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Imperium sine fine after 410.
The Attempt at an Impossible Accomplishment
in Some Latin Poetical Sources

In 1831 Felice Romani was entrusted by his friend, the Sicilian composer Vincenzo Bellini, to abridge and adapt for an operatic libretto the long and far-fetched tragedy *Norma ou l’infanticide*, which was written in the same year by the French dramatist Alexander Soumet. The result is a masterpiece of Italian romantic opera, which is particularly worth quoting at the beginning of our present intervention. Romani, one of the finest librettists of his age, had attended the universities of Pisa and Genoa and had the opportunity of studying classical literature before graduating in law. Reminiscences of his classical education can be perceived here and there in his literary production and are especially meaningful in the text of *Norma*. As is well known, the words Norma pronounces just before starting her famous invocation to the Moon are meant to appease the warlike, rebellious intentions of her father, the chief Druid Oroveso, because she is secretly in love with the Roman consul Pollio.

This hieratical prophecy, however, recalls a feeling – also widespread in classical sources – of pessimism, which ought to be read as a counterbalance to the optimistic idea of the eternity and universality of Rome. It will be sufficient here to refer to the famous phrase contained in Livy’s preface about the unbearable greatness of the eternal city.

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1 The author wishes to thank Domitilla Campanile, Karla Pollmann and Andrea Raggi for further hints and suggestions. She is also grateful to Pauline Tucker who revised the English text.
2 Classical reminiscences in *Norma* are outlined by Questa 1998. The present writer is also going to deal with some aspects of this opera in a forthcoming essay.
3 Liv., Praef.: labente deinde paulatim disciplina velut desidentes primo mores sequatur animo, deinde ut magis magisque lapsi sint, tum ire coeperint praecipites, donec ad haec tempora
evocative word like arcano recurs twice in few lines of the libretto: could this be read as an allusion to the well-known (and in some respects trivialized) notion of arcana imperii?4

This sense of despair and the awareness of an impending end can be often perceived in Roman historiography, so that, according to a perceptive observation formulated by Antonio La Penna, when Christian writers had to attack the political institution of the empire and to blame the viciousness of pagan Rome, they had found allies above suspicion in many Latin historians.5 Mention could also be made of what has been labelled as the ‘biological’ motif, which compares the evolution of the empire to a living organism, naturally subject to decline and decay, and therefore more suitable to express these negative views than the other usual scheme, that of the ages of the world. The notion of decline and fall obviously involves that of a perishable empire, which, like almost every human event is doomed to an end,6 or, in other words, is also fated to irreversible decadence because of evil and wickedness. These ideas recur quite often both in pagan and Christian historiography.7 Jerome, for example, offered an allegorical reading of Daniel’s prophecy in which the use of the words “Roma aeterna” was condemned as blasphemous, even though such thinking could not help stopping the development of a medieval folk notion, expressed by Bede or a contemporary, that Rome would last as long as the world.

At the same time the constructive, and so to say optimistic, attitude was far more widespread.8 Sanctioned by the famous lines of Virgil’s Aeneid (1.277–8),

\[ \textit{quibus nec uitia nostra nec remedia pati possimus perventum est.} \]

One should note, however, that the same Livy stresses elsewhere the constructive image of Rome, by underlining her eternity. In later ages see the reprise by Claud., Gild. 108, \textit{ipsa nocet moles}. On the ambivalent image of Rome see the contribution by K. Pollmann in this volume. It is worth citing the still remarkable entry on “the idea of Rome” (\textit{Idea di Roma}), in particular the sections dedicated to Greco-Roman antiquity and Early Christianity by Giorgio Pasquali and Alberto Pincherle respectively in the 29th volume of the \textit{Enciclopedia Italiana}, Rome 1936, 906–919.

4 On this theme see the still excellent inquiry by De Francisci 1948 (in the introductory section the Italian scholar recalls how the Tacitean notion of \textit{arcana imperii} underwent a gradual development and came to mean the secret affairs of a state). See also Kantorowicz 1955, 68 ff.
5 La Penna 1978, 83.
6 See especially Florus’ proemial section with the commentary by Facchini Tosi 1998, 96 ff. and the lesser known passage of Lactantius, \textit{Divinae Institutiones} 7.15.14, with the quotation of Florus, erroneously attributed to Seneca. This metaphor is discussed by Ruch 1972.
7 For further examples see Mazzarino 1988 (1st ed. 1959); Siniscalco 1983 (and more extensively 2003). It is interesting to note that Gibbon adopts this view when trying to investigate the causes of the ‘decline and fall’ of the empire (Edwards 1996, 81).
8 Mazza 1983, 269 offers a detailed bibliography about the motif of \textit{Roma Aeterna}. Among the vast secondary literature see in particular: Gernentz 1918; Klingner 1927; Ziegler
when Jupiter grants Rome the promise of an imperium sine fine, an endless ruling over the world, this idea constituted the grounds and justification for Roman imperialism, which, however, is to be dated back to the first exploits of Rome’s expansionist politics of the second century BC.\(^9\) It is worth noting the use Virgil makes of negative particles, thus emphasizing the sense of both temporal eternity and spatial unlimitedness:\(^{10}\) *His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono, / Imperium sine fine dedi.* The fact that Rome was endowed with a divine gift of eternity allowed her civilizing mission and legitimized her pretensions to universality; once again, it is Virgil who efficaciously summarizes them when Anchises instructs his son about the future glory of the newly founded city (*Aen.* 6.851–3): *Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento / (hae tibi erunt artes) pacique imponere morem, / parere subiectis et debellare superbos* are lines too famous to be passed over in silence.\(^{11}\)

The idea of the *Vrbs aeterna* was often expressed by means of patriotic allusions or poetical propaganda, but it became a powerful device of the Roman religious structure and theological framework. Augustus associated his cult with the goddess Roma, whose cult had been introduced during the republican age – as witnessed by Melinno’s outstanding Greek hymn, and, most of all, by many numismatics and temples dedicated to both Roma and Augustus (or to *Roma aeterna* and *Venus Felix*).\(^{12}\) This kind of religious involvement is to be linked with notions such as the renewal of the centuries, the golden age and the assimilation of Rome with the cosmos, as in the other Vergilian line, *magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo.*\(^{13}\) It is worth mentioning here also the prophecies

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\(^9\) Vogt 1929, together with the further considerations provided by Mazza 1983. *Aeternum imperium* is to be found for the first time in Cic., *Pro Rab.* 33; for poetical sources of the Augustan period see also *aeterna urbs* in Tib., 2.5.23–24; Ov., *Fast.* 3.72, and the contribution by Pollmann in this volume.

\(^{10}\) We are following here the perceptive suggestion by Turcan 1983.

\(^{11}\) Similar themes are developed also in Horace’s *Carmen Saeculare*, to be considered another manifesto of Augustan propaganda: see for example, ll. 50–3: *clarus Anchisae Venerisque sanguis, / impetret, bellante prior, iacentem / lenis in hostem* (a recent commentary on this poem is provided by Thomas 2011). The civilizing mission of Rome is also expressed by the theme of “giving laws” to the subjected, which often is linked to that of clemency towards the defeated enemies (see e.g. Verg., *Georg.* 4.561; *Aen.* 4.231). This motif is a constant pattern also in later sources.

\(^{12}\) On the religious significance of Rome see Mellor 1981. The cult of Rome had already investigated by Lugli 1949.

\(^{13}\) *Ecl.* 4.5.
of the *Oracula Sybillina* that, although originating in a different milieu, display the same messianic hopes.\(^{14}\)

Virgil’s verses constitute a sort of *Leitmotiv* that winds through the entire Latin literary production of the imperial and late antique age when it deals with the theme of the eternal empire, established by virtue of divine providence.\(^{15}\) The two couplets were often employed as keywords to reassert the eternal rule of Rome also in later ages.\(^{16}\) This feeling was to be reinforced more and more by the progressive embodiment of the sovereign with the idea of empire itself and found sanction in the charismatic perspective that characterizes the later phase of the empire. Certainly, in the majority of our sources the perpetual life of Rome is often linked to contemporary expectations and depends on human factors, even though it is not uncommon to see a divinization of the city, which is often praised in hymnal tones and sometimes worshipped as a goddess (see the different cases of Melinno and, later, of Aelius Aristeides).\(^{17}\) There is also an emphasis on some keywords or stereotype motives, such as the supposed etymology linked to a Greek term for “strength”, or the fact that Rome nurtures and unifies different peoples under her protection,\(^{18}\) not to mention wordplays or puns (*urbs*/*orbis*, or *amor* as mirror word of *Roma*). Besides, Jupiter’s everlasting ruling had already undergone a deep transformation, insofar as Christian authors reused it to assert the new political realm of a Christianized empire.\(^{19}\)

\(^{14}\) For a general outline of this kind of literature see Parker 1992; Monaca 2005; Waßmuth 2010; Brocca 2011 deals with the connections with Constantine’s Greek translation of the fourth Eclogue.

\(^{15}\) Hardie 1986.

\(^{16}\) A brief but clear and precise survey about the idea of Rome from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century is provided by Vauchez/Giardina 2000 (the idea of Rome in the Middle Ages was thoroughly investigated in the learned essay by Graf 1882–83) see already Bondanella 1986; Kytzler 1972 offers a useful selection of poetical passages about Rome from Greco-Roman antiquity to contemporary times. Edwards 1996 takes into account mainly poetical sources from the Augustan and the early imperial age. A similar inquiry is still badly needed for late antiquity (see however Fuhrmann 1968; Brodka 1998; and some of the collected essays of Klein 1999); for spatial transformations in the city reflecting different ideological perspectives see Fraschetti 1999; Curran 2000; Cracco Ruggini 2003. Other general inquiries about the symbolic purport of Rome: Edwards/Woolf 2003; Larmour/Spencer 2007.

\(^{17}\) On Melinno’s hymn see Raimondi 1995–98 and Pollmann 15–17 in this volume. Far better known is Aristeides’ encomium of Rome, on which see, besides Oliver 1953, Pernot 1997; Fontanella 2007. The two latter authors probe different aspects of this oration in the miscellaneous volume on Aelius Aristeides edited by Harris and Holmes 2008. Ratti 1971 emphasized the religious values that emerge from the text.

\(^{18}\) See *infra*, n. 33.

\(^{19}\) See, e. g., ll. 541–542 in Prudentius’ first book of *Contra Symmachum*: *denique nec metas statuit, nec tempora ponit / imperium sine fine docet*, which is an obvious *chresis* (Gnilka
It is currently acknowledged, following Pierre Courcelle and François Paschoud,\textsuperscript{20} that Christian writers developed a strong sense of patriotism after the battle of Adrianople, even though feelings of loyalty towards the empire and a sort of citizenship pride were already professed in the previous decades or even centuries.\textsuperscript{21} Christian authors usually linked the traditional motif of the eternity or, at least, durability (expressed by means of words such as \emph{aeternitas} or \emph{diuturnitas}) of Rome and of its primacy over the world with the idea of a Christian empire, in which the sovereign stands as the earthly vicar of God and ‘imitates’ Him.\textsuperscript{22} By the beginning of the 5th century, therefore, the eternity of Rome came to coincide with the notion of a universal empire, established and ordered by divine providence.

Needless to say, the symbolic purport of Rome is clearly emphasized in all these sources, insofar as the eternal city was no more the political capital of the Empire. Her role, however, was by no means weakened but, on the contrary, acquired new prestige, thanks to the pontifical see and to her primacy among the Western Churches – though it should be noted that such primacy was not unanimously acknowledged in the East: for example some conciliar canons state that the see of Rome should be subject to that of Constantinople, because Constantinople is the actual capital city or, the \textit{Nea Rhome}.\textsuperscript{23} It is worth mentioning the effects achieved by Pope Damasus when he brought to light new monuments and contributed to stressing the role of Christian saints and martyrs by means of a powerful “rhetoric on stone”\textsuperscript{24} and the creation of a one-to-one correspondence between the topography of the \textit{Vrbs} and the geography of saints and martyrs celebrated in its churches.

\textsuperscript{[1984]}: see also Döpp 1988. An antiphrastic treatment of these verses is to be understood in the \textit{Sulpiciae Conquestio} of the so-called \textit{Epigrammata Bobiensia}, to be dated in the fourth century AD: \textit{aut frustra uxorim mendaxque diespiter olim / imperium sine fine dedi dixisse probatur / nunc igitur qui rex romanus imperat inter, / non trabe sed tergo prolapsus et ingluvie albus / et studio et sapiens hominum nomenque genusque / omnia abire foras atque urbe excedere iussit} (93 ff. Munari).

\textsuperscript{20} Courcelle 1966 and Paschoud 1967, who have now acquired the status of standard works.

\textsuperscript{21} The Christian idea of history culminates and has its peak in the Incarnation. It should be noted that early Christian writers display a dual attitude towards history, a negative or pessimistic one (recognizable in Commodianus, ps.-Barnabas, Hippolytus, Victorinus of Petau and partly even Lactantius \textit{[see Pollmann 30 f. in this volume]}) and a positive, or neutral, one, such as that of Melito, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen. These problems have been extensively investigated by Siniscalco 2003.

\textsuperscript{22} Such as in the famous example of Eusebius, on whom see Cameron and Stuart Hall 1999, together with Sirinelli 1961 and Farina 1966. For a reassessment of the category of political theology see the considerations by Rizzi 2000 and 2009.

\textsuperscript{23} Mazza 1983; Irmscher 1983, from whom I derive the information about the Councils. On the imperial idea in the East see already Treitinger 1938.

\textsuperscript{24} Fontaine 1986; Trout 2003; Sághy 2008.
Yet, the momentous sack of Rome, when “together with the city the whole world perished”, and the shock it caused among intellectual elites, necessarily led to a reconsideration of the notion of the endless sovereignty of Rome. Profanation of the Capitolium, which had remained inviolate for about eight hundred years (or for three hundred and fifty years, if one considers the fire the Capitol Hill suffered during the civil war between Vitellius and Vespasian) forced people to face the idea that also the eternal city was exposed to mortal risk.

Scholars have long since investigated how Alaric's plundering of Rome was understood by contemporary historians and how it was perceived by the conscience of both pagan and Christian authors, who reacted differently to this catastrophe, in particular developing a strong meditation on the deepest and ultimate fate of human beings. Furthermore, the crucial context of the formation and establishment of the so-called Roman-Germanic reigns in the previous century had contributed to the emergence of a different idea of Rome. Could the notion of a universal empire be possible after 410? And, if so, how could this be reconciled with the subsequent establishment of the Roman-Germanic reigns in the different regions of the West? How was Jupiter’s promise about the imperishable rule of Rome and the motif of *agerasia* to be interpreted?

Generally speaking, on one hand Christian writers blamed Rome as pagan, decadent and vicious, but on the other they sponsored the idea of eternity as well, because of the pontifical see. They sometimes blended the exegesis of the Book of Daniel with traditional classic themes, asserting that the empire had been established by the will of God. Christian universalism allowed a sort of ‘dual’ citizenship, so that a Christian writer could simultaneously feel himself a citizen of Rome and a member of the Church. This idea had been already developed by the Apologists of the second and third century, but became a central tenet in Augustine, according to whose influential image Rome is endowed with strong earthly (i.e. political) values, even though universal and

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25 According to Jerome’s famous words, *In Ezek. lib. 1 praef.*, *in una urbe totus orbis interiit.*

26 Tac. *Hist.* 3.72: *Id facinus post conditam urbem luctuosissimum foedissimumque rei publicae populi Romani accidit, nullo externo hoste, propitiis, si per mores nostros liceret, deis, sedem Iovis Optimi Maximi auspiciato a maioribus pignus imperii conditam, quam non Porsenna dedita urbe neque Galli capta temerare potuissent, furore principum excindi. arserat et ante Capitolium civili bello, sed fraude privata.* Horace’s lines in *Carm.* 3.3.7–8, *dum Capitolium / scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex*, ought to be interpreted as an allusion to the eternity of Rome.

27 On the idea of *a terrena civitas* see already De Francisci 1948, 241. A useful collection of late antique sources pertaining to the sack of Rome is collected by Piganiol 1964. For a general reflection see also Gärtner 1998, to be supplemented with Zwierlein 1978 and Feichtinger 1998.
trans-national, in contrast to the heavenly Jerusalem, which embodies the ultimate spiritual goal longed for by Christian writers. No wonder, therefore, that the two contrasting notions of “decline and fall” and “endless empire” respectively are currently employed and often intermingle with each other.

Augustine himself is well aware of the fact that an imperium sine fine is impossible to accomplish because earthly reigns are as frail as every human thing. Yet:

[We] find in St. Augustine the first statement of the belief in the providential mission of the empire as a preparation for the world religion of Christianity which, centuries later, fired the imagination of Dante. Attacking the pagan belief that their empire was divinely instituted, St. Augustine points out that even if true, the pagan gods were powerless since, obviously, they had left the Romans to their fate. But, he continues, deliberately obscuring the fact that because of the barbarian eruption the empire was dissolving, the end is not fatal, nor its beginnings fortuitous since the true God had providentially created the empire in preparation for the spiritual kingdom to follow.\(^{28}\)

Augustine and, in his footsteps Medieval writers like Dante (or Joachim da Fiore), stated that the Roman empire was doomed to succeed the previous world empires by right of God, but that conquest by arms should be regarded as propaedeutical to the eventual establishment of a spiritual kingdom. Therefore the political idea of a translatio is completed by a spiritual one.\(^{29}\)

Whereas this theme has been investigated at greater length in historical sources, with the further involvement of the dichotomy between the linear and circular conception of time pertaining to Jewish-Christian or to Greco-Roman Weltanschauung respectively,\(^{30}\) its poetical treatment remained in the shade, with the notable exceptions of Claudian and Prudentius,\(^{31}\) not to mention their most remarkable antecedents, namely the Augustan poets. Claudian and Prudentius, however, could still admire the grandeur of the empire and celebrate the Christian princes as guarantors of the Roman heritage, thanks to whose firmness the barbarian menace is averted. Albeit threatened on different fronts, both external and internal, Rome could find in herself the force to stand up and survive. To my knowledge, no one has so far attempted to investigate how poets writing after 410, in a period marked by political turbulence and the emergence of a new order, could cope with the idea of the eternity of Rome. The present

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28 Klieger 1946, 485.
29 According to a widespread idea, Rome’s ruling all over the world is coincident with the fourth world empire, before the final apocalypse: Mazza 1999 provides further information on the motif of the translatio imperii, which functions also in later centuries. See also Alzati 2001 and 2004.
30 For Salvian’s case see also Lambert 1999.
31 Charlet 1986; Corsaro 2002; the new edition by Tränkle 2008 provides an up-to-date bibliography on the various issues implied in Prudentius’ poem.
inquiry will focus on some different perspectives which share the common belief of the *imperium sine fine* in spite of the new historical realm, and decline it accordingly.

The ability to attract different people from different regions and unify them under her shield of laws and customs, praised by Rutilius Namatianus in his nostalgic and deeply pagan-inspired poem, is surely one of the reasons that allowed Rome to survive despite undergoing a deep transformation. So far, however, few scholars have remarked that in the mid-second century Rome was celebrated by the famous Greek rhetorician and sophist Aelius Aristeides as the mother of citizens all over the world – an idea that already finds its roots in late republican debates about citizenship, and that became officially a tangible reality with Caracalla’s *constitutio* of 212.32 Invoked by Rutilius as *regina pulcherrima mundi*, nurturer of men and gods, her divine origins being underlined by a Lucretian borrowing, Rome embodies the ideas of *honos, virtus, clementia, mores, imperium, consilium, iudicium*, and *gloria*, by which men are allowed to be closer to heaven. Many recent interpreters have demonstrated convincingly that Rutilius’ eulogy of Rome marks the transition between the old and the new conceptions of the city. Indeed, the ‘hymn’ displays a sad awareness that cities are also are destined to perish – as Rutilius repeats while contemplating the ruins of the lesser known Tuscan city of Cosa. Rome, therefore, stands as a touchstone with other, less famous, cities, but pessimistically condemned to the same disastrous fate.33 It is well known (and therefore I will only mention it briefly) that, like many cultivated pagans of his age, Rutilius held the Christian religion – which substituted the ancient gods – responsible for the barbarian invasions and the destruction of Rome. A key passage – though often underestimated – is provided in the violent invective against Stilicho, attacked as “traitor of the state” (2.42): *proditor arcani imperii*, which could perhaps be interpreted in the sense that Stilicho had revealed the secret name of Rome to his barbarian allies, thus allowing the evocation of her secret tutelary gods and the subsequent defeat – an hypothesis, however, as speculative as it is fascinating.34

32 This problem has been recently reconsidered by Marotta 2009, with further bibliographical information. Raggi 2006 explains at greater length a practical case involving the question of double citizenship in the late Republican period.

33 On Rutilius’ passage see the extensive contribution by Schierl in this volume. Hymnological motifs have already been outlined by Lana 1987 and Squillante 2007, whereas the passage on Cosa has been investigated by Brugnoli 2004.

34 Boano 1948; Varadi 1968; Ferri 2010 and De Martino 2011 deal at greater length from a religio-historical perspective with the theme of a ‘secret name’ of Rome. The motif of a *translatio imperii* endowed with religious significance, especially as far as the traditions relating to the Palladium are concerned, is investigated in the perceptive article of Ando 2001 (see also Cracco Ruggini 1983 and Fraschetti 1999, 65 ff. and Borgognoni,
Dramatic or even catastrophic events during the fifth century are therefore assumed as a starting point to establish a new perspective of identity, as is shown in the Roman/barbarian dialectic. It is interesting to note that as Rutilius imitates some passages in Claudian, so does Sidonius Apollinaris, who, furthermore, can also avail himself of Rutilius. Sidonius provides a remarkable case, which, however, has been much less investigated: indeed, Sidonius is a difficult source to deal with, insofar as his elaborate poetry is involved and obscure, resulting in a mix of stylistic mannerism and censures, motivated, in Ralph Mathisen’s words, by ‘political prudence’. 35 Both these features impugn his reliability as a historical source somewhat or, at least, compel us to decipher his ‘rhetorical codes’. 36 Classical reminiscences intermingle with allusive hints to present affairs throughout Sidonius’ entire production and result in an obscuring effect. Far from being an attempt to mislead or deceive his audience, however, Sidonius is driven by the “desire to represent in traditional terms a world which is changing to such an extent that a new vocabulary is required”. 37 In some respects, his poetics come very close to that of Merobaudes, not only because they share the same patterns of encomiastic literature, but also because they deal with similar problems concerning the emergence and the political legitimation of a military aristocracy. 38

In Sidonius too, it is possible to see an aim at reconciling past and present that contributes to strengthen future hopes, in spite of the current circumstances. Interpreters have pointed out perceptively that the antithesis *vetus / novus* underpinning his whole work provides an understanding of how late antique society perceived its past and confronted its future: “Although Sidonius, in using examples from the past as comparison with present or future actions, appears to wish to recreate the past, he is also aware that too much has changed to make this possible or, perhaps, even desirable”. 39

forthcoming. The Palladium legend as narrated in Ovid is discussed by Edwards 1996, 62.

35 Mathisen 1979.
36 Consolino 1974.
38 One of the best treatments of Merobaudes’ poetry can be found in Clover 1971. See also Mazza 1984; Bruzzone 1999; Merobaudes’ first poem, to be dated in the early 440s, has been read as reflecting imperial propaganda on the events of 425 and 437. What is more interesting in Merobaudes’ poetry is the *ekphrasis* of a fresco on the ceiling of a chamber, probably in the royal palace at Ravena, and therefore it “presents two levels of imperial propaganda on dynastic and military issues: the original fresco or mosaic and the poem describing it” (Gillett 1993, 27). For the use of ekphrasis as panegyrical device see the considerations the present writer put forward in Tommasi 2010a. The same Merobaudes, on the other hand, employs some stock motifs of Roman encomiastic literature when dealing with the overthrowing of the barbarians (see *Pan. 1*, fr. II A and *Pan. 2.*27 ff.).
In the panegyric for Avitus, a particularly meaningful example is the skilled use of Rome’s prosopopoeia. The passage shows patent echoes not only from some *loci classici* in Claudian, but also from Rutilius Namatianus – himself a Gallic aristocrat who wrote just after Alaric’s plundering of Rome. As clearly emphasized by Nicoletta Brocca, the link with Rutilius functions as a way to reassert the loyalty of the Gallic aristocracy – or at least, part of the Gallic aristocracy – towards Rome. Unlike the Claudianean model, partly followed by the same Rutilius, the city of Rome is described as an old dowager and her long, lavishly redundant speech evokes many glorious figures of the past. Sidonius’ aim, in fact, is to legitimize the newly proclaimed Avitus, who, incidentally, was also his father in law, and to pave the way for the acceptance of a Gallic emperor and his barbarian supporters. Yet, the contrast between Rome’s description as a dowager and her regained youth thanks to Avitus, notwithstanding some topical features, is central to understanding the entire work. The scene is placed in the final peroration of the poem, before the powerful conclusion that the Fates “drew out with their whirling spindles a golden age”. The originality of these verses, to be compared with a parallel passage in Claudian, lies in the paradoxical *pointe* against Valentinian III and the theme of the *principes pueri*: 

\[ \text{laetior at tanto modo prince, prisca deorum, /} \\
\text{Roma, parens, attolle genas ac turpe veternum / depone: en princeps faciet} \\
\text{iuvenescere maior / quam pueri fecere senem} \] (595–98).

An old sovereign like Avitus, who was about sixty when he ascended the throne, is therefore able to rejuvenate Rome, whereas a cowardly adolescent like Valentinian III caused her downfall.

Furthermore, one must stress the comparison between Avitus and Trajan: in lines 116–118 Rome asks Jupiter to give her a new ruler as mighty and good as Trajan had been. In choosing the example of Trajan, Sidonius aimed at linking

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40 Generally speaking on this rhetorical device see Paxsons 1994 and Roberts 2001 on the rhetorical prosopopoeia of Rome in later poetry. Bonjour 1982 already investigated personifications in Sidonius’ poetry. The same theme has been developed by F.E. Consolino in a forthcoming article (of the same scholar see Consolino 2002, on Claudian).


42 Avitus had been proclaimed emperor in July 455, just after the momentous events of Petronius Maximus’ violent death and the Vandal sack of Rome. The panegyric for Avitus was delivered in Rome at the beginning of A.D. 456. For further information on that momentous event see Tommasi (forthcoming).

43 Cf. ll. 600–602 felix tempus nevere sorores / imperis, Auguste, tuis et consulis anno / fulva volubilibus duverunt saecula penis. Here and in the following quotes we employ the English translation by W.B. Anderson (1936).

Avitus with both Trajan and Theodosius, insofar as Trajan, unanimously praised as *optimus princeps* according to the tradition, was strongly connected with the Theodosian dynasty, because of the common Spanish origin and because of the encomiastic significance implied in the praise of both these sovereigns.\(^45\) What is more, Sidonius relies on some sources stating (though somewhat erroneously) that Trajan became emperor during his old age, so that he is able to establish another celebrative link with Avitus.

Sidonius’ skilful rhetoric allows him to deal with other encomiastic patterns, which are resumed and arranged in order to express the idea of Rome’s everlasting domain. One of the most astonishing peculiarities in the panegyric for Avitus is surely the long gallery of events derived from the glorious Roman past. Such an insertion of historical details recalls some parallel passages in Claudian or in Prudentius’ *Contra Symmachum*: in all likelihood these poets relied on rhetorical handbooks, albeit they all provided a complex and somewhat ideologically oriented reworking of their sources and an attempt at adapting them to contemporary facts.\(^46\) On the other hand, Sidonius chooses to revive some stock metaphors in order to underpin his idea of Rome. In the preface to the Panegyric, written as usual in elegiac couplets, he hints at the mythical struggle between the Olympian gods and the giants, which was usually employed to reassert Rome’s triumphs over her enemies,\(^47\) so to pave the way for equating his laudatory addresses to Avitus with an epic gigantomachy; lines 581 ff. dealing with the triumphs of Hercules should be read in a similar way.

The greatness of Rome is celebrated also by means of a deeply symbolic image, that of the phoenix, which is hinted at in lines 353–56 (and more extensively in *Pan. Anth.* 407–17, although without the political significance).\(^48\) It is possible to suggest that here the poet establishes a connection between the image of the bird resurrecting from its ashes and Rome recovering from her

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45 This is clearly expressed in Claudian: see e.g. *In Ruf.* 1.51 and *De cons. Stil.* 2.52 ff. In both these passages Mazzoli 2011 highlighted some references to Seneca’s *De clementia*.
46 Tommasi (forthcoming).
48 The two passages sound: *Sic cinnama busto / collis Erythraei portans Phoebeius ales / concitat omne avium vulgus; famulantia currunt / agmina et angustus pennas non explicat aer;* and *Est locus Oceani, longinquus proximus Indis, / axe sub Eoo, Nabataeum tensus in Eurnum: / ver ibi continuum est, interpellata nec ullis / frigoris pallecit humus, sed flore perenni / picta peregrinos ignorant arva rigores; / halant rura rosis, indiscriptosque per agros / fragrat odor: violam, cytisum, serpylla, ligustrum, / lilia, narcissos, casiam, colocasia, caltas, / costum, malobathrum, myrrhas, opobalsama, tura / parturiunt campi; nec non pulsante senecta / hinc reditivus petit vicinus cinnama Phoenix.* On the symbolic purport of the phoenix, besides the classical inquiry van den Broek 1971, see now Furbetta forthcoming. A perceptive observation already in Kantorowicz 1955, 88.
ruins – the city that is fated to “flash forth out of her calamities; since from her very beginning it hath been her fixed destiny to grow greater by misfortunes”.

Finally, the theme of the returning golden age characterizes all three panegyrics written by Sidonius, whose immediate model is to be found in Claudian. Whereas the image of the already accomplished fulva … saecula meaningfully concludes the poem dedicated to Avitus, this possibility is evoked either as a wish or a promise in the other poems: the Earth herself endows Anthemius with the foretelling of a golden age and his own birth or infancy is accompanied by marvels or prodigies – the same propitious omens that shine on other famous infants. The same ideological motif is also resumed in the panegyric for Majorian (ll. 68 – 369), where the traditional pattern of the rivalry between Rome and Carthage is adapted to the different situation, because Africa herself, in a long peroration, complains of being subjected to the Vandals. The war between the empire and the Vandals becomes the fourth Punic war, therefore evoking one of the most heroic pages of Roman history.

Furthermore, the same device had already been employed by Claudian in his

49 In lines 5 – 7: quae sicut mersa nitescunt | adversis sic Roma micat, cui fixus ab ortu / ordo fuit crevisse malis, Brocca 2003–2004 rightly stresses a reminiscence from Rutilius Namatianus 1.140: ordo renascendi est crescere posse malis. She also suggests that lines 10–11: iam necte bifrontes, / anceps lane, comas duplicisque accingere lauro are inspired by Rutilius 1.115 – 116, erige crinales lauros seniumque sacrati / vertici in virides Roma recinge comas. Moreover, Anderson outlines a parallel with Pan. Mai. 63, tua nempe putatur / surgere fata malis et celsior esse ruina, which are, in turn, inspired by Hor., C. 4.4.65 – 69: merces profundo, pulchrior evenit; / luctere, multa proruet integrum / cum laude victorem geretque / proelia contugibus loquenda.

50 Claud., De cons. Stil. 2.334–5: tincta simul repetito murice fila / contulimus pensis et eodem nevimus auro.

51 See ll. 102 ff.: cunabula vestra / imperii fulgere notis et praescia tellus / aurea converso promisit saecula fertu. / te nascente ferunt exorto flamma melle / dukatis cunctata vadic oleisque liquores / ipse per attonitas bacu pendente trapetas. / protulit undantem segetem sine semine campus et sine se natis invidit pampinus uvis / hibernae rubuere rosae spreti rigore. / lilia permixtis insultavere pruinis. As is clear, these verses are inspired by the miraculous infant of Virgil’s fourth Eclogue. The theme of ‘eternal spring’ described in Pan. Anth.133 ff. might probably be read in the same way: imperii ver illud erat; sub imagine frondis / dextra per aretem floreabant omina virgam. Generally speaking, the description of the flowers that spontaneously grow in spite of winter and snow is a current pattern in hagiography as well (see for example the dead body of Eulalia covered with flowers in the final lines of Prudentius’ Peristephanon 3).

52 Among these it is worth quoting lines 114 ff., with the reprise of Ascanius’ prodigy in Aeneid book 2, when a sudden flame cracked out on the infant’s head: as we discussed in Tommasi 2006 this omen can be traced back to a Indo-European pattern.

53 This impression is reinforced by the fact that some passages in this work are patently modelled on Silius’ description of Hannibal crossing the Alps, as Brolli 2003–2004 demonstrated. Curiously enough, the motif of the fourth Punic war was employed by Fascist propaganda when launching the African campaign in 1936.
'African' poem on Gildo’s war. This parallel covers the same role as the catalogue in the poem for Avitus did. In a similar way, Rome is described as redundantly accompanied by the provinces constituting her lavish cortège. Once again, the catalogue of tragic and threatening events (Porsenna, Brennus, Hannibal; the debauched emperors) in lines 67 ff. and 316 ff. functions as a way to stress the peaceful reign of Theodosius (ll. 109, 354).

Likewise, Dracontius cannot help avoiding reminiscences from classical history and authors. Even though his poetry does not contain any explicit hints at the eternity of the empire, it is possible to outline few allusions in his long poem In Praise of God as well in his minor works. As we discussed elsewhere, Dracontius wants to offer a broader and, so to speak, universalistic perspective to his audience by providing exemplary characters from Greek and Roman history. He chooses historical or mythical figures that were already praised in classical antiquity for their heroic virtue and strength or for their patriotism. These examples were, of course, part of a common body of learning, insofar as they were taught in school and were easily read in manuals or similar works like Valerius Maximus’ Dicta and Facta Memorabilia, but Dracontius often inserts them in the literary texture with a didactic purpose, usually counterbalancing them with the Biblical model. Following a traditional consuetude, examples are therefore used to back didactic concerns, even though no one can deny the rather simplistic moral lying behind them. It is worth noticing, however, that in some respects the poet shows a moral condemnation. In fact, he blames some of these characters for pursuing mundane glory only and therefore seeking in vain. At the same time, a dark and gloomy image seems to emerge here and there: an interesting hint is provided in book two, where Dracontius parallels the first Biblical homicide, that of Cain and Abel, and the primordial fratricide committed on the boundaries of the newly founded city of Rome. But in the same section, Rome is also evoked by the shadows of Caesar and Pompey and the civil war.55

His profane poems show a different treatment of the subject. Examples and loci communes from the Roman past are inserted in a poem structured as rhetorical controversy as well (n. 5), even though the general impression is that of a composition deeply influenced by the scholastic background underlying it. The catalogue of the tyrants or the reminiscences of archaic times has to be understood as a self-conscious rhetorical and erudite display.56 Conversely, in spite of a similar structure, the gallery of merciful sovereigns recorded in a long

54 Tommasi 2010b.
55 2,301–02, lines that are perhaps to be connected with Verg, Aen. 6.830–31 and Luc., 1.94.
56 A challenging reading of this passage is provided by Bureau 2006.
section of the *Satisfactio* (ll. 175 – 195) is meant to move the Vandal king so that he would release the poet from prison.

To sum up, in his Roman pride as an authoritative writer from the second most important city in the West, Dracontius cannot help avoiding reminiscences from classical history and authors. In doing so, however, Dracontius aims at promoting the everlasting values of *Romanitas* and civilization and attempts at integrating such culture into the new realm of the Vandal kingdom.\(^{57}\) Moreover, is worth stressing that in two prefaces (n. 1 and 3) the poet explicitly praises the ability of the Roman school and culture to attract also the newcomers: *qui fugatas Africanae reddis urbi litteras / barbaris qui Romulidas iungis auditorio* (1.15 ff., addressed to his friend the grammarian Felicianus); and *qua praeduce dictor / antistesque tuus, de vestro fonte, magister, / Romuleam laetus pro flumine linguam / et pallens reddo pro frugibus ipse poema, / Tu mihi numen eris, si carmina nostra levaris, / nam tua sint quaecumque loquor, quaecumque canemus* (3.17 ff., to the same Felicianus).\(^{58}\) What is more meaningful, I think, is that the eternity of Rome is praised in so unexpected a place as an epithalamium, where the motif of Mars raping Rhea Silvia ends with the bright image of the long lasting rule of the city and the deification of the Senate: *Vel quibus, ipse furor, Mars est accensus amore, / Vesticolae niveos peteret cum virginis artus / ut daret aeternum Romana in saecla Quirinum / et post fata deos faceret super astra senatus.*\(^{59}\)

Finally, the theme of the empire and the transformations it underwent is central in Corippus, who is unanimously considered one of the last Western authors. Often regarded until recent times as a minor author by scholars of Latin literature, Corippus is nonetheless used as a reliable source by historians, jurists, and art historians, because of the information he provides about courtly ceremonial.\(^{60}\) Furthermore, his personal vicissitude recalls, though on a minor scale, the translation of the empire – in fact he moved from Africa to Constantinople, where he became if not the official courtly poet, one of the cantors of Justinian’s successor (his case can be paralleled to that of Priscian of

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57 De Gaetano 2009 illustrates other cases that testify Dracontius’ reemployment of school examples and images from the Roman past – even though the idea that Roman education acted as a barrier to avert the Vandal menace seems not entirely convincing. In Tommasi 2009 the present writer discussed the parallel case of secular poetry in the *Latin Anthology* as a rhetorical device to celebrate the new Vandal sovereigns and to build a bridge between the two cultures.

58 See Bureau 2006 and Wolff 2009. I would like to note that the same image of the source and the river is employed also by Corippus in the panegyric to Anastasius (ll. 15 ff.), whereas the ‘divinization’ of the addressee goes back at least to Lucretius and his encomium of Epicurus.


60 For an up-to-dated bibliography on Corippus see Riedlberger 2010.
Caesarea, about fifty or sixty years before). If his Iohannis witnesses to the transformations provoked by the impact of Byzantine rule upon North Africa after the defeat of the Vandals in AD 533–34, his Panegyric sketches out some characterizing motifs of the Byzantine empire, foreshadowing in many respects Medieval ideas about sovereignty and the relationship between political power and religion. As a professional writer, his poems raise questions of patronage: Corippus cannot be treated as a simple armchair poet, but one must underline the real political nature or purpose in his work. The Iohannis constantly praises Justinian and the Byzantine as the direct heirs of the Roman Empire. It is particularly meaningful that Corippus calls them Romans, as Byzantium is the ‘nova Roma’ – this is current, however, in many Greek sources and will become a stereotype in Byzantine writers. Furthermore, there are some hints at exemplar figures of Roman history, which can be considered as a device to underline the strict symbolic relationship between the two partes imperii, even though by the time of Corippus their diversity had resulted in a gap almost impossible to bridge.

It is worth recalling here a remarkable passage in Sidonius, where Constantinople is likewise praised as the Eastern Rome: these verses come from the Panegyric of the newly designated emperor Anthemius and represent a patent celebration of his Byzantine lineage. In lines 30 ff. Byzantium is addressed in these words and is subsequently praised in precious style as a blending of Europe and Asia:

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salve sceptrorum columen regina Orientis / orbis Roma tui, rerum mihi principe misso / iam non Eoo solum veneranda Quiriti / imperii sedes, sed plus pretiosa quod extas / imperii genetrix.
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Coming back to Corippus, consideration of the Iohannis cannot be divorced from its historical background and in this sense the numerous panegyrical hints, which emerge here and there can be easily explained. The strong ideology that permeates the Iohannis and much more so the Panegyric, offers a confirmation of the ‘providential’ reading of the Byzantine empire: the two poems deal with questions such as imperial ideology and the role of the christianus princeps, which had already been the topic of some poems by Prudentius; they also

61 On verse panegyrics in Latin see now the detailed monograph by Schindler 2009.
62 Some of these aspects are outlined by the present writer in Tommasi 2002.
63 We are following here some seminal suggestions by Cameron 1982 and 1983.
64 For example in the Iohannis, when the tribunus refers Stutias’ last words before dying, a rhetorically shaped speech which appeals to the readers’ feelings in regretting his guilty disloyalty, he recalls Catiline’s fault (used as a negative example in African writers such as Tertullian and Augustine); also the famous example of the Decii, the three cognate heroes who committed an act of devotio and immolated themselves for the safety of Rome (Liv. 7.9 and 10.28 and Cic. Tusc. 3.37 and de Fin. 2.18) is mentioned in the poem and was probably suggested by the Virgilian Heldenschaup or by Claudian, who employs it four times.
outline the idea of a providential kingship in which the human sovereign is the vicar of God on earth (it is perhaps worth noting that the same concept is expressed in lines 109 ff. of Dracontius’ *Satisfactio*).

A central idea in Corippus’ poem is that Byzantine success was guaranteed by their righteousness and ratified by divine favour (see for example *Laus* 3.333: *Res Romana Dei est, terrenis non eget armis*). According to his predilection for repetition of key words and concepts, the poet displays basic tenets like victory, triumph and glory already in the proemial sections. A particularly meaningful example is provided by the description of Justinian at the very beginning of the *Iohannis*. The emperor is exampled on the Virgilian Jupiter, grave and solemn, concerned for the misfortunes of the empire, and of Africa in particular (1.48 ff. to be compared with *Aen.* 1.227). To understand Corippus’ idea of the empire, it is worth quoting a longer passage in the same book one. It deals with the motif of the golden age, for Peace and harmony now are allowed to rule all over the world, thanks to Justinian, who is assisted by Victory (1.10 ff.):

Reddita pax Libyae bellis cessantibus astat,
certior et geminis fulget Victoria pinnis.
Iam Pietas caelo terras prospexis ab alto.
Iustitia comitante simul Concordia mundum
laeta foveat reficit, geminis amplexa lacertos.
Has inter medius solio sublimis ab alto,
Iustiniane, tuis princeps assurge triumphis,
laetus et infractis victor da iura tyrannis:
inclita num cunctos calcant vestigia reges,
laetaque Romano servit iam purpura regno,
sub pedibusque tuis victus prosternitur hostis,
et gentes fera vincla ligant, nodoque tenaci
post tergum implicitas stringunt retinacula palmas.

The idea of the golden age is one of the links with the poetry of the Augustan age and therefore it possesses a precise ideological meaning. The imitation of Virgilian motifs is patent from the opening line of this passage, where the poet employs the precious adjective *Aeneadae*. But the link between the Eastern empire and that founded by the Trojan hero is explicitly put forward in a passage, which is, moreover, interesting for its metatextual references: 1.181 ff.:

65 Significantly enough, these verses (which are part of the emperor’s reply to the proud legacy of the Avars) are preceded by a variation on the well-known Virgilian motif: *Sanctum hoc imperium toto sic floruit orbe, / bella gerens pacemque tuens. Nos more parentum / pacem diligimus, numquam fera bella timemus. / Pax est subiectis, pereunt per bella superbi. / Parcimus innocuis, sunt non parcimus ulii.*

66 For a detailed commentary on this section see Vinchesi 1983. It is worth stressing here that the comparison between the poet and his hero is already underlined by Sidonius in the Preface to the Panegyric for Majorian.
Aeneas proavus, celsae quo moenia Romae / nomen et imperii praeclarum auctore refulget, / atque tenet latum dominantis foedere mundum.

A stock motif, that of the defeat of the barbarians, is also employed. This is one of the key concepts of the whole poem and can be compared to other contemporary documents, such as inscriptions or legal decrees. We can also refer to lines 284–5 in book three (the golden section of the book): gaudia post luctus terrae donastis amicae, / dum premitis gentes, totum dum vincitis orbem; and to lines 148 ff. in book one: Hic pietatis amor subiectis parcere nostrae est, / hic virtutis honos gentes domitare superbas. They clearly recall Virgil’s verses about the ruling of mankind, the disposition of peace and the taming of the proud.

Likewise, the account of John’s triumphal entry into Carthage of 546 (6.68–103) is a carefully composed passage which helps the articulation of the poem. The scene is at the same time vivid and impressive, solemn and artful, like the almost contemporary artistic production of diptychs or raised-reliefs. In any case, the Carthaginian entrée reinforces above all the desired impression of Byzantine success; and at the same time, it is intended to demonstrate that the splendour of Roman pageantry had returned to the province, with all its implications of imperial victory. This passage invites comparison not only with the near-contemporary descriptions of the entry of Theodoric into Rome in 500, or the return of Fulgentius and other Catholic exiles to Carthage in 523, but, most of all with the imposant Constantinopolitan triumph of Belisarius, which took place ten years before and which is briefly recalled at the beginning of book three. The culmination of the procession in a church is intended to underline the religious favour enjoyed by the Byzantines: the same device would be employed by Corippus in his second poem.

Indeed, it is nothing more than a mere surmise that the delivery of the Iohannis granted success and glory and that the general John, or someone else, recommended the poet to Justinian and introduced him at the imperial court. His technical proficiency, together with a powerful patron, enabled him to emerge as the poet of the new regime, when, two decades later, he wrote on behalf of the winning party in the struggle for power on the death of Justinian,

67 See for example Cod. Iust. 1.27 and Novell. 37 (535). A remarkable metrical epigraph dating to the second half of the sixth century is edited and discussed by Modéran 1996 (now in AE 1996, n. 1704). It seems worth quoting the text in its entirety, for many expressions come very close to Corippus’ style and ideas: Hoc opus imperium felix has praestitit ares / magnanimitique etiam Solomonis iussa dedere, / cui paruit Nonnus, qui condidit ista tribunus. / Vrbs domino laetare pio, iamque aspice quantis / Es subducta malis, quantoque or[n]ata decore, / Maurorum tandem recipis subducta timore / Censuram, statum, cives, ius, moenia, fastus; / Atque suum nomen posuit <t>ibi regia coniunx, / Iu<sp>tiniani manu Maurorum gente fugata, / omnia tempus [h]abent: flebant et <t>em [por]a gentes.

68 As stated by McCormick 1990.
developing the subject with all the confidence of an insider. Therefore, the history of Latin-speaking Africa concludes, as we said, with a migration to the East and the fate of Rome became the same as that of Byzantium, the ‘new Rome’.

In his second poem, the accession of Justin II is celebrated with strongly laudatory terms, though Corippus offers an interesting and original treatment of some motifs. A brief hint at the city of Rome is set in the description of Justinian’s funeral robe, which the present writer examined elsewhere from an artistic point of view.69 The emperor himself is depicted in the act of the ‘calcatio’ over the barbarians, surrounded by the personifications of Africa and Rome. The resulting effect is a highly symbolic one, which recalls the same imagery that appears on the base of Arcadius’ column. Rome is here addressed as old (surely in opposition to the ‘new’ Rome, Constantinople) and designated as “ancient parent of empire and liberty”, perhaps with an echoing of Rutilius Namatianus ‘jeu de mots’, *altricemque suam fertilis orbis alat* (1.146).

Besides the many ideological motifs, often expressed by means of descriptions, such as that of the throne or that of the silver plates with the triumph over the Vandals (in book three), the poet endows some acts of the court ceremonial with strong symbolic significance. According to a predilection for Roman classical antiquity which is common to many writers of Justinian’s age, long since sketched out by scholars, Corippus employs images drawn from his models, though conferring them with a new nuance. These accounts are endowed with a strong symbolic interpretation. The first one is the ceremony known as ‘lever du roi’, which has its roots in ancient military customs. This passage is a clear example of the theme of cosmic kingship investigated at greater length by H.P. L’Orange:70 the emperor, raised on a shield, is compared with the sun, so that an explicit comparison with the light overwhelming darkness is to be established. The second one is an elaborate simile that concludes book one. It subsumes the old myth of the immortal phoenix and adapts it to the Christian emperor by means of the intricate image of the ‘holy iota’ (the initial letter of the name Justinus).71

*Ales ut exustos cum phoenix innovat artus*
*a busto rediviva suo, concentus in unum*
*stans avium spectat solem solisque volucrem,*
*dum veniat, regemque novum clamore salutant:*

69 See Tommasi 2010a, which I am summarizing above.
70 L’Orange 1953, who stresses that light symbolism assumes a deeper significance due to the strong insistence on light and solar themes to create a sort of imperial theology. On the so-called ‘lever du roi’ see the magisterial inquiry by Kantorowicz 1963.
71 As noted by Cameron 1976, 148 this letter alludes not only to the very name of the two emperors, but to the idea of righteousness too. Justin’s monogram on coins emphasized the letter I by representing it as longer than the others.
Once again, the image of brightness (expressed by the dawn illuminating the sacred rooms in the palace) is emphatically placed at the end of a carefully structured passage, where the court dignitaries are compared to the feasting birds surrounding their chief and the imperial succession from Justinian to his nephew is read as an ideal continuity by choosing the example of the mythical bird resurrecting from its ashes. It is possible to suggest that Corippus is inspired by Sidonius, but even more by Claudian, who employed the same idea of rejoicing birds to describe the jubilant crowd welcoming Stilicho.\textsuperscript{72} Corippus wants to instill in his audience the idea of harmony unanimously professed by all people\textsuperscript{73} towards the emperor, whose analogy with the sun is reinforced by the well-known notion that the phoenix is a solar symbol as well.

The same insistence on harmony recurs in a curious passage, which has no explicit relationship with the idea of Rome, but nevertheless is meant to stress the unity of the state and the citizens that allows the Roman state its power and might. It is worth a brief mention in the present paper because it seems one of the first (if not the earliest one) attestations of the poetical treatment of the ‘organic analogy’ or ‘body-state’ metaphor, that in Latin had found a sort of consecration in Menenius Agrippa’s famous apologue. Attested as early as Aesop, the story recalling how the various limbs quarreled for supremacy was employed in rhetorical or philosophical sources, such as Plato, to equate the state with the body. The “biological truth that an organism can be healthy only when all its organs are acting in unison and none takes precedence”, leads to the consequence that “as in the human body health is present only when all organs are working well together, so in the body political or ecclesiastical ill health

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. \textit{De cons. Stil.} 2.414 ff.: \textit{sic ubi fecunda reparavit morte iuventam / et patrios idem cineres collectaque portat / unguibus osa piis Nilique ad litora tendens / unicus extremo Phoenix procedit ab Euro, / conveniunt aquilae cunctaeque ex orbe volucres, / ut Solis mirentur avem; procul ignea lucet / ales, odorati redolent cui cinnama busti.}

\textsuperscript{73} In the cry “might you win” it is possible to see the attestation of an actual custom recorded also in later sources such as the \textit{De caerimoniis}. 
(disease = dissension) results from disharmony among its diverse elements”.74 The insertion of such exemplum should not be considered a mere diversion75, but recovers a deeper significance, insofar as it is applied to the ordered ruling of the world and to the political hierarchy (2.185 ff.).76

Pluribus ex membris animal conponitur unum, sed caput est, quod membra regit. Deus ergo creator componens hominem† natus† <…> omnibus ut membris caput imperet. Utque regantur, coniuncta est capiti sapientia, corporis arcem quae retinens oculus speculetur membra serenis, et quoscumque videt vigilanti lumine sollers peste laborantes subiecti corporis artus sanet, et infestos pellat medicamine morbas.

Romanum imperium corpus bene ponitur unum compositum multis, quod fas est dicere, membris. Nos sumus ergo caput solidati corporis huius. Huius sacro capiti facta est Sapientia consors, quae mihi commissum pariter regat inclita mundum sedens una. Vos <o> mihi proxima membra, conscripti patres, nostri spes maxima regni, vos estis pectus, vos brachia verticis huius, quorum consilii quorumque laboribus usa publica res domuit gentes et regna subegit. Summa regendarum cura est mihi credita rerum. At quia subiectum nostrum est disponere mundum, nos etiam vobis curas committimus orbis.

Corippus surely bears in mind not only Menenius Agrippa’s story, which had been used as exemplum by many subsequent writers, but is also inspired by the numerous hints at this biological metaphor in Pauline epistles.77 The resulting idea is that the empire is a whole body and that it draws its force from that very unity and unanimity.

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74 The story is recorded in Livy, 2.32 and Dion. Hal., 6.86.1–3: among modern authors, after Nestle 1926, see Hicks 1963 (from whose papers the citations are derived) and Hoefmans 1992 (who does not mention Corippus when dealing with the fortune of this story). Moorwood 1998 deals with a similar passage in Virgil, but notes that there the mention of Menenius Agrippa and the apologue is omitted because it seemed unfitting for an epic poem.

75 A similar case in a writer contemporary to Corippus (though a historian, not a poet), namely Procopius of Caesarea, is discussed by van Dijk 1994: the paper investigates how the insertion of apologues or fables in Procopius’ narrative endows moral concerns.

76 Kantorowicz 1955, 80 ff. outlines other references in later texts, mainly juridical literature. Particularly meaningful is the equation fiscus (treasury) – stomach, which becomes a constant pattern also in subsequent sources.

77 1 Cor. 12:14 and 25–27; Rom. 12:14–15; Col. 1:18 and 2:19.
The notion of the steady durability of Rome seems, therefore, a standard one, at least in poetical sources, which deal with it by varying on stock themes. One can incidentally observe that all these authors seem to reflect also a ‘provincial’ perspective – namely they wrote from peripheral regions. This might perhaps explain some features recurring in that kind of poetry, which seems strongly conservative and pervaded by nostalgic feelings. The imperial idea and its everlasting character function as both a wish and an expectation. At the same time it endows encomiastic patterns, which result in the celebration of the new emperor or sovereign. Rulers may change, but the state is destined to last eternally, whether in the actual Rome or in the ‘translated’ one.\footnote{78}

Indeed, this is the same feeling already prefigured in two passages of Tacitus – an author whose genius foreshadowed the perils and the crisis the empire would to suffer during its ‘obscure ages’, which lead Rome to undergo a progressive and irreversible transformation\footnote{79}. The pensive emperor Tiberius, while considering the vicissitudes of his family, could state that “There was no need of examples from the past, showing how often the Roman people had patiently endured the defeats of armies, the destruction of generals, the total extinction of noble families. Princes were mortal; the State was everlasting” (\textit{Ann.} 3.6: \textit{nil opus vetustioribus exemplis, quotiens populus Romanus cladis exercitu um, interitum ducum, funditus amissas nobilis familias constanter tulerit. principes mortalis, rem publicam aeternam esse}). And, in a lesser known passage, the debauched Otho spurs his guest by exclaiming:

What! Do you imagine that this fairest of cities is made up of dwellings and edifices and piles of stones? These dumb and inanimate things may be indifferently destroyed and rebuilt. The eternal duration of empire, the peace of nations, my safety and yours, rest on the security of the Senate. This order which was instituted under due auspices by the Father and Founder of the city, and which has lasted without interruption and without decay from the Kings down to the Emperors, we will bequeath to our descendants, as we have inherited it from our ancestors. For you give the state its Senators, and the Senate gives it its Princes.\[.\]

\textit{(Hist.} 1.84: \textit{quid? vos pulcherrimam hanc urbem domibus et tectis et congestu lapidum stare creditis? muta ista et inanima intercidere ac reparari promissa sunt: aeternitas rerum et pax gentium et mea cum vestra salus incolumitate senatus)}

\footnote{78} It is worth recalling also the words of a modern scholar: “The theme of Rome spoken of as eternal is a study of the irrational”, wrote K.J. Pratt (1971, 44), “the unreasonable sometimes rationalized, never convincing upon analysis. But the longevity of this specific conceptualization, its long drift through the centuries, demonstrates if not its logic, at least its utility in the historical area of the human emotions”.

\footnote{79} Along the same lines, it is tempting to employ the famous expression \textit{annum reipublicae prope supremum} to the crucial year 455, likewise characterized by an abrupt succession of three emperors contending for the throne and by an attack to the heart of the \textit{Vrbs aeterna}. 

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firmatur. hunc auspiciato a parente et conditore urbis nostrae institutum et a regibus usque ad principes continuum et immortalem, sicut a maioribus accepimus, sic posteris tradamus; nam ut ex vobis senatores, ita ex senatoribus principes nascuntur).

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