410: Honorius, his Rooster, and the Eunuch (Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.25–26)

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Abstract

In his *Wars* (*De Bellis*), Procopius shares an extraordinary tale about Emperor Honorius, who allegedly heard about the plunder of Rome from his poultry keeper. First, Honorius misunderstood the report because he also had a huge rooster that bore the same name as that of the city. Therefore, the central element of the tale is the misunderstanding between the emperor and his eunuch about the name "Rome." However, the structural features of Procopius' work – the rooster and its keeper together – form a narrative in which a fowl and Rome were not two entities but one. The possibility of being a monarch ruling over the Eastern and the Western sides of the empire, his aim guarded by the keeper, could have worried Honorius. This paper aims to reveal the historical event behind Procopius' tale and its circumstances, that is, a meeting in mid-January 409 when Rome's first siege was reported to Honorius by Terentius, who had taken an active part in securing the emperor's prospective reign. It was in vain because Honorius was blinded by the possibility of becoming a monarch from the moment when he received the report of Arcadius' death.

In his description of the sacking of Rome on August 24, 410 AD,[1] Procopius shares an improbable tale from the Western Roman court. According to him, when Honorius was in Ravenna, he received a message from a eunuch, namely his poultry keeper (ὀρνιθοκόμος, lat. *aviarius, pullarius*), about the destruction of Rome. As stated in the *Wars*, the emperor first misunderstood the news and cried out, "He just ate from my hands!"[2] because he had a large rooster[3] who also bore the name Rome. The poultry keeper comprehended his master's words and said that it was the city that had fallen at the hands of Alaric. Procopius bitterly concludes the story with the statement: "So great, they say, was the stupidity of this emperor."[4] The central element of Procopius' story is the misunderstanding between the emperor and his eunuch, caused by the name Rome. This paper investigates the following questions: What event was this meeting based on? Who was hidden behind the poultry keeper?

Although the *Wars* is full of anecdotes, no one has tried to decipher the function of these stories until Kaldellis, who is the first to address several questions concerning the Persian stories (Procop. *Pers*. I, 2–6).[5] Mészáros verifies that Procopius employed Herodotean literary techniques to depict the moral deterioration leading to the war.[6] Nevertheless, researchers studying late antiquity still neglect the anecdotes of Procopius, including the rooster tale, in which they perceive either an undeniable example of Honorius' cowardice or merely Ravenna serving as a safe place.[7] Others might base their thoughts on the ambiguity of the name Rome (Ῥώμη/ῥώμη), which either means the city or a person's physical strength,[8] even though this approach neglects the presence of the

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1 For the latest results about the sacking of Rome, see Lipps & Machado & von Rummel (2013).

2 Procop. *Vand.* 1.2.25: Καίτοι ἔναγχος ἐδήδοκεν ἐκ χειρῶν τῶν ἐμῶν. Transl. Kaldellis (2014: p. 147).

3 On general review of the poultry in the Graeco-Roman world, see Toynbee (1973: pp. 256–257).

4 Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.26: τοσαύτη ἀμαθία τὸν βασιλέα τοῦτον ἔχεσθαι λέγουσι. Transl. Kaldellis (2014: p. 147).

5 Kaldellis (2004: pp. 62–93); Kaldellis (2010: pp. 253–272).

6 Mészáros (2014: pp. 175–177).

7 Gibbon and the subsequent scholarly literature authors have been credited much for the story of Procopius. Thus, Honorius has been viewed as a weak and infantile possessor of the imperial throne, neglecting his rule, contrary to the fact that he held the Western Empire for three decades; e.g., Gibbon (1781: p. 466); Gillett (2001: pp. 158–159); Näf (1995: p. 87); Elton (2018: p. 180). For a detailed historiography of Honorius, see Doyle (2018: pp. 1–30).

8 For Rome/strength (*nomen/omen*), see Lateiner (2005: pp. 45–55). The wish-fulfillment meaning of strength is common in Greek historiography. It can be found in the *Cynegeticus* (X. *Cyn*. 7.5), where Xenophon offers a list of the suitable names for hunting hounds. Later, the city of Rome also incorporated this characteristic when Plutarch in his *Life of Romulus* considered the birth of Rome. According to him, the city's name came from the Pelasgians, who, after they had conquered many, established themselves, and on the record of their strength (ῥώμη) in arms, they named that place Rome. For further examples and connotations, see Erskine (1997: pp. 368–383). The military prowess meaning would be applicable to Honorius' tale; however, the *Wars* contains two similar anecdotes (oracles), in which the misinterpretation gave rise to the ambiguity between a personal or common name and its Latin interpretation. During the early stage of the Gothic War, Mundo's name (μυνδυς) caused confusion among the Romans, which meant not simply the general but the world (*mundus*) as well (Procop. *Goth*. 1.7.8). In another part of the *Wars*, some patricians considered that the Gothic siege of Rome would end in July because a recited oracle mentioned the "month of Quintilis" (θυιντιλι μενσε). Some thought that the siege started in March, from which July is the fifth month, while others believed that it was because March was the first month until the reign of Numa (Procop. *Goth*. 1.24.28). In these cases, Procopius makes the basis of the ambiguities

poultry keeper.[9] Therefore, this paper aims to find a clear historical event that could explain this anecdote together with its actors. The next three sections are thus devoted to the tale's structural features – the rooster and its keeper. Through these sections, it is emphasized that the meeting between Honorius and his poultry keeper occurred in mid-January 409, the rooster represented the prospect of Honorius' Eastern reign, while the poultry keeper was the man who was taking care of Honorius to be able to realize this aim. Overall, Procopius' anecdote describes the event when Honorius received his eunuch's report of Rome's desperate situation after the city's first blockade in mid-January 409.

I. The story in the middle

The misfortunes of Italy were rooted in the consequences of Emperor Arcadius' death. While Alaric was holding Italy under ceaseless pressure, Constantine declared himself the Western Roman Emperor in Britannia in 407, then shortly established his position in Gaul. However, both of them were facing the challenge of Stilicho, the *magister militum*, who was not only capable of cutting short Alaric's frequent incursions but also had a plan against Constantine. These balanced conditions were broken in May 408 when a courier entered Ravenna with the message of Arcadius' death. In agreement with Zosimus' account, Honorius prepared to leave Ravenna to stand behind the imperial playground of the seven-year-old Theodosius II.[10] However, Stilicho convinced him that the best solution might be for the emperor to send Alaric with some Roman forces to Gaul while enabling Stilicho to travel to Constantinople as Honorius' deputy.[11] However, Stilicho's proposal failed due to the resistance of Olympius *magister officiorum*, who provoked a mutiny against him, whispering that Stilicho's goal was to overthrow the young Theodosius and to transfer the jurisdiction of the east to his own son, Eucherius.[12]

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clear, as he does it in Honorius' tale, too; therefore, in this present reading, the word's military prowess meaning is negligible.

9   Through an examination of how Claudian presents Eutropius, Shaun Tougher has found that the figure of the eunuch could generally be exploited as a symbol of disunity and could represent the feminine east in opposition to the manly west, all depending on the context and the motivations of authors; Tougher (2015: pp. 147–163).

10 Zos. 5.31.3.: ὅ τε γὰρ Στελίχων εἰς τὴν ἑῴαν ἐβούλετο διαβῆναι καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὸν Ἀρκαδίου παῖδα Θεοδόσιον διαθεῖναι, νέον ὄντα καὶ κηδεμονίας δεόμενον, ὅ τε βασιλεὺς Ὀνώριος αὐτὸς στέλλεσθαι τὴν ὁδὸν ταύτην διενοεῖτο, καὶ ὅσα πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν τῆς τοῦ νέου βασιλείας οἰκονομῆσαι. The author of the *Historia Augusta* had a harsh judgment of child-emperors, which might reflect the ruling opinion at the end of the fourth century. *Hist. Aug. Tacitus* 6.5–6.: *di avertant principes pueros et patres patriae dici impuberes et quibus ad subscribendum magistri litterarii manus teneant, quos ad consulatus dandos dulcia et circuli et quaecumque voluptas puerilis invitet. quae (malum) ratio est habere imperatorem, qui famam curare non noverit, qui quid sit res publica nesciat, nutritorem timeat, respiciat ad nutricem, virgarum magistralium ictibus terrorique subiaceat, faciat eos consules, duces, iudices quorum vitam, merita, aetates, familias, gesta non norit.*

11 Zos. 5.31.5–6.

12 This gossip did not stand without a basis because Stilicho built solid marital ties with the Theodosian dynasty over the years. First, he married Serena, the niece of Emperor Theodosius I. Through this relationship, he was able to establish his loyalty to Theodosius, who assigned him as the guardian of Honorius.

Olympius' malicious talk apparently found its way to the sympathetic ear of Honorius, who ordered Stilicho's execution in August 408.[13] With his death, the main obstacle had been eliminated for Alaric, who thus found an already empty road to Rome. Arriving in November 408, he immediately took control over the Tiber, causing famine behind the walls and breaking down the citizens' resistance until the fall of Rome in 410.

The sacking of Rome generated a powerful response among the authors of that era and later times.[14] Procopius' chapter about the siege does not concentrate merely on Rome but on the entire political context, examining the events across the empire, from Constantinople to Britain.[15] However, his chronology is inconsistent.[16] While in the introductory part, he carefully lists the German tribes under Honorius, covering their customs and faith, and details how the Visigoths marched westward and started the siege of Rome, Procopius neglects to differentiate among the three sieges of the city from 408 to 410, which are well-known from Zosimus and others. His narrative goes on until late 409, when Alaric declared Priscus Attalus the emperor of the Romans, shortly after the second siege of the city.[17] At this point, Procopius' attention shifts from Rome to the rebellion in Britain, Constantine III' appointment as emperor, and its consequences,[18] followed by the destruction of the Roman flotilla near Libya and Attalus' loss of Alaric's protection in the summer of 410. At the end of the chapter, Procopius mentions the death of Alaric, then the fall of Constantine III and Co-Emperor Constans II (410 and 411, respectively), and finally refers to the Ostrogoths crossing the Danube (454).[19] On this account, the chapter's chronology is broken at the point when Alaric settled at the

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This position became profitable for Stilicho, whose eldest daughter Maria married Honorius in 395, and after her death in 408, Thermantia, Stilicho's other daughter, received Maria's place in the marriage bed. As Claudian states, Stilicho likewise expected to have his son Eucherius marry Galla Placidia, the half-sister of Honorius (Claud. *Cons. Stil.* 2.352–361).

13   Olymp. *Hist. Frg.* 3. Olympiodorus saw the murder of Stilicho as one of the reasons for the sacking, even though it was a consequence of Arcadius' death.

14   The accounts about the sacking of Rome from the most important contemporary authors have been either completely lost or retained only in a fragmentary form. The Western authors either tendentiously evaluated the events from a certain ecclesiastical point of view (e.g., Orosius) or only mentioned the fall of Rome (e.g., Hydatius), until the Eastern authors could establish their notions on a contemporary foundation. This basis was Olympiodorus, who lived in the court of Theodosius II, to whom he dedicated his work the *History*, which is now lost. However, according to Photius, who excerpted Olympiodorus' work for his *Bibliotheca*, the *History* covered the years 407 to 425. Olympiodorus himself considered it a "raw material"; however, this thought did not drive later authors away from using his work. Examples are Sozomen and Zosimus; the latter and his *New History* not only started with the same date as that of Olympiodorus' work, but he followed the timeline, perspective, and word usage of his source, as Matthews notes. It seems that at the turn of the sixth century, Olympiodorus' work was the common denominator for the authors, which is today partly detectable through Zosimus. See Matthews (1970: p. 82).

15   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.

16   Zos. 5.38–6.13; cf. Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.

17   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.28; cf. Zos. 6.7.1.

18   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.31–33; cf. Zos. 5.27.1–2, 6.3.1.

19   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.36 (destruction of the Roman fleet, Attalus lost Alaric's support), 1.2.37 (death of Alaric, Constantine , and Constans II), 1.2.38 (Romans unable to recover Britain), 1.2.39 (Ostrogoths crossing the Danube).

walls of Rome in November 408 because Procopius compresses the city's three sieges into one, then goes back on track to late 409 when Alaric elected Priscus Attalus as (counter)emperor.

The tale about Honorius and his rooster is located exactly where the chronology becomes inconsistent – within an impressive structure. Procopius is unique among the authors who deal with the sacking of Rome because he is the only one who describes two versions of how the Visigoths entered the city. According to his first version, Alaric formed a plan after wasting a lot of time with the blockade. He selected three hundred young men from his army and secretly told them that he would donate them to the patricians of Rome as slaves. However, at midday on the appointed day and when their masters would most likely be asleep after their meal, those three hundred young men rushed to the gates of Salaria, killed the guards, and opened the gates.[20] In his second version, the three hundred young soldiers of Alaric did not open the gates at midday; instead, a few slaves of a Roman noblewoman did so upon her orders at night because she pitied the starving inhabitants.[21] The tale about Honorius and his rooster is gently framed by these versions of how Alaric gained entry into the city.

Similar framing structures are not unique in the *Wars*. During the endgame of the Gothic war, Procopius also shares two versions of an event; in this case, they are about the death of Totila, the penultimate king of the Ostrogoths, who suffered a fatal wound at the Battle of Taginae. Again, these versions are separated by a third thought.[22] According to the first story, a Gepid from the Roman army intended to thrust his spear into Totila's back during the fight, without knowing who he was. However, a man of Totila's household, who followed his master, saw the Gepid's attempt and cried out, "What's this, you dog? Are you rushing to strike your own master?"[23] Even so, the Gepid threw his spear and injured the king of the Ostrogoths. Totila escaped from the battlefield to the Caprae palace, where his men tried to treat his wound; however, he died not long after that incident. According to the second story, his death occurred differently because during the retreat of the Gothic army, a Roman arrow accidentally struck Totila, who wore the attire of a simple soldier and stood at a random place in the phalanx.[24] Although the rest of the story remains the same, and as it is in the case of the sacking of Rome, the two stories frame a third.

Another similarity between the story pairs – despite the numerous differences in content – is the structural pattern. The first halves of the pairs of stories are both based on Herodotus' account. The narrative about the young Goth who cried out to Totila's assailant is based on the *Histories*, where Croesus' mute son also audibly warned his father when a Persian tried to kill him in Sardis.[25] Procopius' description of Rome's siege is also

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20 Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.14–24.

21 Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.27.

22 Procop. *Goth*. 4.32.22–35.

23 Procop. *Goth*. 4.32.24. Transl. Kaldellis (2014: p. 536).

24 Procop. *Goth*. 4.32.33–35.

25 Hdt. 1.85.4; cf. Procop. *Goth*. 4.32.24; Benedicty (1960: p. 80).

based on Herodotus' work, taking the siege of Babylon by the Persians as a sample.[26] Both Dareios and Alaric wasted a lot of time during the siege,[27] which resulted in each of them planning to transfer the traitor(s) to the besieged city,[28] have them gain the confidence of their host,[29] and then, on the appointed day, have them open the gates and usher their master and his army into the city.[30] The second halves of the pairs of stories both start with the same "But some say" phrase.[31] An implication of these structural similarities hypothesizes that the story in the middle has an analogous relation with the texts surrounding it.

The middle story might explain the cause of the events framing it. In the case of Rome, Procopius explains an improbable anecdote about Honorius; nonetheless, concerning Totila's death, he proposes a more reasonable interpretation that supports the notion that the middle story explains the cause of the events. As stated in the *Wars*, the cause of Totila's enduring success and sudden fall was the goddess of fortune and prosperity of a city, Tyche, who demonstrated her contradictory character when she neglected Totila for a long time and suddenly eliminated him.[32] In Procopius' perception, the alternating nature of Tyche's attention thus caused Totila's death; meanwhile, the versions of his death – framing this explanation – are secondary. With Rome, Procopius puts Honorius (instead of a deity) in the middle story, where Honorius misunderstood his eunuch when the latter was reporting the fall of Rome. Taken together, the chronological slip and the structural similarities show a definite cause-and-effect relation between the middle story and those framing it. Accordingly, the meeting between Honorius and his poultry keeper occurred after the first siege of Rome but before the end of 409, which would explain the root cause of the sacking in 410.

II. The rooster

One major dilemma in Procopius' tale is the misinterpretation emerging from the name Rome, which meant either Honorius' pet or the empire's capital or perhaps both. Birds were considered the messengers of the gods in the Graeco–Roman world; Xenophon, Plutarch, and even Ovid thought that birds served as instruments of the gods, who di-

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26   Benedicty (1960: p. 77). As Benedicty has proven, the structure of Procopius' siege description was already used, not only by Herodotus, but by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. However, the motif (a besieged city is handed over to the enemy by someone who has been deserted by the besiegers) was common in ancient historiography. See, e.g., Hom. Od. 4.242; Hdt. 3.150–160 (Zopyros); D. H. *Antiquitates Romanae* 4.55–58 (siege of Gabii). For a detailed comparison with Odysseus (Hom. *Od*. 4.234–264) and Zopyros' case (Hdt. 3.153–160), see Wesselmann (2011: pp. 161–167).

27   Hdt. 3.152.1; cf. Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.14.

28   Hdt. 3.154.1; cf. Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.15.

29   Hdt. 3.157.1; cf. Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.16.

30   Hdt. 3.157.2; cf. Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.17.

31   Procop. *Goth*. 4.32.33: Τινὲς δὲ οὐχ οὕτω τά γε κατὰ Τουτίλαν καὶ τήνδε τὴν μάχην ξυμβῆναι...; cf. *Vand*. 1.2.27: Τινὲς δὲ οὐχ οὕτω Ῥώμην Ἀλαρίχῳ ἁλῶναί φασιν...

32   Procop. *Goth*. 4.32.29.

rected their calls, cries, and overall movements, which were sometimes favorable and at other times unfavorable, similar to the wind.[33] In Livy's monumental history, twin brothers counted vultures to identify which one should be the founder of Rome. The result favored Romulus, who counted twice as many birds on Palatine Hill as his brother did.[34] In Suetonius' work, an eagle flew several times over Augustus, then landed on the Pantheon above the first letter of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa.[35] When noticing this, Augustus ordered Tiberius to recite his vows and declared that he would not be accountable for those pledges that he would never return. Both Romulus and Augustus understood the intention of the gods, but they also took suitable actions after the sign. After killing his twin brother, Romulus became Rome's first king, while Augustus realized that the sign and the letter "M" refer to his upcoming death (*mors*) and marked Tiberius as his successor. These bird observations had a direct connection with Rome and its prospective rulers.

Honorius' rooster is not the only the fowl that stands next to a ruler in the *Wars*. In his book, ten times, Procopius mentions various birds, of which three appeared in front of different monarchs, besides Honorius.[36] The first is an eagle spotted by the Vandal Geiseric. It was revolving over Aspar's *domesticus* when the Vandals captured some Romans in the early 430s. The second bird is a stork that left behind its nest located on the city wall of Aquileia when Attila besieged the city. Procopius' last example is an unknown sort of bird that started tweeting when Hermegisclus, the ruler of Varni, rode under the tree where the bird had its nest.[37] According to Procopius, all three understood the signs of the birds. Geiseric realized that he must spare the soldier's life because he would become influential. The Hun king also interpreted the sign correctly and commanded his army to remain in its place because something would happen;[38] indeed, a part of the wall, where the stork's nest was, collapsed, thus making the seizure of Aquileia possible for the Huns. In his last example, Procopius again stresses that Hermegisclus understood the prophecy in the bird's song because he turned to his men and told them that he would die forty days later, which occurred as he had predicted.[39] These examples of the *Wars* show that those birds that appeared before rulers heralded the forthcoming events; therefore, Honorius' rooster might have served a similar function.

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33 X. *Mem*. 1.1.3; Plu. *Moralia* 975a–b; Ov. *Fast*. 1.446–448; for other sources, see Pollard (1977). In general, see Mynott (2018: pp. 249–266); under Augustus, see Green (2009: pp. 147–167).

34 Liv. 1.7.1–3.

35 Suet. *Aug*. 97.1.

36 Bird mentions in the *Wars*: Procop. *Pers*. 1.9.5, 1.12.4, 2.5.13, Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.26, 1.4.8–9, 1.4.33–35, 2.4.17–18, Procop. *Goth*. 2.11.11, 2.20.32, 4.20.13–15.

37 Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.25–26 (Honorius), 1.4.1–11 (Geiseric), 1.4.30–35 (Attila), Procop. *Goth*. 4.20.11–15 (Hermegisclus).

38 Procop. *Vand*. 1.4.34 (Attila): ὃ δὴ Ἀττίλαν κατιδόντα ῾ἦν γὰρ δεινότατος ξυνεῖναί τε καὶ ξυμβαλεῖν ἅπαντα᾿ κελεῦσαι τὸν στρατὸν αὖθις ἐν χώρῳ τῷ αὐτῷ μένειν, ἐπειπόντα οὐκ ἄν ποτε εἰκῆ ἐνθένδε ἀποπτάντα ξὺν τοῖς νεοττοῖς τὸν ὄρνιν οἴχεσθαι, εἰ μή τι <u>ἐμαντεύετο</u> φλαῦρον οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν τῷ χωρίῳ ξυμβήσεσθαι.

39 Procop. *Goth*. 4.20.14 (Hermegisclus): εἴτε δὲ τοῦ ὄρνιθος τῆς φωνῆς ξυνεὶς εἴτε ἄλλο μέν τι ἐξεπιστάμενος, ξυνεῖναι δὲ τοῦ ὄρνιθος <u>μαντευομένου</u> τερατευσάμενος, τοῖς παροῦσιν εὐθὺς ἔφασκεν ὡς τεθνήξεται τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέραις ὕστερον.

Procopius links these observations because the abovementioned kings were all in a struggle for a throne when they noticed the birds. According to Procopius, Geiseric did not want to kill Marcian, Aspar's *domesticus* and successor of Theodosius II, because it was clear to him that the eagle represented Theodosius, who had died recently.[40] In 452, Aquileia functioned as a critical landmark on the route that Attila followed to take Honoria's hand in marriage and with it, the Western Empire.[41] As Procopius' third example, Hermegisclus saw the bird along his route to find a bride for his son, Radigis, in Brittia. However, after the sign, he changed his mind and ordered his men that after his death, they should let Radigis marry his Frankish wife as the ancestral law permitted.[42] Together, these examples show an important unity of the *Wars*, that is, the birds appeared when the rulers were advancing toward succession. As it becomes visible in the last chapter, Procopius' anecdote refers to an event between November 408 and the end of 409; therefore, it also qualifies Honorius for this pattern because his brother Arcadius died in May 408, which might have allowed him an opportunity to extend his authority over the eastern sphere of the empire.[43]

However, a fundamental distinction among these kings was not merely each bird but also their connection with it. In each of the cases of Geiseric, Attila, and Hermegisclus, the observer's connection with his bird was indirect, while he was also capable of reading its sign. Cicero, who was also an augur and wrote a detailed treatise on the divinations, emphasizes that the augurs differentiated between asked (*auspicia impetrativa*) and given (*auspicia oblativa*) auspices.[44] In the latter case, the divine signs appeared spontaneously, and when they were observed, the acts ended, providing results and excluding the possibility of repetition.[45] In contrast, during imperative auspices, the augur requested divine approval for a task that he would direct personally. If the process was unsuccessful, he claimed that his attempt was only barred at that moment and that it would be fair to ask the same question another day, so he kept asking until it secured a positive response. This practice questions the credibility of this method.[46] In this classical interpretation, Procopius' "barbarian" examples received oblative auspices because a bird unexpectedly appeared in front of the monarchs, while Honorius fed the rooster from his hand, as Procopius states.

Even though Honorius had a direct connection with his bird, the latter was also usable for divination. The augural method of interpreting the eating patterns of poultry was

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40   Procop. *Vand*. 1.4.9.

41   In Procopius' time, it was widely held gossip in Constantinople; see, e.g., *Chron. Marcell*. 434; Jord. *Get*. 223–224; Maenchen-Helfen (1973: p. 130); Thompson (1996: pp. 145–147); Croke (2014: pp. 112–116).

42   Procop. *Goth*. 4.20.15–20; Thompson (1980: pp: 504–505).

43   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.33–34: Ἀρκαδίου γὰρ ἤδη πολλῷ πρότερον τελευτήσαντος, Θεοδόσιος ἐκείνου υἱός, ἔτι παῖς ὢν κομιδῇ, εἶχε τῆς ἔω ἀρχήν. ταῦτα Ὁνωρίῳ καραδοκοῦντι καὶ ἐν τρικυμίαις φερομένῳ τῆς τύχης εὐτυχήματα θαυμάσια ἡλίκα ξυνηνέχθη γενέσθαι.

44   For details about the *disciplina auguralis*, see Linderski (1986: pp. 2147–2296).

45   Cic. *Div*. 2.73.: *Tum igitur esset auspicium (si modo esset ei liberum) se ostendisse; tum avis illa videri posset interpres et satelles Iovis.*

46   Cic. *Div*. 1.27, 2.78.

called *ex tripudiis* and originally belonged to the category of given auspices, not only because any bird, even poultry, could perform it but also because the sign of the deity was based on uncertainty. It held true at least in that case, when it was carried out properly. According to Cicero, the keeper of the poultry kept the birds in a cage, and when the time came, he released them and threw food at them. If the birds did not eat, beat their wings, or flew away, the keeper recognized their behavior as unfriendly. On the contrary, if the chicken was feasting, and in the process, a crumb fell from its mouth and struck the ground, the keeper announced *tripudium solistimum*.[47] The good omen was therefore not expressed by the bird's eating pattern, which was only a tool in this process, but by the chance of a food scrap falling from its toe and hitting the ground; at this point, the deity expressed his will. However, Honorius' connection with his bird rather emphasizes his worship than any expression of a divine sign.

The devotion of Honorius might explain a rooster divination that foretold the Theodosian dynasty's rise to power. According to Zonaras, the Sophist teacher Libanius[48] and Iamblichus[49] performed a rooster divination to reveal who would reign after Emperor Valens. They wrote 24 letters in the dust, then one of them placed seeds in the letters, chanted some spells, and released a rooster that marked four letters by pecking the seeds on the theta (Θ), epsilon (E), omicron (O), and delta (Δ).[50] They were sure that these four letters revealed one of the following names: Theodorus, Theodosius or Theodotus. When Valens learned about this, he executed many who bore one of these names. The archetype of Zonaras' account can be found in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus, with some modifications. As Ammianus states in his work, a certain Hilarius[51] and Patricius[52] built a tripod from laurel twigs and placed a metallic plate on it, which had the engraved Greek alphabet. Then, one of them started swinging a ring on a linen thread that first touched the Θ, E, O and then the Δ letters, so the result of the divination came by chance. They were sure that behind these four letters was a certain Theodorus, and when their practice was revealed, Theodorus and the celebrants were also killed by the order of Valens.[53] To sum up, a source has roots in the late fourth century, in which a rooster, among others, predicted the name of Theodosius the Great, who succeeded Valens in 379.[54]

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47   Cic. *Div.* 2.72.

48   PLRE 1 Libanius 1.

49   PLRE 1 Iamblichus 3.

50   Zonar. 13.16.81.

51   PLRE 1 Hilarius 6.

52   PLRE 1 Patricius 3.

53   For Ammianus' text criticism, see Boeft (2013: pp. 45–53).

54   However, the names of the celebrants, their methods, and the range of the expected names differ among the sources. The common characteristic among Hilarius, Patricius, Libanius, and Iamblichus is that they found themselves in pursuit of Valens' provisions that were linked in two variants of a story about the so-called Theodorus conspiracy. To secure the restored Christianity, Valens proposed several decrees against divination, public and private astrology, funeral sacrifices, and other magic practices from 364 to 371 (*Cod. Theod.* 9.16.7, 9.16.8). As Ammianus states, Hilarius and Patricius wanted to reveal who would reign after Valens, and to gain this knowledge, they applied occult practices in Antiochia that provoked

The used magic practices also stand on the same basis since both cases refer to the par excellence oracle-giving god, Apollo. However, in Zonaras' work, instead of the laurel tripod and the metallic plate used by Hilarius and Patricius, the divination tool was a rooster who picked the same letters. Despite the differences, these items are all strongly related to each other. The tripod is particularly associated with the Delphic oracle and therefore with Apollo, similar to the laurel that was deposited on the Delphic tripod when it was unoccupied by the high priestess of the Temple of Apollo, Pythia. The metal plate could also refer to Apollo as a solar god because Ammianus' word choice reveals his use of the word *lanx* in other places for the sun's disc.[55] The rooster connection with Apollo is also well established. The bird is often represented as sitting on Apollo's arm, shoulder, or head.[56] Following Aelianus' account, it might be because a rooster was standing beside Leto when she gave birth to Apollo; thus, the rooster was dedicated to his birth.[57] Despite the differences in methods, both magic tools refer to Apollo.

Although Ammianus mentions a certain Theodorus, in Procopius' time, in the results of these occult practices, some already envisioned the forthcoming rule of the Theodosian dynasty. As stated in the *Res Gestae*, the celebrants thought that the letters Θ, Ε, Ο, and Δ referred to a certain Theodorus, who was put on trial together with the celebrants and executed. However, Philostorgius – whose work was directly used by Zonaras – already wrote that the letters comprised the name of Theodosius, Theodulus, or Theodorus. In the sixth century, Theodorus Lector already wrote that Valens had killed many because of the letter Θ. Without mentioning any form of this divination, Jordanes already treated its results as an explanation of the Theodosian dynasty's rise to power when he wrote the following: "Theodosius, the father of the later emperor Theodosius [the Great], and many nobles were killed through Valens' insanity."[58] Jordanes therefore saw a connection between the divination and Count Theodosius' death,[59] rightfully so, since his son with the same name became Valens' successor in 379.[60] In summary, Proco-

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a conspiracy issue and a lawsuit that resulted in their execution. In Zonaras' story, Iamblichus is not identifiable with full confidence, but apparently, he speaks about the renowned philosopher who held a chair at the University of Athens in the second half of the fourth century; moreover, he was a friend and relative of Libanius. However, in his *Orationes*, Libanius describes how Emperor Valens thought of him as being connected to the Theodorus affair; as he notes, his head was almost cut off just because he used a divine practice (μαντική) in curing his headache in 371. Lib. *Or.* 1.73; cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.1.: *Vetus opinio est iam usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque et populi Romani et omnium gentium firmata consensu, versari quandam inter homines divinationem, quam Graeci μαντική appellant, id est praesensionem et scientiam rerum futurarum.* Although the sources mention various names, the common characteristic among them is that they are all connected to those practices that were banned by Valens.

55 Amm. Marc. 20.3.1, 20.3.8.

56 Plu. *Moralia* 400C.

57 Ael. *NA* 4.29.

58 Jord. Romana 312.: *Theodosius Theodosii imperatoris postea pater multique nobilium occisi sunt Valentis insania.*

59 For Theodosius' death, see Demandt (1969).

60 Before Jordanes, Aurelius Victor also attributed Theodosius' rise to power to the prophecy; Aur. Vict. *Epit.* 48.2–3.: *Huic ferunt nomen somnio parentes monitos sacravisse, ut Latine intellegimus a deo datum. De hoc etiam oraculo in Asia divulgatum est eum Valenti successurum, cuius nomen e Q et E et O atque D Graecis litteris initiaretur.*

pius does not go off the track that was designated by classical examples, namely the birds heralding the chance of a forthcoming rule. However, Geiseric, Attila, and Hermegisclus received a direct sign, while Honorius protected a rooster that might have symbolized his father's rise to the throne and his rule over both the Eastern and the Western halves of the empire.

III. The poultry keeper

The identity of the eunuch, the poultry keeper, is decipherable from his act. As it has become obvious in the previous section, a series of decrees outlawed various magic practices in the late antiquity; however, the *auspicia ex tripudiiis* earlier fell out from the group of *auspicia oblativa*, since the usage of poultry provided an opportunity to influence the results. As stated in *De Divinatione*, the magistrates made auguries, but their practices were also corrupt since the chickens were inside a cage in a vulnerable status. Cicero ironically notes many people's belief that this could be equal to the method of Romulus, who received a revelation through a spontaneous flight of birds.[61] He adds that if the celebrant wants to receive a favorable response, he needs to ask his poultry keeper, who can give this answer.[62] Although Honorius' rooster indirectly symbolized his forthcoming rule, Cicero's commentaries suggest that the poultry keeper must play an active part in those actions when Honorius tried to achieve his aim to be a monarch of the empire.

Procopius mentions eunuchs thirteen times in his work, but (except for the case of the poultry keeper), he does not cite other eunuchs who bear a message.[63] In the context of the eunuch's report, he uses the verb ἀγγέλλω (bear a message), which appears over fifty times in the *Wars*.[64] One type of these sentences refers to an unknown person bearing the message. In these cases, the report is about a result of a military operation. For instance, Honorius received two reports from unknown persons, both of whom referred

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61 Cic. *Div*. 2.73.: *nunc vero inclusa in cavea et fame enecta si in offam pultis invadit, et si aliquid ex eius ore cecidit, hoc tu auspicium aut hoc modo Romulum auspicari solitum putas?*

62 Cic. *Div*. 2.74.

63 Procop. *Pers*. 1.25.24, Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.25, 1.2.26, 1.4.26, Procop. *Goth*. 2.13.16, 3.13.21, 3.40.35, 4.3.15, 4.3.17, 4.3.19, 4.21.6, 4.21.15, 4.21.16.

64 The bearer of the message is known: Procop. *Pers*. 1.16.10 (Rouphinos); 1.18.53 (Persian arrow counter); 1.21.14 (Persian spy); 1.22.9 (Rouphinos); 2.7.14 (Megas, the bishop of Beroia); 2.20.10 (Ambros, ambassador of al-Mundhir); 2.23.6 (Theodoros, referendarius); 2.29.6 (Phabrizos); Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.25. (eunuch, poultry keeper) 1.8.24 (spies); 1.12.4 (servant); 1.23.6 (peasants); 1.24.18 (Gotheus and Fuscia); 1.24.19 (Solomon); 2.13.36 (Moors); 2.14.42 (Procopius and others); Procop. *Goth*. 1.3.9 (Hypatius and Demetrius priests, envoys); 1.3.14 (Alexandros); 1.3.29 (Alexandros, Hypatius, and Demetrius); 1.4.7 (courtiers); 1.4.23 (Liberius and Oplilo, envoys); 1.6.14 (Petrus and Rusticus); 1.8.6 (envoys); 5.9.17 (Paucaris, Isaurian); 1.9.29 (Stephanus, envoy); 1.18.22 (soldiers); 2.7.13 (envoys); 2.15.33 (messenger); 2.21.41 (Bergantinus); 2.26.15 (Bourkentios); 3.15.7 (deserter); 3.19.29 (horsemen, envoy); 3.19.29 (Isaurians); 3.20.10 (soldiers); 3.20.13 (soldiers); 3.20.20 (soldiers); 3.23.9 (man from Rome); 3.32.42 (Marcellus); 5.4.13 (envoys); 5.19.3 (Aratius, envoy). The bearer of the message (no personal name or title) is not known; Procop. *Pers*. 2.19.47; Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.9; 1.2.36; 1.6.11; 2.8.22; 2.10.2; 2.12.2; 2.13.34; Procop. *Goth*.1.22.18; 2.8.4; 2.13.16; 3.32.19; 3.39.21.

to a distant military event, one concerning the movement of Alaric's forces[65] and the other involving the Roman fleet destruction near Libya.[66] The Sasanian King, Chosroes similarly received information when Belisarius invaded Persian territory.[67] However, in the case of another group of sentences, in which Procopius names the bearer of the message, the messenger is also an active participant or eyewitness of the narrated event. For example, in early 531, an ambassador named Rouphinos, after meeting with the Sasanian King Kavad, reported his message to Justinian when he arrived in Constantinople.[68] In the same year, a Persian spy went to Justinian and revealed Persian secrets to the emperor.[69] On another occasion, a Persian arrow counter "bears the message" about how many Persians died in a battle after he counted the arrows of returnees.[70] A possible explanation based on this distribution is that Honorius' eunuch either received the information about Rome's destruction directly from an envoy, or he himself witnessed the narrated event.

Although Procopius is silent about the details of the sacking, various envoys were moving regularly between Ravenna and Rome after the first siege of the city. As can be read in Zosimus' *Historia Nova*, when Alaric started to enclose the city in November 408, two of Honorius' eunuchs, named Terentius and Arsacius, were in town but were able to depart before the blockade was enforced.[71] The inhabitants of Rome were not as fortunate. Hunting for a solution to the impending famine, they first sent legates to Alaric to talk about the terms of peace. These negotiations ended in December when the senate offered gold, silver, tunics, as well as scarlet skins and pepper.[72] When the Romans collected these goods, they also sent a delegate to Ravenna to inform the court about the conditions, which were confirmed and paid to the Goths, who allowed a market for three days.[73] Nevertheless, Alaric wanted not only goods but also hostages, whom he already desired before his march to Rome; however, this part of his terms was again neglected.[74] To solve the political stalemate, the Senate sent another delegation to Ravenna in January 409.[75] Thus, there were three groups of envoys during the first siege of the city, of which only the first included eunuchs.

While the eunuchs had direct access to the emperor's chamber, for others, it became challenging to reach the emperor directly and even more so after May 408. The main reason for this situation was the emperors' tendency to be less personally involved in

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65   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.9.

66   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.36.

67   Procop. *Pers*. 2.19.47.

68   Procop. *Pers*. 1.16.10.

69   Procop. *Pers*. 1.21.14.

70   Procop. *Pers*. 1.18.53.

71   Zos. 5.37.4–5.

72   Zos. 5.40.1–3, 5.41.4.

73   Zos. 5.42.2, Soc. 7, 9. According to Socrates' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Pope Innocent I was also involved in the senatorial negotiations with the emperor.

74   Zos. 5.36.1; cf. Zos. 5.42.1.

75   Zos. 5.44.1.

negotiations because these were incredibly time-consuming assignments. Thus, the *prae-fectus praetorio* investigated the claims of delegations, preparing draft replies for the emperor that were read in the consistory,[76] while the eunuchs, in effect, acted as walls between the emperors and the physical world.[77] In the summer of 408, Honorius' consistory landed in Olympius' hands. According to Zosimus, during his coup d'état, many high officials were murdered, primarily the supporters of Stilicho. Besides them, there were not only the military officers who left their positions in Gaul after Constantius' arrival, but also the chief magistrates and eunuchs of Italy: the *praefectus praetorio*, the *comes domesticorum*, as well as the *magister officiorum*, the *quaestor sacri palatii*, the *comes rerum privatarum*, and the *comes sacrarum largitionum*.[78] With the removal of the last four titles, Olympius practically destroyed the consistory, which was then filled again with his own men.[79] As a result of his activity, at the end of the summer of 408, Olympius was capable of controlling all court affairs, and he could even issue imperial decrees.[80]

From Rome's three delegates, only one could speak directly with the emperor about the city's situation. Honorius' eunuchs – Terentius and Arsacius – left Rome before the famine; however, they witnessed the Gothic danger. The eunuchs were unable to return to the court in the same way that they had come, so they sailed for Gaul first, then turned to Ravenna. According to Zosimus, after their arrival, Honorius made Terentius *praepositus sacri cubiculi* and Arsacius his subordinate.[81] Terentius therefore became a member of the consistory so he was able to hear the third envoy's description of the vast number of deaths in mid-January 409. Zosimus stresses that this was everything that the last embassy was able to obtain because Olympius prevented its success. Two members of the delegation, namely Priscus Attalus and Caecilianus, both benefited from their journey; Priscus Attalus went home as *comes sacrarum largitionum*, while Caecilianus obtained the position of *praefectus praetorio*. Both appointments were due to the influence of Olympius.[82] Consequently, Honorius could have heard about the destruction of the city, either from Olympius as *magister officiorum* or from Terentius as *praepositus sacri cubiculi*; however, of the two, only the latter was a eunuch.

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76 Jones (1964: pp. 336–337); Nechaeva (2014: pp. 23–43).

77 For instance, see Jones (1964: pp. 336–337). Emperor Julian did not know whether it was the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* who kept him away from his co-emperor or whether Constantius II simply did not desire to meet him. The same happened with Ambrose when he, as an envoy, tried to talk with the usurper Magnus Maximus. Procop. *Vand*. 1.4.26. In Procopius' work, another Maximus could have an audience with Valentinian III because the emperor's eunuchs were well-disposed toward him.

78 Zos. 5.32.2–7. Chariobaudes (MVM per Gallias), Limenius (PPO Galliarum), Macrobius Longinianus (PPO Italiae), Naemorius (*magister officiorum* West), Patronius (CSL West), Salvius (*comes domesticorum* West), Salvius (QSP West), Vincentius (PPO Galliarum 397–400) and the unknown *comes rerum privata-rum*.

79 Zos. 5.35.1. Olympius also placed his nominees in other posts. He then started a general search for his supporters that resulted in the deaths of the eunuch Deuterius *praepositus sacri cubiculi* and Petrus *primicerius*, among others.

80 Zos. 5.34.2.

81 Zos. 5.37.4–*6*.

82 Zos. 5.44.1–*2*.

According to Procopius, Honorius received the news about Rome's destruction from one of his eunuchs, namely the poultry keeper. This eunuch was Terentius, but how did he assist Honorius' aim to be a monarch of the empire? In Zosimus' version, Stilicho's fall was caused by his allegedly planned route to Constantinople to depose Theodosius and elect his son, Eucherius.[83] Honorius executed Stilicho but in the meantime, sent Terentius and Arsacius with the order to kill Eucherius in Rome.[84] Both of them assisted in the emperor's aim with this assassination, yet after they returned to Ravenna, Terentius received a more illustrious position from the emperor who also granted him a position in the consistory. Therefore, he could inform Honorius about not only his direct experiences in Rome from November 408 but also the casualties of Rome – news that he had received from the senatorial embassy in mid-January 409 during a meeting in the consistory. Overall, these results show that Honorius' eunuch, the so-called keeper of his poultry, was Terentius.

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The present research has aimed to examine the historical event behind Procopius' tale about Honorius and his eunuch, who reported the fall of Rome. One of the most significant findings is that the tale's structural pattern is unique in the *Wars*, and it hides a cause-and-effect relation with those stories framing it; accordingly, the anecdote explains the cause of the siege in 410. The chapter's chronological inconsistency assists in narrowing down the date of the meeting between Honorius and his eunuch. Another important finding is that the birds herald the chance of a forthcoming rule in the *Wars*, while Honorius' rooster symbolizes his father's rise to the throne, his rule over both the Eastern and the Western halves of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, as the third part of this paper has shown, Honorius could receive the information about Rome's status from Terentius because of the latter's active part in securing the succession of Honorius with the assassination of Eucherius. This study's findings indicate that the event behind Procopius' tale was Terentius' report to Honorius regarding Rome's first siege in mid-January 409.

As Procopius states, Honorius was greatly relieved when he realized that his rooster was still intact, probably because he thought that even after the first siege of Rome, he could travel to Constantinople and gain some influence on the East after his brother's death. However, its possibility was reduced to zero at the moment of Terentius' report. The subsequent events headed to an unfavorable direction for Honorius.[85] In mid-January 409, Priscus Attalus' and his colleagues returned to Rome but without any success; Alaric threatened Rome further and convinced the city's senate to elect its emperor in the person of the returned envoy, Priscus Attalus. With this decision, the western parts had another emperor besides Constantine and Honorius. Embassy officials were

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83 Zos. 5.32.1.

84 Zos. 5.37.4.

85 Zos. 6, Olymp. *Hist. Frg*. 13ff.

then sent from Rome to Ravenna, threatening Honorius with exile and torture. Alaric subdued many cities in Northern Italy and besieged Ravenna, locking up Honorius in the city, while Attalus sent naval forces to North Africa. The events quickly escalated; finally, Rome was taken and sacked on August 24, 410 AD. Procopius would later state, "So great, they say, was the stupidity of this emperor"[86] because Honorius neglected the report of the first siege of Rome and its effects, while he – after the execution of Stilicho and his son – still envisioned the possibility of going to Constantinople to patronize his seven-year-old nephew. Meanwhile, all of these events were rooted in his decisions, which he pursued for the Eastern part of the empire.

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Abbreviation

PLRE = Martindale, J. R., Jones, A. H. M., & Morris, J. (Eds.). (1971–1992). *The prosopography of the later Roman Empire* (Vols. 1–3). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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86   Procop. *Vand*. 1.2.26: τοσαύτη ἀμαθίᾳ τὸν βασιλέα τοῦτον ἔχεσθαι λέγουσι. Transl. Kaldellis (2014: p. 147).

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