

## The Elder Rome: The Topography of Places and Power during the Amal Administration

This paper examines the multifaceted restoration projects undertaken by Theoderic in the city of Rome beginning in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Although popular knowledge dictates that death came to Rome with Odoacer in 476, the truth is far more complex. Despite voluminous discussion placing the Rome of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century and beyond firmly in the grave, the city managed not only to survive, but to undergo a large restorative building project under the Ostrogothic king Theoderic. Rome also housed a vibrant and powerful local elite who warranted the direct attention of the royal authorities.

Much previous scholarship has sought to uncover the truth of Rome's appearance during this era. The work of Barnish (1987) is especially noteworthy for this period, ultimately finding that though the numbers of Romans may have declined due to the traumatic events of the early and mid-5<sup>th</sup> century, it was still a city with a sizeable population. Marazzi (2007) discusses late 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century Rome through the lens of archaeology, examining many buildings that underwent major restorations during the reign of Theoderic. This study also explores the phenomenon of contracting residential centers of high-status citizens that occurred due to the decrease in the population, noting that the question of whether the great *insulae* of Rome were still in use cannot be concretely answered. Though undeniably diminished, Rome was still a vibrant and powerful city, and much of this vibrancy can be credited to the Ostrogothic ruler Theoderic.

Both archaeological and literary evidence reveal that Theoderic embarked upon an ambitious restoration project within the city of Rome. Cassiodorus's *Variae* reveal much of the scope of the project, which included the restoration of major buildings and monuments such as

the Theater of Pompey as well as the renewal of Roman industrial centers such as the Tiber-front brick-making facilities, which were themselves re-appropriated by the royal authorities to begin producing thousands of roof tiles annually. The letters of Cassiodorus also reveal a large-scale effort in Rome and beyond to repurpose derelict building materials from both the countryside and the urban fabric. Furthermore, it emerges that the *comites* of Rome focused strongly on the upkeep of monuments. In the letters of Cassiodorus, Rome is shown to be a city showered in royal attention, especially for the purposes of restoring the many ancient edifices that still populated the landscape, but also a city dotted with ruins either in need of repair or capable of being repurposed by other sites.

However, the topography of a city is not only determined by its buildings, but also by its people, and especially by the avenues through which power flows. Moorhead (1992) explores the power structures that existed in Rome at the time, focusing on the relationship between these powerbrokers. Rome was a city of not only immense size and beauty, but also a city of an entrenched and powerful elite which Theoderic, a “barbarian” king, had to reckon with. Furthermore, though Theoderic was a Christian, he was an Arian, a sect of Christianity which directly clashed with the heavily Petrine clergy of Rome. Much of this conflict between powers manifested in struggles over the election of Popes and the appointments of Consuls, but it also influenced the form that Theoderic’s interventions took within the city of Rome. Theoderic chose to restore Rome rather than build anew there, preferring instead to build in his own capital of Ravenna. He could not simply place his own stamp upon the city and expect to be welcomed there, “barbarian” as he was. His restoration of monuments is thus clearly an aspect of this political overture.

Theoderic fostered a relationship with Rome not unlike the later feudal obligations between lord and vassal. He patronized the city and its elite, granting them funding and an honored place at the center of his quasi-Roman / quasi-Gothic kingdom while Rome maintained a degree of independence. By only restoring Rome, not building upon it directly, Theoderic maintained a reputation that ultimately gained him that coveted place as a well-loved restorer of Rome alongside Augustus and the other good emperors of Rome.

### Bibliography

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