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EMPERORS, BISHOPS, AND CAPITALS IN THE LATE ANTIQUE ROMAN WEST

by

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A Thesis

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Abstract

The soft currents of the river Moselle, the towering heights of the silvery Alps, the pungent smell of dank marshlands, and the seven rolling hills flanking the Tiber-- these were the four distinct settings of the imperial capitals in which resided the late Roman western emperors. The presence and power of the emperors strengthened the martial, economic, and political aspects of their regions. Bishops, senators, and inhabitants of the western peripheral capitals of Trier, Milan, and Ravenna, along with the ancient capital of Rome, competed over the residency of the emperors in the 4th and early 5th centuries CE. In this thesis, I will examine how the location of imperial seats (*sedes imperii*) coalesced with the power of the imperial person. This symbiosis not only stood as a bulwark against the teeming invasions of Germanic tribes and as a deterrent against usurpers, but also shaped how these areas were Christianized due to ecclesiastical leaders competing over imperial favor. This comparative approach will give us a new perspective on the relationship between imperial power, location, and Christianization in Late Antiquity.

Table of Contents

1. The Imperial Seat of Rome	1
Rome Decentralized	1
Historiography	2
Nicens vs Arians.....	7
The Christianization of Rome	11
2. The Imperial Seat of Trier	16
Trier During the Crisis	17
Constantinian Trier	19
Valentinian Trier.....	23
Trier's Decline	25
Athanasius.....	26
Martin.....	29
3. The Imperial Seat of Milan	33
Milan before Ambrose	33
Ambrose and the Valentinians	35
Ambrose and Symmachus.....	40
Ambrose and Theodosius.....	42
4. The Imperial Seat of Ravenna	47
The Defenses of Ravenna	47
The Bishops of Ravenna	50
5. Conclusion	55
Bibliography	58

1. The Imperial Seat of Rome

“The first among the cities, the divine home, is golden Rome.”¹

Rome Decentralized

The Roman Empire was divided into four parts, two prefectures administered by two senior emperors (*augusti*), and two by subordinate emperors (*caesares*).² Diocletian founded this tetrarchy, or rule of four, establishing Trier, Milan, Sirmium, and Nicomedia as imperial seats. These initial capitals functioned as defensive headquarters in which emperors could effectively and speedily counter the relentless bands of Franks, Goths, and Sassanids continuously threatening the empire from without, along with deterring the cloaked usurpers and dissidents who undermined the empire’s integrity from within. Moreover, these invasions and usurpations could be diminished, if not outright extinguished by the physical and symbolic presence of the emperors.

Before proceeding, a distinction must be made in terminology. The term ‘capital’ varied. Rome and Constantinople were termed *caput*, since they were symbolically seen as the true heads of both halves of the empire, regardless of the emperor’s actual presence in these capitals.³ The border capitals were labelled *sedes imperialis* since these were the physical locations of the emperors’ seat and from where the government administrated.⁴ The aforementioned peripheral

¹ Ausonii, “Ordo Urbium Nobilium,” Forum Romanum, accessed October 2, 2018, http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/ordo_urbium.html.

² Eutropius, *Breviarium Ab Urbe Condita*, ed. F. Rühl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1887), 9.22; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 9.12.8; Aurelius Victor, *Epitome De Caesaribus*, 39.5.

³ Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

⁴ Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, 1.

capitals, along with the ones that came after, such as Ravenna and Antioch, could never overshadow the splendor, traditions, or sacrality of both Old and New Rome. Rome and Constantinople were *caput mundi*, forever advertising to the world the former's glorious past and the latter's blessed future, and no sterile capital near the edge of civilization could ever take these away.⁵ In Claudian's panegyric to emperor Honorius, he even refers to Rome as the true home of the emperors.⁶ However, as we will see further ahead, several emperors attempted to recreate an essence of Rome in their imperial seats to bolster their legitimacy and to deter potential threats from across the border. With this recreation came the construction and renovation of palaces, circuses, cathedrals, mints, statues, theatres, and defenses, along with garrisoning of troops and an imperial guard. These artificial 'Romes' thus became cores of centralized power along the precarious zones of the frontiers, each having their own perks and attractions for the needs of various emperors, and each standing as a leg supporting the seat of a teetering Roman state.

Historiography

Regarding Rome's historiography, there exists a camp of historians who believe that the city's importance had diminished due to its unique functions being outsourced to the border capitals after the Pax Romana. During the Crisis of the Third Century, which rocked the empire with continuous usurpations and invasions, many emperors assumed the purple within the barracks-- these were soldier emperors and they operated on the periphery. Once Diocletian

⁵ Richard Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals: Topography and Politics*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 70.

⁶ Claudian, *Panegyric on the Sixth Consulship of the Emperor Honorius*, trans. Maurice Platnauer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), 105. "Of a truth no other city could fitly be the home of the world's rulers... How long shall our emperor's rule be a stranger to its true home and his governance stray from its rightful seat? Cannot the world be ruled therefrom?"

established his tetrarchy, Rome was further peripheralized. Diocletian only visited the old imperial seat once in his reign to celebrate his twentieth anniversary of his emperorship; however, it was not to his liking. According to Lactantius, Diocletian was “unable to bear the Roman freedom of speech, and peevishly and impatiently burst away from the city.”⁷ This anecdote is telling because it reveals a unique characteristic that the ancient capital had compared to the other cities, in that the emperors were held more accountable to its citizens than a boarder capital where such freedoms of speech and airing out of grievances were more restricted and the emperors’ power was more absolute. Thus, Diocletian fled from Rome and returned to his seat of Nicomedia, where he tried to refashion the Anatolian city in the image of Rome without the “freedoms” that went with it.⁸ His successor Constantine continued this trend, establishing a court in his new city of Constantinople, located across the Adriatic on the Bosphorus. In essence, this group of historians, like Edward Gibbon, imagines that the city of Rome was becoming decentralized and irrelevant while more attention was being focused toward the new capitals on the frontiers.

Conversely, the other camp, which my paper closely aligns with, maintains that though Rome’s importance had somewhat lessened after the 3rd century, it was nevertheless pivotal in the expression of imperial and religious power and legitimization. Though the presence of the

⁷ Lactantius, *On the Manner in which the Persecutors Died*, trans. William Fletcher (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886) 17.

⁸ Lactantius, *Persecutors*, 7. “To this there were added a certain endless passion for building, and on that account, endless exactions from the provinces for furnishing wages to labourers and artificers, and supplying carriages and whatever else was requisite to the works which he projected. Here public halls, there a circus, here a mint, and there a workhouse for making implements of war; in one place a habitation for his empress, and in another for his daughter. Presently great part of the city was quitted, and all men removed with their wives and children, as from a town taken by enemies; and when those buildings were completed, to the destruction of whole provinces, he said, ‘They are not right, let them be done on another plan.’ Then they were to be pulled down, or altered, to undergo perhaps a future demolition. By such folly was he continually endeavouring to equal Nicomedia with the city Rome in magnificence.”

emperor in Rome had been diminishing, Mark Humphries argues that Rome nevertheless retained its ancient, sacred, and legitimizing importance, even into the Gothic and Byzantine periods. Likewise, he reasons that the popes did not automatically fill the power vacuum created by the absence of the emperors, but they and other Christian hierarchs were one amongst several competitors within Rome. So, while emperors chiefly resided in their respective seats, they were still drawn to Rome, hosting grand triumphs in the city as well as negotiating with senators and popes.

Humphries also argues that the late Roman emperors constantly held *adventi* in Rome to primarily display their legitimacy and military prowess. During an *adventus* (a ceremonial visit), an emperor would bestow largesse, sponsor games in the circus, build monuments, and commission renovations.⁹ Likewise, Michael McCormick's *Eternal Victory* outlines how the emperors' presence and use of triumphs and *adventi* legitimized their reigns. Along with this legitimizing aspect, these visits conveyed power, connection with the past, and invincibility.¹⁰ The celebrations, games, and religious ceremonies that followed were used by emperors, generals, and barbarian kings to alter public perception of their image. He likewise notices a stark change in the practice of triumphs after the disastrous Roman defeat at Adrianople, in that they become more frequent. Successful skirmishes were esteemed as major victories, thus requiring a need for lavish celebrations. Rome was the prime location for such events because of what the city symbolized: antiquity, grandeur, the seat of the emperors of old, and the birthplace of Romans themselves. Thus, it became important for emperors, and later bishops, to attached

⁹ Mark Humphries, "From emperor to pope? Ceremonial, space, and authority from Constantine to Gregory the Great," in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300-900*, ed. Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31.

¹⁰ Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 9.

themselves with these nodes of memory, nostalgia, and power. However, after the west fell, Constantinople became the main city for holding triumphs, in which many of the Germanic chieftains and kings tried to emulate in their respective capitals (e.g. Ravenna).

The city of Rome was not only transformed during this period, but also the meaning of the emperorship. Meaghan McEvoy argues in her article “Rome and the Transformation of the Imperial Office in the Late Fourth-Mid-Fifth Centuries AD” that the prevalence of child emperors receiving the purple and participating in ceremonies in Rome suggests a reimagining of the city and the emperor’s role.¹¹ She suggests that child-emperors did not represent decline but a transformation of emperorship. Likewise, their residency in Rome during various and lengthy occasions represents the continual relevancy of the city and its sacralization as the place where legitimate, sanctified emperors were made. Though these infantilized emperors, like Valentinian II, Honorius, and Valentinian III, were not of the soldier variety, they delegated powers to their *magister militum* (commander of the army), while retaining their own God ordained power and reverence. They were seen as paragons of Christianity, since their youth emitted an aura of innocence, meekness, and righteousness. The ancient seat was not entirely forsaken but functioned as a Christianizing and legitimizing locale for the initiation and celebration of young, unsoldierly emperors. Indeed, Krautheimer attributed Rome’s enduring importance to its new sacral identity.¹² Christianity became fused with the antiquity and ceremony of classical Rome, creating a new source of power and legitimization in which both emperors and bishops could tap into. Rome was, in effect, still a center of gravity.

¹¹ Meaghan McEvoy, “Rome and the transformation of the imperial office in the late fourth-mid-fifth centuries AD,” *The British School at Rome*, vol. 78 (2010): 153-154.

¹² Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City 312-1308*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 46.

From a grand narrative perspective, David Rohrbacher's *Historians of Late Antiquity* details the lives and works of several prominent historians within Late Antiquity. He analyzes the different ways these historians perceived the various crises, state transformations, and religious changes during this tumultuous time period. His work juxtaposes historians from the Greek and Latin worlds; those who wrote secular and ecclesiastical works; and those living in the early and late periods. He also devotes a few lengthy chapters to discussing the important role imperial figures like Julian the Apostate and Theodosius played in the religious makeup of the empire, since the former was the last pagan emperor and the latter mandated that Christianity be the sole religion. His comparative approach to late antique historiography presents a fresh corrective to the decline theory of the Roman Empire.¹³

I would like to add to this historiography by focusing on the competitive aspect of Rome against the other imperial capitals of Trier, Milan, and Ravenna. As mentioned previously, the imperial seats were in competition with each other over the residency of the emperor, since his presence often brought more economic opportunity, largesse, and a chance for coercion to one's religious faction. With the Augustan model of rulership having vanished, Rome became one of several power nodes scattered throughout the empire, but with a certain uniqueness not found in the others. This is how I want to frame the eternal city: on one hand it was just another capital vying for the affection of the emperors, but on the other, it embodied sacred features which the other western capitals could not usurp.

¹³ David Rohrbacher, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

Nicenes vs Arians

After the passing of the Edict of Milan, episcopal authority increased dramatically. Within this burgeoning Christian empire, the local power of the bishop became so indispensable that it competed with and in some cases superseded the authority of secular elites and emperors. Along with being spiritual mediators, they functioned as local leaders, helping to finance various building programs and dispensing charity and largesse to their community.¹⁴ Furthermore, when imperial authority began to wane in the provinces, these local episcopal leaders filled the void.

Realizing how the emperors' location had the potential to alter Christianity in a region-- by either supporting a faction or persecuting one-- several bishops actively sought to station the imperial court within or near their respective sees. Imperial alliances with noteworthy episcopal leaders became a new repertory of power in Late Antiquity. For the bishops, they could attempt to sway the emperors to their interpretation of Christianity or side with them on ecclesiastical disputes. For the emperors, alliances with prominent bishops could gain them both political and spiritual legitimacy. This new display of religious favoritism was a prime motivator in determining the location of an imperial seat, with both emperors and bishops using their local proximity and access within these capitals as tools to meet their ambitions. Therefore, the locations of imperial seats played a significant role in the trajectory of Christianity and vice versa.

After Constantine defeated Maxentius in 312, he became Augustus of the west and issued the Edict of Milan which legislated toleration of the Christian faith. Once Constantine had unified the empire under one emperorship following Licinius' capitulation, he strove to unify the church. The Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council, sought to harmonize the paradox

¹⁴ Christine R. Davison, "Late Antique Cities in the Rhineland: A Comparative Study of Trier and Cologne in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2013), Whiterose eTheses, 112.

of Christ's divine and human natures. Though a statement of confession was agreed upon, the outcome of this council further accentuated the divide between the *homoousians* (Nicenes/Trinitarians) and the *heterousians* (Arians). These would be the two largest sects of Christianity within the empire, contesting, debating, and warring with each other over orthodoxy. Additionally, depending on where the emperor resided determined which faction had the greatest influence over the court and region. Therefore, along with military defense deciding the residency of the emperor, favoritism towards a specific religious group created another determining factor for an imperial seat.

When Constantine died in 337, his empire was split between his three sons: Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans. After Constantine II's failure to obtain the rest of the west from Constans, the latter, who was a Nicene, became the sole ruler of the west while his other brother Constantius ruled the east and supported Arianism. Following another civil war, Constantius ruled a reunited empire from his eastern court. He held multiple councils to determine the nature of Christ, often in or around Pannonia and Illyricum, which had a higher Arian demographic. And often, the Arian positions won out.¹⁵

From the various ecclesiastical histories, it appears that the west was predominantly Nicene and the east Arian. However, the writers do not explicitly state why this is. There was a certain cultural difference between the Latin west and Greek east since the Hellenistic era, which could provide a theory to how both spheres were Christianized. Latin Christianity was more exact, terse, and doctrinal. Greek Christianity was more fluid, flexible, interpretive, mystical, and could use more words to convey deeper meanings. This is evident in the writings of Tertullian,

¹⁵ Since we do not have any writings from Arians, we must rely on the Nicene descriptions of Constantius' actions, reasonings, and leanings. Most of these chroniclers describe Constantius as heavily Arian and hostile towards their sect, using his imperial power and his connections with Arian clergymen to usurp the true church.

Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine versus the writings of Origen, Clement, and the Cappadocian Fathers. Aside from this philosophical and linguistic argument, another reason could be that missionaries from either sect made first contact with their target demographic without any other type of Christian competition. Nevertheless, there is still no exact reason why each demographic fell under the Nicene or Arian umbrella. But what is clear is that the positioning of and the relationships between emperors and bishops influenced the crystallization, spread, or cessation of various Christian sects.

As mentioned previously, Constantius II was an Arian. However, what was more important than his Christological views was his desire for ecclesiastical unity, the same view as his father.¹⁶ During this emperor's reign, he convened four church councils in Sirmium and one in Serdica (Sofia), all of which concluded with a favorable view of Arianism. Constantius preferred Semi-Arianism (the Son was not the same substance of the Father nor was he a different substance of the Father, but he was *like* the Father) and wanted this viewpoint to be the unifying doctrine of the church. The western bishops condemned these councils and held their own in Milan, Rimini, and Aquileia. There were four preeminent Arian clergymen who were integral in the proceedings of these disputes: Ursacius of Singidunum (Belgrade), Valens of Mursa, Germinius of Sirmium, Auxentius of Cappadocia. The creed that Illyrican bishops drafted was ardently rejected and condemned by the western bishops in the Council of Ariminum, even naming it the "Blasphemy of Sirmium."

¹⁶ Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, trans. A.C. Zenos (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890) 1.35. Spiritual unity was possible reason for Athanasius' exile described as by Socrates Scholasticus. "Now some affirm that the emperor came to this decision with a view to the establishment of unity in the church, since Athanasius was inexorable in his refusal to hold any communion with Arius and his adherents. He (Athanasius) accordingly took up his abode at Treves, a city of Gaul."

Pope Liberius called a council in Milan within the Basilica Maior to discuss the maltreatment of Athanasius, a leading Nicene bishop from Alexandria. However, emperor Constantius intervened in this meeting and ordered that it be held within his Milanese palace. Attending this new venue was an overwhelming majority of Arians, including the aforementioned ones from the east. They proposed that all who did not consent to the condemnation of Athanasius were to be exiled. This was meted out to several prominent western bishops who attended the council: Paulinus of Trier, Hilary of Poitiers (who was beaten, then exiled), Eusebius of Vercelli, Lucifer of Cagliari, Dionysius of Milan, and Liberius, the pope himself.¹⁷ This punishment left many vacant seats in the west, thus bishops had to be reelected by the clergy or voted into office via popular acclaim. However, while residing within Milan, the emperor opted to install an Arian presbyter, Auxentius of Cappodocia, into the bishopric of Milan, bypassing the electoral process. It is important to note that he only did this in his city of residence and allowed the other sees to reelect their own bishops, be they Nicene or otherwise. This implies that Constantius could install an effective puppet within his own imperial seat but could not in a see beyond his presence.

Constantius' reign was one of the earliest cases of an emperor's physical presence and intervention determining an ecclesiastical outcome, with him ordering church councils to convene and reconvene in favorable locations. Thus, we can see how this emperor and the early to mid-4th century bishops used geography and demographics to forward their Christological

¹⁷ Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Blomfield Jackson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892) 2.12. "Who can narrate such atrocities as they have perpetrated? A short time ago when the Churches were in the enjoyment of peace, and when the people were assembled for prayer, Liberius, bishop of Rome, Paulinus, bishop of the metropolis of Gaul, Dionysius, bishop of the metropolis of Italy, Luciferus, bishop of the metropolis of the Isles of Sardinia, and Eusebius, bishop of one of the cities of Italy, who were all exemplary bishops and preachers of the truth, were seized and driven into exile, for no other cause than because they could not assent to the Arian heresy, nor sign the false accusation which had been framed against us."

positions. Constantius ruled an ecumenically divided empire. To unite it, he summoned councils in northern Italy and the Balkans- these regions acting as a sort of mid-way both geographically and ecclesiastically. The Nicene bishops preferred convening in the western provinces (e.g. Italy, Africa, Gaul) while the Arians favored the eastern ones (e.g. Pannonia, Illyricum, Phoenicia). We will see this trend of positioning become vividly apparent during the tenure of Ambrose in Milan.

The Christianization of Rome

In Ammian's account of Constantius II's adventus and triumph ceremony of 357 in Rome, he describes not only the emperor's grandeur and beneficence (even going as far as importing an obelisk from Egypt), but also reveals the dual necessity for a capital in the center and on the periphery. This is shown during the civil war between Constantius and the general Magnentius. Once this war erupted, the usurper executed numerous senators and citizens once entering Rome. However, seeing Constantius II's army near the city, he retreated to Gaul. When the civil war was over, Constantius took a tour of Rome. It seems that the victorious emperor enjoyed his time in the city, in addressing the old aristocracy, watching the sporting events, and fawning over the old traditions and scenery of the city.¹⁸ However, his imperial presence was likewise needed on the borders.

“Now the emperor desired to remain longer in this most majestic abode of all the world, to enjoy freer repose and pleasure; but he was alarmed by constant trustworthy reports, stating that the Suebi were raiding Raetia and the Quadi while the Sarmatians, a tribe most accomplished in brigandage, were laying waste Upper Moesia and Lower Pannonia. Excited by this news, on the thirtieth day after entering Rome he left the city on May 29th, and marched rapidly into Illyricum by way of Tridentum.”¹⁹

¹⁸Ammian, *Res Gestae*, 16.10.13-17.

¹⁹ Ammian, *Res Gestae*, 16.10.20.

Thus, Constantius desired the legitimizing and ceremonial trappings that Rome offered while still needing to be physically present in the peripheral capitals to stop potential usurpations of unsupervised generals and fend off barbarian attacks.²⁰

Though Ammian excludes anything associated with Christianity in his narrative during Constantius' visit, the emperor nevertheless had to deal with the blowback of his banishment of Pope Liberius. According to Theodoret, when Constantius visited Rome, the wives of aristocrats petitioned the emperor to permit the ex-pontiff Liberius to return from exile.²¹ "Thus entering the presence, they besought him to take pity on the condition of so large a city, deprived of its shepherd, and made an easy prey to the attacks of wolves."²² After these women beseeched him, the spectators in the circus clamored for the return of Liberius as well. Constantius conceded and Liberius was reinstalled as pope. Though written petitions could have fallen on deaf ears, the visceral outcry of these Nicene women, then spectators forced the hand of the present emperor to rescind his decision. Thus, a pro-Nicene bishop was reinstalled to the papal seat, to the chagrin of the Arian emperor. And like Diocletian, who could not bear the clamoring of the various factions within the city, Constantius returned east to his seat.

However, these visits and triumphs were ephemeral and could not permanently establish the emperor's presence in Rome; so, massive building projects were implemented to cement their power and magnanimity within the city. More importantly, bishops, in conjunction with imperial

²⁰ Andrew Gillett, "Rome, Ravenna and the Last Western Emperors," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 69, (2001): 133. "The presence of a Roman emperor in Rome was a rare phenomenon in late antiquity, and the use of the city as the actual imperial residence and seat of government was rarer still. The early augusti, though often exercising their imperium far from Rome, none the less maintained constant contact with the city and regularly imposed their presence there, particularly following their accessions and at other key ceremonial occasions."

²¹ He and his faction of western Nicene bishops were banished for supporting the reinstallation of Athanasius.

²² Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.14.

support, mimicked this physical manifestation of power as well with their development of Christian structures. Constantine donated the Lateran Palace that was initially for his wife Fausta to Pope Miltiades; a palace which soon after held a council against the Donatists of Africa. Likewise, the succeeding Pope Sylvester requested that Constantine repurpose the Shrine of Apollo into a basilica devoted to St. Peter.²³ The Basilica of St. Paul, the Basilica of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, and several churches devoted to various of martyrs were commissioned as well. The emperor also brought with him the resources of an empire for the Church's benefit: land, precious metals, gems, candelabras, lamps, chalices, jars, and of course, material for the buildings themselves. Such buildings gave the pagan capital and new Christian dimension-- from a ceremonially pagan space to a Christian one. Thus, as we will see with Martin of Tours, Ambrose of Trier, and Peter of Ravenna, it was not the bishops themselves who determined the trajectory of Christianity but them working in conjunction with the emperors inside imperial capitals.

Through these negotiations within the ancient capital, the Nicene bishops progressively accrued more authority. Jerome initially revealed this elevation in his letter to his mentor Pope Damasus, describing how the east had fallen into heresy while the west, under the leadership of the Roman bishop, still held to the truth of God:

“Since the east, shattered as it is by the long-standing feuds, subsisting between its peoples, is bit by bit tearing into shreds the seamless vest of the Lord... The fruitful soil of Rome, when it receives the pure seed of the Lord, bears fruit a hundredfold; but here the seed grain is choked in the furrows and nothing grows but darnel or oats. In the West the Sun of righteousness is even now rising; in the east, Lucifer, who fell from heaven, has once more set his throne above the stars. You are the light of the world... My words are spoken to the successor of the fisherman, to the disciple of the cross. As I follow no leader save Christ, so I communicate with none but your blessedness, that is with the chair of Peter. For this, I know, is the rock on which the church is built!... Just now, I am sorry to say, those Arians, the Campenses, are trying to extort from me, a Roman Christian, their unheard-of formula of three hypostases. And this, too, after the definition

²³ *Liber Pontificalis*, trans. Louise Ropes Loomis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 53.

of Nicæa and the decree of Alexandria, in which the West has joined... If you think fit enact a decree; and then I shall not hesitate to speak of three hypostases. Order a new creed to supersede the Nicene; and then, whether we are Arians or orthodox, one confession will do for us all.”²⁴

This is one of the first instances of Petrine succession. Jerome sees the bishop of Rome as the supreme ecclesiastical authority, even wielding the power to revoke or reinterpret previous ecumenical councils such as Nicaea. Rome was not only a center for legitimizing and sacralizing emperors, but also Christian bishops, giving them more authority than any other seat. Jerome likewise envisioned Rome as a symbolic city, likening it to Troy, Babylon, and Jerusalem.²⁵

Concerning the Sack of Rome in 410, he laments:

“My voice sticks in my throat; and, as I dictate, sobs choke my utterance. The City which had taken the whole world was itself taken... The dead bodies of your servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of your saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them.”²⁶

Pagan Rome was continuously taking on a new Christian identity, or as Krautheimer says, “A new Rome, Christian and classical, the capital of the pope as spiritual leader of the West and as Peter’s successor, took the place of ancient Rome” and that “Rome has become the Head of the World through the Holy See of Saint Peter.”²⁷ The climax of papal ascendancy during the late Roman empire can be seen with Pope Leo’s negotiation with Atilla the Hun. A Christian named Prosper recounted the event:

“To the emperor and the senate and Roman people none of all the proposed plans to oppose the enemy seemed so practicable as to send legates to the most savage king and beg for peace. Our most blessed Pope Leo -trusting in the help of God, who never fails the righteous in their trials - undertook the task, accompanied by Avienus, a man of

²⁴ Jerome, *Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. W.H. Fremantle (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893) 15.

²⁵ Jerome, *Letters*, 127

²⁶ Jerome, *Letters*, 127.

²⁷ Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City*, 46.

consular rank, and the prefect Trygetius. And the outcome was what his faith had foreseen; for when the king had received the embassy, he was so impressed by the presence of the high priest that he ordered his army to give up warfare and, after he had promised peace, he departed beyond the Danube.”²⁸

Another version from an anonymous writer recorded:

“Then Leo had compassion on the calamity of Italy and Rome, and with one of the consuls and a large part of the Roman senate he went to meet Attila. The old man of harmless simplicity, venerable in his gray hair and his majestic garb, ready of his own will to give himself entirely for the defense of his flock, went forth to meet the tyrant who was destroying all things. He met Attila, it is said, in the neighborhood of the river Mincio, and he spoke to the grim monarch, saying ‘The senate and the people of Rome, once conquerors of the world, now indeed vanquished, come before thee as suppliants. We pray for mercy and deliverance. O Attila, thou king of kings, thou couldst have no greater glory than to see suppliant at thy feet this people before whom once all peoples and kings lay suppliant. Thou hast subdued, O Attila, the whole circle of the lands which it was granted to the Romans, victors over all peoples, to conquer. Now we pray that thou, who hast conquered others, shouldst conquer thyself the people have felt thy scourge; now as suppliants they would feel thy mercy.’

As Leo said these things Attila stood looking upon his venerable garb and aspect, silent, as if thinking deeply. And lo, suddenly there were seen the apostles Peter and Paul, clad like bishops, standing by Leo, the one on the right hand, the other on the left. They held swords stretched out over his head, and threatened Attila with death if he did not obey the pope's command. Wherefore Attila was appeased he who had raged as one mad. He by Leo's intercession, straightway promised a lasting peace and withdrew beyond the Danube.”²⁹

These accounts reveal the power the bishops of Rome now wielded due to their connection with both the city and the emperors. Bishops, like Leo, now played the role of emperor, in negotiating with barbarian kings and chieftains. Again, Rome contained qualities the other did not, namely a sacred connection with past traditions and emperors. Likewise, it was beneficially disposed at the center of the empire, which was not *as* susceptible to attacks from the ever-growing hordes of barbarian invasions that had befallen Trier, Sirmium, and

²⁸ “Leo I and Attila,” Medieval Sourcebook, Fordham University, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/attila2.asp>.

²⁹ Fordham University, “Leo I and Attila.”

Milan. Although Rome was less frequented by emperors during and after the 3rd century, the city was nevertheless pivotal in the expression of imperial legitimization and religious authority. And although late ancient emperors chiefly resided in their respective seats on the periphery, they were still drawn to Rome, hosting grand triumphs in the city as well as negotiating authority with senators and popes. Rome was, in effect, still a center of gravity and the symbolic linchpin that held the disintegrating empire together. This was apparent with the emperors of the 5th century, beginning with Honorius. Though he took up his imperial seat in Ravenna, he still poured his time and resources into the ancient capital, even commissioning a mausoleum for his interment, which was uncharacteristic of the Ravennese imperial family.

Though none of the peripheral capitals could truly usurp Rome's place as head, the people of Rome nevertheless vied for the emperor's presence and beneficence. Popes and other Christian factions could persuade the emperors to recall exiled bishops or to designate Christian spaces. Likewise, distinguished senators had to inconveniently travel to the boarder to make requests or to curry favor; so having the local presence of emperors, especially impressionable, child ones like Valentinian II, Honorius, and Valentinian III within Rome may grant senators a direct hand in imperial policies and rewards.

2. The Imperial Seat of Trier

“For a long time, warlike Gaul has been demanding my songs in favor of Treveri, the imperial city, which, near the Rhine, seems to be at the heart of a profound peace and rests in safety, because it nourishes, dresses and arms the forces of the empire. Her thick walls extend on the back of a hill. At her feet runs the Moselle, broad and calm river which brings her the distant businesses of all countries.”³⁰

³⁰ “Ausonii, “Ordo Urbium Nobilium.”

Trier During the Crisis

The city of Augusta Treverorum (Trier) within Belgica Prima was ideally situated to sustain pressures from across the Rhine-- positioned not too close to Germania as to be directly threatened and not too far away as to be ineffective in dispatching needed troops to the frontlines. Infrastructurally, Trier protected the vital Via Agrippa of eastern Gaul that stretched from the military garrison at Cologne, down south to Lyon and then to Marseille. Topographically, the city linked the waterways of the Moselle northeast to the Rhine and south to the Rhone, the latter emptying into the Mediterranean.³¹ Comparable to the other peripheral capitals, Trier functioned as a trade and communications hub, the most uniquely dispositioned city north of the Alps and an ideal location for an imperial court.³² As we will see, imperial presence in Trier offered the Gauls protection, the financing of new buildings, and the opportunity to curry favors with the emperor.³³

Trier's role was embedded within a wider tapestry of military changes at the end of the Principate. Roman history is littered with instances of destabilizing usurpations. Chaotic events such as the Crisis of the Third century and the Civil wars of the Tetrarchy necessitated a relocation of border legions to combat claimants to the imperial throne. These civil wars and troop transfers weakened the defensive capabilities of border provinces, which left them

³¹ Davision, "Trier and Cologne," 15-16.

³² Ammian refers to Trier as being *domicilium principum clarum*, the most magnificent home of the emperors in Belgium. Ammian, *Res Gestae*, 15.11.9.

³³ Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 11. Van Dam sees how Trier became a central part of the empire due to its imperial court, from which flowed "imperial authority, imperial patronage, and imperial generosity, simply because of the actual physical presence of the emperors..."

susceptible to barbarian exploitation. Though usurpations could vulnerate provinces, separatism sometimes proved the most beneficial and safest alternative to an absentee government.

Trier rose to prominence in the late 3rd century under one such separatist emperor, the Belgian Postumus who commanded the Rhine legions. Gallienus, the last emperor to campaign in the Rhineland during the 250's, shifted imperial attention further south to tend to civil wars, invasions, and private affairs.³⁴ With the western provinces peripheralized and under threat by Germanic incursions, Postumus led the secession of Gaul, Hispania, and Britannia and established Cologne and later Trier as the capitals of his regime. Though he came to the emperorship by bloodied means, we can infer from the *Historia Augusta* that the citizens beyond the Alps benefited from Postumus' presence given his martial capabilities in driving back the barbarians and the fact that the emperors of Rome had neglected them.³⁵ Even the previous emperor Valerian lauded the general: "He by his presence will safeguard the soldiers in the camp, civil rights in the forum... and preserve for each one his own personal possessions; he is a man at whom I marvel above all others and well deserving of the office of prince."³⁶ Though the *Historia Augusta* is laden with inaccuracies, Eutropius corroborates the Gauls' affection for their local emperors, noting how these Gallic leaders saved the empire from ruin due to an absentee emperor in the south.³⁷ The emperors of the *Imperium Galliarum* likewise set up a mint within

³⁴ Edith Mary Wightman, *Roman Trier and the Treveri*, (New York: Praeger Publishers), 1971, 53.

³⁵ *Historia Augusta: The Thirty Pretenders*, trans. David Magie, vol 3, (Loeb Classical Library, 1960), 3.3. "He performed such exploits that he completely restored the provinces of Gaul, while Gallienus spent his time in debauchery and taverns and grew weak in loving a barbarian woman... Great, indeed, was the love felt for Postumus in the hearts of all the people of Gaul because he had thrust back all the German tribes and had restored the Roman Empire to its former security."

³⁶ *Historia Augusta*, 3.3.

³⁷ Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 9.9-11.

Trier-- imprinting their imperial visages on coinage to symbolize their power and legitimacy. Moreover, they exorcised these qualities tangibly by pushing back the Franks and Alemanni.³⁸ Though Aurelian, *Restitutor Orbis*, defeated the Gallic separatists and reunited the empire, the strategic and administrative significance of Trier and the Gauls' desire for an imperial presence were never lost.³⁹

Constantinian Trier

With the Third Century Crisis ended, Trier's status had elevated. A decade after Gaul's reincorporation, emperor Diocletian designated Trier as one of his four peripheral capitals of the empire and his co-emperor Maximian resided there during his early reign.⁴⁰ Many emperors ruled from the Gallic metropolis:⁴¹ Maximian, Constantius Chlorus, Constantine, Constantine II, Julian, Valentinian I, Gratian, and Maximus. Similarly, notable statesmen and clergymen operated (if only temporarily) in Trier: Ambrose, Athanasius, Augustine, Ausonius, Jerome, Lactantius, and Symmachus. The city became an intellectual center that even rivalled the ones in Italy and Africa.⁴² Imperial presence in Trier offered Gaul protection, the financing of new administrative, clerical, and entertainment apparatuses, the opportunity to gain favors from the emperor, and an essence of Rome.

³⁸ *Historia Augusta*, 3.5. The anonymous author of *Historia Augusta* credited the Gallic emperors for not only saving the west from barbarian invasion, but the empire as whole, since Rome could not singularly combat the Gothic, Persian, and Germanic onslaughts simultaneously.

³⁹ Wightman, *Roman Trier*, 58. "The Gallic Empire was to prove a turning point in the history of Trier, for it showed more clearly than ever both the potentialities of the city, near yet sheltered from the frontier, and the importance, for military and other more general reasons, of having a ruler in the West nearer than Italy."

⁴⁰ William E. Gwatkin Jr., "Roman Trier." *The Classical Journal* 29, No. 1 (Oct. 1933): 8.

⁴¹ Zosimus refers to Trier as the "largest city beyond the Alps." Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, trans. Chaplin and Green, (Fleet-Street, London: Crane-Court, 1814) 3.

⁴² Gwatkin, "Roman Trier," 10.

After Maximian moved to Milan, he assigned his junior emperor Constantius Chlorus the prefecture of Gaul. Chlorus had to deal with the defense of the province, which had been neglected since Gaul's reincorporation, as well as having the greater task of wrestling back Britannia which had firmly been under the control of Carausius for the past 13 years. Constantius was highly favored by the Gauls, celebrated for his modesty and attentiveness to their concerns, Eutropius recalling him say, "it was better for the national wealth to be in the hands of individuals than to be laid up in one place of confinement."⁴³ Likewise the Britanni-ans praised Chlorus and deified him upon his death.⁴⁴ He and his son Constantine made speedy efforts to rebuild Gallic and Britannic cities devastated by the past decades of warfare while pushing back Germanic invaders.⁴⁵ Upon his death, Chlorus left Constantine his imperial seat, though it was the Britannic legions that secured the latter's succession as Caesar. He became emperor with Maximian crowning him as a full Augustus within Trier in 307.⁴⁶

Chlorus had also left his son Constantine a fortified and renovated city: protected by reinforced walls, legitimized with a mint,⁴⁷ and Romanized via baths and a palace complex.⁴⁸ Constantine beautified and expanded this city even further. As he would later replicate an artificial Rome on the Bosphorus, he likewise did with Trier as a junior emperor. He made

⁴³ Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 10.1.

⁴⁴ Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 10.1.

⁴⁵ Eutropius, *Breviarium*, 10.1.

⁴⁶ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 40.

⁴⁷ Wightman, *Roman Trier*, 58. Chlorus' mint in Trier became the main one for the Western Empire until the late 4th century. His coinage produced in the city read: *Redditor Lucis Aeternae*.

⁴⁸ Marice E. Rose "The Trier Ceiling: Power and Status on Display in Late Antiquity." *Greece & Rome* 53, No. 1 (Apr. 2006): 98.

massive repairs and built edifices, basilicas, state buildings, a circus, fora and baths. “Trier is, in fact, the city of Constantine.”⁴⁹ Indeed, on a tombstone of a Syrian resident referred to Trier as “Belgic Rome.”⁵⁰ In 310, a panegyric given in Constantine’s court noted this grandeur, “I see a Circus Maximus to rival, in my opinion, that at Rome, I see basilicas and a forum, palatial buildings and a seat of justice raised to such a height that they promise to be worthy of the stars and the sky.”⁵¹ One writer praised Constantine in 313 saying, “Because of your presence [in Trier] the barbarians were afraid to cross the Rhine.”⁵² Thus, the people, or at least those who wanted to ingratiate themselves with Constantine, were grateful for their accessible emperor. Constantine had created an artificial Rome far beyond the real one which endeared him to the people. Because of his imperial presence, construction of Romanized venues, and distribution of largesse within Trier, he gained additional stability and manpower to effectively topple the other tetrarchs.

Constantine thoroughly destroyed the tetrarchic system in his wars of unification, but still deemed it necessary to split the empire again among his three sons and nephew.⁵³ As Gaul fell into disrepair and devastation in the wake of the wars between Constantine’s sons, the Rhineland in like manner became vulnerable to Germanic incursions. Though the victor of the civil war, Constantius II, believed in a united empire, he nonetheless acknowledged the need for mobile

⁴⁹ Gwatkins, “Roman Trier,” 8.

⁵⁰ Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 223.

⁵¹ Davison, “Trier and Cologne,” 207.

⁵² Van Dam, *Late Antique Gaul*, 9.

⁵³ Victor, *Epitome*, 41.19-21.

emperors as in the days of Diocletian who could rapidly address issues on the frontiers.⁵⁴ A chronography produced during his reign perfectly illustrated the strategic significance of an imperial presence in Trier, with the city being personified as a female warrior with spear, shield, and helmet, leading a bound and bearded German prisoner and his loot.⁵⁵ Thus he gave Gaul and Britannia to his last surviving family member Julian, bestowing him the rank of Caesar while he administered the rest of the empire. Ammianus praises Julian for his martial tenacity and prowess in protecting Gaul from the Alemanni who had been plaguing the region since the usurper Magnentius withdrew western troops to fight Constantius II in the east. However, Zosimus critiques how other historians have written about Julian by omitting certain items; but he sets out to do justice to his character and tell the full account, though his is shorter than Ammian's.⁵⁶

Julian's imperial presence in Trier even benefited criminals. The outlaw Charietto and his gang of thieves and vigilantes operated in and around Trier in the mid-4th century, defending and saving Trier from Quadi attacks. Because of the presence of emperor Julian, Charietto was bestowed the title of military commander of the Rhine.⁵⁷ If the emperor had been absent, the local magistrates would have been inclined to punish this gang for its previous nefarious activities.⁵⁸ Although there is not much evidence suggesting any construction projects or largesse

⁵⁴ Ammian, *Res Gestae*, 15.8.11-12.

⁵⁵ "The Chronography of 354 AD. Part 2: Cities of Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Trier," Tertullian, last modified October 28, 2018, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography_of_354_02_cities.htm.

⁵⁶ Zosimus, *New History*, 3.

⁵⁷ Zosimus, *New History*, 3.

⁵⁸ Van Dam, *Late Antique Gaul*, 36; C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 163-165.

bestowed during Julian's reign in Trier, the city nevertheless benefited from his military presence, which preserved the capital's "Romaness."⁵⁹ The Rhine frontier had come close to collapsing before Julian's ascension, but his military prowess turned the tides and preserved his family's original seat of power. In fact, as Julian reigned there, the barbarians across the Rhine held the Roman name in terror, as reported by Zosimus.⁶⁰

Valentinian Trier

Though Julian died in his infamous botched Persian invasion, Trier nevertheless found in his western successor both a defender and an adversary: Valentinian I. The new emperor, who had been an officer under Julian, did not stay in Milan for long, but moved his court and military headquarters to Trier, the old powerbase of the Constantinian dynasty.⁶¹ His aim in this transition was to stymie the barbarian incursions along the Rhine, who had grown audacious since Julian's absence;⁶² but he also wanted to escape the incessant church squabbles that permeated Italy at that time. Trier thus offered a close venue to the action while limiting annoying visitors.

Valentinian remolded the city into a bleak fortress of solitude, where he vented his rage on petitioners and satiated his bloodlust by using cruel methods of public execution, including man-eating bears.⁶³ Valentinian's capital intimidated both the barbarians from across the Rhine and his subjects (especially clergy) on his side of it. However, the renowned senator Symmachus felt

⁵⁹Wightman, *Roman Trier*, 62. Zosimus, *New History*, 4. Wightman supposes (among other factors) that Julian may have neglected Trier due to Constantine's Christianization of the city, which did not mesh well with his paganism.

⁶⁰ Zosimus, *New History*, 4.

⁶¹ Van Dam, *Late Antique Gaul*, 122; "No Christian emperor ever spent so long in Gaul or achieved so much there as Valentinian..." McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 91.

⁶² Zosimus, *New History*, 4.

⁶³ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 80.

that the presence and efforts of emperor Valentinian were wasted in Trier, assessing that the area was too dangerous and the Gauls prone to revolt.⁶⁴ Likewise McLynn notes how the senators and Roman elites preferred an imperial seat in Rome or Milan to an inaccessible and distant one in Trier.⁶⁵ Even more than Julian, Valentinian's sole purpose was protecting the frontier and his capital, not too overly concerned with appeasing the elites and clergy, but pacifying the Rhine and upper Danube.⁶⁶

As Gaul was peripheralized during the 3rd century crisis, similar issues of imperial neglect during the latter 4th prompted a new usurpation, under Magnus Maximus. Gratian, the son of the now deceased Valentinian, withdrew his Gallic forces to his new imperial seat in Milan during the 380s. Gratian was indeed a brilliant commander, who, like his father, relentlessly countered invaders from the west. He was praised in the ecclesiastical works of Ambrose as well as the secular works of Ammian. However, he had to reconsolidate his forces in northern Italy to counter the Gothic juggernaut in the east after the annihilation of the eastern army under the emperor's uncle Valens at Adrianople. Nevertheless, the Gallic armies seem to have resented this shift of power and Maximus had the young ruler assassinated.⁶⁷ Though he came to the purple drenched in red, Maximus protected the Rhine frontier, received petitions from the locals, and gave privileges to the local elites.⁶⁸ "With a minimum of bloodshed, an imperial presence was

⁶⁴ Symmachus, *Oration*, 1.5.

⁶⁵ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 120. "...accessibility that comes from proximity' encouraged a frequency of contact between the two cities, and a level of participation by senators in state affairs, that had been impossible while the court had remained at Trier."

⁶⁶ Wightman, *Roman Trier*, 62. "The reigns of Valentinian and Gratian brought to Trier a further period of peace and prosperity in the years 367-383, a time which may be compared to a lengthy Indian summer..."

⁶⁷ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 152-155.

⁶⁸ Davison, "Trier and Cologne," 26-27.

restored to the Rhine frontier.”⁶⁹ His treatment of Trier dealt more with ecclesiastical matters concerning the Milanese bishop Ambrose, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Trier’s Decline

Trier’s relevance diminished after the Maximus’ defeat at the hands of Theodosius I. The victor moved the imperial seat of the west to Milan due more to theological reasons than militaristic. Trier’s vulnerability was compounded by the explosion of Suebi, Vandals, and Alans, whose masses crossed the Rhine in the winter of 406. During the same time, the *magister militum* Stilicho ordered that the legions among the Lower Rhine to regroup in Milan to face the Alaric’s Visigoths and surrendered the Rhineland to the confederated Franks.⁷⁰ As the Roman troops pulled out of Britannia, they likewise surrendered the Rhineland by 410. The transalpine administrative capital was moved further south to Vienne, then to Arles. Between 400 and 450, Trier had been sacked 4 times; the devastation of the city along with the rest of Gaul followed under Attila’s scourge in 451.

With the loss of Trier came also the loss of a Rome in the far north. The vital artery of the Via Arippa not only supplied trade and troops to the cities of the Rhineland, but had culturally linked the Romans to the Treveri since the days of Augustus.⁷¹ When this connection was strained by the imperial seat’s recession further south, the Gauls looked towards their own Gallic elites for leadership, instead of relying on the emperor who was either in Milan, Rome, or

⁶⁹ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 154.

⁷⁰ Whittaker, *The Frontiers*, 251.

⁷¹ Greg Woolfe, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 90.

Ravenna.⁷² Without a connection to and presence of Rome, Trier was lost, incorporated into Frankia by the end of the 5th century.

There is an inscription written on a house in Trier: “Before Rome, stood Trier a thousand three hundred years. Stand may it still, and eternal peace enjoy.”⁷³ However, at least for Roman Trier, this peace was interrupted by the absence of an imperial seat. As the western Roman emperors retreated to the Mediterranean, imperial focus on Trier diminished. Though Trier was the first of the imperial seats to fall, it nevertheless demonstrated how the essence of Rome could be transmitted some 800 miles away on a hazardous frontier before Constantine’s famous rebranding of Byzantium. This relocation of imperial authority beyond the Pomerium provided Trier with an attentive emperor who could safeguard the region. His imperial presence also carried with it an artificialization of Rome, which contributed to the loyalty, sustainability, defense, and Romanization of the region. This imperial presence and the benefits that came with it opened opportunities for bishops and politicians to exploit. We will focus on this competition concerning Trier and other western metropolises in the next chapter.

Athanasius

Many of the bishops in Belgica, Aquitania, and Gallica became engulfed in the Arian controversy that had been raging in Italy and Illyricum. Trier, as with most of Gaul and the western provinces, was Nicene Christian⁷⁴. Up until the reign of Constantius II, the Constantinian line had laid the foundation for the city’s Christianization. Constantine’s mother

⁷² Van Dam, *Late Antique Gaul*, 149.

⁷³ Gwatkin, “Roman Trier,” 12.

⁷⁴ Davison views the bishopric of Trier as the “symbolic figurehead of the Gallic Church.” Davison, “Trier and Cologne,” 124.

Helena supposedly delivered Christ's cloak worn during his crucifixion to be housed in this city. Constantine and his father Constantius Chlorus tolerated the Christians in their Transalpine capital, which could have won them more military support during the chaos of the tetrarchy. However, when Constantine became sole emperor, he desired Christian unity and did not allow zealotry on either side of the aisle.

Once Athanasius, the Nicene bishop of Alexandria, took an austere anti-Arian stance, Constantine exiled the firebrand to Trier. This ostracism was a consequence of his supposed threat to stop the Egyptian grain supply if the emperor continued supporting Arian bishops.⁷⁵ Thus, he remained for two years within Trier, until Constantine's death in 337. St. Maximinus, the presiding bishop of Trier, housed and befriended Athanasius during his stay. The bishop, like Athanasius, stood as a strong opponent against Arianism. In one episode, when Arians from the east came to coax the emperor Constans into becoming one himself, Maximinus intervened and rejected their mission. He further persuaded Constans to convene a synod at Serdica to defend the Nicene position. Maximinus later played a heavy hand in other synods, such as at Milan and Cologne. This is the first instance of the presence and authority of a Treveran bishop influencing a local emperor.

Though Constantine II allowed Athanasius to return to Alexandria, Constantius II banished him again for his hostilities towards the Arians. The emperor likewise exiled those six aforementioned bishops who had supported Athanasius. Although his residency in Trier was a temporary setback, Athanasius nevertheless left a residual impact upon the religious underpinnings of this imperial capital. He befriended the future bishop of Trier, Paulinus, who

⁷⁵ Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.29.

would become a staunch supporter of Trinitarianism.⁷⁶ Athanasius' presence and teachings as well as his biography on Anthony the Great inspired several groups of 'servants of God' to take up ascetism in and around Trier.⁷⁷ Augustine's friend Ponticianus was influenced by this work in Trier; likewise, after reading this *vita*, Jerome took up asceticism and would later record the works and acts of St. Hilary. Athanasius' impact upon Trier, if not the whole of the west, seems also to be accidental. He was exiled to a backwater, yet his presence created a power node that attracted future emperors to reside in this frontier capital, primarily for legitimization and stabilization purposes. Because of his temporary exile, Trier was becoming an epicenter of Nicene Christianity, a springboard for Christian ascetism, and worthy city to take up residency as an emperor.

Athanasius interestingly described in a tract the necessity of an imperial presence. He notes how emperors must be visible to their subjects through messages, personal representatives, and more importantly, his physical appearance so that usurpers and malcontents will not exploit their absences. He further couched this importance of imperial proximity in religious phraseology: "But when the real king comes forth and is revealed, then the deceitful revolutionaries are refuted by his presence, while the citizens, seeing the real king, abandon those who formerly deceived them."⁷⁸ So to Athanasius, imperial presence was key to a politically and spiritually stable environment. He found this solace during his stay in Trier and later in Rome under Nicene emperors like Constans and Constantine II; however, he came under

⁷⁶ Davison "Trier and Cologne," 123; Wightman, *Roman Trier*, 227. Because of his defense of the pariah on a separate occasion, Paulinus was banished to Phrygia where he shortly thereafter died.

⁷⁷ Wightman, *Roman Trier*, 228.

⁷⁸ Van Dam, *Late Antique Gaul*, 22.

more condemnation once he moved back to his Alexandrian see from Arian emperors like Constantius II and Valens.

Martin

Sulpicius Severus' hagiography on St Martin sheds more insight on the significance of imperial residency in Trier regarding the solidification of Nicene Christianity in the west. After renouncing his military career as a member of the imperial guard, Martin became a follower of Hilary, bishop of Poitiers.⁷⁹ Like several other bishops of the time, Martin came into conflict with the residing emperor of his diocese. Martin's first bout with imperial authority came when Valentinian I denied the bishop access to his imperial person in Trier due to the emperor's disinterest in Martin's persistent entreaties.⁸⁰ According to Sulpicius, a supernatural event radically changed the emperor's mind. An angel heard Martin's prayers to reach the presence of the emperor and sent a fire that lit the imperial throne. In like manner, Martin reportedly performed many miracles within Trier, even casting out a demon from the proconsul's servant. Consequently, the proconsul, named Tetradius, was converted and gave his house to be transformed into a church.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Sulpicius Severus, *On the Life of St. Martin*, trans. Alexander Roberts (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), 5.

⁸⁰ Scholasticus, *Church History*, 4.1. Valentinian supported Trinitarianism, while his brother Valens fell into Arian influence as reported by Socrates Scholasticus. This historian notes how the presence of bishop Eudoxius of Constantinople influenced emperor Valens to support Arianism after his baptism, thus pushing him towards a more violent policy toward non-Arians in the east.

⁸¹ Severus, *St. Martin*, 17.

Out of all the clergy in the west, Martin became the most ardent opponent of Maximus.⁸² He would not support a usurper who had killed the previous sovereign, Gratian, exclaiming that the favor of God was not upon the murderer. During a certain banquet, it was custom for the servant to pour libations for the bishop, then the bishop presents it to the worthiest person in the gathering, usually the emperor or a high official if the emperor was absent. However, Martin gave the goblet to one of his presbyters, deeming no one worthy in the room save his subordinate. Sulpicius mentions how no other bishop would have performed such an act, even to a lower judge. Strangely, Maximus was not offended by this slight. “And the emperor, as well as all those who were then present, admired this conduct so much, that this very thing, by which they had been undervalued, gave them pleasure.”⁸³

This incident is what makes Maximus a unique player in the era of imperial and ecclesiastical machinations. Maximus was an ardent supporter of Trinitarianism and tried to make allies with the greatest advocates of this Christology at the time:⁸⁴ Martin in Trier, Ambrose in Milan, and emperor Theodosius in Constantinople.⁸⁵ However, these members were overwhelmingly hostile towards him. Though both previously had been friends before becoming emperors, Theodosius now viewed Maximus as an impious murderer.⁸⁶ He even allied with the

⁸² Severus, *St. Martin*, 20. “...at that time elated with the victory he had won in the civil wars, and when the disgraceful flattery of all around the emperor was generally remarked, while the priestly dignity had, with degenerate submissiveness, taken a second place to the royal retinue, in Martin alone, apostolic authority continued to assert itself.”

⁸³ Severus, *St. Martin*, Ch 20.

⁸⁴ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 161. “Maximus... seems to have trumpeted from the outset of his reign his devotion to the ‘catholic faith’ of Nicaea.”

⁸⁵ Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, (Seattle: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2011), 253. “But our saint (Martin) always maintained his apostolical authority, imitating herein St. Ambrose, who had been there before him upon an embassy from Valentinian II.”

⁸⁶ Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.15.

Arian Valentinian II against Maximus, though, according to Theodoret, he consistently tried to convince the exiled young emperor to come back to the true religion. Wanting eagerly to ally with the renowned Ambrose, he readily accepted his delegation in Trier. Ambrose proposed to Maximus that he should not marshal his forces to attack Italy but remain placid until Valentinian II arrives to surrender himself to Maximus' tutelage. Maximus gladly obliged; however, this whole negotiation was a ruse to buy Valentinian more time to fortify the Alpine passes. Martin warned Maximus that if he ventured outside Gaul and attacked Italy, he would win an initial victory, but die in the succeeding battle. This portend came true when the combined forces of Theodosius and Valentinian II decimated Maximus' army.

Though Maximus could not gain the allies he hoped for, he nevertheless made alliances with local Gallic clergy to determine the fate of a Christian sect called the Priscillians. As Maximus donned the imperial mantle in Trier and took control of the western provinces, the Nicene bishop Ithacius took advantage of this chaotic transitory period by exploiting Maximus' illegitimacy, his Nicene leanings, and his proximity. Amidst this perfect storm, Ithacius accused the popular Spanish bishop Priscillian of heresy.⁸⁷ However, while Martin resided in Trier, the Priscillians were not accosted. Though he did not agree with them theologically, he did not want them to be tried and punished. But once Martin left Trier, Maximus' tolerance towards the Priscillians likewise departed.⁸⁸ He allowed the accuser Ithacius and the judge/praetorian prefect

⁸⁷ Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History*, trans. Alexander Roberts (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), 49.

⁸⁸ Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, 218. "But Maximus, out of regard to St. Martin's remonstrances, caused the trial to be deferred all the while he stayed at Triers, and even promised him that the blood of the persons accused should not be spilt. But after the saint had left Triers, he suffered himself to be prevailed upon..."

Evodius to try Priscillian in a civic court.⁸⁹ Maximus, wanting to get as many Nicene supporters as possible to legitimate his precarious emperorship, favored the prosecution, had Priscillian tried in a civic court, and summarily executed the bishop. Additionally, four of his other followers and clerks were beheaded. Martin objected to this ruling on two accounts: first, for an ecclesiastical matter being determined in a secular court; second, for the heretic being harshly punished (the usual punishment for heresy was exile). Priscillian's execution was the first example of secular justice intervening in an ecclesiastical matter.⁹⁰ After Priscillian's execution, Ithacius and the bishops supporting him enjoyed favor and protection that came with the presence of emperor Maximus.

As we have seen, the positioning of a bishop or an emperor could determine the fate of a Christian sect and the sacralization of a city. Though Constantine hoped he could unite Christianity by holding an ecumenical council, his successor Constantius II doubled down on this aspiration by convening subsequent synods in strategic positions. By promoting ecclesiastical concord and flirting with Arianism, he made enemies of the Nicenes who were predominantly in the west. One such opponent was Athanasius whose exile in Trier solidified Trinitarianism within the region, emboldening the clergy to service the community, to adopt ascetism and to engage in imperial machinations. Martin became an amalgamation of these actions during his stay in Trier. He used his episcopal authority to counteract the emperor Maximus' desire to dabble in ecclesiastical matters. Though not entirely successful, Martin's presence and physical negotiations with the emperor seemed to have abated the latter's hostility toward Priscillian, if

⁸⁹ Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, 197. He was convicted of "nocturnal assemblies with lewd woman, of praying naked, and other such things."

⁹⁰ Ana Maria C.M. Jorge, "The Lusitanian Episcopate in the 4th Century: Priscilian of Ávila and the Tensions Between Bishops," Brown University, accessed February 2, 2019, https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue8/html/ajorge_main.html.

only temporarily. The Treverans likewise benefited from this bishop's charity and good works. Therefore, we can see how the presence and cooperation of these emperors and bishops could benefit certain parties within imperial capitals, thus creating a sort of competition of imperial residency. This seed of competition that was planted during the Constantinian dynasty would sprout under Ambrose of Milan.

3. The Imperial Seat of Milan

“At Milan also are all things wonderful, abundant wealth, countless stately houses, men are able, eloquent, and cheerfully disposed; besides, there is the grandeur of the site enlarged by a double wall, the Circus, her people's joy, the massy enclosed Theater with wedge-like blocks of seats, the temples, the imperial citadels, the wealthy Mint, and the quarter renowned under the title of the Baths of Hercules; her colonnades all adorned with marble statuary, her walls piled like an earthen rampart round the city's edge: all these, as it were rivals in the vast masses of their workmanship, are passing grand; nor does the near neighborhood of Rome abase them.”⁹¹

Milan Before Ambrose

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the west was cementing into a bedrock of Nicene Christianity. Churchmen like Athanasius, Maximinus, Martin, and the anti-Priscillians, in consort with various emperors residing in Trier, had both preserved and infused Trinitarianism within in Gaul. Now, in this tale of “how the west was won,” we must look to Mediolanum, an imperial seat in which displayed the first notable instance of a preeminent bishop commanding the physical presence and spiritual fate of a headstrong emperor in the late empire.

Though Milan's significance in this narrative pertains more to its ecclesiastical ascendancy under Ambrose, it nevertheless played a strategic role in the display of imperial power as well as competition in imperial residency. During the first tetrarchy, Maximian Herculeus took Milan as his seat while his counterpart Diocletian reigned from Nicomedia. Milan

⁹¹ Ausonij, “Ordo Urbium Nobilium.”

was perfectly situated at an intersection between eastern and western empires and likewise connected Transalpine Gaul with that of Cis, which provided commanders the ability to readily dispatch troops to address incursions from the southern Rhine and Danube frontiers, along with having the indominable Alps on its northern approach aid in sheltering the city from invaders if properly bulwarked.⁹² For instance, after being stalled by Ambrose, emperor Maximus was prevented from invading Italy due to the Milanese fortifying the Alpine passes.⁹³ Likewise, the city was extremely governable and open to any emperor without riot or open opposition-- be they legitimate or usurpers; Arian or Nicene; Christian or pagan. In 340, Ambrose was born into and operated within this new world of church and state power politics. A native of the imperial capital of Trier and son of the praetorian prefect of Gaul, Ambrose was instrumental in using imperial connections to further his religious agenda once becoming bishop. Throughout his clerical career, this bishop tried to shift the center of imperial power to Milan and bend the will of various emperors to his own.

By the mid-4th century, the western Nicene bishops had made enemies with an Arian emperor, Constantius II during the Council of Milan in 355. This emperor exiled several of them, including Dionysius, the bishop of Milan and installed an Arian presbyter named Auxentius into the Milanese bishopric, who reportedly was not well versed in Latin.⁹⁴ Constantius resided within Milan for two years, which could have eased the transition of the foreign bishop. This

⁹² Krautheimer, *The Three Cities*, 69.

⁹³ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 162.

⁹⁴ Athanasius, *History of the Arians*, trans. M. Atkinson and Archibald Robertson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892), 8.75. "Again, he transferred from Cappadocia to Milan one Auxentius, an intruder rather than a Christian, whom he commanded to stay there, after he had banished for his piety towards Christ Dionysius the Bishop of the place, a godly man. But this person was as yet even ignorant of the Latin language, and unskillful in everything except impiety."

brief stay reveals that even the temporary presence of the emperor could shift the religious climate of a city, which allowed Auxentius to reside within Milan's walls for almost two decades. Auxentius' presence likewise affected the burgeoning ministry of Martin.⁹⁵ This soldier-turned-cleric tried to establish a monastery within Milan, however, "Auxentius, the originator and leader of the Arians, bitterly persecuted him; and, after he had assailed him with many injuries, violently expelled him from the city."⁹⁶ Though Severus' language in his account is quite hyperbolic, it is still noteworthy how an imperially installed bishop detoured a capable holy man from operating in the imperial seat. Auxentius was even anathematized at the Council of Rimini and Synod of Paris, yet these rebukes did not loosen his control over Milan either.⁹⁷

Ambrose and the Valentinians

Upon becoming emperor, Valentinian I resided in Milan for a year and attempted to salvage the empire after Julian's misadventure into Parthia. He promoted concord within Milan and wanted the clergy and the Milanese to respect and support their presiding Arian bishop Auxentius, though the emperor himself was Nicene. This toleration irked firebrands like Hilary who still could not topple Auxentius from power during the former's stay in Milan and was thusly exiled by the emperor.⁹⁸ It was during Valentinian's reign which saw the governor of

⁹⁵ Timothy D. Barnes, "Valentinian, Auxentius, and Ambrose," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 51, no. 2 (2002): 227. Sulpicius Severus notes in his biography of St. Martin how Arianism was radiating from Illyria and how Constantius' episcopal exiles disoriented Gaul. However, Julian allowed the exiled bishops to return to their sees under his reign. Auxentius remained bishop of Milan because Dionysius had died in exile.

⁹⁶ Severus, *Life of St. Martin*, 6.

⁹⁷ Daniel H. Williams, "The Anti-Arian Campaigns of Hilary of Poitiers and the 'Liber Contra Auxentium.'" *Cambridge University Press* 61, no. 1 (March 1992): 8, 14. Convened by emperors Constantius and Julian respectively.

⁹⁸ Williams, "The Anti-Arian Campaigns," 22. "Hilary's debacle at Milan is evidence that the Valentinian administration was not going to reverse Constantius's policies, especially at the risk of creating public disruption. Such policies would continue in the west for almost another decade until the anti-Arian legislation of Theodosius and Gratian."

Aemelia and Liguria be proclaimed bishop of Milan after the death of Auxentius in 374:
Ambrose.

As his biographer, notary, and friend, Paulinus records that both Nicenes and Arians desired for the benevolent and just governor to be elected as the next bishop, disregarding his lack of theological experience. Augustine would commission Paulinus to write a biography of the great church father; however, this *vita* resembled more of a hagiography-- barely mentioning Ambrose's political maneuverings but focusing on his spirituality and ascetism. Martyrologic writings began to alter after the cessation of Christian persecutions. Christian writings previously accentuated the authority, piety, and miracles of the martyrs. However, once Christianity was tolerated, Christian biographies shifted to focus on internal suffering of Christian ascetics, their bouts with heretical groups and emperors, and their miracle working in their respective communities. Paulinus' biography on Ambrose was just one among a slew of biographies that examined the spiritual characteristics of saintly figures during the Nicene/Arian conflict, which provides a new context in understanding holy men in their relation to cities.

Although he was elected for his fairness and temperance, Ambrose quickly and decidedly became the most boisterous advocate for Trinitarianism in the west. It seems from the start that Ambrose knew he needed an imperial connection within his city to gain more authority not only within Milan, but that of the whole empire. After the death of Valentinian I, the bishop's authority in Milan rose due to his association with the late emperor's son Gratian. Ambrose wanted to entice Gratian during the latter's stay in Milan while en-route to Sirmium, desiring proximity to the young emperor to further his goals of Nicene and Milanese interests. In a letter, Ambrose notes how the emperor "stopped up the mouths" of the Arians in Milan due to this

alliance.⁹⁹ While in Sirmium, Gratian asked Ambrose to write him a statement of what Nicenes believed.¹⁰⁰ Ambrose readily accepted the task by writing volumes worth of material, called the *De Fide*. It was not only a theology on Trinitarianism, but an apologetic for why he was so opposed to the Arian court of Illyricum and a warning against residing in areas of Arian influence.¹⁰¹

But for martial reasons, Gratian had to forsake his seats in Milan and Trier (the latter to his detriment) to deal with the marauding Goths that had penetrated the empire after Adrianople. Like the church historian Theodoret, Ambrose insinuated that the war between Gratian and the Goths was akin to a holy war and that the devastation of Danuban provinces was a result of divine vengeance due to this area's Arianism. Therefore, Ambrose persistently invited Gratian to Italy where peace and blessings were in abundance. In this, Ambrose decisively steered the power center to his own domain to win Gratian to Nicene Christianity.

Later, we see Ambrose lead the western vanguard in the opposition against Arianism. During the Council of Aquileia, Gratian ordered that both eastern and western bishops hash out their differences and come to peace. However, the council was started without most of the eastern clergy's presence, since they were holding their own conference in Nicomedia before

⁹⁹ McLynn, *St. Ambrose*, 101. "For you have restored to me quiet in the Church, you have stopped the mouths (would that you had stopped the hearts) of the traitors, and this you have done not less by the authority of your faith than of your power." (Letter 1.2) "The blocked 'catholic' mouths were those of the homoean community in Milan, who had presumably sought to exploit the emperor's presence to state their own case against Ambrose and so reinforce the campaign of their Illyrican allies."

¹⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Letters*, trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1954) 1.1. "Great is my desire that as I remember you though far away, and in spirit am present, with you, so I may be with you in bodily presence also. Hasten then, holy Bishop of God; come and teach me, who am already a sincere believer; not that I am eager for controversy or seek to apprehend God in words rather than with my mind, but that the revelation of His Godhead may sink more deeply into an enlightened breast."

¹⁰¹ Ambrose, *Letters*, 10.12. There was also another heretical group that assembled in Sirmium called the Photinians, a sect which Ambrose advised Gratian to dissolve.

proceeding to Aquileia. Only Palladius of Ratiaria (a town in southern Dacia) and Secundianus of Singidunum (Belgrade) arrived to represent the Arian faction. With just two Arian bishops in attendance, they were essentially ambushed by Ambrose along with bishops from Gaul and Africa. Palladius did not feel comfortable defending his Christology without the support of his comrades and preferred to postpone the council until they arrive, yet the Nicene bishops grilled him and Secundianus, which resulted in both of their anathematizations. Though Valentinian I had supported the religious status-quo, we see that his son Gratian became increasingly involved in ecclesiastical disputes and gradually moved towards supporting the Trinitarian faction through Ambrose's guidance.¹⁰² Through organizing this council in the Italian city of Aquileia and persuading Gratian to reside in Milan, Ambrose scored a double victory for the western cause and the ascendancy of catholic orthodoxy.

However, Ambrose was not the only participant who wanted the emperor to reside in Milan, the Roman aristocracy preferred the move to Milan as well, since it was closer to their sphere of influence than the other dreadful and barbaric frontier capitals. The senatorial elite wanted Gratian (and other emperors) in Italy to support their causes, particularly regarding the upkeep of the Altar of Victory and the toleration of pagan customs. However, when Gratian was assassinated by Maximus, the center of power could shift back to either Trier or Sirmium. Gratian's younger brother Valentinian II succeeded him, which gave Ambrose apprehension concerning the mother empress Justina's fondness for Arianism. While residing in Milan, Justina and the impressionable emperor ordered several times for Ambrose to surrender some basilicas

¹⁰² Gratian may have realized the intertwining facet of religion with political geography in this new era.

for the use of the Arians or be exiled.¹⁰³ In 386, Valentinian only requested for the Portian and Nova basilicas for Easter Mass, while the other basilicas could be used for Nicene services.

Ambrose refused imperial orders and had himself along with his loyal Nicenes barricaded within one of the basilicas. During the Sunday service, Ambrose proclaimed to his congregation that:

“Were you then alarmed lest I should desert the Church, and in fear for my own life abandon you? But you heard my answer. I said that the thought of deserting the Church could not for an instant enter my mind, for I feared the Lord of the Universe more than the Ruler of the Empire; that if I were to be forcibly removed from the Church, it would be my body not my mind which would be driven by violence from thence, that if the Emperor were to act as royal power is wont, I was prepared for that which is the part of a priest to suffer.”¹⁰⁴

He ended this sermon by saying:

“For the Emperor is within the Church, not over the Church; a good Emperor seeks the aid of the Church, he does not reject it, we say this humbly, but we assert it firmly. Some men threaten us with fire, sword and banishment. We, the servants of Christ, have learned not to fear.”¹⁰⁵

After much stubborn resistance from the Ambrose and Nicenes in Milan, the court acquiesced.

He even reallocated the relics of Saints Gervasius and Protas (two patron saints of Milan) to mark his victory in the Ambrosian basilica.

Though Paulinus’ account emphasizes the piety and magnanimity of the bishop, the text nevertheless reveals how Ambrose used his basilicas to fortify his position and that of Milan’s. Several holy relics were stored in these locations, which drew many supplicants and pilgrims into Ambrose’s jurisdiction. Ambrose’s construction and use of his basilicas (Portian,

¹⁰³ Catherine M. Chin, “The Bishop’s ‘Two Bodies: Ambrose and the Basilicas of Milan,’” *Church History* 79, no. 3 (September 2010): 548. This was not the first time an emperor had requested a basilica for Arian use from Ambrose. Previously, the bishop had to surrender the Portian Basilica to Gratian while the latter was still pro-Arian. However, under Ambrose’s spiritual tutelage, Gratian began leaning more Trinitarian and the basilica returned to being exclusively Nicene.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Sermon: Against Auxentius on the Giving Up the Basilicas*, trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, *Against Auxentius*, 1.

Ambrosian, Virgin, Apostolic) were done to supersede those of Rome and Constantinople, again centering Milan on the world-stage. During late antiquity, the prestige of bishops grew in social and political matters through their lavish support of building projects, particularly basilicas. For both bishop and emperor, the building of grandiose churches signified their power to allocate vast amounts of resources, their divine legitimacy, and their grand beneficence to the people of God. Though several emperors instigated the building of new Christian basilicas (or repurposing old ones), they still needed endorsement from the local bishops. Both emperors and bishops had to work in conjunction to see their religious projects come to fruition.

Ambrose and Symmachus

After Ambrose's election to the episcopacy via popular acclaim, his spiritual mentorship of Gratian, and his successful bouts with Valentinian II and empress mother, Ambrose became the de facto hegemon of the western court and Nicene Christianity. The extent of his power even reached the steps of the Roman curia. The Altar of Victory, a pagan statue accompanied by an altar, had resided in the Roman Senate House since the Principate. Constantius II removed it, Julian reinstated it, Valentinian I tolerated it, and Gratian, through Ambrose's insistence, again had it removed. By the mid-380s, the renowned senator Symmachus requested that Valentinian II reinstate the altar. However, Ambrose reported that a significant number of Roman senators were Christian and that they should not be coerced to partake in sacrilegious ceremonies by the pagan senators. The Milanese bishop also demanded that the emperor dissolve the Vestal Virgins and the other pagan offices in Rome, arguing that the emperor could not serve two masters.

Concerning these profanities, he rhetorically asked Valentinian II:

“Is it worthy of your reign, that is of a Christian reign, that Christian senators should be deprived of their dignity, that the profane wishes of the heathen may be carried into effect... And her altar they now ask to have set up in the Senate-house at Rome, that is to

say, where a majority of Christians assemble. There are altars in all temples, an altar also in the temple of victories. Being pleased with numbers, they celebrate their sacrifices everywhere. But to insist on a sacrifice on this one altar, what is it but to insult over the Faith? Is it to be borne that while a Gentile sacrifices Christians must attend?... Is it not enough for him that the baths, the colonnades, the streets are filled with images? Even in that general assembly, are we not to meet upon equal terms? The believing portion of the Senate will be bound by the voices of them that call the gods to witness, by the oaths of them that swear by them. If they refuse, they will seem to prove their falsehood, if they acquiesce, to acquiesce in a sacrilege.”¹⁰⁶

Symmachus said that he spoke on behalf of the Senate and that the emperor should restore their ancient traditions, including reestablishing the Altar of Victory in the Senate house:

“The very glory of this present time makes it the more fitting that we should maintain the customs of our ancestors, the laws and destinies of our country; for it conduces to this glory that you should know it is not in your power to do anything contrary to the practice of your parents. We ask the restoration of that state of religion under which the Republic has so long prospered... Where shall we swear to observe your laws and statutes? By what sanction shall the deceitful mind be deterred from bearing false witness?”¹⁰⁷

Symmachus also addressed the need of the Vestal Virgins, citing several times in Roman history when their absence caused numerous calamities to befall Rome. Ambrose countered Symmachus’ case by showing the inefficacy of the gods throughout Roman history, noting the various sacks and wars that befell the Republic and Empire before Constantine. He also questioned the need for Rome to constantly incorporate new deities into its pantheon, like the gods of Rome’s enemies or the mystery cults, if the Roman gods are powerful and sufficient. Ambrose then explained that Christian churches actually served a purpose in the community: giving to the poor, ransoming prisoners, and ministering to the downtrodden and exiled. He then asked what do the Vestal Virgins and pagan priesthood tangibly offer? He ended by saying that a Christian emperor should instead worship exclusively at Christ’s altar.

¹⁰⁶ Ambrose, *Letters*, 17.10.

¹⁰⁷ Symmachus, *The Memorial of Symmachus, Prefect of the City*, trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 3.

Symmachus' requests were denied, and again, Valentinian capitulated to Ambrose's wishes. So, after Ambrose had won his contestation of space and influence for his faction in Milan, he scored another victory over space in a separate capital. Symmachus was from one of the most powerful families in Italy; his loss against Ambrose symbolized how the old power structures were giving way to new ones. The bishop's reach was extensive, which prompted Maximus, the officer who ordered the death of Gratian, to request an alliance. Interestingly, though Maximus was an ardent Nicene and tried to get Ambrose on his side, Ambrose allied with Justina and Valentinian II, both Arians. Thus, Ambrose preferred a nearby heretical court in Milan than distant, orthodox one on the Rhine. Though this could represent Ambrose being power hungry and opportunistic (which McLynn leans more towards in his book) Ambrose could have also felt that Maximus' claim to power was illegitimate, since the good Christian prince Gratian was assassinated by this ignoble upstart. This whole situation shows the importance of location and imperial legitimacy within this world of competing imperial and religious authority. Ambrose desired to remain in Milan among his powerbase and along with a legally recognized, though Arian, emperor. But by 389, Ambrose would find his perfect advocate, a Nicene, legitimate emperor who resided in Milan and submitted the bishop's authority: Theodosius I.

Ambrose and Theodosius

Theodosius had been residing in Thessalonica and Constantinople after Gratian bestowed upon him the purple following Valens' death at Adrianople. Theodosius became a staunch Nicene as a consequence of his dealings with Ambrose and deemed it necessary to eradicate Arianism in his eastern domains. In fact, during the dual reigns of Gratian and Theodosius, Ambrose noticed a Nicene resurgence in the east:

“For now that, after many times of trial and various persecutions, which the Arians, especially Lucius, who marked his course by the impious murder of monks and virgins, and Demophilus too, an evil source of perfidy, brought on the Catholics, all the Churches of God, in the east especially, have been restored to the Catholics; while in the west scarce two heretics have been found to oppose the decrees of the Holy Council, who can conceive himself able to make an adequate acknowledgement of your goodness?”¹⁰⁸

After successfully fending off and incorporating the Goths into his army, Theodosius became the senior Augustus, since the west was split between a child emperor and a usurper. He allied with Valentinian II, defeated the Gallic separatists, and held a triumph in Rome, accompanied by his son Honorius. He extended clemency to Symmachus and the rest of the pagan senators who supported Maximus, probably hoping to ease the way for his son’s future rule over the west. Symmachus thereafter wrote an apologetic concerning Theodosius.¹⁰⁹

Although he had won the civil war, Theodosius found it necessary to reside within Milan instead of returning to his eastern courts. Like Maximus, he needed an alliance with Ambrose to legitimate his position as a rightful ruler of the west, even though Valentinian II ruled *de jure*. What is telling about Theodosius’ relocation is that of an eastern emperor requiring legitimacy from a western bishop. However, this cut both ways; Ambrose needed Theodosius in Milan for the authority in which the emperor wielded to exact pro-Nicene legislation.

After Valentinian II’s apparent suicide, another usurper, named Eugenius, claimed Milan along with the whole of the Western Empire. Ambrose fled the city, apparently not wanting to be tainted by the paganism of Eugenius’ court in Milan. Eugenius supported the pagan temples and priesthood in the city, which provoked Ambrose to write several rebukes against the usurper while in voluntary exile. He also admonished the Milanese Christians to be like the Maccabees

¹⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Letters*, 12.1.

¹⁰⁹ Symmachus and his faction perhaps supported Maximus’ assassination of Gratian due to the latter’s disallowance of the Altar of Victory and opposed Theodosius due to his strict anti-pagan edicts he passed in the east.

and fight against this new Antiochus who was defiling God's holy places. Ambrose likewise wrote indictments condemning the pagan Eugenius and promoting the pious Theodosius, thus creating the semblance of a holy war. However, Eugenius didn't view himself as a reviver of pagan culture, he was just a puppet of Arbogast, a Frankish general who was the de facto ruler of the Gallic provinces and the man blamed for the death of Valentinian II. The consul Flavianus, friend of Symmachus, extatically supported the idea of a re-paganization of Rome and painted Eugenius as restorer of Roman tradition. Theodosius similarly propagandized himself as a defender of the faith and vanquisher of apostates, reuniting the empire under one Christian faith. When Theodosius defeated Eugenius at the Frigidus, Ambrose apologized to the victorious emperor for not remaining in the city and not having faith in Theodosius' pious cause and military prowess; however, he does not say that he forsook Church of Milan, rather, "I shunned the presence of one who had involved himself in sacrilege."¹¹⁰ Theodosius held a triumph in Milan for this victory and for the elevation of his son Honorius. He soon after unexpectedly died, leaving Honorius to rule to west and his eldest son Arcadius to rule the east.

Once Theodosius won and stood as the sole Augustus, he and Ambrose became even more powerful allies. Ambrose was Milan and the most famous bishop in the west if not all of the empire at this point. Though usually the emperor and the favored bishop worked together to meet their aims, this relationship became increasingly one sided with Ambrose's continuous supersession of imperial authority. Ambrose notoriously flaunted his ecclesiastical imperium by supporting the Christians who had burned down a Jewish synagogue in Callicum, Syria, to the chagrin of Theodosius who commanded the arsonists pay for its reconstruction. Theodosius

¹¹⁰ Ambrose, *Letters*, 61.2.

likewise had to conform to the western practices of liturgy, which centered more on the acts of the clergy than in the east where the emperor played a more active role in these services.

This tension came to a head after Theodosius ordered the massacre of rioters in Thessalonica.¹¹¹ Ambrose excommunicated the emperor, thus excluding the role of imperial presence within the church. Theodoret captures this pivotal moment in his *Ecclesiastical History*.

“When Ambrose heard of this deplorable catastrophe, he went out to meet the Emperor, who---on his return to Milan---desired as usual to enter the holy church, but Ambrose prohibited his entrance, saying "You do not reflect, it seems, O Emperor, on the guilt you have incurred by that great massacre; but now that your fury is appeased, do you not perceive the enormity of your crime? You must not be dazzled by the splendor of the purple you wear, and be led to forget the weakness of the body which it clothes. Your subjects, O Emperor, are of the same nature as yourself, and not only so, but are likewise your fellow servants; for there is one Lord and Ruler of all, and He is the maker of all creatures, whether princes or people. How would you look upon the temple of the one Lord of all? How could you lift up in prayer hands steeped in the blood of so unjust a massacre? Depart then, and do not by a second crime add to the guilt of the first. The Emperor, who had been brought up in the knowledge of Holy Writ, and who knew well the distinction between the ecclesiastical and the temporal power, submitted to the rebuke, and with many tears and groans returned to his palace. The Emperor shut himself up in his palace and shed floods of tears. After vain attempts to appease Ambrose, Theodosius himself at last went to Ambrose privately and besought mercy, saying "I beseech you, in consideration of the mercy of our common Lord, to unloose me from these bonds, and not to shut the door which is opened by the Lord to all that truly repent." Ambrose stipulated that the Emperor should prove his repentance by recalling his unjust decrees, and especially by ordering "that when sentence of death or of proscription has been signed against anyone, thirty days are to elapse before execution, and on the expiration of that time the case is to be brought again before you, for your resentment will then be calmed and you can justly decide the issue." The Emperor listened to this advice, and deeming it excellent, he at once ordered the law to be drawn up, and himself signed the document. St. Ambrose then unloosed his bonds.

The Emperor, who was full of faith, now took courage to enter holy church where he prayed neither in a standing, nor in a kneeling posture, but throwing himself upon the ground. He tore his hair, struck his forehead, and shed torrents of tears, as he implored forgiveness of God. Ambrose restored him to favor, but forbade him to come inside the altar rail, ordering his deacon to say "The priests alone, O Emperor, are permitted to enter within the barriers by the altar. Retire then, and remain with the rest of the laity. A purple

¹¹¹ Even though he changed his mind and rescinded the order, it was too late.

robe makes Emperors, but not priests. . ." Theodosius meekly obeyed, praising Ambrose for his spirit, and saying "Ambrose alone deserves the title of "bishop."¹¹²

This pivotal episode showed the dividing line between two authorities and two spaces:

bishop/emperor and ecclesiastical/temporal.

Likewise, during Theodosius' stay in Milan, more harsh and restrictive legislation was passed against non-Nicene Christians and pagans. The Theodosian decree of 391 to make Christianity the state religion was most likely influenced by Ambrose, since the emperor was residing in Milan at the time:

"Pagan sacrifice, worship of pagan idols, and worship in pagan temples is forbidden. Prosecutors of rank will be fined, but higher officials will pay a smaller amount than lower ranking officials."¹¹³

"Persons with inherited rank or status who abandon Christianity shall lose their position and be branded with infamy."¹¹⁴

"No person shall enter the pagan temples, perform sacrifices, or revere pagan shrines. Even judges are subject to this law; if they violate it, they will be fined. Their staff will also be fined unless they opposed him."¹¹⁵

Ambrose not only made Milan predominantly Nicene Christian but influenced various emperors to spread this view throughout the empire to the detriment of non-Nicene Christians, pagans, and Jews. His steadfastness countered imperial demands which seems to have created a small fissure between church and state that would become more pronounced in future generations. However, the ascension of orthodoxy did not solely rest on the rhetoric and tenacity of Ambrose, but on location as well. Again, imperial cities played a significant role in the

¹¹² Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.17-18.

¹¹³ *Codex Theodosianus*, 16.10.10.

¹¹⁴ *CT*, 16.7.5.

¹¹⁵ *CT*, 16.10.11.

crystallization of Nicene Christianity. Because of Ambrose's proximity to and association with various emperors, he had the necessary political and legislative clout to promote his view of Christianity and silence non-conformists.

Following the death of Theodosius and Ambrose's soon after, one of the former's barbarian commanders, named Alaric, felt betrayed by the Romans and launched a devastating campaign across northern Italy, prompting Honorius to move the capital from Milan to a more secure location: Ravenna.

4. The Imperial Seat of Ravenna

The Defenses of Ravenna

I have usually opened with a passage from Ausonius concerning his thoughts on an imperial capital that I will discuss. Along with detailing the luster of imperial seats like Trier, Milan, and Constantinople, he also conveys the beauty and grandeur of commercial cities like Carthage, Arles, Capua, Antioch, Syracuse etc. during his travels in last years of the 4th century. Several of these locations hosted emperors at one time or another; however, one future imperial seat that is noticeably absent from Ausonius' extensive list is Ravenna. This city would be the permanent lodging of the western emperors from 408 to 440, their semi-dwelling place until the fall of the west in 476, and the capital of the Ostrogothic kingdom and Byzantine exarchate.¹¹⁶ The city likewise held influential bishops who helped steer both the political and ecclesiastical climate of the fracturing Roman west. So how did this rather unimportant city at the start of the 5th century become the center of the late and post-Roman world? As in the cases of Trier and Milan, it was location and religion.

¹¹⁶ Gillett, *Rome, Ravenna, and the Last Western Emperors*, 131.

The 5th century opened with an explosion of barbarian tribes into the Roman west, causing a disintegration of the periphery. In the winter of 406, the Vandals, Suebi, and Alans crossed the Rhine into Gaul. By 410, Britain was forsaken due to continuous usurpations and invasions that consistently drained the imperial coffers and manpower. The years 402, 405, and 409 saw Gothic penetrations into Italy which threatened the center of the Roman world. Honorius, feeling too exposed in Milan and Rome, moved to Ravenna in 408; security seems to have been the chief concern with the transfer of the imperial capital to Ravenna. However, Zosimus notes that the young and impressionable emperor did not move on his own inclination but was prompted by Serena, the wife of the deceased *magister militum* Stilicho: “For she wished him to reside in a more secure city, that if Alaric should infringe the treaty and attack Rome, he might not take the emperor's person. She was the more zealous for his preservation, since her own security depended on his.”¹¹⁷ Thus Honorius “ordered and decreed that Ravenna should be the head of Italy in place of Rome.”¹¹⁸

There is also a noticeable shift of imperial oversight from the periphery to the center at the start of this century. The imperial person disappeared from the seats of Trier and Milan, which vulnerated them to future sackings; thus, imperial power and religious authority would be focused in central Italy. As previously witnessed, the 4th century saw an empire wide struggle over the residency of the emperors. But as we shall explore, the 5th century experienced a more localized competition for imperial residency, between Ravenna and Rome.

What set the rather neglected city of Ravenna apart from the other contenders for imperial residency? Ravenna’s importance before the 5th century owed to its connection with the nearby

¹¹⁷ Zosimus, *New History*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, trans. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 148.

port town of Classe, which harbored much of the Mediterranean fleet. However, since the navy's role in this region had fallen into abeyance by the time of the Dominate, Ravenna and its port at Classe became irrelevant. Likewise, the city was surrounded by marshland, towards which the Romans held a lasting animus. They saw wetlands as useless, dangerous, and only suitable if cultivated. Emperors like Augustus and Claudius advertised their power by draining the swamps and making the land arable, thus overcoming nature.¹¹⁹ However, with the transfer of the imperial seat to Ravenna, we do not see the typical Roman aversion, but recognition of utility. The bogs that had once deterred many Romans from inhabiting the city were now used to repel barbarian warbands. The city was likewise fortunate in being safeguarded from the invasions, sacks, and economic burdens that plagued Italy during this turbulent century. Ancient historians like Socrates, Jordanes, and Procopius, praised Ravenna's remarkable defensiveness, noting especially the impenetrable walls and the impassable marshes of the city's hinterland.¹²⁰ But Ravenna was not a paradise either, as mentioned by contemporary writers – its surroundings emitted a repugnant odor, contained bad water, and were plagued with flies.¹²¹

¹¹⁹Paolo Squatriti, "Marshes and Mentalities in Early Medieval Ravenna," *Viator*, vol. 23 (1992): 4. Squatriti's "Marshes and Mentalities in Early Medieval Ravenna" is important historiographically because it challenges previous notions of continuous Roman aversion towards swampland due to its disease and agricultural inefficacy. Conversely, he presents evidence of Romans using this unique environment for hunting specific game, acquiring certain yields, and using the terrain for fortification.

¹²⁰Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915) 92; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, trans. H.B. Dewing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 5.1. "This city lies amid the streams of the Po between swamps and the sea, and is accessible only on one side." "For this city of Ravenna lies in a level plain at the extremity of the Ionian Gulf, lacking two stades of being on the sea, and it is so situated as not to be easily approached either by ships or by a land army. Ships cannot possibly put in to shore there because the sea itself prevents them by forming shoals for not less than thirty stades; consequently the beach at Ravenna, although to the eye of mariners it is very near at hand, is in reality very far away by reason of the great extent of the shoal-water. And a land army cannot approach it at all; for the river Po, also called the Eridanus, which flows past Ravenna, coming from the boundaries of Celtica, and other navigable rivers together with some marshes, encircle it on all sides and so cause the city to be surrounded by water."

¹²¹ Squatriti, "Marshes and Mentalities," 5.

Like other imperial residencies that revived and strengthened peripheral cities, Honorius' relocation to Ravenna resuscitated the marshy municipality. Because of this imperial favor and presence, Ravenna became remarkably renovated and expansive during the 5th century, which was highly unusual for this period. Agnellus tells us how Honorius "added much to this wall of the city, where formerly it had been girded as merely one of the towns."¹²² Aside from the walls being renovated, legions were garrisoned in the new fortress city; governmental and imperial buildings were erected; baths were created; churches were beautified; a mint was established; and the population skyrocketed.¹²³ Honorius, his sister Galla Placidia, and her son Valentinian III ruled from Ravenna, greatly expanding, sanctifying, and beautifying the city.

However, aside from the city's defensive capabilities, the imperial court of Ravenna enjoyed communications via maritime access with Constantinople, instead of relying on the cumbersome overland routes from the port of Brindisi to either Milan or Rome.¹²⁴ Ravenna's linkage with Constantinople casted the western capital in the eastern's image for the next two centuries, assimilating its building styles, importing its statues, and mimicking its imperial court. As Constantine replicated an artificial Rome on the Bosphorus, so Honorius did with his capital in the Romagna, creating a distinct imperial and religious identity. Since Rome still held much power, soldier emperors like Diocletian, Constantine, and Valentinian thought it best to take up

¹²² Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 148. Living in the what he considered the darkness of the 9th century, Andreas Agnellus wrote an ecclesiastical history of Ravenna. His book chronicles the rise and fall of Ravenna's ecclesiastical prestige— from its glorious height as an imperial seat during the 5th century and as the headquarters of the Byzantine Italy in the 6th, to its decline during the Lombard and Carolingian eras. His account is filled with biographies, hagiographies, martyrologies, and miracle accounts of various Ravennate prelates. The style of his book mimics the "Book of the Popes" (*Liber Pontificalis*). This imitation could reveal how the author valued the significance of the Ravennate episcopacy as equal to or even superseding Rome's in some instances. Agnellus' work could also illuminate several reasons why so many emperors, kings, and exarchs were enticed to reside there.

¹²³ Squatriti, "Marshes and Mentalities," 1-2.

¹²⁴ "The importance of Ravenna in the fifth century lies not in its supposedly defensive swamps, but in its capacity to act as a conduit to the East." Gillett, *The Last Western Emperors*, 162.

residency somewhere else, away from the traditional aristocratic and religious elites to create something new. At the start of the 5th century, this alternate location was Ravenna under Honorius and his successors.

The Bishops of Ravenna

Ravenna's gained prestige through imperial residency coincided with its rise in ecclesiastical importance. Because of this move, the Ravennate bishopric accrued a metropolitan status over northern Italy, even usurping the Milanese bishopric that Ambrose had fought so hard to elevate.¹²⁵ This elevation was due primarily to Valentinian III's amiable relationship with John, the presiding bishop of Ravenna. When the young Valentinian met with John, he was so impressed with his piety that the emperor bestowed the bishop episcopal oversight over fourteen cities in northern and central Italy and gave him the pallium, "as is the custom of the bishop of the Romans to wear over his surcoat, which he and his successors have used up to the present day."¹²⁶ This episode reveals a certain ecclesiastical supersession of the Ravennate see over the Roman one due to the emperors' relocation to the former. This contestation between both sees would continue for the next three hundred years.

During Attila's rampage through Italy, sacking strongholds such as Milan and Aquileia, bishop John worried that the barbarian king would destroy Ravenna as well. According to Agnellus, the bishop prayed so ardently for Ravenna's protection that his body was transfigured to that of a luminescent angelic being. When he approached Atilla, he exclaimed how he would lay down his life for his children if Ravenna be spared. This reference to the Ravennese as his

¹²⁵ Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 4.

¹²⁶ Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 148.

children apparently confused Attila who took the statement literally. Consequently, one of the king's advisors had to explain the metaphor, which stirred Attila's spirit due to the bishop's piety and sacrificial love for his citizens. Attila thus struck a bargain with the bishop: the Hunnic king would spare Ravenna from destruction and slaughter if the city gates be let open and their armies march through the city. This show of theater was done to ensure Attila's reputation was maintained, in that the impregnable defenses of Ravenna did not detour his army, but the city indeed surrendered due to his mighty hosts.¹²⁷ This again speaks to the renown defensive quality of the city. Surprisingly, after Attila's passage through Ravenna, the Scourge of God left Italy altogether back to his own kingdom. Agnellus does not note Attila's famous interaction with the Roman pontiff Leo in his accounts, so either Attila was both detoured from Rome and Ravenna by an ecclesiastical figure or Agnellus is substituting Rome's legendary story with Ravenna. This latter interpretation continues Agnellus' bias towards Ravennate political and spiritual supremacy over Rome's, thus centering Ravenna as the true power locale of the 5th and 6th century west.

Thus far we have witnessed how the Theodosian dynasts and bishop John had bolstered Ravenna's status as a defensive bastion and a metropolitan city of the west. But how did this city factor into the Christianization of the late empire? Similar to Martin in Trier and Ambrose in Milan, another bishop who promoted Nicene orthodoxy through imperial connections was Peter Chrysologus of Ravenna. Indeed, Deliyannis asserts that "Chrysologus became for Ravenna what Ambrose had been for the see of Milan sixty years earlier."¹²⁸ Agnellus was the first to give

¹²⁷ Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 145. "Do this, lest some towns might say cunningly, 'He could not demolish or subjugate Ravenna; he is reduced along with his army, he shows his back, he has fled; and they might have less respect for my powers than for the other kings my predecessors, who ruled for a long time.'"

¹²⁸ Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, 84.

Peter the epithet ‘Chrysologus’ (Golden-Worded), possibly to give the Latin west a Chrysologus to compete with the highly renowned and venerated John Chrysologus from the Greek east.¹²⁹ Like Ambrose, Peter, who was an unlikely candidate, became bishop via popular acclaim. Agnellus notes how it was custom of an assembly of citizens and priests to gather to elect a new bishop, who would then be ordained by the pope. Pope Sixtus, who had a miraculous dream that confirmed Peter’s election, threatened to excommunicate the Ravennese detractors if they did not recognize their new bishop.¹³⁰ Even though Agnellus seems to elevate the episcopal clout of Ravenna throughout his biographies, he nevertheless acknowledges papal primacy on occasion, proving difficult to gauge which bishop had the most authority. For example, he highlights Petrine succession and authority during the Council of Chalcedon, when Chrysologus admonished the heretic Eutyches to return to flock of orthodoxy. “Truly you should humble yourself to the holy Roman pope and diligently obey his commands. And do not think other than that the blessed apostle Peter himself is now alive and apostolically holds the power of the throne of the Roman see in the flesh.”¹³¹

However, the Ravennate bishops still had the ear of the imperial family, thus wielding the necessary means to execute their will, at least during the first half of the 5th century. And here is the primary advantage of having the emperor in the same city as you. Although the bishops in Rome could claim descent from Peter, they were not always near the emperor. One powerful ally and patron that Chrysologus found was the empress Galla Placidia. Aside from the pope, Galla played a heavy hand in Peter’s elevation. His admiration for her was illustrated

¹²⁹ Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 157.

¹³⁰ Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 161. Agnellus reports that some Ravennese did not want Peter as the new bishop since he was from Imola, one of the subordinate churches.

¹³¹ Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 158.

during his consecration speech, calling her the “Mother of the Christian, eternal, and faithful Empire herself.”¹³² Peter had the backing of the imperial family, even having them as congregants each Sunday mass. Together, they sealed Nicene orthodoxy in the new imperial seat and those cities under its jurisdiction by endorsing massive church building projects. Under their purview, these churches were constructed: The Church of the Holy Cross Our Redeemer, St John the Evangelist, the Petriana in Classe and St. Stephen in Rimini.¹³³ Another building constructed, the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, interred the bodies of the empress’ husband Constantius III, her son Valentinian III, and herself. Though it was customary for members of the imperial family to be buried in Rome or Constantinople, the interment of these Theodosians in Ravenna again shows how central and significant this reconfigured city became in the 5th century. This could reveal a shift in Ravenna’s relevancy and the spiritual perception of the imperial body, even mimicking saintly figures and relics.

Ravenna’s Legacy

However, before Valentinian’s death, he took up residency in the old capital of Rome. While in the city, he affirmed Roman ecclesiastical hegemony over all of Christendom, conferring Petrine supremacy to Pope Leo I (the Great) and his successors. So what drew Valentinian and the last Roman emperors back to the Eternal city? Until 476, the emperors either resided in Rome or Ravenna. The ones with strong connections with the senate or the court of

¹³² Deliyannis, *Ravenna*, 84.

¹³³ Agnellus, *Church of Ravenna*, 120-121, 124. Noting the grandeur of the Petriana due to imperial support, Agnellus lauds “No church like it in construction was larger, either in length or in height; and it was greatly adorned with precious stones and decorated with multicolored mosaics and greatly endowed with gold and silver and with holy vessels, which he ordered to be made... In his reign the empress Galla Placidia offered many gifts to the church of Ravenna...”

Constantinople resided in Rome (Petronius Maximus, Avitus, Anthemius, Olybirus, Nepos) while those of military stock reigned in Ravenna (Majorian, Libius Severus, Glycerius, Romulus Augustulus). Ravenna was viewed as more practical and strategic while Rome was more symbolic and legitimizing. Ravenna could never fill Rome's shoes because of its near proximity and established aristocracy. The only true "New Rome" was distant Constantinople, which both combined the traditions of Rome with a new Christian worldview. During Ostrogothic and Byzantine control of Ravenna, the city took on the style of the eastern court, instead of Rome.

Although Ravenna was the seat of the emperor, Rome was still highly valued, seen as the emperor's "true home" by Claudian. Even Honorius, the prime architect of Ravenna's rejuvenation and ascendance, built his mausoleum in Rome. Rome had history, tradition, and sacrality, and in an empire receding around the Mediterranean, it was poised as a prime candidate for imperial residency. Nevertheless, Ravenna still housed several powerful emperors, families, and bishops and both cities, in the end, would continue the legacy of Nicene domination that had characterized the Latin west for the previous century and a half. Rome would still attract rulers to visit it for ceremonial and legitimization purposes and Ravenna would continue to house kings and exarches behind its impregnable marshes and walls.

5. Conclusion

By examining these late imperial capitals collectively, we can observe how the emperor's presence bolstered the defensive capabilities of their respective seats along with opening more economic opportunities within their seats by creating artificial 'Rome-s.' This was first realized during the Crisis of the Third Century, when Gallic leaders seceded from the empire once the emperors' attention became focused around the Mediterranean. These separatist emperors

established Trier as their capital, developing the city into a bastion of defense against the neighboring Germanic tribes. This episode exposed a flaw within the Roman governmental system, namely, the necessity for a continuous imperial presence on frontier metropolises. Diocletian remedied this by establishing a tetrarchy, in which four Roman emperors ruled over their quarter of the empire from a strategically vital capital. This tetrarchic system would forever reshape the political and religious makeup of the Roman Empire.

The Constantinians, Valentinians, and the emperor Maximus further transformed Trier into a Rome north of the Alps. Through their presence, this capital, and Gaul to a larger extent, was made defensible and lucrative. A similar occurrence happened once the Theodosian dynasty moved to Ravenna. Its renovated walls, combined its unique marshy terrain, made it an impregnable fortress against the marauding Goths that plagued Italy in the wake of the 5th century. Likewise, its port of Classe connected this imperial city with Constantinople, recasting it in the latter's image into the Gothic and Byzantine periods. In Rome, largesse was displayed by emperors during adventus ceremonies and triumphs, showing to the citizens that they were still present, in control, legitimate, and connected with the old traditions of eternal city.

Also, the emperors, in conjunction with bishops determined the trajectory of Christianity through these imperial capitals. Maximus' stay in Trier prompted the Nicene faction to ally with the usurper to persecute the Priscillians in Gaul. In Milan, bishop Ambrose used his imperial connections to execute his desires for Christian spaces, first in Milan, then Rome, the west, and eventually the whole empire. After coaxing Theodosius to leave the east to reside in Milan, the bishop used the emperor's proximity to legislate orthodoxy and to ban pagan and heretical doctrines and assemblies across the both halves of the empire. Once the capital shifted from Milan to Ravenna, great ecclesiastical figures like John and Peter Chrysologus allied with the

imperial family in order to sanctify the city with Christian buildings, thus cementing Nicene orthodoxy over the region. Likewise, the Roman pontiffs Miltiades and Sylvester cooperated with Constantine in the conversion of secular and pagan spaces in Rome into Christian ones. Bishops also began to play a more active role in the politics of the receding Roman Empire. By coopting imperial authority within these imperial seats, bishops like John of Ravenna and Pope Leo could negotiate and assuage the wrath of Attila the Hun, thus saving their sees.

Therefore, from the end of the Third Century Crisis to the dissolution of the Roman west, we have seen how the cooperation between emperors and bishops within imperial capitals not only benefited the defensive capabilities and economics of their regions, but also solidified Nicene orthodoxy as the victorious Christology of the Latin west.

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