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The Origin of Zealous Intolerance: Paulus Orosius and Violent Religious Conflict in the Early Fifth Century --Manuscript Draft--

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The Origin of Zealous Intolerance: Paulus Orosius and Violent Religious Conflict in the Early Fifth Century

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Abstract

This article explores the origins of religious intolerance in two episodes from the early fifth century AD: the forcible conversion of 540 Jews in Minorca by Bishop Severus, and the failed attempt by the monk Fronto to uncover heterodox belief in Tarragona, north-east Hispania. This article argues that, with the newly-discovered relics of St Stephen, Paulus Orosius brought a peculiarly vehement and absolute intolerance of non-orthodox Christianity to Minorca. Intolerance was facilitated and communicated through a trans-Mediterranean network of Christians connected through letter-writing and the exchange of visitors, of which Orosius was a particularly mobile and dynamic participant. In contrast to previous criticism, this article identifies Orosius as a point of intersection within the controversies, and, in the dissemination of his ideology of intolerance, as a catalyst for conflict.

Keywords

Orosius – Jews – letters – St Stephen – heterodoxy – Severus of Minorca – networks –
Consentius

This article is concerned with the moment of articulation of intolerance, where (self-proclaimed) catholic Christians mobilised against the unorthodox: pagans, heterodox believers, and Jews.¹ It examines two episodes in the early fifth century where the suspicion of heterodoxy and the desire for conformity had repressive and violent consequences. In Minorca Bishop Severus forcibly converted over five-hundred Jews to Christianity, and the fanatical zealot Fronto was tasked with uncovering heterodox beliefs within a Christian community in Tarragona, north-east Hispania. Fronto's mission, as represented in the verbatim account penned by Consentius, appears to be particularly isolated: a lone Christian activist attempts to infiltrate an unknown community, and is forcibly ejected when the community unites against him. But Fronto's actions are not solitary. Behind both Consentius's letters to Augustine and Fronto and the *Epistula Severi*, the record of Christian triumph against the Minorcan Jews authored by Bishop Severus, is a dynamic and informed network of Christians across the Mediterranean linked by travel and literary activity. This article focuses on Orosius as a particularly mobile and dynamic participant in this network, whose unexpected arrival on Minorca with relics of St Stephen was to set in fateful motion a series of events that would see the violent eradication of the Minorcan Jewish community and reveal the closed ranks of Christian ecclesiastics in Hispania, where local allegiances forcefully resisted external orthodox challenge. The methodological approach of this article is comparative, in the juxtaposition of the two controversies, and prosopographical, in the

¹ This research was originally presented at the 23rd Finnish Symposium *Conflict in Late Antiquity*, held in October 2014 and organised by Majastina Kahlos, Ulla Tervahauta, and Ville Vuolanto. A further version was presented at Oxford's *Late Roman Seminar* in January 2015 organised by Conrad Leyser and Bryan Ward-Perkins. Tom Hunt asked insightful questions and gave invaluable feedback on an earlier draft.

All citations to the *Epistula Severi* are taken from S. Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca. Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*, Oxford, 1996. The editions used for Consentius's *Epistula* 11* and *Epistula* 12* are J. Divjak, *Lettres* 1*-29*, 1987. All translations are my own.

CCSL = *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*; CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*; Ep. = *Epistula*; Ep. Sev. = *Epistula Severi*; HE = *Historia ecclesiastica*; PL = *Patrologia Latina*; Rev. = *Revelatio sancti Stephani*.

identification of Orosius as a point of intersection within the controversies in his role as a catalyst for conflict.

In December AD 415 the tomb of the first Christian martyr, St Stephen, was discovered following the divinely-inspired dreams of Lucian, a priest in Kefar Gamala, north of Jerusalem. Bishop John of Jerusalem took charge of the excavation and was rewarded with the majority of the holy remains. Only six days before the feast day of St Stephen on 26 December, the invented relics were transported in a holy procession 'with psalms and hymns' to the Church of Zion in Jerusalem.² Lucian was left 'some small bits of the saint's limbs...and dust'.³ Lucian dictated an account of the revelation of the relics to the priest Avitus, a refugee from Braga in north-west Hispania, now modern-day Portugal. Avitus recorded Lucian's description in Greek and immediately translated it into Latin. The dissemination of Stephen's relics around the Mediterranean was swift; Avitus sent Lucian's account prefaced with his own letter and the relics from Palestine to bishop Balconius of Braga.⁴ The bearer of these sacred relics was the priest, apologist, and confidant of Augustine and Jerome, Paulus Orosius.⁵ Orosius had travelled to the Holy Land on Augustine's suggestion to, in his own words, 'sit at the feet of Jerome'.⁶ He had become embroiled in the Pelagian controversy and had somewhat unsuccessfully represented the anti-Pelagian cause at the synod of Jerusalem

² Lucian, *Revelatio sancti Stephani*, in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, ed. by S. Vanderlinden, 4, (1946) 178-217, (Vanderlinden, B 8.48, 217): ...cum psalmis et hymnis...

³ Lucian, *Rev.* 8 (Vanderlinden, B 8.48, 217): ...relinquentes nobis de membris sanctis parvos articulos...

⁴ The record of Balconius as bishop of Braga discounts the recent references to Orosius as bishop of Braga. See Lucian, *Rev.* 1 (Vanderlinden, 188). Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Crisis management in late antiquity (410-590 CE). A survey of the evidence from episcopal letters*, Leiden, 2013, 119.

⁵ Orosius's travels and their chronology around the Mediterranean are thoroughly explored by V. Gauge, 'Les routes d'Orose et les reliques d'Etienne', in *Antiquité Tardive*, vol. 6 (1998) 265-286.

⁶ Orosius, *Liber apologeticus contra pelagium de arbitrii libertate*, 3.2 (Zangemeister, 606): *latebam ergo in Bethleem, traditus a patre Augustino, ut timorem Domini discerem sedens ad pedes Hieronymi*. In *CSEL 5*, ed. by K. Zangemeister, Vienna, 1882, 603-66. Trans. by C. L. Hanson, 'Book in Defense against the Pelagians', in *The fathers of the church: Iberian fathers 3. Pacian of Barcelona and Orosius of Braga*, Washington, 1999, 115-167. Kelly understands Orosius's journey to the Holy Land as an integral part of the Pelagian controversy, a deliberate move on the part of Augustine designed to alert Jerome and the church at Jerusalem to the dangers of Pelagius's teachings. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome. His life, writings, and controversies*, London, 1975, 318. For a full description of Orosius's involvement in the synod of Jerusalem, see Hanson, *Iberian fathers 3*, 97-111.

held in July AD 415. He had promised Augustine that he would visit him again in north Africa before heading further west to his (possible) homeland of Hispania.⁷ This promise he fulfilled, arriving in Carthage in the mid-summer of AD 416, carrying two letters from Jerome to Augustine, some works of Jerome for his pupil Oceanus, possibly some record of the council of Diospolis held in AD 415, and a letter from Heros and Lazarus for Aurelius, the Bishop of Carthage, as well as the relics of St Stephen and Avitus's relation of their invention.⁸

Orosius attended the council of Carthage in AD 416 before sailing for Minorca with the intention of travelling on to the Hispanic mainland.⁹ But chaotic conditions and ongoing warfare deterred him, and he returned instead to Hippo in Africa.¹⁰ It was at this opportune juncture that Augustine requested Orosius to write his most infamous work, the *Historiae adversus paganos* in seven books, an apologetical history against the pagans and their accusations that Christian worship had caused the fall of Rome in AD 410.¹¹ The relics of St Stephen that Orosius had carefully transported found their way to Carthage and Uzalis in

⁷ See Augustine, *Ep.* 166 to Jerome for Orosius's promise to return to Africa before proceeding to Hispania. *Ep.* 166, in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, vol. 3, *CSEL*, Vienna, 1904, 545-585. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-203)*, Washington, 1955, 6-31.

⁸ For the record of the Council of Diospolis, see A. T. Fear, *Orosius. Seven books of history against the pagans*, Liverpool, 2010, 5. Fear includes the official minutes of the Council of Diospolis amongst Orosius's baggage but Augustine wrote to bishop John to request the minutes from him (Augustine, *Epistula* 179), and Augustine eventually received them from Cyril of Alexandria. Augustine's *Epistula* 175 mentions Orosius's arrival in Carthage in June-July AD 416. See Augustine, *Epistula* 4* to Cyril. Kelly, *Jerome*, 318 fn. 55, claims that Orosius was also carrying *Epistula* 134 (172 in Augustine's collection) from Jerome to Augustine, which seems likely. In *Epistula* 180 Augustine mentions Orosius carrying a book for Oceanus to copy. Augustine *Epistulae* 172, 175, 179 and 180, in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, vol. 3, *CSEL*, Vienna, 1904, 636-639, 652-662, 691-697, 697-700. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-203)*, Washington, 1955, 72-73, 85-90, 110-117, 117-121. Augustine, *Epistula* 4*, in *Lettres 1*-29**, ed. by J. Divjak, 1987, 108-116. Trans. R. B. Eno, *Letters. Volume VI (1*-29*)*, Washington, 1989, 38-44.

⁹ In Augustine's *Ep.* 175 (Goldbacher, vol. 3, 652-662) Orosius is not listed among the names of those who were present at the Council of Carthage, but he is mentioned in the content of the letter as bringing to the Council a letter from Heros and Lazarus. Augustine was absent from the Council of Carthage in September AD 416 but came to Carthage later in the same year. Augustine was one of a group of bishops who met in Carthage, and Augustine drafted a letter to bishop Innocent on behalf of the convened bishops (*Ep.* 176).

¹⁰ Hispania was invaded by the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves from Gaul in AD 409. See Hydatius, *Chronica*, 34, in *The chronicle of Hydatius and the consularia Constantinopolitana*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Burgess, Oxford, 1993. For discussion, see M. Kulikowski, *Late roman Spain and its cities*, Baltimore, 2004, 158-167.

¹¹ Paulus Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, in *Orose. Histoires. Contre les païens*, ed. and trans. by M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, Paris, 1990.

north Africa where they effected many miracles.¹² He also left relics at Minorca, and it is this historical detail that will receive closer attention.

The relics of St Stephen were deposited in a church outside Magona on the eastern end of Minorca, the second-largest of the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean situated between the Iberian peninsula and Sardinia.¹³ Orosius's translation of the relics is briefly described in the *Epistula Severi*, an account of the effect of the relics on the Minorcan population. This epistolary account was written by Severus, a little-known bishop of Minorca who exploited the appearance of the relics to initiate a relentless campaign to impose religious conformity on the neighbouring Jewish community.¹⁴ Orosius is described by Severus as a priest 'conspicuous for his sanctity' who came from Jerusalem and sojourned for a brief time in Magona.¹⁵ This is generally as much detail and consideration as Orosius's involvement in the following events is ascribed. In this article I argue that Orosius's influence in the ensuing controversy was actually much greater than Severus's brief mention suggests, and has generally been recognised in modern scholarship.

The arrival of the sacred relics of St Stephen on Minorca fractured the previously peaceable community along absolute polarities of religious opposition: it was Christian vs. Jew, and no end to the antagonism and harassment could be found until every last Minorcan Jew had converted to Christianity, even those who had initially chosen exile rather than conversion.

¹² For the miraculous effect of the relics in Uzalis, see Evodius, *De miraculis Sancti Stephani protomartyris libri duo ad Evodium*, in *PL*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 41 (1841) 843-848. For the relics in Carthage, see Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 22.8, in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De Civitate Dei Libri XXII, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, ed. by B. Dombart, Leipzig, 1905-1908, vol. 2. Trans. by H. Bettenson, *Concerning the city of God against the pagans*, London, 2003. Prosper records that a convent in Carthage possessed relics of St Stephen. Prosper, *Liber de promissionibus et praedictionibus Dei*, in *PL*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 51, 842.

¹³ *Ep. Sev.* 4.2, in *Letter on the conversion of the Jews*, ed. by S. Bradbury, Oxford, 1996, 82.

¹⁴ According to Severus, it was without doubt at the inspiration of the martyr himself that Orosius deposited the relics at the church in Magona. *Ep. Sev.* 4.2 (Bradbury, 82).

¹⁵ *Ep. Sev.* 4 (Bradbury, 82).

The effect of the appearance of relics was immediate and explosive: the fire of Christian devotion was kindled, a fire that divided completely, even within families.¹⁶ The complacency of the Christian community in tolerating the presence of the Jews was replaced by burning hearts; the zeal of the faithful was at once fired, and the hope of saving a multitude spurred the Christians on.¹⁷ Where previously relations between Christian and Jew had been cordial, the long-standing affection was transformed into hatred.¹⁸ Severus mobilised his opposition with words, composing a *Commonitorium* against the Jews just as Orosius had against the Priscillianists and Origenists.¹⁹ In turn the Jews consulted their sacred books and, according to Severus, began to hoard weapons such as stakes, rocks, and javelins in their synagogue. Despite the willingness of the Jews to swear under oath to the contrary, Severus effectively accused them of plotting violence and sedition and demanded to inspect the synagogue for himself. The Jews and Christians processed to the synagogue jointly singing a Psalm in praise of Christ, but the harmony of the moment quickly descended into a stone-throwing riot.²⁰ The Christians forcibly removed the sacred books and silver objects, and burnt the synagogue to the ground.²¹ Severus is quick to note the return of the silver to circumvent Jewish complaints of theft and losses, but there is no mention that the sacred books were likewise returned. Whilst the Jews stood in stupefied horror at the destroyed

¹⁶ See *Ep. Sev.* 4.3-5 (Bradbury, 82-4), including the biblical reference to Luke 12.49.

¹⁷ *Ep. Sev.* 4.4 (Bradbury, 82-4): *Statim siquidem tepor noster incaluit et factum est cor nostrum, sicut scriptum est, 'ardens in via'. Nunc etiam iam illud fidei amburebat zelus, nunc spes salvandae multitudinis erigebat.*

¹⁸ *Ep. Sev.* 5 (Bradbury, 84).

¹⁹ *Ep. Sev.* 8 (Bradbury, 84-6). The *Commonitorium* was intended to be circulated with the *Epistula Severi* but it has unfortunately not survived. Orosius wrote the *Commonitorium* to Augustine against the followers of Priscillian and Origen, to which Augustine replied with his own *Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas*, both of which survive. Paulus Orosius, *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*, in *CSEL*, ed. by Georg Schepps, 18 Vienna, 1889, 149-157. Trans. by C. L. Hanson, 'Inquiry or Memorandum to Augustine on the Error of the Priscillianists and Origenists' in *The Fathers of the Church: Iberian Fathers 3. Pacian of Barcelona and Orosius of Braga*, Washington, 1999. For Augustine's reply, see *Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas, Sancti Aurelii Augustini Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum; Commonitorium Orosii et contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas*, in *CCSL*, ed. by K.-D. Daur, 49, Turnhout, 1985, 168-78. Trans. by R. J. Teske, ed. by J. E. Rotelle, *Arianism and other heresies: Heresies, Memorandum to Augustine, To Orosius in refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists, Arian sermon, Answer to an Arian sermon, Debate with Maximinus, Answer to Maximinus, Answer to an Enemy of the Law and the Prophets, 'To Orosius in Refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists'*, New York, 1995, 104-115.

²⁰ *Ep. Sev.* 13.1-4 (Bradbury, 92).

²¹ *Ep. Sev.* 13.12-13 (Bradbury, 94).

synagogue, the elated Christians processed to their Church singing hymns and praising 'the author of our victory'.²² As miraculous conversions begin to occur, the position of the Jews becomes clear; Christian hatred and intolerance left the choice of death, exile, or 'coerced apostasy' for the Jews of Minorca.²³ Conversion is eventually the option chosen universally, and 540 Jews were baptised into the church.²⁴ The Christians departed in jubilant celebration, and the Jews at their own expense and labour levelled the remains of the synagogue and built a Christian basilica in its place.²⁵ Severus ends his epistle, which is addressed to the universal brotherhood of Christians, with an exhortation to follow his example and take up Christ's zeal against the Jews.²⁶

This article is concerned not only with the moment of articulation of intolerance of (self-proclaimed) catholic Christians against the unorthodox, but the collusions and intrigues that occur before that articulation: why that moment in particular? In this article I argue that within the two case studies under scrutiny religious intolerance was motivated by individual authority, and that particularly in Minorca that individual authority derived initially from Paulus Orosius, who brought the material 'provocation' for the conflict, the relics of St Stephen.²⁷ In order to bring a profound symbolism to the affair, Severus compresses the chronology of his narrative to occur over precisely eight days in early February AD 418.²⁸

²² *Ep. Sev.* 14 (Bradbury, 94): *...auctori victoriae nostrae gratias referentes...*

²³ *Ep. Sev.* 18.18 (Bradbury, 106): 'coerced in apostasy', *apostatatare compulsus est*. Theodorus is presented with a clear choice by Reuben, the first to convert from Judaism: if he wants to be safe, honoured, and wealthy, he must believe in Christ. *Ep. Sev.* 16.13-16 (Bradbury, 98). The blunt acknowledgement of Theodorus's Jewish cousin illustrates the threat to life that forced his conversion.

²⁴ *Ep. Sev.* 29.2 (Bradbury, 122).

²⁵ *Ep. Sev.* 30.2 (Bradbury, 122).

²⁶ *Ep. Sev.* 31.2 (Bradbury, 124): *Quamobrem si indigni et peccatoris verbum dignanter admittitis, zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem perpetua salute suscipite.*

²⁷ The arrival of the relics has been described as a staged provocation for the ensuing religious conflict. B. S. Bachrach, Review of *Severus of Minorca: Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*, by S. Bradbury, *Speculum*, vol. 73, 4 (1998), 1169. Bachrach considers the Jewish conflict, Fronto's near-contemporary heterodox-hunting in Tarragona, and the slightly earlier (AD 415) expulsion of the Jews in Alexandria by Cyril of Alexandria as pseudohistory.

²⁸ Severus precisely dates the account: *Ep. Sev.* 31 (Bradbury, 122). Bradbury, *Letter*, 4-5, discusses the issue of dating the *Ep. Sev.*

Orosius left Palestine for north Africa in the summer of AD 416, attended the council of Carthage (in some capacity), and then sailed for Minorca, likely within the same season.²⁹

There is, therefore, a time discrepancy of perhaps two years in between the relics of St Stephen leaving the Holy Land and arriving in Minorca to 'fire Christ's zeal against the Jews'.³⁰ Although it is impossible to determine the exact movements of Orosius and his precious baggage in this interim period, it is feasible that his stay on Minorca was extended beyond a few days, providing the opportunity for Orosius to make a profound impression on Severus.

Orosius was an aggressive fundamentalist Christian whose self-constructed authority rested on his personal association with Augustine and Jerome, his knowledge of heterodoxy in the Iberian peninsula, his involvement in the Pelagian controversy, his participation in ecclesiastical synods in Jerusalem and Carthage, his role as letter-carrier, and his brief propriety of the relics of the protomartyr Stephen. By the time of his arrival in Minorca Orosius could well have seemed an impressive and formidable figure to a recently-appointed bishop like Severus. He was the author of the *Commonitorium*, attacking the heterodoxy of Priscillianism and Origenism, and in late AD 415 he wrote the *Liber Apologeticus* in defence of the charges of blasphemy and heterodoxy by bishop John of Jerusalem following the synod

²⁹ See Bradbury, *Letter*, 23-5, for more details on the chronology of Orosius's movements in this period. Orosius is noted in the minutes of the Council of Carthage as delivering a letter from the exiled Gallic bishops Heros and Lazarus to the Council, but he is not listed as one of the attendees. See Augustine, *Ep.* 175 (Goldbacher, vol. 3, 652-662).

³⁰ *Ep. Sev.* 31.2 (Bradbury, 124): *...zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem perpetua salute suscipite*. Bradbury makes a convincing case that Orosius went from Palestine to north Africa and then to Minorca on his way back to the Iberian peninsula, before turning back to north Africa once his intended journey had become impossible. An expected and prolonged stay in north Africa gave Augustine the opportunity to request that he compose the *Historiae adversus paganos* around AD 417-8. From this Bradbury draws the conclusion that '[t]his revised chronology reveals that the impressions conveyed by Severus...of an outbreak of religious fervour leading to a rapid, miraculous conversion is fundamentally misleading. The relics destined for Bishop Balconius of Braga arrived on Minorca in late summer or autumn 416, not 417. Severus' campaign against the Jews had thus been in progress for over a year before the final march on Magona in February 418.' Bradbury, *Letter*, 25.

of Jerusalem.³¹ Between AD 417-8 Orosius wrote the *Historiae adversus paganos*.³² These texts are characterised by an aggressive, intolerant, and righteous blend of apologetic and polemic, documents that detail the error of the religious beliefs of others and advertise the orthodoxy and propriety of certain Christianities. Orosius's fervour and desire to participate in the correction of Christian orthodox error is reflected in his outspoken contribution to recent ecclesiastical wranglings in the Holy Land and north Africa. As E. D. Hunt has noted, until Orosius's arrival there was no indication that the population of Minorca was preoccupied by religious difference; but the presence of Orosius, as elsewhere around the Mediterranean, spelt the end of religious peace.³³

Orosius seemed to be intent on fighting a religious war to identify and condemn heterodox Christian groups, non-conforming Christians, or non-Christians like pagans and Jews. An exhortation from Orosius to Severus to tolerate no longer the presence of the neighbouring Jewish community in Minorca is not improbable when considering the relics Orosius brought, the context of his enthusiastic involvement in other religious controversies over previous years, and his own writings. The notion that Stephen was not only the first martyr and the first deacon of Christ but 'the first to wage the Lord's war against the Jews' began with John of Jerusalem on the discovery of the relics and plausibly translated with the remains to Minorca, providing apostolic ammunition against the Jewish neighbours for Severus, who frequently exploits the language of war in the *Epistula*.³⁴ In modern criticism Orosius has gained the reputation of a tactless hothead, and Augustine himself described

³¹ For dating and discussion of the *Liber Apologeticus*, see Hanson, *Iberian Fathers* 3, 108-9.

³² See Fear, *Orosius*, 5.

³³ E. D. Hunt, 'St Stephen in Minorca: an episode in Jewish-Christian relations in the early 5th century AD', *Journal of Theological Studies* 33, (1982), 119.

³⁴ Lucian, *Rev.* 6 (Vanderlinden, B, 34, 211): ...*inde beatum Stephanum primum martyrem et archidiaconum Christi, qui primus adversus Iudaeos dominica bella bellavit*. For an example of Severus's bellicose language, see *Epistula Severi* 9, (Bradbury, 86): *Interea dum hi apparatus geruntur, magno quoque altrinsecus studio futurum instruitur bellum, utrique exercitus innumerabilibus atque absolutissimis somniis commonentur*. See Bradbury, *Letter*, p. 62, for the vocabulary of war in the *Epistula Severi* and the identification of examples.

Orosius as 'keen-spirited, swift to speak, and full of zeal.'³⁵ This article argues that it was with this religious zeal, along with the relics of St Stephen, that Orosius was able to direct Severus's attention to the Jewish enemy in Minorca.

The second section of this article is concerned with another narrative of religious intolerance and conflict in the early fifth century, and how the two episodes intersect. Around AD 418, a similarly fanatical ecclesiastic, the monk Fronto, was filled with 'the most ardent flames of zeal' to uncover and correct religious error.³⁶ His target was not the Jews but secret heterodox believers amongst the clergy in Tarragona in north-east Hispania. The connection between heterodoxy-hunting with Fronto in Hispania and Jewish persecution with Severus in Minorca is based on individual authority: from Fronto to Consentius, and Consentius to Severus and Orosius. Consentius was a contemporary of Severus who lived on the Balearic Islands, an educated Christian with a theological propensity.³⁷ We know of Consentius primarily from his correspondence with Augustine, specifically three letters, *Epistulae* 119, 120, and 205, and a treatise, *Contra Mendacium*, by Augustine addressed to Consentius.³⁸ The discovery of previously unknown letters of Augustine by Johannes Divjak in 1979 and published in a

³⁵ Kelly describes Orosius as 'aggressive and tactless', but also as 'talented, opinionated, narrowly orthodox, impetuous young man'. Kelly, *Jerome*, 318 and 317 respectively. Fear, *Orosius*, 6, characterises Orosius as 'pugnacious'. Augustine, *Ep.* 166 to Jerome, 1.2 (Goldbacher, vol. 3, 547): *Ecce uenit ad me religiosus iuuenis, catholica pace frater, aetate filius, honore compresbyter noster Orosius, uigil ingenio, promptus eloqui, flagrans studio...*

³⁶ In *Epistulae* 11* and 12* Consentius describes himself and Fronto as *famuli Christi*: *Ep.* 11*: 1, 12 (Divjak, 184, 204); *Ep.* 12*: 2 (Divjak, 232). Consentius *Epistulae* 11* and 12*, in *Letters 1*-29**, ed. by J. Divjak, (1987) 51-80. Fronto founded a monastery at Tarragona: *Ep.* 11* 2, (Divjak, 186). In *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 184) Consentius describes Fronto as 'a man in whom the Holy Spirit kindles the most ardent flames of zeal for the faith.' *...ut quidam famulus Christi nomine Fronto cui spiritus sanctus flagrantissimas fidelis zeli suggerit flammas subitus adueniret...*

³⁷ W. H. C. Frend, 'A New Eyewitness of the Barbarian Impact on Spain, 409-419', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*, 7 (1990) 333 and fn. 2, considers it probable that Consentius lived on Minorca, and that Consentius and Severus were on good terms. See J. Wankenne, 'Lettre de Consentius à S. Augustin', *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak*, ed. by C. Lepelley, Paris, 1983, 228, for a similar conclusion.

³⁸ *Epistulae* 119, 120, in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi Epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, Vienna, 1895-1923, vol. 2, 698-704 and 704-722. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume 2 (83-130)*, vol. 18, Washington, 1953, 294-300, 300-317. *Ep.* 205 in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi Epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, Vienna, 1895-1923, vol. 4, 323-339. *Ep.* 205 trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume 5 (204-270)*, vol. 32, Washington, 1956, 8-21. *Ad Consentium contra mendacium*, in *PL*, ed. by J.-P. Migne, 40 (1845) 517-48. Trans. by M. S. Muldowney, ed. by R. J. Deferrari, *Treatise on various subjects. Saint Augustine*, vol. 16, Washington, 1952, 125-179.

series distinguished with an asterisk includes two letters by Consentius sent to Augustine around AD 419, *Epistula* 11* and 12*.³⁹ Consentius was an associate of bishop Severus. He had had some involvement in the Jewish controversy and the composition of the *Epistula Severi*, although to what extent is difficult to determine. In *Epistula* 12* to Augustine Consentius describes how, by the power of God ‘certain miracles were performed among us’, that is the forced conversion of the Minorcan Jews, and how Consentius and Severus participated in the composition of a shared narrative of events:

When the blessed priest, the brother of your Paternity, Bishop Severus, along with others who had been present, had repeated these things to me, he broke down my resolution by the great force of his love and he borrowed from me words alone so that he himself might write a letter containing a narrative of events.⁴⁰

The lexical similarities between the *Epistula Severi* and Consentius’s *Epistula* 11* have prompted the conclusion amongst some critics that Consentius was effectively the author of the *Epistula* and not Severus.⁴¹

Consentius potentially distorts a proper understanding of his involvement in the Jewish controversy in his self-representation in *Epistula* 12* to Augustine, perhaps fearing his further disapproval following Augustine's condemnation of the deceitful tactics Consentius

³⁹ For the dating of *Ep.* 11* and *Ep.* 12* see Divjak, *Oeuvres*, 479-80 and 488. Kulikowski dates *Ep.* 11* to AD 420-21. Kulikowski, ‘Fronto, the bishops, and the crowd: episcopal justice and communal violence in fifth-century Tarraconensis’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 2002 (4) 296.

⁴⁰ *Epistula* 12* 13, (Divjak, 248-50): *Eodem tempore accidit, ut quaedam apud nos ex praecepto domini mirabilia gererentur. Quae cum mihi beatus antistes, frater paternitatis tuae Seuerus episcopus cum ceteris qui affuerant rettulisset, irrupit propositum meum summis uiribus caritatis et, ut epistolam quae rei gestae ordinem contineret ipse conscriberet, sola a me uerba mutuatus est.* Consentius's involvement in the composition of the *Epistula Severi* rests on his crucial phrase, *sola a me uerba mutuatus est*. This can be translated as ‘he borrowed from me words alone’ or ‘he only borrowed from me some words’ or ‘words and phrases, but no more than that’. For further discussion, see Bradbury, *Letter*, 59.

⁴¹ A detailed comparison of the two texts is made by Bradbury, *Letter*, 59-62. See also Bradbury, *Letter*, p. 69: ‘...the similarities between the accounts of events on Minorca and in Tarragona raise the possibility that Consentius was more deeply involved in the composition of the *Epistula Severi* than we had suspected.’ For further discussion and critical references, see fn. 61.

advocated in ensnaring heterodox believers in *Epistula* 11*.⁴² At the very least Consentius had detailed knowledge of events and had helped Severus to compose his *Epistula*. As a Christian living on the islands Consentius could have been one of the many nameless Christian participants in the confrontation (only one Christian is named besides Severus, whereas many of the Jewish converts are named); but this article argues that Consentius was part of the discrete Christian circle that began the mobilisation against the Jews on Minorca, a circle which included Severus and Orosius.⁴³ Orosius and Consentius were both participants in the aggression against the Jewish Minorcan community, and it is therefore credible that they became acquainted during Orosius's visit to the island. It also seems that Orosius recounted the horrors of Priscillianism in Hispania to Consentius and showed him his own and Augustine's anti-Priscillianist writings, which motivated Consentius to compose his own.⁴⁴ Consentius's anti-Priscillianist works contained practical instructions on the cunning and craftiness needed to insinuate oneself with heterodox believers in order to expose their beliefs.⁴⁵ Consentius even composed a discourse written from a heterodox point of view for use in the undercover investigation of supposed Priscillianists.⁴⁶ It was these writings of Consentius, based on second-hand information from Orosius, that were sent to the monk Fronto around AD 418 and inspired his anti-heterodox campaign. We know of Consentius's writings, not because they survive, but because he refers to them in his *Epistula* 11* to

⁴² See *Ep.* 12* 13 (Divjak, 248-50). Augustine had written his treatise *Contra mendacium* in response to Consentius's *Epistula* 11*, apparently in horror at the tactics Consentius advocated in the letter. It is unsurprising that Consentius would then attempt to distance himself from the violent persecution of the Jewish community in Minorca, of which Augustine had not commented but could not be guaranteed to support.

⁴³ The possibility of a wider circle is suggested by Consentius's reference to 'others' (*ceteris*) present during what could have been the shared composition of the *Epistula Severi* or at least a retelling of events by Severus. Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 13, (Divjak, 248-50). (See above 11 and fn. 40 for quotation).

⁴⁴ Orosius wrote his *Commonitorium* to Augustine in refutation of Priscillianism and Origenism, and Augustine wrote the *Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* in reply. Raymond Van Dam speculates following the same vein. R. Van Dam, 'Sheep in Wolves' Clothing': The Letters of Consentius to Augustine', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 37, no. 4, (1986) 529. Virginia Burrus understands that Orosius also supplied Jerome with information about Priscillianism in Hispania. Burrus, *The making of a heretic: gender, authority, and the Priscillianist controversy*, Berkeley, 1995, 138-9.

⁴⁵ *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 186).

⁴⁶ *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 186): ...*quem postquam plenius uniuersa condidici quam ob causam ex persona haeretici scripserim breuis praefatiunculae sermone signatur.*

Augustine, where he recounts, ostensibly verbatim, the tribulations of Fronto to reveal the heterodox conspiracy in Tarragona and the considerable danger he faced in doing so.⁴⁷

Consentius provides a frame for Fronto's story which is related in the first person. Fronto recounts how he received an 'envelope' (*inuolucrum*) from Consentius via bishop Agapius containing letters, memoranda, and books (*litteras et commonitoria et libros*) from Consentius.⁴⁸ It is from these communications that Fronto learns of Severa, a woman of heterodox belief who is the first target in Fronto's campaign.⁴⁹ Severa unsuspectingly reveals the priest Severus to be in possession of three codices that contained heterodox material. These codices were seized by barbarians and passed into the hands of local bishops. Through bribery the codices were restored to Severus, but Fronto's decision to make allegations against Severus and Severa before an ecclesiastical tribunal rapidly escalated the situation, intensifying hostile emotions with destructive and violent consequences. Fronto is forced to seek sanctuary in a church and is subject to threats of violent attack from those he accuses. Various local bishops are drawn into the conflict, as is Count Asterius, an important military commander who was related to Severus. The correspondence from Consentius that was delivered by bishop Agapius is demanded to be shown at the tribunal, and on Fronto's refusal the bishop tries to strangle him to death.⁵⁰ Whilst the tribunal is deliberating an attempt is made to murder Fronto by a servant from Asterius's household. A complex perjury is fabricated by Severus and various bishops who had previously received the dangerous codices, which are then effectively stolen back from Severus in order to maintain the pretence

⁴⁷ For Consentius's claim to have related Fronto's narrative verbatim, see *Ep.* 11* 24 (Divjak, 222). For a more detailed paraphrase of the letter, see Burrus, *The making of a heretic*, 115-20.

⁴⁸ For Fronto's reception of the material sent by Consentius, see *Ep.* 11* 2 (Divjak, 186-8). The literature sent from Consentius to Fronto is later demanded to be shown by bishop Agapius, who had originally delivered the material, in order to ascertain why Fronto was persecuting 'innocent people' (*...ad persecutionem innocentissimorum hominum...*). Fronto's purposeful evasion of the request prompts a violent attack on Fronto by the bishop. *Ep.* 11* 10-11 (Divjak, 200-2). Agapius is a presumably local bishop whose see is unknown, and who is the main challenger of Fronto.

⁴⁹ *Ep.* 11* 2, (Divjak, 188).

⁵⁰ *Ep.** 11 10-11, (Divjak, 200-2).

of innocence and propriety of the bishops. Fronto voices his suspicions of the cover-up but oaths are sworn against Fronto's version of events and Bishop Sagittius demands that Fronto immediately prove his suspicions or be stoned to death. Although Fronto successfully proves his accusations the heterodox believers are restored to communion and the codices burnt.⁵¹ Again Fronto is physically attacked by bishop Agapius, pounding him with blows and punches. Fronto is forced to flee Tarragona, leaving the bishops with the promise of Christ's judgement ringing in their ears.⁵² Fronto escapes to the sanctity of bishop Patroclus of Arles, but the bishop could not enforce attendance at an ecclesiastical council in Beziers to resolve the situation. Consentius suggests that an appeal to the emperor would be forthcoming.⁵³

Unlike the near-contemporary Jewish controversy in Minorca where belief and faith were central, the conflict in Tarragona was less concerned with what people believed and more preoccupied with the defamation of character following the accusation of heterodoxy and the damage to reputation. Fronto's narrative is ordered in two halves: the first half focuses on Count Asterius and how the accusations jeopardise his reputation and that of his household; the second half concentrates on the priest Severus and the bishops and their attempt to conceal their deceit. Asterius's entire household is shaken by Fronto's accusation, including Asterius's daughter.⁵⁴ It is this defamation that stirs up a great public anger against Fronto, who faces reproach from the bishops, being confounded by the clerics, torn to pieces by the heretics, accused by the count, spat upon by the soldiery, and stoned by the people.⁵⁵ As Van Dam has previously emphasised, heterodox beliefs are not even specified as Priscillianist by Fronto, whose finger-pointing does not provoke denial or attempts to prove innocence in a doctrinal sense, but rather a scramble to retrieve the heterodox codices and cover up the affair

⁵¹ *Ep.* 11* 21, (Divjak, 220).

⁵² *Ep.* 11* 22-23, (Divjak, 220-2).

⁵³ *Ep.* 11* 24, (Divjak, 224).

⁵⁴ *Ep.* 11* 7, (Divjak, 196).

⁵⁵ *Ep.* 11* 10, (Divjak, 200).

so as to retain the appearance of ecclesiastical propriety.⁵⁶ The accusation of heterodoxy against Severus rests not on non-orthodox belief or observance but on the possession of the heterodox codices. Much of Fronto's framed story is concerned with these codices passing from barbarian to bishop to priest, being secretly retrieved, edited and split. In the same way that possession of these codices is incriminating and proves the heterodoxy of the possessor, so the writings that Fronto carries from Consentius endorse his orthodoxy. These writings also come under scrutiny, being demanded to be shown by bishop Agapius, who had originally delivered the material, in order to ascertain why Fronto was persecuting 'innocent people'.⁵⁷ Fronto confidently refuses the bishops request, maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of Consentius's writings both from the contemporary audience at the synod and the reader of *Epistula 11**.

Unlike Bishop Severus, Fronto's actions were not disguised or excused by miraculous divine intervention; his inspiration, indeed, his instruction, came from Consentius's pen. The sacred relics of St Stephen that were central in the Jewish controversy find their equivalent in the heterodox codices, whose dangerous and subversive power, as the opposite of orthodox, cannot be sustained and must be destroyed. And just as the codices are treated vaguely – their contents are not divulged, and an attempt to read them publicly fails – so the relics of St Stephen are.⁵⁸ The *Epistula Severi* does not dwell on the relics; there is no *adventus* ceremony, and the text is unclear about how they arrived in the church or who received

⁵⁶ Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 515-517, including fn. 8, and 523. Noted also by Burrus, *The making of a heretic*, 116. For an opposite view see Frend, 'A new eyewitness', 337, fn. 35. Possibly in a related sense, Anne Kurdock notes that the anti-Pelagian *De vera humilitate* does not directly name Pelagius or his followers. A. Kurdock, 'Demetrias ancilla dei: Anicia Demetrias and the problem of the missing patron', in *Religion, Dynasty and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900*, ed. by K. Cooper and J. Hilner, Cambridge, 2007, 216 fn. 109. P. Brown, *Religion and society in the age of St. Augustine*, London, 1972, 216-17, notes the initial reluctance of Augustine and other Pelagian opponents to name him directly.

⁵⁷ *Ep. 11** 10, (Divjak, 200): ...*ad persecutionem innocentissimorum hominum...*

⁵⁸ *Ep. 11** 20, (Divjak, 218) for the attempt to read aloud the codices and the effect they have on the listeners.

them.⁵⁹ Christ is the most powerful name who is often invoked, with Stephen and his relics featuring explicitly hardly at all. Where religious intolerance focuses on the Jewish community in Minorca it is place and space that directs the narrative, whereas in Tarragona texts, letters and books are most prominent and powerful. In Minorca place is solidly affirmed, occupied and marked out as territory, being firmly divided between communities along religious lines. Armed with relics the bishop Severus successfully motivates his diocese against a neighbouring religious group whilst remaining within his own community and place. In Tarragona the religious division in the community is acknowledged but does not become absolute and damaging in the same sense; those who are accused of holding heterodox beliefs are ultimately reaffirmed into the Christian communion without rehabilitation or recrimination. Where Severus's attempt to divide the community in Minorca is successful, Fronto's attempt ultimately fails, and he suffers the most for it. Conversely the monk Fronto, whose authority is ambiguous as a *famulus Christi* ('servant of Christ'), is transient and his attempt to infiltrate an unknown community is more problematic where the division between heterodox and orthodox Christian is harder to distinguish than Christian and Jew in Minorca.⁶⁰ Fronto's credibility is undermined by his assumption of a false identity, and his transference to an unknown community renders him alone and powerless against a society that is ultimately united against him.⁶¹ Severus's authority, perhaps unsurprisingly in his own representation of events, is never questioned.

⁵⁹ See Bradbury, *Letter*, 126, fn. 4.

⁶⁰ *Ep.* 11* 1, (Divjak, 184), 12 (Divjak, 204). Augustine uses a similar phrase, *servus Dei*, to describe Fronto. Augustine, *Contra mendacium* 4. The Christian and Jewish communities in Minorca were physically divided by distance, with the Jewish community and synagogue in Magona and the Christians occupying Jamona. See *Ep. Sev.* 2.5-4 (Bradbury, 80-2). Compare with the Alexandrian Jews who, in their conflict with the Christians, wore rings made of the bark of the palm tree for recognition. Socrates, *HE*, 7.13, in *Sokrates Kirchengeschichte, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*, G. C. Hansen, Berlin, 1995, 358.

⁶¹ Van Dam, 'The Letters of Consentius to Augustine', 523, likens Fronto's flight out of Tarragona to that of 'a condemned heretic.'

The notion that Consentius rather than Severus authored the *Epistula Severi* is connected to a wider critical trend that sees Consentius as the driving force behind the Minorcan conflict, a concept that would logically extend to Fronto's activities in Tarragona.⁶² And although it is clear that Fronto received specific and compelling instruction from Consentius, the information that formed the basis of Consentius's directive against heterodoxy derived from Orosius.⁶³ In contrast to previous critical interpretations, it is possible to build a convincing case that Orosius rather than Consentius inspired intolerance. In Orosius we find a peculiar blend of dynamic and self-determining fanaticism with an aligned authority and expedient itinerancy, as well as an echo of Consentius's self-education. It is likely that Orosius's sudden appearance on Minorca with his credentials and sacred fragments incited both Severus and Consentius. Orosius had built a personal association with Augustine and Jerome, which could be confirmed by the writings of all three. Orosius had been a recent key participant in the case brought against Pelagius in the Holy Land, being called as a witness by bishop John of Jerusalem and having personal communication with Pelagius himself. Orosius's reliability in bearing letters and his inclination for travel was a powerful currency when the relics of St Stephen were discovered and swiftly distributed. An author and authority himself, Orosius seems to have been a vital source of knowledge for Priscillianism in Hispania even in the

⁶² Consentius has been described as the 'father' of the *Epistula Severi* and the driving force behind Christian mobilisation against the Minorcan Jews. J. Amengual i Batle, *Els Orígens Del Cristianisme a les Balears i el seu desenvolupament fins a l'època musulmana*, (Palma de Mallorca, 1991), vol. 1, p. 215. This view is echoed by Hillgarth: 'His [Consentius's] love for controversy (with both Priscillianists and Pelagians) and for intrigue makes him, as Amengual suggests, the ideal person to have masterminded the sensational events that produced the very rapid conversion of the Jews of Mahon in 418.' J. N. D. Hillgarth, Review of *Els orígens del cristianisme a les Balears i el seu desenvolupament fins a l'època musulmana*, by J. Amengual i Batle, *Speculum*, vol. 69, no. 3 (1994), 731. Bradbury interprets the lexical parallels between the *Epistula Severi* and Consentius's *Epistula 11** as significant, centering Consentius within the sphere of power that directed events in Minorca. Bradbury does not consider the potential extent of Orosius's role in events, and denies the collusion of thought between Orosius and Severus. Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca*, 53.

⁶³ Orosius's influence on Consentius has been tentatively recognised by modern critics, but not fully explored. Frend considered it probable that Orosius and Consentius met during Orosius's visit to Minorca, and that Orosius was the direct motivation for Fronto's mission to uncover the heterodox conspiracy in Hispania: 'The effect of his sudden appearance was to stimulate Consentius into rabid action against the Priscillianists resulting eventually in Fronto's mission of deceit in 418.' Frend, 'A new eyewitness', 337. See Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 528, cited below fn. 65.

early fifth century.⁶⁴ If Orosius is the shadowy figure in Consentius's *Epistula* 12*, the 'holy and venerable man' with whom Consentius scratches his theological itches, the impact Orosius had on Consentius was certainly considerable, as Van Dam has argued.⁶⁵ Although not in his polemical literary style, in terms of physical movement Consentius is passive: when pressed by Augustine to visit him in order to read some of his works and receive gentle theological correction, Consentius seems unwilling to travel and never makes the journey. And yet his letters are characterised by a distinct dissatisfaction with the texts he has available to him, and also with the lack of stimulating and learned Christian society in the 'cultural backwater' of Minorca.⁶⁶ Orosius, by contrast, is especially active, disrupting the quiet communities in Minorca with tales of saints from the Holy Land, personal recount of influential ecclesiastics like Augustine and Jerome, and valuable knowledge of contemporary heterodoxy in Hispania.

The argument that Orosius exerted a considerable influence on Consentius and Severus finds evidence in the ancient literature, but the tendency towards anonymity that characterises Consentius's *Epistulae* and the *Epistula Severi* allows only provisional conclusions.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Burrus recognises Orosius's *Commonitorium* as the earliest source that uses the term 'Priscillianist'. Burrus, *The making of a heretic*, 166 n. 7.

⁶⁵ Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 9, 10 (Divjak, 240-2, 242): ...*sancti ac uenerabilis uiri*... See *Ep.* 12* 9, 10, 13, 14, for reference to Consentius's unnamed associate (Divjak, 240-2, 242, 246-8, 250). Van Dam has argued for the identification with Orosius. Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 528. Consentius has been suggested as the author of the *Quaestiones Orosii et responsiones Augustini*, and it is possible that he makes reference to the work in his *Ep.* 12* 5 (Divjak, 236). Van Dam concludes that Orosius's effect on Consentius was powerful and 'expanded...[his] intellectual horizons – and pretensions – considerably'. Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 528.

⁶⁶ Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 4, 5 (Divjak, 234, 236) on the unwelcome solitude of Minorca and the rarity of learned Christian company. Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 1, 2 (Divjak, 230, 232) on the (puzzling) aversion Consentius readily admits to reading, particularly Augustine's *Confessiones*, finding Scripture and Lactantius only slightly more palatable. Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 6 (Divjak, 236) where he claims to have come to Minorca to wear away his days in leisure and inertia. In *Ep.* 120.1 (Goldbacher, 169, vol. 2) Augustine exhorts Consentius to do what he had not yet done, to visit him so as to read some of his works and to receive correction in theological matters from Augustine personally. There is no evidence that Consentius fulfilled Augustine's request and visited him in north Africa. In *Ep.* 12* 13 (Divjak, 248) Consentius alludes to his intention to travel being disrupted by the providential recall to study Scripture. The description of Minorca as a 'cultural backwater' in the early fifth century belongs to Frend, 'A new eyewitness', 338.

⁶⁷ For an example of the desire for anonymity, see Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 13 (Divjak, 250).

Severus describes how a ‘certain priest, conspicuous for his sanctity’ brought the relics of St Stephen from Jerusalem to Minorca.⁶⁸ The messenger is Orosius, and the importance of his actions are not underplayed but nowhere is his identity confirmed. Although the *Epistula Severi* is initially addressed to the universal brotherhood of the entire world, there are two instances where the addressee is more specifically identified as ‘your Blessedness’ (*beatitudo vestra*).⁶⁹ Similarly Consentius’s *Epistula* 12* refers to an important individual, a ‘leader’ or *dux* for whom Consentius promised to produce some rhetorical ‘weapons’ against the Jews.⁷⁰ Both Severus and Consentius could be referring to Orosius as the stimulus behind the proactive intolerance of non-orthodox Christianity, primarily against the Jews in Minorca and then Priscillianists in Hispania.

Furthermore, the distinctive imagery of fiery zeal that describes Orosius resonates in the writings of Consentius and Severus, suggesting the active circulation of letters and writings, and not only those authored by the bearer. In a letter from around AD 415 to Jerome, Augustine describes Orosius as ‘a pious young man’, ‘keen-spirited, swift to speak, and full of zeal’.⁷¹ Augustine adds that he came to him ‘prompted only by burning zeal in regard to the Holy Scriptures’.⁷² Similarly burning with desire, Consentius describes Fronto as ‘...a man in whom the Holy Spirit kindles the most ardent flames of zeal for the faith...’.⁷³ The

⁶⁸ *Ep. Sev.* 4.1 (Bradbury, 82): ...*presbyter quidam sanctitate praecipuus ab Hierosolyma veniens...*

⁶⁹ *Ep. Sev.*, [preface]: *Sanctissimis ac beatissimis dominis episcopis, presbyteris, diaconibus et universae fraternitati totius orbis terrarum, Severus episcopus misericordia Dei indigens et omnium ultimus in Christo Redemptore nostro aeternam salutem.* For the more specific addressee, see 8.2 and 31 (Bradbury, 86, 122).

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 12*, 13 (Divjak, 250): ...*<ut> aliqua aduersus Iudaeos quorum proeliis urgebamur duci nostro arma producerem, ea tamen lege, ut officio nomen penitus sileretur.*

⁷¹ Augustine, *Ep.* 166, 1.2: *Ecce uenit ad me religiosus iuuenis, catholica pace frater, aetate filius, honore compresbyter noster Orosius, uigil ingenio, promptus eloqui, flagrans studio...*

⁷² Augustine, *Ep.* 169: ...*solo sanctorum Scripturarum ardore inflammatus aduenit...* In *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis Episcopi Epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, vol. 3, Vienna, 1895-1923, 621. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-203)*, Washington, 1955, 61.

⁷³ Consentius *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 184): *Verum accidit, ut quidam famulus Christi nomine Fronto cui spiritus sanctus flagrantissimas fidelis zeli suggerit flammis subitus adueniret...* In Consentius’s *Ep.* 11* 24 (Divjak, 224), following the failed attempt to convene an ecclesiastical council after the book-burning in Tarragona, Patroclus and the Gallic bishops are enflamed by the fire of a greater zeal and will appeal for imperial intervention.

same imagery appears in the *Epistula Severi* as the driving force behind Christian anti-Semitic hostility: the relics of St Stephen kindle a zeal for the faith that fires Christian hearts in their pursuit of wayward souls in need of correction.⁷⁴ The encyclical letter ends with an exhortation to take up Christ's zeal against the Jews, for the sake of their eternal salvation.⁷⁵ Orosius's first line of defence against his charge of blasphemy by bishop John of Jerusalem is that out of his own faith and zeal for Christ he was obliged to call attention to the wolves caught within the flock of sheep.⁷⁶ This shared imagery of fiery zeal is revealing in two senses: one, in practical terms it illuminates the trans-Mediterranean Christian network that exchanged letters and texts as well as visitors, advertising the associations between individuals; and two, in the same way that modern criticism has identified the zealous dynamism at the origins of intolerance in the early fifth century, so there was an ancient recognition. But, perhaps in opposition to more cautious and critical modern scepticism, the ancient perspective as represented in the sources here discussed saw the committed Christian zeal that obstinately demanded orthodox hegemony in desirable terms, as a quality to admire, eulogise and imitate.

The critical reception of both episodes has previously focused on their fiction or reality, with less attention given to the remarkable actions contained within the narratives.⁷⁷ Both incidences are characterised by considerable and sustained violence. Fronto's testimony is marked with the persistent threat and realisation of violence against him. Although there is little stylistic evidence to suggest obvious exaggeration, as a complainant and victim Fronto

⁷⁴ *Ep. Sev.* 4.3-5 (Bradbury, 82-4): *Statim siquidem tepor noster incaluit et factum est cor nostrum, sicut scriptum est, 'ardens in via'. Nunc enim iam illud fidei amburebat zelus, nunc spes salvandae multitudinis erigebat.*

⁷⁵ *Ep. Sev.* 31.2 (Bradbury, 124): *Quamobrem si indigni et peccatoris verbum dignanter admittitis, zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem perpetua salute suscipite.*

⁷⁶ Orosius, *Liber apologeticus contra pelagium de arbitrii libertate*, 1 (Zangemeister, 603). For Orosius's use of the imagery of 'zeal' in the *Historiae adversus paganos*, see 1.Pref.5; 7.29.2; 7.29.4; and 7.42.17 (Arnaud-Lindet, vol. 1: 7; vol. 3: 80, 80, 127).

⁷⁷ For the debate over the authenticity of the *Epistula Severi*, see Bradbury, *Letter*, 9-16. For the contention that Fronto's heterodoxy-hunting in Tarragona is fabricated, see Bachrach, 'Review', 1168.

does not attempt to downplay or conceal the physical aggression he suffers. Conversely the conflict and hostility in the *Epistula Severi* is euphemistically concealed. But the silence and absence within the account cannot disguise the physical intimidation, terror and threat of violence or death that coerced the Minorcan Jews into conversion. The synagogue did not spontaneously combust nor was it divinely ignited; it was deliberately burnt to the ground by the Christians, and the objects that made it holy were removed. The Christian method of occupation was a non-peaceful, illegal and invasive protest movement. The Christians were happy to occupy Jewish homes to ensure eventual success, and only departed following the conversion of every single Jew. The righteous aggression of the Minorcan Christians was enshrined in a public document intended to be promulgated throughout the Christian world. Severus did not expect a hostile reception, and the evidence suggests that he did not get one.⁷⁸

When considering events on Minorca it is possible to conclude that the status of Christian orthodox authorities and followers in the early fifth century had increased to such an extent that they were no longer constrained by societal and legislative norms. As a result illegal occupation, harassment, coercion, theft, violence and the threat of violence were acceptable if the cause was justified. Severus considered his mission to be not only vindicated, but that it would be publicly received as such. Similarly Fronto's pretence of heterodoxy and his tactics of deception as advocated by Consentius were made public without hesitation or mitigation. The violence against Fronto and the deep-rooted conspiracy that effectively rejected accusations of heterodoxy implicated those within the lay Christian community as well as the hierarchy of the church, including numerous bishops. This leaves us with a particularly disjointed and disharmonious image of the church in Hispania, where regional differences

⁷⁸ The Letter was greeted with applause when read aloud as part of a sermon in Uzalis around AD 420. Evodius, *De miraculis Sancti Stephani protomartyris libri duo ad Evodium*, in *PL*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 41 (1841) 835.

were considerable and loyalties within the closed ranks of communities had more power than the ecclesiastical hierarchies the church was able to enforce.

This article has argued that, with the relics of St Stephen, Paulus Orosius brought a peculiarly vehement and absolute intolerance of non-orthodox Christianity to Minorca. Endorsed and enabled by a network of Christians around the Mediterranean connected by travelling texts, letter writing, and the movement of people, the itinerant and seemingly restless presbyter was a key and active member whose wanderings were not without mission. Orosius was able to disseminate his ideology of intolerance and translate it into action through his influence on other individual Christians like Severus and Consentius, who were then able to exert this intolerance in a wider sense.⁷⁹ The previous lack of critical recognition afforded to Orosius as an instigator of religious conflict, revised by the argument of this article, alters an understanding of religious intolerance, particularly in its origins. In addition, it augments our comprehension of how Christian communities were structured, how they operated and impinged on one another, and how significant carved-out Christian authority could be, existing outside of the institutionalised church.⁸⁰

Orosius, like Jerome, was not a bishop. But if ecclesiastical authority is central, the example of Orosius demonstrates how potentially powerful peripheral Christian authority was. An interpretation that centralises Orosius also foregrounds communication and contact between Christians: intolerance in Minorca can be considered within a wider, trans-Mediterranean

⁷⁹ The network of Christians this article has focused on includes Augustine, Jerome, Orosius, Consentius, Severus and Fronto, but could be narrowed or widened depending on the chosen perspective, particularly through the exchange of letters. Elizabeth A. Clark discusses the role of networks in the Origen and Pelagian controversies. *The cultural construction of an early Christian debate*, Princeton, 1992.

⁸⁰ Orosius is described as a presbyter, but if the biographical interpolation of the *Historiae* is correct, he abandoned his Christian community following barbarian incursion. See, for example, Orosius, *Historiae* 5.1-2. Arnaud-Lindet gives serious consideration to the theoretical biography of Orosius interpolated from his writings. Arnaud-Lindet, *Orose*, vol. 1, ix-xiii.

movement, which is perhaps negated if the sedentary Consentius is considered pivotal. However, the obscurity of Orosius within these two controversies is more complex than a result of inadequate critical scrutiny. The evidence is circumstantial, intertextual, and allusive: the argument of this article rests principally on the fortuitous coincidence of dates and journeys, the intertextual proliferation of the imagery of fiery zeal, and the textual allusions of both Severus and Consentius to a leader. The tendency towards anonymity further complicates a full understanding of events, especially in terms of attribution and accountability. The deliberate disassociation of Orosius in the writings of Consentius and Severus is reflected in Consentius's desire for anonymity, the muted and then silenced mention of Orosius in the writings of Augustine, and Orosius's anonymity in his own writings.⁸¹ However, the absence of a triumphant *Epistula Orosii* does not negate his centrality in disseminating intolerance, an intolerance that was part of a wider movement in the early fifth century against any form of religious belief or practise that was not considered to be orthodox, and one that was most keenly embodied in the character of Orosius.

⁸¹ Despite the critical perception of the importance of what have been perceived as the biographical passages in the *Historiae adversus paganos*, the narrative voice is not explicitly associated with Orosius. Anonymity can be connected with extremes of brevity and humility, both of which Orosius exhibits a tendency towards in his writings. Augustine's *Epistula* 179 is a further example of reference to Orosius but without explicitly naming him. Augustine's letter to Bishop John of Jerusalem requested the *acta* of the Council of Diospolis that exonerated Pelagius in 415. Augustine opens the letter by telling John that he is not at all offended not having received a letter from him, and would rather believe that no messenger was available rather than to suspect that John held him in low esteem. Augustine's caustically ironic comment would find flesh with John, knowing (as Augustine suspects that he did) that Orosius was such an available messenger, sailing directly from the Holy Land to north Africa. Augustine, *Ep.* 179 in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, vol. 3, *CSEL*, Vienna, 1895-1923, 691-697. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-203)*, Washington, 1955, 110-117. This anonymity extends to the *Quaestiones Orosii et responsiones Augustini*, for whom no author is known.

The Origin of Zealous Intolerance: Paulus Orosius and Violent Religious Conflict in the Early Fifth Century

Abstract

This article explores the origins of religious intolerance in two episodes from the early fifth century AD: the forcible conversion of 540 Jews in Minorca by Bishop Severus, and the failed attempt by the monk Fronto to uncover heterodox belief in Tarragona, north-east Hispania. This article argues that, with the newly-discovered relics of St Stephen, Paulus Orosius brought a peculiarly vehement and absolute intolerance of non-orthodox Christianity to Minorca. Intolerance was facilitated and communicated through a trans-Mediterranean network of Christians connected through letter-writing and the exchange of visitors, of which Orosius was a particularly mobile and dynamic participant. In contrast to previous criticism, this article identifies Orosius as a point of intersection within the controversies, and, in the dissemination of his ideology of intolerance, as a catalyst for conflict.

Keywords

Orosius – Jews – letters – St Stephen – heterodoxy – Severus of Minorca – networks –
Consentius

1 This article is concerned with the moment of articulation of intolerance, where (self-
2 proclaimed) catholic Christians mobilised against the unorthodox: pagans, heterodox
3 believers, and Jews.¹ It examines two episodes in the early fifth century where the suspicion
4 of heterodoxy and the desire for conformity had repressive and violent consequences. In
5 Minorca Bishop Severus forcibly converted over five-hundred Jews to Christianity, and the
6 fanatical zealot Fronto was tasked with uncovering heterodox beliefs within a Christian
7 community in Tarragona, north-east Hispania. Fronto's mission, as represented in the
8 verbatim account penned by Consentius, appears to be particularly isolated: a lone Christian
9 activist attempts to infiltrate an unknown community, and is forcibly ejected when the
10 community unites against him. But Fronto's actions are not solitary. Behind both
11 Consentius's letters to Augustine and Fronto and the *Epistula Severi*, the record of Christian
12 triumph against the Minorcan Jews authored by Bishop Severus, is a dynamic and informed
13 network of Christians across the Mediterranean linked by travel and literary activity. This
14 article focuses on Orosius as a particularly mobile and dynamic participant in this network,
15 whose unexpected arrival on Minorca with relics of St Stephen was to set in fateful motion a
16 series of events that would see the violent eradication of the Minorcan Jewish community and
17 reveal the closed ranks of Christian ecclesiastics in Hispania, where local allegiances
18 forcefully resisted external orthodox challenge. The methodological approach of this article is
19 comparative, in the juxtaposition of the two controversies, and prosopographical, in the
20 identification of Orosius as a point of intersection within the controversies in his role as a
21 catalyst for conflict.

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¹ All citations to the *Epistula Severi* are taken from S. Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca. Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*, Oxford, 1996. The editions used for Consentius's *Epistula 11** and *Epistula 12** are J. Divjak, *Lettres 1*-29**, 1987. All translations are my own.

CCSL = *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*; CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*; Ep. = *Epistula*; Ep. Sev. = *Epistula Severi*; HE = *Historia ecclesiastica*; PL = *Patrologia Latina*; Rev. = *Revelatio sancti Stephani*.

1 In December AD 415 the tomb of the first Christian martyr, St Stephen, was discovered
2 following the divinely-inspired dreams of Lucian, a priest in Kefar Gamala, north of
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4 Jerusalem. Bishop John of Jerusalem took charge of the excavation and was rewarded with
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6 the majority of the holy remains. Only six days before the feast day of St Stephen on 26
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8 December, the invented relics were transported in a holy procession 'with psalms and hymns'
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10 to the Church of Zion in Jerusalem.² Lucian was left 'some small bits of the saint's limbs...and
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12 dust'.³ Lucian dictated an account of the revelation of the relics to the priest Avitus, a refugee
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14 from Braga in north-west Hispania, now modern-day Portugal. Avitus recorded Lucian's
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16 description in Greek and immediately translated it into Latin. The dissemination of Stephen's
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18 relics around the Mediterranean was swift; Avitus sent Lucian's account prefaced with his
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20 own letter and the relics from Palestine to bishop Balconius of Braga.⁴ The bearer of these
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22 sacred relics was the priest, apologist, and confidant of Augustine and Jerome, Paulus
23
24 Orosius.⁵ Orosius had travelled to the Holy Land on Augustine's suggestion to, in his own
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26 words, 'sit at the feet of Jerome'.⁶ He had become embroiled in the Pelagian controversy and
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28 had somewhat unsuccessfully represented the anti-Pelagian cause at the synod of Jerusalem
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30 held in July AD 415. He had promised Augustine that he would visit him again in north
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45 ² Lucian, *Revelatio sancti Stephani*, in *Revue des Études Byzantines*, ed. by S. Vanderlinden, 4, (1946) 178-
46 217, (Vanderlinden, B 8.48, 217): ...cum psalmis et hymnis...

47 ³ Lucian, *Rev.* 8 (Vanderlinden, B 8.48, 217): ...relinquentes nobis de membris sanctis parvos articulos...

48 ⁴ The record of Balconius as bishop of Braga discounts the recent references to Orosius as bishop of Braga. See
49 Lucian, *Rev.* 1 (Vanderlinden, 188). Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Crisis management in late antiquity (410-*
50 *590 CE). A survey of the evidence from episcopal letters*, Leiden, 2013, 119.

51 ⁵ Orosius's travels and their chronology around the Mediterranean are thoroughly explored by V. Gauge, 'Les
52 routes d'Orose et les reliques d'Etienne', in *Antiquité Tardive*, vol. 6 (1998) 265-286.

53 ⁶ Orosius, *Liber apologeticus contra pelagium de arbitrii libertate*, 3.2 (Zangemeister, 606): *latebam ergo in*
54 *Bethleem, traditus a patre Augustino, ut timorem Domini discerem sedens ad pedes Hieronymi*. In *CSEL 5*, ed.
55 by K. Zangemeister, Vienna, 1882, 603-66. Trans. by C. L. Hanson, 'Book in Defense against the Pelagians', in
56 *The fathers of the church: Iberian fathers 3. Pacian of Barcelona and Orosius of Braga*, Washington, 1999,
57 115-167. Kelly understands Orosius's journey to the Holy Land as an integral part of the Pelagian controversy, a
58 deliberate move on the part of Augustine designed to alert Jerome and the church at Jerusalem to the dangers of
59 Pelagius's teachings. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome. His life, writings, and controversies*, London, 1975, 318. For a full
60 description of Orosius's involvement in the synod of Jerusalem, see Hanson, *Iberian fathers 3*, 97-111.
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1 Africa before heading further west to his (possible) homeland of Hispania.⁷ This promise he
2 fulfilled, arriving in Carthage in the mid-summer of AD 416, carrying two letters from
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4 Jerome to Augustine, some works of Jerome for his pupil Oceanus, possibly some record of
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6 the council of Diospolis held in AD 415, and a letter from Heros and Lazarus for Aurelius,
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8 the Bishop of Carthage, as well as the relics of St Stephen and Avitus's relation of their
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10 invention.⁸
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17 Orosius attended the council of Carthage in AD 416 before sailing for Minorca with the
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19 intention of travelling on to the Hispanic mainland.⁹ But chaotic conditions and ongoing
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21 warfare deterred him, and he returned instead to Hippo in Africa.¹⁰ It was at this opportune
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23 juncture that Augustine requested Orosius to write his most infamous work, the *Historiae*
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25 *adversus paganos* in seven books, an apologetical history against the pagans and their
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27 accusations that Christian worship had caused the fall of Rome in AD 410.¹¹ The relics of St
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29 Stephen that Orosius had carefully transported found their way to Carthage and Uzalis in
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37 ⁷ See Augustine, *Ep.* 166 to Jerome for Orosius's promise to return to Africa before proceeding to Hispania. *Ep.*
38 166, in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, vol. 3, *CSEL*, Vienna, 1904,
39 545-585. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-203)*, Washington, 1955, 6-31.

40 ⁸ For the record of the Council of Diospolis, see A. T. Fear, *Orosius. Seven books of history against the pagans*,
41 Liverpool, 2010, 5. Fear includes the official minutes of the Council of Diospolis amongst Orosius's baggage
42 but Augustine wrote to bishop John to request the minutes from him (Augustine, *Epistula* 179), and Augustine
43 eventually received them from Cyril of Alexandria. Augustine's *Epistula* 175 mentions Orosius's arrival in
44 Carthage in June-July AD 416. See Augustine, *Epistula* 4* to Cyril. Kelly, *Jerome*, 318 fn. 55, claims that
45 Orosius was also carrying *Epistula* 134 (172 in Augustine's collection) from Jerome to Augustine, which seems
46 likely. In *Epistula* 180 Augustine mentions Orosius carrying a book for Oceanus to copy. Augustine *Epistulae*
47 172, 175, 179 and 180, in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, vol. 3,
48 *CSEL*, Vienna, 1904, 636-639, 652-662, 691-697, 697-700. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-*
49 *203)*, Washington, 1955, 72-73, 85-90, 110-117, 117-121. Augustine, *Epistula* 4*, in *Lettres 1*-29**, ed. by J.
50 Divjak, 1987, 108-116. Trans. R. B. Eno, *Letters. Volume VI (1*-29*)*, Washington, 1989, 38-44.

51 ⁹ In Augustine's *Ep.* 175 (Goldbacher, vol. 3, 652-662) Orosius is not listed among the names of those who were
52 present at the Council of Carthage, but he is mentioned in the content of the letter as bringing to the Council a
53 letter from Heros and Lazarus. Augustine was absent from the Council of Carthage in September AD 416 but
54 came to Carthage later in the same year. Augustine was one of a group of bishops who met in Carthage, and
55 Augustine drafted a letter to bishop Innocent on behalf of the convened bishops (*Ep.* 176).

56 ¹⁰ Hispania was invaded by the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves from Gaul in AD 409. See Hydatius, *Chronica*, 34,
57 in *The chronicle of Hydatius and the consularia Constantinopolitana*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Burgess, Oxford,
58 1993. For discussion, see M. Kulikowski, *Late roman Spain and its cities*, Baltimore, 2004, 158-167.

59 ¹¹ Paulus Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, in *Orose. Histoires. Contre les païens*, ed. and trans. by M.-P.
60 Arnaud-Lindet, Paris, 1990.
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1 north Africa where they effected many miracles.¹² He also left relics at Minorca, and it is this
2 historical detail that will receive closer attention.
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7 The relics of St Stephen were deposited in a church outside Magona on the eastern end of
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9 Minorca, the second-largest of the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean situated between the
10 Iberian peninsula and Sardinia.¹³ Orosius's translation of the relics is briefly described in the
11 *Epistula Severi*, an account of the effect of the relics on the Minorcan population. This
12 epistolary account was written by Severus, a little-known bishop of Minorca who exploited
13 the appearance of the relics to initiate a relentless campaign to impose religious conformity
14 on the neighbouring Jewish community.¹⁴ Orosius is described by Severus as a priest
15 'conspicuous for his sanctity' who came from Jerusalem and sojourned for a brief time in
16 Magona.¹⁵ This is generally as much detail and consideration as Orosius's involvement in the
17 following events is ascribed. In this article I argue that Orosius's influence in the ensuing
18 controversy was actually much greater than Severus's brief mention suggests, and has
19 generally been recognised in modern scholarship.
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39 The arrival of the sacred relics of St Stephen on Minorca fractured the previously peaceable
40 community along absolute polarities of religious opposition: it was Christian vs. Jew, and no
41 end to the antagonism and harassment could be found until every last Minorcan Jew had
42 converted to Christianity, even those who had initially chosen exile rather than conversion.
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50 ¹² For the miraculous effect of the relics in Uzalis, see Evodius, *De miraculis Sancti Stephani protomartyris libri*
51 *duo ad Evodium*, in *PL*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 41 (1841) 843-848. For the relics in Carthage, see Augustine, *De*
52 *civitate Dei*, 22.8, in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De Civitate Dei Libri XXII, Bibliotheca Scriptorum*
53 *Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, ed. by B. Dombart, Leipzig, 1905-1908, vol. 2. Trans. by H.
54 Bettenson, *Concerning the city of God against the pagans*, London, 2003. Prosper records that a convent in
55 Carthage possessed relics of St Stephen. Prosper, *Liber de promissionibus et praedictionibus Dei*, in *PL*, ed. by
56 J. P. Migne, 51, 842.

57 ¹³ *Ep. Sev.* 4.2, in *Letter on the conversion of the Jews*, ed. by S. Bradbury, Oxford, 1996, 82.

58 ¹⁴ According to Severus, it was without doubt at the inspiration of the martyr himself that Orosius deposited the
59 relics at the church in Magona. *Ep. Sev.* 4.2 (Bradbury, 82).

60 ¹⁵ *Ep. Sev.* 4 (Bradbury, 82).
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1 The effect of the appearance of relics was immediate and explosive: the fire of Christian
2 devotion was kindled, a fire that divided completely, even within families.¹⁶ The
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4 complacency of the Christian community in tolerating the presence of the Jews was replaced
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6 by burning hearts; the zeal of the faithful was at once fired, and the hope of saving a
7
8 multitude spurred the Christians on.¹⁷ Where previously relations between Christian and Jew
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10 had been cordial, the long-standing affection was transformed into hatred.¹⁸ Severus
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12 mobilised his opposition with words, composing a *Commonitorium* against the Jews just as
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14 Orosius had against the Priscillianists and Origenists.¹⁹ In turn the Jews consulted their sacred
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16 books and, according to Severus, began to hoard weapons such as stakes, rocks, and javelins
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18 in their synagogue. Despite the willingness of the Jews to swear under oath to the contrary,
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20 Severus effectively accused them of plotting violence and sedition and demanded to inspect
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22 the synagogue for himself. The Jews and Christians processed to the synagogue jointly
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24 singing a Psalm in praise of Christ, but the harmony of the moment quickly descended into a
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26 stone-throwing riot.²⁰ The Christians forcibly removed the sacred books and silver objects,
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28 and burnt the synagogue to the ground.²¹ Severus is quick to note the return of the silver to
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30 circumvent Jewish complaints of theft and losses, but there is no mention that the sacred
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32 books were likewise returned. Whilst the Jews stood in stupefied horror at the destroyed
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42 ¹⁶ See *Ep. Sev.* 4.3-5 (Bradbury, 82-4), including the biblical reference to Luke 12.49.

43 ¹⁷ *Ep. Sev.* 4.4 (Bradbury, 82-4): *Statim siquidem tepor noster incaluit et factum est cor nostrum, sicut scriptum*
44 *est, 'ardens in via'. Nunc etiam iam illud fidei amburebat zelus, nunc spes salvandae multitudinis erigebat.*

45 ¹⁸ *Ep. Sev.* 5 (Bradbury, 84).

46 ¹⁹ *Ep. Sev.* 8 (Bradbury, 84-6). The *Commonitorium* was intended to be circulated with the *Epistula Severi* but it
47 has unfortunately not survived. Orosius wrote the *Commonitorium* to Augustine against the followers of
48 Priscillian and Origen, to which Augustine replied with his own *Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et*
49 *Origenistas*, both of which survive. Paulus Orosius, *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et*
50 *Origenistarum*, in *CSEL*, ed. by Georg Schepps, 18 Vienna, 1889, 149-157. Trans. by C. L. Hanson, 'Inquiry or
51 Memorandum to Augustine on the Error of the Priscillianists and Origenists' in *The Fathers of the Church:*
52 *Iberian Fathers 3. Pacian of Barcelona and Orosius of Braga*, Washington, 1999. For Augustine's reply, see
53 *Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas, Sancti Aurelii Augustini Contra adversarium legis et*
54 *prophetarum; Commonitorium Orosii et contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas*, in *CCSL*, ed. by K.-D. Daur, 49,
55 Turnhout, 1985, 168-78. Trans. by R. J. Teske, ed. by J. E. Rotelle, *Arianism and other heresies: Heresies,*
56 *Memorandum to Augustine, To Orosius in refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists, Arian sermon, Answer*
57 *to an Arian sermon, Debate with Maximinus, Answer to Maximinus, Answer to an Enemy of the Law and the*
58 *Prophets*, 'To Orosius in Refutation of the Priscillianists and Origenists', New York, 1995, 104-115.

59 ²⁰ *Ep. Sev.* 13.1-4 (Bradbury, 92).

60 ²¹ *Ep. Sev.* 13.12-13 (Bradbury, 94).

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synagogue, the elated Christians processed to their Church singing hymns and praising 'the
author of our victory'.²² As miraculous conversions begin to occur, the position of the Jews
becomes clear; Christian hatred and intolerance left the choice of death, exile, or 'coerced
apostasy' for the Jews of Minorca.²³ Conversion is eventually the option chosen universally,
and 540 Jews were baptised into the church.²⁴ The Christians departed in jubilant celebration,
and the Jews at their own expense and labour levelled the remains of the synagogue and built
a Christian basilica in its place.²⁵ Severus ends his epistle, which is addressed to the universal
brotherhood of Christians, with an exhortation to follow his example and take up Christ's zeal
against the Jews.²⁶

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This article is concerned not only with the moment of articulation of intolerance of (self-
proclaimed) catholic Christians against the unorthodox, but the collusions and intrigues that
occur before that articulation: why that moment in particular? In this article I argue that
within the two case studies under scrutiny religious intolerance was motivated by individual
authority, and that particularly in Minorca that individual authority derived initially from
Paulus Orosius, who brought the material 'provocation' for the conflict, the relics of St
Stephen.²⁷ In order to bring a profound symbolism to the affair, Severus compresses the
chronology of his narrative to occur over precisely eight days in early February AD 418.²⁸

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²² *Ep. Sev.* 14 (Bradbury, 94): ...*auctori victoriae nostrae gratias referentes...*

²³ *Ep. Sev.* 18.18 (Bradbury, 106): 'coerced in apostasy', *apostatatae compulsus est*. Theodorus is presented with a clear choice by Reuben, the first to convert from Judaism: if he wants to be safe, honoured, and wealthy, he must believe in Christ. *Ep. Sev.* 16.13-16 (Bradbury, 98). The blunt acknowledgement of Theodorus's Jewish cousin illustrates the threat to life that forced his conversion.

²⁴ *Ep. Sev.* 29.2 (Bradbury, 122).

²⁵ *Ep. Sev.* 30.2 (Bradbury, 122).

²⁶ *Ep. Sev.* 31.2 (Bradbury, 124): *Quamobrem si indigni et peccatoris verbum dignanter admittitis, zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem perpetua salute suscipite.*

²⁷ The arrival of the relics has been described as a staged provocation for the ensuing religious conflict. B. S. Bachrach, Review of *Severus of Minorca: Letter on the Conversion of the Jews*, by S. Bradbury, *Speculum*, vol. 73, 4 (1998), 1169. Bachrach considers the Jewish conflict, Fronto's near-contemporary heterodox-hunting in Tarragona, and the slightly earlier (AD 415) expulsion of the Jews in Alexandria by Cyril of Alexandria as pseudohistory.

²⁸ Severus precisely dates the account: *Ep. Sev.* 31 (Bradbury, 122). Bradbury, *Letter*, 4-5, discusses the issue of dating the *Ep. Sev.*

1 Orosius left Palestine for north Africa in the summer of AD 416, attended the council of
2 Carthage (in some capacity), and then sailed for Minorca, likely within the same season.²⁹
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4 There is, therefore, a time discrepancy of perhaps two years in between the relics of St
5 Stephen leaving the Holy Land and arriving in Minorca to 'fire Christ's zeal against the
6
7 Jews'.³⁰ Although it is impossible to determine the exact movements of Orosius and his
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9 precious baggage in this interim period, it is feasible that his stay on Minorca was extended
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11 beyond a few days, providing the opportunity for Orosius to make a profound impression on
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13 Severus.
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22 Orosius was an aggressive fundamentalist Christian whose self-constructed authority rested
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24 on his personal association with Augustine and Jerome, his knowledge of heterodoxy in the
25
26 Iberian peninsula, his involvement in the Pelagian controversy, his participation in
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28 ecclesiastical synods in Jerusalem and Carthage, his role as letter-carrier, and his brief
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30 propriety of the relics of the protomartyr Stephen. By the time of his arrival in Minorca
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32 Orosius could well have seemed an impressive and formidable figure to a recently-appointed
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34 bishop like Severus. He was the author of the *Commonitorium*, attacking the heterodoxy of
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36 Priscillianism and Origenism, and in late AD 415 he wrote the *Liber Apologeticus* in defence
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38 of the charges of blasphemy and heterodoxy by bishop John of Jerusalem following the synod
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47 ²⁹ See Bradbury, *Letter*, 23-5, for more details on the chronology of Orosius's movements in this period. Orosius
48 is noted in the minutes of the Council of Carthage as delivering a letter from the exiled Gallic bishops Heros and
49 Lazarus to the Council, but he is not listed as one of the attendees. See Augustine, *Ep.* 175 (Goldbacher, vol. 3,
50 652-662).

51 ³⁰ *Ep. Sev.* 31.2 (Bradbury, 124): *...zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem perpetua salute*
52 *suscipite*. Bradbury makes a convincing case that Orosius went from Palestine to north Africa and then to
53 Minorca on his way back to the Iberian peninsula, before turning back to north Africa once his intended journey
54 had become impossible. An expected and prolonged stay in north Africa gave Augustine the opportunity to
55 request that he compose the *Historiae adversus paganos* around AD 417-8. From this Bradbury draws the
56 conclusion that '[t]his revised chronology reveals that the impressions conveyed by Severus...of an outbreak of
57 religious fervour leading to a rapid, miraculous conversion is fundamentally misleading. The relics destined for
58 Bishop Balconius of Braga arrived on Minorca in late summer or autumn 416, not 417. Severus' campaign
59 against the Jews had thus been in progress for over a year before the final march on Magona in February 418.'
60 Bradbury, *Letter*, 25.
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of Jerusalem.³¹ Between AD 417-8 Orosius wrote the *Historiae adversus paganos*.³² These texts are characterised by an aggressive, intolerant, and righteous blend of apologetic and polemic, documents that detail the error of the religious beliefs of others and advertise the orthodoxy and propriety of certain Christianities. Orosius's fervour and desire to participate in the correction of Christian orthodox error is reflected in his outspoken contribution to recent ecclesiastical wranglings in the Holy Land and north Africa. As E. D. Hunt has noted, until Orosius's arrival there was no indication that the population of Minorca was preoccupied by religious difference; but the presence of Orosius, as elsewhere around the Mediterranean, spelt the end of religious peace.³³

Orosius seemed to be intent on fighting a religious war to identify and condemn heterodox Christian groups, non-conforming Christians, or non-Christians like pagans and Jews. An exhortation from Orosius to Severus to tolerate no longer the presence of the neighbouring Jewish community in Minorca is not improbable when considering the relics Orosius brought, the context of his enthusiastic involvement in other religious controversies over previous years, and his own writings. The notion that Stephen was not only the first martyr and the first deacon of Christ but 'the first to wage the Lord's war against the Jews' began with John of Jerusalem on the discovery of the relics and plausibly translated with the remains to Minorca, providing apostolic ammunition against the Jewish neighbours for Severus, who frequently exploits the language of war in the *Epistula*.³⁴ In modern criticism Orosius has gained the reputation of a tactless hothead, and Augustine himself described

³¹ For dating and discussion of the *Liber Apologeticus*, see Hanson, *Iberian Fathers* 3, 108-9.

³² See Fear, *Orosius*, 5.

³³ E. D. Hunt, 'St Stephen in Minorca: an episode in Jewish-Christian relations in the early 5th century AD', *Journal of Theological Studies* 33, (1982), 119.

³⁴ Lucian, *Rev.* 6 (Vanderlinden, B, 34, 211): ...*inde beatum Stephanum primum martyrem et archidiaconum Christi, qui primus adversus Iudaeos dominica bella bellavit*. For an example of Severus's bellicose language, see *Epistula Severi* 9, (Bradbury, 86): *Interea dum hi apparatus geruntur, magno quoque altrinsecus studio futurum instruitur bellum, utrique exercitus innumerabilibus atque absolutissimis somniis commonentur*. See Bradbury, *Letter*, p. 62, for the vocabulary of war in the *Epistula Severi* and the identification of examples.

Orosius as 'keen-spirited, swift to speak, and full of zeal.'³⁵ This article argues that it was with this religious zeal, along with the relics of St Stephen, that Orosius was able to direct Severus's attention to the Jewish enemy in Minorca.

The second section of this article is concerned with another narrative of religious intolerance and conflict in the early fifth century, and how the two episodes intersect. Around AD 418, a similarly fanatical ecclesiastic, the monk Fronto, was filled with 'the most ardent flames of zeal' to uncover and correct religious error.³⁶ His target was not the Jews but secret heterodox believers amongst the clergy in Tarragona in north-east Hispania. The connection between heterodoxy-hunting with Fronto in Hispania and Jewish persecution with Severus in Minorca is based on individual authority: from Fronto to Consentius, and Consentius to Severus and Orosius. Consentius was a contemporary of Severus who lived on the Balearic Islands, an educated Christian with a theological propensity.³⁷ We know of Consentius primarily from his correspondence with Augustine, specifically three letters, *Epistulae* 119, 120, and 205, and a treatise, *Contra Mendacium*, by Augustine addressed to Consentius.³⁸ The discovery of previously unknown letters of Augustine by Johannes Divjak in 1979 and published in a

³⁵ Kelly describes Orosius as 'aggressive and tactless', but also as 'talented, opinionated, narrowly orthodox, impetuous young man'. Kelly, *Jerome*, 318 and 317 respectively. Fear, *Orosius*, 6, characterises Orosius as 'pugnacious'. Augustine, *Ep.* 166 to Jerome, 1.2 (Goldbacher, vol. 3, 547): *Ecce uenit ad me religiosus iuuenis, catholica pace frater, aetate filius, honore compresbyter noster Orosius, uigil ingenio, promptus eloqui, flagrans studio...*

³⁶ In *Epistulae* 11* and 12* Consentius describes himself and Fronto as *famuli Christi*: *Ep.* 11*: 1, 12 (Divjak, 184, 204); *Ep.* 12*: 2 (Divjak, 232). Consentius *Epistulae* 11* and 12*, in *Letters 1*-29**, ed. by J. Divjak, (1987) 51-80. Fronto founded a monastery at Tarragona: *Ep.* 11* 2, (Divjak, 186). In *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 184) Consentius describes Fronto as 'a man in whom the Holy Spirit kindles the most ardent flames of zeal for the faith.' *...ut quidam famulus Christi nomine Fronto cui spiritus sanctus flagrantissimas fidelis zeli suggerit flammas subitus adueniret...*

³⁷ W. H. C. Frend, 'A New Eyewitness of the Barbarian Impact on Spain, 409-419', *Antigüedad y Cristianismo*, 7 (1990) 333 and fn. 2, considers it probable that Consentius lived on Minorca, and that Consentius and Severus were on good terms. See J. Wankenne, 'Lettre de Consentius à S. Augustin', *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin découvertes par Johannes Divjak*, ed. by C. Lepelley, Paris, 1983, 228, for a similar conclusion.

³⁸ *Epistulae* 119, 120, in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi Epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, Vienna, 1895-1923, vol. 2, 698-704 and 704-722. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume 2 (83-130)*, vol. 18, Washington, 1953, 294-300, 300-317. *Ep.* 205 in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi Epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, Vienna, 1895-1923, vol. 4, 323-339. *Ep.* 205 trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume 5 (204-270)*, vol. 32, Washington, 1956, 8-21. *Ad Consentium contra mendacium*, in *PL*, ed. by J.-P. Migne, 40 (1845) 517-48. Trans. by M. S. Muldowney, ed. by R. J. Deferrari, *Treatise on various subjects. Saint Augustine*, vol. 16, Washington, 1952, 125-179.

1 series distinguished with an asterisk includes two letters by Consentius sent to Augustine
2 around AD 419, *Epistula* 11* and 12*.³⁹ Consentius was an associate of bishop Severus. He
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4 had had some involvement in the Jewish controversy and the composition of the *Epistula*
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7 *Severi*, although to what extent is difficult to determine. In *Epistula* 12* to Augustine
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9 Consentius describes how, by the power of God ‘certain miracles were performed among us’,
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11 that is the forced conversion of the Minorcan Jews, and how Consentius and Severus
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13 participated in the composition of a shared narrative of events:
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17 When the blessed priest, the brother of your Paternity, Bishop Severus, along with others who
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19 had been present, had repeated these things to me, he broke down my resolution by the great
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21 force of his love and he borrowed from me words alone so that he himself might write a letter
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23 containing a narrative of events.⁴⁰
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25 The lexical similarities between the *Epistula Severi* and Consentius’s *Epistula* 11* have
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27 prompted the conclusion amongst some critics that Consentius was effectively the author of
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29 the *Epistula* and not Severus.⁴¹
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35 Consentius potentially distorts a proper understanding of his involvement in the Jewish
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37 controversy in his self-representation in *Epistula* 12* to Augustine, perhaps fearing his
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39 further disapproval following Augustine's condemnation of the deceitful tactics Consentius
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47 ³⁹ For the dating of *Ep.* 11* and *Ep.* 12* see Divjak, *Oeuvres*, 479-80 and 488. Kulikowski dates *Ep.* 11* to AD
48 420-21. Kulikowski, ‘Fronto, the bishops, and the crowd: episcopal justice and communal violence in fifth-
49 century Tarraconensis’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 2002 (4) 296.

50 ⁴⁰ *Epistula* 12* 13, (Divjak, 248-50): *Eodem tempore accidit, ut quaedam apud nos ex praecepto domini*
51 *mirabilia gererentur. Quae cum mihi beatus antistes, frater paternitatis tuae Seuerus episcopus cum ceteris qui*
52 *affuerant rettulisset, irrupit propositum meum summis uiribus caritatis et, ut epistolam quae rei gestae ordinem*
53 *contineret ipse conscriberet, sola a me uerba mutuatus est.* Consentius's involvement in the composition of the
54 *Epistula Severi* rests on his crucial phrase, *sola a me uerba mutuatus est*. This can be translated as ‘he borrowed
55 from me words alone’ or ‘he only borrowed from me some words’ or ‘words and phrases, but no more than
56 that’. For further discussion, see Bradbury, *Letter*, 59.

57 ⁴¹ A detailed comparison of the two texts is made by Bradbury, *Letter*, 59-62. See also Bradbury, *Letter*, p. 69:
58 ‘...the similarities between the accounts of events on Minorca and in Tarragona raise the possibility that
59 Consentius was more deeply involved in the composition of the *Epistula Severi* than we had suspected.’ For
60 further discussion and critical references, see fn. 61.
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advocated in ensnaring heterodox believers in *Epistula* 11*.⁴² At the very least Consentius had detailed knowledge of events and had helped Severus to compose his *Epistula*. As a Christian living on the islands Consentius could have been one of the many nameless Christian participants in the confrontation (only one Christian is named besides Severus, whereas many of the Jewish converts are named); but this article argues that Consentius was part of the discrete Christian circle that began the mobilisation against the Jews on Minorca, a circle which included Severus and Orosius.⁴³ Orosius and Consentius were both participants in the aggression against the Jewish Minorcan community, and it is therefore credible that they became acquainted during Orosius's visit to the island. It also seems that Orosius recounted the horrors of Priscillianism in Hispania to Consentius and showed him his own and Augustine's anti-Priscillianist writings, which motivated Consentius to compose his own.⁴⁴ Consentius's anti-Priscillianist works contained practical instructions on the cunning and craftiness needed to insinuate oneself with heterodox believers in order to expose their beliefs.⁴⁵ Consentius even composed a discourse written from a heterodox point of view for use in the undercover investigation of supposed Priscillianists.⁴⁶ It was these writings of Consentius, based on second-hand information from Orosius, that were sent to the monk Fronto around AD 418 and inspired his anti-heterodox campaign. We know of Consentius's writings, not because they survive, but because he refers to them in his *Epistula* 11* to

⁴² See *Ep.* 12* 13 (Divjak, 248-50). Augustine had written his treatise *Contra mendacium* in response to Consentius's *Epistula* 11*, apparently in horror at the tactics Consentius advocated in the letter. It is unsurprising that Consentius would then attempt to distance himself from the violent persecution of the Jewish community in Minorca, of which Augustine had not commented but could not be guaranteed to support.

⁴³ The possibility of a wider circle is suggested by Consentius's reference to 'others' (*ceteris*) present during what could have been the shared composition of the *Epistula Severi* or at least a retelling of events by Severus. Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 13, (Divjak, 248-50). (See above 11 and fn. 40 for quotation).

⁴⁴ Orosius wrote his *Commonitorium* to Augustine in refutation of Priscillianism and Origenism, and Augustine wrote the *Liber ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* in reply. Raymond Van Dam speculates following the same vein. R. Van Dam, 'Sheep in Wolves' Clothing': The Letters of Consentius to Augustine', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 37, no. 4, (1986) 529. Virginia Burrus understands that Orosius also supplied Jerome with information about Priscillianism in Hispania. Burrus, *The making of a heretic: gender, authority, and the Priscillianist controversy*, Berkeley, 1995, 138-9.

⁴⁵ *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 186).

⁴⁶ *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 186): ...*quem postquam plenius uniuersa condidici quam ob causam ex persona haeretici scripserim breuis praefatiunculae sermone signatur.*

1 Augustine, where he recounts, ostensibly verbatim, the tribulations of Fronto to reveal the
2 heterodox conspiracy in Tarragona and the considerable danger he faced in doing so.⁴⁷
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7 Consentius provides a frame for Fronto's story which is related in the first person. Fronto
8 recounts how he received an 'envelope' (*inuolucrum*) from Consentius via bishop Agapius
9 containing letters, memoranda, and books (*litteras et commonitoria et libros*) from
10 Consentius.⁴⁸ It is from these communications that Fronto learns of Severa, a woman of
11 heterodox belief who is the first target in Fronto's campaign.⁴⁹ Severa unsuspectingly reveals
12 the priest Severus to be in possession of three codices that contained heterodox material.
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22 These codices were seized by barbarians and passed into the hands of local bishops. Through
23 bribery the codices were restored to Severus, but Fronto's decision to make allegations
24 against Severus and Severa before an ecclesiastical tribunal rapidly escalated the situation,
25 intensifying hostile emotions with destructive and violent consequences. Fronto is forced to
26 seek sanctuary in a church and is subject to threats of violent attack from those he accuses.
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34 Various local bishops are drawn into the conflict, as is Count Asterius, an important military
35 commander who was related to Severus. The correspondence from Consentius that was
36 delivered by bishop Agapius is demanded to be shown at the tribunal, and on Fronto's refusal
37 the bishop tries to strangle him to death.⁵⁰ Whilst the tribunal is deliberating an attempt is
38 made to murder Fronto by a servant from Asterius's household. A complex perjury is
39 fabricated by Severus and various bishops who had previously received the dangerous
40 codices, which are then effectively stolen back from Severus in order to maintain the pretence
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51 ⁴⁷ For Consentius's claim to have related Fronto's narrative verbatim, see *Ep.* 11* 24 (Divjak, 222). For a more
52 detailed paraphrase of the letter, see Burrus, *The making of a heretic*, 115-20.

53 ⁴⁸ For Fronto's reception of the material sent by Consentius, see *Ep.* 11* 2 (Divjak, 186-8). The literature sent
54 from Consentius to Fronto is later demanded to be shown by bishop Agapius, who had originally delivered the
55 material, in order to ascertain why Fronto was persecuting 'innocent people' (*...ad persecutionem*
56 *innocentissimorum hominum...*). Fronto's purposeful evasion of the request prompts a violent attack on Fronto
57 by the bishop. *Ep.* 11* 10-11 (Divjak, 200-2). Agapius is a presumably local bishop whose see is unknown, and
58 who is the main challenger of Fronto.

59 ⁴⁹ *Ep.* 11* 2, (Divjak, 188).

60 ⁵⁰ *Ep.** 11 10-11, (Divjak, 200-2).

1 of innocence and propriety of the bishops. Fronto voices his suspicions of the cover-up but
2 oaths are sworn against Fronto's version of events and Bishop Sagittius demands that Fronto
3 immediately proves his suspicions or be stoned to death. Although Fronto successfully proves
4 his accusations the heterodox believers are restored to communion and the codices burnt.⁵¹
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6 Again Fronto is physically attacked by bishop Agapius, pounding him with blows and
7 punches. Fronto is forced to flee Tarragona, leaving the bishops with the promise of Christ's
8 judgement ringing in their ears.⁵² Fronto escapes to the sanctity of bishop Patroclus of Arles,
9 but the bishop could not enforce attendance at an ecclesiastical council in Beziers to resolve
10 the situation. Consentius suggests that an appeal to the emperor would be forthcoming.⁵³
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24 Unlike the near-contemporary Jewish controversy in Minorca where belief and faith were
25 central, the conflict in Tarragona was less concerned with what people believed and more
26 preoccupied with the defamation of character following the accusation of heterodoxy and the
27 damage to reputation. Fronto's narrative is ordered in two halves: the first half focuses on
28 Count Asterius and how the accusations jeopardise his reputation and that of his household;
29 the second half concentrates on the priest Severus and the bishops and their attempt to
30 conceal their deceit. Asterius's entire household is shaken by Fronto's accusation, including
31 Asterius's daughter.⁵⁴ It is this defamation that stirs up a great public anger against Fronto,
32 who faces reproach from the bishops, being confounded by the clerics, torn to pieces by the
33 heretics, accused by the count, spat upon by the soldiery, and stoned by the people.⁵⁵ As Van
34 Dam has previously emphasised, heterodox beliefs are not even specified as Priscillianist by
35 Fronto, whose finger-pointing does not provoke denial or attempts to prove innocence in a
36 doctrinal sense, but rather a scramble to retrieve the heterodox codices and cover up the affair
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56 ⁵¹ *Ep.* 11* 21, (Divjak, 220).

57 ⁵² *Ep.* 11* 22-23, (Divjak, 220-2).

58 ⁵³ *Ep.* 11* 24, (Divjak, 224).

59 ⁵⁴ *Ep.* 11* 7, (Divjak, 196).

60 ⁵⁵ *Ep.* 11* 10, (Divjak, 200).

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so as to retain the appearance of ecclesiastical propriety.⁵⁶ The accusation of heterodoxy against Severus rests not on non-orthodox belief or observance but on the possession of the heterodox codices. Much of Fronto's framed story is concerned with these codices passing from barbarian to bishop to priest, being secretly retrieved, edited and split. In the same way that possession of these codices is incriminating and proves the heterodoxy of the possessor, so the writings that Fronto carries from Consentius endorse his orthodoxy. These writings also come under scrutiny, being demanded to be shown by bishop Agapius, who had originally delivered the material, in order to ascertain why Fronto was persecuting 'innocent people'.⁵⁷ Fronto confidently refuses the bishops request, maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of Consentius's writings both from the contemporary audience at the synod and the reader of *Epistula 11**.

Unlike Bishop Severus, Fronto's actions were not disguised or excused by miraculous divine intervention; his inspiration, indeed, his instruction, came from Consentius's pen. The sacred relics of St Stephen that were central in the Jewish controversy find their equivalent in the heterodox codices, whose dangerous and subversive power, as the opposite of orthodox, cannot be sustained and must be destroyed. And just as the codices are treated vaguely – their contents are not divulged, and an attempt to read them publicly fails – so the relics of St Stephen are.⁵⁸ The *Epistula Severi* does not dwell on the relics; there is no *adventus* ceremony, and the text is unclear about how they arrived in the church or who received

⁵⁶ Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 515-517, including fn. 8, and 523. Noted also by Burrus, *The making of a heretic*, 116. For an opposite view see Frend, 'A new eyewitness', 337, fn. 35. Possibly in a related sense, Anne Kurdock notes that the anti-Pelagian *De vera humilitate* does not directly name Pelagius or his followers. A. Kurdock, 'Demetrias ancilla dei: Anicia Demetrias and the problem of the missing patron', in *Religion, Dynasty and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900*, ed. by K. Cooper and J. Hilner, Cambridge, 2007, 216 fn. 109. P. Brown, *Religion and society in the age of St. Augustine*, London, 1972, 216-17, notes the initial reluctance of Augustine and other Pelagian opponents to name him directly.

⁵⁷ *Ep. 11** 10, (Divjak, 200): ...*ad persecutionem innocentissimorum hominum...*

⁵⁸ *Ep. 11** 20, (Divjak, 218) for the attempt to read aloud the codices and the effect they have on the listeners.

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them.⁵⁹ Christ is the most powerful name who is often invoked, with Stephen and his relics featuring explicitly hardly at all. Where religious intolerance focuses on the Jewish community in Minorca it is place and space that directs the narrative, whereas in Tarragona texts, letters and books are most prominent and powerful. In Minorca place is solidly affirmed, occupied and marked out as territory, being firmly divided between communities along religious lines. Armed with relics the bishop Severus successfully motivates his diocese against a neighbouring religious group whilst remaining within his own community and place. In Tarragona the religious division in the community is acknowledged but does not become absolute and damaging in the same sense; those who are accused of holding heterodox beliefs are ultimately reaffirmed into the Christian communion without rehabilitation or recrimination. Where Severus's attempt to divide the community in Minorca is successful, Fronto's attempt ultimately fails, and he suffers the most for it. Conversely the monk Fronto, whose authority is ambiguous as a *famulus Christi* ('servant of Christ'), is transient and his attempt to infiltrate an unknown community is more problematic where the division between heterodox and orthodox Christian is harder to distinguish than Christian and Jew in Minorca.⁶⁰ Fronto's credibility is undermined by his assumption of a false identity, and his transference to an unknown community renders him alone and powerless against a society that is ultimately united against him.⁶¹ Severus's authority, perhaps unsurprisingly in his own representation of events, is never questioned.

⁵⁹ See Bradbury, *Letter*, 126, fn. 4.

⁶⁰ *Ep.* 11* 1, (Divjak, 184), 12 (Divjak, 204). Augustine uses a similar phrase, *servus Dei*, to describe Fronto. Augustine, *Contra mendacium* 4. The Christian and Jewish communities in Minorca were physically divided by distance, with the Jewish community and synagogue in Magona and the Christians occupying Jamona. See *Ep. Sev.* 2.5-4 (Bradbury, 80-2). Compare with the Alexandrian Jews who, in their conflict with the Christians, wore rings made of the bark of the palm tree for recognition. Socrates, *HE*, 7.13, in *Sokrates Kirchengeschichte, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*, G. C. Hansen, Berlin, 1995, 358.

⁶¹ Van Dam, 'The Letters of Consentius to Augustine', 523, likens Fronto's flight out of Tarragona to that of 'a condemned heretic.'

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The notion that Consentius rather than Severus authored the *Epistula Severi* is connected to a wider critical trend that sees Consentius as the driving force behind the Minorcan conflict, a concept that would logically extend to Fronto's activities in Tarragona.⁶² And although it is clear that Fronto received specific and compelling instruction from Consentius, the information that formed the basis of Consentius's directive against heterodoxy derived from Orosius.⁶³ In contrast to previous critical interpretations, it is possible to build a convincing case that Orosius rather than Consentius inspired intolerance. In Orosius we find a peculiar blend of dynamic and self-determining fanaticism with an aligned authority and expedient itinerancy, as well as an echo of Consentius's self-education. It is likely that Orosius's sudden appearance on Minorca with his credentials and sacred fragments incited both Severus and Consentius. Orosius had built a personal association with Augustine and Jerome, which could be confirmed by the writings of all three. Orosius had been a recent key participant in the case brought against Pelagius in the Holy Land, being called as a witness by bishop John of Jerusalem and having personal communication with Pelagius himself. Orosius's reliability in bearing letters and his inclination for travel was a powerful currency when the relics of St Stephen were discovered and swiftly distributed. An author and authority himself, Orosius seems to have been a vital source of knowledge for Priscillianism in Hispania even in the

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62 Consentius has been described as the 'father' of the *Epistula Severi* and the driving force behind Christian mobilisation against the Minorcan Jews. J. Amengual i Batle, *Els Orígens Del Cristianisme a les Balears i el seu desenvolupament fins a l'època musulmana*, (Palma de Mallorca, 1991), vol. 1, p. 215. This view is echoed by Hillgarth: 'His [Consentius's] love for controversy (with both Priscillianists and Pelagians) and for intrigue makes him, as Amengual suggests, the ideal person to have masterminded the sensational events that produced the very rapid conversion of the Jews of Mahon in 418.' J. N. D. Hillgarth, Review of *Els orígens del cristianisme a les Balears i el seu desenvolupament fins a l'època musulmana*, by J. Amengual i Batle, *Speculum*, vol. 69, no. 3 (1994), 731. Bradbury interprets the lexical parallels between the *Epistula Severi* and Consentius's *Epistula 11** as significant, centering Consentius within the sphere of power that directed events in Minorca. Bradbury does not consider the potential extent of Orosius's role in events, and denies the collusion of thought between Orosius and Severus. Bradbury, *Severus of Minorca*, 53.

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63 Orosius's influence on Consentius has been tentatively recognised by modern critics, but not fully explored. Frend considered it probable that Orosius and Consentius met during Orosius's visit to Minorca, and that Orosius was the direct motivation for Fronto's mission to uncover the heterodox conspiracy in Hispania: 'The effect of his sudden appearance was to stimulate Consentius into rabid action against the Priscillianists resulting eventually in Fronto's mission of deceit in 418.' Frend, 'A new eyewitness', 337. See Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 528, cited below fn. 65.

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early fifth century.⁶⁴ If Orosius is the shadowy figure in Consentius's *Epistula* 12*, the 'holy and venerable man' with whom Consentius scratches his theological itches, the impact Orosius had on Consentius was certainly considerable, as Van Dam has argued.⁶⁵ Although not in his polemical literary style, in terms of physical movement Consentius is passive: when pressed by Augustine to visit him in order to read some of his works and receive gentle theological correction, Consentius seems unwilling to travel and never makes the journey. And yet his letters are characterised by a distinct dissatisfaction with the texts he has available to him, and also with the lack of stimulating and learned Christian society in the 'cultural backwater' of Minorca.⁶⁶ Orosius, by contrast, is especially active, disrupting the quiet communities in Minorca with tales of saints from the Holy Land, personal recount of influential ecclesiastics like Augustine and Jerome, and valuable knowledge of contemporary heterodoxy in Hispania.

The argument that Orosius exerted a considerable influence on Consentius and Severus finds evidence in the ancient literature, but the tendency towards anonymity that characterises Consentius's *Epistulae* and the *Epistula Severi* allows only provisional conclusions.⁶⁷

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⁶⁴ Burrus recognises Orosius's *Commonitorium* as the earliest source that uses the term 'Priscillianist'. Burrus, *The making of a heretic*, 166 n. 7.

⁶⁵ Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 9, 10 (Divjak, 240-2, 242): ...*sancti ac uenerabilis uiri*... See *Ep.* 12* 9, 10, 13, 14, for reference to Consentius's unnamed associate (Divjak, 240-2, 242, 246-8, 250). Van Dam has argued for the identification with Orosius. Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 528. Consentius has been suggested as the author of the *Quaestiones Orosii et responsiones Augustini*, and it is possible that he makes reference to the work in his *Ep.* 12* 5 (Divjak, 236). Van Dam concludes that Orosius's effect on Consentius was powerful and 'expanded...[his] intellectual horizons – and pretensions – considerably'. Van Dam, 'The letters of Consentius to Augustine', 528.

⁶⁶ Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 4, 5 (Divjak, 234, 236) on the unwelcome solitude of Minorca and the rarity of learned Christian company. Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 1, 2 (Divjak, 230, 232) on the (puzzling) aversion Consentius readily admits to reading, particularly Augustine's *Confessiones*, finding Scripture and Lactantius only slightly more palatable. Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 6 (Divjak, 236) where he claims to have come to Minorca to wear away his days in leisure and inertia. In *Ep.* 120.1 (Goldbacher, 169, vol. 2) Augustine exhorts Consentius to do what he had not yet done, to visit him so as to read some of his works and to receive correction in theological matters from Augustine personally. There is no evidence that Consentius fulfilled Augustine's request and visited him in north Africa. In *Ep.* 12* 13 (Divjak, 248) Consentius alludes to his intention to travel being disrupted by the providential recall to study Scripture. The description of Minorca as a 'cultural backwater' in the early fifth century belongs to Frend, 'A new eyewitness', 338.

⁶⁷ For an example of the desire for anonymity, see Consentius, *Ep.* 12* 13 (Divjak, 250).

1 Severus describes how a ‘certain priest, conspicuous for his sanctity’ brought the relics of St
2 Stephen from Jerusalem to Minorca.⁶⁸ The messenger is Orosius, and the importance of his
3 actions are not underplayed but nowhere is his identity confirmed. Although the *Epistula*
4 *Severi* is initially addressed to the universal brotherhood of the entire world, there are two
5 instances where the addressee is more specifically identified as ‘your Blessedness’ (*beatitudo*
6 *vestra*).⁶⁹ Similarly Consentius’s *Epistula* 12* refers to an important individual, a ‘leader’ or
7 *dux* for whom Consentius promised to produce some rhetorical ‘weapons’ against the Jews.⁷⁰
8 Both Severus and Consentius could be referring to Orosius as the stimulus behind the
9 proactive intolerance of non-orthodox Christianity, primarily against the Jews in Minorca and
10 then Priscillianists in Hispania.
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45 Furthermore, the distinctive imagery of fiery zeal that describes Orosius resonates in the
46 writings of Consentius and Severus, suggesting the active circulation of letters and writings,
47 and not only those authored by the bearer. In a letter from around AD 415 to Jerome,
48 Augustine describes Orosius as ‘a pious young man’, ‘keen-spirited, swift to speak, and full
49 of zeal’.⁷¹ Augustine adds that he came to him ‘prompted only by burning zeal in regard to
50 the Holy Scriptures’.⁷² Similarly burning with desire, Consentius describes Fronto as ‘...a
51 man in whom the Holy Spirit kindles the most ardent flames of zeal for the faith...’.⁷³ The
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⁶⁸ *Ep. Sev.* 4.1 (Bradbury, 82): ...*presbyter quidam sanctitate praecipuus ab Hierosolyima veniens...*

⁶⁹ *Ep. Sev.*, [preface]: *Sanctissimis ac beatissimis dominis episcopis, presbyteris, diaconibus et universae fraternitati totius orbis terrarum, Severus episcopus misericordia Dei indigens et omnium ultimus in Christo Redemptore nostro aeternam salutem.* For the more specific addressee, see 8.2 and 31 (Bradbury, 86, 122).

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 12*, 13 (Divjak, 250): ...*<ut> aliqua aduersus Iudaeos quorum proeliis urgebatur duci nostro arma producerem, ea tamen lege, ut officio nomen penitus sileretur.*

⁷¹ Augustine, *Ep.* 166, 1.2: *Ecce uenit ad me religiosus iuuenis, catholica pace frater, aetate filius, honore compresbyter noster Orosius, uigil ingenio, promptus eloqui, flagrans studio...*

⁷² Augustine, *Ep.* 169: ...*solo sanctorum Scripturarum ardore inflammatus aduenit...* In S. Aureli Augustini *Hipponiensis Episcopi Epistulae*, ed. by A. Goldbacher, vol. 3, Vienna, 1895-1923, 621. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-203)*, Washington, 1955, 61.

⁷³ Consentius *Ep.* 11* 1 (Divjak, 184): *Verum accidit, ut quidam famulus Christi nomine Fronto cui spiritus sanctus flagrantissimas fidelis zeli suggerit flammis subitus adueniret...* In Consentius’s *Ep.* 11* 24 (Divjak, 224), following the failed attempt to convene an ecclesiastical council after the book-burning in Tarragona, Patroclus and the Gallic bishops are enflamed by the fire of a greater zeal and will appeal for imperial intervention.

1 same imagery appears in the *Epistula Severi* as the driving force behind Christian anti-
2 Semitic hostility: the relics of St Stephen kindle a zeal for the faith that fires Christian hearts
3 in their pursuit of wayward souls in need of correction.⁷⁴ The encyclical letter ends with an
4 exhortation to take up Christ's zeal against the Jews, for the sake of their eternal salvation.⁷⁵
5 Orosius's first line of defence against his charge of blasphemy by bishop John of Jerusalem is
6 that out of his own faith and zeal for Christ he was obliged to call attention to the wolves
7 caught within the flock of sheep.⁷⁶ This shared imagery of fiery zeal is revealing in two
8 senses: one, in practical terms it illuminates the trans-Mediterranean Christian network that
9 exchanged letters and texts as well as visitors, advertising the associations between
10 individuals; and two, in the same way that modern criticism has identified the zealous
11 dynamism at the origins of intolerance in the early fifth century, so there was an ancient
12 recognition. But, perhaps in opposition to more cautious and critical modern scepticism, the
13 ancient perspective as represented in the sources here discussed saw the committed Christian
14 zeal that obstinately demanded orthodox hegemony in desirable terms, as a quality to admire,
15 eulogise and imitate.

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39 The critical reception of both episodes has previously focused on their fiction or reality, with
40 less attention given to the remarkable actions contained within the narratives.⁷⁷ Both
41 incidences are characterised by considerable and sustained violence. Fronto's testimony is
42 marked with the persistent threat and realisation of violence against him. Although there is
43 little stylistic evidence to suggest obvious exaggeration, as a complainant and victim Fronto

51 ⁷⁴ *Ep. Sev.* 4.3-5 (Bradbury, 82-4): *Statim siquidem tepor noster incaluit et factum est cor nostrum, sicut*
52 *scriptum est, 'ardens in via'. Nunc enim iam illud fidei amburebat zelus, nunc spes salvandae multitudinis*
53 *erigebat.*

54 ⁷⁵ *Ep. Sev.* 31.2 (Bradbury, 124): *Quamobrem si indigni et peccatoris verbum dignanter admittitis, zelum Christi*
55 *adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem perpetua salute suscipite.*

56 ⁷⁶ Orosius, *Liber apologeticus contra pelagium de arbitrii libertate*, 1 (Zangemeister, 603). For Orosius's use of
57 the imagery of 'zeal' in the *Historiae adversus paganos*, see 1.Pref.5; 7.29.2; 7.29.4; and 7.42.17 (Arnaud-
58 Lindet, vol. 1: 7; vol. 3: 80, 80, 127).

59 ⁷⁷ For the debate over the authenticity of the *Epistula Severi*, see Bradbury, *Letter*, 9-16. For the contention that
60 Fronto's heterodoxy-hunting in Tarragona is fabricated, see Bachrach, 'Review', 1168.

1 does not attempt to downplay or conceal the physical aggression he suffers. Conversely the
2 conflict and hostility in the *Epistula Severi* is euphemistically concealed. But the silence and
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4 absence within the account cannot disguise the physical intimidation, terror and threat of
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6 violence or death that coerced the Minorcan Jews into conversion. The synagogue did not
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8 spontaneously combust nor was it divinely ignited; it was deliberately burnt to the ground by
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10 the Christians, and the objects that made it holy were removed. The Christian method of
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12 occupation was a non-peaceful, illegal and invasive protest movement. The Christians were
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14 happy to occupy Jewish homes to ensure eventual success, and only departed following the
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16 conversion of every single Jew. The righteous aggression of the Minorcan Christians was
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18 enshrined in a public document intended to be promulgated throughout the Christian world.
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20 Severus did not expect a hostile reception, and the evidence suggests that he did not get one.⁷⁸
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29 When considering events on Minorca it is possible to conclude that the status of Christian
30
31 orthodox authorities and followers in the early fifth century had increased to such an extent
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33 that they were no longer constrained by societal and legislative norms. As a result illegal
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35 occupation, harassment, coercion, theft, violence and the threat of violence were acceptable if
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37 the cause was justified. Severus considered his mission to be not only vindicated, but that it
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39 would be publicly received as such. Similarly Fronto's pretence of heterodoxy and his tactics
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41 of deception as advocated by Consentius were made public without hesitation or mitigation.
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45 The violence against Fronto and the deep-rooted conspiracy that effectively rejected
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47 accusations of heterodoxy implicated those within the lay Christian community as well as the
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49 hierarchy of the church, including numerous bishops. This leaves us with a particularly
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51 disjointed and disharmonious image of the church in Hispania, where regional differences
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59 ⁷⁸ The Letter was greeted with applause when read aloud as part of a sermon in Uzalis around AD 420. Evodius,
60 *De miraculis Sancti Stephani protomartyris libri duo ad Evodium*, in *PL*, ed. by J. P. Migne, 41 (1841) 835.
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1 were considerable and loyalties within the closed ranks of communities had more power than
2 the ecclesiastical hierarchies the church was able to enforce.
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7 This article has argued that, with the relics of St Stephen, Paulus Orosius brought a peculiarly
8 vehement and absolute intolerance of non-orthodox Christianity to Minorca. Endorsed and
9 enabled by a network of Christians around the Mediterranean connected by travelling texts,
10 letter writing, and the movement of people, the itinerant and seemingly restless presbyter was
11 a key and active member whose wanderings were not without mission. Orosius was able to
12 disseminate his ideology of intolerance and translate it into action through his influence on
13 other individual Christians like Severus and Consentius, who were then able to exert this
14 intolerance in a wider sense.⁷⁹ The previous lack of critical recognition afforded to Orosius as
15 an instigator of religious conflict, revised by the argument of this article, alters an
16 understanding of religious intolerance, particularly in its origins. In addition, it augments our
17 comprehension of how Christian communities were structured, how they operated and
18 impinged on one another, and how significant carved-out Christian authority could be,
19 existing outside of the institutionalised church.⁸⁰
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41 Orosius, like Jerome, was not a bishop. But if ecclesiastical authority is central, the example
42 of Orosius demonstrates how potentially powerful peripheral Christian authority was. An
43 interpretation that centralises Orosius also foregrounds communication and contact between
44 Christians: intolerance in Minorca can be considered within a wider, trans-Mediterranean
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53 ⁷⁹ The network of Christians this article has focused on includes Augustine, Jerome, Orosius, Consentius,
54 Severus and Fronto, but could be narrowed or widened depending on the chosen perspective, particularly
55 through the exchange of letters. Elizabeth A. Clark discusses the role of networks in the Origen and Pelagian
56 controversies. *The cultural construction of an early Christian debate*, Princeton, 1992.

57 ⁸⁰ Orosius is described as a presbyter, but if the biographical interpolation of the *Historiae* is correct, he
58 abandoned his Christian community following barbarian incursion. See, for example, Orosius, *Historiae* 5.1-2.
59 Arnaud-Lindet gives serious consideration to the theoretical biography of Orosius interpolated from his
60 writings. Arnaud-Lindet, *Orose*, vol. 1, ix-xiii.
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1 movement, which is perhaps negated if the sedentary Consentius is considered pivotal.
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3 However, the obscurity of Orosius within these two controversies is more complex than a
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5 result of inadequate critical scrutiny. The evidence is circumstantial, intertextual, and
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7 allusive: the argument of this article rests principally on the fortuitous coincidence of dates
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9 and journeys, the intertextual proliferation of the imagery of fiery zeal, and the textual
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11 allusions of both Severus and Consentius to a leader. The tendency towards anonymity
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13 further complicates a full understanding of events, especially in terms of attribution and
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15 accountability. The deliberate disassociation of Orosius in the writings of Consentius and
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17 Severus is reflected in Consentius's desire for anonymity, the muted and then silenced
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19 mention of Orosius in the writings of Augustine, and Orosius's anonymity in his own
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21 writings.⁸¹ However, the absence of a triumphant *Epistula Orosii* does not negate his
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23 centrality in disseminating intolerance, an intolerance that was part of a wider movement in
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25 the early fifth century against any form of religious belief or practise that was not considered
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27 to be orthodox, and one that was most keenly embodied in the character of Orosius.
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48 ⁸¹ Despite the critical perception of the importance of what have been perceived as the biographical passages in
49 the *Historiae adversus paganos*, the narrative voice is not explicitly associated with Orosius. Anonymity can be
50 connected with extremes of brevity and humility, both of which Orosius exhibits a tendency towards in his
51 writings. Augustine's *Epistula* 179 is a further example of reference to Orosius but without explicitly naming
52 him. Augustine's letter to Bishop John of Jerusalem requested the *acta* of the Council of Diospolis that
53 exonerated Pelagius in 415. Augustine opens the letter by telling John that he is not at all offended not having
54 received a letter from him, and would rather believe that no messenger was available rather than to suspect that
55 John held him in low esteem. Augustine's caustically ironic comment would find flesh with John, knowing (as
56 Augustine suspects that he did) that Orosius was such an available messenger, sailing directly from the Holy
57 Land to north Africa. Augustine, *Ep.* 179 in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi epistulae*, ed. by A.
58 Goldbacher, vol. 3, *CSEL*, Vienna, 1895-1923, 691-697. Trans. by W. Parsons, *Letters. Volume IV, (165-203)*,
59 Washington, 1955, 110-117. This anonymity extends to the *Quaestiones Orosii et responsiones Augustini*, for
60 whom no author is known.
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