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Romanus Sum Ergo Sum: Claims to Romanitas from Late Antiquity to the Dawn of Humanism

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Romanus Sum Ergo Sum:

Claims to *Romanitas* from Late Antiquity to the Dawn of Humanism

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by

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For my mother

JOANN D'ALISERA

to whom I owe everything.

"ita ut saepe erumperet, cum me videret, in eius praedicationem gratulans mihi, quod talem matrem haberem..."

- Saint Augustine, *Confessiones* VI.2

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<div align="right">- AD</div>

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A Note on Translation

Translation is that most ancient art of literary betrayal, wherein the translator attempts to carry over the words and ideas found in one language into another. The Latin word from which we derive our own is *translatio*, itself a combination of *trans* ("across") and *latum* ("bring"), and in the context of my translations in this work, I adhere to this ancient Roman denotation. All translations from Latin primary sources are my own, the texts of which are referenced in the bibliography. I have stayed close to the original texts as much as possible, but if the meaning found in Latin would have been lost through literal translation, I have changed the English to more closely suit the original connotations. Still, English can only go so far in conveying the nuances of Latin, and I thus encourage readers to engage with the original language in order to discover the truest beauty of the works herein.

All non-Latin primary sources are cited according to existing English translations. Despite being a clear anachronism vis-à-vis my ancient and medieval sources, I have cited the Bible in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), if only to increase the ease of access to the contemporary English reader who may not be as familiar with the text as were bygone generations. All abbreviations that I use throughout the work are listed below.

- AD

List of Abbreviations

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Aen.	Virgil, *Aeneid*
Anon. Vales.	*Anonymous Valesianus*
ARF	*Annales Regni Francorum*
Civ.	Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*
Conf.	Augustine, *Confessiones*
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Exc. Urb.	Augustine, *Sermo de Excidio Urbis Romae*
Gal.	Galatians
Gen.	Genesis
Get.	Jordanes, *Getica*
Hist.	Gregory of Tours, *Historiae Francorum*
Inf.	Dante, *Inferno*
Mon.	Dante, *De Monarchia*
ODB	Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium
Par.	Dante, *Paradiso*
Ps.	Psalms
Purg.	Dante, *Purgatorio*
Rel. Cons.	Liudprand of Cremona, *Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*
Rom.	Romans
VK	Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*

Introduction

An Imagined Rome

"...den man kann sich nur in Rom auf Rom vorbereiten."[1]

- *Goethe, c. 1786*

        Around seven decades after the death of Benito Mussolini and during the dawning hours of a wet and gray Saturday, I walked alone through the streets of *il Duce*'s stark vision of the bygone Roman world. *Favonius* whirled around me, fighting in futile celestial combat against the onslaught of mighty *Auster*, yet still I trekked onward through that most mysterious milieu of bleakness and desolation. The old dictator's cognomen for the place endures on maps as *Esposizione Universale Roma*, but the locals have chosen, consciously or not, to forgo this title and call it by nothing more than its three initials. To its merit, EUR is a clean and orderly district; still, a particular artificiality grounded in a whitewashed ethos permeates the atmosphere of the place. The domineering remnants of a long-since departed fascist paradigm remain manifestly cogent, even to the most untrained of eyes.

        I emerged unto EUR's monochromatic landscape from a tattered subway car, a once-proud exemplar of Italian engineering, now covered in faded graffiti and devoid of people. A light rain drizzled down from a colorless sky, but this proved to be nothing more than a slight annoyance, and the few cars that drove idly by found no need for the use of their automated wipers. Though it was filled with buildings and roads (and ostensibly, people lived there too), the space of EUR evoked a solitudinous emptiness. Like the ruins of the ancient Roman *fora*, the district was a relic of a previous era, teeming with the character of a past that existed no longer. Unlike the remnants of the ancient world, however, EUR was without any sense of hope.

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[1] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italienische Reise I*, In *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, vol. 11, ed. Ernst Beutler (Zurich: Artemis-Verlag, 1949), 142.

Instead, I caught a glimpse into an alternate future, a vision of Rome and the surrounding world where the most sterile fascism had triumphed over the forces of the individual will, and where the worldview of the Duce had ultimately prevailed.

Prior to and during the course of his rule, Mussolini was convinced that his fascist-governed Italy served as the direct successor to the ancient Roman Empire of the Caesars, and that he himself was a modern day Augustus. In the manner of the old emperors, he articulated his power and ideology through institutions such as the military, but he attempted to assert his dominion most prominently in relation to the architecture and urbanism found at EUR. Meant to be nothing short of a "New Rome,"[2] EUR represented the Duce's attempt to fuse the classical glories of the old Roman Empire with the fascist, ordered modernity of his new Italian Empire. Cultural-historical unification was thus the goal of the architects who collectively designed EUR under his directives. They sought to achieve this end in implementing their designs, with the result being the necropolis in which I found myself on that lonely Saturday morning.

I wandered down the district's broad boulevards from building to building; to my bemusement, the city-scape was more reminiscent of the surreal settings found in the paintings of de Chirico, or even the samizdat-era ramblings of Yerofeyev and his literary comrades. A squared, enlarged, isolated version of the ancient Colosseum in the *Palazzo della Civiltà Romana* loomed in the distance to my left. A similarly-styled interpretation of Hadrian's iconic Pantheon, the *Palazzo dei Congressi*, stood even closer on my right. On a hill in the distance rested the *Basilica dei Santi Pietro e Paolo*, a starkly fascist vision of the Christian past. The re-interpreted versions of these ancient monuments stood as sterilized incarnations of their ancient predecessors, bearing neither the grace nor the sense of historical continuity of the bygone Rome.

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[2] Maria Stone, "A Flexible Rome: Fascism and the Cult of *Romanita*." In *Roman Presences*, *Reception of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*, ed. Catharine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 219-220.

I was a man apart, standing in the midst of what amounted to a fascist graveyard of bombastic architecture, where everything was tied to the past and everything evoked a clear sense of a present-ness that was never meant to be.

I later wondered, having spent an entire day at EUR alone and in the rain, how an interpretation of *Romanitas* such as that of Mussolini could carry such bleak connotations. Rome had always been the eternal *caput mundi*, after all, and almost three millennia of history had attested to the fact of the city's grandeur. The idea of Rome finds itself imbued within the works of countless poets, philosophers, monarchs, and theologians, writing and thinking throughout the passing ages. Saint Augustine in the fifth century, sitting in his study in Hippo and listening with dread to the war cries of the approaching Vandal hordes, fought to his last breath to understand the collapsing Roman world around him. Charlemagne, a Germanic king of the Franks, accepted nothing short of a revived Rome, and became the progenitor of a political body in the year 800 that turned out to be a non-holy, non-Roman, non-empire, despite its name. Dante voyaged both in literature and life at the outset of the fourteenth century, and shed tears at the fact that the Roman poet Virgil could never join him in the heavenly realm. A generation later, Petrarch turned down a literary award in Paris, then the pinnacle of western intellectualism, in order to receive a much less prestigious token of appreciation from the inhabitants of a dilapidated late-medieval Rome. In a sense, the entire trajectory of this past, beginning some seven hundred years before Christ with the foundation of Rome, seemed to culminate in a perverse way in EUR. Ancient pagan and Christian forms, fused together in a bizarre futurist and modernist fashion, dominated the landscape of Mussolini's New Rome. But the Duce's *Romanitas* was clearly not the *Romanitas* that the Augustines and Dantes of history had panegyrized and fought to preserve. It was something else entirely, and in order to explain what

felt so inherently 'wrong' at EUR, I vowed to work towards an understanding of the *Romanitas* that had been lost in the depths of Mussolini's worldview.

It should first be noted that I use the term *Romanitas* anachronistically (in the vein of many contemporary historians) in order to refer to feelings and evocations of Roman-ness and Roman identity. Though the word itself is not found in classical Roman sources and was invented by Tertullian in the late-second or early-third centuries, the concept of the cultural identity implied by *Romanitas* is present throughout the Latin corpus. The *Aeneid* of Virgil – the late-first century B.C.E. epic poem and cornerstone of the western literary canon both in its day and two thousand years later – carries the most cogent evocations of *Romanitas* among these ancient sources. During Aeneas' famous katabasis in the sixth book, the eponymous hero encounters his father Anchises, who predicts the prosperous future of eternal Rome and all her inhabitants. Most significantly, he prophecies that the emperor Augustus Caesar will bring Rome into a golden age (*aurea...saecula*)[3] of world empire and peace. Anchises reveals to Aeneas how to attain this era of prosperity:

> *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento*
> *(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,*
> *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*.[4]
>
> O Roman, remember to rule, by empire, over all peoples,
> and your arts are to be these: to make peace and to impose customs,
> to spare the vanquished and subdue the proud.[5]

Through the words of Anchises, Virgil articulates the inherent characteristics of a Roman with clarity and verve. The foremost quality of a Roman is to rule by means of imperial power, and in saying this, Virgil reminds us of Jupiter's earlier promise to the Romans of an "empire without

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[3] Virgil, *Aen.* VI.792-793.
[4] Virgil, *Aen.* VI.851-853.
[5] All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

end" (*imperium sine fine*).[6] This imperial paradigm will result in global political unity, universal

prosperity, piety towards traditional customs, and a respect for those whom the Romans have

conquered. Empire and peace are inherent to each other, and the resulting cornucopia of

characteristics that define Rome's citizens has allowed for their worldly success in the past and

in the future. By encouraging him to somehow 'remember the future,' the father's proleptic

address to his son as a "*Romane*" emphasizes the timeless nature of the *Romanitas* which Aeneas

will stand to represent. Further, it is not just Aeneas to whom he is speaking; countless

generations of his Roman progeny should understand the speech as addressed to them as well.

Because all these attributes of Virgil's ideal Roman must be grounded in that rule of empire, the

prosperity that arises from their presence simply cannot exist without this imperial quality.

The shield of Aeneas described in the eighth book further articulates these features of

Virgil's imperial *Romanitas*. Upon it, the god Vulcan has carved the entire future trajectory of

Rome, and from the nurturing of Romulus and Remus by the she-wolf[7] to the late-republican

events involving Catiline and Cato,[8] Aeneas marvels at the continuous progression of unity,

strength, and peace carved into the metal. In the center, Augustus leads all of his people,

patricians and plebeians together (*cum patribus populoque*),[9] into glorious battle against the

enemies of the empire. The emperor carries with him both the great and the lesser gods

(*cum…penatibus et magnis dis*)[10] in a spectacular display of his own piety, backed by a distinctly

divine legitimacy. With wonder, Aeneas accepts the shield from the gods, and with it the fame

and fate of all of his future Roman progeny (*famamque et fata nepotum*).[11] As his father had

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[6] Virgil, *Aen.* I.279.
[7] Virgil, *Aen.* VIII.626-634.
[8] Virgil, *Aen.* VIII.668-670.
[9] Virgil, *Aen.* VIII.679.
[10] Virgil, *Aen.* VIII.679.
[11] Virgil, *Aen.* VIII.731.

previously prophesied in the underworld, the character of Rome would be most exemplified by the *Romanitas* of Augustus, that ideal figure of piety and leadership in the mind of Virgil for the classical Roman world. Indeed, Augustus embraced the ideals laid out first by Anchises in the underworld and then by Vulcan upon the shield, for with his imperial power came prosperity and the dawn of the *Pax Romana*. Mussolini, acting two millennia later as a self-proclaimed Roman emperor, neglected to address the complexities of Virgil's *Romanitas* and sought to rule by means of empire alone. Peace-making, acting reverently towards ancient customs, and promoting unity among the social classes were all priorities that seemed to escape the Duce's attention. His vision of Rome remained incomplete, perhaps because his understanding of Virgil was minimal to nonexistent.

It is with the Virgilian understanding of classical *Romanitas* in hand that my endeavor begins. Most generally, I seek to examine later historical claims to *Romanitas* by individual philosophers, political leaders, and literary figures whose actual cultural identity was far removed from that of Augustus and Virgil. In the broadest sense, my work stands as an intellectual and cultural history, grounded in various responses to the classical era by those individuals living and acting in decidedly post-classical times.

I shall first examine the period of late antiquity, as seen through (but not necessarily exemplified by) the writings of Saint Augustine in the late 300s and early 400s. Watching his Rome succumb to a violent siege for the first time in eight centuries, the Bishop of Hippo could have simply dismissed the city as one of moral turpitude and collective depravity. He could have accepted the life of an ascetic, and gone off into the wilderness in the manner of his contemporary Saint Jerome. Instead, I argue that he cannot forsake Rome entirely, since he is a dual citizen of Rome (the City of Man) and of the Christian *ecclesia* (the City of God). I put

forth that Augustine – fusing Pauline views of the importance of community with Ciceronian political ideals – wants to "keep" certain aspects of Rome in his vision of the future for humans on this earth. The saint believes that the ideal *res publica* of which Cicero speaks can be attained on the terrestrial plane, and it would be filled with exemplars of Roman virtue that, prior to Christianity, held misplaced intentions. By combining the idea of God's providence being behind the expansion of the Roman Empire with the work of Christians in the City of Man looking towards the City of God, Augustine makes a distinctive claim to the legacy of *Romanitas* in his temporal vision for the wandering Christian community. Rome, for the saint, is an ideal to which we can aspire on this earth, with an eye towards a future grounded in the ethereal.

I follow my discussion of late antiquity with an examination of the *Romanitas* found in the fragmentary period following Augustine's death, from the middle of the 400s to the late 900s. While I do not focus upon one particular thinker, I explicate the political machinations of the leaders of Rome's successor nations, namely the Ostrogoths, the Franks, and the Byzantine Greeks. In doing so, I discuss the *Romanitas* that kings such as Theoderic the Great and Charlemagne attempted to foster among their people through the building of iconographical architecture, the implementation of vast political reform programs, and the patronage of the literary minds of their times. Rome was the highest model of unity for these men, and their rule sought to transcend the near universal strife that had befallen the European continent since the erosion of the original Roman Empire's authority. Though irreconcilable differences of geography, religion, and politics ultimately destroyed the early medieval dream of implementing the old Roman form of unity, the ideal of Rome endured throughout that era and into the next.

In the context of the post-Carolingian conflict between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, I examine the late medieval period through the lens of the Florentine poet Dante. Like

his earlier predecessors, Dante maintained a conception of an eternal Roman ideal throughout his poetical and philosophical work. I argue that Dante portrays himself as a true Florentine descendent of Rome, particularly in regards to his exile at the hands of his political enemies of the time. He draws a contrast between himself as a Roman and his rivals as descendants of the ancient rabble, and he dreams of world unity under a world empire, continuous with the Roman past and united in Roman virtue. Dante's idea of *Romanitas* consists of two parts, papacy and empire, that retain their distinctive purposes within their overarching unity. I end my macrohistorical examination with a nod towards Petrarch's transference of the Roman ideal into the proto-Italian national ideal at the dawning days of the Renaissance, before returning to Mussolini's fascistic appropriation of *Romanitas* as means of conclusion.

The Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote, on the eve of his death in 1930, that "In hours like these, one rises to address / The ages, history, and all creation,"[12] rightfully recalling the importance of attempting to understand the past. Rome – the very idea of Rome – has always implied a multiplicity of meaning, both for those ancients who lived under her aegis and for those of us alive now who, perhaps, wish that we too lived in those bygone times. Still, the attraction to Rome throughout the ages has waned, in part due to Mussolini's misappropriation of the city's image for the sake of his disastrous political purposes. At the hands of the Duce, Virgil's universal, unified, and peace-minded *Romanitas* – along with two thousand years of subsequent interpretation – was placed in danger of being forgotten. But to forget Rome is to forget her beauty and her eternality, and for this I cannot stand. In the following pages, I attempt to confront this potential loss and maintain Rome's legacy by telling a piece, albeit a small one, of her illustrious story.

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[12] Vladimir Mayakovsky, *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*, trans. Max Hayward (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975), 237.

Chapter I

The Twofold Roman: Saint Augustine's Dual Citizenship in the Heavenly City and the Capital of the World

"Inter Romanos, ut dixi, Romanus, inter Christianos Christianus, inter homines homo legibus inploro rempublicam, religione conscientiam, communione naturam."[13]

- *Orosius, c. 418 C.E.*

On the 24th of August in the year 410 C.E., an impossible and unthinkable event occurred – the city of Rome, *caput mundi* for a thousand years, succumbed to a violent siege and was mercilessly sacked by Germanic invaders.[14] The city that had produced Cicero and Catullus, that had served as the home of the Caesars, and that had been the site of the martyrdoms of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, had fallen. Saint Jerome wrote soon after with a profound sadness, epitomizing the collective feeling of the moment:

> *Haeret vox et singultus intercipiunt verba dictantis. Capitur urbs, quae totum cepit orbem…*[15]

> My voice is at a loss, and sobbing interrupts my words, so often spoken. The City that had conquered the whole world has itself been conquered…[16]

The world could not fathom what had happened; the capital of the world was taken. The last time Rome fell to an outside invader had been eight centuries prior, when the Gauls had sacked the city and extracted a humiliating tribute from the Romans as a result. Livy, writing in the late first century B.C.E., poignantly described the chaos that the besieged residents of the city underwent during this earlier moment of national disgrace:

> *Quocumque clamor hostium, mulierum puerorumque ploratus, sonitus flammae, et fragor ruentium tectorum avertisset, paventes ad Omnia, animos oraque et oculos flectebant, velut ad spectaculum a fortuna positi occidentis patriae…*[17]

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[13] Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos* V.2.
[14] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 286.
[15] Jerome, *Epistula* CXXVII.12.
[16] All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.
[17] Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.xlii.4.

> Wherever the noise of the enemies, the wailing of women and children, the sound of flames, and the crash of collapsing buildings drew [the besieged Romans'] attention – trembling, they turned their souls and faces and eyes towards it all, as if ordained by Fortune herself, to observe the spectacle of their perishing fatherland…

A profound horror permeates the text as Livy relates the events of the Gallic sacking. The morale of the Romans trapped upon the Capitoline in 390 B.C.E. was at an all-time low.[18] When Brennus, chieftain of the Gauls, dishonorably extracted tribute from the Romans, they were forced into even further supplication at his statement "*vae victis!*"[19] The legacy of this humiliating defeat never quite lost its place in the cultural memory of the Roman people, and when history seemed to repeat itself eight centuries later, the new sacking could hardly be believed. After the grand worldly success of the Roman state, whose humble origins as a small village on the banks of the Tiber belied its evolution into the world's premier political power, it seemed impossible for such an event to occur again. To be sure, the prowess of the Roman state had seen better days; the era of the strong centralized government led by a Trajan or a Hadrian in the second century was long past. Still, Rome as an idea continued to hold vast significance for those living under its crumbling auspices, and to see the city so embarrassedly decimated by Germanic tribesman constituted a moment of great heartbreak for all who learned of it.

It was in this context of shock and disbelief that Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, began to wrestle with the most difficult concept of Rome itself, as both a Roman citizen and a Christian. He could very well have dismissed his secular identity outright, and forsaken the earthly former in the name of the eternal latter. Indeed, some scholars have claimed that he did

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[18] Christopher Hibbert, *Rome: The Biography of a City* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 14.
[19] Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* V.xlviii.9.

just this, and have interpreted his thoughts as singularly anti-Roman.[20] Such interpretation

initially seems valid, especially when he is conflated with his "desert saint" contemporaries such

as Jerome, who avidly championed the monastic lifestyle in opposition to the luxurious opulence

of Roman society.[21] But unlike Jerome, Augustine did not (and perhaps could not) entirely let go

of his conception of *Romanitas*. He certainly critiqued Roman decadence and agreed that the

Christian future should always hold precedence over the pagan past. Ultimately, however, he

was a citizen of Rome in the secular world. With the empire beginning to crumble around him

and facing a crisis of identity, Augustine was thus inspired to begin crafting his great twenty-two

volume tome, the *City of God*. It is in this work that his citizenship in both the eternal city of

heaven and the earthly city of man is made most evident.

Augustine's claim to *Romanitas* and that which is to be kept from the Roman past stands

at the crux of his dual citizenship. The Roman commonwealth (*res publica*) is the first

prominent example – Augustine repeatedly notes the importance of community to Christians and

their continuing survival. Further, he recognizes the potential for good that Roman virtue

inherently possesses, though this virtue has been polluted by the wrong intentions. Throughout

his discussion of community and virtue, he posits that the expansion of the Roman Empire was

in fact ordained by God, and that such secular growth helped make known the virtuous Romans

who are to be upheld as examples for those awaiting the heavenly city while living in the

terrestrial realm. The earthly city is not to be wholly ignored, as Augustine states at the outset of

the work. He simply cannot hold himself back from speaking about:

> *Unde etiam de terrena civitate, quae cum dominari adpetit, etsi populi serviant, ipsa ei dominandi libido dominator...*[22]

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[20] *E.g.* Paul Weithman, "Augustine's Political Philosophy," In *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 240-245.
[21] *Cf.* Jerome, *Epistula* XXII.
[22] Augustine, *Civ.* I.Pr.

> …the city of the world, which strives for domination, which subjects people to slavery, and is itself dominated by the lust of domination.

From the beginning of the *City of God*, Augustine holds that the conception of the ideal Rome has suffered in servitude to the real Rome, almost in the same Neoplatonic sense that the rational soul is enslaved to the appetites of the body. If the *Confessions* was a work of his most profound self-examination of his soul, then the *City of God* transfers this methodology into the political realm. In this public sphere, being a Roman means many things: you are a citizen, you pay taxes, you serve the emperor, *et cetera*. Moreover, you are a member of a community, and seek the best for that community and you yourself within it. This community and the virtue that accompanies it are the most important Roman characteristics to keep.

Augustine's assertion of *Romanitas*, then, is rendered clear. As a dual citizen of Rome (the earthly City of Man) and of the Christian *ecclesia* (the heavenly City of God), Augustine – grounded deeply in Pauline views of the importance of community and drawing on Cicero's political writings – wants to "keep" certain aspects of Rome in his vision of the future for humans on this earth. The *res publica* of which Cicero speaks can be attained on earth, and it would be filled with exemplars of Roman virtue whose empire would be guided by God's providence. Using this model, Augustine can make a cogent claim to the legacy of *Romanitas* in his vision for this wandering Christian community. His worldly citizenship, in the moments he spends on this earth, remains grounded in elements of the Roman past.

Augustine, the Great Amalgamator

In the decades prior to Augustine's birth in 354, the Roman state had undergone a series of profound religious changes. The pagan religion of Rome had been highly public and

political,[23] in decided contrast to the complex, ritualistic, and secretive mystery cult of

Christianity. When the emperor Constantine legalized the faith in the early fourth century, a

truly momentous shift occurred. Rome swiftly became a Christian state, and a religion that was

once a decentralized collection of small communities, each with its own interpretations and

beliefs, became a unified Church.[24] The once-persecuted faith was on a quick path towards

becoming a powerful political and cultural force, all of its own momentum.

While Christianity was spreading throughout the Mediterranean basin, the glory days of

Roman imperial hegemony were coming to a close. Since the end of the prosperous second

century, Rome had found herself fraught by the anarchy of constant civil war and repeated

foreign invasion.[25] The economy spiraled out of control, and the fourth century was a time of

great struggle for most people, Christian or not.[26] Eusebius, a Greek Christian contemporary of

Constantine, exemplifies the political confusion of the times by relating an anecdote from the

middle of the third century:

> Just as a cloud, which ran under the rays of the sun and obscured it, for a little
> while darkened it and appeared in its place, then, when the cloud passed and
> dissolved, the sun that shone before and shone again appeared, so Macrianus
> [Fulvius Macrianus Major, general to the emperor Valerian] who came forward
> and obtained access for himself to the Empire which belonged to Gallienus is no
> more, since he never was, while the other [Gallienus] is like he was…[27]

The metaphor of the cloud obstructing the sun encapsulates the ever-fluctuating politics of the

Roman state. Augustus Caesar, institutor of the empire, would not have even recognized his

nation. Generals overthrew emperors, became emperors in their own right, were swiftly

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[23] *Cf.* Mary Beard and Michael Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 30-34.

[24] Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 245.

[25] A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 25.

[26] Brown 2000, 13.

[27] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History (Books 6-10)*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 127.

murdered by a new set of power-hungry men, and the cycle continued to mercilessly propagate itself throughout the third and beginning of the fourth century. The political reorganization of Diocletian in the late 200s and early 300s was certainly a worthy attempt at reaffirming stability throughout the empire,[28] but it was actually Constantine's subsequent (and successful) grab for singular authority that returned any sense of order to the Roman state. Still, the later years of Constantine's reign (ending with his death in 337) represented one of the last times that the empire of Augustus was united under one ruler. Augustine himself lived through this brief final period of unification (*c.* 392-395) under Theodosius the Great,[29] but spent most of his life under the presence of a divided state. With historical hindsight, then, the sacking of Rome in 410 by the Goths is not a surprising occurrence. At the time, however, the event was as unfathomable to the people of the empire as was the Gallic sack so many centuries prior.

Still, Augustine's perspective should not be conflated with the circumstances in which he lived. The political machinations of Constantinople and the military quests on the empire's northern frontier probably had just as much significance to him as did his love for Latin literature,[30] the deaths of those close to him,[31] and the philosophical discussions he would spark with his friends throughout his life.[32] Indeed, he lived the vast majority of his life in North Africa, far from the capital of the empire and rarely traveled elsewhere. By 410 he was a man in his mid-fifties, and was beginning to establish himself as a primary theological leader among the now-burgeoning Christian community of the Mediterranean basin. He had written his profoundly personal and philosophical autobiography in the *Confessions* over a decade previously, and was well known for his letters and sermons. With the sack in 410 came refugees

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[28] Jones 1964, 41.
[29] Jones 1964, 182.
[30] *Cf.* Augustine, *Conf.* I.13.
[31] *Cf.* Augustine, *Conf.* IV.4 and IX.12.
[32] *Cf.* Augustine, *Conf.* VI.16.

– learned and illiterate, Christian and pagan – from Rome itself to the province where Augustine resided.[33] In simplest terms, these people were searching for answers as to why the seemingly immortal city had fallen. Augustine, as Bishop of Hippo, was a logical man to which to turn for answers, and the *City of God* was his response.

Over a decade and twenty-two books later, however, the scale of the work had far eclipsed the context of the Gallic sack.[34] Not merely serving as a refutation of paganism and an as exemplification of late antique Christian thought, the work expounds upon such diverse topics as original sin and free will, offers exegeses of many stories from the Old Testament, and provides what could be called a universalizing history of all of Rome itself. Instead of refuting Rome entirely (a model for Augustine's political thought that has been claimed by certain scholars[35]), the *City of God* puts forth a much more complex interpretation of the past. Rather than simply dispute with Cicero and the other pagan writers, Augustine takes their words and reinterprets their meaning in a Christian sense. Like Saint Paul some three and a half centuries earlier, who fused Jewish theology with Greek philosophy in his definition of Christianity, Augustine was a cunning merger of seemingly contradictory thoughts. Just as Athens and Jerusalem could be united (with a bit of skillful maneuvering), so could Rome and Christ. *Romanitas* was not to be lost to history, and by weaving together Ciceronian and Pauline strands of thought in regards to the commonwealth, Augustine provides a natural starting point for demonstrating both his tactic of philosophical amalgamation, as well as his claim to the Roman past.

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[33] Brown 2000, 340.

[34] James J. O'Donnell, "Augustine: His Time and Lives," In *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13.

[35] *Cf.* Weithman 2001.

Roman Commonwealth and Community

Augustine, like Paul, recognized the nature and importance of the *ecclesia* to the

development of a faithful Christian community, and Paul's conception of the Church was both

metaphorical and literal. The community under Christ was a spiritual collective comprised of the

individual faithful:

> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the
> same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we
> are members one of another.[36] [37]

Each member's life is significant as each individual has their own specific role to play, but on the

allegorical level, each serves as a component of the larger Christian corpus. The *ecclesia* is a

family comprised of unique people, but nonetheless falls under the aegis of a collective whole.

Still, the Apostle saw the benefit of the existence of actual gatherings of people who discussed

their faith, prayed, and acted for the good of this community. Indeed, the "house churches" that

Paul references in 1 Corinthians 16:19 and elsewhere served as vibrant loci for the development

and spread of Christianity across the empire in the mid-first century.[38] He grew highly troubled

when divisions in Christian communities arose, and this feeling of unease manifests itself in his

writings. When writing to the schismatic churches of Galatia, he was furious and filled with

contempt ("You foolish Galatians!").[39] When composing his more nuanced words to the

community of the Corinthians, he approached the situation with much more tact:

> Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
> that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that
> you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to
> me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.
> What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos,"

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[36] Rom. 12:4-5

[37] All references to the Bible, unless otherwise indicated, arise from the New Revised Standard Version

[38] Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 193-194.

[39] Gal. 3:1

or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?[40]

Paul wanted no divisions among his Christian brethren; it was unhealthy for the well-being of the community, and made the faithful more susceptible to rampant persecution from secular and other religious authorities. The Apostle felt that a community, unified in the body of Christ and under the grace of God, should have no divisive factionalism. For Paul, there can be no such thing as rival leaders in the faith. Christ himself was never separated; he had a singular purpose, and for his community to be so torn apart by petty division is an affront to his sacrifice. In its union, moreover, the *ecclesia* is a community of equals:

> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'[41]

The law, albeit good and necessary for the development of mankind, does not apply to believers in Christ, for the law was fulfilled on the cross with the Messiah.[42] In freedom from this law the Gentiles may "belong to another"[43] and begin a new life in the name of God. Indeed, the veil has been lifted[44] through Christ and the Spirit, and mankind is no longer a slave to the law but beholden to the grace of God. In this unity, the continued cohesion of the *ecclesia* stands among the most important features of community for Christians to maintain.

It is a vast understatement to proclaim that Augustine's theological outlook was deeply grounded in the Pauline epistles, and he often turned to the Apostle for spiritual guidance in his own times of personal uncertainty.[45] In turning to Paul's work for guidance, for example, he wrestled with difficult conceptions of grace, free will, the relationship between the two, and

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[40] 1 Cor. 1:10-13
[41] Rom. 10:12-13
[42] Rom. 10:4
[43] Rom. 7:4
[44] *Cf.* 2 Cor. 3:18
[45] Brown 2000, 144-145.

God's role in the entire process. Indeed, it was the Apostle's own words in Romans 13:13-14 that ultimately brought Augustine into the Catholic fold during his most intense and personal moment of conversion.[46] The intertextual and intertheological relationship between the two was quite profound, and Augustine certainly would have been aware of Paul's feelings surrounding the importance of community. Thus, when he was examining Rome in the *City of God*, he deduced that one of its most crucial features, the commonwealth (*res publica*), could be harnessed for the newly ascendant gathering of the faithful.

The phrase *res publica* is among the more ambiguous Latin phrases, almost universally serving in some reference to the state. It was often used to refer to the actual structure of the republic itself, such as when Julius Caesar spoke of the state suffering harm in the years leading up to the civil wars of the first century B.C.E.[47] Livy used the term in a more abstract sense, connoting the spiritual nation of Rome as a whole,[48] and Seneca combined the two sentiments into one unified conception of the government.[49] Quintilian, Tacitus, Valerius Maximus, and many other writers found use for the term in their respective works, in various references to their own political, cultural, and social ideas of the meaning of the Roman state. The *res publica* was an enduring concept, both for the Romans themselves and for those that sought to emulate their success for centuries after.

But it was the writings of Cicero, wherein the orator utilizes the term *res publica* innumerable times, which provided Augustine with the most inspiration for his arguments regarding the commonwealth.[50] In *On the Commonwealth*, written in the late 50s B.C.E., Cicero

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[46] *Cf.* Augustine, *Conf.* VIII.12.
[47] Julius Caesar, *Commentarii de Bello Civili* I.7.
[48] Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* II.xxxi.10.
[49] Seneca, *Epistulae* LXXXV.38.
[50] When discussing these two figures' writing, I always translate *res publica* as "commonwealth" and *res populi* as "thing of the people."

sets up a series of dialogues between a Socratic figure in the form of Scipio Africanus Minor,[51]

and various other characters from Rome's past. Cicero, by means of these characters'

discourses, discusses topics related to the commonwealth such as the role of justice in a

governing body, the education of the youth, and the fundamental nature of man. Notably,

Augustine draws upon the words of Cicero's Scipio, who:

> *…recolitque suam atque commendat brevem rei publicae definitionem,*
> *qua dixerat eam esse rem populi…nec ipse populus iam populus esset, si esset*
> *iniustus, quoniam non esset multitudo iuris consensu et utilitatis communione*
> *sociata, sicut populus fuerat definitus.*[52]

> …repeats and commits to his brief definition of the commonwealth – that it is
> a "thing of the people…" There can be no "thing of the people" if that same
> group of people is now unjust, since it is not unified by a consensus of the right
> and by a fellowship of advantage – which was the definition of the people
> themselves.

For Augustine, the community is essentially the vessel of the people. Justice, or the "consensus

of the right," is crucial to its wellbeing. The ideal Roman commonwealth is one in which the

people are united in the name of high concepts such as justice and common administration. The

res publica of which Augustine speaks is intentionally vague, just like the term itself. The

community is that which makes the people united, and for Cicero, this was a purely temporal

goal. With this secular intention in mind, Augustine can begin to unify this Ciceronian

conception with Pauline theological ideas about the *ecclesia* under the body of Christ in his

vision for Christians in the earthly realm. He notes first that governments of man that lack these

Ciceronian characteristics such as justice are nothing more than petty criminal institutions:

> *Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia? quia et latrocinia*
> *quid sunt nisi parva regna? Manus et ipsa hominum est, imperio principis regitur,*
> *pacto societatis astringitur, placiti lege praeda dividitur. Hoc malum si in tantum*
> *perditorum hominum accessibus crescit, ut et loca teneat sedes constituat,*

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[51] Not to be confused with his more famous grandfather, Scipio Africanus Major.
[52] Augustine, *Civ*. II.21.

civitates occupet populos subiuget, evidentius regni nomen adsumit, quod ei iam in manifesto confert non dempta cupiditas, sed addita inpunitas.[53]

What are kingdoms without justice but great bands of criminals? What are these criminal gangs but small kingdoms? A gang is a host of men governed by the authority of a leader, drawn together by a communal pact, in which the spoils are allocated according to a mutually-acceptable agreement. If this evil (with the arrival of the servile masses to its ranks) flourishes so much so that it gains territory, establishes a residence, occupies cities, and subjugates peoples, then it more evidently adopts the title of kingdom, which is now conferred on it manifestly, not by the repudiation of greed and avarice, but by the procurement of impunity.

The realm cannot be aggressive in its militaristic actions, nor joined together in the name of gaining material wealth and the spoils of victory. Such criminal kingdoms trick the people into serving their own interests, and the ruling class acquires a dangerous level of impunity. These kingdoms are counter to Cicero's ideal, and are certainly in direct spiritual opposition to Paul's ideas of commonwealth and governance. The intent behind the establishment of such governments is adverse for the people at best, evil at worst.

Augustine notes that the real, historical Rome never actually attained the ideal commonwealth of which Cicero spoke. He returns to the pagan orator much later in the work in order to relay this point, noting that if Scipio's definition of the commonwealth is true:

...numquam fuit Romana res publica, quia numquam fuit res populi, quam definitionem voluit esse rei publicae. Populum enim esse definivit coetum multitudinis iuris consensu et utilitatis communione sociatum. Quid autem dicat iuris consensum, disputando explicat, per hoc ostendens geri sine iustitia non posse rem publicam; ubi ergo iustitia uera non est, nec ius potest esse.[54]

…then there never was a Roman commonwealth, because the Roman state was never the "thing of the people" – which stands as the intended definition of the commonwealth. So [Scipio] defined the people as a community unified by a consensus of the right and by a fellowship of advantage. He explains in the discussion, moreover, what he means by this consensus of the right, demonstrating that the "thing of the people" cannot carry on without justice. Thus, where there is no true justice, there can be no right.

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[53] Augustine, *Civ*. IV.4.
[54] Augustine, *Civ*. XIX.21.

In making such an observation – that the Roman state never reached its ideal form as described by Cicero – Augustine could have easily begun to distance himself from Rome. Indeed, he has already relayed the debaucheries associated with the decline of the Roman Empire in his work with ease. He discusses the theatre, for example, which represents to him the gross moral degradation and harsh appetites of the Roman people. These are the same people who showed no gratitude to their heroes in times of war and peace, and the same people who violently persecuted Christians for hundreds of years. Augustine notes the corruption, greed, and avarice of Roman generals and the base desires of the public that they serve. A less nuanced writer might have turned on Rome completely, forsaking it to damnation and removing himself from the material world entirely.

But rather than break from Rome, Augustine cannot disassociate himself from *Romanitas*. He understands the importance of a cohesive community above all and, like Paul, appreciates the significance of this unity. He is a Roman citizen on the terrestrial plane and a Christian citizen on the ethereal one. The *parousia* and the final judgment might not be quite as nigh as the earliest Christians had envisioned, and Augustine recognized that the faithful did have to live on this earth for a time, at least as dual citizens. His personal life, as he himself described, was filled with these moments that relayed the importance of secular community. When he lost his friend to fever in his younger days, he was flooded with grief; for a time, his world ceased to exist without the pain of his compatriot's absence.[55] His relationship to his mother was of great importance to Augustine: not only was she instrumental in his conversion to Christianity, but the intimacy of their final conversations and the pain he felt at her death display

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[55] Augustine, *Conf.* IV.4.

the importance of this worldly familial connection.[56] The world of the present, grounded in the past, means everything to Augustine when looking towards the future. This future is based in his Christian identity, as is his present; his past remains indubitably Roman.

The importance that Augustine had previously granted to his unnamed friend and his mother demonstrates his recognition that there was, in fact, an unavoidable temporal world in which he had to live. Demonstrably, the *City of God* was written in response to events of the earthly realm. The world of Augustine was the world of Rome, and Rome had just fallen. Still, the exact political structures of Rome mattered little to him. She could be a kingdom or an empire or a republic, and it would not matter. The *concept* of Rome, however, remains decidedly important to him. Christians must live in a certain way while embarking on their pilgrimage towards glory everlasting, and for Augustine, Rome was here in the now. He recognized that he could harness the ideal community which previous Romans had claimed to seek, and harmonize this ideal with similar conceptions found in Scripture. In the context of the combined Ciceronian and Pauline community that Augustine envisions, he can then turn to answering the difficult question of how exactly to live in such troubled times as both a Christian and a Roman.

(Misplaced) Virtue of the Romans

Augustine holds a vision of ideal Roman virtue, in parallel to his vision of the ideal community of Rome itself. Likewise, this ideal is in servitude to the views of virtue that his enemies hold. In his epistles, Paul noted the importance of doing good for the world, regardless of one's position in it:

> There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.[57]

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[56] *Cf.* Augustine, *Conf.* IX.

For the Apostle, evil has no place in the Christian community; there is only room for the virtuous deeds done by its members. If a man is Jewish or Greek (or Roman, or even barbarian), he must act for the good of his community above all else. With this view in mind, Augustine does admit (in the vein of Sallust in the first century B.C.E.) that Rome came to power through the presence of good men who did just that:

> *Sed per quosdam paucos, qui pro suo modo boni erant, magna administrabantur atque illis toleratis ac temperatis malis paucorum bonorum providentia res illa crescebat…*[58]

> But it was through the actions of a mere few, who were good men in and of themselves, that great tasks were accomplished; and it was because of the forethought of those few good men that terrible things were made more tolerable and moderate, and from this, the country thrived…

Their virtue was responsible for the successes of Rome; indeed, the Romans overthrew their own corrupt kings, fought wars against the opulence of foreign rulers, and won just battles against all odds. Augustine does agree with Sallust in stating that only a minority of Romans throughout history held the virtue that allowed for such worldly success.[59] His argument diverges, however, as he holds that this virtue (though commendable) is misguided. For Augustine, the problem lies not with the consequences of the virtuous actions, but in the intent with which they are measured and completed.

Consider, as Augustine did, the case of Regulus.[60] The story goes that Regulus was a highly successful Roman commander in North Africa who was eventually defeated in battle and captured by the forces of Carthage during the course of the First Punic War. After another Carthaginian army was defeated elsewhere, he was sent to Rome under a sworn oath; he was to

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[57] Rom. 2:9-11.
[58] Augustine, *Civ.* V.12.
[59] *Cf.* Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 53.
[60] *Cf.* Cicero, *De Officiis* III.99-100.

negotiate the release of crucial Carthaginian prisoners, or return to Carthage himself to be tortured and killed. Recognizing that the Roman state would be more adversely affected by the loss of the prisoners than by the loss of himself, Regulus swayed the Senate to not release the prisoners at all. In keeping with his oath, he returned to the bosom of his enemy, whereupon he suffered endless torture at the hands of the Carthaginians before being brutally murdered.

Cicero discusses Regulus' story as among the highest and most heroic examples of the conflation between the honorable and the useful, which he sees as the two characteristics of virtuous and moral action. In contrast, Cicero considers a negative example, discussing what the traits of a non-virtuous Regulus would have been:

> *Perspicuum est enim ea, quae timido animo, humili, demisso fractoque fiant, - quale fuisset Reguli factum, si aut de captivis quod ipsi opus esse videretur, non quod rei publicae, censuisset aut domi remanere voluisset,- non esse utilia, quia sint flagitiosa, foeda, turpia.*[61]

> For it is evident that behavior put forth by a cowardly, humiliated, downtrodden , and shattered spirit – conduct which Regulus would have produced if his actions regarding the captives had been done for himself alone and not for the good of the commonwealth, or if he had sought and wanted to remain at home – is not proper, because it is shameful, detestable, and dishonorable.

By articulating this negative example, Cicero shows that Regulus himself was actually a man who was brave, honorable, and without fear. Even in the face of torture and death, he remained true to his oaths and to his virtue. Augustine does not necessarily disagree with Cicero's veneration, noting that the praise of such courage by the pagans is a completely justifiable action.[62] Indeed, he later mentions that:

> *Inter omnes suos laudabilies et virtutis insignibus inlustres viros non proferunt Romani meliorem…*[63]

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[61] Cicero, *De Officiis* III.115.
[62] Augustine, *Civ.* I.15.
[63] Augustine, *Civ.* I.24.

> Amongst all their illustrious men, praiseworthy and distinguished by virtue, the Romans could offer none greater.

Yet this pagan virtue is misguided. Quite simply, Regulus was devoted to the wrong gods. The nature of his suffering (despite his loyalty to them) proves to Augustine that those gods do not exist, or if they do, they do not care for their suppliants.[64] Therefore, they are not worthy to be worshipped by men as virtuous as Regulus. More significantly for Augustine, the reward that the Romans ultimately received as a result of Regulus' (and others') virtue was merely temporal.[65] Rome may have bested Carthage in the war, but she did not see any higher realm of goodness accrued in her society; in fact, the benefits of winning the war were purely economic and political, having nothing to do with bettering the morality of the state. Regulus knew this, and he sacrificed himself in the name of the secular success of Rome alone. There might have even been an issue of pride at stake; like Lucretia, Regulus considered his reputation above all else. In the end, the intent of Regulus' actions, to Augustine, were flawed and might have been better placed. Instead, he contends that men of virtue in the Christian community should be seen as the highest examples to which other men can aspire,[66] and the goal of acquiring wealth in the earthly realm does not line up with Augustine's conception of Christian virtue.

In a similar vein, Augustine sees the suicide of Cato the Younger as an even more problematic misplacement of Roman virtue. (Cato had ended his life as a republican hero, after refusing to submit to the will of Julius Caesar in the mid-first century C.E.) Of course, Augustine holds that suicide is an act that a Christian should never consider as it is both a violation of God's creation and his commandments, and as such, Cato's suicide itself should scarcely be upheld as virtuous. Yet Augustine later contends that Cato's qualities came very

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[64] *Cf.* Augustine, *Civ.* I.15.
[65] *Cf.* Augustine, *Civ.* V.15.
[66] *Cf.* Augustine, *Civ.* V.16.

close to reaching the highest form of virtue,[67] and he upholds him as one of the aforementioned

"handful of good men" whose virtue led the Roman people to greatness. Cato's virtue was there,

but the act itself was problematic. Suicide is a transgression against God, and Augustine could

never condone the action. But Cato was a known figure, whose life and death resonated deep

within the bounds of the cultural memory of the Romans, and Augustine feels that something

powerful could have been gained from his example had he acted more appropriately. Augustine

notes the profundity of Cato's example, stating that the expansion of the Roman Empire had an

important purpose for Christians:

> *...ut cives aeternae illius civitatis, quamdiu hic peregrinantur, diligenter et sobrie illa intueantur exempla et videant quanta dilectio debeatur supernae patriae propter uitam aeternam, si tantum a suis civibus terrena dilecta est propter hominum gloriam.*[68]

> ...that the citizens of the Eternal City, during the course of their wandering pilgrimage, should diligently and soberly look upon these exemplars, and see what love is owed to the celestial kingdom on account of life eternal, as the Earthly City had been beloved by her own citizens on account of the glory of men.

The Romans, at least ideally, were supposed to look towards men such as Cato and Regulus for

direction on how to live in the present. Augustine, in accord with his distinct sense of the

present, sees value in their exemplification of virtue. The Christian martyrs and saints belong to

the ethereal realm, and citizens of the heavenly city already know to look to them for guidance.

Indeed, Augustine barely speaks of them. Yet Christians, with an eye towards the eternal life,

still must also live on the earth. While living in the earthly city, they must also observe the

virtues of those of that sphere. Rome expanded so that the stories of Cato and Regulus could be

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[67] Augustine, *Civ.* V.12.
[68] Augustine, *Civ.* V.16.

spread across the world. It was an expansion that, despite its paganism and depravity and lack of

faith, was ordained by God himself.[69]

Of course, Augustine does not deign to expect perfection from such exemplars.

Sermonizing in the year of the sacking of Rome, he references the good citizens of the city:

> *Fuerunt Romae quinquaginta iusti, immo si modum humanum consideres, millia iustorum; si regulam perfectionis inquiras, nemo iustorum existat Romae. Qui se iustum audeat dicere, audiet a veritate : numquid tu sapientior Daniele?*[70]

> There were fifty just men in Rome. In reality, if you consider the ways of humans, there were thousands of just men. If you investigate the rule of perfection, then there exist no just men in Rome. If anybody dares to call himself just, then he should listen to the truth: *Is it so that you are wiser than Daniel?*

For Augustine, no citizen of this earth could reach the perfection of the Biblical patriarchs, and

no one should have the audacity to claim that ideal status. Instead, even in the face of the Gothic

invasion, Christians must remember that there are in fact good and just people in the earthly city.

Augustine notes that this is one of the crucial reasons that God actually corrected the trajectory

of the city of Rome by means of the sack, as opposed to destroying it outright.[71] The created

must respect the will of the Creator, and the word of Christ must be esteemed above all else. Yet

Rome cannot be forgotten entirely:

> *Appende cum Christo Romam, appende cum Christo totam terram, appende cum Christo caelum et terram...*[72]

> Consider Rome with Christ, consider the entire land with Christ, consider the heaven and earth with Christ.

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[69] Augustine, *Civ.* V.21.
[70] Augustine, *Exc. Urb.* V.
[71] Augustine, *Exc. Urb.* VIII.
[72] Augustine, *Exc. Urb.* IX.

Rome suffered greatly, but she was not destroyed entirely. As such, the city of man cannot be

forsaken – criticized for its flaws, yes, but not abandoned – and Augustine recognizes it as his

home for the time being.

In the city of man, the wise and virtuous must act, though they may have only imperfect

and incomplete knowledge. To demonstrate this idea, Augustine poses a hypothetical situation

common to the Roman world, wherein a judge is faced with the task of investigating the veracity

of criminal accusations weighed against a fellow citizen.[73] The judge must seek the truth with

the sole intention of seeking the truth. This allows him license to choose to torture an innocent

man in order to reach the conclusion that the man is indeed innocent, and as a result, this action

may inadvertently kill him. And when that innocent man confesses to a crime that he did not

commit and is put to death by the judge, it can never be truly known whether or not he was

guilty. Still, the magistrate does not act with evil intentions as long as he starts the process with

the goal of seeking the truth. He is still a wise man, and acts out of necessity; his ignorance is

unavoidable. Augustine laments this difficult situation, but understands its inevitability:

> *Haec est ergo quam dicimus miseria certe hominis, etsi non malitia sapientis.*[74]
>
> Here, thus, is what I certainly call the misery of man, given that this action does
> not arise from wickedness on the part of the wise magistrate.

The judge is not guilty of sin, as his duty and lack of knowledge force him into his actions. Once

he realizes the truth of his situation, he could ask God to deliver him from his troubles.[75] With

the story of the judge, Augustine demonstrates the importance of acting with good intention

combined with the practicality of acting in the moment. God will release the judge from his

necessities as the judge is not guilty of sin, but he must act in the earthly realm for the present

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[73] Augustine, *Civ.* XIX.6.
[74] Augustine, *Civ.* XIX.6.
[75] *Cf.* Ps. 25:17

day. The Roman world was ordained by God so that men such as the hypothetical magistrate can

act for the good of the earthly realm, with an eye towards the ethereal. The *parousia* is not quite

as imminent for Augustine as Paul might suggest, and Rome is the now. Augustine knows that

he and his Christian brethren must live with that situation, for better or for worse.

The Ideal Commonwealth

Consider the words of the Apostle in regard to secular authorities, and the attitude that

Christians are to have towards these powers:

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority
> except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.
> Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those
> who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to
> bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you
> will receive its approval…[76]

Rome expanded by the providence of God, according to Paul (indirectly) and Augustine

(directly). Neither could completely remove himself from the concept of Rome itself, as much

as they may have liked to. The Roman world was crumbling around Augustine, but it was a far

different world from that which had killed Paul. In the Apostle's time, Christianity was

considered to be a mystery cult, a fringe offshoot of the already bizarre Judaism, and its members

were easily scapegoated by pagan authorities in times of crisis. In Augustine's time, it was the

religion of the state. Roman legions fought under the Chi-Rho and the sign of the cross, as

opposed to the aegis of Jupiter or the chariot of Victoria. Still, the ideal conception of Rome

continued to prevail, even as the real Rome crumbled and the chaos of the migrations of non-

Roman peoples across the boundaries of the empire added to its structural demise. The Huns,

Goths, Vandals, and others ended any conception of the frontier security upon which Rome had

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[76] Rom. 13:1-3.

prided herself prior to the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries.[77] The secular authorities of whom Paul had spoken – the same authorities that had embraced Christianity – were in trouble, and Augustine recognized this. What mattered to him was the ideal commonwealth, or his amalgamated Ciceronian and Pauline "thing of the people," that could be spread via just wars and righteous expansion. The stories of exemplars of virtue could be spread throughout the empire, teaching Christians awaiting the end how to live in the world in which they spent their pilgrimage. That divinely ordained empire was threatened and this problem had to be addressed. All that could remain of the real Rome was the conception of the ideal Rome, and Augustine knew just what had to be salvaged from its remains.

Augustine, like Orosius, was a dual citizen: among Romans he was a Roman, among Christians he was a Christian.[78] When Rome was sacked, his earthly citizenship was threatened, and the question of what to salvage from this dying world permeates the *City of God*. The real Rome had always been in servitude to its own appetites, never coming close to the ideal Rome of which Cicero and others had dreamed. The real Rome, however, was in its death throes, and Augustine saw a distinct opportunity to attempt to attain certain aspects of its ideal form. With the new perspectives of non-Roman peoples closing in on his homeland (often accompanied by savage cruelty and acts of violence), Augustine's sense of the present could be redirected towards the future. Christian and Roman identity would be fused together centuries later, but the Bishop of Hippo was not quite at that point. Augustine's claim to the legacy of *Romanitas* was complex but poignant, problematic but durable. He upheld Pauline values above much else, but recognized the potential blessings that could arise from a reappropriation of the Roman past. He also recognized the limitations of that history. Though Alexander the Great was not Roman at

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[77] Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 173.

[78] *Cf.* the epigraph to the current chapter.

all, a story about the Macedonian conqueror stands as a classic moment where Augustine can

relate his moral-political values:

> *Eleganter enim et veraciter Alexandro illi Magno quidam comprehensus pirata*
> *respondit. Nam cum idem rex hominem interrogaret, quid ei videretur, ut mare*
> *haberet infestum, ille libera contumacia: Quod tibi, inquit, ut orbem terrarum;*
> *sed quia id ego exiguo navigio facio, latro vocor; quia tu magna classe,*
> *imperator.*[79]

> Indeed, it was handsomely and truthfully that a captured pirate responded to
> the inquiries of Alexander the Great. The king asked the man, 'Why is it that you
> infest the sea?' To this, the pirate responded with free obstinacy, 'For the same
> reasons as you, when you infest the earth. But because I do it with a small vessel,
> I am called a marauder; because you have great armed forces, you are called an
> emperor!

Perspective is crucial to this story. The impunity that Alexander gained as a result of his

incredible military prowess does not entitle him to be unjust; at the end of the day, he is nothing

more than a pirate himself. King and bandit are both citizens of this earth, and both are equally

as insignificant from the perspective of the heavenly realm. Therefore, this story from the past

allows Augustine to demonstrate how to act for the present. He will always be a citizen of Rome

while he lives, as will his Christian brethren throughout the empire. *Romanitas* is his for the

taking, and he lays claim to that legacy as much as he possibly can, with an eye towards the

future return of Christ. This appropriation of Roman-ness, pivotal for Augustine himself and his

direct contemporaries, would retain its poignancy in regards to future conceptions of Christian

identity in the West.

The Bishop of Hippo serves as a significant endpoint to the classical period of Western

philosophy that had begun some eight centuries prior with Socrates. His profound philosophy

and intricate theology would influence the next millennium of thought in the west without rival.

Those who read and assessed the writings of Augustine throughout the Middle Ages likewise had

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[79] Augustine, *Civ*. IV.4.

their own conceptions of *Romanitas*, and developed new ideas of what the legacy of Rome meant

to them. Their own historical contexts would shape these ideas in wholly unique ways, but the

cultural memory of the world's capital would never cease to exist in the mind's eye of the west,

an aspect of the great debt due to Augustine. The ideal of Rome, *caput mundi* and ever-

changing, would always remain present.

Chapter II

The *Romanitas* of the Successors: From the Reign of Theoderic the Great to the Coronation of Charlemagne

"Aurea Roma iterum renovata renascitur orbi…"[80]

- *Modoinus, c. 805*

In the autumn of 430 C.E., a frail Saint Augustine lay dying as his prelatic city of Hippo suffered the miseries of war at the hands of besieging Vandal invaders. By the beginning of September, the bishop had succumbed to the inevitabilities of old age, leaving behind a theological legacy fitting for a man of such profound intellectual prowess. Possidius wrote of his friend's continual devotion to his community, despite the impending disaster:

> *Verbum Dei usque ad ipsam suam extremam aegritudinem impraetermisse, alacriter et fortiter, sana mente sanoque consilio in ecclesia praedicavit.*[81]

> Up until that very moment of his final illness, he preached the Word of God in the church without interruption, joyfully and boldly, sound of mind and clear in judgment.[82]

As Augustine passed from life into the immortality of history's annals, the Roman Empire that he had called home was undergoing inescapable death throes of its own. His province in North Africa, which had been relatively secure compared to the rest of the west throughout his lifetime, soon suffered a complete collapse.[83] No more were the glorious days of Cicero's philosophical orations, Virgil's poetic genius, and the foreign conquests of the emperor Trajan; the Roman state in the fifth century was nothing more than a mere shadow of its previous success, a relic of a better and bygone age. Not a generation after Augustine's death, the last emperor in the west would be deposed by a Germanic general and any remaining auspices of the old Roman order

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[80] Modoinus, *Ecloga* I.27, quoted in Gerhart B. Ladner, "Terms and Ideas of Renewal," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 3.

[81] Possidius, *Sancti Augustini Vita* XXXI.

[82] All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

[83] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 424, 428.

were subsequently lost. But the concept of *Romanitas* did not suffer the same forgotten fate. While the empire of the Caesars was no more in practice, the idea of this past glory endured with verve amongst a wide range of the successor peoples throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond.

The Greek-speaking areas of the empire in the east (known to us anachronistically as the Byzantine Empire) survived as a quasi-unified imperial entity for another thousand years, always claiming the cognomen of the old Roman Empire and enjoying varying levels of success throughout this time. When its capital of Constantinople finally succumbed to centuries of Muslim incursions in 1453, the victorious (and decisively non-European) Ottomans thought themselves to be the inheritors of Rome and the classical imperial tradition. Elsewhere, to the distant north of the fallen Byzantine Empire, the rulers of Muscovy held similar ideals of Moscow as a third and final Rome.[84] Snorri Sturluson in Iceland[85] and Geoffrey of Monmouth in Britain[86] claimed their people to have held common ancestry with the Romans. Even into the twentieth century there remained a Qayser in Turkey, a Tsar in Russia, and a Kaiser in Germany, and the *Pontifex Maximus* continues to reign in Vatican City to this day. Any examination of this tradition, however, must begin with the late antique and early medieval descendants of the Latin-speaking areas of the old Roman Empire in the west, who maintained the most cogent claims to the legacy of *Romanitas*. If Saint Paul brought the God of Israel to the Gentiles, then in the same manner, it was the rulers and elites of these non-Roman peoples who engendered a sense of Roman-ness in their new societies. Beginning with the reign of the Ostrogoth Theoderic the Great in the late fifth century and culminating with the coronation of the Frankish king Charlemagne as Roman Emperor in 800, some of the most cogent examples of post-classical

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[84] Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople: 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 178.
[85] *Cf.* Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda* Pr.
[86] *Cf.* Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae* I.

claims to *Romanitas* endured in the west. To understand the lasting significance of these

assertions, however, an explication of the Byzantine claim to continuity in the east must first be

examined.

Roman in Name Only: The Greek Assertion of *Romanitas*

A generation prior to Saint Augustine, the Greek-speaking historian Eusebius wrote a

vivid oration in praise of Constantine the Great, who had famously moved the capital of the

empire east to Byzantium. Put forth on the thirtieth anniversary of the emperor's reign in the

mid-300s, Eusebius' oration panegyrizes the first Christian ruler, and draws frequent connections

between the reinvigorated Rome in the Greek east (*viz* Constantinople) and the blessed presence

of a Christendom on earth:

> At the same time one universal power, the Roman Empire, arose and flourished,
> while the enduring and implacable hatred of nation against nation was now
> removed: and as the knowledge of one God, and one way of religion and
> salvation, even the doctrine of Christ, was made known to all mankind; so at the
> self-same period, the entire dominion of the Roman empire being vested in a
> single sovereign, profound peace reigned throughout the world. And thus, by the
> express appointment of the same God, two roots of blessing, the Roman Empire,
> and the doctrine of Christian piety, sprang up together for the benefit of men.[87]

For an historian living in the time of a unified empire, the concept of an eternal and universal

Rome would have been considered inherent to the state's existence, and this view would not

have been unlike that of the historians of the more distant classical past. But Eusebius also

breaks away from this tradition quite significantly; his conception of Rome is that of an empire

grounded in the Greek east as opposed to the Latin west, united under the providence of God,

and guided by a philosophy rooted in what post-Renaissance scholars would term

Caesaropapism. Under this model, religious authority and secular governance were to be wholly

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[87] Eusebius, *Oration in Praise of Constantine* XVI.4, trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series Vo1 1.*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890).

integrated as one. Like the pagan Roman emperors who were simultaneously of divine nature and worldly-political essence, the Byzantine Emperor was head of both church and state. Though the Patriarch of Constantinople held a prominent role in the Eastern Church, it was not him but the emperor who was more like a 'thirteenth apostle,' and true authority remained in the hands of the imperial court. In the west, a division emerged between secular rulers (kings, later emperors) and spiritual leaders (namely, the pope), but in the east, any distinction between religious and political authority was rendered nonexistent.

During Eusebius' time under the reign of Constantine, the vision of a Caesaropapist empire for the Romans had come to fruition. The panegyrist refers to the emperor himself as one from whom "the countless multitudes of angels, the companies of archangels, [and] the chorus of holy spirits, draw from and reflect his radiance, as from the fountains of everlasting light."[88] Even more so, the emperor is the "great High Priest of the mighty God, elder than all time and every age, devoted to his Father's glory," and that he "first and alone makes intercession with Him for the salvation of mankind."[89] At the foundation of Eusebius' praises rests the idea that the emperor's authority comes from God himself, and that he should rule his most perfect empire as if he were imitating the heavenly kingdom itself.[90] Though the historian is avidly engaged in a politically-charged hagiography in the context of his oration, the model that he puts forth of the Roman emperor as a Caesaropapist ruler endured far beyond Constantine's reign, and was used as inspiration by Greek Byzantine rulers for centuries forward. Even as the actual territory of the Roman Empire fell to Ostrogoths, Lombards, Franks, and Muslims, the Greek rulers in the east

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[88] Eusebius, *Oration in Praise of Constantine* I.2.
[89] Eusebius, *Oration in Praise of Constantine* I.6.
[90] Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East & Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 60-61.

would always retain this Eusebian model, particularly in regards to their own, and often misconceived claims to the legacy of Rome.

In relation to the Greek claim, the titles surrounding the concept of Roman leadership held a particular importance in the royal courts of the Byzantine east. The primary titles of the Byzantine emperor were *basileus* (βασιλεύς) [91] and *autokrator* (αὐτοκράτωρ),[92] the Greek translations of the Latin terms *augustus* and *imperator* respectively. Affixed to these titles was the word *Rhomaioi* (Ῥωμαῖοι), or "of the Romans,"[93] and the emperor's children were considered *porphyrogennetos* (πορφυρογέννητος), or "born of the purple."[94] Despite having lost the vast majority of the original imperial Roman lands and being confined to the Greek east (with the brief exception of Justinian the Great's reconquest of Italy in the sixth century), the Byzantine rulers never ceased claiming the legacy of Rome in their royal titles. Any ruler of the western successors to Rome would have been considered by the Byzantines to be nothing more than a petty king (*rex*), a lesser title with more barbaric connotations. Even when one of these kings actually ruled the city of Rome itself and the people who could legitimately call themselves Roman, the Byzantine court would fiercely guard its assertion of Roman legacy and claims to ancient *imperium* throughout the Middle Ages, up until its ultimate demise in 1453.

Ostrogothica Roma Redux, 493-526 C.E.

In the west, political structures proved to be more tenuous and unstable than in the east, and it is among the great ironies of history that a feeble boy and puppet ruler named Romulus Augustus served as the final emperor of the state that his two renowned namesakes had worked

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[91] *ODB*, s.v. "Basileus."
[92] *ODB*, s.v. "Autokrator."
[93] *ODB*, s.v. "Rhomaios."
[94] *ODB*, s.v. "Porphyrogennetos."

to establish.[95] In 476 C.E., the boy-ruler was overthrown by the Germanic general Odoacer, a

man described by a near-contemporary as a tall of stature youth (*iuvenis statura procerus*),

whose appearance was hindered only by his cheap clothing (*vilissimo habitu*).[96] To an ordinary

Roman citizen at the time, the overthrow of Romulus Augustus must have seemed like yet

another in a series of *coup d'états*, common to the circumstances of a decaying empire. But even

as early as the sixth century, it was clear to many observers that a major historical transition had

occurred by means of Odoacer's actions. Writing his *Gothic History* in the early 550s (and

claiming to be summarizing the work of an even earlier writer named Cassiodorus), Jordanes

evokes the profound significance of that year's events:

> *Sic quoque Hesperium Romanae gentis imperium, quod septingentesimo nono urbis conditae anno primus Augustorum Octavianus Augustus tenere coepit, cum hoc Augustulo periit anno decessorum prodecessorumve regni quingentesimo vicesimo secundo, Gothorum dehinc regibus Romam Italiamque tenentibus.* [97]

> As such, the Empire of the Roman people in the West, which Octavian, first of the line of the Augusti, began to lead seven hundred and nine years from the city's founding, passed from life with this Augustulus [a diminutive nickname for the boy king] in the five hundred and twenty-second year from the outset of the rule of his forbearers. Henceforth, it was the Gothic kings that held Rome and Italy.

Writing as his Gothic kingdom was crumbling under decades of war with Byzantium, Jordanes'

sense of history and the passing of time resonate throughout his description of Rome's ultimate

fate. The scale of the *coup* was nothing short of the disposal of a thousand years of history,

culture, and tradition, and Jordanes recognizes the significance of this closing year. As both

Romans and Goths on the Italian peninsula were suffering under the yoke of Greek invasion, the

historian attempts to fuse the histories of both peoples throughout his work. As such, the most

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[95] Romulus was the traditional founding figure of the city of Rome, and seven centuries after his time, Augustus founded the empire that bore its home city's name.

[96] *Anon. Vales., Pars Posterior* X.46.

[97] Jordanes, *Get.* XLVI.243.

important phrase he writes denotes who exactly took up the mantle of this age-old leadership: the Gothic people.

Odoacer ruled Italy for just over a decade, but not unlike most of the later Roman emperors, he would be violently overthrown and murdered. In illegally taking the title of *rex* of Italy, he had greatly angered Emperor Zeno in the Byzantine east, who continued to claim sovereignty over the whole of the Italian peninsula.[98] On a similar symbolic and emotional level, the emperor was angered that the age-old homeland of his empire rested in barbarian hands. And in the practical sphere, the potential of having an autonomously-minded enemy on his western frontier could not have looked like a healthy prospect. With the eastern realm of the empire already facing stability troubles of its own, Zeno turned to a man whose ostensible allegiance to Byzantium was existent at the time, but tenuous at best.

Theoderic the Great of the Germanic Ostrogoths had been held in political captivity in Constantinople as a youth,[99] and once he became leader of his people, manipulated his way through numerous alliances with Byzantium.[100] Described centuries later by an otherwise critical Edward Gibbon as a "superior genius" and as a hero "excellent in the arts of war and of government who restored an age of peace and prosperity,"[101] Theoderic was greatly feared and respected by his contemporaries. With a substantial sum of money in hand from Zeno, the Ostrogothic leader invaded Italy and destroyed the kingdom that Odoacer had built.[102] Jordanes, though likely attempting to idealize the emperor's relationship to Theoderic and thereby legitimize later Ostrogothic rule over the city of Rome, describes an almost familial relationship

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[98] Yitzhak Hen, *Roman Barbarians: The Royal Court and Culture in the Early Medieval West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 28.

[99] Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 262.

[100] Hen 2007, 28-29.

[101] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1946), 1146.

[102] *Anon. Vales., Pars Posterior* XI.49.

between the two men. With sadness, according to the sixth-century historian, Zeno sent his

friend away with total command of the Senate and People of Rome (*senatum populumque ei

commendans Romanum*).[103] Though it is unlikely that Zeno actually granted the full ancient

power of S.P.Q.R. to the barbarian king, it is significant in and of itself that a near-contemporary

of Theoderic would portray the command to destroy Odoacer in such a manner. Even if this

particular instance was exaggerated by Jordanes, cooperation with the Byzantine court would

prove to be a staple of Theoderic's political dealings with the east and helped to guarantee the

surprising peace and prosperity of his reign.[104]

Whether or not Jordanes embellished his description of the commission from Zeno,

Theoderic himself proved to embrace a *Romanitas* of his own while ruling over the Romans.

The *Anonymous Valesianus* describes his peaceable and prosperous reign as king in such

laudatory terms:

> *Sic gubernavit duas gentes in uno, Romanorum et Gothorum, dum ipse quidem
> Arrianae sectae esset, tamen nihil contra religionem catholicam temptans;
> exhibens ludos circensium et amphitheatrum, ut etiam a Romanis Traianus vel
> Valentinianus, quorum tempora sectatus est, appellaretur, et a Gothis secundum
> edictum suum, quo ius constituit, rex fortissimus in omnibus iudicaretur.*[105]

> Thus, he governed two races at once, the Romans and the Goths, so that although
> he was a member of the Arian sect, he nonetheless urged no attack against the
> Catholic faith; he put on games in the circus and amphitheater, so much so that
> even the Romans dubbed him a Trajan or a Valentinian, whose times he chased
> as exemplary; and by the Goths too, because of his edict in which he established
> law, he was considered to be their best king in all respects.

The text portrays a just and noble king who can rule over an ethnically and religiously divided

society, and his accomplishments are likened to those of the most glorious Romans of yore. To

the document's author, Theoderic is a savvy man who can appease the people through the

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[103] Jordanes, *Get.* LVII.292.

[104] Walter Pohl, "The Barbarian Successor States," In *The Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Leslie Webster
and Michelle Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 38.

[105] *Anon. Vales., Pars Posterior* XII.60.

exhibition of public games, but also protect them with the establishment of law and order. He is

seen by the Goths as their premier leader, and even the conquered Romans respect him as one of

their own. Theoderic is thus an ideal king.

Indeed, such vocal and literary praise gains a particular significance when considering the

origins of the document in which it is found. The *Anonymous Valesianus* is a text that arises

from Byzantine scholars and politicians who, in their loyalty to the eastern claim to the legacy of

Rome, would otherwise be skeptical of a barbarian ruler asserting that tradition for himself. If

this text (written from a potentially antithetical perspective) is so generous in its language, the

depth of Theoderic's *Romanitas* must have extended beyond simple imitation. For example, it

relates the king's aphorisms vis-à-vis Roman-ness with ease and confidence:

> *Dixit...'Romanus miser imitatur Gothum et utilis Gothus imitatur Romanum.'*[106]

> He said, 'A poor Roman resembles the Goth, and the proper Goth resembles the Roman.'

Theoderic held a vision of "proper" Goths being closer in nature to Romans than the *actual*

Romans, and even as related through the lens of a Byzantine text, his viewpoint is rendered clear.

The differences between people were more in the realm of social status than ethnic identification,

a fact that would have been shocking to the Romans not a century prior. Consider the rhetoric of

Tacitus towards the end of the first century, for example, as he described the neighboring

Germanic tribes to the north:

> *Ipse eorum opinionibus accedo, qui Germaniae populos nullis aliis aliarum nationum conubiis infectos propriam et sinceram et tantum sui similem gentem exstitisse arbitrantur.*[107]

> For myself, I give credence to those who posit the observation that the Germanic peoples are free from the corruption of intermarriage with other nations, and that they are a characteristic, pure people like no one else but themselves.

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[106] *Anon. Vales., Pars Posterior* XII.61.
[107] Tacitus, *Germania* IV.

Tacitus uses language of difference to separate the Germanic tribes as a unique people, distinct from himself as a Roman. Though he treated his northerly neighbors more favorably than did his contemporaries, the idea that the two races were (and should be) distinct was a common sentiment of his time. To an outside observer, then, Theoderic's ability to rule over both peoples relatively peacefully would have seemed to be a great achievement of its own right. Indeed, the text goes forth to describe how the king, in unity with the senate itself, publically promised to maintain the decrees of the old Roman emperors during his reign.[108] An example of a clear political manoeuver at its core, such moves in the public sphere defined the period of his rule. In public he wore the imperial purple and his coinage shared a stylistic resemblance to that of bygone eras.[109] Theoderic the Gothic barbarian had fully transformed himself into Theoderic the Great, ruler of the Romans.

A sentiment can be found amongst the work of more contemporary historians that interprets Theoderic's adoption of the Roman imperial style as a practical move, designed to both solidify his rule as an Arian barbarian over Catholic Rome and justly rule over the two peoples.[110] Certainly, the practical success of his adaptation of *Romanitas* cannot be understated, as his reign was unquestionably a period of stability and prosperity. And significantly, he was always able to keep the Byzantine court relatively pacified, despite his obvious cultivation of a personal (and rather Roman) imperial image. Theoretically, Theoderic was just a servant to the Byzantine emperor, serving as nothing more than the protector of the empire's territory in

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[108] *Anon. Vales., Pars Posterior* XII.66.
[109] Hen 2007, 31-32.
[110] *E.g.* Thomas S. Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 69-72; Wolfram 1988), 306-307; Hen 2007, 32; Pohl 1997, 38.

Italy.[111] In this vein, Jordanes records the king's final words to his children as culminating in a

reminder regarding the emperor in the east:

> *...ut regem colerent, senatum populumque Romanum amarent principemque
> Orientalem placatum semper propitiumque haberent post deum.[112]*
>
> …that they honor their king, that they love the Senate and People of Rome, and
> that they always maintain an attitude of appeasement to the Eastern Emperor,
> after God.

Theoderic knew that the Byzantine emperor had to believe that he retained primacy over Rome,

as opposed to the Ostrogoths who were merely "protecting" the Eternal City. But significantly,

the Theoderic of Jordanes' portrayal believes that honor for the Gothic king, in conjunction with

Gothic love for the ancient S.P.Q.R., is of greater merit, as they are the first of his final

commands. In the imagination of Jordanes, Theoderic and his line are the true successors of the

ancient Roman lineage.

Even if we disregard Jordanes as an embellisher and story-teller, it seems that

Theoderic's seizing of *Romanitas* went beyond the practical-political sphere and served as a type

of cultural and personal identity for the man and his people. He was a patron to the literary

brilliance of Cassiodorus and Boethius, and oversaw not only economic success and political

stability, but also a *bona fide* cultural flourishing.[113] His architectural program in his capital of

Ravenna served as an homage to the ancient Roman past; his imperial city would be as glorious

and monumental as Rome herself had been.[114] Matching his architectural splendor was his belief

in religious tolerance. Like many Goths, Theoderic was an Arian Christian who believed,

against the Trinitarian Catholics, that the Son was made by the Father and thereby of a lesser

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[111] Wolfram 1988, 289.
[112] Jordanes, *Get.* LIX.304.
[113] Burns 1991, 216.
[114] *Cf.* Hen 2007, 33-37.

status in the divine hierarchy.[115] But he did not tyrannize those of the Catholic faith, and was

able to peaceably promote Arian intellectual activity without having to resort to religious

persecution.[116] Despite the extremely confusing interplay of multiple ethno-religious and

cultural identities in the kingdom, Ostrogothic Italy represented, for a time, a return to ancient

Roman glory.

Theoderic's *Romanitas* was one of fusion and cohesion, and his ability to synthesize

German-ness and Roman-ness was nigh unmatched in late antiquity.[117] Saint Paul once wrote to

the Galatians that there were no longer distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and freeman,

or man and women under Christ.[118] Perhaps Theoderic could be said to have similarly removed

the distinction between Goth and Roman, at least for the period of his rule. And in fact, his

adaption of *Romanitas* seemed to be less of mere imitation and more of complete cultural

identification. Significantly, the great thinkers with whom Theoderic surrounded himself

(Boethius and Cassiodorus among them) continued to write as if they were living in a

continuation of the ancient Roman past. They do not speak of a lost glory in their works,

perhaps because the glory did not appear to have gone anywhere at all. For all intents and

purposes, Theoderic was a Roman ruler, next in the line of the brilliant emperors of old, and for

most of his reign, he was able to claim that identity as his by right.

But such cultural accommodation was not to last, and in the year before his death,

Theoderic made a number of blunders that threatened the harmony of his kingdom. As the result

of a complex dispute involving himself, the Byzantine emperor, Roman elites in Ravenna, and

the Catholic leadership, the king executed the great Boethius and the consul Symmachus, while

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[115] Christopher P. Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 15-16.
[116] Hen 2007, 53-57.
[117] Burns 1991, 219.
[118] Gal. 3:28.

imprisoning the pope to his demise.[119] Theoderic himself died a year later, and it became evident

that the divisions between Arian and Catholic, east and west, and Gothic and Roman would

prove to be too entrenched to avoid without his charismatic leadership holding the delicate

puzzle together. When his successors fell so swiftly to the forces of the upstart Byzantine

emperor Justinian the Great not a generation later, it was mainly due to these ethno-religious

differences that could not truly be overcome.[120]

Still, Theoderic's accomplishments cannot be understated, and his adaptation of

Romanitas would endure beyond his lifetime. Most poignantly, when Charlemagne was crafting

his own version of the Roman Empire some centuries later, it was a statue of none other than the

Ostrogothic king that he would insist be transported from Italy to his home in Aachen.[121] And to

the Germanic peoples, the historical Theoderic became a hero of legendary proportions, enduring

for millennia throughout their vast and rich mythological tradition as Dietrich.[122] In the context

of the demise of Theoderic's kingdom, the closing lines of the Middle High German

Nibelungenlied ring with profundity, and resonate well with the passing on of a once prosperous

era:

> Dietrich and Etzel began to weep, and deeply they lamented both kinsmen and vassals. Their great pride lay dead there. The people, one and all, were given up to grief and mourning. The King's high festival had ended in sorrow, as joy must ever turn to sorrow in the end. I cannot tell you what happened after this, except that knights and ladies, yes, and noble squires too, were seen weeping there for the death of dear friends.[123]

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[119] Wolfram 1988, 331.
[120] Wolfram 1988, 332.
[121] Hen 2007, 58.
[122] Ian Wood, "The Transmission of Ideas," In *The Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Leslie Webster and Michelle Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 113.
[123] *The Nibelungenlied*, trans. A.T. Hatto (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 291.

The Lombard Interlude

Paul the Deacon, a Lombard monk and historian of the eighth century, described the

pestilent and dilapidated conditions of Italy after the collapse of the Ostrogothic kingdom and

during the period of Byzantine rule:

> *Videres seculum in antiquum redactum silentium: nulla vox in rure, nullus*
> *pastorum sibilus, nullae insidiae bestiarum in pecudibus, nulla damna in*
> *domesticis volucribus…Nulla erant vestigia commeantium, nullus cernebatur*
> *percussor, et tamen visus oculorum superabant cadavera mortuorum. Pastoralia*
> *loca versa fuerant in sepulturam hominum, et habitacula humana facta fuerant*
> *confugia bestiarum.*[124]

> You might see the world returned to an ancient silence: not a voice in the field, no
> shepherd's call, no attacks by wild beasts against cattle, no doom for farm-
> birds…there were no footprints of frequenters, no assassin was seen, yet
> nevertheless the corpses of the dead were overflowing the observer's vision.
> Pastoral places had become sepulchers for men and human habitations had
> become sanctuaries for wild beasts.

Paul speaks of the past landscape in almost hellish terms. The natural niches of man and animal

have been reversed, and an almost primordial calm has enveloped the peninsula. The dead rest

unburied, killed not by any human act of violence, but eviscerated by the wrath of nature herself.

This is post-Ostrogothic Italy in the mind of the deacon, writing over a century later, and it is a

dismal sight. No Boethius or Cassiodorus resides in the halls of Ravenna in his vision; instead, a

period of instability on the Italian peninsula would endure, and no singular interpretation of

Romanitas would be manifest. This was the fragmentary era of Lombard rule.

While the Greek forces had successfully defeated the Ostrogoths in Italy, they had so

depleted themselves in attaining this victory that their dominion over the peninsula was not to

last. The Lombards, another Germanic tribe who had bided their time on the northern frontier of

the Gothic kingdom, swiftly stole Italy from the clutches of the weakened Byzantines.[125] Unity

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[124] Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* II.4.
[125] Pohl 1997, 38-39.

over the entire peninsula was never achieved by either side during this period; the Greeks always

held Rome and Ravenna while the Lombards maintained hegemony over the rest of the old

Ostrogothic territories.[126] For two hundred years, the Lombards retained their primacy in Italy,

but their rule remained politically unstable and divisive. Indeed, it was not until the reign of the

Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV (668-685), about one hundred years after the foundation of

the kingdom, that the Lombards were even recognized as a political entity by the East.[127] The

religious loyalties of the monarchs switched from Arian to Catholic, and then back to Arian. The

divisions among the Lombards were so entrenched, in fact, that the origins of the fragmentation

that defined Italy until the nineteenth century have been traced to their period of rule.[128] [129] No

distinct literary or political claim to the legacy of Rome emerges from this era, despite the

relative longevity of the kingdom and its proximity to the antique Italian heartland. Only in the

year 774 would the Lombards finally be overthrown by the Franks, and a wholly new claim to

Romanitas would emerge: one that would define the foundations of medieval Europe for

centuries after the fact.

From Gaul to Francia

      The Kingdom of the Franks was a political amalgamation of the eponymous Germanic

peoples who had come to occupy roughly the territory of the old Roman province of Gaul. The

Franks were just one of the many barbarian peoples that had slowly been encroaching upon

Roman territories from the third century onward, and the fourth-century Roman historian

Ammianus Marcellinus described one of their kings as a deceitful setter of traps (*regis*

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[126] Pohl 1997, 39.

[127] Evangelos Chrysos, "The Empire in East and West," In *The Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Leslie Webster and Michelle Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 17.

[128] Pohl 1997, 39.

[129] The Lombards ruled from their capital of Pavia far in the north of Italy, and outside of Rome, the greatest Byzantine influence was felt in the south. This cultural division could be said to mark the origin of the bifurcation of Italy between Central-European north and Mediterranean south.

insidiis)[130] with a warlike strength and eagerness for battle (*virum bellicosum et fortem*).[131] In

the process of the loss of Roman imperial authority, the disorganized Franks formed a loose

confederation, whose chronology and specificities in this early period are mostly uncertain.[132] It

was not until the late fifth and early sixth centuries – around the time of Theoderic's battles with

Odoacer in Italy – that a man named Clovis was able to unite the Frankish tribes under his rule.

(He ascended to the throne in 481 and died in 511.)[133] Gregory of Tours, writing about a

generation later, relates the events surrounding his role in the utmost defeat of the last Roman

general Syagrius:

> *Super quem Chlodovechus cum Ragnechario, parente suo, quia et ipse regnum
> tenebat, veniens, campum pugnae praeparare deposcit. Sed nec iste distolit ac
> resistere metuit. Itaque inter se utrisque pugnantibus, Syagrius elisum cernens
> exercitum…*[134]
>
> Clovis, approaching with his relative Ragnachar (who himself possessed an air of
> authority), demanded that he prepare his camp for a fight. But Syagrius
> himself did not deign to remain passive, for he did not fear Clovis. And so, whilst
> the two fought each other, Syagrius' army was decidedly destroyed…

Clovis' victory and subsequent execution of Syagrius in the late 480s marked the end of the last

remnants of Roman authority in Gaul. Shortly thereafter, the new "King of the Franks"

converted to Catholicism at the bidding of his wife,[135] earning later praise from Gregory as a

"*novos Constantinus*."[136] In the Frankish imagination, Clovis was the great convertor as

Constantine had been, and the Merovingian dynasty that he founded would rule as singularly

Catholic Frankish kings for the next two centuries.

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[130] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum* XXX.3.7.
[131] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum* XXXI.10.6.
[132] Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms: 450-751* (New York: Longman Group, 1994), 38-39.
[133] Wood 1994, 41-42.
[134] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* II.27.
[135] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* II. 30.
[136] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* II.31.

The Merovingian period of rule, though a departure from the disorganized chaos of the fifth century, was marked by a complex political structure that was neither cohesive nor unified.[137] Familial strife and competition amongst the various members of the Merovingian family resulted in tangible political divisions in the Frankish realm, and much of Gregory's *History of the Franks* is devoted to lengthy descriptions of these squabbles and their consequences. Indeed, civil wars and bloody political conflict in 'peacetime' were more common than not.[138] This conflict and divisive behavior is most exemplified by the bishop's descriptions of the ruthless Queen Fredegund and her actions. Her political machinations, completed in the name of securing power for herself and her children, were often brutal and sometimes murderous. Gregory, albeit taking at least a few dramatic liberties with his language, poetically describes the knives which she commissioned for the murder of her nephew Childebert II:

> *…Fredegundis duos cultros ferreos fieri praecepit, quos etiam caraxari profundius et veneno infici iussit, ut scilicet, si mortalis adsultus vitalis non dissolverit fibras, vel ipsa veneni infectio vitam possit velocius extorquere.*[139]
>
> Fredegund commissioned the crafting of two iron daggers, which she insisted be incised deeply and stained with poison so that, even if no mortal assault should destroy the fibers of life, then the infection caused by the poison itself would cause the victim's soul to be swiftly wrested away from him.

Though Gregory can easily be criticized for literary embellishment, it remains significant that a contemporary of these Merovingian rulers felt strongly enough to write an entire series of historical books dedicated to their collusions and conspiracies. As a point of contrast, Gregory rarely identifies himself as a Frank, instead placing his status as a Catholic Christian first and

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[137] Wood 1994, 55.
[138] Wood 1994, 88.
[139] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* VIII.28.

foremost. His entire preface to the first book of the *History*, in fact, is dedicated to his own profession of the Catholic faith, and he scarcely mentions his political position or identity.[140]

When Gregory does mention the Franks as a socio-political entity, he seems to take the perspective of one observing as an outsider. At the outset of the fifth book, he puts forth a harsh critique of the manipulative Merovingian rulers and the complacent subjects over whom they rule.[141] It disgusted him (*taedit me*) to have to write about the discord of the Frankish people, and he offered stern warnings to the leaders of his time. Significantly, he invoked the memory of classical Roman glory itself:

> *Quotiens et ipsa urbs urbium, et totius mundi caput ingens bella civilia diruit; quae cessante, rursum quasi ab humo surrexit.*[142]

> How many times did that city of cities, that great head of the entire world, destroy itself with civil war? Yet when the dust had settled, did she not arise again as if from the soil?

Rome is a model of unity in Gregory's mind, despite its penchant for repeated civil war, because she always rose from the ashes towards a newer splendor. Clovis followed this model, and did not fall into decadence and corruption when he was unifying the Franks. He knew the grace of God (*Dei gratiam*) and acted upon it; the royalty that Gregory was observing seemed not to share this trait of piety. In his critique, Gregory seems to conflate old notions of Roman grandeur, more recent nostalgia for the great Frankish unifier, and his present sense of being a Christian. For him, the city of Rome is synonymous not merely with unity, but the ability to overcome discord within her own ranks and a tendency to emerge more strongly from this chaos. He does not yet link his Catholicism with his vision of *Romanitas* (as this view remains more tied to

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[140] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* I.Pr.
[141] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* V.Pr.
[142] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* V.Pr.

Clovis), but nevertheless strongly criticizes his fellow Franks for not living up to this ancient standard of harmony and civil accord.

Gregory understood his present situation to be less glorious than times past. He apologized profusely for his backwater speech (*loquentem rusticum*) and understood how poor his Latin might seem when compared to those writers and philosophers of the classical past.[143] Gregory felt some sense of longing for a (certainly idealized) past that was tangibly grounded in the successes of the Catholic Clovis and more remotely tied to a distant *Romanitas*. Indeed, the days of Charlemagne, the Carolingian Renaissance, and more institutionalized claims to the Roman legacy were still hundreds of years in the future. When Gregory died in 594, any Frankish claim of that nature would have been unsure, undeveloped, and far from unchallenged in the world of early medieval Europe. Though the reigns of Chlothar II and Dabogert I in the early seventh century were more peaceable than the previous chaotic century and marked the height of Merovingian unity and power,[144] the dynasty would return to a state of strife not a generation later.[145] In these times of Merovingian weakness, a new source of power would emerge in the Frankish courts that would ultimately culminate in the coronation of a Frank as Roman Emperor: the rise of the Carolingian mayors.[146]

A Frankish Identity Emerges

As exemplified by the stories of Gregory of Tours, the Franks during the time of the Merovingians lacked a unified cultural identity, paralleling the political discord and disunity of the age. Likewise, the Roman ideal was known but very distant, and a political version of *Romanitas* akin to that of Theoderic and the Ostrogothic kingdom could not have yet been

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[143] Gregory of Tours, *Hist.,* Praefatio.
[144] Wood 1994, 140.
[145] Wood 1994, 158.
[146] J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings: And Other Studies in Frankish History* (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), 238-239.

considered by the Franks. It was only in the period of the first Carolingian mayors that both concepts – Frankish identity and *Romanitas* – would see the origins of their later fusion under Charlemagne. This process of identity-crafting was inexorably linked to three factors of the time: the emergence of strong Carolingian leaders, the growing connection between these leaders and the Church, and the proliferation of large-scale warfare against non-Frankish and non-Christian enemies.

In the autumn of 732, the forces of the Umayyads continued their successful military forays into the European continent. The second of the Islamic caliphates claiming the legacy of the prophet Mohammed, the Umayyad Empire encompassed a vast territory, stretching from the remnants of the old Persian Empire in the east, across the former provinces of the Roman Empire in the Levant and North Africa, and encroaching upon Europe's Iberian Peninsula in the west. By 732, Hispania had been decisively overrun by the expansive Muslim realm, and Western Christendom watched anxiously as the forces of the caliph pushed farther onto the European continent.

The next prize in the eyes of the Muslim invaders was the seemingly divided Kingdom of the Franks. Towards the beginning of the eighth century it was the Mayor of the Palace, as opposed to the Merovingian king, who held true authority and ran the affairs of the state. The most successful of these mayors and progenitor of the Carolingian dynasty, Charles Martel, would prove to be the rejoinder to the Muslim incursions. The Merovingians had refused to adopt an ideal of Frankish unity in their program of ruling,[147] and Charles manipulated the late-Merovingian political climate to gain his own influence and control. While he did indeed rebuff the Muslim onslaught at the Battle of Tours in 732, he was not the heroic 'defender' of Christendom that later hagiography portrayed him to be. Other generals had held off similar

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[147] Wallace-Hadrill 1962, 240.

enemies before and after Tours, and Charles' subsequent actions indicate the character of a man more defined by personal political ambition than selfless heroic intent.[148] Still, Charles' defeat of the Muslims at Tours, in conjunction with his rapid ascent to power, worked towards an irrevocable alteration of the trajectory of Frankish history, most cogently seen in the religious realm.

Most significantly, Charles sowed the seeds of an immutable bond between his later Carolingian descendants and the Church, a relationship that was encouraged thanks to his military victories in the name of Christendom and his fiscal support of monasteries throughout Francia.[149] Clovis had converted to Catholicism during the course of his initial bout of unification centuries prior, and the continued tradition of strong Frankish adherence to the Catholic line was tantamount to their religious identity. The actions of Charles Martel and his familial successors solidified this bond, and their titles of Mayor belied their activities as *de facto* Frankish kings. When his son Pippin III finally deposed the last Merovingian king Childeric III, it was accomplished with the blessing and authority of the pope himself (*per auctoritatem apostolicam*).[150] Of this process, the Carolingian-commissioned *Royal Frankish Annals* of the late eighth century underscores the bond between the family and the church:

> *Pippinus secundum morem Francorum electus est ad regem et unctus per manum sanctae memoriae Bonefacii archiepiscopi et elevatus a Francis in regno in Suessionis civitate. Hildericus vero, qui false rex vocabatur, tonsoratus est et in monasterium missus.*[151]

> Next, Pippin was elected as king in accord with Frankish custom, and was anointed by the hand of Archbishop Boniface of holy memory, and elevated to the title of king by the Franks in the city of Soissons. Childeric, on the other hand, who was mistakenly called king, was tonsured and placed in a monastery.

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[148] Wood 1994, 286.
[149] Wallace-Hadrill 1962, 240-241.
[150] *ARF* 749.
[151] *ARF* 750.

The connection between the Roman Church and the ascendant Carolingian family was manifest from the moment of Pippin's coronation and continued throughout his reign as king. Moreover, the process of anointment was of paramount traditional importance to the Frankish kingship, dating back to Saint Remigius' baptism of Clovis in 496 C.E. This newly established relationship between church, state, and identity, combined with the ability to pose a unified front and wage warfare against a common, non-Christian enemy, was instrumental for future developments in the Frankish realm. Indeed it was this political and religious bond, gained during the rise of Pippin's son Charlemagne, that allowed the Franks to harness the most cogent claim to the legacy of classical Rome, and to accept *Romanitas* as a more fully developed identity of their own.

King of the Franks, Emperor of the Romans

Much had changed in Francia during the time between Charles Martel and his grandson Charlemagne, as Pippin III had worked tirelessly to solidify Frankish unity. He successfully campaigned against the Lombards in Italy with the express invitation of Pope Stephen II,[152] worked to defeat the troublesome Duke Waiofar of Aquitaine,[153] and solidified Carolingian rule over the Franks themselves as a whole. When Pippin died in 768, he left behind to his sons an expanded Frankish realm, fully endowed with the capacity to support the goals of a leader who held aspirations towards a more ancient form of glory.

Charlemagne proved to be just that leader, and the vast empire that he assembled over the course of his reign epitomized his ruling prowess. Summoned by the pope to Italy (much in the manner of his father two decades earlier), he had wholly conquered the Lombard kingdom by

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[152] *ARF* 755.
[153] *ARF* 760-767.

774.[154] He fought the Muslims in Spain, the Saxons and Bavarians in Germany, and the

powerful Avars in Hungary. In the wake of Charlemagne's reformed and systematized armies,

many of the people in Western Europe found themselves unified under a single ruler for the first

time since the days of Rome itself.[155] The almost familial bond between Charlemagne's

kingdom and the Church was a crucial aspect of this expansion, and the king took it upon himself

to 'Christianize' Europe according to the Catholic line. An ancient type of unity and stability

was slowly returning to the continent as Charlemagne worked to establish Frankish hegemony in

the manner of bygone Roman emperors. Still, it was not until 799, when Pope Leo III called

upon him to resolve a dispute in Rome, that the culmination of the Frankish-Roman fusion

through the Church would ultimately occur.

Einhard, Charlemagne's friend and biographer, described the king's affinity for the

Roman legacy with grandeur:

> *Colebat prae ceteris sacris et venerabilibus locis apud Romam ecclesiam beati Petri apostoli... Neque ille toto regni sui tempore quicquam duxit antiquius, quam ut urbs Roma sua opera suoque labore vetere polleret auctoritate, et ecclesia sancti Petri per illum non solum tuta ac defensa, sed etiam suis opibus prae omnibus ecclesiis esset ornata atque ditata.*[156]

> He honored the church of Saint Peter the Apostle at Rome before all other sacred and venerable places…nothing was more important to him throughout his whole reign than leading the ancient city of Rome back to its old authority by his own trouble and labor, and not only to make the church of Saint Peter safe and secure, but also to adorn and enrich it from his own wealth before all other churches.

Charlemagne's love for the city of Rome is shown to be bipartite; indeed, he cares for the ancient

legacy of the city as well as its contemporary religious function. As a man who had conquered

many nations and much territory, he saw that his duty was to not only protect the city, but to

uphold its value and strengthen its position in the world once more. *Romanitas* was synonymous

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[154] *ARF* 773-774.
[155] *Cf.* the epigraph to the current chapter.
[156] Einhard, *VK* 27.

with both the historical past of the city and the Church itself, and the ruler had to establish his place in this ancient continuity. Thus, when Pope Leo called upon Charlemagne in 799 for protection from his enemies in the city, the king was disturbed by the assault on papal authority and personally hastened to Rome to deal with the situation.[157] Soon thereafter, on Christmas Day 800, the pope crowned Charlemagne as Roman Emperor. Notker the Stammerer, writing a generation after Einhard, wrote that the pope was following a "divine plan" in granting Charlemagne the titles of Augustus, Caesar, and Emperor,[158] and the *Royal Frankish Annals* state that the people of Rome hailed him with a praiseful cry:

> *Carolo Augusto, a Deo coronato magno et pacifico imperatori Romanorum, vita et victoria!*[159]

> To Charles Augustus, crowned by God as the great and peaceful Roman Emperor, life and victory!

Einhard relates Charlemagne's humility regarding his coronation, stating that the Frank would not have even gone into the church had he known the pope's intent, and goes on to describe his liege's magnanimity in dealing with the irritated Greek emperors in the east.[160] While it remains unclear as to who actually instigated the events of the coronation, pope or emperor,[161] the result was that a Frank now held the ancient titles of Emperor and Augustus by the authority of the Roman Church.[162] This moment was the culmination of the positive relations between the Franks and the Church first cultivated by Charles Martel, and also signified a radical shift in how

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[157] Einhard, *VK* 28.

[158] Notker the Stammerer, *Gesta Karoli* 26.

[159] *ARF* 801.

[160] Einhard, *VK* 28.

[161] Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 115.

[162] Charlemagne's full imperial title, as related by McKitterick 2008, 116, was *Karolus serenissimus augustus a deo coronatus magnus pacificus imperator Romanum gubernans imperium qui et per misercordiam dei rex francorum atque langobardorum.*

the Frankish leadership would craft its identity. *Romanitas* was now firmly in the possession of

Charlemagne's Franks, who now ruled over all of Western Europe.

Charlemagne's coronation did not go unnoticed by contemporary observers, most of all

in the Greek east. The Byzantine emperors had safely guarded their imperial Roman titles for

centuries, and a distinct problem arose when a Frank was crowned emperor in the west. Some

commentators justified the pope's action due to the fact that a woman, Empress Irene, reigned in

Constantinople without a true claim to the masculine title of emperor.[163] Einhard takes a

stronger approach, referring to the Greeks as envious (*invidiam*) and indignant (*indignantibus*),

and states that they had merely taken up Roman titles (*suscepti nominis*) as opposed to inheriting

them legitimately.[164] Still, with the ancient *imperium* in hand, Charlemagne could fully attend to

the details of his own Roman Empire. As a result, Europe's first monumental reinterpretation of

the classical past ensued, and because of Charlemagne's clear power on the continent, it only

took twelve years for the Byzantines to recognize his claims to the imperial title and the Roman

legacy.[165]

Charlemagne's rule transcended nationality, as did his sense of *Romanitas*. Gregory of

Tour's ideal of Rome was one of unity combined with religion, and Charlemagne added ancient

revival (alongside a sense of continuity with that classical past) to the mixture. He not only

expanded the Frankish realm by means of war, but also rebuilt cathedrals, roads, and renovated

entire cities such as his capital of Aachen.[166] He altered the monetary system[167] and his

programmatic military dictates enabled further vast conquests.[168] His most significant goal

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[163] McKitterick 2008, 117.
[164] Einhard, *VK* 28.
[165] McKitterick 2008, 281.
[166] On Charlemagne's Aachen, *cf.* McKitterick 2008, 157-171.
[167] McKitterick 2008, 274.
[168] McKitterick 2008, 270-273.

regarding *Romanitas*, however, rested in his desire to restore the Latin language to its rightful

position of splendor and revive classical Roman learning entirely. Being a Roman, for

Charlemagne, inherently consisted of desiring to cultivate Roman culture, and his attempts at

educational and linguistic reform spoke highly towards that wish. He even saw an innate

relationship between learning and Christian faith, and believed that by controlling both, he could

mutually enhance their benefits while simultaneously making his administration more

efficient.[169] As such, men from all over Europe such as Alcuin of York (an Anglo-Saxon) and

Paul the Deacon (a Lombard) were drawn to the emperor's service alongside many Franks, and

composed their greatest works of literature and philosophy under his patronage. Alcuin's

Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne stands among the strongest testaments to the emperor's

commitment to learning. "God has adorned you with the light of all wisdom (*omni sapientiae*

lumine), my Lord King Charlemagne," begins Alcuin,[170] thus alluding to the bond between the

Frankish monarchy and the Catholic Church that had seen its origins with the king's grandfather

Charles Martel some seven decades earlier. Charlemagne's first lines proclaim the virtues of the

art of learning, and state just how absurd it is (*ridiculum videtur*) to not understand rhetoric when

it is so necessary (*necesse est*) in day-to-day life.[171] Indeed, these fictionalized words do well at

mirroring the actual policies of the emperor himself. When the Franks adopted a common

language and learning process with their Roman predecessors, they did not merely link

themselves with the classical past, but fully integrated their culture with that of the bygone

Romans.[172] Frankish, Roman, and Christian culture became most fully intertwined by this

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[169] McKitterick 2008, 315-316.
[170] Alcuin of York, *Disputatio de Rhetorica* I.23-24.
[171] Alcuin of York, *Disputatio de Rhetorica* I.16-17.
[172] McKitterick 2008, 320.

program of educational and linguistic reform on the part of Charlemagne, and his version of *Romanitas* reflected the complexities of this combination.

A series of frescoes in Bamberg from the first decade of the 1700s speak most vociferously to the emperor's vision: Charlemagne stands in the company of Julius Caesar and Constantine, and the text beneath his image reads "*Christus regnat, Christus vincit, Christus triumphat*."[173] A Christian emperor – in the vein of both Christ and the ancient line of Augusti – once more ruled in Europe, to the praise of his contemporaries, later history, and a millennium of iconography. When Charlemagne died in 814, the three aspects of Rome, the Church, and the Carolingian Empire were fully associated, and his lasting legacy as *pater Europae* could immediately begin.

A Late Eleventh-Century Interpretation of Charlemagne's Unity

The coronation of Charlemagne in 800 stood as the ultimate fusion of religious and political leadership, and brought an ancient Roman style of unity to the continent for the first time in centuries. As a result of Charlemagne's program of Latin education, a Frank could be a Roman and a Christian at the same time. But this unity was lost a generation after his death, and the emperor's descendants, seemingly lacking in the passion for the learning and stability that their progenitor had possessed, began to fight among themselves for control of the disintegrating empire. By the end of the eleventh century, Europe was a continent continually at war with itself. Church fought Empire for control over taxation, dukes sparred on the field of battle for dominion over the tiniest plots of land, and kings rose and fell with the rapidity of the ancient Roman soldier-emperors. At the Council of Clermont in 1095, for instance, the pope had to call nothing short of a Holy Crusade against a distant Muslim threat in order to convince Europeans to stop fighting each other. Despite the preponderance of this chaos, the memory of

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[173] McKitterick 2008, 3-4.

Charlemagne's eighth- and ninth-century unity endured rather cogently in the literature of the time.

When the *Song of Roland* was composed *c.* 1100, it was done so at the height of this uncertain political and religious climate. A poem in Old French describing the Battle of Roncevaux (778) and its aftermath, the work pits Franks against Muslims and pagans, and Charlemagne himself is a central character. Throughout the work he boldly leads his fellow Franks to victory, yet follows these moments of military glory with intense instantiations of personal contemplation combined with public displays of grief. His physical attributes are that of a proud monarch:

> …the king who holds the fair land of France.
> His beard is white and his hair hoary,
> His stature is noble, his countenance fierce:
> If anyone seeks him, there is no need to point him out.[174]

But on the other hand, he is shown to be a pained and aged leader:

> …'I marvel greatly
> At Charlemagne, who is old and hoary;
> To my knowledge he is more than two hundred years old.
> His body has suffered in so many lands,
> So many blows he has taken from lance and spear,
> So many powerful kings has he reduced to begging.
> When will he ever tire of waging war?'[175]

Charlemagne is both a brave warrior-king and an archetypal antediluvian patriarch. Like Noah or Abraham, he has lived and prospered for an unnaturally long period of time.[176] The "whiteness" of his features makes his age and experience most apparent, yet he still carries "fierce" characteristics. Without any doubt, his demeanor is one of strength, though he has suffered to no end over the course of his military victories. Like Christ, he has taken

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[174] *The Song of Roland*, trans. Glyn Burgess (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 32.
[175] *The Song of Roland* 1990, 46.
[176] *Cf.* Gen. 9:28-29 and Gen. 25:7-8.

innumerable blows "from lance and spear." He is tireless in his endeavors, and possesses a quality of near timelessness. He strikes wonderment into the heart of his enemies, who cannot help but "marvel" at his being. Yet he is not merely a man of warrior-mettle or of pure physical strength; his spiritual qualities are what define his appearance from the perspectives of others around him, and as such, the secular and the spiritual are decisively fused together as one in his character. He is a man with two distinctive aspects contained together in great unity, and it is clear that the anonymous author has a distinct memory of Charlemagne's own (Roman) conception of political and spiritual accord.

The *Song of Roland* concludes with the spirit of Saint Gabriel exhorting Charlemagne to keep fighting against yet another enemy of Christendom:

> '…The Christians call upon you and cry out for you.'
> The emperor had no wish to go.
> 'God,' said the king, 'how wearisome my life is!'
> He weeps and tugs at his white beard.[177]

Even in the play's penultimate lines, the unified Charlemagne shines through. He will perform his earthly duty to protect the Christian faith from pagans and Muslims alike, as he has for the two hundred years of his life. He is tired, weary, and old, but undertakes the task nonetheless. He is both a contemplative patriarch and a strong warrior-emperor all in one. He calls upon God to relieve him from his troubles, but understands his role on this earth as a Christian ruler. He is the highest exemplar of a leader who is able to combine his spiritual and secular characteristics as he rules. The legacy of Charlemagne as unifier is present throughout the poem, and considering that the poet is speaking from a time of great discord on the European continent, it is clear as to why the *Romanitas* of Charlemagne's character would be so evident throughout the

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[177] *The Song of Roland* 1990, 156.

work. Three centuries after his death, his memory lived on as vividly as it had during his own lifetime.

A Later Journey to Constantinople

In 968, Bishop Liudprand of Cremona was sent to Constantinople by Holy Roman Emperor (and Carolingian successor) Otto the Great, in order to negotiate a politically-charged marriage arrangement with the Byzantine Emperor, Nikephoros II Phokas. Despite Liudprand's docile intentions, he was treated with the utmost contempt by the Greek court as a result of his affiliation with the Holy Roman Empire, and felt the need to write an entire account dedicated to descriptions of the ignoble treatment that he suffered at the hands of the Byzantines. The resulting *Embassy to Constantinople* remains as an exemplary testament to the vitriolic state of competitiveness and mutual hatred felt between the leaders of the two most powerful post-classical claimants to *Romanitas*. Liudprand does not waste any time in critiquing his reception at the Greek capital; his opening chapter is dedicated to the "insult" (*contumeliam*) of a reception that he received, and he notes that not a single day passed without "pain" (*gemitus*) and "lamentation" (*luctus*).[178] He next relates that the Byzantine chancellor pressed him into an argument over Otto's royal title (calling him *rex*, not *basileus*),[179] before delving into a vivid description of the mean-hearted Nikephoros himself:

> *Hominem satis monstruosum, pygaeum, capite pinguem, atque oculorum parvitate talpinum, barba curta, lata, spissa et semicana foedatum, cervice digitali turpatum, prolixitate et densitate comarum satis hyopum, colore Aethiopem, cui per mediam nolis occurrere noctem, ventre extensum…lingua procacem, ingenio vulpem, perjurio seu mendacio Ulyxem.*[180]

> He is quite the monstrosity of a man; he is a dwarf with a fat head, and with insignificantly tiny mole-like eyes. He is disfigured by a short, wide, thick, half-frothy beard, defiled by a fingerlike neck, and rendered less favorable by a rough

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[178] Liudprand of Cremona, *Rel. Cons.* I.
[179] Liudprand of Cremona, *Rel. Cons.* II.
[180] Liudprand of Cremona, *Rel. Cons.* III.

> thickness of hair. He is Ethiopian in color, and you would not go to meet him or his big belly in the middle of the night…he is impudent in his speech, a natural shark, and is in perjury or falsity, a Ulysses.

The disdain between the Byzantine Emperor and the western envoys, as evidenced by Liudprand's diatribe, is mutual beyond any doubt. The bishop was treated disrespectfully and without regard for his status upon his arrival, and his vociferous imagery of the monstrous Greek emperor relates his similar feelings on the matter.   Liudprand then quotes Nikephoros as decrying the impious (*impietas*) Otto for falsely asserting Rome as his own,[181] before he rebuts the emperor by putting forth an equally vehement defense of the Ottonian claim to the ancient legacy. The cycle of scornful disparagement between the two parties continues *ad infinitum*, and the bishop spends a total of sixty-five chapters describing his misfortunes in Greece at the hands of the Byzantine authorities. Liudprand concludes his work with one final, emotional jab at the Greeks:

> *Qui enim ficte Deum quaerunt, numquam invenire merentur.*[182]

> For those who falsely seek God never shall deserve to find Him.

The Greeks, to Liudprand, are neither truly Christian nor truly Roman, and the Byzantine ruling class feels the same way about the Holy Roman Empire that he represented. Though men such as Theoderic the Great and Charlemagne were able to build and promulgate unified conceptions of *Romanitas* in their political and religious programs, the ancient Roman unity that they craved never lasted far beyond their own lives. Divisions between east and west, Catholic and Orthodox, and pope and emperor would continue to define Europe for many centuries after. Still, despite this highly divisive and debilitating atmosphere, the hope for achieving the ideal of

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[181] Liudprand of Cremona, *Rel. Cons.* IV.
[182] Liudprand of Cremona, *Rel. Cons.* LXV.

the Eternal City would continue to endure throughout the rest of the long medieval period and beyond.

Chapter III

"*Quella Roma Onde Cristo è Romano*": Dante's Florentine Vision of the Roman Legacy

"Ce corps qui s'appelait et qui s'appelle encore le saint empire romain n'était en aucune manière ni saint, ni romain, ni empire."[183]

- *Voltaire, c. 1756*

Giovanni Boccaccio, humanist and harbinger of the Italian Renaissance, wrote in later

praise of the birth of Dante Alighieri:

> This was that Dante of whom I write; this was that Dante who was granted to our
> age by the special grace of God; this was that Dante who first was destined to
> open the way for the return to Italy of the banished Muses. By him the glory of
> the Florentine idiom was made manifest; by him all the beauties of the common
> speech were set to fitting numbers; by him dead poetry may properly be said to
> have been revived…[184]

Even during his lifetime, *il Sommo Poeta*'s prowess of language was easily recognized by his

Italian compatriots, and Boccaccio's panegyric exemplifies the veneration with which later

thinkers would praise him and his works. His epic poem, the tripartite *Comedy*, not only serves

as a mesmerizing allegorical interpretation of the chaotic politics of his lifetime vis-à-vis

medieval Catholicism, but also standardized the dialect of his native Florence, resulting in the

origins of the modern Italian language. Dante's works also extended beyond the metaphorical

and into the realm of the analytical. Though less of a spectacle than the *Comedy*, his Latin

political treatise *On Monarchy* comments with verve and vehemence upon the conflicting

interests of pope and emperor found in the political happenings of his time.

Mostly in relation to this conflict, the concept of Rome finds itself embedded throughout

these two works, and is grounded in Dante's perception of the city's universal unity and

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[183] Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs, Tome I* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963), 683.

[184] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Life of Dante*, trans. G.R. Carpenter (New York: The Grolier Club, 1900), 39.

historical continuity. The poet's metaphysical Rome lives as an idea, transcending both time and space. He notes that the legacy of the Eternal City stands hopelessly, but not irrevocably, divided between the interests of the two larger political entities that he discusses. Unlike the dogma put forth by the two great medieval institutions, however, Dante's understanding of *Romanitas* is much more nuanced. In considering himself and his fellow Florentines as the inheritors of the Romans, he came to the understanding that the papacy and the empire should stand as two distinct, but ultimately united aspects of Rome. Most cogently and peculiarly, Dante can even imagine a "Rome where Christ himself is Roman" towards the end of his literary journey through purgatory. [185] [186]

Dante's understanding of this idea of an eternal Rome manifests itself in both his Italian poetic and Latin philosophical works. He demonstrates his personal claim to *Romanitas* most clearly in the former, in which he is only Florentine by birth and by language but Roman in his spirit. Such spirit manifests itself in the latter, as he proceeds to discuss his dream of world unity, and his accompanying desire for a world empire that is continuous with the Roman past. Still, it must be noted that Dante speaks only for Dante (and not necessarily for his fellow Florentines), and his outlook arose from within the context of his life of a political outcast. An examination of the civic situation that sparked this exile, thus, shall serve as the first step in understanding his viewpoint in relation to *Romanitas*.

Popes and Emperors, Guelphs and Ghibellines

By the mid-thirteenth century, Charlemagne's version of the Roman Empire had long since been torn asunder, but his imperial legacy remained intact in the form of the Holy Roman

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[185] All English quotations from Dante's *Commedia* herein arise from the Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander translations found in *Inferno* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), *Purgatorio* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), and *Paradiso* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007).
[186] Dante, *Purg.* XXXII.102.

Empire. Later rulers of the empire such as Otto the Great (the man who had sent Liudprand of

Cremona on his disastrous voyage to Constantinople in the latter half of the tenth century) sought

to reclaim a decisive *imperium* over the course of their reigns through diplomatic means and

political maneuvers; others like Frederick Barbarossa worked instead to strengthen the empire's

sanctum by means of holy wars and crusades. Though its territories encompassed various and

oft-changing parts of Germany, northern Italy, Burgundy, and the occidental fringes of Eastern

Europe, the Holy Roman Empire never became a unified or politically cohesive body. As most

famously noted by Voltaire half a century before its dismantling, the empire was vastly

dissimilar to the ancient counterpart whose name it bore, and could scarcely be deemed holy,

Roman, or even an empire in its own right.[187] Still, successions of emperors (in the manner of

their self-proclaimed forerunner Charlemagne) claimed the legacy of ancient Rome in their

dealings in both the spiritual and temporal realms, and the Holy Roman Empire remained a

major player in European politics throughout the medieval period and beyond.

  To the direct south of the empire, the pope – the power in the actual city of Rome – stood

in distinct opposition to this imperial assertion of *Romanitas*, and always applied this same

ancient legacy to his own institution. The papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, issued by Pope Boniface

VIII at the outset of the 1300s, stands as the most fervent example of the assertion of papal

supremacy over the empire, claiming both spiritual and temporal power for the Roman pontiff.

Indeed, conceptions of *Romanitas* rested subtly beneath provocations and public statements on

both sides, and as such, the diplomatic and military strife between the two great medieval powers

was intrinsically related to these simultaneous claims to the ancient past. Empire and papacy

fought seemingly endless, repetitive wars of attrition in their respective quests for political

hegemony over Europe, and costly conflict was more common than not. Much of the continent,

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[187] *Cf.* the epigraph to the current chapter.

from the smallest Italian city-state to the largest German kingdom, played some role in the power struggle. In Italy, the division between pope and emperor had been actualized most cogently in the realm of local politics, where the Guelph party fervently fought against their counterparts in the Ghibellines for dominion over each city. With the former group sympathizing with the pope and the latter supporting the emperor, ideological strife swiftly turned into sociopolitical conflict and violence. From the smallest villages to the largest urban centers, the Guelph-Ghibelline struggle reached every region of the Italian homeland in some form or another.

Dante Alighieri's Florence was no exception, and the thirteenth century brought the tiresome conflict to the Tuscan city with an unnatural vehemence.[188] From the outset of the century, the city violently shifted between the dominance of each faction, with the Ghibellines gaining total power by the mid-1240s. Though the Guelphs eventually established dominion over Florence in 1250, the Ghibellines retook control a decade later, before losing power once again in the mid-1260s. As soon as the Guelphs were firmly ensconced in power, however, disagreement soon arose within their own ranks, and the party split along class and guild lines between the Black (papal) and White (republican-leaning) sub-factions.[189] Still, by the time of Dante's young adulthood in the late 1280s, ideological differences regarding pope and emperor had long-since ceased to motivate the conflict. Instead, petty family rivalries drove the fight in Florence, so that when Dante and the other White Guelphs were exiled by the Black Guelphs in 1301, greater conceptual ideals about the Roman legacy had little to do with the lives of both those who ordered the mass exile and those who suffered from it. Still, the results of this factional strife had a profound impact upon the poet, who wrote his greatest works over the course of his wanderings. Dante was a lost and itinerant pilgrim in both his life and his

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[188] Christopher Hibbert, *Florence: The Biography of a City* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 13-26.
[189] Hibbert 1993, 27-34.

literature, a feature most clearly represented in his *Comedy*, and the *Romanitas* that resides within.

Florentine in Name, Roman in Spirit

The fictionalized Dante begins his journey in the *Comedy* as a fearful man lost in the darkness of the woods,[190] a situation reminiscent of the very real political exile with which he was faced at the time of writing. At the outset of his wanderings, a she-wolf (not unlike the creature that nurtured the legendary Romulus and Remus in their infancy) stands in the way of the pilgrim's journey.[191] After backing away fearfully and wondering how to proceed, Dante is struck with amazement to see that the ancient Roman poet Virgil has appeared before his very eyes.[192] The only way to escape the danger of the woods, says the ancient poet, is to embark on a lengthy journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven. Virgil will serve as the pilgrim's guide through the first two realms, but his non-Christian status prevents him from ascending with Dante to the third. Though accepting of the ancient poet's guidance, Dante worries about his own standing in regards to the upcoming voyage, particularly when compared to those who previously experienced journeys of katabasis or heavenly ascent:

> 'You tell of the father of Sylvius
> that he, still subject to corruption, went
> to the eternal world while in the flesh.
>
> 'But that the adversary of all evil showed
> such favor to him, considering who and what he was,
> and the high sequel that would spring from him,
>
> 'seems not unfitting to a man who understands.
> For in the Empyrean he was chosen
> to father holy Rome and her dominion,
>
> 'both of these established – if we would speak

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[190] Dante, *Inf.* I.1-6.
[191] Dante, *Inf.* I.49-54.
[192] Dante, *Inf.* I.61-63.

the truth – to be the sacred precinct where
successors of great Peter have their throne.

'On this journey, for which you grant him glory,
he heard the words that prompted him
to victory and prepared the Papal mantle.

'Later, the Chosen Vessel went there
to bring back confirmation of our faith,
the first step in our journey to salvation.

'But why should I go there? who allows it?
I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul.
Neither I nor any think me fit for this…[193]

Dante prudently reminds Virgil of the last two figures who have had the privilege to transcend

the terrestrial world and voyage into other planes of existence. Aeneas was allowed to descend

into the underworld[194] because his military victory over Turnus in Italy depended on the

experience of the voyage. As a result of that war, Rome and all her history would thus arise

from the deeds of his progeny. This history, in turn, would allow for the birth of Christianity,

and the empire's capital would faithfully serve as the home of Saint Peter's successors, the

popes. Of similar significance, Saint Paul was transported to the third heaven during a celestial

vision, an experience that would serve as a necessary step in his bringing of the God of the

Israelites to the Gentiles, and thereby stood as crucial in mankind's path to redemption.[195]

Without Paul (as "Chosen Vessel"[196]), Christianity would have scarcely existed as anything less

than an insignificant sect of Judaism, were it to have even lasted beyond the time of Christ

himself. As such, these two otherworldly journeys stand for Dante as significant steps in human

history (due to God's providence), and he claims that he is neither an Aeneas nor a Paul in terms

of stature or prominence. As a result, he remains uncertain as to his readiness for the journey

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[193] Dante, *Inf.* II.13-33.
[194] *Cf.* Virgil, *Aen.* VI.
[195] *Cf.* 2 Cor. 12:1-7.
[196] *Cf.* Acts 9:15.

that Virgil has proposed. The voyages of those long dead men led to Rome, to Christianity, to

the papacy, and to the empire; the purpose of the current pilgrimage seems more ambiguous to

the wanderer. He is certainly a Florentine – but an exiled Florentine – and at this point in his

journey, Rome still seems to belong more to the estimable ancients than to him.

Throughout the journey, Virgil guides Dante deeper into the confines of the infernal

region, with each circle of hell containing lost souls ordered according to their sins. In the inner

ring of the seventh circle, a space reserved for those who acted against God and nature, Dante

encounters his friend and teacher, Brunetto Latini. Latini is surprised to see his former student

voyaging through the realm that is reserved for the sexually deviant,[197] and wonders as to how

Dante came to find him.[198] The pilgrim explains that he "lost his way" on earth before he

"reached the zenith" of his life, reiterating the circumstances of his unfortunate exile from

Florence.[199] Latini responds with a rich and metaphorical prophecy for Dante's future, grounded

in an allusion to the bygone Roman past:

> …'By following your star
> you cannot fail to reach a glorious port,
> if I saw clearly in the happy life.
>
> 'Had I not died too soon,
> seeing that Heaven so favors you,
> I would have lent you comfort in your work.
>
> 'But that malignant, thankless rabble
> that came down from Fiesole long ago
> and still smacks of the mountain and the rock
>
> 'rightly shall become, because of your good deeds,
> your enemy: among the bitter sorbs
> it is not fit the sweet fig come to fruit.
>
> 'The world has long believed them to be blind,

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[197] Dante, *Inf.* XV.24.
[198] Dante, *Inf.* XV.46-48.
[199] Dante, *Inf.* XV.50-51.

> a people greedy, envious, and proud.
> Be sure you stay untainted by their habits.
>
> 'Your destiny reserves for you such honor
> both parties shall be hungry to devour you,
> but the grass shall be far from the goat.
>
> 'Let the Fiesolan beasts make forage
> of themselves but spare the plant,
> if on their dung-heap any still springs up,
>
> 'the plant in which lives on the holy seed
> of those few Romans who remained
> when it became the home of so much malice.'[200]

Latini praises Dante's work in both the political and literary spheres, and assures the pilgrim that despite his present situation, he will indeed attain widespread honor and lasting glory. But the hateful descendants of the ancient Fiesolans, stuck in their rustic and vengeful ways, have stood in the way of the poet's life, if only because they envied his conduct and good deeds. Latini reminds Dante that the remaining Fiesolans, supporters of the Catilinarian uprising and later vanquished by Julius Caesar, had been placed in the new city of Florence alongside true Roman settlers many centuries prior. As such, these two separate groups of people lived together for centuries with virtually no distinction, until the Guelph-Ghibelline conflict (and then the Black-White split) revealed their true natures. In the imagination of Latini (a Florentine himself), the Black Guelphs were the ones descended from the treacherous Fiesolans, whereas the White Guelphs come from the stock of the true Romans. Through a rich horticultural metaphor, he describes how the "Fiesolan beasts" (*i.e.* the Blacks) have all but destroyed the plant that contains the "holy seed" of the ancient Romans (*i.e.* the Whites), and he mourns this loss. Latini believes that Dante's destiny transcends such petty earthly politics; he, as a Florentine wandering in exile, is in fact the truest Roman of them all.

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[200] Dante, *Inf.* XV.55-78.

The character of Dante is thus shown to have the same Roman essence as both Aeneas'

progeny (temporally) and Saint Paul (spiritually), the two figures with whom he contrasted

himself at the outset of the text. His journey downwards is thus legitimized, since perhaps only

those who are like the Romans can engage in such a katabasis. A conflation exists between the

pilgrim's voyage, his Florentine nature, and his exile; at least a part of his descent into hell

revolves around his deciphering of that connection. In the ninth and final circle of hell – a place

home to Satan himself and reserved for those who committed the most disgraceful treachery –

the legacy of Rome is perhaps rendered most manifest to Dante. At the very center of hell

resides Satan, lost forever in a state of eternal punishment resulting from his personal betrayal of

God. Three faces rest upon his tortured head, one on front and the others on each side, in a

convoluted trinity.[201] Dante notes that Satan "champed a sinner / in each mouth, tormenting

three at once,"[202] and Virgil proceeds to hastily identify the tortured souls in turn:

> 'That soul up there who bears the greatest pain,'
> said the master, 'is Judas Iscariot, who has
> his head within and outside flails his legs.
>
> 'As for the other two, whose heads are dangling down,
> Brutus is hanging from the swarthy snout –
> see how he writhes and utters not a word! –
>
> 'and from the other, Cassius, so large of limb.
> But night is rising in the sky. It is time
> for us to leave, for we have seen it all.'[203]

Eternal torture in the maw of Satan is the only fitting punishment for these three treacherous

men. Judas betrayed the redeemer of man's sins, while Brutus and Cassius betrayed Julius

Caesar, progenitor of the empire whose role it was to govern all of mankind. Echoing the

previous reference to Aeneas (as the temporal Rome) and Paul (as the spiritual Rome), we see

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[201] Dante, *Inf.* XXXIV.37-42.
[202] Dante, *Inf.* XXXIV.56-57.
[203] Dante, *Inf.* XXXIV.61-69.

Dante's vision of the Eternal City most clearly. The men that betrayed her empire exist in the utmost suffering akin to that of the man who betrayed Christ, thus rendering their sins worthy of equal punishment. The foundations of Dante's conception of the close relationship between the Roman Empire and the Christian faith are thus established, nowhere else but in the most infernal region of the pit of hell. Virgil can only instruct Dante to leave with solemnity, and the ancient Roman leads the Florentine back to the surface, thereby ending their journey across the hellscape for good.

No longer voyaging through the confines of hell, the character of Dante continues to discover further truths about his Florentine nature during his ascent through paradise. Guided upwards by Beatrice, the pilgrim travels through the spheres of heaven, each of which are categorized based upon the various cardinal and theological virtues. It is within the fifth sphere of Mars, reserved for the faithful warriors of God, that Dante meets his crusader ancestor Cacciaguida.[204] His forbearer's first words are entirely in Latin (the only such instance of a Latin tercet in the poem), speaking to Dante of a more glorious past and evoking both an ecclesial and classical sensibility.[205] After properly introducing themselves, as well as figuring out just what language to speak to each other, Cacciaguida reminds Dante of the prosperous Florence of his own day. In his time, the city "dwelled then in peace, temperate and chaste."[206] Decadent materialism was not known,[207] marriages and dowries were instituted properly,[208] and the presence of evil citizens then would have been just as surprising as the presence of good ones in the current time.[209] The Florence described by Cacciaguida is a city free of the rustic Fiesolan

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[204] Dante, *Par.* XV.25-27.
[205] Dante, *Par.* XV.28-30.
[206] Dante, *Par.* XV.99.
[207] Dante, *Par.* XV.100-102.
[208] Dante, *Par.* XV.104-105.
[209] Dante, *Par.* XV.127-129.

influence about which Dante had previously learned from Latini. Instead, it was a city more in

line with that of the old Romans, the bloodline from which true Florentines arise. Cacciaguida

reminds his itinerant descendant of this peaceful *Romanitas*, as evidenced by the just people of

his time:

> 'With these noble families, and with others still,
> I saw Florence in such tranquility
> that there was nothing that might cause her grief.
>
> 'With these noble families I saw her people
> so glorious and just, that the lily
> had not yet been reversed upon the lance
> nor by dissension changed to red.'[210]

Dante's ancestor praises the bygone days of Florence, when it was a city that acted as if it was

descended from the ancient Romans themselves. The recent conflicts between Guelphs and

Ghibellines (symbolized by the lily's reversal) and the contemporary fight among the

subsequently developed Guelph factions (seen in the color change) would not have existed in

Cacciaguida's Florence. Dante himself – proven by now to be a Roman in spirit, if not Roman

by actual genetics – would never have been exiled in this much more glorious time. *Romanitas*

endured once in Cacciaguida's Florence, and Dante, though displaced, remains very much a part

of that tradition.

The Empire and the Pagans in Heaven

During his ethereal journey, the pilgrim proceeds to Jupiter, the sixth sphere of heaven

that is reserved for the most just of rulers. Dante observes that the souls in the realm have begun

to shape themselves into the form of letters.[211] The Latin phrase "*DILIGITE IUSTITIAM QUI*

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[210] Dante, *Par.* XVI.148-154.
[211] Dante, *Par.* XVIII.76-78.

IUDICATIS TERRAM"[212] manifests itself before his very eyes,[213] and the shapeshifting souls rest

for a little longer upon the last "*M*" in the phrase.[214] The letter then undergoes a transformation

of its own:

> Then, as when someone strikes a burning log,
> causing innumerable sparks to fly,
> sparks from which the foolish form their divinations,
>
> just so a thousand lights and more appeared
> to rise from there and mount, some more, some less,
> as the Sun that kindles them ordained.
>
> When each had settled in its place
> I saw an eagle's head and neck
> take shape out of that overlay of fire.
>
> He who fashions there has need of none to guide Him
> but Himself. Thus we recognize as His
> the form that every bird takes for its nest.
>
> The other blessed spirts, who seemed at first content
> to turn themselves into a lily on the *M*,
> with gentle motion joined, completing the design.[215]

The "*M*," standing for '*monarchia*,' turns into a proud eagle, the symbol of both the ancient

Roman and Holy Roman empires, and the concept of justice, the legacy of Rome, and the rule of

the empire find are fused together in this circle of paradise. In regards to this conception of this

heavenly bird, the multitude has become one for Dante; the Christian, the Roman, the imperial,

and the just are all united in one form.

The souls residing eternally in the eye of the eagle exemplify this confounding conflation.

David,[216] Hezekiah,[217] and Constantine[218] are all unsurprising members of the group, but

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[212] The phrase is a command – identical to the opening lines of the Wisdom of Solomon – that orders those who judge the earth to love justice.
[213] Dante, *Par.* XVIII.91-93.
[214] Dante, *Par.* XVIII 94.
[215] Dante, *Par.* XVIII.100-108.
[216] Dante, *Par.* XX.37-42.
[217] Dante, *Par.* XX.49-54.

strangely, two pagan Romans share that position of prominence and honor among them. Present

first is the emperor Trajan,[219] whose story Dante had previously encountered in purgatory.[220]

Second is Ripheus,[221] mentioned only briefly in the *Aeneid* as nothing more than the "most just"

(*iustissimus*) of all the Trojans.[222] The pilgrim expresses great confusion at this combination of

souls; he cannot understand the presence of pagans in the eye of the holy creature. In return, the

eagle scolds Dante for focusing too much on the fact of the two pagans' appearance in paradise,

as opposed to the reasoning for why they are there:

> 'I see that you believe these things because I say them
> but fail to see, how, though you believe them,
> they came to pass, because their cause is hidden.
>
> 'You are like the man who knows a thing by name
> but does not understand its quiddity
> unless another makes that plain to him.[223]

The pilgrim thus deduces that God's plan cannot be anything more than a mystery in the eyes of

man. If Ripheus was actually the most just Trojan, and Trajan was truly resurrected by the pope

and converted to the faith, then both deeds were done according to some aspect of an

overarching divine providence. One man is a proto-Roman and the other ruled over the greatest

expanse of that ancient empire. The eagle in which they reside, itself originating from the "*M*"

of monarchy, represents nothing short of Rome, and the poet's manifestation of the Eternal City

in paradise stands as a testament to his vision of Rome as an ideal worthy of aspiration. He and

his fellow Florentine exiles are descendants of the Romans themselves, and only the imperial

Roman form of justice can "cure the shortness of my vision" and "apply sweet medication to my

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[218] Dante, *Par.* XX.55-60.
[219] Dante, *Par.* XX.43-48.
[220] Dante, *Purg.* X.73-93.
[221] Dante, *Par.* XX.67-72.
[222] Virgil, *Aen.* II.426.
[223] Dante, *Par.* XX.88-93.

eyes."[224] As the fictional Dante has traveled and gained a greater understanding of this Roman

legacy, the real Dante can begin to examine the political situation of his time that revolved

around that very same tradition.

The Providential Necessity of the Roman Empire

If Dante's conception of Rome subtly underlies his poetic work, it is within his political

treatise *On Monarchy* that he explicitly addresses the issue with full philosophical force. Three

primary points of inquiry define the work,[225] which is a concise document written in Latin, as

opposed to the poet's native Florentine dialect. At the outset of the work, Dante wishes to

understand whether temporal monarchy (otherwise defined as a unified empire) is necessary for

the world's well-being. Secondly, he seeks to answer the question as to whether the empire of

the Romans represented that ideal monarchy. Finally, and most pertinently to his conception of

the Roman legacy, he wonders if that imperial authority is gained directly from God, or if it

arises from his minister on earth, the pope.

Using arguments grounded mostly in the philosophy of Aristotle, Dante is able to

affirmatively answer the first inquiry, arguing in Book I that mankind is indeed best governed by

a worldwide empire.[226] [227] The poet notes that if the Aristotelian principles which he has

explicated are true, mankind is in its ideal state when governed by an emperor, to the concurrent

benefit of humanity and the world as a whole.[228] Significantly, Dante states that there never

existed a perfect imperial system, except under the reign of the divine Augustus Caesar (*nisi sub

divo Augusto monarcha, existente Monarchia perfecta*).[229] But in his view, the human race has

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[224] Dante, *Par.* XX.140-141.
[225] Dante, *Mon.* I.ii.3.
[226] Dante, *Mon.* I.ii-xv. The philosophical underpinnings of this argument are not relevant to the present work.
[227] *Cf.* Homer, *Iliad* II.204-205.
[228] Dante, *Mon.* I.xv.10.
[229] Dante, *Mon.* I.xvi.1.

once more fallen away from this unique instance of Roman glory and peace, and he greatly

laments this fact:

> *O genus humanum, quantis procellis atque iacturis quantisque naufragiis agitari*
> *te necesse est dum, bellua multorum capitum factum, in diversa conaris!*
> *Intellectu egrotas utroque, similiter et affectu: rationibus irrefragabilibus*
> *intellectum superiorem non curas, nec experientie vultu inferiorem, sed nec*
> *affectum dulcedine divine suasionis, cum per tubam Sancti Spiritus tibi*
> *effletur…*[230]

> O human race, how many tempests must toss you about, and how many
> shipwrecks must disturb you while, made into a beast with many heads, you strive
> after opposing things! You are sick in both of your intellects, and similarly in
> your affections; you do not take care of your highest intellect with irrefragable
> reason, nor your lowest with lessons of experience, nor your affectations with the
> sweetness of divine suasion, when to you it is sounded by the trumpet of the holy
> spirit…[231]

Dante exhorts the people of his time to look at themselves and realize that they are not properly

living up to the Roman ideal. Both theoretical reasoning and practical intellect have been

squandered, and the once-peaceful world under the proud reign of Augustus is no more. At the

turn of the fourteenth century, it is clear to Dante that the human race of his time does not consist

of Romans at all. It was the original Romans, after all, who won their empire by divine right,

and Dante seeks next to prove this assertion.

If Aristotle provides Dante with the theoretical basis for the necessity of a perfect empire,

then it is Virgil and the other Latin poets who support his claims in Book II: namely that this

perfect state of governance only existed during the formative years of the Roman Empire, and

that the Romans gained this power by right. Dante puts forth a series of arguments supporting

this assertion, with the first being the nobility argument:

> *…nobilissimo populo convenit omnibus aliis preferri; romanus populus fuit*
> *nobilissimus; ergo convenit ei omnibus aliis preferri.*[232]

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[230] Dante, *Mon.* I.xvi.4-5.
[231] All translations from Dante's Latin works are my own.
[232] Dante, *Mon.* II.iii.2.

> …it was suited that the noblest people should rule over all the others; the Roman people were the noblest people; therefore, it was suited that they should rule over all the others.

Dante substantiates the claim that "the noblest people should rule over all" with Aristotle, Juvenal, and the Gospels, while underscoring the nobility of the Romans with the example of Aeneas found in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[233] He notes that Aeneas was not only noble in regards to his piety towards his city and his father, but held wives from each of the world's continents. Creusa (from Asia), Dido (from Africa), and Lavinia (from Europe) all constitute a "confluence of blood" in the figure of Aeneas, thus justifying the dominance of his Roman progeny over the entire world.[234] The nobility of the Romans, as most easily exemplified by Aeneas, is what allows them the right to hold imperial dominion over the earth. *Romanitas*, in this sense, is intrinsically tied to Virgilian ideals of national nobility, geopolitical unity, and personal piety.

The next argument derives from what Dante sees as God's intervention in Roman affairs, or the miracles argument. Whether the miracle consisted of Numa's shield falling from heaven,[235] of the serendipitous noise of geese alerting the Romans on the Capitoline to the presence of oncoming Gauls,[236] or even of the hailstorm that confused the armies of Hannibal and saved Rome during the Punic wars,[237] Dante puts forth that it was God who ordained such events to occur, as evidence of the Roman right to their empire. Since all such things are willed by God, their results must have come about by divine right.[238] The Romans thus gained legitimacy from the heavens, as God's providence guided their success. Being a Roman in this paradigm, then, implies a certain level of spiritual support from above.

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[233] Dante, *Mon.* II.iii.4-17.
[234] Dante, *Mon.* II.iii.17.
[235] Dante, *Mon.* II.iv.5-6.
[236] Dante, *Mon.* II.iv.7-8.
[237] Dante, *Mon.* II.iv.9.
[238] Dante, *Mon.* II.iv.1.

Another argument involves the examples set by the piety and selflessness of the greatest of Romans, as those who put the good of the community above their individual desires and wants.[239] Men from Roman history such as Cincinnatus,[240] Camillus,[241] and even Cato[242] stand as exemplars of this ancient virtue, harkening back to Dante's first idea of *Romanitas*' key feature of noble piety. Still another argument comes about through Dante's understanding that an international race for world domination has been on-going since time immemorial, and that the Romans were the first to 'win' where other peoples had failed.[243] A series of faith-based arguments grounded in Scripture carry the rest of Book II to its conclusion, continuing to affirm the right of the Romans to their worldwide empire. The complex combination of God's providence, communal nobility, individual piety, and strength of character among the Romans all serve to justify the existence of that empire. It is with these qualities of *Romanitas* in mind that Dante proceeds to examine the major conflict of his time: the fight between (Roman) pope and (Roman) emperor for superiority over Europe.

Dante's Dual Rome

In order to discover a resolution to this conflict, Dante must understand whence the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor arises, be it God himself or God's minister in the pope.[244] If what is contrary to nature is contrary to God,[245] and it is against the Church's nature to have temporal authority, then the emperor's authority cannot be derived from the pope. Various Scriptural arguments follow that support Dante's view,[246] before he examines historical events as evidence to his claim. He first discusses the Donation of Constantine, wherein the eponymous

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[239] Dante, *Mon.* II.v.1.
[240] Dante, *Mon.* II.v.9-11.
[241] Dante, *Mon.* II.v.12.
[242] Dante, *Mon.* II.v.15-17.
[243] Dante, *Mon.* II.viii.1-15.
[244] Dante, *Mon.* III.i.5.
[245] Dante, *Mon.* III.ii.2.
[246] Dante, *Mon.* III.iii-III.ix.

emperor gifted the city of Rome to the pope.[247] Dante understands that this was not an action

befitting of a Roman emperor for a number of reasons, and thus considers Constantine out of line

with his view of *Romanitas*. First, based upon his arguments regarding the nature of empire in

the first two books, he understands Constantine's donation as philosophically impossible. The

emperor cannot hand over an empire that is a singular universal monarchy,[248] and the Church, by

nature cannot receive temporal gifts.[249] And to those who consider Charlemagne's coronation as

representative of papal supremacy, Dante reminds these critics that emperors such as Otto the

Great had since placed popes in power in similar manners, such that the argument no longer

holds.[250] Indeed, none of these historical figures (and nobody who makes the arguments he is

refuting) are exemplars of *Romanitas* for Dante. Those who lay sole claim to the legacy of

Rome in such fashion are no more Romans than the Black Guelphs who sent him into exile. The

poet's *Romanitas* is of a much more nuanced stock.

Considering these factors, there are two goals in life for men: happiness in the temporal

world and happiness in the eternal realm.[251] Mankind thus needs two guides – one for each

sphere – and the concept of Rome rests behind both of them.[252] It is the Roman emperor who

should guide the world's affairs, and the Roman pontiff who should help those of this world

reach the immortal happiness of eternal heaven. Human beings have two natures (body and

soul), two goals, and thereby two guides in life. Though the emperor does hold temporal

supremacy over the pope, this does not imply any overarching subjugation of the latter to the

former, as any earthly good is oriented towards the eternal good:

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[247] Though the Donation of Constantine is now understood to be a later falsehood, Dante would have understood the event as having taken place in history.
[248] Dante, *Mon.* III.x.8-9.
[249] Dante, *Mon.* III.x.14-15.
[250] Dante, *Mon.* III.xi.1-3.
[251] Dante, *Mon.* III.xvi.7.
[252] Dante, *Mon.* III.xvi.10.

> *Illa igitur reverentia Caesar utatur ad Petrum qua primogenitus illius debet uti ad patrem: ut luce paterne gratie illustratus virtuosius orbem terre irradiet, cui ab Illo solo prefectus est, qui est omnium spiritualium et temporalium gubernator.*[253]

> Therefore, let Caesar employ that same reverence towards Peter that a firstborn son should owe to his father, so that, illuminated by the light of paternal grace, he might more virtuously light up the world over which he has been placed by Him alone, who is the leader of all things spiritual and temporal.

Rome for Dante is a unified concept that happens to contain two component parts. The offices of pope and emperor are both equally as Roman as the other, and they each have their distinct parts to play in the grander scheme of human existence. Rome is an idea to be embraced by both institutions, and Dante, understanding himself as descended from the ancients, could be in no better position to make such a claim. *Il Sommo Poeta* was able to transcend the petty partisan politics of his time and return the legacy of Rome to the forefront of the conversation. Dante thus conceived of a Roman idea, dual in nature but unified nonetheless, and ultimately of a "Rome where Christ himself is Roman" after all.[254]

Petrarchan Postludes

One of Dante's friends and fellow exiles was Pietro di Parenzo di Garzo, a merchant and former politician who identified strongly with his Florentine roots. His son Petrarch would go forth to intellectual heights of his own, while developing new models of poetry and helping to father the impactful humanist movement in Europe. Deeply familiar with the works of Dante, Petrarch was able to look beyond the medieval conflict that had so displaced his intellectual predecessor's life, and developed a new idea of Italy, grounded in nothing short of Rome herself. It was Petrarch who would first take the idea of Roman unity and place it in the context of Italy as a nation.[255] Indeed, his concept of Rome as the underlying basis of the nation-state would

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[253] Dante, *Mon.* III.xvi.18.
[254] Dante, *Purg.* XXXII.102.
[255] *Cf.* Petrarch, *Canzoniere* 128.

transcend the centuries, touching upon revolutionary America, Napoleonic France, and even the

contemporary European Union. From Dante's writings in exile, Petrarch was able to glean an

idea of Rome that would allow Edward Gibbon to describe his poetic coronation in the Eternal

City as equal to that of the greatest poets and emperors of the bygone past:

> The poverty and debasement of Rome excited the indignation and pity of her
> grateful son: he dissembled the faults of his fellow-citizens; applauded with
> partial fondness the last of their heroes and matrons; and in the remembrance of
> the past, in the hope of the future, was pleased to forget the miseries of the present
> time. Rome was still the lawful mistress of the world; the pope and the emperor,
> her bishop and general, had abdicated their station by an inglorious retreat to the
> Rhone and the Danube; but if she could resume her virtue, the republic might
> again vindicate her liberty and dominion. Amidst the indulgence of enthusiasm
> and eloquence, Petrarch, Italy, and Europe were astonished by a revolution which
> realised for a moment his most splendid visions.[256]

Petrarch, grounded in Dante, was able to truly bring Rome to the forefront of the western

imagination once more. Though the great city was in a period of ruin during his lifetime, and

though her two guardians claimed disgraceful residences in France and Germany, Rome was able

to celebrate one more time through the art of her greatest poets. Italy was to be Rome and

Europe was to be Rome in Petrarch's eye. Though such an idea would remain politically

dormant until its misappropriation by fascism in the twentieth century, its emotional impact

would always hold its rightful place in the western imagination henceforth.

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[256] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1946), 2395.

Conclusion

Whither *Romanitas*?

"Quid est enim aliud omnis historia, quam Romana laus?"[257]

- *Petrarch, c. 1373*

At the dawn of the summer of 1944, American forces marching up the Italian peninsula finally broke through the German lines at Monte Cassino, and were able to advance towards the Eternal City after years of unmitigated warfare. Though many more months of battle would be required in order to topple the forces of fascism in Europe, the Allied liberation of Rome would mark an emotionally poignant, if not a militarily significant instance in the course of the Second World War. The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had marched upon Rome some twenty-two years prior with the intent of seizing power for himself and his party, and two decades of his totalitarian rule in Italy had left its indelible mark upon the city. The Duce's broad boulevards and hastily-planned archaeological excavations, combined with the omnipresence of fascistic propaganda grounded in ancient iconography, worked in tandem to craft a Rome more fitting to serve as the capital of an Axis power instead of a *caput mundi*. The American march north into the city served as a fitting inversion of these recent developments; both Mussolini and his ally Adolf Hitler would be dead and vanquished within a year's time.

An Italian with the cognomen of Curzio Malaparte, a former fascist ideologue and ruthless political opportunist, accompanied the Allied troops north as a liaison officer, having switched his loyalties to the winning side at just the right moment. In writing of his experience leading the Allies towards Rome, he can scarcely contain his emotions as the city comes into view for the first time. After having spent decades working mostly for the regime that had

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[257] Petrarch, *Invectiva Contra Eum Qui Maledixit Italie* VII.60.

finally abandoned the capital, Malaparte can do nothing but weep. His American friend, Colonel

Jack Hamilton, inquires as to his display of emotion, noting that the birds are sounding and that

all should be well in his mind, and Malaparte struggles to understand the contradiction:

> The birds were singing, and I was crying. Jack's words, so simple, so human, made me blush. This foreigner from beyond the seas, this American, this warmhearted, generous, sensitive man had found in the depths of his heart the right words, the true words, the words that I had been vainly seeking within my mind and without, the only words that were appropriate to that day, to that moment, to that place. The birds were singing, and I was crying! Through my tears I looked at Rome, trembling in the depths of the limpid mirror of light; and I was happy.[258]

The Roman ideal, even for one of such a political bent as Malaparte, transcends all earthly

happenings, resulting in nothing short of the simplest and most genuine happiness. Foreigners

have (and will) always come to Rome, whether as conquerors or witnesses to its eternality, and

the city will always bring out that most human of emotions within them. Despite their previous

political and military opposition, their distinct nationalities, and their differing reasons for

marching towards the city in that moment, Hamilton and Malaparte are both at their happiest in

seeing Rome at long last. The Eternal City survived the strictures of fascism and the brutality of

the world's greatest and most destructive war. She had overcome millennia of dictators,

emperors, kings, and generals in the past, and now the Duce, her most dangerous threat, had been

defeated as well.

The urban plan of Mussolini had uncovered much of the Roman imperial ruins, but this

work came at the expense of the natural progression of the city. Centuries of Roman history

from the medieval to the early-modern had been destroyed by his artificial road construction and

hasty excavations. Perhaps more than any other location, EUR remains as a monumental

graveyard to his vision of urbanism gone wrong, for this gray and lonely "New Rome" stands in

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[258] Curzio Malaparte, *The Skin*, trans. David Moore (New York: New York Review Books, 2013), 276-277.

opposition to the vibrant and diverse Rome of old. Mussolini, like many men before him, held a vision of the ideal Rome, but his mistake was that he tried to make this ideal manifest in reality. Augustine and Dante certainly recognized the real-ideal divide in their visions of Rome. The saint considered his Rome to be twofold, with the City of God serving as an ethereal archetype for the terrestrial City of Man, and nothing more. The poet understood that the original Rome was no more, and recognized that it was the natural progression of historical continuity that connected himself and his fellow Florentines with that past. Neither Dante nor Augustine advocated a literal return to ancient Rome; they merely understood the city as a model for societal unity and as a virtuous exemplar to which their own communities could adhere. Even Theoderic the Great and Charlemagne, caught up in their medieval quests of re-attaining imperial grandeur, recognized the fact that Rome could be nothing more than a model to them. Each ruler imitated Rome and claimed to be Roman, but they did so with the understanding that the Eternal City was an ideal and not a reality for them. Mussolini's *Romanitas* failed where the *Romanitas* of the other men carried a lasting profundity. The Duce tried to actualize the Roman ideal, and this attempt collapsed under its own weight. His Rome remained beneath Plato's divided line, while always claiming to be above it. In the context of centuries of adaptation of *Romanitas* by distinctly non-classical people, this was the boldest and most unenduring claim to that legacy to date. One must only experience the desolation of EUR, as compared to the vibrancy of the old Rome, as a testament to that fact.

In a moment of great poignancy, Curzio Malaparte suggests to the Allied generals that they enter Rome in the manner of Caesar, Cicero, Augustus, and all the other ancient heroes: along the *Via Appia Antica*.[259] The Italian guides the Americans along that most classical of roads, serving as an informal tour guide and informing them of the nature of the passing

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[259] Malaparte 2013, 289-290.

monuments and ruins. The Americans "clicked their Kodaks" at the material history of the
bygone Rome, as Malaparte identifies each in turn.[260] The great tombs, columns, and buildings
of the Roman past loom to each side of the American army, reminding them of the millennia of
the senators, popes, and emperors that had marched that same path before them. This was
Romanitas manifest, and the culmination of the Roman ideal in the view of yet another
conquering army. It had been over two and a half thousand years since Romulus had legendarily
founded the city that bore his name, and this time it was the Americans' turn to embrace that
history, perhaps as the new Romans themselves. "So this is Rome," a general exclaimed upon
entering the city proper; Malaparte notes, with a stoic simplicity, that he could say nothing
more.[261]

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[260] Malaparte 2013, 291.
[261] Malaparte 2013, 296.

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