

June 2017 | pp. 27–45

Some Thoughts on the Image of Rome in Late Antique Authors: Ausonius, Symmachus, the Panegyrists

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This paper aims to explore the different ideas of some late antique writers about the image of Rome, pointing out the common elements and depicting a landscape that connects traditional concepts with the perception of the contemporary political difficulties arising from the presence of barbarians and from the crisis of the Roman Empire.

1. The problem: the image of Rome in late antiquity

The representation¹ of Rome in ancient sources is a very common element in all literary genres and it has generated a rich bibliography.² In late antiquity,³ discussion about the idea of Rome involved necessarily the political theme of patriotism, well documented by an important book published by François Paschoud in the 1960s.⁴ According to him, the traditional Roman ideology lost its force and was defeated by the power

¹ I use the word here with the meaning of literary description.

² Here I give only a small sample of texts. In general see L. Krattinger 1944; W. den Boer 1977; C. Edwards, 1998; A. Kriekhaus, 2001. About the Augustan age see for instance M. Bonjour 1975; E. Romano 2012; P. Pinotti 2015, but in general all the works about the rule of Augustus; about the Flavian age see Th. N. Habinek 1987; J.M. Madsen 2014. About the provinces see J.M. Madsen 2009.

³ About the concept and the periodization of late antiquity, refer to the recent P. Rousseau 2009.

⁴ F. Paschoud 1967.

of Christian ideology, which incorporated traditional pagan virtues and values, strengthening a primary ideological myth, the idea of *Roma aeterna*. Scholars have normally followed Paschoud's itineraries in defining the main elements of Roman patriotism. Andrea Pellizzari (1999-2000, 3–41) confirms Paschoud's interpretation and observes the persistence of Ciceronian grounds:⁵ there is a local *patria*, based on the conception of one's origin and birthplace,⁶ and the political one, based on Rome as *patria communis* of the empire.⁷ A further change occurred in 4th and 5th century writers, when the abstract idea of *Romanitas* instead of Rome became a common slogan, identifying itself with *civilitas* against barbarian societies (*Romania* vs. *Barbaria*). Rome remains the most important city and the capital, but also the symbol that represents the existence of the empire, and its power and unity: see for instance Ammianus 14, 6, 3: *Roma victura dum erunt homines*.

2. Rome in the 4th–5th century authors

If, as I have tried to show, the landscape has been well described by scholarship in its general developmental lines, we cannot state the same for what concerns many authors of late antiquity. This paper does not aim to be a complete reappraisal of the subject in late antiquity, but a *mise à jour* of some concepts witnessed by a number of authors who share three features: (1) there are no specific or satisfactory studies concerning their idea of Rome; (2) they all are orators or rhetoricians; (3) they are strongly engaged in the political system of their times. We can deal briefly with

⁵ *De legibus* 2, 3–5: *et illi [Caton] et omnibus municipibus duas esse censeo patrias, unam naturae, alteram ciuitatis: ut ille Cato, cum esset Tusculi natus, in populi Romani ciuitatem susceptus est, ita, quom ortu Tusculanus esset, ciuitate Romanus, habuit alteram loci patriam, alteram iuris* ("Surely I think that he and all natives of Italian towns have two fatherlands, one by nature and the other by citizenship. Cato, for example, though born in Tusculum, received citizenship in Rome, and so, as he was a Tusculan by birth and a Roman by citizenship, had one fatherland which was the place of his birth, and another by law" [translated by C.V. Keyes]). In Cicero's time this concept, which had a Stoic origin, sounded somehow not natural to Romans, but in late antiquity it lost all connection with the original philosophical context: see A.R. Dyck 2004.

⁶ "L'une naturelle, leur ville d'origine" F. Paschoud 1967, 11.

⁷ "Politique et juridique" (*ibid.*).

their texts.⁸

2.1. Ausonius (310–395 AD)

In the *Ordo urbium nobilium*, written between 354 and 388, Ausonius gives us a catalogue of some important towns of the empire, both in the Western and in the Eastern part. The purpose, as noted by R.P.H. Green, is “to include cities with the greatest claim to fame, whether past or present.”⁹ This is the list of the cities:

1. ROMA: Prima urbes inter, divum domus, aurea Roma.
- 2-3. CONSTANTINOPOLIS ET CARTHAGO.
- 4-5. ANTIOCHIA ET ALEXANDRIA.
6. TREVERI
7. MEDIOLANUM
8. CAPUA.
9. AQUILEIA.
10. ARELATE.
- 11-12-13-14. HISPALIS (VEL EMERITA), CORDUBA, TARRACO, BRACARA.
15. ATHENAE.
- 16-17. CATINA, SYRACUSAE.
18. TOLOSA.
19. NARBO.
20. BURDIGALA.

And these are the final verses

*Hic labor extremus celebres collegerit urbes.
Utque caput numeri Roma inclita, sic capite isto
Burdigala ancipiti confirmet vertice sedem.
Haec patria est: patrias sed Roma supervenit omnes.
Diligo Burdigalam, Romam colo. Civis in hac sum,
consul in ambabus: cunae hic, ibi sella curulis.*¹⁰

⁸ For general remarks and interpretation on these authors see F. Gasti 2013.

⁹ R.P.H. Green, ed. 1991, 570.

¹⁰ “Let this task conclude the muster of famous cities. And as illustrious Rome leads at one end of the rank, so at this end let Bordeaux establish her place, leaving the precedence unsettled. This is my own country; but Rome stands above all countries. I love Bordeaux, Rome I venerate; in this I am a citizen, in both a consul; here was my cradle, there my curule chair” (translated by H.G. Evelyn-White).

The first remark concerns the position of Rome, the first and most important *urbs*. As many scholars have highlighted, the adjective *aurea* celebrates the greatness of Rome with the aim of contrasting with the Christian writers who thought of Rome as a mortal entity.¹¹ The formula *aurea Roma* finds its most important occurrence in Ovid (*ars* 3, 113), but recalls also the *aurea Capitolia* of Virgil, *Aen.* 8, 347, many other passages of Ovid himself¹² (*ars* 3, 451; *fast.* 1, 77 s.; *am.* 3, 9, 43; *fast.* 1, 223; *Pont.* 2, 1, 41–2), Silius (3, 622), and an anonymous epigram of *Historia Augusta* 12, 4 concerning Pescennius Niger.¹³ Therefore, Ausonius follows a long and robust tradition of praising the city as the center of the Roman state. It is recognized since Paschoud and Green that the second and third towns are classified according to their relationships with Rome: a new rival (Constantinople), and an ancient enemy (Carthage);¹⁴ followed by important towns of the East and imperial capitals such as Trier and Mediolanum. The series continues with Gallic, Italian, Greek and Spanish towns, finishing with Bordeaux (*Burdigala*). Rome, still the main city, represents the heart of the empire and shines above the world like a lighthouse of civilization. Still more important is the comparison between Burdigala and Rome, which renews Cicero's position in *De legibus* concerning the double homeland and citizenship, *naturae* and *civitatis*. Every man has his own *patria* (homeland), but Roma is a super-homeland—if it is possible, a *patria patriarum*, as the different verbs (*diligo*, *colo*) underline. M. Bonjour¹⁵ has shown that the hierarchy of the text beyond the reverence for Rome means a particular evaluation for the writer's local *patria*, Bordeaux, which is seen by Ausonius as his real mother. As a matter of fact, the *dilectio* is the affection

¹¹ See, for example, P. Marpicati 2009, 333–44.

¹² *Simplicitas rudis ante fuit: nunc aurea Roma est*: M. Bonjour 1980, 221–30.

¹³ “*Terror Egyptiaci Niger astat militis ingens, / Thebaidos socius, aurea saecla volens. / Hunc reges, hunc gentes amant, hunc aurea Roma / hic Antoninis carus <et> imperio. / Nigrum nomen habet, nigrum formavimus ipsi, / ut consentiret forma, metalle, tibi*” (Glorious Niger stands here, the dread of the soldiers of Egypt / Faithful ally of Thebes, willing a golden age / Loved by the kings and the nations of earth, and by Rome the all golden / Dear to the Antonines, aye, dear to the Empire too / Black is the surname he bears, and black is the statue we've fashioned / Thus do surname and hue, hero and marble, agree [translated by D. Magie]).

¹⁴ See also M. Gindhart 2008, 68–81.

¹⁵ M. Bonjour 1987.

of the son,¹⁶ while the *cultus* is a metaphorical translation of the affective relationship on a symbolic level.

2.2 Symmachus (340–402)

Due to the limits of time and space in this paper, I will pass to Symmachus' *Relationes* and present only some examples of the rich material to be found in this author. As it is well known, the *Relationes* comprise 49 official communications addressed to the emperors in his capacity as *praefectus urbi* in 384 AD and, more generally, as an esteemed member of the senatorial aristocracy. Like the rich and diverse correspondence, these are strongly affected by the influence of Pliny's tenth book and are documents of remarkable historiographical value. Symmachus in the *relatio quarta* (384) writes to the emperor Valentinianus expressing opposition to some changes in the *pompa magistratus*. There was a project to embellish the chariot of the Prefecture with silver decorations, in a similar fashion to the carriage of the prefect of Constantinople and of the bishop of Rome. In the third and last paragraph of this very short *relatio* he says:

*Inritamentum superbiae Roma Vestra non patitur memor scilicet bonorum parentum quos Tarquinius fastus et ipsius Camilli currus offendit. Nam tanto illi viro albentes quadrigae exilium triste pepererunt. ... Ergo moribus potius quam insignibus aestimemur. Non culpamus novum beneficium, sed bona nostra praefereamus. Submoveite vehiculum cuius cultus insignior est; illud maluimus cuius usus antiquior.*¹⁷ [I will discuss another Symmachian text in par. 3.]

The orator addresses the emperor connecting him strictly with Rome: *Roma Vestra*. The *exempla* of monarchy and the early Republic underline the role of the *mores*: they are the common background of the Roman state. The *mores* unite the emperor, the orator and all Romans in a unique entity

¹⁶ The image of the cradle underlines the idea of the mother-son bond.

¹⁷ "This Rome of yours does not tolerate anything likely to encourage pride: for it has not forgotten, as you know, its splendid ancestors to whom the arrogance of a Tarquin and the chariot even of a Camillus gave such offence; a great man though he was, his chariot drawn by freedom of the citizen-body. Let us then be held in regard for our character rather than for our trappings. We do not censure this novel concession, but we value more the good things we already have. Get rid of this conveyance: its array may be more spectacular, but we have always preferred the kind whose use is the more ancient" (translated by H. de Romestin).

symbolized by Rome.

2.3. *Panegyrics* (289–389 AD)

The Latin panegyrics are praising speeches that crystallize in the scheme of a eulogy specifically addressed to the Prince (βασιλικὸς λόγος). The anthology, alongside the Plinian oration that thanks emperor Trajan for the consulate, also includes eleven praising speeches addressed by several rhetoricians of Gallic origin to Augusts and Caesars between 289 and the 389, and was probably created by Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, author of the panegyric to Theodosius in 389.¹⁸ The order of the speeches in the manuscripts is not chronological: the inspiring model is the Plinian text that comes first, followed, starting from the most recent, with the aforementioned panegyric by Pacatus Drepanius (Rome, 389), the one by Claudius Mamertinus to Julian (Constantinople, 362) and the one by Nazarius in honor of Constantine (Rome, 321). Then follow the others, the twelfth and last being a *Panegyricus dictus Constantino filio Constantii* composed in Trier, in 313 AD. The paneyrists belonged to the state bureaucracy and the political leadership of the Roman Empire (they were usually teachers and/or officers) and became not only supporters of the policy of the emperor, but also active promoters of consent (Lassandro and Micunco 2000, 14; Camastra 2012, 123). They outlined, with oratorical skills modelled on the classics, the figure of the *Optimus Princeps*. In these praising speeches Rome finds a very important place and is repeatedly cited with metaphorical addresses that allow us to build a little dossier in chronological order, one that has only an exemplifying role:¹⁹

Anon., *Pan.* 6 (7)
8, 8 and 10, 5,
307 AD

*Te rursus vicesimo anno imperatorem, octavo consulem, ita ipsa
amplexu quodam suo Roma voluit detinere, ut videretur augurari iam
et timere quod factum est.*²⁰

¹⁸ D. Lassandro and G. Micunco 2000, 122. Lassandro's edition gives an Italian translation and commentary using his former critical edition: Lassandro D. ed. 1992.

¹⁹ I quote the Latin texts according to Lassandro's critical edition and English translations from C.E.V. Nixon and B. Saylor Rodgers, 1994.

²⁰ "Again, when you were in your twentieth year as Emperor and consul for the eighth time, Rome herself so wished to detain you in its embrace, so to speak, that she seemed

	<p><i>Fecit enim Roma ipsa pro maiestate nominis sui ut ostenderet posse se etiam imperatoribus imperare. Abduxit exercitus suos ac tibi reddidit et, cum ad sedandos animos auctoritatem privati principis attulisses, supplices tibi manus tendens vel potius queribunda clamavit.</i>²¹</p>
<p>Nazarius, <i>Pan.</i> 4 (10), 6 and 36, 321 AD</p>	<p>[1] <i>Verum ut in magnis domibus interiorum ornatum vestibula ipsa declarant, sic nobis venturis ad ingentium virtutum stupenda penetralia debet laudationis ingressum et praedicationis ianuam Roma praebere. [2] Quae demersa quondam tyrannidis impiae malis et quo maior eo miserabilior maiestatis pristinae decus ad misericordiae ambitum conferebat, tibi tamen, Constantine maxime, etiam in illa sui sorte venerabilis, quod quos impense amamus observantia illorum integra est, etiamsi dilapsa fortuna est. In abiectos officia gratiora sunt quae non ex misericordia sed ex honore venerunt. [3] Sed nimirum recte a sapientibus ponitur conexio inter se apta virtutum. Sic enim mutuo et opera iuvant et fructum operae partiuntur, ut facile appareat inseparabilis et indiscreta permixtio. [...] [6] Constituta enim et in perpetuum Roma fundata est, omnibus qui statum eius labefactare poterant cum stirpe deletis.²²</i></p> <p>Tantorum Roma compos bonorum, quae quidem ei sunt cum toto orbe communia, haurit insuper ingentis spei fructum, quam propositam sibi ex Caesaribus nobilissimis habet eorumque fratribus. Quorum iam nomina ipsa veneramur, etsi vota nostra interim proferuntur.²³</p>

already to have a presentiment and fear of what actually happened” (translated by C.E.V. Nixon).

²¹ “For Rome itself has acted out of regard for the majesty of her name and demonstrated that she can command even Emperors. She withdrew her armies and restored them to you and when you had brought the authority of a prince in private life to the quieting of their spirits, she cried out, stretching out her suppliant hands to you, or rather, complaining” (translated by C.E.V. Nixon).

²² “But as in great houses where the very entrance halls give evidence of the beautifully furnished interiors, so Rome ought to furnish us, who are about to come to the astonishing sanctuary of egregious virtues, with an entrance for our praise and a doorway for our commendation. Once overwhelmed by the crimes of an impious tyrant and more pitiable the grander she was, she applied the glory of her former majesty to the pursuit of pity, yet she was venerable to you, greatest Constantine, even in that sorry condition of hers, because our regard for whose whom we love well remains undiminished even if their fortunes have ebbed. Services to the downcast are more welcome if they come not from pity but from respect. But wise men have doubtless rightly supposed that virtues are closely connected with one another. For they both support each other’s works and share the fruits of their labor with such reciprocity that the admixture is easily seen to be inseparable and undivided. Rome has been established and founded for eternity, since all who could weaken her condition have been destroyed root and branch” (translated by B.S. Rodgers).

Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, <i>Pan.</i> 2 (12), 45, 389 AD	<i>Vide, imperator, quid hac clementia consecutus sis: fecisti ut nemo sibi victus te victore videatur. Spectabas haec e tuis collibus, Roma, et septena arce sublimis celsior gaudio ferebaris.</i> ²⁴
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We can draw some conclusions from this little dossier:

1. First of all, Rome is personified (*spectabas*) and an object of love (*amamus*) according to the rules of *prosopopoeia*; she speaks (*clamat*), embraces (*amplexu*), becoming a real mother and wife, tender, and resembling a great goddess.
2. Rome is timeless and endless (*constituta enim et in perpetuum Roma fundata est*), according to an exegetic line that is common also in Rutilius Namatianus²⁵ and Ammian and comes from Virgil *Aen.* 1, 278–9: *His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono: / imperium sine fine dedi.*²⁶
3. The city is not a mere symbol but a warranty of the unity of the empire, generating *gaudium* in all Romans.
4. She is the owner of benefits (*compos bonorum*) and shares them with all the towns and cities of the *imperium*.

These little observations can be added to the remarks of C. Giuliese, who had already studied the image of Rome in two *Panegyrics* (12/9 of 313 and 4/10 of 321), casting a look also on the others. According to her reading, Rome in these texts was *arx omnium gentium* (*pan.* 4 (10), 35, 2), *domina gentium* (*pan.* 10 (2), 1, 4; 14, 3; 11 (3), 12, 1; 7 (6), 11, 7), *mater imperii* (*pan.* 10 (2), 14, 4), *regina terrarum* (*pan.* 4 (10), 35, 2), *sacra urbs* (*pan.* 10 (2), 1, 1; 12 (9), 1, 1), *sancta parens* (*pan.* 7 (6), 11, 6).²⁷ To sum up, panegyrist represent Rome as a respectable queen ruling over all lands,

²³ “While partaking of such great blessings, which in fact are hers in common with the whole world, Rome also derives enjoyment from the enormous hopes which she has conceived of the most noble Caesars and their brothers, whose very names we already revere, even if our prayers are deferred in the meantime” (translated by B.S. Rodgers).

²⁴ “See, Emperor, what the consequences of this clemency are for you: you have so managed things that no one feels that he has been conquered by you, the victor. You regarded this from your hills, Rome, and sublime on your seven citadels, you were raised even higher with joy” (translated by C.E.V. Nixon).

²⁵ See section 4.

²⁶ “No date, no goal I here ordain; Theirs is an endless, boundless reign” (translated by J. Conington).

²⁷ C. Giuliese 2007, 97-105. Also Italy is called *gentium domina* in *pan.* 8 (5), 10, 3; 10 (2), 2, 3.

a sort of Queen Victoria of antiquity. She is a sacred symbol so high and remote that she becomes both almost untouchable and deeply present in the cultural memory of Romans,²⁸ even after the progressive loosening of ties between the western and eastern parts of the empire that followed the tetrarchy experience.²⁹

3. Rome about itself: the third *Relatio* and below

The third of Symmachus' *Relationes* was a formal and highly rhetorical request to the emperors (Valentinian II, Theodosius and Arcadius) for the restoration of the Altar of Victory into the curia of the Senate. The altar was built by Octavian in 29 BC to commemorate the victory against Antonius and Cleopatra at Actium and had a strong symbolic meaning, representing the continuity of Roman power. It had been already removed by Constantius II in 357, restored by Julian the Apostate and once more removed by Gratian in 382. Symmachus tried to achieve his goal arguing that the removal of the monument caused a famine. As is well known, his speech was a very effective plea in praise of tolerance, which he requested for pagan cults in the face of the dominant Christian faith. Symmachus' attempt was in vain, faced with the opposition of Bishop Ambrose of Milan, who exerted strong influence over the emperors, in particular, the young Valentinian II. In the following paragraphs, Symmachus introduces the personified Rome who addresses a speech to the emperors:

²⁸ See the final remarks of this paper.

²⁹ Her further considerations are worthy of attention: "I numerosi epiteti utilizzati attestano il grande rispetto dei panegiristi verso Roma, sentita come l'impero per antonomasia. Tale preminenza ideale avrebbe chiaramente minato la stabilità della tetrarchia e avrebbe reso più forte uno dei quattro. Questo si sarebbe potuto evitare, secondo Diocleziano, se Roma non fosse stata più sede di governo, ma soltanto un simbolo di potere e se ogni imperatore avesse avuto il suo esercito, la sua amministrazione e la sua capitale" (C. Giuliese 2007, 98 no.2; "The numerous epithets used attest the great respect of the panegirists towards Rome, which they felt to be the pinnacle of the empire. Such an ideal preeminence would clearly have undermined the stability of the tetrarchy and made one of the four rulers stronger. This could have been avoided, according to Diocletian, if Rome had no longer been the seat of government, but only a symbol of power and if every emperor had had his own army, his administration and his capital" [translated by A. Balbo]).

9-10: *Romam nunc putemus adistere atque his Vobiscum agere sermonibus: «Optimi Principum, Patres Patriae, reveremini annos meos in quos me pius ritus adduxit ! Vtar caerimoniis avitis, neque enim paenitet! Vivam meo more, quia libera sum! Hic cultus in leges meas orbem redegit, haec sacra Hannibalem a moenibus, a Capitolio Senonas reppulerunt. Ad hoc ergo servata sum, ut longaeua reprehendar? Videro quale sit quod instituendum putatur; sera tamen et contumeliosa est emendatio senectutis.»*³⁰

Rome presents itself as ancient, venerable, worthy of respect, owner of traditional elements. She desires that her great antiquity is taken into consideration. The Rome model is built on the image of a dignified *matrona* who asks for a free life, appealing for attention to tradition and respect for *senectus*. The literary model is the speech of personified Rome found in Cicero's first *Catilinaria*, but orations of Rome as a character are common also in other late antique authors, as Kurt Smolak showed in an interesting paper,³¹ where he recalls also letter 72 of Ambrosius of Milan and the *Contra Symmachum* 2, 649-768 of Prudentius.³²

To Smolak's short dossier, I would like to add another example:

Pan. Inc. *Maximiano et Constantino* 7 (6), 11

“Quousque hoc, Maximiane, patiar me quati, te quiescere; mihi libertatem adimi, te usurpare tibi illicitam missionem? [2] An, quod divo Augusto post septuaginta aetatis, quinquaginta imperii annos non licuit, tam cito licuit tibi? [3] Ideone te mihi ille, cuius tot aras tot templa tot nomina colo, Hercules dedit, ut tu in suburbano otis cedens usum dicatae mihi virtutis amitteres? [4] Redde te gubernaculis meis et, quoniam tranquillo mari portum intrare properasti, vade per fluctus mei quidem amore sollicitus sed tua maiestate securus. Et tamen per te tibi steterit, <si> iniuriam in mei restitutione patieris. Imperasti pridem

³⁰ “Let us imagine that Rome herself stands in your presence and pleads with you thus, ‘Best of emperors, fathers of your country, respect my length of years won for me by the dutiful observance of rite: let me continue to practice my ancient ceremonies, for I do not regret them. Let me live in my own way for I am free. This worship of mine brought the whole world under the rule of my laws, these sacred rites drove back Hannibal from my walls and the Senones from the Capitol. Is it true that I have been kept solely for the purpose of being reprimanded at my age? I will see what kind of changes I think should be set on foot, but reformation of old age comes rather late and is humiliating” (translated by R.H. Barrow).

³¹ K. Smolak 2012.

³² See also C. Gnllka, “Zur Rede der Roma bei Symmachus rel. 3,” *Hermes* 118, (1990): 464-70.

*rogatus a fratre, rursus impera iussus a matre.*³³

This speech was delivered in Treviri in 307 AD, following the abdication of Diocletianus and Maximianus that gave space to the “second Tetrarchy,” formed by Constantius and Galerius as *Augusti* and Severus and Maximinus Daia as *Caesares*. As is well known, this situation was both deeply unsatisfying and unstable, in the face of the break out of new civil wars;³⁴ so Maxentius, son of Maximian, asked his father to cut short his forced retirement and come back to his role of Augustus. Maximian accepted and tried to establish new alliances, giving his daughter Fausta in marriage to Constantine, son of the dead Constantius, and raising him to the role of Augustus. In this passage, Rome, personified, talks to Maximian asking him to assume again the role of emperor, and the tones are somewhat surprising. The Catilinarian model of the *exordium* is self-evident, as we can easily see just from the following example:

Cic. <i>Cat.</i> 1, 1	An., <i>Pan. Maximiano et Constantino</i> 7 (6), 11
<i>Quousque tandem, Catilina, abutere patientia nostra</i>	<i>Quousque hoc, Maximiane, patiar me quati, te quiescere</i>

The word order is the same, while the position of vocatives and the etymological relationship *patientia* / *patiar* mark the close relationships between the texts. The power of this *exordium* is very strong in all of Latin literature and it is not possible to follow here all its imitations and re-uses,³⁵ but it is a little surprising that a tool used to reproach and attack

³³ “How long, Maximian, am I to suffer myself to be shaken to pieces, while you remain inactive? To be deprived of my liberty, while you enjoyed a discharge that is not permitted to you. Or should what was not permitted the divine Augustus after seventy years of age and fifty years of rule be so swiftly granted to you. Or was it for this that Hercules whose countless altars, temples, names I revere, gave you to me, that, yielding idleness on your suburban estate, you should abandon the practice of valor consecrated to me. Restore yourself to my helm and since you have hastened to enter the harbor where the sea is calm, go through the waves anxious indeed in your love with me, but secure in your majesty. Yet it will be your own fault if you will suffer injury in restoring me. Aforetime you ruled at the request of your brother, rule again at the behest of your mother” (translated by C.E.V. Nixon).

³⁴ See C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers 1994, 178–9.

³⁵ To take just one example, I recall here the precise quotation of Sen. *Rhet. Suas.* 7, 14 and the clear reprise of Tac. *Ann.* 1, 13, 4: “*quo usque patieris, Caesar, non adesse caput*

an enemy of Rome is here adapted to praise an emperor. The panegyrist reverses the model depriving it of negative elements and replacing them with positive images, as of a mother—an anthropological model, not an historic one. He connects together an historical example (Augustus) and a mythical one (Hercules), and links them with the image of a helmsman, one who should take the responsibility of guiding Rome and the Empire to peaceful lands and to a quiet harbor.³⁶ All human and divine forces are working to preserve Rome's greatness: the forces of tradition and family, supported by *mos maiorum* and reinforced by the image of the mother, allow the reformulation and new use of the ancient image, underlined by the emphasis and the pregnancy of the author's style, that highlight his faith in the cult of Rome.

4. Rome in difficulty

The image of Rome is not always positive, and the late antique authors sometimes overlook the real difficult situation of a split empire, threatened by barbarians and external enemies and in deep economic crisis. Nazarius, the most famous rhetorician of his time, called *insignis* by Hier. Chron, 324, explicitly recalls this twice in his panegyric for Constantine in 321 AD, where he praises the emperor for having won victory against Maxentius:

Pan. 4 (10) 3, 3

[3] *Cuius cum divina virtus et eius misericordia comes appendixque victoria urbem Romam non praecipitantem exceperit, sed adflictam ac plane iacentem excitavit recreavit erexerit, cumque aliae felicissimae tuae prius ac deinceps expeditiones non minus in sese operis amplexae sint quam ex ipsis faucibus fati Roma servata, quid dignum magnitudine tua excogitari ac dici potest, in cuius laudibus id maximum non est quod in terrarum orbe primum est?*³⁷

rei publicae?” made by Q. Haterius. About this last occurrence see A. Balbo 2007, 16–21.

³⁶ S. Gastaldi 2003, 187–216; G. Cipriani and T. Ragno 2015. On this topos in late antiquity see P.G. Tarigo 2012.

³⁷ “Since your divine valor and its companion mercy and adjunct victory did not catch Rome falling headlong, but revived her when she was downcast and completely prostrate, restored her, raised her up, and since your other most prosperous campaigns, before and after, compassed in themselves no lesser tasks than the rescue of Rome from

Pan. 4 (10) 13, 1–3

*Nihil profecto gravius, nihil miserius, Roma, doluisti. Quamvis recondita alte magis gemeres, et ingestos cotidie luctus callo quodam obduratae patientiae sustineres, confessus est se inconsultior dolor nec timuit deprehendi, et male clausi signa maeroris per vultus indices exierunt. [2] Hoc enim, Roma tot vulneribus saucia, vindicari volebas, cum tamen praestantissimus princeps iniuriae suae neglegens ulcisci tuas mallet. [3] Ita ambo, benigni ratiocinatores officiorum, paria fecistis, tu voto quo solo valebas, ille amore pariter et facultate, ut tantum bonorum tibi tribueret quantum te sibi velle recognosceret.*³⁸

The embodiment of Rome is evident also in terrible conditions: the town suffers (*doluisti*), has received wounds (*vulneribus saucia*), wanted revenge (*vindicari volebas*). As a defeated man or soldier, Rome was *adflicta et iacens*, and only the ability of Constantine could awaken her. The orator does not go into depth with his analysis and does not want to contradict the general principle of faith in the eternity of Rome, but it is clear that, with these words, he downplays the strength of this cultural background and hints at least of a deep crisis in the city. The panegyrists claim that only strong emperors can preserve Rome from destruction, but what if they are not available? Or if tyrants take their place? And what about the barbarians? Late antique authors seem to avoid the question and the answer, taking refuge in a hope that persists in the face of every reality.

The situation does not change in the following century. Rutilius Namatianus³⁹ in his *De reditu suo*, written in the first part of the 5th century AD, in verses 47–66, states his belief in a Rome that is difficult to

the very jaws of Fate, what can be devised or spoken which is worthy of your greatness, in the praises of which that is not the most important thing which is the most excellent thing in the world?" (translated by B.S. Rodgers).

³⁸ "In fact there was nothing for which you lamented with greater grief, Rome, or with greater despair. Although you sighed the more over things deeply concealed and endured daily inflicted griefs with calloused and hardened patience, an indiscrete sorrow revealed itself without fear of detection and the signs of ill-suppressed mourning escaped through faces which betrayed themselves. This was what you wanted to be avenged, Rome injured by so many wounds, yet the most excellent leader, heedless of his own injury, preferred to take vengeance for yours. Thus was for you, benevolent calculators of duty, repaid the other, you in the prayer when your only strength lay, he with love and capability both, so that he bestowed as much good upon you as he knew you wished for him" (translated by B.S. Rodgers).

³⁹ Rome will be represented later also by Ennodius in his panegyric to King Theodericus, re-using elements of Latin panegyrists: see A. Russo 2003, 461–70.

place in the terrible context of his times, and in verses 115–140 he recalls that Rome has fallen, but was able to rise up again:

*exaudi, regina tui pulcherrima mundi,
inter sidereos Roma recepta polos,
exaudi, genetrix hominum genetrixque deorum
non procul a caelo per tua templa sumus:
te canimus semperque, sinent dum fata, canemus:
sospes nemo potest immemor esse tui.
obruerint citius scelerata oblivia solem,
quam tuus ex nostro corde recedat honos.
nam solis radiis aequalia munera tendis,
qua circumfusus fluctuat Oceanus.
volvitur ipse tibi, qui continet omnia, Phoebus
eque tuis ortos in tua condit equos.
te non flammigeris Libye tardavit harenis,
non armata suo reppulit Ursa gelu:
quantum vitalis natura tetendit in axes,
tantum virtuti pervia terrae tuae.
fecisti patriam diversis gentibus unam:
profuit iniustus te dominante capi.
dumque offers victis proprii consortia iuris,
urbem fecisti quod prius orbis erat.
dumque offers victis proprii consortia iuris,
urbem fecisti quod prius orbis erat.*

...

*“erige crinales lauros seniumque sacrati
verticis in virides, Roma, refinge comas.
aurea turrigero radiant diademata cono,
perpetuosque ignes aureus umbo vomat!
abscondat tristem deleta iniuria casum:
contemptus solidet vulnera clausa dolor.
adversis solenne tuis sperare secunda:
exemplo caeli ditia damna subis.
astrorum flammae renovant occasibus ortus;
lunam finiri cernis, ut incipiat.
victoris Brenni non distulit Allia poenam;
Samnis servitio foedera saeva luit;
post multas Pyrrhum clades superata fugasti;
flevit successus Hannibal ipse suos:
quae mergi nequeunt, nisi maiore resurgunt
exsiliuntque imis altius acta vadis;*

*utque novas vires fax inclinata resumit,
 clarior ex humili sorte superna petis.
 porrige victuras Romana in saecula leges,
 solaque fatales non vereare colos,
 quamvis sedecies denis et mille peractis
 annus praeterea iam tibi nonus eat.
 quae restant nullis obnoxia tempora metis,
 dum stabunt terrae, dum polus astra feret!
 illud te reparat quod cetera regna resolvit:
 ordo renascendi est crescere posse malis.⁴⁰*

Rutilius summarizes all the elements that we have highlighted in the previous texts: Rome is a queen—kind, divine, maternal, eternal, and maintaining at the same time its political value as the center of unity. The city is able to find the forces for a real rebirth, because Rome knows how

⁴⁰ “Listen, O fairest queen of thy world, Rome, welcomed amid the starry skies, listen, thou mother of men and mother of gods, thanks to thy temples we are not far from heaven: thee do we chant, and shall, while destiny allows, for ever chant. None can be safe if forgetful of thee. Sooner shall guilty oblivion whelm the sun than the honour due to thee quit my heart; for benefits extend as far as the sun’s rays, where the circling Ocean-flood bounds the world. For thee the very Sun-God who holdeth all together doth revolve: his steeds that rise in thy domains he puts in thy domains to rest. Thee Africa hath not stayed with scorching sands, nor hath the Bear, armed with its native cold, repulsed thee. As far as living nature hath stretched towards the poles, so far hath earth opened a path for thy valour. For nations far apart thou hast made a single fatherland; under thy dominion captivity hath meant profit even for those who knew not justice: and by offering to the vanquished a share in thine own justice, thou hast made a city of what was erstwhile a world. ... Raise, O Rome, the triumphal laurels which wreath thy locks, and refashion the hoary held of thy hallowed head to tresses fresh and fair. Golden let the diadem flash on thy tower-crowned helmet; let the golden buckler belch forth perpetual fires! Let forgetfulness of thy wrongs bury the sadness of misfortune; let pain disregarded close and heal thy wounds. Amidst failure it is thy way to hope for prosperity: after the pattern of the heavens losses undergone enrich thee. For flaming stars set only to renew their rising; thou seest the moon wane to wax afresh. The Allia did not hinder Brennus’ penalty; the Samnite paid for a cruel treaty by slavery; after many disasters, though defeated, thou didst put Pyrrhus to flight; Hannibal himself was the mourner of his own successes. Things which cannot be sunk rise again with greater energy, sped higher in their rebound from lowest depths; and, as the torch held downward regains fresh strength, so from lowly fortune thou dost soar more radiant aloft. Spread forth the laws that are to last throughout the ages of Rome: alone thou needst not dread the distaffs of the Fates, though with a thousand years and sixteen decades o’erpast, thou hast besides a ninth year in its course. The span which doth remain is subject to no bounds, so long as earth shall stand firm and heaven uphold the stars! That same thing builds thee up which wrecks all other realms: the law of thy new birth is the power to thrive upon thine ills” (translated by J.W. Duff and A. Duff).

to take advantage from her moments of collapse. It is not important that these statements are not entirely true; it is not significant that the military forces of the empire are weak and full of barbaric elements: it is possible to forget that Rome fell under Alaric's Visigoths in 410 AD, as Rutilius remembers, speaking of *iniuria*. Even when the Empire is falling, late antique writers continue to preserve its image as an anchor of salvation in the waves of decay.

5. Final remarks

The image of Rome in late antique authors could really be connected to some characteristics of Jan Assmann's reflections on the weight of cultural memory; these refer to institutionalized memories that can be reincorporated throughout generations through literature.⁴¹ Nonetheless, we cannot say that late antique authors build their Rome only according to procedures of re-use of the distant past: certainly, they reckon on many ancient elements, such as the *septena arx* of Drepanius, who bases himself on the tradition of the seven hills as a symbol of Rome,⁴² but for them, Rome is an existent true goddess, a real and living sign of the persistence of the Empire, not just a mere image confined in the corners of their thought. Rome is not—uncritically—thought of as perfect and free from threats: the bad emperors, in contrast with the good ones, are a real danger for her; she can feel ill, suffer pains and sorrows, but, with the help of good rulers, can find a rebirth. As we have seen, even a limited sample of references can show the variety of representations of Rome: there are some common features (the connection between Rome and the emperors, the *prosopopoea*) shared by different authors, and also some peculiarities. The epithets are often metaphorical and connected with the idea of empire as a family (*Roma mater*). These differences reveal, in reality, a great wealth of imagery and the existence of a texture of *loci communes* probably coming both from the rhetorical schools and from historical traditions. To sum up, in reference to the title of the panel that gave origin to this paper, surely

⁴¹ See for instance J. Assmann 2008, 109–18.

⁴² See Verg., *Aen.* 6, 783; Varro, *De lingua Latina* 6, 24 speaks about *Septimontium*, but perhaps is influenced by the Augustean idea of Rome as a city built on seven hills: see L.A. Holland 1953, 16–34.

many Romes exist, but perhaps not too many.

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KEYWORDS | Ausonius, Late antiquity, Latin, Panegyrists, Rome, Symmachus

I want to thank Dr. F. Gasti (University of Pavia) for his helpful reading and suggestions.

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