Approaches to the Fate of the Late Antique City

Experience is not what happens to a man; it's what a man does with what happens to him.

—Aldous Huxley[1]

My heart is moved by all I cannot save
So much has been destroyed
I have to cast my lot with those, who, age after age,
Perversely, with no extraordinary
Power, reconstitute the world.
—Adrienne Rich, Excerpt from *Natural Resources*.[2]

This book is about what generations of men and women experienced and did in the wake of political and military crises that overtook the city of Rome from the late third through the early seventh centuries. Rome was still the largest city in the western Mediterranean and an imperial capital, with a resident aristocracy and prestigious institutions that had enabled Romans to rule an empire since the third century BCE. The five political and military crises that I analyze are the ones that historians have considered critical for understanding the "decline and fall of Rome." By focusing on how these crises led Romans to act to rebuild their city, I offer an alternative perspective for understanding the last three centuries of the western Roman Empire, its imperial city, and its senatorial aristocracy. Although the fortunes of Rome's leaders – senators, emperors, generals, and bishops – ebbed and flowed in a city which suffered population loss and reduced resources, the senatorial aristocracy remained at the center of the city's recovery. The resilience of Roman senatorial aristocrats who, time and again, used their resources to fuel the city's resurgence in the midst of loss, is significant and moving.

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[1] Huxley 1933, p. 5. [2] Rich 1978, p. 67.

Yet the resilience and power of Roman senatorial aristocrats in relation to other elites is often understated by those who write the history of the city in the final centuries of the western Roman Empire. I begin with a paradigmatic example of that oversight which is also relevant to Rome's most important physical defense – the wall that encircled the city built under the emperor Aurelian (270–75) for a barbarian invasion that never happened. Soon enough, in the coming centuries, Rome would be under attack and Aurelian's Wall, along with his reorganization of the city's food supply, were critical to the city's survival. But the wall and the food supply are also emblematic of how Romans were able to restore the city after each military and political crisis.

Waiting for the Barbarians: Aurelian's Wall and the Defense of Rome

> Since all that [had] happened [the war with various Germanic tribes] made it seem possible that some such thing might occur again, as had happened under Gallienus, after asking advice from the Senate, he [Aurelian] extended the walls of the city of Rome.[3]

In the uncertain times of the late third century, Italy faced a series of invaders. In 259, Germans had penetrated as far south as the city of Rome. The Senate, with the emperor and military away, armed soldiers and citizens to ward off the attack.[4] In 270, the Iuthungi invaded northern Italy. The newly acclaimed emperor, Aurelian, defeated them in autumn of 270 and then fought the Vandals. But the Iuthungi returned to Italy and surprised Aurelian in a wood near Placentia (modern Piacenza), where the emperor faced a disastrous rout.[5] The news of his defeat spread terror, especially since the inhabitants of Rome remembered the all-too-recent attack on their city under the emperor Gallienus (253–68), as noted in the epigraph at the

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[3] *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 21.9: trans. Magie, vol. 3, pp. 235–37: *His actis cum videret posse fieri ut aliquid tale iterum, quale sub Gallieno evenerat, proveniret, adhibito consilio senatus muros Urbis Romae dilatavit.* Cf. *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 39.2: *muros Urbis Romae sic ampliavit, ut quinquaginta prope milia murorum eius ambitus teneant.* ("He so extended the wall of the city of Rome that its circuit was nearly fifty miles long.") The actual wall was only twelve miles long, so either the word *milia* refers to 50,000 feet, not miles, or this is a gross exaggeration.

[4] Zos. 1.37.2 specifies the Senate at Rome: ἡ γερουσία. See too Zonaras 12.24.

[5] Aurelian's defeat in 270 is noted by the *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 18.3; 21.1–3; Aur. Vict. *Epit.* 35.2; Zos. 1.37.1–2. The *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 18.3–.4 refers to wars with the Marcomanni. Zos. 1.49.1 identified the Germans whom Aurelian confronted in Italy as Alamanni, but they were accompanied by their neighbors, identified correctly as Iuthungi by Dexippus *Frag.* 6 [Jacoby]. See too Potter 2004, pp. 269–70; Paschoud, 1996, pp. 118–20 and on Zosimus, Paschoud 2003, pp. 168–69.

beginning of this section.[6] The Iuthungi made their way as far south as Umbria before being defeated there and again near Ticinum (modern Pavia). The proximity of the enemy led to rioting in the streets.[7] The Senate tried to restore calm. According to the unverified account in the anonymous fourth-century *Augustan History*, some senators turned to the famous Sibylline Books, the set of oracles in Greek verse that were consulted on how to avert the anger of the gods in a crisis. If this account is true – an issue that scholars still debate because of the unreliability of the *Augustan History* – the Senate undertook ceremonies of purification on behalf of the populace.[8]

When the victorious Aurelian entered Rome in 271, he found a city in open revolt. The mint workers, fearful of reprisals for their manipulation of the currency, took up arms against him. Some senators supported their revolt in what the author of the *Augustan History*, the fourth-century historian Aurelius Victor, and the early sixth-century historian Zosimus allege was a plot against the emperor by those senators unhappy that the army had chosen Aurelian as ruler and perhaps concerned that they would be implicated in the currency manipulation.[9] Fighting between Roman soldiers and the rebels broke out in the city. The mint workers and their supporters retreated to the Caelian Hill in Rome, where in the struggle that followed, thousands of Aurelian's soldiers died in hand-to-hand combat.[10] Aurelian had faced insurrections before, and perhaps now he repeated what would become a signature claim for the legitimation of his regime, that "God had

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[6] See note 3 above and *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 18.4: *In illo autem timore, quo Marcomanni cuncta vastabant, ingentes Romae seditiones motae sunt paventibus cunctis, ne eadem quae sub Gallieno fuerant provenirent.* For confusion about the Marcomanni, see note 5 above.

[7] Aur. Vict. *De Caes.* 35.2; *Epit. de Caes.* 35.2 and Zos. 1.49.1 and Paschoud 1971, vol. 1, p. 163. For the rebellion in Rome, see Zos. 1.49.1–2; *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 18.4–6; 20.3; 21.5–6; 38.2–4; Aur. Vict. *De Caes.* 35.6; Eutrop. *Brev.* 9.14 and commentary by Paschoud 1996, pp. 118–20.

[8] For the consultation of the Sibylline books and the Senate's religious response with the celebration of the *ambarvalia* and *amburbium*, the sole narrative is *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 18.4–6; 20.3–8. Although Aurelian's letter berating the Senate's belated response is fictional and we cannot be certain that the purificatory rites were practiced, it is plausible that the Senate consulted the Sibylline Books now, as they had under the previous emperor Claudius II (268–70); see Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 34.3; and the *Epit. de Caes.* 34.3. For this account, see Paschoud 1996, vol. 5.1, pp. 121–23.

[9] For the mintworkers' rebellion and the senators involved, see *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 21.5 and 38.2–4; Aur. Vict. *De Caes.* 35.6; and Zos. 1.49.2, ed. Paschoud 2003, who, on pp. 168–69, includes the names of the senators later executed as Septimius, Urbanus, and Domitian. We know little about these men. See Watson 1999, pp. 52–53, on the complicity of the senators; Dey 2011, p. 112. On the mintworkers, Turcan (1969), pp. 948–59.

[10] Aur. Vict. *De Caes.* 35.6 cites 7,000 soldiers killed, as does *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 38.2. Malalas, *Chron.* 12, incorrectly identifies this revolt as taking place in Antioch. Doubts about the number of men killed are expressed by Dey 2011, p. 112, note 7.

given him the purple," for he had been "born to rule."[11] Aurelian's seasoned troops quashed the revolt. The insurgents were executed as well as some senators who had supported them.[12] Some later sources recalled this move as a vindictive act against senators motivated by the new emperor's need for money, but it was also a stark reminder that it was better to cooperate than to rebel.[13]

Although in 271 Rome had not fallen to the Germanic Iuthungi, the inhabitants along with their new emperor faced the task of rebuilding the city along with their relationship. They did so with remarkable speed and resourcefulness. The most visible sign of this act of restoration of the city, noticeable even to a visitor to Rome today, is the construction of a city wall, the first since the fourth century BCE. Aurelian's Wall extended for twelve miles, reaching eight meters high and 3.5 meters thick, and was reinforced at intervals of 100 Roman feet (29.6 meters) with square towers.[14] The Wall was clearly intended for defense, and it quickly took on a number of other functions such as tax collection. But I want to underscore how much Aurelian's Wall quickly redefined the city and the relationships of its inhabitants to it and to one another. As Robert Coates-Stephens aptly observed based on an archaeological case study of the Sessorium Palace in Rome (see Map 2), construction in this region now took place within the confines of Aurelian's Wall, and there is no evidence of continued civic building outside the wall.[15] Only burial sites with churches were the kinds of communal structures that we find outside the walls in the coming centuries.

The Wall concentrated human interactions within newly established confines, and developed new relations beginning with its very construction. Building the Wall required not only imperial financing but also the support of a large number of the city's inhabitants. The Senate, which had been responsible for the protection of the city a decade earlier, would have supported this fortification to protect its members and

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[11] *FHG* 4.197, ed. Müller at 10.6 in Latin reads: *Aurelianus seditione militari aliquando appetitus dixit falli milites, qui regum fata in sua se potestate habere putarent. Quippe deum, qui dator sit purpurae (quam utique dextera praetendebat), etiam annos regni definire.* Although we cannot date this military insurrection, the notion that Aurelian was chosen by the gods and hence born to rule emerges from his coins and inscriptions more widely; see especially Wienand 2015, pp. 63–99.

[12] *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 38.2–4; Aur. Vict. *De Caes.* 35.6; Zos. 1.49.2; and Malalas, *Chron.* 12.

[13] Amm. Marc. 30.8.8 underscores the tradition that this was motivated by money, as does the *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 21.5–9.

[14] Dimensions from Dey 2011, p. 19.

[15] Coates-Stephens 2012, pp. 83–110. For its impact on trade, see Malmberg 2015, pp. 196–98.

their homes.[16] Senatorial aristocrats would also have seen the advantage of a public works project that, as Hendrik Dey observed, served to "divert the energies of the masses away from more destructive avenues" by employing several thousand workers.[17] Building the Wall was a mutually beneficial decision that simultaneously restored Rome's security, boosted relations between Aurelian and the city's inhabitants, and defined how residents interacted with one another.

 Aurelian's reorganization of the food supply of the city also promoted good relations with the city's residents. Since the late republic, a number of citizens living in Rome had been granted the right, chosen by lot, of free grain. In the early empire these recipients, male adult citizens, numbered between approximately 160,000 and 180,000. They received tickets (*tesserae frumentariae*) that they and then later their heirs exchanged for monthly rations at the *Porticus Minucia Frumentaria* in the Campus Martius in Rome (see Map 2).[18] Since the recipients of the grain dole are estimated to have made up between one-fifth and one-quarter of the city's population, this public dole could not have fed the entire city, which in the first century CE is widely estimated to have reached between 700,000 and 1,000,000 inhabitants and to have continued at roughly that size into the fourth century.[19] Although the rest of Rome's inhabitants bought their grain on the private market, state-subsidized grain stabilized food prices for the residents of Rome. This reduced the potential for food shortages and rioting while also demonstrating the state's generosity. Aurelian's efforts at improving the food supply thus won him popularity while at the same time gaining greater control over suppliers and administrators. Changes in the system benefitted some of the new corporations such as the bakers, for now Aurelian distributed free bread instead of grain. Under his rule a decentralized system for the bread's distribution occurred in a variety of locations (steps or banks) across

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[16] *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 21.9, a not entirely reliable source, underscored that Aurelian's construction occurred after his having consulted with the Senate (*adhibito consilio senatus*). For the building of the wall, see also Aur. Vict. *Epit.* 35.7–9. Although the actual construction of the wall negatively affected some private estates, as can be documented, for example, for the Esquiline Hill gardens, the advantages to the propertied classes must have outweighed the concerns of those few. We do not know if the owners of affected estates were compensated for their losses.

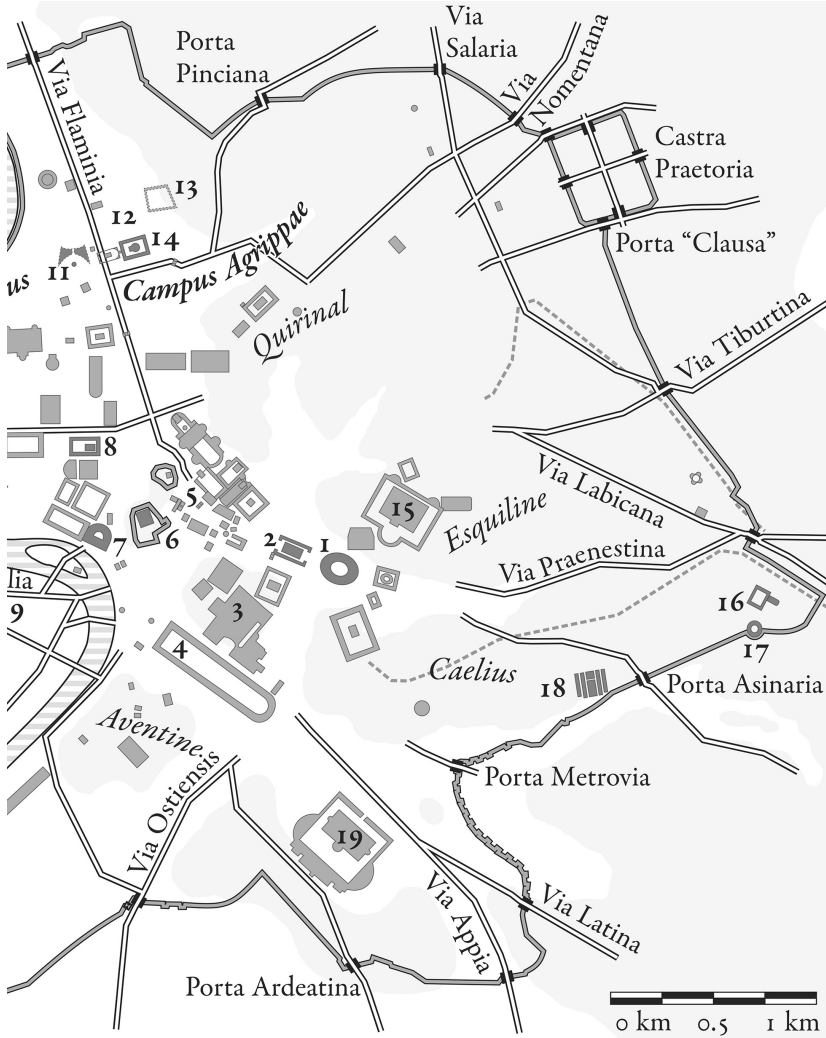[17] Dey 2011, p. 113.   [18] For the grain dole and its recipients, see Virlouvet 1995 and 2000.

[19] Estimates about the size of the population are based on the grain dole. See Lo Cascio 2000, pp. 57–59, and Lo Cascio 1999, pp. 178–82 for estimates of 650,000–700,000. For the assumption that the grain supply and hence the population was relatively stable into the fourth century, see Vaccaro 2013, pp. 262–65, and Virlouvet 2000, p. 103 with bibliography. These numbers are widely but not uniformly accepted. For a succinct discussion of population estimates, see Morley 2013, pp. 29–44, and Sessa 2018, p. 54.

ROME IN 275

1. Colosseum
2. Temple of Venus & Roma
3. Palatine
4. Circus Maximus
5. Forum & Imperial Fora
6. Capitol
7. Theater of Marcellus
8. Porticus Minucia Frumentaria
9. Excubitorium cohortis
   VII vigilum
10. Mausoleum of Hadrian
11. Augustan sundial & obelisk
12. Forum Suarium?
13. Castra Urbana
14. Temple of Sol
15. Baths of Trajan
16. Sessorium Palace
17. Amphitheatrum Castrense
18. Castra Equitum Singularium
19. Baths of Caracalla

Map by Ian Mladjov

Map 2 Rome in 275.

the city. This also facilitated crowd control. Finally, Aurelian added free pork for those on the dole and sold wine at subsidized prices to the population at large.[20]

[20] For Aurelian's reorganization, see *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 48.1; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 35.7; and *Chronographus a.* 354, ed Mommsen, 1892, MGH AA 9, p. 148. For the "steps" or banks, see *Th. Cod.* 14.17.2, 364 CE, and 14.17.3, 368 CE. It seems unlikely that the bread and pork were provided for the entire population. On this see too Machado 2019, pp. 45–61.

Porta
Pinciana

Via
Salaria

Via Flaminia

Via Nomentana

Castra
Praetoria

Porta "Clausa"

13

12

14

11

us

Campus Agrippae

Quirinal

Via Tiburtina

8

5,

6

7

2 1

Esquiline

15

Via Labicana

Via Praenestina

16

17

Porta Asinaria

lia

9

3

4

Caelius

18

Aventine

Via Ostiensis

Porta Metrovia

19

Via Appia

Via Latina

Porta Ardeatina

0 km   0.5   1 km

Map 2 (cont.)

The administration of this restructured and expanded food dole fell to
a large degree upon Roman senatorial aristocrats, whose oversight of aspects
of the supply system opened up exceptional avenues for their own economic
and political gain. This reorganization resulted in a consolidation of power
among the praetorian prefects, the provincial governors, and the urban
prefects of Rome, all of whom were senators whose appointments were

approved by the emperor.[21] But the urban prefect was the key official in Rome held responsible for the food supply. When the price of wine was too high or the grain ships did not arrive on time in Rome's port, he faced murderously angry crowds who could burn down his home or do real bodily harm.[22] Despite these potential dangers, senatorial involvement in this reorganized system offered unmatched opportunities to augment their wealth and political prestige. Dedicatory inscriptions survive that underscore the patron–client networks that developed between urban prefects and the guilds of Rome's food suppliers, such as the bakers, pork suppliers, and wholesale dealers.[23] These ties offered real financial rewards as well since senatorial urban prefects were often also the owners of estates in Italy and North Africa that supplied the grain, pork, and wine for the city, either to the private markets or to the state.[24]

Aurelian also strove to secure the loyalty of senators through his religious patronage. Aurelian attributed his success to a deity associated with military victory, *Sol Invictus* (The Unconquered Sun), for whom he built a new and magnificent temple in the Campus Agrippae (where he also conveniently stored the wine that he now distributed at reduced prices).[25] Once more, senators took a leading role, accepting appointments as *pontifices Solis*.[26]

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[21] Machado 2019, pp. 30–61.

[22] The urban prefect was blamed for famines or food or wine shortages; see Amm. Marc. 14.6.1; and 19.10.1–4 for the prefect Tertullus who during a food shortage in 359 calmed the angry crowd by showing his young boys; see Cracco Ruggini 1961, pp. 152–76 for a full list of food shortages. In 409, a hungry mob murdered the urban prefect, Pompeianus 2, *PLRE* 2, p. 897–98.

[23] Honorary inscriptions of corporations to the twice urban prefect, L. Aradius Valerius Proculus and the urban prefect Attius Insteius Tertullus survive; see *CIL* 6.1690, *CIL* 6.1692, and *CIL* 6.1693. For the career of Proculus, see Salzman and Roberts 2015, p. 16 on Symm. *Ep.* 1.3.4 and Populonius 11, *PLRE* 1, pp. 747–49, urban prefect 337–38 and 351–52. For Attius Insteius Tertullus, urban prefect in 307–08, see Tertullus 6, *PLRE* 1, pp. 883–84. For more on these networks, see Machado 2019, p. 47 especially.

[24] For more on the ties between private sales and the food supply, see Vaccaro 2013, pp. 262–65 with bibliography. See too my discussion in Chapters 2 and 3. For the estates of senators in Italy and Southern Italy, see Vera 2005, pp. 26–30; for Sicily, see Vaccaro 2013, pp. 265–72; in North Africa, see Salzman 2002, pp. 93–96 for the fourth century and Conant 2012, pp. 135–42, for Romano-African estate owners who flourished into the fifth-century Vandal period.

[25] The Temple of *Sol* is well attested: see *Chron* of 354, ed. Mommsen 1892, 1981 rept., p. 148: *templum Solis et castra in campo Agrippae dedicavit [Aurelian]*; Aur. Vict. 35.7: *His tot tantisque prospere gestis fanum Romae Soli magnificum constituit donariis ornans opulenti*; *Hist. Aug. Aur.* 25.6: *templum Solis fundavit*; 48.4: *in porticibus templi Solis fiscalia vina ponuntur*. See *LTUR s.v. Sol, Templum*, pp. 331–32 and Salzman 2020A, pp. 149–67, for its identification as the Temple of *Sol Invictus*.

[26] So, for example, he appointed the senator Iunius Gallienus, *CIL* 14.2082, from Lavinium (Latium), as *pontifex dei Solis invicti*. See Rüpke 2008, 65, p. 386; Salzman 2020A, pp. 149–67; and more broadly, Hijmans 2010, pp. 381–427.

Under Aurelian and afterward, the new priestly college of *Sol Invictus* and the new solar temple to this deity became a focus of senatorial aristocratic activity. As one more sign of his outreach, Aurelian chose a western senatorial aristocrat to share the consulship with him in 271 and allowed two others to hold the office in 272.[27] The consulship was still the highest magistracy in the empire, although this still-prestigious honor, bestowed by the emperor, had lost any real political or military function. Its recipients, however, gained significant prestige and influence.[28]

Given the ways in which Aurelian restored his ties to Rome and its senatorial aristocracy, it is not surprising that Aurelian or his supporters could find no better reward for his defeated enemy Tetricus than to make him a senator, and some later accounts claim that he married the vanquished queen Zenobia to a Roman senator.[29] For his respect for senators as well as his critical role in the fortification of the city, Aurelian was remembered with some admiration by the pro-senatorial fourth-century author of the *Augustan History* despite his harsh repression of the insurgents who had greeted his arrival in the city at the beginning of his regime.[30]

We should also appreciate how Roman elites – senators and the military in the urban cohorts – along with non-elites, worked with Aurelian to restore the city. Aurelian offered incentives, material – wall, temple, food – and metaphysical – honor and priesthoods – to support an emperor who was divinely legitimated as one "born to rule." Senators seized upon these new opportunities for honor and office, undertaking civic patronage roles along with making real economic gains. Religion was especially relevant for this relationship. The emperor, elites, and non-elites used religion to create a new "topography of devotion" for Sol Invictus in the city.[31]

Yet the resilience of Roman senators at this critical juncture and the building of a wall with long-term implications for the survival of the city have not received enough attention. This situation is due, in part, to the brevity of Aurelian's reign, less than five years. But it also is true because the

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[27] Potter 2004, pp. 265 and 270.

[28] For the consulship in late antiquity, see Bagnall, Cameron, Schwartz, and Worp 1987, pp. 1–6.

[29] For Tetricus receiving senatorial status and an office after his surrender, see Aur. Vict. 35.5; Eutr. *Brev*. 9.13. *Hist. Aug. Aurelian* 39.1 claims he held the office of *corrector Lucaniae*, while the *Hist. Aug. Tyr. Trig*. 24.5 says that Tetricus received the office of *corrector totius Italiae*. Doubts about the veracity of this account as the result of Aurelianic propaganda do not diminish the fact that senatorial status was offered as a means of bribing this rebel emperor. For Zenobia wed to a Roman senator, see Zon. 12.27 [607], ed. Banchich and Lane, 2009, p. 60.

[30] *Hist. Aug. Aur*. 42.4 notes that he was deified; and 50.5: *populus eum Romanus amavit, senatus et timuit*.

[31] "Topography of devotion" is a phrase used by Moralee 2018, p. 42.

resurgence of Rome even before Constantine does not fit easily into narratives of "decline and fall." Nor do many modern historians fully appreciate that the city of Rome remained central to the material and political survival of the Roman Empire. That is where this book begins, for newer work on the city of Rome requires rethinking its position in the Mediterranean in late antiquity.

The Influence of the City of Rome on Its Mediterranean Empire

This book focuses on the city of Rome and not on a subset of cities or on the western Roman Empire writ large because the city's influence had shaped the outlines of its Mediterranean empire. The city of Rome was a nexus of political, cultural, and social networks that the Romans had developed to assert their control of the Mediterranean. Importantly, the "city" – as Rome was called – remained into late antiquity, in the words of Robert Markus, "the head, centre and sum of the world; the world was only the expanded version of the city."[32] This equivalency was possible because, as Lucy Grig trenchantly observed:

> Where "Roma" is involved there is always a certain ambivalence: Rome is not just an *urbs* [city], even the *urbs* ([the city,] as she was for so many of her inhabitants): there is always slippage between the city and the idea, *urbs* and *imperium, urbs* and *orbis.* The city of Rome was both symbol and society, material and immaterial, its topography both symbolically redolent and endlessly polyvalent.[33]

This situation was also true in late antiquity. Aurelian's Wall was both a material and immaterial statement of the city's centrality as an urban as well as a Mediterranean-wide imperial hub into the late Roman period down though the late sixth century CE.

The city of Rome continued to exercise a centripetal attraction for elites and non-elites alike. In large part because of Rome's role as the capital of the empire, "the ruling elite invested the spoils of imperialism in the urban environment, and migrants flocked to service their needs and gain a share of the empire's wealth; but the elite made this investment precisely because of the importance of the city in establishing and maintaining their power. Rome's greatness was itself a crucial element of the ideology that sustained Roman rule."[34] The migration of men and women to Rome that replenished the city's population provided labor for the building projects that elites and the state initiated. The city – with its monuments and topography, its "free

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[32] Markus 1970, p. 26.   [33] Grig 2012, p. 127.   [34] Morley 2013, p. 29.

bread and circuses" – provided the empire's inhabitants "a template for a new way of life that the Romans eagerly put before the eyes of their subjects, current and prospective."[35]

To meet the demands of its capital city with its exceptionally large population, the Romans had developed an economy and trade network as well as social and political structures that extended across the Mediterranean.[36] In a pretechnological age, meeting the demands for resources as well as for labor to support a city of this size was an impressive feat. Feeding Rome required tremendous organizational skills as well. The public grain dole, the reorganization of which I discussed as part of Aurelian's response to crisis, provides a good example of how much the Roman state and its elites invested not just money and manpower but also prestige in the special status and size of the city of Rome. There is a strong note of pride in this accomplishment, evidenced when, for example, the first-century senator Pliny the Elder concluded that "no city in the whole world . . . could be compared to Rome in magnitude."[37] Although the public grain dole fed fewer than a quarter or a fifth of its inhabitants, the networks of state-supported trade that coexisted with private merchants drew on grain from Egypt, North Africa, and Italy to supply the city allowed the population to grow to this unprecedented size.

Rome's complex food supply system continued into late antiquity, making Rome still, from the fourth through the sixth century of this study, the largest city in the western Mediterranean. Rome's unique status continued even after Constantine established Constantinople as an imperial capital, to which he channeled Egyptian grain after 332.[38] The Roman market compensated for this change with a marked growth in the agricultural output from Sicily and other Italian regions. Thus, as has become increasingly clear from recent archaeological studies of Sicily, Apulia, Campania, and Sardinia, a newly established corn belt in these areas in the fourth century, thriving alongside trade from Carthage and North Africa, maintained the overall features of the food supply of Rome and its public grain dole that had developed in the early empire and in the late third century.[39] Moreover, there is evidence, such as the improvement of Sicily's road network, that the

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[35] Dey 2015, p. 2. For Rome's fame as a source of "bread and circuses," see succinct accounts in Erdkamp 2013, pp. 262–77 and Virlouvet 2000, pp. 103–35; and on games, see Purcell 2013, pp. 441–60.

[36] Morley 1996, pp. 33–39.   [37] Pliny the Elder, *Hist. Nat.* 3.5.67.

[38] Vaccaro 2013, p. 267. On Constantinople and the channeling of Egyptian grain to the eastern city, see Socr. *HE* 2.13.

[39] Vaccaro 2013, p. 267; Panella et al. 2010, p. 58.

Roman aristocracy "made increasing financial investments in southern Italy and Sicily from the late second and third [centuries CE], which accelerated in the fourth."[40] This late Roman development continued into the fifth century, allowing Roman aristocrats to feed Rome and grow wealthier still as they invested in estates in Sicily as well as in urban properties in and around the city of Rome.

Given that Rome was so deeply embedded in economic, political, and social networks around the Mediterranean, what happened there made a difference across the empire. That is one reason why I focus on the city in this book. Though its monopolistic and privileged assertion of being "the" capital of the empire no longer stood unchallenged, given the rise of Constantinople and the reality that emperors no longer resided for long periods in Rome, the city and its aristocracy continued to shape the political, economic, social, and religious life of Mediterranean society. The eastern court and emperor were aware of their influence and resources. Indeed, the notion that the empire had simply split into two halves beginning with Constantine's establishment of Constantinople cannot be sustained: Politics, then as now, went beyond the local. On the contrary, the reemergence of strong ties between the eastern and western emperors and elites was especially critical in the sixth century. Even after the Gothic War when eastern Romans (i.e. Byzantines) ruled in Italy and the city declined as an urban center that attracted wealthy elites, the memory of Rome as an imperial capital remained.[41]

Given the ongoing significance of the city of Rome from the fourth through the sixth centuries, it is understandable that emperors, generals, and senators, along with bishops, continued to demonstrate their concern for the city as well as to manifest their own power and prestige by taking action in response to the crises faced by the inhabitants of Rome. The good ruler was expected to invest in the city both materially – as Aurelian had done by building his wall and temple to Sol Invictus – and also on a human level by establishing personal ties with Roman senatorial aristocrats. Consequently, non-elites returned to the city as well. Tradespeople, laborers, and migrants came back to Rome in search of opportunities and sources of support that were not available in other cities. However, these recovery efforts have not attracted adequate attention.

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[40] Vaccaro 2013, p. 268; Vera 2005, pp. 206–9.
[41] For the use of the term Byzantine to distinguish eastern Roman forces from Italo-Roman ones in Italy, see Chapter 6, note 23.

Paradigms for Rome: Catastrophists, Transformationalists, and World Historians

To better appreciate why the resilience of Rome's civic elites and their continuing role in the recovery of the city have been underappreciated, I will briefly discuss the historiography on the "decline and fall" of Rome paradigm and its most important modern alternatives. I then turn to my approach to the study of Rome and its elites.

As I argue, to fully understand the resilience of Rome, we have to consider the role of its senatorial aristocracy, who were the products of a culture in which competition for influence and prestige acted as a stimulant. Crises brought about changes in the late Roman world that rendered politics in the late antique city more diffuse and variable. Personal relations played an even greater role than they had previously in winning power and building social networks that enabled material and political advancement. This competition energized rather than enervated senatorial aristocrats during the last three centuries of the western empire. At times, it is true, their actions led to downturns and failure. But their intervention also allowed for the recovery of urban life and society, both of which have been overshadowed by the assumptions that come with alternative paradigms for understanding the end of late antique Rome.

The Shadow of Edward Gibbon. Since the publication of Gibbon's history in the late eighteenth century, historians have engaged in a lively debate about the utility of his paradigm of "decline and fall" to describe the last centuries of the western Roman Empire, from the early fourth through the late sixth centuries. Although Gibbon decided to extend his history into the fifteenth century and to include the fall of Byzantium, his view of the fall of the western Roman Empire has remained influential. As he said in the conclusion to his seven-volume work, his history describes the "triumph of barbarism and Christianity."[42] Indeed, to his mind, these external factors acted on Rome with the force of biological necessity: "The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay: the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest."[43] Few, if any, modern historians would agree with Gibbon that Christianity sapped the spirit and resources the empire needed to face its challenges, for, as N. H. Baynes and A. H. M. Jones observed long ago, Christianity thrived alongside the eastern Roman Empire for centuries after the end of the western imperial system.[44] But Gibbon's ghost lives on.

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[42] Gibbon, ed. Bury, vol. 7, 1897, p. 321.   [43] Gibbon, ed. Bury, vol. 4, 1897, p. 161.
[44] Baynes 1943, pp. 29–35. Jones 1964, chapter 25.

Bryan Ward-Perkins, in his provocatively titled book *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, and Peter Heather, in *The Fall of Rome*, are among the most influential historians who have revived Edward Gibbon's paradigm insofar as both emphasize the external impact of the "barbarians" – the Germanic incursions in the case of Ward-Perkins, and the Hunnic invasions in the case of Heather – as the primary cause of the "end of civilization."[45] A popular strain in Anglophone scholarship has continued to focus on the weakness of the Roman military in confronting German invaders.[46] More recently, some scholars have incorporated the impact of climate change and disease to explain the decline of Rome's western empire without fully considering their impact on the eastern empire.[47] None of these narratives has moved away from a view of an empire more or less "fated" to decline and fall; differing emphases highlight and even add new elements to an old paradigm. Scholars have sometimes used the term *catastrophist* to describe what I regard as a neo-Gibbonian viewpoint insofar as they see the fall of the western Roman Empire as the result of catastrophic, destructive, and disruptive forces that brought about an end to Roman "civilization."

This "decline and fall" perspective is famously at odds with an alternative understanding of this period proposed by historians influenced especially by the work of the historian Peter Brown. These *transformationalists* have argued for the ongoing vitality of Rome's culture and institutions by stressing "change, continuity, and transformation over collapse."[48] Brown's work has inspired a generation of scholars who particularly emphasize innovations and continuities in religion and culture that gave new life to the society and institutions in the Roman Empire, West and East. The rise of Christianity in Europe and of Islam in the Near East are perhaps the primary positive developments of this era.[49] So, for example, Peter Brown sees the bishop's role in caring for the poor and the development of an ideal of Christian charity as revolutionary advancements quite distinct from traditional forms of civic patronage or euergetism (elite gift-giving or civic philanthropy).[50] Other scholars have emphasized continuities that led to innovation. So, for example, Alan Cameron has brilliantly considered how Christian writers continued to use classical education and rhetoric to craft new Christian literary works such as the mid fourth-century traditional epico-panegyrical

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[45] Ward-Perkins 2005; Heather 2006, especially pp. 443–59.
[46] See, for example, Goldsworthy 2009, p. 149.   [47] Harper 2017, p. 33.   [48] Dey 2015, p. 5.
[49] Brown 1971, p. 7. This book has been widely influential in developing the transformationalist view.
[50] Brown 2002, p. 11; and 2012, pp. 79–81.

poem of the aristocratic woman Proba, which is stitched together with lines from Vergil's *Aeneid* to praise Christ.[51]

An alternative to these perspectives has been taken more recently by what I call proponents of a world-historical paradigm. Mark Humphries, inspired by the work of the anthropologist Jack Goody, has proposed that we should dismiss both the "decline and fall" paradigm and the "transformationalist" one as the "western theft" of history. Relying on Goody's arguments that historians have "taken the experiences of Europe as the central framework within which the totality of history is interpreted" and that there is an implicit western bias that history progresses in an essentially upward curve, Humphries proposes that we consider developments in late antiquity against a world-historical background. Hence, we should, for example, study barbarian invasions or geopolitical politics across Eurasia from the third through the eighth centuries and not restrict ourselves to the Mediterranean world.[52] Taking a similarly broad view of time and geography, Walter Scheidel has argued that the fall of Rome was "the best thing that ever happened, clearing the path for Europe's economic rise and the making of the modern age" by the sheer fact of the Empire's "going away and never coming back."[53] Scheidel's work ranges from Roman times down through the Napoleonic era and is broadly comparative, making connections, for example, between Rome, Byzantium, and China.

These three paradigms have shaped studies of other late antique cities as well, from Antioch and Constantinople to Ravenna and Rome. Indeed, this development is understandable since scholars of late antiquity generally agree that late Roman cities are not just mirrors of ancient society but are also a "valuable gauge of broader patterns of cultural evolution."[54] So for catastrophists like J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, the demise of key elements of Roman urban life – be it the decline of civic councils, the private patronage of amphitheaters and baths, or the disappearance of high-quality imported pottery – is a valid indicator of the end of the Roman city.[55] The demise of these institutions reflects the fracturing of networks of trade and communication that had made urban life possible and profitable. Gian Pietro Brogiolo and Bryan Ward-Perkins, catastrophists as well, argue that changes in urban life, except for the late antique Christianization of the city, are best described as the "dissolution of a sophisticated and impressive experiment in how to order society – an experiment developed by the Greeks and Romans."[56]

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[51] Cameron 2011, pp. 327–37 of late antiquity.

[52] Humphries 2017, pp. 18–19, citing Goody 2006, pp. 13–25 and Goody 2010, especially pp. 115–26.

[53] Scheidel 2019, blurb and p. 503 for quote.   [54] Dey 2015, p. 7.

[55] See Liebeschuetz 2003, pp. 104–36 especially; and Christie 2011, for example, on baths, pp. 112–40.

[56] Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins 1999, pp. XV–XVI.

In opposition to this view, transformationalists emphasize innovation and continuity in urban phenomena. Although these scholars acknowledge a decline in population or the fracturing of trade networks, along with losses of material wealth overtaking a city that had fallen in a siege, transformationalists focus instead on the maintenance of urban life such as the continued use and repair of infrastructures like aqueducts or the presence of circuit-walls. As art historian Hendrik Dey observed, "many of the leading urban nuclei of the Roman period continued to be characterized in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages by a relative concentration of population, by new kinds of monumental and domestic architecture, by continued signs of political, economic, and cult activity, and also by the continuing presence of the most prominent members of society."[57] For Dey, the building of monumental colonnades, as can still be seen in cities like Antioch or as existed in Milan, represents distinctive innovations characteristic of late antique cities.[58] The construction of monumental churches across the Mediterranean in connection with the veneration of saints, as analyzed by Ann Marie Yasin, provides another example of an innovative transformation in the late antique city with important implications for the patterns of social life.[59] While admitting that there is tremendous variation in the survival of particular cities and regions in late antiquity, transformationalists like Dey and Yasin nonetheless emphasize innovations and continuities as indicators of the vitality of urban life in late antiquity, in the West as well as in the East.[60]

The third paradigm for understanding the Roman Empire within a world-historical context has also been applied to cities in late antiquity. So, for example, Neil Christie for Italy and Adam Rogers for Britain have suggested that we see the city in the late antique period within a longer arc of history as but one stage in settlement patterns that go back to pre-Roman times.[61] If we consider the late Roman phase of a city like London over this longer time frame, its late antique phase would be but one in a long arc of time, a perspective that would encourage London's comparison with cities across the Eurasian continent. To focus on a particular period is to admit a subjective choice that does not address the full history of a city.[62] The notion that late antique cities can be studied in a global and comparative framework is also recognized by Mark Humphries in his 2019 survey on the late Roman city.[63]

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[57] Dey 2015, p. 8.   [58] Dey 2015, pp. 65–126.   [59] Yasin 2009, especially pp. 14–97.
[60] Dey 2015, pp. 9–10 and note 28 for bibliography.
[61] N. Christie 2006, p. 185; on Britain, Adam Rogers 2011, pp. 47–72; 177–79.
[62] Humphries 2019, pp. 86–87 makes this point.   [63] Humphries 2019, pp. 86–88 and note 382.

Resilience and Resurgence in the Face of Crisis: An Alternative Perspective

I offer this schematic summary of the dominant paradigms in modern historiography on the "falls" of Rome – the city and its western empire – to provide context for my own perspective on the evidence from the city of Rome. I have learned much from them and from the writings of other scholars. But I have been moved to write this book because no one of these approaches captures the contingencies, choices, and resourcefulness with which individuals and groups faced the political and military crises that they encountered in late antique Rome.

The alternative paradigm that I offer sees the recovery and rebuilding of Rome after crisis as the response of elites – emperors, senators, generals, and bishops. Admittedly, the resurgence of Rome in the fifth century took place within the context of diminished horizons, with fewer people and less wealth. Nonetheless, the actions of Roman elites in relation to one another shaped the city's recovery, for better or for worse. Although the power of different elites fluctuated, the senatorial aristocracy remained at the center of the city's resurgence, and as a group, senators and the Senate increased their power over the course of these centuries. So, too, did the influence of the bishops grow, but their role in the resurgence of the city was far less than many have suggested. The most destructive transformation of the city of Rome, in terms of public life, occurred only after the disappearance of the senatorial aristocracy and its focalizing institution, the Senate, in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

Although I focus on the resilience of elites in response to crisis, I am keenly aware that it is not enough to simply narrate what happened in Rome over these centuries. As Aldous Huxley observed in the opening epigram to this chapter, not just the event but also the process by which we make meaning of the event and then act on this experience is relevant. At times, the ways in which Romans experienced and understood a crisis led them to make new relationships or to engage in structural change. So, for example, when the senator Petronius Maximus, one of the wealthiest and most honored of men in mid fifth-century Rome, chose to compete for power by plotting the murders of the general Aetius and then of the emperor Valentinian III, he brought about the fall of the last successful imperial dynasty in the West and the sack of Rome three months later. Petronius's political power was great. However, he miscalculated when he chose to betroth his son to Valentinian's daughter, a girl already engaged to the son of the Vandal King Geiseric.[64] Geiseric used these

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[64] For the career of Petronius Maximus, see *PLRE* 2, pp. 749–51. For the plot, see Priscus, *Frag.* 30.1 = John of Antioch, Frag. 201, ed. Blockley 1983, pp. 326–32. See also Marcellinus *comes*, s.a. 455 (3);

actions as a pretext for attacking Rome in 455. The Vandal occupation of the city for fourteen days was one of the most ruinous events that Romans had faced.[65] Thus Petronius's interpretation of his position led him to take actions that led to the fall of Rome in 455, a crisis that ultimately strengthened the ties between Roman senators and the German general Ricimer (see Chapters 4 and 5).

If we view the world as the Romans at the time did and consider how individuals and groups reacted to these and other events that they themselves regarded as crises, we can see that senators, emperors, bishops, and generals also interpreted these events as opportunities to advance their own positions or viewpoints. Roman elites in these centuries demonstrated what social scientists call *resilience*, defined as the marshalling of resources to reorganize and restore social formations even in the face of fractures and swerves. Although social scientists have developed this model to analyze environmental shocks on societies or to consider state-level interventions to mitigate the consequences of catastrophic events like plagues or earthquakes, I use the term *resilience* to consider how Roman elites adapted to the shocks from political and military crises that overtook the city of Rome during the last three centuries of its existence. Thus I follow those scholars who study how the "resilience of a society affects other groups and institutions within the same society", and acknowledge that the burden of recovery and its costs are not shared equally.[66]

Part of society's resilience, I would add, is making meaning of events to initiate action. Hence, my history of the last centuries of the city of Rome emphasizes the humans who led the city's responses. I consider their efforts as social resilience. This view makes the history of Rome more dependent on human actors, and therefore the "falls" of Rome are more circuitous and circumstantial than the catastrophist paradigm suggests. Rome depended upon leaders who could absorb shocks and marshal resources to bring about

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and my discussion in Chapter 4. By forcing Valentinian's widow to marry him and engaging his son to Valentinian's daughter, Petronius gave reasons for the Vandal King Gaiseric to attack.

[65] See my discussion in Chapter 4.

[66] Izdebski, Mordechai, and White 2018, p. 291. There is a vast and growing bibliography on resilience that traces its origins in environmental history into the social sciences. But I am using the term resilience as a historian to focus on the social responses to political and military shocks. For discussion of the ways in which this term has been used, see, for example, Izdebski, Mordechai, and White 2018, pp. 291–303; Folke 2006, pp. 253–367; and for sound criticism of how historians should apply resilience as a concept, see especially Sessa 2019, pp. 211–55. I thank Kristina Sessa for bringing to my attention the associations of this term for social scientists involved in assessing environmental catastrophes. That is not, however, how I am using this term.

the city's recovery. Over these centuries, the senatorial aristocrats remained in this position, as did the bishops of the city to varying degrees.

While I emphasize the resilience of Roman elites in response to crises, the catastrophist paradigm focuses on these same political and military events and sees them as setting the city and its inhabitants on an ever-downward, virtually unavoidable spiral. This approach has thus underestimated the political and economic strength of Romans and their institutions, including the Senate, over the *longue durée*. So, for example, rather than dismiss the delegation sent in 476 from the Senate of Rome to the eastern emperor Zeno that asserted that one emperor in the East was enough as merely the ineffectual actions of a weak institution manipulated by a strong general, Odoacer, I argue that the embassy was an expression of the changed political goals of still powerful and wealthy western senators.[67]

Certainly, the textual and archaeological evidence indicates that the city of Rome suffered periodic losses and disruptions in both population and trade over the centuries I cover in this book. However, we are, at best, able to only estimate the extent of loss of any crisis on a human scale. Even such basic information as the population of Rome, as I noted earlier, is approximated primarily on the basis of textual references to the grain dole. If we accept these calculations, then the population of the city of Rome declined from its high of between 700,000 and 1,000,000 residents in the early fourth century to between 300,000 and 500,000 in the mid fifth century.[68] Yet how much the city decreased in size after this can only be estimated.[69]

Even in a city that faced a sharply declining population, there is ample evidence of rebuilding and restoration after crisis. Although ongoing political and military crises in the second half of the fifth century hampered recovery, the city of Rome remained at the center of late Roman political and aristocratic society. And it was also the home of the bishop of Rome.

No one of the crises discussed in this book brought about the catastrophic end of Rome. An important set of papers that tried to assess the damages of the sack of Rome in 410 showed, in place after place in the city, the limited impact of this attack despite the fact that it had radically shocked contemporaries since it had been the first time in more than eight hundred years that the city had "fallen to barbarians."[70] Hence, in opposition to the neo-Gibbonian perspective, I see ample evidence that

[67] Malchus *Frag.* 14., ed. Blockley 1983, pp. 418–21.
[68] For the calculations for the mid fifth century, see my discussion in Chapters 3 and 4.
[69] The sixth-century city lacks the information for the grain dole that we have for the mid fifth century. See my discussion in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, note 121; cf. Sessa 2018, p. 54.
[70] See the essays in Lipps, Machado, and von Rummel 2013.

losses in population and trade after this occupation of the city did not destroy urban life. Even the disruptions to the grain supply of the city after the Vandal sack of 455 were met with new sources of food, as more recent work on agricultural production in Sicily and southern Italy, along with Sardinia, has indicated.[71] These sources of food continued to feed Rome's smaller urban population in the ensuing decades.

At the same time, the loss of control of the western Roman provinces of Gaul, Spain, Africa, and Britain over the course of the first half of the fifth century brought significant changes in society and politics. Evidence from excavations of elite housing in Rome, as that on the Esquiline Hill, as well as from texts that document charitable gifts to the church indicate that by the late fifth century, a number of large urban homes had been broken up into smaller housing units, reused for commercial purposes, or donated to the church.[72] These are significant transformations that reflect changed dynamics in the economic, political, and social life of the city. Some of these changes were the result of the ruptures created by the political and military crises that we hear about from late Roman writers.

Because I want to take into account the harsh breaks created by certain crises, I cannot fully align with the transformation paradigm. Not all changes led to new or positive developments. The abandonment of certain villas or apartment buildings, for instance, is evidence that their owners either had died or had deemed rebuilding as not a viable option. The owners of the Esquiline Treasury never returned to their home to reclaim their wealth and social position.[73] People did die and suffer when Rome was taken captive; I can well believe that the enslavement of Romans brought tears to the eyes of the bishop Deogratias when he saw them in Carthage after the Vandal capture of the city in 455.[74] If we focus only on developments in religion and culture, as many scholars who fall under what is generally described as the transformation paradigm tend to do, we miss sight of critically important economic, military, and political as well as institutional changes.

Nonetheless, my approach aligns more with that of scholars who focus on change over rupture. And like scholars associated with the transformation paradigm, I see the responses to crisis by Romans over these centuries as leading to the recovery and resurgence of Rome, even if this meant the loss, for example, of freedom of movement for men and women in certain professions,

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[71] Vaccaro 2013, pp. 259–313 for analysis with bibliography.

[72] Machado 2012B, pp. 120–21; Salzman 2017, p. 251; and Machado 2019, pp. 261–69.

[73] On the owners of the Esquiline Treasure likely buried in the early fifth century, see Cameron 1985, pp. 135–45.

[74] Vict. Vit. *Hist*. 1.25, *MGH AA* 3, p. 7. Trans. by Moorhead 1992.

or the increasing insistence on forced religious orthodoxy.[75] Nor do I think we can easily assess the history of Rome in simple terms of upward or downward progress over these centuries, as is implied by these paradigms. So, for example, the civic ideals that justified free food for certain Roman citizens as their right were in a dialectical relationship with the Christian idea of distributing food to those in need as the embodiment of the virtue of charity. This complex of justifications for the continuation of Rome's grain dole is emblematic of the limitations of approaching this period through either the lens of Christian innovation or through one of catastrophic administrative rupture.[76] The Romans who maintained the city's free food supply based their actions on a combination of motivating factors.

The third paradigm for Rome, one that locates the city within a world-historical framework, cannot explain the resilience of the city in terms of individuals and groups. There is value in this macro-historical approach, but the loss of granularity obscures the agency of individual men and women whose actions in response to crises were based on specific circumstances and decisions. So, too, this macro-historical approach is not adequate for considering how different segments of society, such as the bishops, interacted with one another. Hence, this third paradigm will not provide insight into the ways in which these specific Romans demonstrated resilience in late antiquity, nor will it explain how they were able reshape urban life in the face of events that our sources regarded as crises.

The Senatorial Aristocracy of Rome

Key to the resilience of the city was the senatorial aristocracy of Rome. As legitimators of political authority and as wealthy landed estate owners, their power increased from the late third century onward. Emperors as well as military commanders sought to integrate them in support of their rule. Indeed, to comprehend this dynamic, it is essential to appreciate the economic resources, social prestige, political power, and cultural values of Roman senatorial aristocrats.

These individuals owed their social status in no small part to their wealth. Senatorial wealth was based, in general in the Roman Empire, on extensive landownership. But importantly, senators reinforced their economic and social standing in society by holding high office. These offices allowed

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[75] For growing limits on certain professions, such as bakers and pork suppliers in the third and fourth centuries, see Bond 2016, pp. 160–61.

[76] For this dialectic, see Salzman 2017B, pp. 65–85.

them to protect and transmit from generation to generation both their inherited landed wealth and certain senatorial status distinctions that elevated the members of senatorial families above the rest of society. From the second century on, ambitious sons of senators who had attained the requisite high political office held the title of *clarissimus* ("most outstanding").[77] Their wives and daughters also held this title, but, of course, women could not attend meetings of the Senate.[78] Thus, central to senatorial status since the late republic and continuing into the early imperial period was the attainment of a political office that allowed one the full benefits of senatorial rank, such as the right to sit in the Senate in Rome.[79]

Certain families took great pride in continuing a tradition of public service. Those families that had attained the consulship were distinguished as "noble" (*nobiles*) into the fourth century.[80] Aristocrats not only boasted of their ancestors who had been consuls; they also proudly displayed painted portraits of their ancestors in their homes and traced their family trees back for centuries.[81] The pervasive concern for senatorial status continued to motivate members of established senatorial families to seek high office even though we see under Constantine and in the fourth century that the sons of senators in Rome inherited the title of *clarissimus* and, once approved by the Senate, became senators in Rome. Nonetheless, to realize the full benefits of senatorial status and to fulfill aristocratic expectations, aristocratic families strove to have their members attain a senatorial office; the higher the office, the higher the senatorial standing of the man and his family. Roman senatorial aristocrats passed this distinction on to their heirs and sought to establish ties with members in collateral family lines. These distinctions were formalized with higher senatorial rank by the later fourth century (see Chapter 2).

Based on senatorial status, a senatorial aristocrat could claim not just material wealth and a high office but also more general social prestige.

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[77] If Weisweiler 2020, pp. 29–56, is correct, only sons who were going to engage in a civic career were given the honor of being called either "most outstanding youths" (*clarissimi iuvenes*) or "most outstanding boys" (*clarissimi pueri*).

[78] Women were called *clarissimae feminae* from the second century on; see also Weisweiler 2020, pp. 42–44 with bibliography.

[79] Salzman 2020, pp. 251–94 for an overview; and see also Weisweiler 2020, pp. 29–56, for full bibliography on the early empire.

[80] On the definition of the term "noble" (*nobilis*) based on this and a narrow range of high offices in the fourth century, see Barnes 1974, p. 446, and for counterarguments, see Salzman 2002, p. 22.

[81] For his proud presentation of family busts in the atrium of his wife's house, see Symm. *Ep.* 1.2. For ancestral portraits considered part of a Roman house according to earlier law, see Flower 1996, pp. 40–47.

Senators were assumed to possess good noble birth, high moral character, and a good education. As Symmachus said, the members of the senatorial aristocracy comprised "the better part of the human race."[82] And this continued to be the widely shared view. Similarly, the sixth-century senator Cassiodorus connected a noble family and other superior personal qualities or characteristics, such as education, to public service: "Ancestry itself is already glorious: praise has its origins in noble birth. For you, the advent of life is likewise the beginning of public office."[83] To a Roman, at the root of public service was the honor it bestowed. Indeed, public office was called, in Latin, *honor* or *honos*. Concern about achieving such public honor, as well as being recognized as possessing it, was a pervasive preoccupation of the late Roman aristocrat and the status culture that he inhabited.

Indeed, senatorial status was desirable also for its material benefits. Individual senators and their families enjoyed certain fiscal and legal privileges associated with senatorial status.[84] So, for example, senators were exempt by Roman law from the duty of financing acts of munificence in their cities of origin, were protected from physical torture, and participated in the meetings of the Senate in Rome.[85] Roman senatorial families took pride even in their distinct obligations, including residency in the city of Rome, which was officially required for senators, as was the sponsoring of games associated with certain senatorial offices.[86]

However, being a member of the senatorial aristocracy was not the same as being a senator by virtue of holding a high office at the imperial court or in the state bureaucracy. In the early empire, men in these positions had a lower social rank, being mostly equestrians. But the rank of many holders of these positions changed under the reign of Constantine. Thus, the emperor opened up new avenues for formerly equestrian imperial administrators to attain senatorial, that is, *clarissimate*, rank. After 312, civic officials who had arisen through office were found holding senatorial rank alongside men who were senators by birth. So, too, certain military officers were given senatorial rank.

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[82] Symm. *Ep.* 1.52: *pars melior humani generis*.

[83] Cass. *Var.* 3.6.1: *origo ipsa iam gloria est: laus nobilitati connascitur. Idem vobis est gignitur quod vitae principium.* Modified translation of that offered by Bjornlie 2019, p. 125.

[84] This view of elites is similar to, but not the same as that of Haldon 2004, pp. 184–85.

[85] For these privileges in the early empire, see Mommsen 1887, pp. 466–75 and Weisweiler 2020, pp. 29–35. For exemption from torture, see *C. Th.* 9.35.3, 377 CE. For the exemption from curial duties, see Jones 1964, p. 741; La Rocca and Oppedisano 2016, pp. 23–24; and Chapter 2.

[86] For the required profession of residence, see *C. Th.* 6.2.13; Chastagnol 1992, pp. 298–99; and for the fourth century, La Rocca and Oppedisano 2016, pp. 185–6, and Chapter 2 note 239. The offices of quaestor or praetor still required the giving of games in Rome; see Symm. *Or.* 8; and Moser 2018, pp. 37–39 for a succinct discussion.

At the same time and in the aftermath of the civil war in 312, Constantine made certain key adjustments that opened up new opportunities to hold high office to men from the senatorial aristocracy. (See Chapter 2.)

To accentuate differences in the career paths and social origins of these men who all were now called the "most outstanding" (*clarissimi*) and held senatorial rank, I use the term *senatorial aristocrat* to mean those senators who were from established Italian or Rome-based families, who were tied to the city of Rome in particular, and who pursued civic careers. I am well aware that this usage is somewhat problematic since the term *aristocracy* is used by modern historians to describe a legally privileged class of interconnected families whose position is based on the inheritance of large landed estates. In contrast, the late Roman senatorial aristocracy combined inherited wealth with political office, a powerful conjunction that allowed for the accumulation of intergenerational resources.[87] Thus, the term senatorial aristocracy in this book refers to a narrower group than all men of senatorial rank. Those who attained senatorial rank through their positions in the imperial court or in service to the emperor, or high-ranking military officers also attained senatorial rank and are among the senatorial elite, but I refer to them as the imperial or military elite. Senators in Constantinople with civic office are noted as such.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, Constantine and his successors turned to members of the senatorial aristocracy to supplement the civic administration of the fourth-century empire. His innovations brought unprecedented opportunities for political influence for senatorial aristocrats. Certainly, those senatorial families that benefitted most from these changes did so in no small part because they were able to retain a large portion of their income from agriculture and business. Thus, their political and economic influence augmented their social and cultural positions in the fourth century and after.

In the absence of a resident emperor in the city of Rome, a reality true from Constantine's time until the mid fifth-century reign of Valentinian III, senatorial aristocrats became increasingly central to the running of the state. Consequently, the Senate as an institution grew in influence and prestige. The loss of large areas of Gaul, Africa, and Britain over the course of the first half of the fifth century meant that the senators and Senate of Rome and Italy gained greater political prominence in the city and region. Territorial losses brought more limited horizons and reduced the number of senators over the

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[87] For fuller justification of the use of this term, see Salzman 2002, pp. 20–24. For the problems with this view as applied to the early empire, see Weisweiler 2020, pp. 29–56.

course of the fifth century as elites from the provinces chose to make Rome their residency less frequently. However, the attraction of the city of Rome, especially to certain powerful families that competed for office, remained and even increased as the stage on which they could assert and accrue power grew smaller.[88]

The political influence of Roman senatorial aristocrats cannot on its own explain the decisions of scores of men and women – both elites and non-elites – to return with their families to the city of Rome after each political and military crisis, especially during the second half of the fifth century after a series of increasingly violent attacks had undermined urban life. To understand this dynamic and the reasons why senatorial aristocrats were able to absorb shocks and repeatedly marshal their resources – the definition of *resilience* used by some scholars – to rebuild the city of Rome, we need also to consider the enduring institutions, values, and social networks that compelled senators to reinvest in the city even after the losses they had suffered during the assaults on the city in the years 312, 410, 455, and 472 and in the sixth century after the Gothic War.[89]

Based on my study of Rome in late antiquity, I argue that the processes of competition for influence among senators – those from established aristocratic families as well as those new to senatorial status through either civic, imperial, or military careers – were central to the recovery of Rome in the aftermath of a series of major political and military crises. The extensive economic resources that senatorial aristocrats had accrued over centuries provided the means for them to participate in this competition. Wealth was a key factor, to be sure. But the choice made by Rome's senators, conditioned by previous resolutions to crises, to return to Rome to rebuild their city – materially, ideologically, and institutionally – was also based on a competitive prestige culture and values that had been present in Roman society for centuries. For these men and women, and those who emulated their positions in society, service to the state either in the city of Rome or in the empire at large remained the key source of their status. High civic office – *honor* – continued to be central to senatorial aristocratic identity, even in the face of an increasingly weakened state.

The social dynamics of competition among senators for political advantage did, however, shift in relation to events and developments over the period of this study. In the fourth century, senators primarily competed for political favor among themselves and from the emperor. However, after the

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[88] Machado 2013, pp. 62–63; and on this I agree also with Machado 2019, pp. 13–14.
[89] For this definition, see Harper 2017, p. 20 and note 27. See my discussion in note 66 above.

crisis of 410 and continuing into the fifth century, political influence was more diffuse. Senators strove for political advantage from the imperial court, either in Ravenna or Constantinople; from fellow senators in Rome; or from military men powerful in Gaul and Italy. Senatorial competition for political favor – from a variety of sources – was a stimulant to recovery after crisis. Under weak and absent emperors, senatorial competition was dispersed in ways that made political life in Rome in the fifth century CE sound a lot more like what it must have been in the last decades of the Roman republic in the first century BCE, when senators vied for influence with each other without a strong, central figure in control.[90] When Valentinian III returned to Rome in the 440s and permanently after 450, his presence led to increased competition from senators, as the usurpation of Petronius Maximus attests (see Chapter 4). By the late fifth century, and continuing into the sixth century, these dynamics shifted again under Germanic kings who controlled Italy but relied greatly on senators to legitimate their positions and administer Rome and Italy (see Chapters 5 and 6).

The resilience of Roman senators also depended on the maintenance of their social networks – friends, family, clients. These ties had political repercussions. By the late fourth century, senators could and did at times ally themselves with the "barbarian" – that is, Germanic – military leaders. Rather than seeing senatorial aristocrats as the puppets of these strong generals, I stress the active engagement of senators with military elites. Although the generals Ricimer and Odoacer had control of their military forces, both commanders sought alliances with senatorial aristocrats.[91] Senatorial aristocrats not only provided legitimacy and stability, they also served in key positions in the state, as magistrates, patrons, and ambassadors. Thus, the political influence that Rome's senatorial aristocrats exercised through their social and political networks made them increasingly important to the military through the early sixth century.

It is not that surprising, then, that many senators had come to rely on these military figures and no longer saw the need for a resident western emperor. So, unlike those scholars who think that in the fifth-century senators managed to establish themselves (once more) at the center of imperial power as the means to their survival, I emphasize senatorial willingness to turn away from an imperial presence in either Rome or Ravenna (see Chapter 5).[92] Their influence increased over this century, I argue, because they of their

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[90] Matthews 1981, p. 19.   [91] On these men, see my discussion in Chapters 4 and 5.

[92] Stein 1959, I, pp. 380 ff; Clover 1978, pp. 169–75; Humphries 2003, p. 44. Here I also part company from Matthews' groundbreaking 1975 study of western aristocracies. My view of the rising political power of the Senate and viewing it as a protagonist in the late antiquity owes much to

autonomy and leadership in Rome and Italy. Senatorial aristocrats had grown increasingly comfortable using their political and economic resources in support of their friends, be they aspiring courtiers, kings, emperors, or generals. So, for example, when the Gothic king Alaric besieged Rome between 408 and 410, senators took on greater leadership roles in negotiations and in the recovery of the city (see Chapter 3).

Although provincial aristocrats developed their own regional networks and identities over the fifth century, Rome nonetheless continued to attract newcomers, including upwardly mobile men and women from the provinces and from the East who recognized the power and influence to be gained by making friendship ties with or becoming part of Rome's senatorial aristocracy.[93] This had been the case for the mid fifth-century Gallic senator Sidonius Apollinaris.[94] Others came to Rome for financial or educational opportunities. Consequently, the city continued to attract new men and women even as severe political and military crises forced migrations at times. Senatorial aristocratic networks were diminished but not disrupted by these crises in the fourth through the sixth centuries. With the loss of western provinces, the city of Rome became increasingly important as the stage upon which Italo-Roman senatorial aristocrats could still compete for status and high office. Thus, we can better understand their willingness to reinvest their resources in reconstituting the city.

Christianizing Rome: The Influence of the Bishop of Rome

The spread of Christianity did not mitigate the competition for prestige among Roman senatorial aristocrats and elites in general. The teaching of Christian virtues like humility and piety by bishops and the clergy did not diminish the appeal of senatorial status and high political office. Nor did most senatorial aristocrats turn away from secular careers. The notion that senators simply traded their togas for the bishop's mitre does not fit well the trajectories of the majority of senatorial aristocrats in Rome.[95] Gibbon's assumption that the church merely stepped in where the state had been is not viable.[96]

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the work of Mazzarino, as articulated, for instance, in his important 1974 article. See too on his view Oppedisano 2020B, pp. 27–39.

[93] On this I agree with Machado 2019, p. 14; and Wormald 1976, pp. 221–22. See too Barnish 1988, pp. 130–34.

[94] On his career, see especially Harries 1994.

[95] For a nuanced analysis of aristocrats as bishops in Gaul, see Brown 2012, pp. 494–95; and in southern Gaul, see Esders 1997, p. 185.

[96] On this widespread view held by Gibbon and his contemporaries, see Pocock 1999, p. 3.

On the contrary, in Rome senatorial aristocrats played an important role in influencing the city's religious life. Wealthy Christian senators with large incomes at their disposal funded their favorite Christian communities and used their houses as well as their patronage to advance their ideas about proper Christian worship in the city. We can see the impact of their influence, for example, in the building of neighborhood churches (the titular churches) or in their funding of funeral celebrations, which fed the poor in the great churches of the city.[97] They patronized certain deacons and priests whose presence at banquets and religious services in their great homes in Rome was a source of friction among the clergy.[98] Even Leo (440–61), one of the most influential bishops of Rome, faced competing aristocratic senatorial traditions of worship when he strove to craft liturgies centered on St. Peter's.[99]

Certainly, the bishop of Rome claimed control of religious life in the city over lay senators as well as the clergy. The bishops of Rome traced their authority to their apostolic succession from Peter, the first bishop of the city. They asserted authority over the consecration, discipline, and doctrine of a large number of clergy in the city, and over those in the suburbicarian churches (i.e., those literally "under the city"), which were located in that part of Italy that lay south of a line roughly from the gulf of modern Ancona to Genoa, including as well Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. As Kristina Sessa observed, by ca. 500 there would be around 200 bishops under their authority, far more than other bishops in the western Roman Empire.[100]

The bishops of Rome faced ongoing challenges to their authority not just from lay senatorial aristocrats, but also from other Christians. Rome was teeming with a variety of Christian sects. The church had only in the early third century managed to have centralized Christian leadership.[101] Many sects in the fourth- and fifth-century city, such as Arians and Novatians, had their own bishops.[102] Even the bishops and clerics who recognized the authority of the Christian bishop of Rome were not forced to follow his

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[97] For the use of houses by aristocrats as religious centers, see Bowes 2008; and Machado 2019, pp. 162–97. For the titular churches, see my discussion in Chapter 2, and Sessa 2012, pp. 127–73. For aristocrats feeding the poor at parties in the great churches in Rome, see Grig 2006, pp. 146–61.

[98] Hunter 2017, p. 505.   [99] For Leo's use of liturgy, see Salzman 2013, pp. 208–32.

[100] On Petrine primacy, see Demacopoulos 2013. For the growth of the papacy and area under his authority, see Sessa 2012, pp. 25–27. For the suburbicarian churches and their organization, see Moorhead 2015, pp. 12–13.

[101] For the evidence from Rome as centralizing authority relatively late, see Brent 1995, pp. 458–580.

[102] For a discussion of the limits on the later fourth-century Bishop Damasus (366–84), see Trout 2015, pp. 9–10.

advice, and those bishops outside of the city were especially able to selectively apply his opinions to match their own views.[103]

Tensions with clergy within the Christian church at Rome also undermined the authority of the bishop of Rome, and these emerged openly, most often over the issue of episcopal succession. We see some of these strains in one well-known conflict over succession, when two men, Ursinus and Damasus, were both elected bishop in Rome in 366 by competing groups of Christians within the Church in Rome. The dispute could not be resolved, leading to violence in the streets of the city. The civic magistrate in charge of Rome, the urban prefect Praetextatus, a pagan senatorial aristocrat, put an end to the rioting, but skirmishes persisted. With the backing of the emperor, Praetextatus supported Damasus over Ursinus, thereby essentially defining the correct – that is, orthodox – notion of Christianity, in this case that of Damasus (366–84).[104] Yet Damasus's position over his own clergy and in society was weakened by this fight. Moreover, as Carlos Machado has well argued, the senatorial aristocratic officials, in this case the urban prefect, by resolving such disputes thereby exercised great influence over the "life and history of the Christian community" in Rome.[105]

The bishops of Rome also faced challenges to their authority from emperors and the imperial court, East and West. Certainly, following Constantine, the emperors (with the exception of Julian, 361–63) supported the spread of Christianity in the city and empire. Constantine set the precedent for elite patronage with his lavish donations and church building.[106] Yet imperial donations to the church were considered private gifts, and thus keeping imperial favor was critical for keeping the financial support that bishops used for their own purposes.[107] Being dependent on an imperial or senatorial patron for financial support did, however, place certain limits on the public role that the bishops of Rome would have, as we shall see. And from the early fourth century, imperial intervention in Christian controversies led to tensions with the bishops of Rome, as in other cities, that at times similarly undermined the authority of the bishop (see Chapters 2 and 4 especially).

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[103] On Rome as a court of appeals in disciplinary cases for the metropolitan sees of Arles and Thessalonica, see Sessa 2012, p. 27. On Rome's assertion of authority over Gaul, for example, see Mathisen 1989, pp. 44–68.

[104] In this interpretation of these events, I am in agreement with Machado 2019, pp. 171–72.

[105] Machado 2019, p. 171.

[106] For the standard emphasis on the role of the emperor on the Christianization of Rome's physical spaces, see especially Krautheimer 1980, pp. 59–87; see too Chapter 2.

[107] Pietri 1976, 1, pp. 79–83; and Neil 2017, p. 56 and note 30.

For these and other reasons that I explore subsequently, my work supports those scholars who see the bishops of Rome as structurally, relatively weak civic leaders despite the rhetoric in texts such as the *Book of the Popes*, a sixth-century collection of papal biographies modeled on Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* (discussed below).[108] Because the bishops were part of a Christian church that was not nearly as developed as its medieval counterpart, in this book I favor the term bishop of Rome instead of pope for the fourth and fifth centuries. The Latin word "*papa,*" or pope, meaning father, was used for many other bishops around the Mediterranean, and only in the sixth century, as John Moorhead has proposed, do we see a shift to using the word pope as a title with the implication of office only for the bishop of Rome.[109] Hence I use the term pope as well as bishop only for the sixth-century holders of this office and their successors.

Although the bishops of Rome did act on behalf of the city to feed the poor or to ransom prisoners at specific moments, the emperors, the kings, and the senators were the dominant civic leaders in Rome for the centuries covered in this book. Nor was the removal of the western emperor in 476, in my view, the pivotal moment that created a powerful papacy in Rome, in the medieval sense of the term as an institution with complete civic authority.[110] On the contrary, only after the Gothic War did the rhetoric concerning the civic authority of the bishops of Rome as expressed by Gelasius (bishop of Rome 492–96) come closer to matching their public role.

The Five Falls of Rome: Method and Evidence

This book is structured around five military and political episodes and responses to what the Romans themselves saw as crises that overtook the inhabitants of the city of Rome in the period between 312 and 604. Modern historians follow the views of the ancients in seeing these five events as crises. This period covers the changes associated with the new empire of Constantine and extends through the "decline and fall" of the western Roman Empire. My aim, however, is to better understand Roman resilience over this *longue durée*.

I focus on the political elites active in the city of Rome – senatorial aristocrats, emperors, kings, generals and bishops. Rome's senatorial aristocratic leaders emerge as singularly important because they were the ones who so frequently led Rome's recovery and because Rome was a hegemonic society in which wealth brought power – political, social, religious, and military.

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[108] See, for example, Sessa 2012, pp. 25–30; and Chapter 2.   [109] Moorhead 1986, pp. 337–50.
[110] See, for example, the arguments of Meier 2015, pp. 15–68.

Thus, when I use the term *elite*, I mean it as John Haldon so well defined it: as "the leading element of this ruling, or dominant, social-economic class, those who shared a situation in respect of access to political/ideological power and influence."[111] In Rome, as elsewhere, members with senatorial rank may or may not have been born into their positions. In fact, the senatorial elite was not one single block. As noted earlier, the senatorial aristocracy of Rome, tied to the city of Rome and its environs, was distinct from those senators who, often new to senatorial rank, had attained their status through service at the imperial court or in the administration of the state. Even within the senatorial aristocratic families of Rome, marriages and adoptions brought new men into this group as well. But all elites – senatorial, imperial, and military – competed to preserve and advance their interests, bringing them at times to work together and at other times to contest with one another for positions, status, wealth, and personal satisfactions.

It is worth underscoring, however, that all elites – senatorial, imperial, and military – could not function without the support and work of non-elite Romans. On a domestic level, as the masters of large urban households, Roman senatorial aristocratic elite men and women relied on laborers, often slaves, for the maintenance of their lifestyles. It is well known, for example, that educated slaves often managed the financial records and performed domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and educating children in the houses of wealthy senatorial elites. In rebuilding Rome after a crisis, elites would naturally also seek to replace not just their domestic workers but also those who could rebuild the city, from its walls to its food supply. Understanding this human dynamic is important for explaining the ability of elites to recover Rome after each crisis. So, for instance, in the years following the sack of Rome in 410, the urban prefect wrote to the emperor to increase the grain supply as people were returning more quickly than anticipated to the city.[112] The urban prefect also needed to have professional bakers return. As well, he needed his staff to help in the distribution of the bread. Even the restoration of order required non-elite assistance. While wealthy aristocrats employed their own private bodyguards, the urban prefect Flavius Leontius employed lightly armed forces to quell urban riots in 355 and 356.[113]

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[111] Haldon 2004, p. 181.   [112] See my discussion in Chapter 3.

[113] Amm. Marc. 15.7.2. In the early third century, the urban prefect had soldiers at his disposal, but the military urban cohorts disappeared over the course of the fourth century and were replaced by a limited police force under the urban prefect. For the early third century, see Ulpian (*Digesta* 1.12.1.12) and Kelly 2012, pp. 410–24; for the fourth century, see Chastagnol 1964, pp. 254–56.

The performance of elite status also required public recognition by non-elites. Restoring a part of the Colosseum or a statue in the Roman Forum or funding circus games remained an integral component of elite senatorial status that relied on acknowledgment by non-elites.[114] Similarly, elites strove for public recognition of their acts of Christian virtue, be it almsgiving or building churches. However, the competition for influence on and honor from elite peers or the emperor was probably, for most Roman senators, an even greater stimulant for action than the adulation of the crowd.[115]

The pattern of crisis and reconstruction that I trace over the three hundred years of this study resulted in a city far smaller in population, wealth, and resources. Yet the responses of the still-dominant leading groups in Rome – senatorial aristocrats, the emperor and imperial courtiers, the military, the Germanic kings, and the bishops – to the political and military crises that came to the city, beginning with the civil war of Constantine and Maxentius in 312 and ending with the post–Gothic War period, demonstrate how its inhabitants recovered Rome. Roman senatorial aristocrats were convinced that this was a city worth renewing time and again.

I focus on responses to military and political crises because these events allow me to consider one other key element in assessing the role of elite leadership – time. As much as possible, I look at the first decade or two after an event to gauge the recovery of the city and its inhabitants. I concentrate on the immediate responses because, as the work of certain social scientists has underscored, processes of change are highly sensitive to events that take place in the early stages of an overall historical sequence.[116] Analysis of historical causality has led scholars to appreciate that not only what one does but when one does it has a larger than expected impact on the outcome of events and the ability of a society to recover. By restricting my time frame, I can better discern patterns to recovery.

The five crises that I analyze were also the ones that were highlighted by our ancient sources. In addition to what ancient histories and chroniclers tell us about what they saw as critical inflection points, I have incorporated the evidence of individual lives as pieced together from inscriptions, letters, and allusions in a wide variety of ancient documents and literary texts. I focus on those senatorial aristocrats who lived in Rome, owned property there, or held office there. I reconstruct the lives of individual actors, notably those who took on leadership roles by holding high office, in the moments after a crisis.

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[114] For the work of urban prefects after 410, see my discussion in Chapter 3.
[115] On the critical importance of peer recognition, see Salzman 2002, pp. 43–56.
[116] Mahoney 2000, pp. 507–48, for the classic formulation of this idea. For its application, see, for instance, Pierson 2000, pp. 251–67.

Of particular importance for this study are the private letters and letter collections of individuals who visited Rome or lived there over the centuries. Scholars have come to appreciate the complex nature of these letters and have sought to interpret them within their historical, literary, and social contexts. The letters of the Gallo-Roman senator and urban prefect, and later bishop of Clermont, Sidonius Apollinaris are a good example of how much scholars have come to see these writings as literary works that were carefully curated for publication. Additionally, this collection of letters provides vivid descriptions of this man's interactions with Roman senators, emperors, and clergy in the mid fifth century.[117]

This heightened sensitivity of scholars to our sources has also been applied to the study of material culture. For individuals, the thousands of inscriptions that have survived from Rome are a critical source of untapped and ever-increasing information. But for these, too, scholars have become increasingly aware of the need to be sensitive to context. So, as Silvia Orlandi has shown, the monumental inscription that she has recently interpreted as evidence of a restoration of the Colosseum by the urban prefect identified as Iunius Valerius Bellicius befitted an imperial celebration, thus narrowing the date of his actions to either 417 or 422 (see Figure 6 in Chapter 3).[118] Hence the context, here public honorific, supplies important clues. And, as is well known, Rome is extraordinarily well supplied with personal inscriptions, including those not only from public honorific monuments but also from private dedications, funerary sites, and official records.[119] I rely on these to reconstitute the lives of many of the men and some women whose responses to crisis I focus on in this study.

I also incorporate what I regard as underutilized evidence as new sources for this book. One area that I have found particularly rich for this study is the laws, letters, and documents that shed light on the actions of the bishop and clergy of Rome. For example, the letters of bishops Leo and Pelagius and documents like the *Scriptura of 483* of Pope Simplicius, preserved within the documentary record of a Church Council of 502, can convey important information not only about internal church controversies and differing theological positions but also about the role of senatorial aristocrats and bishops.[120] Of particular import for this book are the collections of

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[117] For a good introduction to the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris and other late antique letter collections, see the essays in Sogno, Storin, and Watts 2017.

[118] Orlandi 2017, pp. 212–14.

[119] I refer to some of these collections of inscriptions in my list of abbreviations. For a succinct discussion of late antique epigraphy, see Salway 2015A, pp. 364–93.

[120] For the letters of Leo and Pelagius, and the *Scriptura of 483* that survives in the record of the Church Council of 502, see my discussion in Chapter 5. The collections of papal letters appear in several different modern editions, which are usefully described by Neil 2017, pp. 449–66.

documents pertaining to the church in Rome. The one today known from the monastery that preserved it, the *Avellana Collection*, dated to sixth-century Rome, has been the object of much recent study.[121]

Another important collation of the biographies of the *Lives of the Popes* is also dated to sixth-century Rome. Its first edition is generally viewed as finalized in the 530s based on a fundamental study of the manuscripts by Louis Duchesne, which has been augmented by Herman Geertman who argued that this first edition was completed in 535.[122] A second edition (now standard) of the *Lives of the Popes* was produced soon afterward, in the 540s, under Pope Vigilius (537–55). It reworked the lives of the first edition to reflect contemporary concerns and was itself extended into the ninth century by anonymous compilers who had access to church archives in Rome.[123] (In this book, I follow the text of Duchesne's second edition, but I note where the text is suspect due to later additions.) Most importantly for this study, however, is the need to determine the reliability of the information in the *Lives of the Popes*. Not all scholars agree on the historical value of particular *Lives*.[124] Some of the *Lives* were finalized to reflect the views of the second edition's sixth-century compilers. So, for example, the *Life of Pope Silvester*, bishop at the time of the emperor Constantine, asserts that Silvester baptized Constantine. This goes against all contemporary sources but reflects fifth-century and later legends about the bishop.[125] Similarly, the *Life of Pope Symmachus* (498–514) includes details to justify his office that conflict with other documents pertaining to this controversial pope and his disputed

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[121] For the *Avellana Collection*, see the important collections of essays in Lizzi Testa and Marconi 2019; and Blair-Dixon 2007, pp. 59–76.

[122] For the text of the *Book of the Popes* (*Liber Pontificalis*), I use the revised edition of Duchesne 1981, with observations on the publication at pp. xlvii–xlviii and ccxxx–ccxxxi. Duchesne suspected that the *Lives* of Vigilius, Pelagius I (556–61), John III (561–74), and Benedict I (575–79) were added during the pontificate of Pelagius II (579–90); see Duchesne 1981, pp. ccxxxi–ccxxxii. For the English translation, I modify that of Davis 2010, who also summarizes these details, xiii–xiv, xlvi–xlviii. For an excellent discussion of these developments, see Trout 2015, pp. 58–60. For modification of this publication scheme based on a reassessment of the manuscripts, see Geertman 2003, pp. 267–72.

[123] Davis 2010, p. xiv, sees the *Book of the Popes* as the work of "low level officials in the papal bureaucracy, whether laymen or, more probably, lower clerics." Others see this book as more literary and of dubious historicity, but still largely the work of clerics. See notes 124 and 125 below.

[124] For doubts about the historicity of information in the *Lives*, see, for instance, McKitterick 2011, pp. 19–34, McKitterick 2020, pp. 203–09; and Blair-Dixon 2007, pp. 59–76.

[125] For the *Life of Silvester*, see *Lib. Pont. 33*, ed. Duchesne 1981, pp. 170–201. For further discussion of the image of Silvester as a later construction, see Chapter 2.

election.[126] Nor do all scholars agree that even the information in the *Lives* that was likely derived from church archives, like the donation and ordination lists, is fully reliable.[127] Clearly, each *Life* presents particular challenges that require careful historical contextualization and consideration of the manuscript evidence before we assume that it is reliable. Nonetheless, the *Lives of the Popes*, along with the other collections pertaining to the Church in Rome offer still underappreciated sources of evidence for Roman responses to crisis, not only the reactions of bishops and clergy, but those of lay Romans and senatorial aristocrats as well.

I am not the first scholar to use many of these sources, nor am I the first to recognize the resources at the disposal of bishops and senators. But new information about the city in late antiquity, new scholarly work on relevant sources, and the new perspective I develop focusing on resilience and resurgence have led me to write on what many would consider a very old topic, the "Decline and Fall of Rome." I hope that the reader will gain from considering, as I have, how Roman elites, in the face of great losses, were able to, in Adrienne Rich's words, "reconstitute the world." I turn in Chapter 2 to their first major challenge, to what many historians see as the truly pivotal crisis for Rome – the civil war that culminated with the victory in 312 by Constantine, Rome's first Christian emperor (306–37). The interactions between senators, bishops, emperor, and the military in the aftermath of 312 set the foundations for the resurgence of the city and its aristocracy in the coming centuries.

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[126] For the *Life of Symmachus*, see *Lib*. *Pont*. 53, ed. Duchesne 1981, pp. 260–68. For the controversies surrounding his papacy and the slanted information in the *Lives of the Popes*, see my discussion in Chapter 5.

[127] For a strong argument for the veracity of the donation lists in the *Lives*, see Liverani 2019, pp. 169–218; and Trout 2015, pp. 59–60, summarizing Geertman's views on this aspect of the text.