Ritual and Space in the Mirror of Texts: the Case of Late Medieval and Humanist Rome

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In Rome, both ritual and space were understood as products of the history of the city. This is not a phenomenon restricted to Rome, but in this city, history is charged with meanings that elsewhere would be unimaginable. For late medieval Romans, the city was not only the casket enclosing an exemplary story, but was also the origin of European history. Whereas Greek history inevitably remained nebulous, known only through fragments reflected in the mirror of Latin sources, Roman history could be followed in all its phases, from its very roots. It could also be related to the other great history of humanity then known, as narrated in the Old Testament. The ties between the two stories were to be as complex and as reiterated as the decorations of a romanesque capital, but what has so far not been underlined is that the history of ancient Rome could also be read as a sacred history, from the moment when Aeneas arrived in the place that would become Rome and from the foundations of the city. This profane sacrality was, from its earliest moments, a question of ritual and space.¹

There were two main texts from which a learned reader of the Trecento could have acquired knowledge of the origins of Rome: the first book of Ab Urbe condita by Livy and the eighth book of the Aeneid of Virgil. In both texts, ritual plays a prominent role. According to Livy, when Romulus and Remus decided to found a city, as they were twins and no claim to precedence could be based on seniority, 'in order to let the gods, who had those places in their protection, choose by augury who should give the new city its name, who should govern it when built, Romulus took the Palatine for his augural quarter, Remus the Aventine'.² In the

¹ On ritual, see in particular A. B. Seligman, R. P. Weller, M. J. Puett and B. Simon, Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity (Oxford, 2008). Literature dealing with the panorama of ritual and space in the city of Rome (as against the liturgical rituals of the Church in the city) is nonexistent, but there are many important fragments, particularly on festivals, which will be cited in the course of the essay. On space see for example F. Andrews, 'Umkämpfter Raum im Rom Innocenx' des III.: die "Gesta Innocentii papae III.'', in Ausen und Innen, Räume und ihre Symbolik im Mittelalter, ed. N. Staubach and V. Johanowage (Frankfurt am Main, 2007), pp. 133-50.

² Livy, Ab Urbe condita, 1, 6, 4, ed. R. M. Ogilvie (Oxford, 1974), p. 10: '... ut Dii, quorum tutelae ea loca essent, auguriis legereant qui nomen novae urbi daret, qui conditam imperio regeret, Palatium Romulus, Remus Aventinum ad inaugurandum templo
case of Rome, the traditional ritual of divination, necessary for the founding of a city, therefore becomes a competition, which materialised in the choice of different spaces, the Palatine and the Aventine. Remus sees six vultures and announces the augury, but then Romulus announces that he has seen twelve; so the ritual breaks out into armed conflict and ends with the killing of Remus: the city will be founded on the Palatine. In the history of Republican Rome, however, as related in the first Decade of Livy’s account, the Aventine will remain the space of political dissent: the ritual and its controversial outcome forever mark the nature of the space in which a no less controversial history will unfold.

With Virgil, the story takes a step further back, to the mythical times of the disembarking of Aeneas. Over the course of a night and the following morning, he and his Trojans sail up from the mouth of the Tiber, finally seeing walls in the distance, a fortress and ‘scattered rooftops’ (rara domorum tecta). It is the poor realm of Evander, king of the Arcadians, who were at that very moment gathered in a grove opposite the city to offer the sollemnis bonor to Hercules. When the Arcadians saw unknown ships arriving, they were alarmed and about to abandon their ceremony, but Pallas, the son of Evander, forbids them to break off the rites (rumpere sacra) and goes alone to meet what would turn out to be Aeneas. Evander himself recognises Aeneas as the son of Anchises, to whom he was tied by longstanding feelings of admiration and recognition. As a sign of friendship, Evander invites the Trojans to participate in the rite: ‘Meanwhile, since you are come hither as friends, graciously solemnize with us this yearly festival, which we may not defer, and even now become familiar with your comrades’ board’. The sacred ritual for Hercules, who had freed them from the harassments of the giant Cacus, is the most important moment in the social life of the Arcadians and Virgil describes it in detail. The space of a proto-Rome is articulated around the high altar of Hercules, which Evander, ‘founder of Rome’s citadel’ (Romanae conditor arcis), describes to Aeneas as they go from the sacred grove towards the city on the Palatine. He relates how these places were initially inhabited by Fauns and Nymphs, semi-wild creatures, until Saturn, exiled from Olympus, came to civilize them; his reign then coincided with a golden age. Evander shows Aeneas the altar and gate dedicated to his mother Cämenta, prophetess of the greatness of Rome, the grove in which Romulus would place the Asylum, the Lupercal, and the grove of holy Argiletum. Then it is the turn of the still wild Tarpeian rock and the Capi-

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4 The Asylum was ‘the grove on the Capitol ... sacred to the god Iuconis ... where
toline, whose dread sanctity (*religio dira*) terrifies the rural inhabitants of the place. It is indeed the home of a god, and though it is uncertain which one, the Arcadians believe they have seen Jove himself there, ‘when as often happens, he has shaken with his right hand the darkening aegis and summoned the storm clouds’. There are also two fortresses in ruins, founded by Father Janus and by Saturn. In the meantime, the panorama of what will become the Forum and the elegant quarter of the Curiae is outlined in the background, as yet no more than pasture for herds. So ancient Rome will rise on a sacred space, bristling with divine presences, altars and *monumenta* of a history largely determined by divine intervention. The first act of Aeneas on the soil of the future Rome is thus his participation in a sacred ritual, the most important for the inhabitants of the place. The rite to which he is associated ratifies the continuity of a story which is above all sacred, a story which reflects the exceptional nature of the place.

The Trecento in Italy, and Rome in particular, saw a kind of ‘Livy-renaissance’, whereas Virgil, it hardly needs saying, remained familiar throughout the Middle Ages. And another ancient text which, despite its difficulty, was always read, was the *Fasti* of Ovid. Whereas Virgil had written of the origins of Rome, Ovid gave an

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Rumulus offered sanctuary to attract Manpower to his new city’, see T. P. Wiseman, ‘Asylum’, in *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*, ed. E. M. Steinby, 6 vols. (Rome, 1993–2000), vol. I, p. 130. The Lupercal is the legendary cave at the foot of the Palatine hill where the flood of the Tiber had left the babies Romulus and Remus; it was also connected with the cult of the Lycean Pan and the most ancient ceremony of the Lupercalia, see F. Corelli, *Lupercalium*, ibid., vol. III, pp. 198–9. Argiletum was the street going from the Roman Forum to the neighbourhood of the Subura; the name Argiletum seems also to have been used for the neighbourhood which, during the republican age, stood on the valley at the NE side of the Roman Forum, see E. Tortorici, *Argiletum*, ibid., vol. I, pp. 125–6.

The Tarpeian rock was ‘the cliff on the Capitoline Hill from which convicted criminals were thrown to their death’ (see T. P. Wiseman, ‘Saxum Tarpeium’, in *Lexicon topographicum*, ed. Steinby, vol. V, pp. 237–8), related to the legend of the treachery of Tarpeia, who allowed the Sabine besiegers, led by King Titus Tatius, to get into the Capitoline area.


image of the city at the peak of its powers. Once again it is an image intimately tied to the sacred: in Ovid, the city of Augustus was a city of temples, houses of all the gods of the classical pantheon, from Janus who remembers having ruled in his citadel (arx), later called the Janiculum: 'when gods could live on the earth, and divinities inhabited the places of men'.

He then reconnects the place of his cult, at the junction of the Roman Forum and the Forum of Caesar, with the old story of Titus Tatius, the Sabine king who, helped by Tarpeia, was about to conquer the Capitoline to avenge the rape of the Sabine women.

So a learned individual in the high or late Middle Ages would have been in a position to conceive of ancient Rome as a place whose sacredness was written into its spaces, witnesses to a story dominated by divine intervention, and continually renewed by rituals. In the early Middle Ages on the other hand, the memory of the ancient Urbs seems to have been reduced almost to nil. The extraordinary evidence of the so-called Einsiedeln Itinerary, datable to the Carolingian period, is entirely isolated. Moreover, limited as it is to a simple list of names, the Itinerary furnishes precious topographical information, but is not designed to communicate ideas about the nature either of the ancient or of the modern city. Even in an outstanding source for the early medieval history of Rome such as the Liber Pontificalis, the few images of the ancient city are mostly utilitarian. In one of the masterpieces of the Liber, the vita of Hadrian I (772-95), who rebuilt, restored and enriched a substantial proportion of the sacred buildings of the city, the only ancient structures to which the pope turns his attention are those of practical interest, the aqueducts and the walls.  

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Memory of the ancient world was nonetheless inexorably destined to re-emerge as soon as the level of urban culture had risen. If we take the case of writing on marble, which is a useful area for approaching the concepts and relationships of ritual and space, among the hundreds of medieval Roman inscriptions, I have found just one in which the ancient city really relates to the modern. The place is the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The inscription has a narrative tone which it is worth indulging. The famous Pope Silvester II (d. 1005), former tutor to Otto III (d. 1002), not entirely happy in his conscience, ‘having perhaps obtained the pontificate in a not very fair way’ (non satis rite forsas pontificatum adeptus), was warmed by a spirit (spiritus) that he would die the day he went to Jerusalem. Perhaps without realizing, or in any case without giving much weight to the name of the basilica as the second Jerusalem (nesciens forte hoc sacellum esse Hierusalem secundum), Silvester went to Santa Croce in Gerusalemme on a set day to perform a sacred ritual, and died. Already before communion, he realised he was about to die and, as a result of divine grace, because of his repentance and the holiness of the place, he would probably be given salvation. So, after the divine office, he confessed his sins to the people and ordered that ‘in punishment of his crimes’ (in criminum ultionem) his lifeless body should be dragged by wild horses, ‘running all over the city’ (per urbem quaqua versum discurrentibus) and left unburied, ‘unless God in his mercy should dispose otherwise’ (nisi Deus sua pietate aliud disponeret). After a long chase, the horses stopped in the Lateran basilica, where the Emperor Otto (who in reality had died a year earlier) had Silvester buried and where his successor, pope Sergius IV (III in the edition of the text, certainly by mistake) was to have a better tomb erected to his predecessor (the tomb then became celebrated for the prodigies associated with the pope’s reputation for magic).

The inscription is part of the legend of the death of Pope Silvester, for which the most important sources are William of Malmesbury, Vincent de Beauvais, and Martinus Polonus (died 1279). Vincent and Martinus are the specific sources of

11 These are scattered through the thirteen volumes of V. Forcella, Iscrizioni delle chiese e d’altri edifici di Roma dal secolo XI fino ai nostri giorni (Rome, 1859–79). For an introduction on the epitaphs – the largest section, of course, of the Roman medieval inscriptions – see J. Kajanto, Classical and Christian. Studies in the Latin Epitaphs of Medieval and Renaissance Rome (Helsinki, 1980).

12 The inscription no longer exists: it was in the entrance to the underground chapel of Sant’Elena; the text was edited in L. Schrader, Monumentorum italicæ quæ boc nostro saeculo et a Christianis posta sunt libri IV (Helmstadt, 1592), p. 128, and reproduced from Schrader in Forcella, Iscrizioni, vol. VIII, p. 24. R. Besozzi, La storia della basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (Rome, 1750), p. 64, reports that the inscription was removed because it was recognised that the story told in it was false. For these references and the long-lasting and controversial story of the legend of the death of Pope Silvester see the classic A. Graf, Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo, 2 vols. (Turin, 1892–3), vol. II, pp. 3–40 (reprinted, ed. C. Allasia and W. Mehta)
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the inscription, which is quite likely to have been written during the fourteenth century, cutting out or mitigating the most awkward details of the story (the role of the demons, replaced by a spiritus, and the pope’s body cut into pieces before his death). The inscription is entirely exceptional in the general panorama of the epigraphy of Rome and the popes in particular, being placed in one of the most important Roman basilicas, close to Silvester’s burial in San Giovanni Laterano. But the text then continues for a few lines. While the section on Pope Silvester has been by far the most interesting to historians, it is the second half which is the real core of the text, since the inscription was not conceived either for or against Silvester, but so as to legitimize the plenary indulgence accorded to the basilica. The last part of the text affirms that some, following Vincent de Beauvais, affirmed that the asylum created by Romulus to guarantee the impunity of men and women, ‘first between the two sacred groves, the Tarpeian and the Palatine’ (primum inter duas lucos, Tarpeium et Palatium), had, with the expansion of the Urbs, been transferred by Tullius Hostilius ‘from the Caelian hill ... to the edge of the hill within the pomerium of the city’ (ex Caelo monte ... ad finem ipsius montis intra Urbis pomerium), to the very place where the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme now stands, ‘so that, where once there was impunity from crime, there forgiveness of all sins would be given to those approaching under the name of Christ’.14 This story expands what Vincent de Beauvais had written, telling the story of the death of Silvester: ‘There is a church in Rome called Jerusalem, that is “vision of peace”, since whoever has taken refuge there, of whatever crime he is guilty, finds aid. They say that this very church was the asylum set up by Romulus’.15 This expansion is based on Livy who narrated that king Tullius Hostilius had added the Caelian


14 ‘... ut, ubi olim fuerat flagitiis impunitas, ibi sub Christo accedentibus omnium peccatorum veniam tributatur’. The ‘pomerium’ was ‘the boundary line of the site destined for a city, which site, according to the rules of augural procedure, was inaugurated as a templum, or rectangular area, within which auspices could be taken, marked off from the ager publicus by a line of stones at regular intervals’, S. B. Platner and T. Ashby, A topographical dictionary of ancient Rome (Oxford, 1929), p. 392; see also M. Andreussi, ‘Pomerium’, in Lexicon topographicum, ed. Steinby, vol. IV, pp. 96–105.

hills to the urbs, moving his royal residence there and living there afterwards, in order to encourage people to inhabit the hill.16 This is an apparently bizarre legitimisation of a plenary indulgence accorded to a church, the most bizarre that I have ever chance to read. It is a small, but exemplary, fragment of fourteenth-century Roman classicism, and gives an idea of how, in putting together a modern reference book such as the Speculum Historiale and the first Decade of Livy, Christian ritual in Rome made the most of every opportunity (and text) for presenting itself as the legitimate heir of its pagan predecessor. Those who ran Santa Croce in Gerusalemme certainly had a powerful interest in presenting the basilica as the place where a controversial, and possibly sinful, pope had found salvation; it might be as fruitful for the basilica as having it set under the protection of a powerful saint. The inevitable discontinuity between the pagan asylum and the Christian temple at an ethical level, was to be offset by the historical continuity, which was guaranteed in the first place by the fact that the space in which the new ritual took form was the same as that which had given shape to the old.

Whereas the inscription from Santa Croce is unique in its use of classicism, another inscription is exemplary in its incidental, contingent reference to the ancient world. One of the principal monuments of the history and glory of Rome in the Middle Ages was undoubtedly the Antonine column. It is cited, however, only in a purely administrative inscription of 1119, in which the monastery of San Silvestro in Capite claimed ownership of the column and the neighbouring church of Sant'Andrea. This concludes with a canonical sanction: ‘if any man shall steal this column by violence from our monastery, he shall lie under perpetual curse as sacrilegious and a plunderer and invader of holy things and be held in the perpetual chain of anathema’.17 A few decades later, in 1162, the Roman Senate, settling a dispute between two churches about the ownership of Trajan’s Column (and the houses, vegetable gardens and other properties which lay around the column), prescribed, on pain of death, that the column was to be preserved intact until the end of the world, for the honour of the church and the whole Roman people.18 Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the period between the epigraph and the

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16 It is significant that this passage of Livy (1, 30, 1) is repeatedly quoted and commented in the Polistoria of Giovanni Cavallini (7, 1, 7; 8, 1, 1; 9, 2, 1); on Cavallini and his work see below, pp. 321–6.
17 Forcella, Iscrizioni, vol. IX, p. 79: ‘Sic quis ex hominibus colonniam per violentiam a nostro monasterio subtraxerit, perpetue maledictioni sicuti sacrilegus et raptor et sanctuarum rerum invasor subiaceat et anathematis vinculo perpetuo tenetur’.
18 Codice diplomatico del Senato Romano dal MCXLIV al MCCCLXXII, vol. I, ed. F. Bartoloni, Fonti per la storia d’Italia, 87 (Rome, 1948), pp. 26–7: ‘... ne unquam per aliquam personam dominium miniat, sed ut est ad honorem ipsius ecclesiae et totius popoli Romani integra et incorrupta permaneat, dum mundus durat, sic eius stante figura’ (the last part is a leonine hexameter). See also I. Baumgärtner, ‘Römische Herrschaft und Romanisierung. Die römische Kommune im 12.
edie: saw the appearance of a text which attributed a decisive role to the buildings, spaces and rituals of ancient Rome in the complex process of constructing the image of the modern city. The *Mirabilia Romae*, the earliest known version of which can be dated *ante* 1143, is a text which, although a great deal has been written about its authorship, premises, scope and fortune, still remains enigmatic in many respects, beginning with the structure, where the abrupt opening and decided, tripartite division leap to the eye, the latter having prompted the suggestion that it was three works brought together into a single text.¹⁹ In what follows, the standard issue raised in regard to the *Mirabilia* – whether the work is to be related to the Roman Senate or to the Curia – is not of concern. Indeed in practice it is impossible to give an answer on the basis of the text itself, and not enough

¹⁹ On the dating, authorship and potential political intent of the work, see N. R. Miedema, *Die "Mirabilia Romae": Untersuchungen zu ihrer Überlieferung, mit Edition der deutschen und niederländischen Texte* (Tübingen, 1996), pp. 1–11, who discusses previous hypotheses, rejecting the idea that the work could have a political objective associated with the *renovatio senatus* of 1143–4, accepting the *ante quem* dating of 1143 fixed by Valentini and Zucchetti for the earliest redaction to have come down to us, but dismissing as improbable the idea that the author was Benedict, a canon of San Pietro who inserted the *Mirabilia* in his *Liber Polypticus* (a vast handbook for the administration of the Roman curia, containing the *Ordo Romanus*) between 1140 and 1143, even though there is as yet no evidence for a redaction of the *Mirabilia* earlier than that of the *Liber Polypticus*. On the literary genre and typology of works with which the *Mirabilia* can be compared, see ibid., pp. 437–65. Further, and different, opinions on the nature of the work, and particularly on the connection with the *renovatio senatus* or with the papal Curia, can be found in J. Strothmann, *Kaiser und Senat. Der Herrschaftsanspruch der Stadt Rom zur Zeit der Staufer* (Gologne – Weimar – Vienna, 1998), pp. 93–127; Nardella, *L’antiquaria romana dal Liber Pontificialis ai “Mirabilia urbis Romae”*, pp. 429–39; D. Kinney, *Fact and Fiction in the “Mirabilia urbis Romae”*, in *Roma Felix – Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*, ed. É. Ó Carragáin and C. Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 235–52; G. Scilt, *Anonimo Romano. Geschichtsschreibung in Rom an der Schwelle zur Renaissance* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 164–77 (also available in Italian as *Anonimo romano. Scrittura e storia nelle fonti del Rinascimento* [Rome, 2000], pp. 205–26); I. Herklots, *Gli eredi di Costantino. Il papato, il Laterano e la propaganda visiva nel XII secolo* (Rome, 2000), pp. 215–17, who quotes other studies, preceding and following Miedema’s, all of which deal with the political background of the work, relating the *Mirabilia* either to the Senate or to the Curia. The text of the *Mirabilia* is cited here from the edition in Valentini – Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, vol. III, pp. 17–65, the English translations are my own. The classic translation of the *Mirabilia* by P. M. Nichols, *Mirabilia urbis Romae. The Marvels of Rome or a picture of the Golden City* (London – Rome, 1889), introduced the text of the *Graphia* into the original *Mirabilia* as well as later additions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, indicating the former with crosses and the latter with square brackets.
external evidence has yet been found to provide an uncontroversial solution. Although the earliest copy of the Mirabilia is preserved in a book produced for the Curia, as an account of the marvels and the glory of ancient Rome, both republican and imperial, the text could undoubtedly have been 'used' for political propaganda in the environment of the Senate; but did it ever happen? Instead, what is of interest here is the idea behind the picture of the city provided by the text.

While the first part of the Mirabilia has all the characteristics of a systematic survey of the places, buildings, and monuments of the city, in the second, Rome appears as the space in which ancient history unfolds. But this is not yet the idea of the city as a great book of history which, in various forms, would be characteristic of the late Middle Ages and early Humanism. What seems to concern the author is to show how Rome is a space where ancient history becomes sacred history, or qualifies the city as a sacred space. This is the substance of the stories of Augustus and the Altar of heaven (Ara coeli), of Agrippa and the Pantheon and of the festival instituted by Augustus for the victory over Anthony and Cleopatra, transformed into a Christian festival by the Empress Eudoxia, with the consent of Pope Pelagius, and located in the new basilica of S. Pictio in Vincoli. 20

If ancient history becomes sacred history, the sacred, in its dual nature as space and event, acquires the depth of history. The projection of the sacred into the past takes place along lines which are substantially those of continuity. In this sense the chapters in the Mirabilia on Agrippa and the Pantheon and on Augustus and Eudoxia appear characteristic. Pope Boniface, with the consent of the Emperor Phocas, transforms the Pantheon, temple of Cybele (mother of the gods), Neptune and all the deities into a church dedicated to the Virgin, mother of all the saints. The dedication takes place on the same day on which the pagan temple had been dedicated (1 November) and to reconfirm the change in the nature of the building, the pope establishes a rite, as solemn as that of Christmas, to be celebrated every year on 1 November. In this case the continuity is perfect: the place, the building, the date remain identical, and even the typology of the cult appears the same (Cybele mother of the gods, the Virgin, mother of the saints). Conversely, the festivity instituted by Augustus to celebrate his victory over Anthony and Cleopatra, accomplished on 1 August, a rite which is repeated every year and involves the whole city (tota civilitas), is not located in a particular place. Here the first coincidence is again that of the calendar: Eudoxia returns to Rome on 1 August, while the customary festivity is in progress. Whereas Augustus had brought back from the East a decisive military victory, the Empress brings back a relic of the most important of the apostles. So the author uses the speech of Eudoxia to Pope Pelagius to underline the further parallels: 'just as he freed you from Egyptian servitude, so this heavenly emperor frees you from the slavery of the devils'; and therefore, 'just as blessed Peter was freed by the angel, so the

Roman people retreat from sins freed with a blessing'. But in this case there is also an element of discontinuity, because this is the transformation into a religious celebration of a festivity which is not only pagan but also profane. The reaction of the Romans is anything but enthusiastic: 'Hearing which, the people took it very badly' (gravissime suscipit). The change is ratified by the construction of the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli, undertaken so that every 1 August the Roman people, without particular signs of joy, 'could come together there and pay reverence to the chains of the apostles Peter and Paul' (ibi ... confluat et saluet catenas apostolorum Petri et Pauli). The chapter on Augustus and Eudoxia is symptomatic of a process of reduction: what survives paganism in some way is only that which is transformed into a religious rite. But it is an exception which proves the rule, where the rule is that ancient Rome was already a sacred city. The first three chapters of the third section of the Mirabilia, the so-called itinerary (periegesis), dedicated to the area of the Vatican, are framed by two sentences, one at the opening of chapter nineteen, the other at the end of chapter twenty-one, which make this clear. The first states that the basilica of the Vatican is so-called 'because the seers (vates), that is priests, sang their offices there before the temple of Apollo'. The second specifies that 'The monuments we mentioned were all dedicated as temples, to which Roman virgins came together with their votive offerings, as Ovid says in the book of the Fasti.' Among the monuments in question, according to the author of the Mirabilia, there were the tomb of Romulus, Castel Sant'Angelo, formerly the temple of Hadrian and the mysterious Tiburtinum (or Terebratium) Neronis ('beside which was crucified the holy apostle Peter'). The Vatican then, already in the ancient world, was a space consecrated to religious cults. This sacral character continues in the following chapter, which opens with a reference to the Augustum, the mausoleum built by Octavian for imperial burials near porta Flaminia, which at its centre had an apse in which sat Octavian, 'and where there were priests per-

21 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, ch. 18, pp. 41-2: 'Et sicut ille liberavit vos ab Aegyptiaca servitute, ita iste imperator caelestis liberet vos a servitute daemonum ... sicut beatus Petrus ab angelo solutus fuit, ita Romanus populus a peccatis cum benedictione liberatus recedat.'

22 Ibid., p. 42.

23 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, ch. 19, p. 43: 'Ideo dictur Vaticanum, quia vates, id est sacerdotes, caneabant ibi sua officia ante templum Apollinis'.

24 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, ch. 21, p. 47: 'Hac monumenta quae dioinus, omnia pro templis dedicata erant, ad quae confluabant Romanae virgines cum votis, sicut dict Ovidius in libro Faustorum' (the allusion is too generic to be identified with a specific passage of the Fasti).

forming their ceremonies.\textsuperscript{26} Chapters nineteen to thirty-one of the *Mirabilia* can be defined as a *periegesis* as long as it is clear that it is almost exclusively an itinerary of temples. The only exception is the chapter on the Circus Maximus. The Capitoline, onto which the author of the *Mirabilia* projects his own time, describing it as the political centre of the ancient city ('where consuls and senators used to reside to govern the globe'), is again identified as a hill of temples.\textsuperscript{27} This follows texts which were probably confused in the memory of the author (the aside 'which I can recall to mind' - *quae ad memoriam ducere possam* - seems to open an unexpected window onto his working method). But here as elsewhere, it is the Ovid of the *Fasti* that emerges, in this case defined as a martyrology (*maribirologium*), a telling name for a pagan poem explaining the origins, the nature and the procedures of the festivals devoted to each pagan god.\textsuperscript{28} Even the *fora*, the key public spaces of ancient Rome, are restricted to, and almost identified by, their temples.\textsuperscript{29}

The *periegesis* presents ancient Rome as a city of temples, and the churches of Christian Rome are often located over them. While the first part of the *periegesis* is markedly descriptive, the second is almost entirely a list of names, with only occasional explanations. In this second part most of all, the continuity between pagan temples and Christian churches appears perfect: 'Where Sta Maria Maggiore stands, there was the temple of Cybele; Where San Pietro ad Vincula stands, there was the temple of Venus; at Sta Maria in Fontana, the temple of Faunus.'\textsuperscript{30} The elementary grammatical structure *ubi est ... fuit*, with slight variations, is repeated several times, as though to underline, in its utter simplicity, the naturalness of the evolution, that is the lack of interruption or at least of trauma in the passage from temple to church. The Rome of the *Mirabilia* - of the *Mirabilia* in their entirety - is a Rome in which there is no trace of decline, or loss of memory.

So the Rome of the *Mirabilia* is a city without uncertainties, without flaws; a city in which everything is explicable, understandable, everything can be reconstructed. It is an eternal Rome, in which, even when there seems to be no trace left of the ancient wonders - as in the case, for example, of the Circus Maximus -

\textsuperscript{26} 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, ch. 22, p. 48: '... ibique erant sacerdotes facientes suas ceremonias'.

\textsuperscript{27} 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, ch. 23, p. 51: '... ubi consules et senatores morabantur ad gubernandum orbem'.


\textsuperscript{29} See 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, chapters 23-4, pp. 51-7.

\textsuperscript{30} 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, ch. 28, p. 60: 'Ubi est Sancta Maria Maior, fuit templum Gibeles. Ubi est Sanctus Petrus ad Vincula, fuit templum Venereis. Ad Sanctam Marian in Fontana templum Fauni'.

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there are no explicit references to decline. This rarefied atmosphere is further strengthened by the effective absence of inhabitants. An occasional, episodic reference to the Romans, or rather the people of Rome, is to be found in the central section of the Mirabilia, but the living people of the city at the time of the author, their nature, customs, or daily activities, are entirely missing. This is another feature of the originality of the work, to be stressed whenever the Mirabilia is categorized—as has often and entirely naturally been done—within the complex genre of descriptiones urbis, of which a good number of examples survive, from across the whole period of the Middle Ages and its different geographical areas. We can consider the Mirabilia as the medieval description of Rome par excellence, but in the knowledge that the absence of the real life of the city characterises the work as a substantial exception, a largely autonomous chapter in the genre of medieval descriptions of cities. Which brings us back to the beginning of this analysis: the Rome of the Mirabilia, more than a city, is a sacred space, in which the sacred acquires the chronological depth of history, becomes history, but only so as to obtain a further, definitive confirmation of its sacrality, to make of this sacrality a destiny assigned ab origine, which history constantly undertakes to reconfirm.

The features thus far described were certainly not the reasons for the extraordinary success of the Mirabilia, with several hundred manuscript and printed copies, hosts of adaptations or re-workings, and translations into almost all the vernaculars of the Latin West. Rather its success was the result of its being what today we might call an encyclopaedic dictionary of the ancient city and its modern reproduction, and what is more, a small one, of a size that anyone interested in Rome

would easily have been able to acquire. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the earliest redaction of the *Mirabilia* to reach us, inserted into the *Liber Polyptichus* of canon Benedict, could also have served practical ends, providing a repertory of places, buildings and monuments of the city and arranging them on an ideal map which could come in handy for both administrative and liturgical purposes. What is certain is that this enormous success rendered the *Mirabilia* an almost exclusive point of reference, and even an explicit model for whoever, to whatever end, wished to describe Rome: the fortune of the work and its power as a model depend on the one the other.

The centuries-long succession of re-workings of the *Mirabilia*, in greater or lesser depth, began with the famous *Graphia aureae urbis Romae*, datable to circa 1155. It continued in ways which can easily be traced through the texts published by Valentinii and Zucchetti in the volumes of the *Codice toposgrafico della città di Roma* and then studied by Miedema, down to the updates, expansions and changes to the original text which took place, for example, in the translation into the Roman vernacular with the title *Le miracole de Roma* (in the mid-thirteenth century or slightly later) or in the redaction of the *Mirabilia* inserted into the *Collectanea* of Cardinal Nicolás Rosell (1360–62). The one thing that should be

32 The volume put together by Benedict contains an *Ordo Romanus*, a description of papal ceremonial. The processions that the pope was required to undertake in the city were not intended to give him a breath of fresh air, but to make his ownership of the city visible. This led to large crowds and potentially dangerous situations. The *Ordo* of Gencio Savelli (Gencius Camerarius) [after 1188] prescribes that in several places those following the pope must be ready to throw coins at the crowd, above his head, not as gifts, but to clear the way, thereby avoiding dangerous gatherings (see the text in *Codice toposgrafico*, ed. Valentinii and Zucchetti, vol. III, pp. 223–70, at p. 223). So the route had to be absolutely certain, the spaces well known and defined: the survey of the buildings and the description of the city in the *Mirabilia* could also serve this contingent need. As always, in the rituals which marked the life of the city, the equilibrium between the ideal and practical dimensions was difficult to achieve and uncomfortable to maintain.


34 See Miedema, *Die “Mirabilia Romae”. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Überlieferung*, 320
underlined is that all the modifications and innovations, even when they changed the purpose of the work (transforming it into a guide for pilgrims) may have affected the details, sometimes extensively, but never changed the ratio, the substance of the work, which continued to serve as the model for descriptions of Rome until the arrival of Humanism.

In reality, the cultural context had already changed fundamentally by the middle of the Trecento when, even without the papal library, it would have been possible to line up on a bookshelf in Rome, Livy, Suetonius, the *Historia Augusta*, the *Chronicon* of Eusebius-Jerome and the *Liber Pontificalis*, and acquire therefore a renewed sense of the depth and continuity of the pagan and Christian history of Rome. A product of this change is the omnivorous (to the point of indigestion) encyclopedia of *Romanitas* written in the 1340s by Giovanni Cavallini, the *Polistoria de virtutibus et dotibus Romanorum*. On the history of Rome as a continuum, Cavallini had no doubts. To give an idea of his method, it is enough to cite the passage on Numa Pompius (the second king of Rome), who on accepting the kingdom conferred on him by the people and Senate, consulted the gods ‘by augur, that is the priest, who prefigures the pope, and approves, anoints and crowns the kings’ and was then led into the citadel and took a seat on the south side, called the stercoraria’. Thus the newly elected Numa sits on the sella stercoraria of the popes, while the Roman senate is a ‘sacred consistory’ (sacrum consistorium), and so on. The substance of the work is that, while the tura of the Roman people are still perfectly whole and have never abandoned the enclosure of the Aurelian walls, the prerogatives of the Roman senate have been transferred to the college of Cardinals. For a Roman like Cavallini in the first half of the fourteenth century, having reluctantly emigrated to Avignon, there was lit-

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56 Cavallini, *Polistoria*, 1, 5, ed. Laureys, p. 23: ‘... per augurem, id est sacerdotem, qui sub typo papa significat, quique reges approbat, inungit et coronat ... deductus in archem consedtit sellam ad meridiem versus, stercorarum nuncupatam’. See also ibid. 9, 2, 5, ed. Laureys, p. 228.

tyle to be done beyond closing oneself in with one’s books to dream that, while everything had changed in form, in Rome nothing had changed in substance. It was also a dream which, with the expedient adaptations, could serve as a basis for political action, as demonstrated by the story of Cola di Rienzo.58

Three books of the Polistoria are devoted to the city, for which Cavallini uses the Graphia. He makes special reference to this work, recalling the copy kept 'in the church of Sta Maria Nova, which I saw and read continuously'.59 These three books, numbers six to eight of the Polistoria, of which six is dedicated to the founders and gates, seven to the hills, eight to the regiones (districts), do not provide the reader with a true description of the city: inside his Rome 'shaped like a lion' (in forma leonis) Cavallini places only that which serves to demonstrate the validity of his solidly continuist thesis. Individual locations in the city are frequently made the object of anthropological rather than historical considerations. Thus the regio Columbine (column) is so called, 'because of rectitude and steadfastness, from which the inhabitants of this district, like columns of a strong building, were once said to be upright and steadfast'.60 The column only arrived later, when an emperor Antonius, realising the virtues of the inhabitants, decided to build his giant palaces (ingentia palatia) there and to put up the colossal column of marble ‘for the eternal fame of the district’ (in ... regionis ipsius nomen sempiternum: it is the column of Marcus Aurelius). The emperor ordered that on the whole surface of the column ‘images, effigies and statues ...’ were to be carved ‘representing the most important consuls of Rome because of their great virtues and deeds’.61 Cavallini emphasises how these sculptures, located at a site of the greatest importance, serve to educate the people, to encourage them to civil virtues. He thus outlines a relationship which works in two directions: the physical space is determined by moral virtues, which are in turn fed by what is found in the physical space.

In the Polistoria the space of the city and of the rituals that take place in it is the product of virtues and qualities, almost we might say of quiddities innate in the ancient Romans, as in the modern. Of the Monti district Cavallini writes: ‘like the

58 On which see below, pp. 330–2.
61 Cavallini, Polistoria, 8, 3, 2–3, ed. Laureys, p. 207: ‘... in circumferentis columnae huiusmodi iussit sculptri ymagines, simulacra et statua ... representantes clarissimos viros consules Romanos ob magnificas virtutes gestaque eorum’.
stern in ships, where the direction of the whole ship is located, so the government and regimen of the city was once in this region, rather than in all the other regions of the said city, because there stood the palace of the imperial monarchy, the Colisseum, the baths of Caesar Diocletian [and] the temple of Consus, the god of advice. But this idea derives from the fact that the inhabitants of the region are distinguished 'by the quality of their habits' (morum qualitate) and 'fervid with the heat of faith to the point of martyrdom'. Above all, the region is the tail of the lion, in which is described its shrewdness' (in qua describitur eius sagacitas), because the lion covers its tracks with its tail so as not to be taken by hunters, as Isidore had specified. The Rome of Cavallini is in large part arome of symbols in search of legitimation in a past which he wishes to see continue in the present. It is the Rome of the theatrical ostentations of Cola di Rienzo, and it is the Rome of the anonymous Chronicler, whose Cronica records how Cola had not been able to die nobly like the ancient senator Papirius, thereby depriving his whole affair of all credibility.

The continuity with ancient Rome which for Cavallini is in the main the heroic Rome of kings and the first centuries of the Republic, as furnished by his much loved and cited first Decade of Livy) is recovered by connecting spaces with the accounts of historians. Such continuous, systematic reference to historians, ancient and modern, conferred a depth on the vocabulary of the city represented by the tradition of the Mirabilia which had remained unattainable in that tradition itself, ever more downgraded as it was to the role of guide for pilgrims and the curious. The chapters on the gates are exemplary from this point of view. Not only are they what put the city in contact with the outside world, but they are also a stratigraphy representing the various phases of its history. The chapter on the porta Lavinia opens with a daring etymological suggestion taken from the Catholicon of Giovanni Balbi (finished in 1286), who connected it to the 'seers, that is learned people so named from seeing, as if they were vases of wisdom' (vates, id est philosophi, a videndo dicti, quasi vasa sapienue) who, with their wisdom and long experience, foresaw 'the course of events in public affairs' (futura contingentia in re publica). But Cavallini points out that 'today in the Roman language' (bodie Romano ydiomate) the gate is called Maior, since it is

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42 Cavallini, Polistoria, 8, 1, 6, ed. Laureys, p. 203–204: 'Ad instar puppis classium, ubi consistit gubernatio totius navigii, ita in huiusmodi regione fuit ab olim gubernatio et regimen urbis pre ceteris aliis regionibus dicte urbis, quia ibi etat palatium imperialis monarchiae, Coloseum, terme Diocletiani Cesaris, templum Consi dei consiliorvm'.

43 Cavallini, Polistoria, 8, 1, 5, ed. Laureys, p. 203: '... fervent calere fidei ad martirium usque producti'.


45 See below, pp. 351–2.

46 Cavallini, Polistoria, 6, 29, 1, ed. Laureys, p. 169.
the most beautiful and stands out from the others because of its bastions and towers 'as is evident to people's eyes, which give a more reliable opinion on these kinds of things'. The *porta* is also called *Exquilia*, like the hill on which it stands, 'that is, food for flying birds' (*id est esca alitum avium*; the source is the *Derivationes* of Uguccione da Pisa, d. 1210), because the bodies of those condemned to death were strung up on the hill. Cavallini then introduces an important digression: in Rome there were two *carnaria* (charnel houses), one on the Esquiline 'above the houses of Gaius Caesar, first monarch of the Romans', the other on the Quirinal 'above the houses of Metellus, pontifex maximus of the Romans'. Since the *carnaria* were 'places of justice' (*loqui iustitie*), it was undoubtedly understood that in Antiquity both imperial and pontifical authorities had had their own courts of justice in the city. So once again, Cavallini investigates the past to legitimate the present, or rather the present as he dreamed it, as a hope for the near future. There follow three passages of Livy in which the *porta* *Exquilia* and the corresponding hill were mentioned. To these is connected the memory of the 'wicked street' (*vicus scleratus*), with the episode of Tullia driving his chariot over the body of his father Servius Tullius (based once more on Livy), here again admitting no discontinuity between the period of the kings and the present: 'from which the Romans, when blaspheming somebody unworthy and hateful, say "Go to the cursed street"'. Cavallini also records Juvenal: 'they seek the Esquiline and the hill named from its osiers', and the presence on the hill of the *templum Lucilii* (indicated by Livy), of baths, aqueducts for the *Aqua Claudia* and brothels. The porta was 'also called *Equilia* from fairness, because the fairness of king Servius Tullius prospered next to it'. Servius had placed his residence in the quarter, as,


Cavallini, *Poliorama*, 6, 29, 5, ed. Laureys, p. 171: '... unde blasphemantes quandoque Romani aliquos maleremitos et odiosos dicuerunt "Vade in via maledicta"'.


Cavallini, *Poliorama*, 6, 29, 7, ed. Laureys, p. 171: 'Alias huiusmodi porta dicitur Equilia ab equitata, quia luxta illam portam floreat equitas Servi Tullii'.
once again, Livy recorded; and again the urban spaces appeared: the house of the king was situated, with signal anachronism, 'between the memorial of the Cimbri and the meat-market of Liberia [a mix between the macellum Liviae and the basilica Libertana]', where today stands the church of San Vito in Macello, in the place once called Militia', in other words a barracks, which Cavallini reports was demolished in his day to allow the restoration of the church, which was threatening to collapse directly onto it. The key information remains the fact that Servius Tullius had put his residence there so that the Romans would have a place expressly dedicated to observing the 'dignity of fairness and justice' (dignitas equitatis et tustitiae); this allowed Cavallini to place at the Equkia gate, the 'tail of the lion, by which is meant the government of the Roman city, because it used to be there long ago in the times of the said Servius Tullius'. Thus Cavallini places no real difference of values between ancient and modern history up to his own time, unless in so far as ancient history always preserves its value as an exemplum, a laboratory from which to extract interpretative categories and a key to the reading of modern history.

It is worth observing how Cavallini also extends the continuity between ancient and modern into the daily sphere. To explain the dialect expression 'Go pay yourself on the tufa of the circus' ('Pacate ad lo tofo de lo Cierchio'), for example, used to make fun of anyone who tried to get credit back from a debtor who was never going to pay up, Cavallini claims that in the Circus Maximus in ancient times there was a large stone of tufa on which insolvent debtors were placed. Having been brought from Gaol still in chains, on that stone they renounced all their goods in favour of their creditors, 'beating this stone with their ases over and over and saying as many times as they beat the stone 'I waive my assets''. There is little need to point out that this custom had never existed in the ancient world and that the Circus Maximus had never been a place for the exercising of justice. This is an extreme case, in which we are witnesses to the creation of a pseudo-rural,

53 Ibid: '... rex huiusmodi habitavit ibi inter memoriam Cymborum et macellum Liberis, ubi est hodie ecclesia Sancti Viti in Macello, in loco qui dicebatur ab olim Militia'.
54 Cavallini, Polisoria, 6, 29, 8, ed. Laureys, pp. 171-2: 'Et proportea apud portam huiusmodi est cauda leonis, per quam designatur gubernaculum civitatis Romane, quod ab olim in huiusmodi loco consuevit consistere temporibus dicti Servii Tullii'.
55 Cavallini, Polisoria, 5, 7, 2, ed. Laureys, p. 147: '... verberantes huiusmodi lapidum cumculo ipsorum vicibus repetitae totidemque sermonibus dicentes “Cedo bonis”'
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located in a space where it could never have taken place, so as to give the authority of antiquity and, therefore of nobility, to a rather vulgar expression. But it is also a revealing case, because it shows how in Cavallini the semantic of the present, whether history or reportage, is all entrusted to the past: the spaces and rituals of ancient Rome, recovered through the detailed examination of the historians, give sense to the present and, alone, continue to justify the excellence of Rome.

Cavallini does not disguise the fact that for Rome the present age is an era of decline. In the prologue he affirms that the Romans of his day not only did not like to write about the remote warlike undertakings of their ancestors, but they did not even want to read ‘the things that their ancestors had not disdained to do’ (here yet again Livy, 10, 31, 15, is in the background). Concluding the ninth book, at the end of the passage on the prerogatives of the lion, ‘which fit all Romans’ (Romanis conventunt universis), Cavallini recalls the legend of the three ages of the lion, which ‘in its third, decrepit age, is very weak’. The first age was the Rome of the kings and the consuls, the second of the emperors, but now, Rome, ‘in its third, decrepit age, having lost its empire and papacy, has become impotent, and completely drained of its strength’. The chapter closes with the famous verses, Roma vetus, veteres dum te revere Quirites, in which the concluding phrase precipitata ruis (you fall collapsing) is glossed ‘that is, remaining ruined’ (id est dirupta permanens), with a further echo of the still more famous verses of Hildebert of Lavardin: Sed quales olim Roma fuit bodie ipsa ruina docet (But what Rome once was, today its ruins teach). If we wanted to summarise the difference between the Rome of the Mirabilia and that of the Polistoria in a single formula, it might be that, whereas the Mirabilia subordinates the profane to the sacred, the Polistoria makes the sacred a superstructure of the profane: the greatness of Rome is the greatness of its people, above all relying on civil and military virtues, those same people who, in the Mirabilia, not by coincidence, were virtually absent. But in reality, the two works are the expressions of historical and cultural circumstances which were not just distant in time, but also of diametrically opposing natures. The first was the expression of a renaissance, the second the fruit of a dark time, during which, caught between the absence of the popes and the oppressive power of the barons, Rome seems to have reached the lowest point in

57 Cavallini, Polistoria, prologue 4, ed. Laureys, p. 8: "Set quinam est hodie civium eorumdem quem non piget hodie longinquitates bellorum non solum scribere, sed etiam periege rea qae maiores ipsorum gerere non fastidierunt".

58 Cavallini, Polistoria, 9, 3, 5, ed. Laureys, p. 230: "... in tertia eius etate decrepita et debilissimus".

59 Ibid.: "... in tertia eius etate decrepita, perditis eius imperio et papatu, facta est inpotens et viribus extincta".

60 Cavallini, Polistoria, 9, 3, 7, ed. Laureys, p. 231; Hildebert’s verses are also evoked ibid., 3, 1, 4, p. 69. Compare Hildebert of Lavardin (Hildeberti Genomansensis episcopi), Carmina minora, ed. A. Brian Scott (Leipzig, 1969), 36, 1–2, p. 22.
LATE MEDIEVAL AND HUMANIST ROME IN THE MIRROR OF TEXTS

its history. It is no coincidence that the Polistoria remained an isolated work, an exceptional witness to the ideas and feelings of that Trecento, which was the most troubled century in the late medieval history of Rome, but incapable of any real effect on either the tradition of the Mirabilia, or the work of Humanists, who, if they ever became aware of it, kept well clear.

But decline can also be the necessary precondition for a renewal. In the Rome of the fourteenth century, for the first time after many centuries, laymen were no longer exercising only administrative roles, but found themselves within reach of political power, which they came fully to exercise. This new lay power legitimised itself by differentiating its spaces and its rites from those of the popes. The institutional space of late medieval Roman politics was fundamentally the Capitoline. During the late republican and imperial age, the Capitoline had been almost entirely consecrated to the religious life; it became the theatre for political events only when politics had need of the sacred (on such special occasions the Senate met on the Capitoline). Moreover, the sacred image of the hill passed virtually without disruption from the pagan to the Christian, in part thanks to the legend of the vision of the Emperor Octavian, who, after interrogating the Sybil on the expediency of having a divine cult attributed to him, is said to have seen the sky open and a virgin with a child in her arms appear above an altar, a vision which led to the construction of the church of the Aracoeli (altar of heaven), according to the account in the Mirabilia, in which the Capitoline was identified as the seat of politics in ancient Rome: 'the Capitoline, which was the head of the world, where the consuls and senators used to reside to govern the globe'.

When the Senate was reconstituted in 1143/44, the best way to claim an impossible continuity with the ancient Senate was to place the new institution in the presumed location of the ancient one. The new Senate would thus inherit the lay secularities of its ancient predecessors, while the presence of the Aracoeli would ward off any accusations of neopaganism. It is no accident that in the fourteenth-century statutes of Rome the church is sometimes associated with the neighbouring Palace of the Senators: 'If anyone should commit a crime in the Palace of the Capitoline ... or in the church of Sta Maria in Aracoeli ... and in the places of the market when the mar-

61 'Mirabilia', ed. Valentini and Zucchetti, ch. 23, p. 51: 'Capitolium, quod erat caput mundi, ubi consules et senatores morabantur ad gubernandum orbem'.
ket is going on, then the penalties are to be multiplied by four’. Between the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the Quattrocento the church became one of the key places of politics in the city. And the Capitoline as a whole became the most important public space, the favourite place for displaying and confronting the various ideas and natures of Rome. All of which moved through the dialectic between space and ritual.

Thus in 1340, for example, both Rome and Paris proposed to Petrarch that he be crowned poet. Needless to say, Petrarch — who had openly sought and solicited the laurel crown — chose Rome; his idea was to bring a presumed ancient ritual back to life and overhaul the much vaunted, but by now decidedly rusty, centrality of Rome in European culture. Having been examined in Naples by King Robert of Anjou, in April 1341 (the precise day is disputed) Petrarch went up onto the Capitoline, where he delivered a highly sophisticated oration on the nature and the history of poetry, mostly based on passages from ancient authors. The ceremony took place in the room of the Assestamentum, the great hall of the Palace of the Senators (Palazzo Senatorio). Who knows whether Petrarch knew that the lower part of the palace, right under his feet, was a prison which was anything but comfortable? Perhaps the marble lion which was on the steps of the Capitoline will have been cleaned up for the occasion and exhibited in all its splendour as a symbol of the city, following the words of Honorius of Autun: ‘Rome has the form of a lion which presides over other beasts like a king’. On that day the lion will not have had to listen to the solemn condemnations, usually read out before the statue, was to be placed astride the lion,

61 ‘Si vero quis in palatio Capitolii ... vel in ecclesia Sancte Marie de Araceli ... et in locis fori, quando forum fit, malleficium commictatur, tunc pene quadruplicatur’: Statuti della città di Roma, ed. C. Re (Rome, 1880), p. 147 (ch. CXI: De duplicatone pontorium ratione temporis, loci et personarum); C. Carbonetti Vendittelli, ‘La curia dei magistri edificiorem Urbis nei secoli XIII e XIV e la sua documentazione, in Roma nei secoli XIII e XIV. Cinque saggi i Rome aux XIII et XIV siècles. Cing études, ed. É. Hubert (Rome, 1993), pp. 15–16, found a document which allowed her to backdate the Statutes from the traditional 1363, suggested by Re, to 1360.


with a kind of a mitre on his head on which is to be written "inobedient transgressors of orders", and his face is to be covered with honey, and he is to stay there as a rider as long as the market shall last."\footnote{66}

The laureatio of Petrarch was an exceptional, outstanding event, but the encounter of two different concepts of Rome on the Capitoline hill, one literary and extrinsic to the real city, the other political and internal, was not new at all: it usually took shape through rituals, and ritualised the same space in completely different ways. In the Trecento it was the second which was to prevail. Whereas ritualisation of a literary or erudite character evolved gradually over long periods (at the apex of the Renaissance a large theatre was set up on the Capitoline hill, in which plays of Plautus and Terence were performed in Latin), political ritualisation, in a situation as fluid as that of Rome in the fourteenth century, was subject to continual mutation.\footnote{67}

Petrarch probably did not realize that the building from which he gave his speech was not always entirely secure. In 1353, at the height of a famine, the cry 

\textit{Puopolo, puopolo!} went up from the market on the Capitoline, 'at which call, the Romans ran hither and thither like devils, inflamed with evil fury' and attacked the \textit{Palazzo Senatorio}.\footnote{68} One of the two Senators then in office managed to escape by letting himself down with a rope from the back of the building. The other remained blockaded inside and became the lone target of popular anger: 'More stones and rocks pelt[ed] him from above, like the leaves that fall from trees in the autumn. Some threw them, others promised\footnote{69} to. For a moment it seemed that the Senator would manage to escape but, coming to a painted image of the Virgin at the foot of the Palace by reason of the cascades of stone he lost his strength. Then the people, without any mercy or law ended his days in that place, stoning him like a dog, launching stones at his head as if at St Stephen.\footnote{70}

This episode is narrated in the only fourteenth-century chronicle written in Rome to have come down to us, if with large gaps. The work of an author who has

\footnote{66} \textit{Statuti della città di Roma}, ed. Re., p. 151 (ch. CXX: \textit{De fessoribus manutaturis et expellentibus eos}): ‘... debat poni eques in leone marmoris existentiae in scalis Capitoli cum quadam mitra in capite, in qua sit scriptus “inobedientum mandati transgressarum”, et faciem habeant tum de melle et debat manere ibi eques quosque fuerit et duraverit mercatum’.

\footnote{67} For the Capitoline theatre see F. Cruciani, \textit{Il teatro del Campidoglio e le feste romane del 1515} (Milan, 1968).


\footnote{70} Anonimo, \textit{Cronica}, ed. Porta, p. 221: ‘Puro abbe potestate de inc in pede allo palazzo dove stao la maine de santa Maria. Lì da prioso per lo moito fioccare de prete la virtute lì venne meno. Allora lo puopolo senza misericordia e lele in quello loco lì compio lì dìi, allapadannolo come cane, iettano sassi sopra lo capo como a Santo Stefano’.

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unfortunately remained anonymous, it is today considered a masterpiece of Italian literature, and not just that of the Middle Ages. Written in a colourful medieval Roman dialect, this chronicle is also the best narrative of the affair of Cola di Rienzo: through the Anonimo’s eyes we can follow the political and military actions of Cola from inside the city and the development of his ideological programme. The strength of Cola in his struggle with the barons of Rome was in not occupying the Capitoline by arms, not making it a place of military conflict as it had been until that point, but in exploiting its nature as a public space to communicate his ideas to the Roman people. Thus Cola used the Palazzo Senatorio, which had at this date become an impregnable fortress, for displaying a large and complex allegorical painting, aimed at deploring the miserable state of Rome and the arrogance of the over-mighty barons.

Whereas Cavallini was an antiquarian who looked to the glory of the past to exorcise the decline of the present, Cola was a man of culture who used the past to shape and dominate the present, manipulating rituals and spaces with great nonchalance, perfectly aware of their value and ready to bend them to his own ends by every means possible. Emblematic of this is the account the Anonimo gives of his investiture as a knight, in which Cola has walls pulled down in both the old and the new papal palaces at the Lateran so as to allow all the Romans to participate in the great banquet which was to follow his investiture, and during which the equestrian monument which was thought to be Constantine is turned into a fountain so that wine and water pour from the nostrils of the horse. The many tables needed to allow as many Romans and guests as possible to join the banquet were made with the planks of the former stockades of the barons. Then Cola submerges himself in the baptismal pool of Constantine and for one night turns it into


his bedroom. The *Anonimo* reports the comments of observers: ‘There were
some who criticised his audacity, others who said he was fantastic, mad.’73 The
papal vicar who assisted at these things was astounded: ‘He was like a lump of
wood’.74 Cola was indeed intervening in one of the spaces of greatest symbolic
value in the city. He was staging a ritual without precedent which served to legiti-
mate a political act without precedents: that of convoking to Rome the pope, the
college of cardinals, the emperor and the German electors of the emperor, saying
‘I want to check what their rights in the election are’ (it does not matter here that
the convocation was, of course, unsuccessful).75 But in terms of the domestic
scene, it also served to consolidate the relationship between Cola and the Romans,
who remained the true source of his power and his only support in the fight
against the barons. The more the barons enclosed the city with their fortresses,
occupying the space, including that of the monuments, the more Cola exploited
ritual, or better, invented ritual, to open the space of the city to all and thereby ren-
der the Romans participants in their own politics. It is not a coincidence that the
very first sign of the decline of Cola’s political fortune, according to the *Anonimo*,
appears precisely when the Tribune (as he called himself) ceased to use the Capit-
toline as the chosen space for communicating with the people who supported him
and instead had fortifications built around the *Palazzo Senatorio* which were
identical to those of the hated barons:

> At the beginning this man lived a fairly temperate life. Then he began to mul-
tiply meals, and dinners and feasts and merrymaking with various foods and
wines and with numerous sweets. Then he had the *Palazzo of the Capitoline*
 enclosed with walls between the columns and enclosed with timber. And
ordered that all the stockades of the enclosures of the barons of Rome be
thrown to the ground.76

By this means the Capitoline became the theatre for the tragic end of Cola,
besieged in the Palace, fleeing from the back disguised as a Neapolitan shepherd,
betrayed by one of his fellows, recognised, captured, torn to pieces and burned:
‘Thus that body was burned and reduced to dust: not a scrap remained’.77 The pub-
lic death of a public personality is a ritual, but this time Cola had been unable to

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elezione’. On the political meaning of the whole ceremony see Seibt, *Anonimo
comenzare a multiplcare vite e cene e conviti e capule de divierzi civi e vini e de moiti
confetti. Puoi fece steccionare lo palazzo de Campituoio fra le colonne e chiuselo de
lename. E commannao che tutte le steccata de Renchosstri de baroni de Roma issero
per terra.’
control its performance and the *Anonimo* concludes by contrasting him with the Roman Senators who, during the siege of the Capitoline by the Gauls, having decided to abandon the fortress so as not to hamper the defenders, dressed in all their finery and paraded in procession, going to sit in front of their houses. When a Gaul touched his beard saying ‘Ah! vegliardo, vegliardo!’ then the Senator

Papirius became indignant because the Frenchman was not talking to him with reverence, as his dress required. He stretched out his rod and wounded the Frenchman on the head, and was not afraid to die to safeguard the honour of his majesty.\(^8\)

The end of Cola also marked the end of any hypothesis of direct continuity between ancient and contemporary Rome. The Capitoline administration no longer had the strength for proposals of a scope that might utilize rituals and spaces in the city to affirm its power, which was in practice to reveal itself to be rather weak. Moreover, the tortured return of the popes to Rome completely transformed the nature of the situation. Whereas from the point of view of sacred ritual and spaces the popes had only to retie the threads which had been unduly broken, from the point of view of profane ritual and spaces the problem was substantial, because the popes had to come to terms with everything that had happened in the period of their absence in Avignon. The policy of the pontiffs was to maintain the reference to pagan antiquity and even to endorse it, with the assistance of the many humanists who worked in the curia as apostolic secretaries, but substituting rupture in place of the fourteenth-century idea of perfect continuity.

The first part of the dialogue *De varietate fortunae* of Poggio Bracciolini, begun soon after the death of Martin V (1431), but published only at the beginning of 1448, can be considered the true archetype of the modern European literature on ancient ruins. In his pages the disaster of Rome becomes the best metaphor for the fragility of human fortunes. For Poggio, Rome is an empty space, as expressed at the beginning of the dialogue, ‘we were often seeing the deserts of the city’ (*vicebanum saeae* [numerous manuscripts give *secepius*] *deserta urbis*), to the panorama which precedes the long finale on the walls, in which the Capitoline is ‘so desolate and deranged, and changed from the once famous, golden Capitoline, that vines have taken over the seats of the Senators, [and] it has become a receptacle for dung and rubbish’.\(^9\) On the Palatine, the house of Nero,

\(^{8}\) Ibid., pp. 266–7: ‘Allora Papirio se desdegnao, perché lo Francesco non li favellava con reverenza, come l’abito sio musitra. Destese la bacchetta e ferio lo Francesco nella capo, e non temèo de morire per salvare la onoranza della maiesta sua’. The bibliography on Cola is immense and there is no space for a summary, but see most recently A. Schwartz, ‘Eternal Rome and Cola di Rienzo’s Show of Power’, in *Acts and Texas. Performance and Ritual in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2007), pp. 63–75.

\(^{9}\) Le Fogge (Poggio Bracciolini), *Les ruines de Rome. De varietate fortunae*, livre 1, ed.
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decorated with woods, lakes, obelisks, porticoes, colossi, theatres, varicoloured marbles, has been so struck down by Fortune, 'that not a shadow remains of any of these that you can identify for certain except vast ruins'. On the other hills, 'you will see every space empty of buildings and filled with ruins and vines'. The Forum and the Comitium (the meeting place on the Forum), the principle places of political activity 'were made bleak deserts by the evilness of fortune: one is a lodging-place for pigs and wild-oxen, the other a field for cultivating with vegetables'.

This is the Humanist image of the antiquities of Rome, or rather of what will from now on be the ruins of Rome. The key author in this world is Biondo Flavio, the leading historian of the Quattrocento, who not by chance was the inventor of the category media tempestas to indicate the historical period which stood between antiquity and his own time, in turn identified by him as the age of a renewal that had taken its origins precisely from the new way of reading the ancient texts embodied by the first generation of humanists (men such as Guarino Veronese, Vittorino da Feltre, Coluccio Salutati, Niccolò Niccoli, Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini and so on). Biondo Flavio worked, with up and downs, in the curia of some of the most important popes of the fifteenth century, Eugenius IV, Nicholas V and Pius II. He dedicated a significant part of his energies as a historian to the history of the city of Rome, in particular in his Roma instaurata, written between 1444 and 1446, in the last years of the pontificate of Eugenius IV, who had only then been able to return permanently to Rome. Biondo Flavio presents Rome as a deserted space, populated by mute ruins and the great, late antique and early medieval basilicas. The mark left by the Middle Ages on the buildings and the profane spaces of the city, when not negative, appears to him insignificant. What Biondo writes about the Capitoline is telling: he observes that on the hill where in antiquity more than sixty sacred buildings had stood, there was nothing left, if you excepted the Franciscan church of the Aracoeli and the Palazzo Senatorio, which he defines as a 'brick house' (domus latericia), built by Boniface IX for the use of the Senator and causidici (lesser lawyers), and which in antiquity would have been disdained even by a Roman of average status.

J.-Y. Boriaud, with introduction and notes by P. Coarelli and J.-Y. Boriaud (Paris, 1999), pp. 11 and 39: '... adaequ desolatum atque auresum at a priori illo aureo immutatum, ut vineae in Senatorum subsellia successerint, stercorum ac purgamentorum receptaculum factum'.

Ibid., p. 39: '... ut nulla rei cuiusquam effigies superexest, quam aliquid certum praeter vasta ruderar quaescus dicere'.

Ibid., p. 39: '... omnia vacua aedificiis, ruinis vineisque oppleta conspicies'.

Ibid., p. 39: '... desertar squalent malignitate fortunae, alterum pororum babalionumque diversumium, alterum serendis olieribus cultum'.

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Working entirely on a philological-antiquarian level, Biondo cuts away any possible continuity between ancient and medieval ritual. A significant case is that of the festivities of Testaccio, the most important Roman carnival in the Middle Ages, which, according to Cavallini, consisted of races of ‘quadrigas or carts with bulls from the countryside and other wild animals drawing the foreshadowed quadrigas down’ the slopes of the Testaccio hill.84 From the beginning Biondo discredits the fourteenth-century legend (told by Cavallini), according to which the Testaccio had been created by the shards of the amphorae in which the provinces of the empire sent their tributes to Rome. He then excludes, via an examination of the ancient witnesses, the idea that the modern festivity could trace its roots to the ancient Ludi Tauri, which, according to Biondo, consisted in a horse race with carts, from the Mausoleum of Augustus in the Campus Martius straight to the Circus Flaminius, which he identified with the place called Agoni, today Piazza Navona.85 Biondo conducted his analyses of space and ritual with philological method, but it was not philology as an end in itself. Denying that: there had been a continuity between ancient and medieval Rome, a continuity powerfully asserted by the fourteenth-century sources, signified cancelling the fourteenth-century understanding, or at least considering it an unrealistic pretension without any ideological foundation and, consequently, offering the ancient city as virgin material to the new pontifical power, soaked in Humanist culture (two of the popes for


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whom Biondo worked were sophisticated Humanists). So the city became material that the popes could shape at their pleasure and exploit freely to legitimise their power. 1471 saw the election of Pope Sixtus IV, a Franciscan theologian who was very remote from any Humanist spirit. A few months after his election, on December 1471, Sixtus gave the city the statues which had been displayed throughout the Middle Ages in the Campo Lateranense (with the exception of Marcus Aurelius), having them transferred into the Palazzo Senatorio on the Capitoline, with a solemn inscription, saying that the pope ‘by his immense benignity decided that the noble bronze statues, monument of the ancient excellence and virtue, were to be returned and donated to the Roman people, from whom they took their origins’.66 The gift had an immediate purpose, that of winning the uncertain affection of the Romans for the pope. But in reality, this gesture began a process completed only in the second half of the sixteenth century: the metamorphosis of the Capitoline from centre of urban political life into a museum. The necessary condition for this shift had been precisely that perception of the Capitoline as a deserted space, in which the memories of antiquity lay mute and unrecognized, awaiting someone to give them a renewed breath of life. Sixtus IV cunningly declared that he had both ‘returned’ and ‘donated’ the statues as monumenta of the glory of the Roman people, but actually this was the moment that began the transformation of the Capitoline into what would become, throughout the modern age, a giant monument to the glory of the popes.

Philology often, however, creates more problems than it solves. Biondo Flavio dedicated the last and most important book of his most nature work, Roma triumphans, completed in 1459, to the reconstruction of the most theatrical of the Roman rituals, the military Triumph.67 He reconstructed each of the moments of the ritual, and focused on the places through which the Triumph had to pass. Biondo’s reconstruction gave a fundamental impulse to the fashion for the ‘trionfo


all'antica', which in time spread all over Europe, but in the first instance provided a model for the popes, for the representation of their renewed temporal power, which made of humanist Rome a civitas sacerdotalis et regia ('a priestly and royal city') capable of competing with, if not overtaking, the ancient city. We know from several eyewitnesses that in 1492 the ceremony of taking possession by Alexander VI (the possesso, which required the new pope to ride from San Pietro to the Lateran) looked to some extent like an ancient triumph. Rome at the end of the fifteenth century and in the first half of the sixteenth thus becomes a city periodically traversed by ancient-style Triumphs, performed not just on the canonical occasion of the entry into possession of the city by a new pope, but also for the entries of foreign lords and even for the weddings of papal relatives. In these cases once again, the space was reorganised for the ritual, but the ritual was established by philological means, since those antique-style triumphs were fairly indebted to Biondo's Roma triumphans.

Following the reconstruction of the ancient triumphs provided by Biondo, however, it seemed clear that the surviving ancient buildings, and in particular the triumphal arches, were inadequate for a celebration 'all'antica'. The solution to the problem was the construction of great ephemeral structures, above all arches, decorated with statues, columns, trabeations, paintings and inscriptions, which for a day created a space where the ritual could be performed as it supposedly was in ancient Rome. Bernardino Corio, a Humanist who lived in Rome, left us a description of the above-mentioned possesso of Alexander VI: '... very fine cloths of tapestry were placed on the walls, and the doors of the palaces were decorated according to the ancient style, on the ground there were great quantities of herbs and flowers. Some truly superb triumphal arches were built there.' Corio went on to describe in detail the two main arches: 'the first was like the arch of Octavian beside the Coliseum [actually this was the arch of Constantine]' (il primo era a similitudine de quello de Octaviano presso al Coliseo), 'ancient figures were painted' (erano dipinte figure antiche) on it, 'and many other things dealing with modern subjects' (e molte altre cose a proposito moderno). This fashion for Triumphs 'all'antica' also found superb artistic expression in the cycle of the Tri-

91 Ibid., p. 1488–9.

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... umphs of Caesar painted by Mantegna for the Gonzaga in the last twenty years of the fifteenth century: nine canvases, today at Hampton Court, for which the dependence on Biondo Flavio has been demonstrated. Finally, on 28 March 1507, after his conquest of Bologna, Julius II even celebrated a true military Triumph along the via Flaminia over which triumphal arches and votive altars had been raised for the occasion. The modern Triumph too was a case where the space of the city was modified by a ritual determined by a philological reconstruction, symptomatic of an age when the study of ancient Rome provided models on which society drew for ideals of self-representation and self-awareness. This was not just archaeology, because from these ephemeral constructions a new element began to emerge, as seen in the testimony of Corio, when the imitation of the antique was accompanied by the first signs of emulation (as the molte altre cose a proposito moderno). Thus there arose the idea that in reconstructing a space and a ritual ‘all’antica’, it was possible to do better than the ancients, to overtake them. This was to be the predominant feature of all the festivals and profane celebrations organised in Rome in the early modern period. But by this point even the memory of the medieval idea of continuity between the ancient and the modern, which Biondo had worked so hard to negate, had been lost.

As we have seen, it was possible to situate numerous versions of the city in texts over the passage of centuries, cultures and political events in Rome: a Rome for every period and every need. But Rome is never purely a space of the mind: the image of Rome remains attached to its stones, like moss: covering them ever more thickly over time, even or perhaps above all, when those stones cease to exist. In descriptions of the city, throughout the Middle Ages, the Rome of the past remains almost more present than the present itself. Rome is a space in which everything is recaptured, nothing is really lost, even when it no longer exists. It is a space in which past and present are in a perpetual, if changing, osmosis. So the history of the city is not linear but circular: a history in which the thread of events is unravelled into as many episodes as there are places and monuments to which they can be associated. Ritual and the ritualisation of space, eternally repeated, though changing in forms and contents, is thereby shown to be entirely in line with this conception of history. For anyone describing or reconstructing ancient Rome

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in the Middle Ages, ritual was often a powerful catalyst, around which to collect and organise ideas, historical witnesses, anecdotes. In the same way, ritual can provide a powerful tool in the attempt to understand and trace the threads running through the heterogeneous corpus of texts composing the medieval descriptions of Rome, or to understand the dialectic which, in these texts, ties together the city and its image.\footnote{This paper is one outcome of a Caledonian Research Foundation/Royal Society of Edinburgh European Visiting Research Fellowship, which allowed me to spend the first half of 2008 at the University of St Andrews Institute of Medieval Studies, working on the medieval descriptions of Rome with Frances Andrews.}