustus'; they are all recognised as usurpers at worst, or at best as lower-ranking Caesars recognised by the Eastern Augustus – until even this finally comes to an end in 476.[142] Interestingly, Cassiodorus in the West appears to share this general conception of history, albeit with a markedly different orientation. As the analysis of the *Reichenauiensis* in my previous paper has demonstrated with considerable certainty, Cassiodorus likewise discontinued the previously continuous line of emperors after the reign of Marcian (451).[143] This is clearly not a coincidence. Armin Eich has noted that Marcellinus's account portrays the West as a territory without legitimate authority, thereby legitimising its conquest by the Eastern Empire – a justification for Justinian's campaign to reclaim Italy in the 530s.[144] At the court of the Ostrogoths, a similar justification seems to have been employed: Cassiodorus identifies Marcian (451–457) as the last legitimate emperor of the entire empire, while Leo, who succeeded him, is explicitly designated as emperor '*Orientis*' and Anastasius as ruler '*in orientali imperio*'.[145] In typical Ostrogothic fashion, the Eastern consuls are consistently ignored. All Western rulers from Avitus to Odoacer are meanwhile portrayed more or less as usurpers raised to the throne and repeatedly styled rulers over a *regnum*, not as emperors.[146] In any case, neither the emperors of the West nor those of the East are any longer counted in the line of succession that had been maintained by Cassiodorus until Marcian. Cassiodorus thus effectively also constructs the West as a space without legitimate imperial rule since the 450s, thereby implicitly justifying the Ostrogothic rule that ultimately filled this vacuum with its *regnum.*[147] At the same time, Cassiodorus rejects any Eastern claims to the West: the Western throne has remained vacant since the 450s, with the emperor in Constantinople strictly confined to the East. Thus, in both historical narratives (and as part of different political agendas), the 450s mark the end of the legitimate Western Roman Empire.

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[141] Marc. Chron. ad ann. 454,2 (Mommsen 1894, 86): *Aetius magna Occidentalis rei publicae salus et regi Attilae terror a Valentiniano imperatore cum Boethio amico in palatio trucidatur, atque cum ipso Hesperium cecidit regnum nec hactenus valuit relevari.*

[142] Croke (2001a), 175–177 et passim; Croke (1983), esp. 87–90. Cf. the lengthy discussion by Siebigs (2010), 790–796.

[143] Fröhlich (2024), 181–183.

[144] Eich (2015), 51.

[145] Cass. Chron. 1268 and 1328 (Mommsen 1894, 157 and 159).

[146] While the reigns of earlier emperors are regularly described by a variation of *regnat*/*regnavit* or *imperium tenet*, after Marcianus we find three formulas expressing 'taking' of the throne. Cass. Chron. 1262 (Mommsen 1894, 157): 1264: *Avitus sumit imperium*; 1266: *Maximus invadit imperium*; 1268: *Maiorianus Italie suscepit imperium.* After Ricimer deposed Majorian, he is explicitly styled a kingmaker in a *regnum.* 1274: *cui* (*sc.* Ricimer) *Severum* (...) *succedere fecit in regnum.* Cassiodorus repeats this use of *regnum* in 1297 (158).

As much as these two historical constructions served as political strategies to legitimise different regimes, they also reflect the genuine rupture in historical and historiographical continuity that occurred in the mid-fifth century, as this study has sought to demonstrate. In the 450s, the political order in the West disintegrated, and with it, so did the steady flow of imperial information. This disruption – affecting not only knowledge of individual events but also the very framework of regnal and consular years that structured historical writing and the ideological conception of continuous imperial time along safe, unbroken lines – led to the collapse of 'minor historiography', which had until then been flourishing. In some cases, this decline was quite abrupt, unfolding over just a few years and ending in a sudden discontinuation of a textual tradition. In any case, a subsequent wave of 'minor historiography' (sometimes mere lists) only resumed after a significant hiatus, once the political and informational landscape had begun to stabilise, with a clear early peak between approximately 510 and 530. Yet all such later continuations of 'minor historiography' are characterised not only by a different world inherited by new generations and by new ideological self-images; they are also characterised by the evident struggle to bridge the profound gap left by the preceding generations. Some attempted to conceal this divide through harmonisation, not least of retrospective consular dates. Some even underscored the rupture, driven by distinct political agendas relevant to their own time. Some, such as the author(s) of the *Laterculus Vandalorum*, shifted focus entirely from the Roman emperors to the new barbarian rulers, constructing a local history rooted in a post-Roman successor state.

Even though these texts and their authors usually continued the earlier chronicle traditions of the period from 420/430 to 450/460, they all bear the unmistakable imprint of a new, post-imperial age. The crisis of 'minor historiography', then, represents not just a temporary disruption, but a demarcation line that divides two markedly different literary and cultural phases of late antiquity – at least in terms of the 'minor historiography' discussed in this study.

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[147] Indeed, in contrast to many of the emperors mentioned before, Cassiodorus even attributes Theodoric the rule over an *imperium* (1339 [Mommsen 1894, 160]).

5 The Literary Aftermath: Chronicles, Genre, Codices

The distinct waves of late antique chronicles described here had significant and lasting consequences for historiography. Shortly after Jerome's death, his chronicle attained canonical status and inspired numerous successors, resulting in a flourishing of decentralised chronicle writing during the second third of the fifth century, as outlined before. The sixth-century revival resumed this tradition after the extended crisis of nearly fifty years, further consolidating writing and continuing chronicles in this tradition as an established practice. By this time, not only Jerome but also Prosper – whose status was affirmed not only by the widespread distribution of his chronicle, but also by, for example, Gennadius in *De viris illustribus*[148] – had been canonised as chroniclers. Moreover, the genre itself was firmly established and now also formally defined and incorporated into the canon of Christian scholarship, not least by Cassiodorus in his *Institutiones.* In the fifth century, continuators like Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicler may have had access to the chronicle of Jerome, as it was kept as a kind of encyclopaedia in their ecclesiastical libraries. In the sixth century, we can observe chroniclers – Cassiodorus, Marcellinus Comes – now holding prestigious positions at royal courts and chronicles offered as prestigious gifts, as in the cases of Bonifatius Crucicola with his gift to the PPO Marinus and, once again, Cassiodorus's chronicle compiled to honour the Gothic prince Eutharic.

The practice of successive continuations and revisions resulted in the formation of manuscripts with chronicle chains circulating in various forms and combinations. These often featured significantly variant core texts – typically Jerome's chronicle or an epitome thereof – alongside multiple additions and continuations, so that some of these chains would already at an early point contain as many as half a dozen or more genetic layers. Anyone consulting a chronicle in this era would therefore typically have accessed several chronicles in immediate succession – something our modern editions of separate 'works' tend to conceal.[149] Consequently, when later authors made use of numerous chronicles, this was not always the result of wide-ranging research and compilation, but often simply because, quite certainly, many of these texts were already preserved collectively in the same manuscript.[150]

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[148] Genn. Vir. ill. 85 (Richardson). This canonisation was so influential that Marcellinus Comes (ad ann. 463 [Mommsen 1894, 88]) also included it in his chronicle in the East, though he apparently made no use of Prosper's chronicle himself.

[149] Now studied in detail by Fröhlich (2025), 211–297, but already pointedly noted by Burgess (1993), 6: "To present Hydatius' chronicle as I have done in this volume is in fact a serious misrepresentation of Hydatius' intentions. It cannot be helped, of course, but one should not make the same mistake when studying it. Hydatius wrote his chronicle as an integral continuation of Jerome's translation and continuation of Eusebius' Chronici Canones; it was never published as a separate work on its own and it was only ever intended to be read in the context of Eusebius and Jerome, just as Jerome's continuation of Eusebius was never intended to be treated separately from Eusebius."

Through the appropriation and continuation of earlier chronicles, a soon canonical[151] tradition of 'minor historiography' took shape in the West – one that would come to define historiography at the end of antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages. At the same time, however, a variety of diverse forms also emerged. These have thus far received only marginal attention in the preceding discussion, but they surely deserve some consideration now.

One of the developments was that in the sixth century the boundary between the more 'literary', often authorial chronicles following Jerome's tradition and the more succinct, usually anonymous genre of consularia began to blur.[152] Those chronicles had already been continued in the style of consularia to some extent in the fifth century, as can be seen in various minor continuations of Prosper. Still, after the crisis of the fifth century, this trend became even more pronounced: with the chronicle of Cassiodorus, we encounter what is effectively an attempt to elevate consularia into an authorial work drawing on the traditions of Jerome and Prosper, and even into a prestigious courtly gift. In other cases – such as with the *Continuator of 523* – earlier chronicles (in this instance, Prosper's) were provided with long continuations based on consularia that had been only slightly reworked to suit a more literary taste. Similarly, the earlier sections of the chronicle of Marius of Avenches offer little beyond what he must have compiled (in radical selection) based on consularia.[153] As previously suggested, the persistent emphasis on consular dating may to some extent be explained by the political climate of the post-imperial West, where Roman identity, not yet fully transformed into new, post-imperial identities, was upheld with increasing urgency and anxiety.[154] Although the empire had collapsed, considerable effort was made to preserve the outward forms of imperial proclamation, even in the absence of an emperor.[155] This trend ultimately contributed to the blending of genres that characterises the extant textual tradition and led to some scholarly debate over whether distinct genre boundaries ever existed at all – a discussion that can be laid to rest in light of the new syntheses.[156]

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[150] Cf. above, 162 with note 54 on the sources of Cassiodorus, who may have used a chronicle chain consisting of Jerome, Prosper and additions going back to the *Consularia Italica.*

[151] It has to be stressed, though, that in many cases chronicle chains were not used/continued *by choice* because they were canonical, but because they were *there:* as pointed out before, many late antique and medieval scribes and scholars would simply use an existing manuscript containing a great number of different chronicles and continuations that had come to their hands as the source and conceptional basis for their own enterprise.

[152] Cf. Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 36 et passim.

[153] This has led Croke (2001b), 309–310, to deny any boundaries of genre between chronicles and consularia.

[154] But cf. also note 127: in many cases, in the absence of new historiographical and chronological options, an exemplar of a chain of chronicles or of consularia may have been the only source available for any historiographic enterprise at all.

[155] Thus, Marius of Avenches, living under Burgundian rule in what is now Switzerland, would use the time-honoured consular dating not only over a century after the last Western Roman emperor, but also almost 40 years after the consulate had finally been abolished.

Furthermore, this practice of keeping consular lists with annalistic annotations had been mixed with a characteristically Christian chronology, in some cases since the fourth century,[157] but especially from the fifth/sixth century onwards: consular chronology was combined with Easter dates, and these paschal lists were in turn augmented with brief historical notes. We can see this clearly in the case of the *Chronicon Vivariense:* here, the chronicle of Prosper was first continued with material from the *Consularia Italica* (until around 453), then continued independently, yet still in the genre format/style of consularia (until 466) – the *Vatican Continuation* discussed above. In the sixth century, this chain was continued by the *Paschale Campanum*, a historically annotated Easter Cycle with consular dating, which was later continued on a small scale by different hands until the early seventh century (613 AD), based only on Easter dates and *anni a passione Christi* (without consular dates). Similarly, the Easter cycle of Dionysius Exiguus (c. 525 AD) was enriched at an early stage of its diverse tradition with information from the tradition of the *Consularia Italica* and independent annalistic annotations.[158] In short, we find ourselves here at a central moment in the development that would soon lead to the famous 'annals' of the early Middle Ages.[159]

A further, important development fundamentally altered the nature of late antique/early medieval chronicles: the chronicle of Eusebius and Jerome was originally structured in parallel columns, aligning the reigns of rulers from various empires to create a chronological framework for annalistic annotations – until, gradually, only the Roman Empire and its emperors remained, and the chronology thus followed a single empire. Prosper had, in a sense, already retroactively applied this format to earlier history by significantly abbreviating Jerome's chronicle: up to the birth of Christ, he confined himself to listing broad chronological periods – such as successive patriarchs or, primarily, rulers – as the primary chronological framework. Instead of assigning events to specific years in an annalistic fashion, he consequently grouped them under these larger periods. This method of abridging existing chronicles, or newly compiling them, became increasingly widespread and has been described by modern scholars as ‘chronicle epitome’, ‘*synopsis*’ or ‘time-span chronicle’.[160] The *Carthaginian Chronicle*, the *Laterculus Vandalorum*, Hydatius as preserved in the *Spanish Epitome*, and the epitome of Prosper in the *Chronicon Vivariense*, for example, all follow this pattern.

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[156] This criticism was voiced by Croke (1990, 2001b) and is still reflected by Becker in Becker/Nickbakht (2016), 4–7. The new synthesis as it is presented here took its start from Muhlberger (1990), 23–46, and Burgess (1993), 178–186; see now Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 35–57, 133–187; Burgess/Kulikowski (*Mosaics of Time* Vol. 2, forthcoming); Fröhlich (2025), 325–337.

[157] For example, in the 'proto-consularia' of the *Chronograph of 354*; cf. Burgess (2012), 349.

[158] Ed. Mommsen (1892), 751–756, under the title *Adnotationes antiquiores ad cyclos Dionysianos.*

[159] According to the definitions applied here, these 'annals' would more accurately be described as 'chronicles', since their structure aligns with the same genre as Jerome's chronicle or the *Consularia.* Cf. the rigid definitions of genre by Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 1–62.

In this regard, the practice of continuing chronicles through mere lists of rulers – with little to no historical commentary – can be seen as a natural extension of the broader tendency to reduce history to a sequence of reigns marked only by occasional annotations. Yet this development was not confined to anonymous compilers or abridgers of earlier material: it also gave rise to new and significant historiographical works. Isidore of Seville, for instance, followed this model in what we call his *Chronica Maiora* and later abridged it even further into his *Chronica Minora*, which became part of his *Etymologiae* – one of the most influential reference works of the Middle Ages.[161] Interestingly, in early eighth-century England, Bede adopted precisely this model for his own chronicle, which went on to have a profound impact across the Continent, inspiring numerous adaptations and continuations.[162]

The scale of condensation is evident when viewed quantitatively: in Eusebius/Jerome, the whole of the first millennium BC is covered on 125 pages of a codex. In Prosper’s epitome, this is reduced to just under 18 pages as laid out in Mommsen’s modern edition, surely much less in contemporary manuscripts. In Isidore’s *Chronica Maiora*, this period is reduced to about seven (modern) pages of the same size. His *Chronica Minora* condense the same material even further into less than 300 (!) words, presented as straightforward, linear lists of rulers accompanied by brief notes on events during their respective reigns.[163] It is therefore unsurprising that some modern scholars have raised very valid doubts whether this form of ‘minor historiography’ should still be classified as belonging to the same genre of chronicles as the broad annalistic chronicles of Jerome, Prosper, Hydatius or John of Biclar.[164]

In any event, the understanding of this historical evolution helps explain the diverse forms of ‘minor historiography’ found in the Middle Ages: though often differing strongly in form and content, these texts – late antique chronicles and epitomes, medieval annals, and annotated ruler lists – share a common ancestry.[165] Often, the structure of regnal periods in chronicle-epitomes (or *synopses*), as described above, would be used as a framework to insert longer, narrative parts – one of the reasons why medievalists now use the term 'chronicle' to describe such narrative, literary works, in contrast to annalistic texts, such as most of the late antique chronicles described here. Much scholarly debate has centred on whether a coherent definition of historiographical genres can be drawn from this diverse tradition(s).[166] Yet whatever conclusions are reached, the developments discussed here – marked by two distinct waves of late antique 'minor historiography' clearly defined and shaped by an intervening crisis – must necessarily form their historical-genetical background.

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[160] Burgess/Kulikowski (2013) 31–32, 60–61 et passim, suggested calling them ‘chronicle epitomes’, though Burgess (2021) later preferred the term ‘*synopsis*’. I myself employed the term ‘Zeitspannenchronik’ (‘time-span chronicle’); Fröhlich (2025), esp. 48–50, 155–163, 195–199.

[161] Martín (2003); cf. Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 192–201.

[162] Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 204–208. For Bede’s influence and use on the continent, cf. McKitterick (2004), Kaschke (2021), and Kaschke (2006).

[163] The exact page count of the original chronicle by Eusebius/Jerome follows the reconstruction by Helm (1956). For reasons of comparability in all four of the other texts (Prosper, both chronicles of Isidore, Bede), the editions in Mommsen’s *Chronica Minora* are used as a reference: Mommsen (1892), 391–408; Mommsen (1894), 440–454.

[164] Strongly emphasised by Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 31–32 et passim.

[165] It must be mentioned, though, that many of these developments also occurred (in somewhat different forms) in the Greek East, cf. Burgess (2021) and Burgess/Kulikowski (2016). A detailed,

Given this background, we can also better understand the manuscripts in which these historiographic texts of different forms have been handed down to us: as early as the fifth century, and certainly by the sixth, manuscripts containing complex chains of chronicles were in circulation, often with half a dozen or more genetic layers linked together in unbroken succession. Throughout their subsequent transmission, these texts were frequently combined with other chronographic and, in general, list-like materials, resulting in extensive encyclopaedic-chronographic miscellanies. For many centuries, well into the early modern period, these miscellanies served as compendia of historical chronology and important historical events in general. At the same time, these collections are never homogeneous; they usually preserve a loosely coherent assemblage of varied texts that simultaneously reflect many of the developments discussed in this study.

Against this backdrop, we also finally gain a much clearer understanding of the lost *Reichenauiensis*, the starting point of the discussion in the preceding volume of *Millennium.* It contains Prosper's chronicle up to 445, continued by the anonymous *Continuation of 451*, later expanded first to 455, then to 457/8 – the *Reichenau Continuation*, written in Vandal Africa and ending abruptly in the wake of the historiographical crisis of the fifth century. Following the historical gap caused by this disruption, the chain of chronicles was resumed with the two-layered *Laterculus Vandalorum* (523/34) – which shifted away from an annalistic format in favour of a 'chronicle epitome' or '*synopsis*', thus focusing on the regnal periods of the Vandal kings as its chronological framework rather than on individual years. At about the same time, someone compiled a list of consuls (*fasti*), possibly using African material similar to that of the *Reichenau Continuation*, as the list includes a corresponding crisis-ridden interruption marked by rumours of false consuls. This list was extended (using consular data from Ostrogothic Italy in its later sections) up to the year 497, and around 500 may have served to continue Jerome's chronicle to close the gap between 378 and the present. Later, someone combined these two very different chains of chronicles in the same manuscript. At a later stage, this collection appears to have migrated to Italy

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comparative analysis of these mostly separated traditions, as well as of possible points of contact, is yet to be conducted.

[166] Comprehensive overviews and numerous proposed solutions can be found in Wolf (2016); Burgess/Kulikowski (2013), 1–62; Dunphy (2010); Dumville (2002); cf. also Fröhlich (2025), 37–60.

(or perhaps was only assembled there), where Cassiodorus's chronicle – composed in 518 and, just as had happened to Jerome's chronicle, extended by *fasti* (down to 559) – was incorporated into the compilation. Finally, this manuscript or a copy of it must have found its way to Reichenau. There, it would later constitute the chronographic section of the now-lost *Reichenauiensis*, which appears to have included the following components:[167]

1) *Chronicle of Jerome*, ending in 378/9
1b) *Fasti Augustani*, continuing Jerome to 497, ending with the Explicit of Jerome's chronicle
2) *Chronicle of Prosper* in the recension of 445, augmented by
2a) some '*Reichenau Additions*' in textu,
2b) the *Continuation of 451*,
2c) the *Reichenau Continuation* extending to 457/8.
3) The *Laterculus Vandalorum*, an annotated list of Vandal kings serving as a continuation of Prosper from Geiseric's capture of Carthage (439) to 523 and the recapture of Carthage (533/4), closing with a supputation of the complete chain beginning with Jerome.
4) The *Chronicle of Cassiodorus* (ending in 519 AD), continued by
4a) a consular list (*fasti*) extending from 520 to the 16th post-consulate of Basilius (559).
[5) Jordanes, History of the Goths – not a chronicle]
6) The *Chronica Maiora of Isidore* (edition of 615)
7) The *Chronica Maiora of Bede* (ending in 725 AD)

Thus, nearly a dozen of the chronicles and continuations examined in this study – originating before the crisis, marked by it or emerging in its aftermath – are preserved within a single manuscript tradition, some of them surviving exclusively through this transmission. The *Parisinus BN Lat. 4860*, the most important surviving manuscript copy of the lost *Reichenauiensis*, also bears witness to the clearly medieval descendants of the late antique chronicle tradition: it includes several epitomes – primarily of Bede – extended into the ninth century through lists of rulers, as well as a later inserted layer containing the so-called *Annales S. Albani Moguntini.*[168] Thus, in this single manuscript, we are effectively presented with a genetic cross-section of the various forms of 'minor historiography' that developed from the fourth to the tenth century.

This is by no means an isolated case: similar collections can be found in other manuscripts as well – most notably in the still physically preserved late antique codex *Vat. Reg. Lat. 2077* (sixth century), containing the many layers of the *Chronicon Vivariense* (see above), or in the *Madrid, Universidad Complutense BH MSS 134* (thirteenth century). The latter contains no fewer than two epitomes of Jerome's chronicle; the continuation of Prosper (in the 455 recension); Victor of Tunnuna and John of Biclar; an epitome of Prosper's chronicle together with the *Continuation of Alcobaça*; the *Gallic Chronicle of 511* (which itself includes another epitome of Jerome); the Spanish epitome of Hydatius with an appended continuation; the *Carthaginian Chronicle*; Isidore's *Chronica Maiora*; and several later, in part medieval, texts of (minor?) historiography.[169] It is precisely this type of manuscript tradition that marks the starting point of modern scholarly engagement with the material.[170] What we encounter today are the remnants of late antique chronicles embedded in voluminous, predominantly medieval miscellanies – texts belonging to multiple historical strata, different genetic layers, and distinct 'works' must be carefully disentangled and identified. Interpreting these sources is an intricate endeavour, full of challenges and interpretative uncertainties, and it seldom leads to clear-cut conclusions. Nevertheless, I am convinced that it is both possible and meaningful to reconstruct a reasonably coherent history of late antique 'minor historiography' from the extant material – a history characterised by alternating phases of great activity, disruption and adaptation. Still, in light of the few but often very rich manuscripts – sometimes composed of dozens of layers of chronicles – we are prompted to return to a pressing question: how many similar manuscripts have been lost? And to what extent can the few examples that *have* survived in these densely packed codices be considered representative of the much broader, now only fragmentarily preserved tradition?

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[167] Fröhlich (2024) with further discussion and bibliography.

[168] Cf. the detailed description of the manuscript's content along with a short discussion and bibliography in Fröhlich (2024), 137–144.

It appears entirely plausible that the lost *Reichenauiensis*, the text of which survives in only two copies and serving as this study's point of departure, is just one surviving example of a large number of similar manuscripts that are completely lost to us. These lost exemplars, studied as complex miscellanies of genetic layers of many different periods, just as in the case of the *Reichenauiensis*, would likely have offered a far richer and more nuanced picture of late antique and early medieval 'minor historiography', shedding additional light on its moments of flourishing, of crisis and of transformation.

6 Conclusion and Future Perspectives

What I began in the preceding study as an investigation into the complex genetic layers of the lost *Reichenauiensis* tradition has gradually evolved into a more comprehensive exploration of what I would like to establish as 'minor historiography' from the fourth to the sixth/seventh centuries. Within this broader context, the *Reichenauiensis* proves to be more than a peculiar early medieval miscellany – it emerges as a crucial textual witness to a range of political and historiographical developments outlined in this paper.

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[169] On this manuscript and its importance, see Furtado (2016); cf. Cardelle de Hartmann (2002), 27*–38*.

[170] As emphasised by Wood (2010).

There is, of course, a certain danger of circular reasoning in such interpretations, especially when dealing with the many anonymous revisions and continuations that first must be reconstructed and reinterpreted as historical sources out of the complex textual tradition. Even more so, this article should be regarded as a preliminary attempt to sketch out a broad field of inquiry. It does not aim to be complete, exhaustive or conclusive.[171] A more thorough historical, historiographical, codicological, and cultural-historical investigation of the many sources considered here would undoubtedly yield a fuller and more differentiated picture – one that could easily fill several monographs.[172] What I have presented are some initial observations, first steps toward developing a new interpretative framework for some aspects of late antique history and, more specifically, the history of historiography, that, it seems, have not yet been explored in greater depth. With all these caveats in mind, we can conclude that:

1. There was a notable flourishing of (Latin) 'minor historiography' in late antiquity, concentrated in the period of approximately two generations between 420/430 and 450/460 AD. This phenomenon has gone largely unnoticed in overviews of the period, partly because of the challenging nature of the sources and partly because the diverse forms of 'minor historiography' do not conform easily to classical literary definitions. Editing practices also play a decisive role here – see Point 7 below. As a result, the various forms of 'minor historiography' discussed in this study have not yet been brought together in a comprehensive synthesis or interpretation. However, once we adopt such a perspective, we uncover a remarkably vibrant phase of decentral works, continuations, and creative appropriations. If we acknowledge these as legitimate forms of historiography, we can identify nearly a dozen contemporary (minor) historians for the 450s alone – a density of (documented and preserved) historiographical activity unmatched in any other comparably brief period of ancient history.

2. When examining this peak phase of 'minor historiography', a second development becomes strikingly evident: there was a pronounced and sudden break after c. 455, evident in all the sources examined, many of which show clear signs of increasing crisis until they finally cease altogether. While the political turmoil of this period has, of course, always been recognised and studied, its profound and immediate effect

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[171] To give some examples: if it is true that the *Index imperatorum* (see above, 161 – 162 with note 52) has an earlier layer dating to 474 and was not just compiled retrospectively in c. 503, we would indeed have to add some kind of 'minor historiography' (this list of emperors) to the gap. The same might be the case for a similar list of emperors in an appendix to *De duratione mundi of Q. Iulius Hilarianus*, the so-called *Expositio temporum* (ed. Mommsen 1898, 415 – 417), which must be dated to around the same time. Both texts were excluded from consideration, partly due to their uncertain nature, partly because while they complicate this first demonstration of the gap, they do not substantively modify its interpretive value in any way. Similarly, due to its uncertain nature I have avoided any discussion of the so-called *Consularia Caesaraugustana*, now edited by Bleckmann/Court (2025b) as *Chronica Caesaraugustana.* See there for critical discussion.

[172] Many hundreds of pages filled with new editions, translation, studies, and commentary will be found in the forthcoming volumes of Burgess/Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time*, providing a new material basis for all future interpretations and studies.

on historiographical production has gone largely unnoticed: for one or two generations – roughly between 450 and 500 AD – there is a marked hiatus in the tradition of ‘minor historiography’. This gap is unlikely to be merely the product of literary trends or accidental losses in the textual tradition. Instead, it appears to be a direct consequence of, or at least deeply connected to, a profound political crisis that undermined the systems of communication and chronology – consular and regnal dating alike – as a meaningful historical framework in the disintegrating Western Roman Empire.

3. When all testimonies are examined collectively, a broader trend emerges that reveals not only the extent of this crisis and disruption, but also a subsequent revival: nearly half a century had to pass before the earlier chronicle traditions were taken up and continued again. What we are witnessing then, however, is not continuity in any meaningful sense, but rather a deliberate and constrained revival – one that should itself be seen as evidence of the preceding crisis and the historiographical rupture it caused. The ‘minor historiography’ that follows is shaped both by an attempt to deal with the void of the intervening decades and by a new, very different, cultural and political reality, one that is unmistakably post-imperial. In light of this, it becomes all the more valuable to explore, far beyond the individual references made here, the new forms of historical orientation and historiographical practice of this era, which we find in the numerous sources of the time.

4. Such broader historiographical studies are not merely insightful in themselves, they are essential for source criticism. The rupture caused by the fifth-century crisis compels us to approach the limited retrospective accounts that follow with a certain scepticism. As already noted, their chronological frameworks – especially consular dating – have often been subject to retrospective harmonisation. At the same time, the chronicles composed after the crisis appear to draw on extremely limited source material, most notably on revisions of the *Consularia Italica* tradition, which itself seems to have been an attempt, toward the end of the fifth century, to gather and systematise the scattered fragments of the rather chaotic preceding decades. Consider, for instance, the longstanding debate over when and how Majorian was proclaimed emperor.[173] One of the key dates often discussed derives exclusively from the *Consularia Italica* tradition. Ultimately, our interpretation hinges on the degree of reliability we attribute to such sources to begin with. In many cases, we are clearly dealing with the retrospective structuring of events by later generations who, in truth, possessed little more insight into the preceding historical void than we do today. The much-debated end of the Western Roman Empire was, as discussed before, obviously imagined and construed in different ways by, and serving different political needs for, post-crisis writers such as Cassiodorus and Marcellinus Comes.[174] Earlier positions, such as A. Ferrill’s, that the history of Western rulers after 455 was so obscure that “as much

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[173] For a summary, see Siebigs (2010), 790–801.

[174] Cf. Croke (1983).

as possible we shall avoid the telling of it"[175] are certainly exaggerated. And yet, in light of the fifth-century crisis and the historiographical gap outlined here, we are surely well advised to sharpen our awareness for source criticism – both toward the often disordered sources at the beginning of the crisis as well as towards the later sources that retrospectively attempted to fill the resulting void with harmonised series of rulers, consuls, and historical narratives.

5. Besides laying a foundation for source criticism in historical analysis, the perspectives offered here hold significant potential for developing a new understanding – and possibly even a revised paradigm – of late antique and early medieval historiography. The pattern of a historiographical peak, decline, and attempted revival outlined above offers valuable insights that can deepen discussions surrounding crisis, continuity, and transformation in late antiquity, opening up many avenues for further inquiry.

6. This is particularly relevant to our understanding of historiography at the transition from antiquity to the early Middle Ages: the developments traced here form the crucial background for the development of the historiographical models preserved in medieval manuscripts and subsequently imitated – especially for chronicles (both annalistic and synoptic), (annotated) lists of rulers, and (annotated) Easter tables.

7. Finally, this study underscores once more the importance of critically reflecting on the editions on which we base our historical interpretations. One key reason why scholars have not already examined the panorama outlined here in this way lies in the editions' complexities: many of the shorter continuations are typically printed only in appendices (or even hidden in long, Latin prefaces) and have never attained the status of independent 'sources' (i. e. 'works') worthy of being edited or analysed in their own right. Moreover, the editorial conventions surrounding the classification and naming of these texts have often obscured underlying connections. While some have been published and studied as 'chronicles', others have been labelled as *fasti*, *consularia* or *laterculi.* In terms of genre, of course, this distinction is justified: the *Fasti Augustani* or the *Laterculus Vandalorum* clearly differ in form and function from the chronicles of Jerome or Prosper. Nevertheless, within the manuscript tradition and in terms of minor historiographical practice, they surely served as continuations of these chronicles – yet were detached from this tradition and reassigned to different categories of genre by name and placement in the editions, being slotted, for example, into different sections or even volumes of the *Chronica Minora.*[176] Although recent years have seen great progress, considerable work remains to be done.[177] In that sense, I also hope that this paper can serve as a brief guide through this still quite tangled terrain.

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[175] Ferrill (1986), 154.

[176] Thus, both texts are edited in Volume 3 of Mommsen's *Chronica Minora* (1898), grouped together with other *fasti* and *laterculi.*

[177] Burgess/Kulikowski (2013 and forthcoming) and of course the numerous valuable editions with significant commentaries in the KFHist series, which have rendered this material accessible for contemporary scholarship. For some methodological reflections on how the actual textual traditions are

Many aspects of the topic remain understudied, and the conclusions reached here point toward a broader set of questions that merit continued analysis – it might be useful, for instance, to extend the discussion to Eastern (Greek) sources as well as to more literary, often lost, historiography of the fifth/sixth century. Shadowy works like the lost histories of Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus may have had to deal with the very same crisis outlined here – making it more than coincidence that the few fragments we have suggest that his work may have ended soon after the death of Aetius, in the 450s. Yet there also remains much to explore in the field of 'minor historiography' in the West: although most of the texts cited above have been systematically (if sometimes confusingly) edited and widely available since the late nineteenth century, their sub-literary character has long confined them to use as repositories of mere historical 'facts'. Only in recent decades have these sources – beginning with the more literary chronicles attributed to named authors[178] – started to receive sustained attention as valuable witnesses to late antique historiographical practices and historical thought. Much has happened since: many of the texts discussed have been edited and studied anew, and in many cases are being translated and commented on for the first time.[179] The time has come to engage in new syntheses of this 'minor historiography' and its crisis-ridden development – and this article offers an initial contribution towards this endeavour, an invitation for many future studies to follow.

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transformed by critical editions, see now Fröhlich (2025); cf. also Steinacher (2001) for a valuable case study on the *Laterculus Vandalorum.*

[178] Muhlberger (1990) and Burgess (1993) were groundbreaking in this field.

[179] Not least in the KFHist, a project explicitly dedicated to 'minor historiography' ('*Kleine und Fragmentarische Historiker*').

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