Thomas Granier

**Rome and Romanness in Latin southern Italian sources, 8th–10th centuries**

In the early Middle Ages, Latin southern Italy was completely permeated with Romanness, not only because of its close proximity to the city itself: language, names, roads, cities, buildings and monuments were everywhere, and many still are today. The southern Italian cities which, though suffering from the Gothic War, escaped the Lombard conquest are arguably the only places in the West where Romanness and Latinity – namely, Latin language and Roman law and traditions – evolved nearly undisturbed since Late Antiquity. This region was directly submitted to the Roman Church: the sees south of Rome were a single ecclesiastical province, the head of which was the holder of the Roman see, the pope himself, and this until the second half of the tenth century. This region was also subject to influences, varying in types and degrees, from the new Rome, including, in some times and places, actual military control and imperial government. Finally, its political organization was extremely fragmented: Lombard principalities, former ‘Byzantine’ Tyrrhenian duchies and areas governed by the Eastern Empire neighboured each other; from 800, then 962, the western empires, Carolingian, then Ottonian, also had ambitions and actual influence in the south. This was the very time and place when and where the two Romes, the old and the new, were in close contact. In such a context, Rome and Romanness cannot but have original and complex meanings.

This issue is mainly addressed in narrative sources – historiography and hagiography –, those in which the themes of identity, history, power and ideology are the most fully dealt with, their writers reflecting the ideas and conceptions of rulers and the élites, both lay and clerical, to which they belonged. To begin with, understanding these writers’ idea of Rome demands that what they really knew about it, its history and legacy be precisely established. Next, the study focuses on how writers and sources dealt with Rome itself, the city and the people; what, to their minds, was Rome, who was Roman and who were the Romans? It then moves from the city to the two institutions associated with it: the Roman Church and the empire, then the two empires; addressing the issue of Romanness thus demands to investigate that of imperium, and to try to weigh whether, how and how much ‘Roman’ each empire might be in these people’s minds. Finally, a close look is taken at a few special contexts and sources, which grant access to specific views of Rome, revealing the full complexity of what Romanness can mean and imply there and then.¹

¹ For the general context, see Wickham 1981, 146–167, Galasso/Romeo 1994 and La Rocca 2002a; for a detailed analysis of Carolingian politics in the South, see West 1999; for a general overview of ideas about Rome in the early Middle Ages, see Roma fra Oriente e Occidente 2002.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110598384-015
Southern Italy was subjected to Roman conquest from its very first beginnings and was included in the Roman heartland very early; as a consequence, people living here shared their mother tongue and most of their cultural background with the Romans. The two language areas, Latin and Greek, bordered each other here. All Latin authors have a clear conscience of the language difference: for instance, they single out people able to speak both languages, or the liturgical use of Greek in Latin areas. Texts are also passed from one language sphere to the other through numerous translations or rewritings, with hagiographical examples having been particularly studied. The prologues to these works often address the issues of language and method: the authors were precisely aware of the specificities of each language, which made direct transfer impossible, so that the translation method *ad sensum* was almost always preferred. As far as language is concerned, Greek is thus almost always differentiated from *latinum* or *latina lingua*, only exceptionally from *romana lingua*. Roman, therefore, is almost never equated to Latin in these sources: to these authors and the people they wrote about and for, sharing the language of Rome did not make one Roman.² Southern writers also had a clear conscience of the status of Rome in history: this was the main region where Roman history was written and copied in the early Middle Ages, with two reworkings of Eutropius’ *Breviary*, by Paul the Deacon in the 770s for duke Arechis of Benevento’s wife Adelperga, and by Landolfus Sagax in the late tenth century, for an unidentified southern ruler – most probably a duke of Naples or a prince of Capua-Benevento (Vatican City, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Pal. lat. 909).³ So, there was a real interest in Roman history here, including and, mostly, because of its continuation in Constantinople. Other sources use Roman history as a frame and background: the *Gesta episcoporum* of Naples, written in three stages between the 840s and the mid-tenth century, fit local and regional institutions and events in the general history, ecclesiastical and imperial. In their reworkings of the *Passions* of third- and fourth-century martyrs, ninth- and tenth-century Neapolitan hagiographers detailed, sometimes with astonishing precision, the historical context, in order to insert persecution, martyrdom and sainthood in a general history of the Christianization of the Roman Empire and of salvation, the main source and ideological model of which was Jerome’s *Chronicle*.⁴ Finally, Rome’s political heritage was especially alive here, imperial sovereignty being the main model for rulers, as it was for all rulers in the early medieval West. The Neapolitan dukes are a special case, their authority being, as a matter of fact, an offshoot of Constantinopolitan power. The Lombard rulers imitated Roman imperial sovereignty,

---

⁴ Peter the Subdeacon, *Passio Sanctorum Abbacyri et Iohannis* (*BHL* 2078) 2, 1–6; *Passio sanctae Iuliani* (*BHL* 4526) 2, 1–3, and *Passio sanctorum Restitutae* (*BHL* 7190) 1–4, ed. D’Angelo, 21–22, 100 and 186, and ‘Introduction’, ibid., cl-cli, on the use of Jerome’s *Chronicle*; Bonitus of Naples, *Passio Theodori ducis* 2, AA SS Februarii II, 31 A-C.
making use of its ideology and ways of displaying political language: in Benevento, the triumphal arch of Trajan (dated 114–117) was a tangible testimony of Roman heritage; Arechis had his Saint Sophia church built not far from it, a direct imitation of Justinian’s Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. In Salerno, Arechis’ palace, chapel and especially inscriptions are also a clear imitation of imperial Roman display of the language of power.⁵ The princes’ interest in manuscripts of Roman historiography clearly proves they modelled their own rule on that of the Roman and Byzantine emperors. So, Romanness as a political concept had an actual presence and relevance in the early medieval South, being both accounted for, imitated and continued; writers, commissioners and audiences thus enjoyed an actual familiarity with Rome and Romanness, cultural and political, both current and historical.

The word ‘Rome’ first and most regularly qualified the city itself, and its territory. Erchempert of Montecassino, writing his Ystoriola of the Beneventan Lombards c. 891–895, listed the main cities of central-southern Italy: Tunc Salernum, Neapolim, Gaietam et Amalfim pacem habentes cum Saracenis, navalibus Romam graviter angustiabant depopulatio;⁶ Rome lies next to the other cities, equal to them. It is sometimes qualified as urbs, the word also at times being applied to small cities, such as Nocera in this account.⁷ In Erchempert’s Ystoriola and in the Chronicon Salernitanum, written by an abbot of Salerno c. 974–978, however, Urbs alone, without a name, usually means only Rome (papa Stephanus Urbem deserit).⁸ Like the other cities, Rome is head of a territory. The anonymous first part of the Gesta episcoporum of Naples, written in the 840s, mentions a series of strongholds around Rome, describing this territory according to its military organization.⁹ Another passage shows the Romani suffering under stress of imminent military action from the Lombards upon the Romania.¹⁰ The same view of this Roman territory is found in the surviving fragment of Peter the Subdeacon’s third part of the text, written in the first half of the tenth century: he wrote about the Romana provincia suffering from Saracen raids.¹¹ Similarly, Erchempert mentions the Romana tellus, and in the Salerno Chronicon, its author related that King Aistulf took relics ex Romanis finibus.¹² Concerning the areas raided by the Saracens, Erchempert also stated that omnem terram Beneventanam si-

---

5 Granier 2006, 63–72; Peduto/Fiorillo/Corolla 2013.
7 Erchempert, Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum 5, ed. Waitz, 236.
8 Erchempert, Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum 47, ed. Waitz, 254; Chronicon Salernitanum 3, ed. Westerbergh, 5; the quotes from Erchempert in the Chronicon, all indicated by Ulla Westerbergh, are not always detailed here.
9 Gesta episcoporum Neapolitannorum 27, ed. Waitz, 415.
mulque Romanam necnon et partem Spoletii dirruentes. Here, Rome is head not of a mere territory, but of a polity, such as the former principality of Benevento (divided into Benevento and Salerno since 849) and the duchy of Spoleto. Erchempert’s perception of space was thus politically based, a geography of polities.

The name or adjective *Romanus* was mostly used to name the inhabitants of Rome itself and its territory. In the Salerno *Chronicle*, Pope John XII (955–964) welcomed Prince Gisulf I of Salerno (946–977) to Rome, surrounded by *Romani*. In another passage, the phrase *plures Romanorum vel ceterarum civitatum populi*, quoted from the *Liber Pontificalis*, clearly shows the writer distinguished a *populus Romanus* from people from other cities. Lines 47–48 of the epitaph of Prince Grimoald of Benevento (d. 806), quoted in the *Chronicon*, state:

> Itala, Romana, Illirica, Hebrea, Afra, Pellasga
> Morte tua princeps <gens> sine fine dolet.

There was thus a *Romana gens*, distinguished from the *Itala* (the inhabitants of the kingdom) and also from the Lombards, the *Bardorum gens*. *Romanus* can also qualify men holding government offices in the city: in the first part of the *Gesta episcoporum* of Naples, passages excerpted from the *Liber Pontificalis* mention a *Romanus patricius* and a *Romanus exercitus*, imperial officers and troops in Rome. In a very few cases, the word *Romanus* can have another meaning. In the first part of the Neapolitan *Gesta*, in an account of the Gothic War, *Romani* means the Latin inhabitants of Italy, as opposed to both *Gothi* and *Greci*. This account, however, was taken word for word from chapter 2, 5 of Paul the Deacon’s *Historia Langobardorum*. This special meaning of *Romani* must thus first be ascribed to Paul, even if the Neapolitan writer made it his own.

All in all, the bulk of the sources equate *Romanus* with ‘inhabitant of Rome’. Southern Italian writers, whether they were Lombards or not, did not consider themselves as Romans, in so far as they did not live in Rome or come from Rome.

Their view of Rome was also shaped by the fact that the city remained the seat of a major institution, the Roman Church, and was the place where the crown of the Western Empire was bestowed upon its bearer. The bishop of Rome is a major political and ecclesiastical actor in the South at the time; the sources thus often account for his actions, and closely link pope and city. Phrases like *episcopus Romanus*, pon-

---


14 *Chronicon Salernitanum* 167, ed. Westerbergh, 171.

15 *Chronicon Salernitanum* 3, ed. Westerbergh, 5.

16 *Chronicon Salernitanum* 29, ed. Westerbergh, 33.

17 *Chronicon Salernitanum* 29, ed. Westerbergh, 32.


19 *Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum* 20, ed. Waitz, 412.

20 See the contribution of Paolo Delogu in this volume.
tifex Romanus, sedes Romana or sedes apostolica are commonplace everywhere; the Neapolitan Gesta episcoporum use the phrase sancta Romana ecclesia twice. The very close link between Rome and St Peter is vividly stressed in John the Deacon of Naples’ translatio of Severinus, written in 902–903 in response to very recent events: the sea expedition of Emir Ibrahim ibn Ahmad from Kairouan to Sicily and the completion of the Arab conquest of the island. John described the emir’s hatred towards Rome and St Peter: in the words he ascribed to him, Ibrahim would attack and destroy the civitas Petrali, and, a little later, John used the phrase Petrus Romanus. Finally Ibrahim was miraculously killed by an apparition of St Peter. In this very detailed narrative, John singled out the two main cities of the Christian world, Rome and Constantinople; he interprets recent events as being driven by Ibrahim’s hatred towards Christianity. His miraculous punishment which eventually put a halt to the Arab conquest is logical. St Peter’s heritage in Rome gave the city’s bishop real institutional authority, clearly acknowledged in the suburbicarius dioecesis, which lay to the south of the city. This authority is one of the main themes of the first part of the Neapolitan Gesta, because, in order to fit the Neapolitan church in the general history of Christianity, large parts of the text are devoted to the history of the church between the fourth and eighth centuries, especially the dogmatic arguments and conflicts between East and West. One passage recounts the tentative promotion of the Neapolitan see to archbishopric by the patriarch of Constantinople, and the swift reaction of the Roman see (around 717). In this instance, the author clearly separated the Greek and Roman churches: hic dum a Grecorum pontifice archiepiscopatum nancisceretur, ab antistite Romano correptus, veniam impetravit. Part two of the Gesta, written by John the Deacon around 900, regularly attests that the Neapolitan bishops were ordained in Rome; in part three, Athanasius II (876–898) is ordained in Capua by John VIII (872–882). The Roman liturgy works as rule and model, and the Neapolitan rite is reformed according to this sacer Romanorum ordo by Bishop Stephen II (766–794). The pope has actual disciplinary authority: he sends legates to investigate accusations of slander against Bishop Tiberius (819–839). Likewise in the Vita of Bishop Athanasius (849–872), written shortly after his death, Pope John VIII and Emperor Louis II (855–875) send their missi to investigate the circumstances behind the bishop’s exile from his see. This aspect of Roman authority can also be seen in Erchempert: John VIII anathematizes

21 Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum 15, 29, ed. Waitz, 410, 417; the second instance is a quote from the Liber Pontificalis, but the first one is original.
23 Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum 36, ed. Waitz, 422.
26 Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum 52, ed. Waitz, 428.
the Christian polities allied to the Arabs (877) and receives Landonolf in Rome in order to ordain him as bishop of Capua (879).²⁸

Tightly connected to the idea of Rome is of course the idea of empire. From Charlemagne’s campaign in the South in 787 to that of Henry II in 1022, southern Italy was, albeit irregularly, the very region where the two empires came face to face, with a peak in the second half of the tenth century: the time of the Ottonian emperors was also that when the Eastern Empire firmly renewed its hold on the most southern parts of the peninsula. In most instances, the two empires were qualified without distinction or precision. The most commonly used words are *augustus, augusta, caesar, imperator, imperium*, alone, without any geographical or linguistic precision. Part One of the Neapolitan *Gesta* deals with a time in which there was no Frankish Empire, and thus reflects the perfect continuity of the one Empire, from Rome to Constantinople. Once, its authority is qualified as *res publica*, for the time of Justinian. Part Two of the *Gesta* deals with a time when there were two empires, yet the same undifferentiated vocabulary is used for both; for instance, the same words *augustalis diadema* are used in accounts of Charlemagne’s and Michael II’s (820) coronations.²⁹ Erchempert’s narrative deals with a period when a significant change took place: the renewal of eastern initiative in the South in the last decades of the ninth century. In the first half of his narrative (until Chapter 38 out of eighty-two), he used the standard vocabulary to deal with the Carolingian emperors, and from there on, the same words are, in turn, mostly used about the eastern ones. Any geographical precision about empire is exceptional, mostly when it was absolutely necessary to avoid confusion, for example in the Neapolitan *Gesta* (*Leo Constantinopolitanus imperator*), concerning events of the 820s when Frankish authority was much more effective.³⁰ Erchempert wrote about the *augustus Achivorum* in the early part of his narrative, because Charlemagne was the *augustus* most frequently referred to here;³¹ in Chapter 38, he wrote about *Gregorium Baiulium Imperiale Grecorum*, precisely because this is the turning point in the narrative, when the Eastern Empire takes initiative again.³² So, in the later part of the work, it was necessary to be specific about the *augusti Gallici* because the narrative context is fully reversed compared to that of the beginning, with major initiative and authority from Constantinople.³³

We can draw a perfectly matching picture from the charters: Benevento and Salerno charters from November 867 to July 871, and from December 873 to August 874 are dated according to the years of Louis II, always qualified as *domnus Ludovicus imperator augustus*. One, from the brief period of Byzantine control of Benevento (March, 892), is dated *sexta anno imperii domni Leoni et Alexandri magni imperatores*. The

---

³⁰ *Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum* 54, ed. Waitz, 429.
hundreds of known Neapolitan private charters from the early tenth century onwards are invariably dated according to the years of a *magnus imperator*, as are the dukes’ charters. And, in his own charters, Louis II is always and exclusively qualified as *imperator augustus*.³⁴

Both empires, therefore, were simply empires, and none of them was qualified as the ‘Roman’ Empire. They were qualified as Frankish or Greek only in the very few instances when it was absolutely necessary for clarity’s sake.³⁵ Yet the two empires were by no means identical, almost all authors sharing a common idea of Roman imperial history: direct continuity was from Rome to Constantinople, never from Rome to the Franks. The 774 conquest made Frankish then Saxon rulers the successors of the Lombard kings in Italy, while the only true successors of the Roman emperors were the eastern rulers, as Roman historiography clearly proves: Paul carried on Eutropius’ narrative until the time of Justinian, and Landolfus in turn further on, until Leo V’s coronation in 813.

Things are much more complex in the Salerno historian’s narrative. Like the ninth-century authors, he frequently used *augustus, imperator or imperium* in an unspecific way for both rulers. He did not restrict the verb *imperare* to the emperors, using it for instance in regard to Prince Radelchis of Benevento (881–884).³⁶ As the list of Italian rulers at the beginning of the *Chronicon* proves, he shared the common idea of Lombard-Frankish-Ottonian continuity as far as the northern kingdom was concerned.³⁷ But his narrative has four specific features. First, he clearly disconnected the Eastern Empire from the *res publica*: at the beginning of his narrative, he lifted a phrase from the *Liber Pontificalis* when describing Pippin III’s campaigns against King Aistulf *(ut per pacis federam beati Petri et rei puplese Romanorum disponent et propria sancte Dei ecclesie rei puplese Romanorum reddidisset)*; equating the *res publica* and the city and Church of Rome, he made one of the main ideological stances of the papacy his own.³⁸ This can be connected to the account of

---


³⁵ It is the same in John the Deacon of Venice’s early eleventh-century *Istoria Veneticorum*: Berto 2001, 66–69.


³⁷ *Chronicon Salernitanum* 1, ed. Westerbergh, 1–2.

Alexander III’s (886–913) death: falling into excessive pride, he wants to renew the reverence towards the seventy antique statues of the subdued peoples – now brought from the Capitol to Constantinople – which used to make noise when one of the gentes rebelled against the empire. He embellishes them with precious fabrics, but Peter appears to him the following night and declares ‘Ego sum, inquid, Romanorum princeps Petrus!’, and Alexander dies the following day. This narrative aims at disconnecting the eastern emperors from their Roman roots and tradition, and at stressing the new Christian nature and identity of Rome: Rome was no longer the city of the emperors, but that of St Peter only. Second, the Salerno historian is very detailed about the accessions of western emperors, always stressing that their dignity stemmed precisely from the crowning and anointing by the pope in Rome. Third, he is the writer most frequently dealing with so-called ‘Greeks’. In his mind, like in the other sources, Greek was primarily a language, and Greeks were first distinguished on a language basis: he often gave Greek etymologies of words, or explained the meaning of Greek words. He also frequently differentiated Greek writers from Latin ones. In one instance, Grecia is a clearly defined place, set apart from Tracia and Frigia: this is the narrative of the origins of the Amalfitans, said to have travelled from Italy to the East and back again, and this detail aims at building an accurate account of the journey of the founders. In all other instances, ‘Greek’ has a political meaning: the people in and from the areas under eastern imperial authority, be they from the Near East, Greece itself, Sicily or southern Italy. Greci ruled over Sicily before the Arab conquest, Greci referred to inhabitants of Bari or Matera (current Basilicata), and of Puglia as a whole, and distinguished them from Lombards, Neapolitans and Arabs. Albeit these Italian areas under imperial rule were also inhabited by people speaking Latin and/or living under Lombard law (especially in Puglia), yet to this writer’s mind, all were Greci nonetheless. And fourth and last, but by no means least, this historian paid great attention to the rulers’ titles. To him, like to other contemporary writers, a ‘Roman Empire’ was firstly a thing of the past, for instance in the narrative of the origins of the Amalfitans, said to be the descendants of Romani who had left for Byzantium along with Constantine, tempore quo Costantinus imperator Romanorum regni moderabat habenas. But he also set

---

39 Chronicon Salernitanum 131, ed. Westerbergh, 143.
40 Chronicon Salernitanum 103 (Louis II), 121 (Charles the Bald, quote from Erchempert) and 169 (Otto I), ed. Westerbergh, 104, 134 and 172.
41 Chronicon Salernitanum 80a, 99, ed. Westerbergh, 78–79, 100; these etymologies are lifted from Isidore and Bede.
42 Chronicon Salernitanum 107, ed. Westerbergh, 109 and 111.
43 Chronicon Salernitanum 89, ed. Westerbergh, 90.
44 Chronicon Salernitanum 60, ed. Westerbergh, 59.
45 Chronicon Salernitanum 129, ed. Westerbergh, 142.
47 Chronicon Salernitanum 120, ed. Westerbergh, 134.
up a very meaningful fictitious exchange of letters between a Frankish ruler and the Constantinople court: the emperor writes to the Frankish leader (indeed a confused mix of Carloman and Charlemagne, and of the crownings in 774 as king of Italy and in 800 as emperor): *imperator augustus patricio Karolo salutes*. In his answer, Charles ignores this title of *patricius*, acknowledges the eastern dignity (*augusto imperatori Karolus*), but clearly states that he is the one responsible for the existence of a Roman Empire: *capud mundi Roma est, quam teneo and scio Romanorum regnum esse sicuti fuit, meis vero temporibus volo, si placet Deo, ut existat.*⁴⁹

All in all, the Salerno historian had a special idea of ‘empire’ and the ‘Roman Empire’ – of the Romanness of empire – compared to the other southern Italian writers: there used to be a Roman Empire, in the time of Constantine for instance. It had now moved to the East and ceased to be properly Roman; it was now inhabited by Greeks, even in its Italian parts. It had alienated itself from Romanness – the city, its Church and St Peter. A genuine Roman Empire could have only one capital city, Rome itself; its possible existence in the present rested on the ruler in Rome – the western sovereign. The main reason behind this special stance was the fact that the historian wrote in a very different context than the Neapolitan hagiographers or Erchempert. As a Lombard from the west coast, living under the prince of Salerno’s rule, he differentiated himself and those he called ‘Lombards’ from the people of the Southeast, living under imperial rule. Above all, he wrote when the Ottonian emperors had efficiently revived the idea of a Roman Empire: they ruled over two kingdoms, they were present and effective in Rome and in the South, where their power was met with support (however limited). Otto II married Theophano in 972 and ran campaigns in the South in 981–982. With the eastern emperors having also vividly renewed their authority in Italy at the time, both empires were active in the region, both connected to and rivalling one another. Their ultimate ideological model was the same, yet they dramatically differed as far as the lands they ruled and the language they spoke were concerned. As a consequence, the Salerno historian has a sharp, clear-cut view of two different empires: the western one was not really the ‘Roman’ one – yet it could have been; the eastern one was clearly Roman no more.

A few special cases deserve being pointed out and discussed, because they show that the idea of Romanness could, in some specific contexts, give rise to original, detailed and complex views and writings. Southern Italian cities had ancient pre-Roman and Roman roots, and antique traditions remained mostly undisturbed by the Lombard conquest. And some of them were capitals of independent, sovereign princes; these two features combine to encourage civic pride, and the writings extolling it. The late ninth-century Montecassino *Cronicae* refer to the great fire that destroyed the city of Capua, and its refoundation, on a nearby site, by the four sons

---

of gastald Landolf in 856. The Cassinese historian wrote that the four founders called their new city a ‘second Rome’ and transcribed a dedicatory verse inscription, of which two lines also draw a parallel with Rome: they recall the Roman, senatorial dignity of the old Capua, and its complete and legitimate transfer to the new one. As a monk, he read these events as evidence of foolish pride: Capua burned because of its inhabitants’ sins, and its leaders, instead of amending, remained blinded by pride. But these references nonetheless stemmed from genuine antique traditions: Cicero’s *De lege agraria* mentions that Capua was called *altera Roma*, and the great amphitheatre of what is today Santa Maria Capua Vetere offered tangible evidence of this glorious past, as well as it was a military stronghold at the time.\(^5\) The prologue to the *Life* of Bishop Athanasius extolls Naples’ rich, pre-Roman antiquity, stating that it was so ancient that naming it *Neapolis* was nonsense and that its power and glory made it second only to Rome.\(^51\) Another piece of evidence concerning local pride and Roman emulation is the flourishing of apostolic narratives of origins about southern Italian and Sicilian churches, written mainly between the eighth and tenth centuries, that is in the period when, between the Lombard conquest of Ravenna and the end of an actual Byzantine political and military authority in most of the peninsula (750) and the new hierarchy among southern churches with the creation of the archbishoprics (late tenth century), Rome exerted real direct authority over these sees: Roman authority was acknowledged, yet created dynamics and tensions and, moreover, prompted the conception and writing of narratives that clearly emulated it.\(^52\)

Another spectacular testimony of what Rome and Romanness could mean is the very long letter sent in the name of Louis II to Basil I (867–886), most probably between the conquest of Bari (February 871) and Louis’ custody in Benevento (August-September 871), apparently conceived and written by Anastasius Bibliothecarius and passed down to us through the *Salerno Chronicon*.\(^53\) It apparently answers a letter (unknown to us) from the *basileus* rebuking Louis for being called *imperator augustus* – which he was indeed, as his charters prove. This exchange of letters proves that the eastern emperor and his counsellors had to deal with a new, unusual situation: there was another, a western empire and, in the time of Louis II, Carolingian rule was actually present and successful in the South and challenged Byzantine authority; never before had the Eastern Empire needed to justify its legitimacy and uniqueness.

---


51 *Vita Athanasii* 1, 6–40, ed. Vuolo, 115–119.

52 Granier 2012, 176 – 182.

Louis’ and Anastasius’ answer is in two parts: a lengthy discussion of the imperial title, and an account of recent events in southern Italy. The idea of Rome permeates this letter, and it is the only reflection about what ‘empire’ and ‘Roman Empire’ meant that originated from a southern Italian context – and an extraordinarily detailed one at that. Its arguments are as follows: there is only one empire, the one of Christ, reflected in the Church; both emperors rule it inasmuch as they are in spiritual communion. The Western Empire is not a novelty, but dates back to Louis’ great-grandfather Charlemagne; even the Roman Empire was once a novelty; the Empire is an effect of divine will, and, as such, has been designed forever, before time began. The Franks are not Romans, but are nevertheless able to rule the Empire: history proves that there have been Spanish, Isaurian or Khazar emperors; anyway, God can appoint to Empire any man fearing him. The Carolingians are not called Frankish emperors, because they rule Rome and are anointed and crowned in Rome. They are Christians, and thus of the true blood of Abraham; just as the Jews refused to acknowledge Christ, the Greeks have ceased to be Romans when they left the City, abandoned its language, and steered away from orthodoxy. As a matter of fact, almost everything is already summed up in the very address:

*Lodoguicus divina ordinante providencia imperator augustus Romanorum dilectissimo spirituali-que fratri nostro Basilio gloriosissimo et piissimo eque imperatori nove Rome.*

Thus there were two Romes: Basil ruled the new one and Louis the old. Yet only Louis was truly *imperator Romanorum*, and Basil was his equal, not the reverse.

Louis’ empire was thus truly Roman because he ruled Rome, was in communion with the pope, had been anointed by him and acclaimed by the people of Rome. But this is almost the only instance in which Louis, or a Carolingian for that matter, stressed, explained and justified the ‘Roman’ nature of his rule – the pseudo-corre-

---

54 *Preterea mirari se dilecta fraternitas tua significat, quod non Francorum sed Romanorum imperatores appellemur, sed scire te conventit, quia nisi Romanorum imperatores essemus, utique nec Franco- rum. A Romanis enim hoc nomen et dignitatem assumpsimus, apud quos profecto primum tante culmen sublimitatis et appellacionis effulsit, quorumque gentem et urbem divinitus gubernandum et matrem omnium ecclesiariam Dei defendendam atque sublimandam supsceptimus, a qua et regnandi prius et postmodum imperandi autoritatem prosapie nostre seminarium sumpsit. Nam Francorum principes primo reges, deinde vero imperatores dicti sunt, hii dumtaxat qui a Romano pontifice ad hoc oleo sancto perfusi sunt;* *Chronicon Salernitanum* 107, ed. Westerbergh, 112.

55 *Sicut si Christi sumus, secundum apostolum Abrahe semen existimus, ita si sumus Christi, omnia possimus per gratiam ipsius, que possunt illi qui videntur existere Christi; et sicut nos per fidem Christi Habrahe semen existimus, ludeique propter perfidiam Abrahe filii esse desierunt, ita quoque nobis propter bonam opinionem, orthodosiam, regimen imperii Romani supsceptum, Greci propter kacodo-siam, id est malam opinionem, Romanorum imperatores existere cessaverunt, deserentes videlicet non solum urbem et sedes imperii, set et gentem Romanam et ipsam quoque linguam penitus amic- tentes, atque ad aliam urbem sedem gentem et linguam per omnia transmigrantes;* *Chronicon Salerni-tanum* 107, ed. Westerbergh, 114.

56 *Chronicon Salernitanum* 107, ed. Westerbergh, 107.
spondence between Carloman-Charlemagne and Constantinople being an invention of the author. This was only done at that time because of the need to claim and prove that the conquest of Bari, which deprived the Eastern Empire of its main stronghold in the South (very briefly, indeed, but this would not have been predictable in 871), made Louis’ authority perfectly legitimate in all Italy, that his rule was the true imperium, for which there was only one ideological model, the Roman Empire, and one source of legitimacy, the city and Church of Rome. Obviously, neither Louis nor Anastasius considered Louis’ empire first and foremost as ‘Roman’, but they were nevertheless able to build very sound reasoning in this sense aimed at undercutting whatever challenge, criticism or reproach might have come from Constantinople. In this letter, Anastasius drew much of his evidence from Greek writers: he showed off his vast culture, encompassing Greek sources, and placed the basileus face to face with arguments and proofs from his own cultural universe. However exceptional, the letter matches many of the Salernitan writer’s ideas about empire, as detailed and discussed above, which explains why he paid so much attention to this unique document and inserted it in his own work.⁵⁷

Shortly after, in the decades around 900, several bitter criticisms against Rome originated from the South. The poem known as Versus Romae might have been written in Naples in or shortly after 878. These twenty-four hexameters refer to recent events of the years 876–878 to point out that Roman glory had faded, that its prestige and power had passed to the Greeks, and that it was even unworthy of the protection of Peter and Paul, whom it had murdered long ago and whose relics it now sold.⁵⁸ Around ten years later, Pope Formose (891–896) was exhumed and judged (897), and his ordinations were invalidated, which upset several Italian and western churches in the following twenty years. The writers taking his side in this argument were mostly southern ones, or at least hosts in southern cities: Auxilius and Eugenius Vulgaris in Naples, and Rodelgrimus and Guiselgardus in Benevento. The latest known text in the argument is the Invectiva in Romam pro Formoso papa, an attack against John X (914–928) written around 914, the writer of which knew and quoted the Versus Romae and the previous southern pro-Formose writings.⁵⁹ This polemical stance did not clash completely with nor invalidated the general acknowledgement of Rome’s prestige and institutional authority over the southern churches. These writers’ commitment in the Formose affair was of course triggered by the cancellation of his ordinations of several southern clerics and prelates, but also clearly

⁵⁹ Most texts are in Auxilius und Vulgaris, ed. Dümmler, the Invectiva is edited separately as Invectiva in Romam pro Formoso papa by Dümmler; Gnocoli 1995.
shows that these men expected something from the Roman see: that it should not
tear itself apart and after having ridiculed itself by digging up and judging a de-
ceased pope; that it should not be governed by an invasor such as John X. The Versus’
context was that of the years between Louis II’s and John VIII’s deaths (875 – 882),
that is the time when the pope tried against all odds to carry out Louis’ imperial pro-
gramme in the South, while favouring Charles the Bald, then Carloman and Charles
the Fat; the poem can be read as a charge against the political ambitions of the pa-
pacy – which had to face hardships in Rome itself – without close and efficient sup-
port from an emperor: a disreputed Rome had no claim to pretend to carry out the
imperial rule by itself. The Western Empire could not exist without the Roman
Church, but, to these writers – and, most probably, their rulers – the Roman Church
could not substitute itself for the Empire.

These partisan writings show that many southern intellectuals could have a clear
idea of where Romanness is located and what it implies: the Roman Church and Em-
pire needed each other, but were clearly differentiated; the Roman Church enjoyed
an acknowledged authority, but with matching demands and limits. These authors
lived in independent polities, whose rulers and bishops could have different views
and political agendas from the popes and emperors. They were perfectly able to chal-
lenge and question Roman and regal political choices, and to make it known.

***

A major change in the history of Italy and the whole West occurred around 750: the
Lombard conquest of Ravenna dramatically diminished the actual presence and gov-
ernment of Constantinople in Italy, and the papacy’s alliance with the Frankish rul-
ers distanced it from its traditional, imperial protector. From the second half of the
eighth century onwards, the Roman Church claimed to be the perfect embodiment of
Romanness – the use of the phrase res publica in the Liber Pontificalis being a spec-
tacular testimony to this claim. From 800 on, Constantinople faced a second Christ-
ian Empire, that of the Franks, then the Saxons, and was thus forced for the first
time to claim its own Roman legitimacy and continuity. Southern Italy was the single
region in the Christian world where these transformations of what Romanness was
and meant in the early Middle Ages had their most noticeable effect, where these
two rival claims of Romanness met and interacted with each other. The strength of
these claims and debates in the late tenth century explains the Chronicon Salernita-
um’s author’s unique attention to the Empire’s Romanness. In addition, the sources
reveal Romanness as a shared culture: while clearly differentiating themselves from
those they named Romans, Latin southern Italians shared most of their culture with
them; it is thus no wonder that the issue of Romanness was a key ideological issue in
the early medieval South and that the sources and their writers paid special attention
to it.

See the contribution of Paolo Delogu in this volume.
Southern Italy was an extremely fragmented area, a world of cities and city-centred polities, both large (like the principality of Benevento before 849) and small, even minute ones (like the duchy of Amalfi). Yet, it was unified by the Christian faith. As a consequence, identity was felt and expressed on two major scales, the local polity each one belonged to being the first, the Christian Church the second.⁶ Such criteria of identity explain the conception of Rome and Romanness encountered in the sources studied here: although Roman imperial ideology remained the ideal model of Christian sovereignty, and was imitated almost everywhere, the emperors of Constantinople were the only genuine successors of the ancient rulers of Rome. Yet, none of the two contemporary empires – the ambitions and, at times, actual successes of which are dramatically described in our sources – was first and foremost a Roman Empire. The *Chronicon Salernitanum*’s stance, exceptional among the body of sources, must be connected to the specific context of the late tenth century. Rome itself was a city among others, head of its own polity; it was far from being the only one enjoying Romanness, antiquity and prestige. Yet it was absolutely unique as a church, that of St Peter, standing apart both from the universal ecclesia and from either empire. Its unquestionable prestige did not mean absolute authority and did not exclude emulation: thus the many narratives of apostolicity; thus the frequent clashing of rulers’ and bishops’ political agendas with those of the popes; thus the exploitation and biased use of the very prestige, authority and history of Rome by rulers, intellectuals and writers involved in the challenges and debates of the present.