

Rome Represented: Personifications of the Eternal City in Later Latin Epic

This paper examines the development and meaning of the personified Rome in imperial Latin epic and panegyric: how she progresses from the tragic, turret-crowned figure that pleads with Lucan's Caesar at the Rubicon to the armed, Bellona-like goddess who flits between Claudian's Theodosius or Stilicho and his Olympus. Though Roma appears in the numismatic record from the third century BCE, her first literary cameo is surprisingly not until the famously godless Lucan. I argue that her very presence in imperial poetry, particularly court poetry, betrays an increasing anxiety about the stability and meaning of Rome. For instance, why does Claudian's Roma appear to Theodosius when it is not, in fact, Rome that the emperor defends? To answer that Roma is an important symbol of the empire as a whole is obviously true, but also merely begs the question. I argue that, in order to reassure the elite Roman psyche, the literary person Roma can—and sometimes must—stand in for the physical city, as the imperial capital starts to wander and the empire itself to fragment. The analysis will build on the important work done by Gowing 2008 and Edwards 1996 about the City as a receptacle of meaning and Roman identity. In dealing with issues of crisis and decline within an imperial, propagandistic discourse, I will draw on Paschoud 1967 and Cameron 1970. This paper aims to bridge the gap in treatment between the early and late empires, developing the through-lines in literary practice and ideas.

In order to achieve this, my paper will also touch on treatments of a number of human and divine stand-ins for the goddess, or the place, Roma, following imperial literary and political trends in the identification of women with abstracted virtues. Cato's wife Marcia, for instance, in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, comes back from her second husband's funeral to marry Cato in a simple ceremony. It is not difficult to cast Marcia as Roma here; Cato's devotion to the state is

total, and this ritual, performed in front of the equally devoted Brutus as sole witness, occurs in an atmosphere of eroticized sentiments for *libertas* and the *res publica*. In the same poem, Pompey, at various stages, identifies his wife Cornelia with Roma, and calls her his *lares* and *penates*. Good men, it seems, love Roma as she appears in their good wives, even—or perhaps particularly—when they are prevented from loving Rome in person. We might compare to these human ladies, in appearance and effect, Silius Italicus' *Virtus* as she visits and instructs the young Scipio Africanus in the *Punica*. She, too, is modestly dressed, a model Roman woman, and exhorts Scipio to action on behalf of the *res publica*. This literary milieu of virtuous women and women as virtues contributes to the construction of the increasingly insistent personified Roma. Her varying appearances map onto different values as circumstances change and demand reassurance and an imagined stability; her insistence on an embodiment of that city and a promulgation of her image gives us illuminating insights into Roman self-identification and imperial anxieties.

Bibliography

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