ROME, RAVENNA AND THE LAST WESTERN EMPERORS

O sad, and sweet, and silent! surely here
A man might dwell apart from troublous fear.
Oscar Wilde, "Ravenna II" (1878)

Ravenna features, in modern textbooks and specialist works, as the capital of the western half of the Roman Empire from 402 until the deposition of Romulus ‘Augustulus’ in 476. The description is misleading. Ravenna did indeed serve as the main imperial residence and seat of government for the early part of the century, between 408 and 440. But from 440 the city of Rome became, for the first time since the third century, a regular seat of government in its eponymous Empire, and remained so throughout the last generation of the existence of the Empire in the West. While Rome enjoyed renewed imperial status, Ravenna continued to serve strategic and ceremonial functions. But it was not until after 476, under the successive regimes of Odoacer, the Ostrogoths and the Byzantine exarchate, that Ravenna became, in the words of a ninth-century writer, the caput Italiae. The antedating of the primacy of Ravenna has served essentially literary functions: in the narrative of Rome’s fall, Ravenna is a locus of imperial decline, the Weimar of the later Roman Empire. Occupied by shadowy emperors as a refuge offering ease of escape, Ravenna is a metonym for the decadent state, a weak and watery capital befitting a dissolving empire. If this literary role of Ravenna is put aside, a different image of the last decades of western imperial rule emerges. The celebrated conflicts between generalissimos, emperors and kings that attended the unravelling of the Roman Empire in the West were played out against the backdrop of the city of Rome and, critically, in the milieu of its senatorial aristocracy, which dominated political affairs.¹

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¹ The Poems of Oscar Wilde (London, 1908; reprinted 1969).
² Sources generally are cited using the abbreviations and editions that appear in J.R. Martindale, The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire II A.D. 395–527 (Cambridge, 1980), xiii–xxxvii. Details of exceptions to this are given at the end of the paper (as are the abbreviations used for frequently-cited modern works) or on their first occurrence in the paper.

Fifth-century imperial residence in Rome has been noted, but without full discussion. For example for Valentinian III: Oost, Galla Placidia, 254 n. 11; Deichmann, Ravenna: Kommentar III, ‘Spätantike Regesten’, 80–3; C. Pietri, ‘Les aristocraties de Ravenne (Ve–VIe s.)’, Studi Romagnoli 34 (1983), 648. For the fifth century generally: brief comments in Bury, LRE I, 467; Jones, LRE, 211, 366–7, 553, 687; E. Ewig, ‘Residence et capitale pendant le haut Moyen Age’, in his Spätantike und Fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften I (ed. H. Atsma) (Munich, 1976), 362–6; C. Wickham, Early Medieval Italy (Houndmills, 1981), 15; R. Collins, Early Medieval Europe (Houndmills, 1991), 89; T.S. Brown, ‘Everyday life in Ravenna under Theodoric: an example of his ‘tolerance’ and ‘prosperity’?’, in Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d’Italia I (Spoleto,
The imperial career of Anthemius usefully illustrates the role of Rome. In Constantinople, on 25 March 467, the *augustus* Leo I elevated to the rank of *caesar* Anthemius, a Constantinopolitan noble, *patricius*, and successful general, with impressive dynastic claims to the imperial throne. At the request of an embassy sent by the Senate of Rome, Leo dispatched Anthemius to Italy to be installed as emperor. No emperor had resided in the West since the death of Libius Severus, in Rome, in November 465. Anthemius, accompanied by a substantial navy, sailed from Constantinople to Italy, where he was proclaimed *augustus* at Brontotas, three miles from Rome, on 12 April 467. The whole of Anthemius’s known imperial career was spent in the city of Rome. He entered the city at a time of raging pestilence. Later in 467 the populace of Rome enjoyed the lavish revelry surrounding the marriage there of Anthemius’s daughter, Alypia, to Ricimer, the leading general of the West. The celebrations for Anthemius’s imperial consulate on 1 January the following year, which included an extant panegyric by Sidonius Apollinaris, were staged in the Forum of Trajan and other sites in the city. During the first year of his reign, he swore an oath in Saint Peter’s basilica to support Pope Hilary against attempts to introduce Macedonian liturgical practices into the city. In 468 Anthemius received in Rome embassies from the Goths of Toulouse and the Sueves of Gallaecia, seeking to draw him into local conflicts between barbarian rulers and Roman provincials. All Anthemius’s surviving laws were issued in Rome; all his Palatine officials who can be localized are attested only in Rome; and his principal coinage was struck at Rome. A court intrigue in Rome in 470 resulted in the execution of a senior figure, the *patricius* and former *magister officiorum* Romanus, and punishment of other figures. A breach consequently arose between Anthemius and his son-in-law Ricimer, who removed himself and 6,000 of his followers from Rome to Milan. Despite the temporary success of an embassy sent to Anthemius in Rome in early March 471, civil war erupted. Ricimer besieged Anthemius in Rome for five months in early 472; Anthemius, residing in the palace, held out with the support of the local populace and authorities. Reinforcements from Gaul were defeated and their commander killed at Hadrian’s bridge in early July. Soon after, Anthemius’s forces gave way, and on 11 July Ricimer’s nephew Gundobad captured the emperor and executed him in the church of Saint Chrysogonus (now Santa Maria in Trastevere). Ricimer none the less granted what a contemporary called a ‘royal burial’ for Anthemius; the location is uncertain, but the phrase at that time probably referred to interment in the imperial mausoleum, built by the emperor Honorius, adjoining Saint Peter’s. At the beginning of the siege, Ricimer had elevated the senator Olybrius as emperor, outside Rome. With Anthemius dead,
Olybrius was installed in the imperial palace recently vacated by Anthemius, probably on the Palatine.\(^3\)

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. But though the Empire remained conceptually an extension of the city of Rome, the city itself was progressively abandoned as a political centre and as a seat of government throughout the second and third centuries AD, as the soldier emperors increasingly resided in towns located close to the Empire's long and periodically unstable borders. Under the tetrarchs, there appear the first signs that other cities were considered as possible rival capitals, rather than merely as favoured *stationes* in the imperial itinerary. Their successors completed the prolonged withdrawal of the court to the periphery of the Empire: Maxentius was the last emperor of the fourth century to spend any significant amount of time in the city (306–12); his victor, Constantine, was the last to pay lengthy visits there. Later fourth-century emperors in the West ruled from Trier in Gaul, Sirmium in Pannonia or Milan in northern Italy, all strategic locations.\(^4\) The rarity of even

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imperial visits to Rome after Constantine is underscored by Ammianus Marcellinus's famous description of the adventus of Constantius II into the city, and Claudian's assertion that Rome had been visited only three times by an emperor in the century to 404. Contact between the imperial court and the Senate of Rome was sustained by a busy traffic of embassies. Yet the distance at which the court remained from the ancient capital is sometimes regarded with suspicion in modern scholarship. It is thought that the late emperors' militaristic and autocratic ethos antagonized the Senate's cultured otium and jealousy-guarded local authority, as had been the case with Maximinus Thrax and other third-century soldier emperors; consequently, the emperors, even when in Italy, kept away from the city as much as possible in order to avoid clashes with the powerful aristocracy, and Rome fell, by default, under the dominance of its bishops.

At the turn of the fourth century the eastern court moved from its traditional itineraries to an exclusive residence and fixed bureaucratic centre, a radical change in imperial behaviour. The eastern emperors settled, not at Antioch, the imperial residence most often used throughout the fourth century, but at Constantinople. Though formally founded by Constantine in 330, the city was not consolidated as the permanent eastern capital until the reigns of Theodosius I and Arcadius.

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ROME, RAVENNA AND THE EMPERORS

In the West, a similar shift from a mobile court to a new, stable and distinctly Christian centre is generally associated with Ravenna. The site of a fleet established by Augustus, and occasionally used as an imperial statio, Ravenna’s tenure as an imperial residence is usually dated to its occupation by Honorius in 402, presumably during the initial incursion of the Goths of Alaric into Italy. After the deposition in 476 of Romulus ‘Augustulus’, the last Roman emperor to reign in the West, Felix Ravenna served as the capital first of the quasi-imperial regimes of Odoacer and the Ostrogothic monarchs, then, following Justinian’s wars, of the Byzantine generals and exarchs. Notwithstanding the Lombard invasion of Italy in 568, Ravenna remained the centre of western Byzantine administration and, occasionally, usurpation) throughout the early Middle Ages until 751, when it was finally taken by the Lombard king Aistulf. Even then, Ravenna played an imperial role in the West, for Charlemagne, the new Imperator imperium Romanorum gubernans after 800, paid the city the compliment of imitating and plundering its most beautiful architecture when constructing his own new imperial capital at Aachen.

The long history of Ravenna as ‘capital of the late antique West’ (in Friedrich Deichmann’s term) makes it easy to assume that the city enjoyed this role consistently from its first imperial occupation in the early fifth century. The following description of the position of Ravenna in late antiquity usefully sums up modern views:

Ravenna had become the imperial capital in the West when, after the siege of Milan by Alaric late in 401, the court of Honorius sought for somewhere safer to live. It found this in a city protected by marshes and lagoons ... From that time on, the western emperors [became] more or less permanent residents there. They had no need to leave the security of their fastness in the lagoons, and rarely did. The assumption that Ravenna served as the primary residence of the fifth-century western emperors, and that the residence of Odoacer and the Ostrogothic monarchs was thereby predetermined by custom, has been a fixture of

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modern historical narratives since at least Gibbon. The fifth-century *augusti* have become cast as ‘the emperors of Ravenna’.  

Ravenna’s supposed role as capital and refuge is more than an inaccuracy of detail. In the rhetorical style of an older generation of historian, Ravenna fulfilled a purpose more literary than historical, for the city served to symbolize, and indeed localize, decline: ‘sad Ravenna, symbolic capital of the decadent empire’. The new capital has been held as both a symptom and a cause of the decline of the western Empire: the lesser splendours of this Christian capital fatally undermined the court’s prestige. The recline of the fifth-century emperors into permanent capitals complements the image of the later Theodosians as *rois fainéants*, and their successors in the West as little better. Ravenna is the locus of western imperial decline, intrinsically and culpably linked with ‘barbarian invasions’ and Roman military defeat. These moralizing sentiments often underlie sober recent literature.


13 Section headings of Demougeot, *La formation* II, part four, chapter one, §§ I and II.


ROME, RAVENNA AND THE EMPERORS

In fact, Ravenna did not serve continuously as an imperial residence in the fifth century. Rather, it was largely (though not entirely) unused by the western imperial court throughout the critical period of the last generation of the Empire in the West, from about 450 to 476. During this period Ravenna retained administrative and military functions, and was intermittently used as a stage for imperial ceremonial, an available alternative to the main seat of government, Rome.

ITINERARIES

The emperors' preference for Rome over Ravenna is shown by their itineraries. The following pages, tabulating evidence for the location of the imperial court with discussion, is drawn largely from Seeck's *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr.* (1919). Additions to Seeck are marked with an asterisk (*); disputed evidence or postulated locations are set in square brackets [ ].

HONORIUS (395–423)

From the death of Theodosius I (17 January 395) until September 401, Honorius is attested almost exclusively at Milan. He visited Ravenna once during a tour of north Italian coastal cities (29 August 399).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>401</td>
<td>10 Sept.</td>
<td>MILAN</td>
<td>CTh I 15.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[*mid-Nov./April</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td>Claud. <em>De Bello Get.</em> 450–419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>402</td>
<td>6 Dec.</td>
<td>RAVENNA</td>
<td>CTh VII 13.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>403</td>
<td>20 Feb.–25 July</td>
<td>RAVENNA</td>
<td>CTh XII 6.29; VII 18.11; XIV 3.21; VIII 5.64; XIII 1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oct./Nov.</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td>Claud. <em>De VI Cons. Hon.</em> 541; Dewar, <em>Claudian</em> xlvi n. 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>404</td>
<td>*1 Jan.</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td>Claud. <em>De VI Cons. Hon.</em> 491–660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>consular celebrations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 Seeck himself considered Ravenna, not Rome, the fifth-century imperial residence: *Geschichte* V, 391; VI, 93–4, 116, 313. For tabulation of data from the *Codex Theodosianus*, see also T. Mommsen and P. Meyer (eds), *Theodosiani libri XVI*, 2 vols (fourth edition) (Berlin, 1970), I.1, ccLxxii–cccvii; II, xcvi–cix. The format of the following is derived from Barnes (as in the latter four works cited in n. 4).

19 Between Alaric's entry into Italy (18 November 401) and the battle of Pollentia (6 April 402); but Claudian is not reliable for events at the time of Pollentia; A. Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), 414.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*15 Feb.–25 July</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td>*Innocent. Ep. 12.14 (PL 20, 478); CTh VIII 5.65; VII 5.2; XVI 8.16; XIV 1.4; XVI 8.17; Aug. Ep. 88.7 (PL 33, 306)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>405</td>
<td>[*1 Jan.</td>
<td>Rome consular celebrations?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Feb.–8 Dec.</td>
<td>RAVENNA</td>
<td>CTh XVI 2.35; II 8.24; XVI 6.4.5; XVI 5.38; XVI 6.3; XVI 5.37; XVI 11.2; IX 42.19; XI 30.62; IX 38.10; XV 1.43; XI 20.3; V 16.30; XI 1.27; XVI 5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>406</td>
<td>11 Jan.–24 March</td>
<td>RAVENNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Dec.</td>
<td>RAVENNA</td>
<td>CTh XI 36.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>407</td>
<td>[1 Jan.</td>
<td>Rome consular celebrations]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Feb.–22 March</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td>CTh XVI 5.40; VII 13.18; VII 20.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[7 April</td>
<td>15 Nov.</td>
<td>RAVENNA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Nov.</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td>CTh XVI 2.38; XVI 5.41,43; XVI 10.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Jan.–3 Feb. after 1 May</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td>CTh XIV 4.8; I 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>depart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–13 Aug.</td>
<td>PAVIA</td>
<td>Zos. V 32.3; Excerpta Sangallensia (MGH(AA) IX, 300 cc. 538–9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13–24 Sept.</td>
<td>MILAN</td>
<td>CTh XI 28.4; IX 42.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Nov.</td>
<td>RAVENNA</td>
<td>CTh XVI 5.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Honourius is subsequently attested only at Ravenna until his death on 27 August 423, except for brief visits: 22

414
30 Aug. (attested in Ravenna 8 Aug. and 17 Sept.) | ROME | CTh XVI 5.55 |

416
May (attested in Ravenna 3 May and 4 July) | MILAN | Lib. Pont. 4423 |

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20 Subscription 'Rav.' doubted by Mommsen; Mommsen and Meyer (eds), Theodosiani libri (above, n. 18), I.1. cclxxvii n. s.a. 407 title; I.2, 772, n. to CTh XIV 1.5, I. 4.
23 The source includes anachronisms, that is Honorius and Valentinian III as co-emperors. Cf. Kent, RIC X, 133.
ROME, RAVENNA AND THE EMPERORS

Honourius made prolonged stays at both Rome and Ravenna in the period 402–8. The court relocated from Milan to Ravenna presumably after Alaric’s entry into Italy (23 August or 19 November 401), possibly after his departure (summer 402). No contemporary source mentions the court’s relocation, or indicates that the move was intended to be permanent.

Honourius’s subsequent relocation from Ravenna to Rome in late 403, to celebrate his sixth consulship there on 1 January 404, was attended by widespread publicity. Claudian presented Honourius’s arrival as long-anticipated. This was probably accurate: Honourius had visited Rome with his father, Theodosius I, in 389, but not at subsequent important ceremonial occasions, for example his imperial elevation in 393; after the death of Theodosius in 395; or his consulates of 396, 398 and 402. The Senate had unsuccessfully petitioned the emperor to come to Rome at least twice by 397, and may have appealed again later. The Senate anticipated, in vain, that Honourius would celebrate a triumph in the city following the defeat of Gildo in 398. Again in 402, following Stilicho’s first defeat of Alaric at Pollentia, the Senate might have petitioned for Honourius to attend victory celebrations in Rome. But Stilicho, de facto regent in the West, visited Rome at least twice in this period for ceremonial occasions, in February 400 (as part of his consular celebrations) and in mid-402 (celebrating the defeat of Alaric at Pollentia).

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24 Dates: Dewar, Claudian xxxii, xlii–xliv.
25 Zosimus omitted western events 399 to 405. Noticeably silent is Claud. De Bello Get. and De VI Cons. Hon., though cf. De Bello Get. 269–315 (Stilicho convinces the court to remain in Milan, not to flee to Gaul); and De VI Cons. Hon. 494–5 (Honourius departs Ravenna for Rome, late 403).
29 Claud. De VI Cons. Hon. 366–83 with CIL VI 1187, 31256; perhaps deferred because of the conflict between Stilicho and Eutropius; Seeck, in his introduction to Symm. Ep. clxiv n. 838; Cameron, Claudian (above, n. 19), 124; Dewar, Claudian, 272.
At the consular celebrations of 404 Claudian also strongly intimated that the emperor's future residence would be Rome.²² Possibly during this stay in Rome and as part of such propaganda, Honorius began construction of his own tomb, adjacent to Saint Peter's in Rome.²³

Nevertheless, the court returned to Ravenna, possibly first celebrating Stilicho's second consulate (405) in Rome, where celebrations for his first (400) and Honorius's sixth (404) had been held. Honorius relocated again to Rome, perhaps in time to celebrate there his seventh consulship (407) and Stilicho's victory over the Goth Radagaisus (August 406).³⁴ From 404 to 407 Ravenna was Stilicho's military base; Rome was the fiscal centre of government.³⁵

According to Zosimos, Honorius's residence in Rome was curtailed in May 408 by specific political circumstances: his brother Arcadius's death, the plot against Stilicho and vacillating relations with Alaric. Stilicho actively sought to prevent Honorius from relocating to Ravenna; Stilicho's wife Serena, however, urged Honorius to leave Rome as a potential target for extortion by Alaric.³⁶ Ravenna was the safer city, not because of its lagoons but because it hosted the army, mustered in anticipation of conflict with Constantinople; Rome was the more perilous, not because of its defences (Honorius had substantially restored and extended the Aurelian walls in 403³⁷), but because its

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²³ Claud. De Cons. Stil. I 325–32; Cameron, Claudian (above, n. 19), 230–2, but was not present in Rome (Symm. Ep. IV 5). In 402, prior to Pollentia, Stilicho made a display of arms before Rome, but is not recorded as having entered the city (Claud. De Bello Get. 450–68). Dewar, Claudian xlv–lii.
²⁴ In 397 Stilicho persuaded the Senate to declare Gildo hostis publicus (Claud. De Cons. Stil. I 325–32; Cameron, Claudian (above, n. 19), 230–2, but was not present in Rome (Symm. Ep. IV 5)). In 402, prior to Pollentia, Stilicho made a display of arms before Rome, but is not recorded as having entered the city (Claud. De Bello Get. 450–68). Dewar, Claudian xlv–lii.
wealth was a fatal lure to Alaric’s army, as some other Roman aristocrats also anticipated.\textsuperscript{38}

The relocation to Ravenna of 408, not those of 401/402 or 404/405, should be taken as the definitive move there.\textsuperscript{39} Stilicho had established the army, rather than the court, in Ravenna for strategic purposes: seaward contact with Constantinople; control of the Dalmatian coast; and landward defence of the Alpine passes into Illyricum, breached repeatedly since the 380s by both imperial and barbarian forces, and threatened in the 400s by the Huns in Pannonia.\textsuperscript{40} Frequent communication with Constantinople and easy movement of troops from there were made possible by Ravenna’s good port.\textsuperscript{41} Sources for this period do not mention the supposed defensive advantages of Ravenna; Honorius’s court twice endured actual or threatened siege in Ravenna, and was relieved not by the lagoon around the city but by other distractions.\textsuperscript{42}

During Honorius’s later reign, two usurpers, Heraclian and Attalus, sought to occupy Rome.\textsuperscript{43} Honorius’s brief visits to Rome of 414 and 416 were politically-necessary reminders of the imperial presence in the city where Attalus had enjoyed support, and gestures of support for the well-advanced restorations following the Gothic sack of 410.\textsuperscript{44}

Notwithstanding his long occupation of Ravenna, Honorius constructed a dynastic mausoleum in Rome, interring several family members before his own death. His model was the Apostoleum in Constantinople, built by Constantine as a tomb for himself and annexed as a family mausoleum by Honorius’s forebears, Valentinian I and Theodosius I.\textsuperscript{45} The mausoleum flagged Honorius’s residence at Ravenna as no more than a protracted absence from the true imperial city of the West.


\textsuperscript{39} Move of 404/405 as definitive: T. Mommsen, ‘Ostgotische Studien’, in his \textit{Gesammelte Studien} VI (Berlin, 1910), 396; E. Stein, ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte von Ravenna in spätromischer und byzantinischer Zeit’, \textit{Klio} 16 (1920), 62–3 n. 3; Stein, \textit{Bas-empire} I, 249; Demougeot, \textit{De l’unité à la division de l’empire romain} (above, n. 15), 495; Deichmann, \textit{Ravenna: Kommentar} III, 80 s.a. 404.


\textsuperscript{42} Sieges: by Alaric (Zos. VI 7.4–9.3; Olymp. \textit{fr.} 14) and Constantine (Olymp. \textit{fr.} 15.1; Soz. \textit{HE} IX 12.4–6).

\textsuperscript{43} Attalus: Zos. VI 7.1–4. Heraclian: Oros. VII 42.12–14; Marcell. com. \textit{Chron. s.a.} 413; \textit{PLRE} II, 540.


\textsuperscript{45} Krautheimer \textit{et al.}, \textit{Corpus} V, 173–84; Johnson, ‘Mausolea’ (above, n. 33), 27–8, 118, 298–9, 301–2; Johnson, ‘Burial places of the Theodosian dynasty’ (above, n. 33).
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GILLET

JOHN (423–5)

423
*20 Nov. [?Rome] accession
Ann. Rav. s.a.; [Greg. Tur. HF II]

424
425
n.d. RAVENNA
Hyd. Chronicon 84 [75]; Philost. HE XII
defeated (executed at Aquileia)

John’s coinage in silver and gold was minted at Ravenna.47

VALENTINIAN III (425–55)

n.d. RAVENNA entry
Olymp. fr. 43.1; Chron. Gall. 452 s.a.

23 Oct. ROME accession as augustus48
Chron. Pasch. s.a.; Olymp. fr. 43.1

426
[*1 Jan. ROME consular celebrations]

3 Jan.–24 Feb. ROME CTh X 10.33; X 26.2; V 1.7; VI 2.25
6 March–7 April RAVENNA CTh X 26.1; IV 10.3; XVI 7.7; XVI 8.28
7 Nov. RAVENNA CTh I 4.3; IV 1.1; V 1.8; VIII 13.6; VIII 18.9; VIII 18.10; VIII 19.1

427
428
26–8 Feb. RAVENNA CTh VII 13.22; I 10.8
429
25–7 Feb. RAVENNA CTh XI 1.34; XI 30.68; XII 1.185,186; XI 1.35; XII 6.32

11 June RAVENNA Just. Codex I 14.4

430
15 Feb. RAVENNA CTh XII 6.33
18 Dec. RAVENNA Haenel, Corpus legum, 241

431
29 April RAVENNA CTh XI 1.36
432
24 March RAVENNA CTh VI 23.3

434

46 The reference to Rome comes before Gregory’s verbatim extract from Renantus Frigeridus; it may not be accurate. Cf. Proc. Wars III 3.5; Malalas, Chron. XIII 50; Theoph. Chron. AM 5915.
47 Kent, RJC X, 157.
48 Valentinian had been raised as caesar at Thessalonika, 23 October 424; Olymp. fr. 43.1; PLRE II, 1139.
**ROME, RAVENNA AND THE EMPERORS**

**435**
*5 Sept.*
RAVENNA
Aetius made *patricius*

**436**

**437**
*15 July*
(NO LOCATION) departs for wedding

[n.d.]
ROME *departs for wedding*

**21 Oct., 28/29 Oct.**
CONSTANTINOPELE
adventus; *wedding*

**438**
n.d.
RAVENNA
return

**439**
8 July
RAVENNA

**440**
6 Aug.
RAVENNA
Licinio Eudoxia made *augusta*

**441**
24 Jan.–20 March
ROME *Nov. Val. 4; 5; 6.1*

**442**
4–24 June
RAVENNA *Nov. Val. 7.1; 8.1; 9*

**443**
27 Jan.–20 Feb.
RAVENNA *Nov. Val. 8.2; 10*

**444**
13 Aug.
ROME *Nov. Val. 2.2*

**445**
27 Sept.
SPOLETO *Nov. Val. 7.2*

**446**
13 March
ROME *Nov. Val. 11*

**443**
RAVENNA *Nov. Val. 6.2; 2.3; 12*

23 Dec.
ROME *Constitutio de constitutionariis (Mommsen and Meyer (eds), Theodosiani libri (above, n. 18), I.2, 4)*

**444**
*n.d.*
ROME
the *magister utriusque militiae*
Merobaudes recalled to Rome

**445**
14 July–11 Sept.
RAVENNA *Nov. Val. 6.3; 14*

18 Jan.
ROME *Nov. Val. 16*

**446**
14 June–8 July
ROME *Nov. Val. 20; 18; 13; 17*

8 Dec.
ROME *Nov. Val. 19*

**446**
*1 Jan.*
ROME *Mero baud. Pan. II 33–4; Clover, Merobaudes, 54–5*

celebrations for III *cons. Aetius*
21 Oct.–26 Dec.  ROME  Nov. Val. 21.1; 22; 21.2
13 March–3 June  ROME  Nov. Val. 23; 7.3; 24; 25
3 June  RAVENNA  Nov. Val. 26
17 June–11 Sept.  RAVENNA  Nov. Val. 27; 28
21–2 Feb.  ROME  adventus  Leo, Ep. 55.1 (PL 54, 858); (cf. Polemius Silvius, CIL I 317)
24 April  ROME  Nov. Val. 29
3 Oct.  ROME  Nov. Val. 30
*n.d.  ROME  Continuatio codicis Prosperi epitoma chronicon Reichenaviensis [hereafter Cont. Reich. ad Prosp.] 12 (MGH(AA) XI, 489)
27 Nov.  ROME  Continuatio codicis Prosperi epitoma chronicon Ovetensis 10 (MGH(AA) XI, 488)
*n.d.  ROME  reception of Prisc. fr. 20.3

451
31 Jan.  ROME  Nov. Val. 31; 32; 33
13 July  ROME  Nov. Val. 34
452
*30 March  ROME  arrival of icons Cont. Reich. ad Prosp. 21 (MGH(AA) XI, of Marcian 489)

15 April  ROME  Nov. Val. 35
29 June  ROME  Nov. Val. 36
453
454
21 Sept.  ROME  Addit. ad Prosp. Haun. s.a. (MGH(AA) kills Aetius IX, 303)
28 Oct.  ROME  Nov. Val. 2.4
455
16 March  ROME  Cont. Reich. ad Prosp. 27 (MGH(AA) XI, Valentinian killed 489)

Ceremonial occasions
Valentinian’s imperial accession was celebrated at Rome. The coin evidence suggests that he celebrated most of his six quinquennial consulates (430–55) there also.50 The date recorded by the Annals of Ravenna for Valentinian’s

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49 Date: E.A. Thompson, Attila and the Huns (Oxford, 1948), 221.
50 Kent, RIC X 32, 165–6, 167–9 (solidi). Cf. Sid. Ap. Carm. XXIII 305, 423: Valentinian at Rome for one of his consular games (contra PLRE II, 308–9, not necessarily after 437, as the reference to Theodosius II as Valentinian’s socer need not be accurate for the narrative chronology). The striking of contorniates for 435 (Valentinian’s decennalia) at both Rome and Ravenna suggests celebrations in both cities; Kent, RIC X 175, 383. Parallels exist for possibly
departure for his marriage in 437 is perhaps from Ravenna; given that his arrival in Constantinople was three months later, a sojourn in Rome for preliminary celebrations is possible.\textsuperscript{51} Other ceremonial occasions on which the court may have visited Rome include (almost certainly) the celebrations for the third consulship of Aetius (1 January 446) and for the birth of Valentinian and Eudoxia’s two daughters, Eudocia (438/439) and Placidia (439/443).\textsuperscript{52}

**430s**

Evidence is sparse due to the hiatus between Valentinian’s last constitutio in the *Codex Theodosianus* and his first novellae (432–8). There is no attestation of the court at Rome throughout the 430s, apart from the possible visit prior to Valentinian’s wedding. Valentinian and his family, however, were notably involved during the 430s with the ambitious building programme of Pope Sixtus III (432–40), giving more largesse to the Church in Rome than any emperor since Constantine.\textsuperscript{53} The imperial family also contributed to the building programme of Leo I in the 440s.\textsuperscript{54} Sixtus and Leo transformed the urban landscape of Rome and its patterns of ecumenism; their works, often seen as an expression of the popes’ new-found local authority within the city of Rome, occurred in the presence, not the absence, of the western emperors. It is difficult...

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\textsuperscript{51} B. Croke, *The Chronicle of Marcellinus* (Sydney, 1995), 82.

\textsuperscript{52} Cf. Merobaud. *Carm.* IV with Clover, *Merobaudes*, 29–30; Aetius observed tradition by ensuring that his son Gaudentius was born in the capital (440/441).


Imperial aid in the 430s includes the following. By Valentinian: to Sixtus’s redecorations of Saint Peter’s; Saint John Lateran; San Paolo fuori le mura; permission (and perhaps contribution) to new basilica of Saint Laurence (probably Saint Laurence in Lucina); possible involvement with mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore (*Lib. Pont.* 46; Krautheimer et al., *Corpus II*, 9; III, 53–6; V, 10, 98–9, 162–3; Pietri, *Roma Christiana I*, 508–9; N.A. Brodsky, *L’iconographie oubliée de l’Arc Éphésien de Saint-Marie Majeure à Rome* (Brussels, 1966), 87–91; Kent, *RIC X*, 160). By Theodosius II and Eudocia: to the new San Pietro in Vincoli (Krautheimer et al., *Corpus III*, 181 (before the separation of Theodosius II and Eudocia in 441; A. Cameron, ‘The empress and the poet: paganism and politics at the court of Theodosius II’, *Yale Classical Studies* 27 (1982), 256–63)). By Gallia Placidia, with her children Honoria and Valentinian: mosaics to Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, under either Sixtus or his predecessor Celestine (422–32) (Krautheimer et al., *Corpus I*, 168). Largesse: contra Pietri, *Roma Christiana II*, 558–9, who failed to acknowledge the different financial positions of the Roman Church in the times of Constantine and of Valentinian III, and the near-absence of imperial patronage of ecclesiastical building works in Rome in the intervening period.

\textsuperscript{54} Imperial aid under Pope Leo I: by Gallia Placidia to repairs of San Paolo fuori le mura (begun by Theodosius I, completed by Honorius, later contribution by Valentinian III under Sixtus III); by Licinia Eudoxia to San Pietro in Vincoli (begun by Theodosius II and Eudocia) (Krautheimer et al., *Corpus III*, 181, 229; V, 98–9, 162–3).
to believe that such major donations were made, and such cooperation with the papacy developed, without the court exploiting public approbation in Rome through its presence at ceremonial occasions.\textsuperscript{55} There are signs, too, that Valentinian courted the senatorial aristocracy of Rome in the 430s.\textsuperscript{56}

440s
The residence of the court alternated between Rome and Ravenna throughout the 440s. The proximate cause of the relocation to Rome in late 439/early 440 was probably the capture of Carthage by the Vandals in mid-October 439; Valentinian’s arrival at Rome would have been a gesture of support for the city (described in a \textit{constitutio} issued there as ‘the city of Rome, which we rightly venerate as the head of our empire’\textsuperscript{57}); fifteen years later Avitus resided in Rome after Geiseric’s raid. Valentinian made provision for the protection of Rome and the rest of Italy from possible Vandal attack before returning to Ravenna, perhaps fearing a naval attack on that city (all coastal settlements, including Constantinople, were considered at risk), certainly in anticipation of receiving an eastern fleet dispatched by Theodosius II.\textsuperscript{58} Subsequently, the court moved between the two cities at least seven times in ten years, residing for prolonged periods in each.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{55} The court also patronized building works in Ravenna (Agnellus, \textit{Lib. Pont.} 27, 41–3; Oost, \textit{Galla Placidia}, 273–87; B. Ward-Perkins, \textit{From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Urban Public Building in Northern and Central Italy, AD 300–850} (Oxford, 1984), 241–3), and had a close relationship with the bishops of the city, newly-promoted as a consequence of the imperial residence there (Oost, \textit{Galla Placidia}, 266–7, 274; Stein, ‘Geschichte von Ravenna’ (above, n. 39), 48–52). Both the court and the bishops of Ravenna, however, strongly supported the papacy’s growing articulation of its Petrine authority in the face of challenges from suffragan bishops and the Patriarch of Constantinople (\textit{Nov. Val.} 17.1; Leo, \textit{Ep.} 55–8 (= letters of Valentinian, Galla Placidia and Licinia Eudoxia); Peter Chrysologus, \textit{Sermo} 175 (\textit{PL} 52, 656c); \textit{Epistula ad Eutychem} 2; Pietri, \textit{Roma Christiana} II, 913–15, 979 n. 2, 934, 948–54, 955–98, 1105–19, 1316–26).

\textsuperscript{56} That is, the inscription of 431 in the name of Valentinian III and Theodosius II, rehabilitating Virius Nichomachus Flavianus, consul 394 under usurper Eugenius (\textit{CIL VI} 1783; A. Cameron, ‘The date and identity of Macrobius’, \textit{Journal of Roman Studies} 56 (1966), 35); the use in 438 of the Senate of Rome to disseminate the \textit{Codex Theodosianus} in the West (\textit{Gesta senatus} in Mommsen and Meyer (eds), \textit{Theodosiani libri} (above, n. 18), I.2 1–4). Note that in 432 Rome was visited by each of the generals, Boniface, his son-in-law Sebastianus and Aetius, during their conflict for power (Prosp. Tiro, \textit{Chron.} 1310; Addit. ad \textit{Prosp. Haun.} s.a. 432 (\textit{MGH(AA) IX}, 301)).

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Nov. Val.} 5 \textit{praefatio} (3 March 440, Rome): \textit{urbis Romae, quam merito caput nostri veneramur imperii.}

\textsuperscript{58} Provisions for protection: \textit{Nov. Val.} 5; 6.1 (at Rome); also 9 (at Ravenna); 1.2 (no date or location); cf. 10.3,4 (20 February 441). Vulnerability of coastal settlements and expectation of eastern fleet: \textit{Nov. Val.} 9; F.M. Clover, \textit{Geiseric the Statesman: a Study of Vandal Foreign Policy} (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1966), 79–84. Constantinople: Clover, \textit{Geiseric the Statesman}, 68–77; Cameron, ‘Empress and poet’ (above, n. 53), 240–1; \textit{Chron. Pasch.} s.a. 439 and n. 243; 450 and n. 261 (Whitby). News of the Vandal attack on Sicily had not been received by the time Valentinian issued \textit{Nov. Val.} 9 from Ravenna (24 June).

\textsuperscript{59} Constantius, \textit{Vie de Saint Germain d’Auxerre} (ed./trans. R. Borius) (\textit{Sources chrétiennes} 112) (Paris, 1965), 35–44 placed Valentinian in Ravenna at the time of the embassy there of
In late February 450 the imperial household relocated to Rome. The entry was timed to coincide with the important feast of the *cathedra Petri*, commemorating at the Vatican the establishment of Saint Peter’s episcopacy in Rome, and a church synod held there.²⁶ Valentinian is subsequently attested only in Rome, the first continuous imperial residence there since Maxentius. The move in 450 was perhaps flagged, through ceremonial, as definitive. Galla Placidia’s first-born child, Theodosius, her son by the Gothic war-leader Athaulf, had been entombed first at Barcelona where he had died in 414/415, and later probably reinterred at Ravenna after the establishment there of Valentinian and Galla Placidia in 426, perhaps in the erroneously-named Mausoleum of Galla Placidia adjacent to the basilica of San Vitale. Between late February and late November 450 Galla Placidia had the body reinterred again, in the dynastic mausoleum constructed by Honorius adjacent to Saint Peter’s in Rome, in a public ceremony attended by Pope Leo I and the Senate.²⁷ This consolidation of dynastic mausolea may be read as a gesture advertising the intention of the imperial court to occupy Rome as its permanent residence thenceforth.

The relocation of the court to Rome has been associated with the later incursions of Attila’s Huns into the West in 451 and 452, echoing Honorius’s supposed withdrawal to Ravenna during Alaric’s first entry into Italy.²⁸ But Attila’s goal in his Italian campaign of 452 was thought to be Rome; a court rumoured to be contemplating flight would hardly remove itself from maritime Ravenna for Rome, the prime target for plunder.²⁹ Many important towns in northern Italy, including former imperial residences and military bases at Milan, Pavia and Aquileia, were devastated by Attila’s incursion, but not Ravenna, possibly because it served as a military base and as the point of

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arrival for eastern reinforcements. It has been suggested that northern Italy was to have been strategically sacrificed by Aetius; if so, Valentinian's residence in Rome in 451–2 might indeed have been a retreat. But the court's relocation pre-dates attested evidence of preparations in Italy for a Hunnic attack, and Valentinian remained in Rome well past Attila's death and the disintegration of his Empire. Domestic considerations, not external defence, seem to have prompted the relocation.

Probably in 454/455, Valentinian married his younger daughter Placidia to the Roman aristocrat and member of the Anicii clan, Olybrius. Valentinian's main coinage, originally issued from both Rome and Ravenna, was struck in Rome during his final years.

PETRONIUS MAXIMUS (455)

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>References</th>
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The senator Maximus had been praefectus urbis Romae twice (420–1, 421/439), praefectus praetorio Italiae twice (421/439, 439–41), and consul twice (433, 443). As praefectus urbis Romae he had displayed conspicuous euergetism to Rome, repairing Saint Peter's basilica and constructing a new forum on Mons Caelius. Alleged to have motivated the murders of both Aetius and Valentinian III, he was able to seize power in opposition to the experienced general

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67 Oost, Galla Placidia, 254 somewhat disingenuously suggested that Valentinian personally preferred Rome, while Galla Placidia had favoured Ravenna; similarly, Brown, 'Everyday life in Ravenna under Theodoric' (above, n. 1), 80 on Theodoric and Ravenna.
68 PLRE II, 'Anicius Olybrius', 796; Placidia 1', 887.
69 Kent, RJC X, 33.
70 PLRE II, 'Petronius Maximus 22', 749–51.
MAJORIAN, who enjoyed the support of the widowed *augusta* Licinia Eudoxia.\textsuperscript{71} He was only the second civilian without dynastic connections to be raised as emperor in over two centuries.\textsuperscript{72}

**AVITUS**

9 July
ARLES
accession


21 Sept.
entry into Italy

Addit. ad Prosp. Haun. (MGH(AA) IX 304) s.a.; cf. Hyd. Chron. 163 [156]\textsuperscript{73}

456

1 Jan.
ROME
consular celebrations


n.d.
ARLES

Hyd. Chron. 177 [170]

17 Oct.
PLACENTIA
deposed by Ricimer

Addit. ad Prosp. Haun. (MGH(AA) IX 304) s.a.

Eparchius Avitus, *magister utriusque militiae* under Petronius Maximus, had been both *magister utriusque militiae* in Gaul and *praefectus praetorio per Gallias* in the late 430s. He was elevated as *augustus* with the support of both the Gallic troops and the Gothic king of Toulouse.\textsuperscript{74} After his elevation at Arles, Avitus travelled to Italy to secure his title and to assure the aristocracy of Rome, shocked by Geiseric’s raid on the city in May, that the destruction of the Vandals was his first priority.\textsuperscript{75} Avitus went to Rome, not Ravenna, to consolidate his power. He remained in Rome until civil disturbances among the populace of the city and the revolt of the generals Majorian and Ricimer forced him to flee.\textsuperscript{76} Avitus never visited Ravenna, nor issued coins there, though he did maintain a military presence in the city.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{71} Prisc. fr. 30.1; Sid. Ap. Carm. V 312–14. Cf. the determining roles of the *augustae* Pulcheria and Ariadne in the imperial elevations of Marcian (450) and Anastasius (491); K.G. Holm, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), 208–9; *PLRE* II, 141, 929.

\textsuperscript{72} The other was Fl. Eugenius, raised by Arbogastes (392); *PLRE* I, ‘Fl. Eugenius 6’, 293.

\textsuperscript{73} The next previous civilian emperor without known dynastic connections was Balbinus (238).

\textsuperscript{74} *PLRE* II, ‘Eparchius Avitus 5’, 196–8.


\textsuperscript{74} *PLRE* II, ‘Eparchius Avitus 5’, 196–8.


MAJORIAN (457–61)

457
28 Feb.  NO LOCATION
appointed magister
utriusque militiae
(?by Marcian; ob.
26 Jan.)

Fast. Vind. Prior. s.a. (MGH(AA) IX 305)

1 April  NEAR CAMPUS AD
COLUMELLAS
(UNIDENTIFIED)78
elevation as augustus

Fast. Vind. Prior. s.a. (MGH(AA) IX 305)

28 Dec.  RAVENNA
elevation as augustus

Auct. ad ed. Prosp. a. 455 s.a. (MGH(AA)
IX 492)

458
11 Jan.–6 Nov. winter

RAVENNA
LYONS
represses rebellion79

Nov. Maior. 1–7

459
17 April

ARLES

Nov. Maior. 9

460
28 March

ARLES
CARTHAGINIENSIS
(Spain)
prepares fleet against
Vandals; departs
to return to Italy

Nov. Maior. 11
Caesaraug. s.a.; Prisc. fr. 36.1–2

461
n.d.
2, 7 Aug.

ARLES
DERTONA
deposed and killed
by Ricimer

Chron. Gall. 511 635
[205]

The reality behind Majorian’s two recorded imperial accessions is unclear;
the location of the first is unidentified.80 The latter accession is the first imperial
elevation firmly attested in Ravenna. Majorian claimed the support of the
Senate of Rome for his accession.81 He struck no coinage at Rome; the palatine
moneyers were moved to Arles.82 Unlike Valentinian III (after 450), Petronius
Maximus and Avitus, Majorian resided in Ravenna, before departing Italy to

80 Stein, Bas-empire I, 596–7 n. 49; Kent, ‘Style and mint’ (above, n. 35), 268.
82 Kent, RIC X, 31–3, 184–8; his consular contorniate might have been struck at Ravenna.
ROME, RAVENNA AND THE EMPERORS

go to Gaul for campaigns against the Burgundians and the Vandals. Two contemporaries independently stated that Majorian’s destination when departing Arles in 461 for Italy was Rome.83

LIBIUS SEVERUS (461–5)

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<th>Date</th>
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<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46284</td>
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<tr>
<td>463</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Feb.</td>
<td>ROME</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nov. Sev. 1</td>
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<td>464</td>
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<td>465</td>
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Libius Severus ‘Serpentius’, elevated by Ricimer, claimed the support of the Senate of Rome.85 Following his accession he is attested only at Rome. Under Severus the Palatine mint returned to Italy from Arles, initially to Ravenna and then to Rome, his principal mint.86 It is none the less likely that a substantial military force was maintained in Ravenna during Severus’s reign, probably in the presence of Ricimer, for Marcellinus, _magister utriusque militiae_ and de facto independent ruler of Dalmatia, threatened to invade Italy in retaliation for the murder of Majorian.87 Ravenna was the obvious landing-place for a seaborne invasion from the Dalmatian coast, as the later career of Nepos illustrates.

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83 Hyd. _Chronicon_ 210 [205]; Prisc. fr. 36.2. Priscus, telescoping the collapse of the Vandal campaign and Majorian’s murder, represented Majorian’s return as a retreat, but Hydatius was more positive: _Maiorianum de Galliis Romam redeuntem et Romano imperio vel nomine res necessarias ordinantem._

84 F. Martine (ed.), _Vie des Pères du Jura (Sources chrétiennes_ 142) (Paris, 1968), 96–110 placed the treason trial and acquittal of the _comes_ Agrippinus in Rome, in the presence of an unnamed emperor. The identity of the emperor and date are unclear; the firmly stated location is integral to the narrative and cannot be ignored without arbitrary selectivity (contra Mathisen, ‘Resistance and reconciliation’ (above, n. 79), 614–18, esp. p. 616 n. 79). Possible dates are April–December 457 (Majorian unlocalized between first and second imperial elevations) and 462 (under Severus; cf. Hyd. _Chronicon_ 217 [212]).


ANTHEMIUS (467–72)

(no western emperor for 466)

467
25 March
Constantinople elevation as caesar
Seeck, *Geschichte* VI, 359, 486
12 April
Brontotae (outside Rome) elevation as Augustus

*late 467
Rome marriage of Ricimer and Alypia

*n.d. (467 or early 468)
Rome oath to Pope Hilary (ob. 29 Feb. 468)
Gelas. *Ep.* 13; *PL* 59, 73b

468
1 Jan.
Rome consular celebrations
21 Feb.–19 March
Rome
*Nov. Anth.* 1–3
469
*470
*n.d.
Rome executes Romanus
471
before 9 March
Rome reception of Ligurian embassy
Ennod. *V. Epiph.* 73
472
?Feb. (or Oct. 471) to 11 July
Rome besieged by Ricimer; death

The consistency of Anthemius’s presence in Rome has generally passed unrecognized;89 there is no indication that it was considered unusual. Anthemius resided in Rome both before and after the failure of the expedition against the Vandals dispatched by the eastern emperor, Leo; his presence was not determined by tactical needs of the campaign, though perhaps it facilitated raising funds.90 Anthemius’s army was stationed near Rome; when he and Ricimer fell out, Ricimer removed 6,000 men from the city, still leaving

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88 Blockley (see Bibliography, Sources, under Olymp.), 400 n. 203.
89 For example, Demougeot, *La formation*, 569: ‘l’avant-dernier emperor légitime de Ravenne, Anthemius’ (Anthemius is not known ever to have visited Ravenna); Pierpaoli, *Storia di Ravenna* (above, n. 12), 103: Anthemius’s ‘visit’ to Rome for the wedding of Alypia and Ricimer.
Anthemius with a substantial force. Ricimer removed to Milan, not Ravenna; the Adriatic port was not the exclusive domain of the western generalissimo. The populace of Rome appears to have been an important factor in sustaining Anthemius against the rebellion of Ricimer, just as Avitus’s loss of popular support in the city had led to his downfall (in contrast to the common assumption that Anthemius was unpopular in the West because of his eastern origins). Anthimius used the Senate to place the praefectus praetorio Galliarum Arvandus on trial for the charge of maiestas. His principal coinage was struck at Rome.

OLYBRIUS (472)

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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>OUTSIDE ROME elevation as Augustus</td>
<td>Marcell. com. Chron. 472.2; Cass. Chron. s.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td>*after 11 July</td>
<td>Rome installed in palatium</td>
<td>Prisc. fr. 65</td>
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Olybrius, like Petronius Maximus, was a leading aristocrat of Rome who had held no military office, and was a member of the Anicici clan. He was consul in 464 under Severus and patricius. The eastern emperors generally married their daughters to prominent generals, but Valentinian III had bestowed his younger daughter, Placidia, on the noble Olybrius, perhaps in 454/455. The

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91 Gillett, ‘Accession of Euric’ (above, n. 3), 34 n. 117. By contrast, during the residences in Rome of Honorius and Valentinian III, the army remained at Ravenna under the commanders Stilicho and Aetius; Zos. V 30.1; Kent, RIC X, 30, 164 (on non-comitatensian gold coinage at Ravenna).

92 Contra Seeck, Geschichte VI, 349. Possibly Ricimer resided in Milan 470–2 to safeguard the northwestern alpine passes into Italy against Gothic intrusion (cf. Ennod. V. Epiph. 80); moreover, the proximity of Ravenna to Constantinople by sea, and Leo’s support for Anthimius, might have precluded the rebel Ricimer from control of the city.


Vandal king Geiseric (related to Olybrius through the marriage of his son Huneric to Valentinian’s older daughter Eudocia) called for Olybrius’s elevation both at the death of Majorian and during the reign of Anthemius.  

GLYCERIUS (473–4)

| 3 March | RAVENNA | Glycerius, Epistula to Himilco praefectus praetorio (Haenel, Corpus legum, 260) |
| 11 March | RAVENNA |  |
| [*29 April | ROME |  |

Unlike Olybrius, Glycerius had a military background as *comes domesticorum*, and was nominated not only by Gundobad, Ricimer’s successor as *magister utriusque militiae* and *patricius*, but also ‘at the wish of the entire army’.  

NEPOS (474–5)

| 19 or 24 June | ROME | Anonymi Valesiani pars posterior  |
| *before mid-June | RAVENNA |  |

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98 Cf. *Laterc. imp.* 423: Glicerius apud Ravennam Caesar factus est Romaeque regnans a Nepote imperio expulsus est anno imperii sui II.

475
*before 28 Aug. Rome
departs, threatened by Orestes

28 Aug. *Ravenna
departs for Dalmatia

Like Valentinian III and the magister utriusque militiae Anthemi, the magister utriusque militiae Dalmatiae Nepos was dispatched by the eastern imperial court to stabilize the West.\(^{100}\) Nepos clearly used Ravenna for a strategic, not defensive, reason: its proximity to the Dalmatian coast. He resided for part or all of his reign in Rome.\(^{101}\) His coinage was struck at both Rome and Ravenna; the silver coinage, issued in Ravenna, features the earliest known example of the tyche of Ravenna, modelled on the standard personifications of Roma and Constantinoplis.\(^{102}\) At least some administrative functions continued in Ravenna.\(^{103}\)

**ROMULUS (475–6)**

31 Oct. Ravenna\(^ {104}\)
elevation as augustus

476
?soon after
31 Aug. or 4 Sept.\(^ {105}\)
Ravenna\(^ {106}\)
deposed by Odoacer

Romulus is recorded only at Ravenna during his brief reign; his known gold coins, however, were struck at Rome.\(^ {107}\)

Odoacer’s itinerary is poorly attested; he can be localized in Italy only at Ravenna. The city was the main residence of Theoderic, though he also resided for substantial periods in Rome, Verona and Pavia. The epithet Felix Ravenna, which first appeared on a series of bronze coins issued by the city of Ravenna

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\(^{100}\) *PLRE* II, ‘Iulius Nepos 3’, 777–8; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (above, n. 41), 47.

\(^{101}\) Cf. *Auct. Haun. ordo prior* 475.1; *Laterc. imp.* 423.

\(^{102}\) Kent, *RIC* X, 204; cf. 17, 58, 208–9, 210, 217 for later emperors, including eastern augusti during western ‘interregna’; cf. Agnellus, *Lib. Pont.* 94 for the typology.

\(^{103}\) Sid. *Ep.* V 16.1: *Ravenna veniens quaeestor Licinius*; cf. *Ep.* III 7.2–4; the date is unclear. Ennod. *V. Epiph.* 81 may indicate Nepos’s presence in northern Italy, perhaps soon after his entry into Italy.


\(^{105}\) After the death of Orestes at Placentia (28 August) and of his brother Paulus in Ravenna (31 August or 4 September).


apparently during Ostrogothic rule, invokes the position of the city as the seat of government.\textsuperscript{108}

Odoacer and Theoderic were not constrained to reside in Ravenna by recent practice or need for refuge. Though his siege of Ravenna took over two and a half years, Theoderic ultimately reduced Odoacer to surrender through famine;\textsuperscript{109} it would have been perverse for Theoderic then to have chosen the city as his main residence because of its protective swamps. Theoderic spent significant periods away from Ravenna: he toured the main cities of northern Italy to strengthen Italian defences against possible attack from Gaul, Noricum and Illyricum; twice he suppressed domestic rebellions against his rule by Gothic comites while away from Ravenna (Rome, 500; Milan, 514).\textsuperscript{110} The visual imagery of the mosaics of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo (with its parallel city portraits of Ravenna and Classis) and of lost mosaics from Theoderic’s palaces at Ravenna and Pavia (the king flanked by personifications of Roma and Ravenna, striding across the sea) emphasize the port of Classis, an indication of Theoderic’s priorities.\textsuperscript{111}

Rome played an important role in the politics of both Odoacer and Theoderic: Roman senators were studiously courted with the highest titles of honour and palatine offices, and were chosen as the kings’ envoy to Constantinople.\textsuperscript{112} During his visit to Rome and residence there for five months in 500, Theoderic observed imperial practices (including worship in Saint Peter’s and

\textsuperscript{108} Coins: W. Wroth, \textit{Western and Provincial Byzantine Coins of the Vandals, Ostrogoths and Lombards} (London, 1911; reprinted Chicago, 1966), 68, 98–100, 106–7, pl. 14 nos. 8–13; P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, \textit{Medieval European Coinage I: the Early Middle Ages} (Cambridge, 1986), 31–3, 434 and pl. 9, nos. 145–50. The typology of the Ravenna tyche is different from that used on coinage of the 470s, but similar to the municipal issue of Rome, seen as contemporary to the Ravenna coinage by Wroth, but earlier by Grierson and Blackburn. For felix as an epithet of a capital: Wroth, \textit{Western and Provincial Byzantine Coins}, xxv, xxviii, 13 (Carthage under Hilderic), xxxix, 91 (Ticinum under Totila).


\textsuperscript{111} Agnellus, \textit{Lib. Pont.} 94 (mosaics in palace tribunals, that of Ravenna quod vocatur ad mare). Cf. MacCormack, \textit{Art and Ceremony} (above, n. 32), 235.

The city portraits of Ravenna and Classis in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo feature the walls of both cities, which is conventional, and the Adriatic sea, but not the waters of the Po. Cf. the Peutinger Table: Ravenna is portrayed as a walled city, with no indication of surrounding waters, though the Po and its tributaries are shown (cf. Aquileia; proximity to the coast, an important defensive feature of the city, is evident). Ravenna and other walled cities are clearly demarked from the three major centres, Rome, Constantinople and Antioch; L. Bosio, \textit{La Tabula Peutingeriana: una descrizione pittorica del mondo antico} (Rimini, 1983), 55–67 (esp. p. 65), 83–92 and ill. 21–5.

occupation of the Palatine). Rome was used as a ceremonial stage for celebrations of the consulship of Theodoric’s son-in-law and intended successor, Eucharic, in 519. None the less, Rome’s mid-fifth-century role as a seat of government ended with Nepos’s departure from the city.

CONTEMPORARY DESCRIPTIONS

The data for imperial residences indicate Rome, not Ravenna, as the main residence of the western imperial court in the last decades of the Empire in the West. Literary sources from the period reinforce this impression. No contemporary author referred to the relocation of the imperial court to Ravenna; to judge by the few later writers who did, no lost source contained reliable data on the move. The historians Olympiodorus of Thebes and Zosimos, writing in the 440s after the extended residences in Ravenna of Honorius and Valentinian, attested pseudo-historical claims (perhaps made in the court milieu) for the foundation of Ravenna by Remus, apparently an attempt to validate the elevation of Ravenna to the status of sister city of Rome. These claims are not mentioned in later descriptions of Ravenna, suggesting that their propaganda value had become redundant.

Fifth- and sixth-century writers in both West and East gave Rome, not Ravenna, as the residence of the emperors after 440. The fullest contemporary sources for the West c. 440 to 476 are the Gallaecian chronicler Hydatius, the Constantinopolitan historian Priscus and the Gallic litterateur Sidonius Apollinaris; none portrayed Ravenna as an imperial residence. Hydatius, who completed his chronicle probably c. 468/469, did not mention Ravenna after 430, but located imperial events only in Rome. The extant fragments of Priscus do not even mention Ravenna, though Priscus knew many exact details of political events at Rome. A new reader of Sidonius, not forewarned about Ravenna’s sometime role as the western administrative centre, would be hard

113 Anon. Val. XII 67–9; Cass. Chron. 1339 s.a. 500; Ferrand. V. Fulg. XIII 27 (PL 65, 130–1); Moorhead, Theodoric (above, n. 109), 60–3.
114 Cass. Chron. s.a. 519.
116 Jord. Get. 147 is the only fifth- or sixth-century author to refer to Ravenna as urbs regia, conflating the narrative time (of Honorius) with the 550s. Orosius (c. 417) made Rome the centre stage of his account of the 400s and 410s: VII 37.4–6; 39; 42.10–14 (Ravenna mentioned at VII 39.2; cf. Innocent. Ep. 11; PL 20, 519).
118 Prisc. fr. II 11.2, 1. 328; 20.3; 30.1; 32; 36.2; 62, 64–5. Likewise, the fragments of Malchus and Candidus (but references to western affairs as τὰ ἐν Ρώμῃ and to Nepos as ‘emperor in Rome’ may be Photius’s glosses).
pressed to spot it.\textsuperscript{119} His description of Ravenna, which he visited en route to Rome in 467, makes no mention of the former role of Ravenna as an imperial capital.\textsuperscript{120} Sidonius was struck not by imperial largesse to Ravenna, but by the poor civic facilities, the filth of the waters and the want of aqueducts or wells with potable water.\textsuperscript{121} Elsewhere, Sidonius equated Ravenna not with Rome or Constantinople, but with Milan, as an important north Italian city, while praising Rome in hyperbolic terms.\textsuperscript{122} Sidonius had accurate knowledge of current political circumstances, not least from his experience in imperial politics and administration at Rome in the 450s and 470s.\textsuperscript{123}

Later western sources likewise regarded Rome as the residence of the last western emperors.\textsuperscript{124} Andreas Agnellus, the ninth-century bishop of Ravenna who drew upon now-lost chronicles and inscriptions, referred frequently to the Theodosians and to Theoderic, and related a patriotic story in which Valentinian III decreed that Ravenna, not Rome, should be the caput Italiae; strikingly, he recorded no association between Ravenna and any ruler from Valentinian to Theoderic.\textsuperscript{125}

Sixth-century Byzantine historians of the West’s fall pay short, but significant, attention to Ravenna. Both Procopius and John Malalas recorded (with disapproval and wild inaccuracies) Honorius’s removal to Ravenna at the time of Alaric; both also presented Honorius’s residence in Ravenna as peculiar to him among fifth-century emperors. Procopius conflated events of 402 and 410, sending Honorius fleeing in comical panic from Rome to Ravenna, where the well-known scene of Honorius’s pet rooster Roma occurred.\textsuperscript{126} Despite its

\textsuperscript{119} Imperial functions: Sid. Ap. \textit{Carm.} IX 298 (469) (the \textit{magister utriusque militiae} and panegyricist Merobaudes in Ravenna; cf. Clover, \textit{Merobaudes}, 7–10); Ep. I 8.2 (\textit{milites; foederati; eunuchi}; and \textit{negotiatores militanti} (owners of ships contracted by the imperial government to supplement the Adriatic fleet?)); Ep. V 16.1 (474) (Nepos’s \textit{quaeuer} Licinianus).


\textsuperscript{124} For example the early sixth-century forged trial of Pope Sixtus III at the court of Valentinian III (Mansi, \textit{Sacrorum Conciliorum} V (above, n. 60), 1061–70), set at Rome; \textit{Laterc. imp.} 422–3: emperors from Valentinian III onwards ruled at Rome, some first elevated at Ravenna.

\textsuperscript{125} Agnellus, \textit{Lib. Pont.} 27, 34–5, 40–2, 48 (Honorius, Galla Placidia, Valentinian III), 39, 86, 94 (Theoderic), 40 (\textit{caput Italiae}).

\textsuperscript{126} Flight: Proc. \textit{Wars} III 2.8–9; rooster: III 2.25–6. The only later reference to fifth-century Rome is \textit{Wars} III 4.15 (death of Galla Placidia, followed by murder of Valentinian II, unlocalized, whence Rome was taken as the setting by the Elizabethan playwright John Fletcher for his \textit{Tragedy of Valentinian} (in R.K. Turner (ed.), \textit{The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon} IV (Cambridge, 1979), 261–414)).
chronological flaws and music hall humour, this scene seems to be the kernel of the modern image of Ravenna as the safe house of the fifth-century emperors. Like Sidonius, Procopius had visited both cities, yet he considered Ravenna significant only for the contingency of being the Gothic capital; he described Milan as the foremost of the western cities after Rome, without mentioning Ravenna.\textsuperscript{127} Malalas made the cause of Honorius’s flight not Alaric, but ‘senatorial enemies’ in Rome, on whose behalf, perversely, Alaric sacked the city.\textsuperscript{128} The rest of Malalas’s fifth-century western history follows a similar course: all Honorius’s successors, firmly placed in Rome, were either Roman senators or Byzantine nominees deposed by senatorial machinations. It is only under Theoderic that a ruler again resided in Ravenna (glossed as ‘a coastal city’).\textsuperscript{129} Malalas’s account, however distorted, preserves a Byzantine perception that the politics of the fifth-century West were determined in Rome not by its barbarized armies or hostile neighbours, but by a rebellious senatorial aristocracy.\textsuperscript{130}

**PHYSICAL FEATURES**

Architectural evidence similarly points away from Ravenna in the fifth century. Galla Placidia and Theoderic are regarded as the great builders of Ravenna; their generosity, however, is prominent by default of any attested imperial patronage of construction at Ravenna in the half century between their times.\textsuperscript{131} Known imperial works in Ravenna include ecclesiastical constructions, a *palatium* and extensions of the city walls. Civic works and other facilities becoming to an imperial capital, however, are unattested or absent. Before the fifth century, the aqueduct built by Trajan had become inoperative, constricting supplies of fresh drinking-water; Honorius and Valentinian III failed to provide this basic municipal infrastructure, which was not repaired until early in the reign of Theoderic.\textsuperscript{132} Fifth-century Ravenna seems to have

\textsuperscript{127} Proc. *BG* II 7.38.

\textsuperscript{128} Malalas, *Chron.* XIII 45–6, 48, 49–50; followed by Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5895.


had no circus, the principal venue for communication between late antique rulers and the populace.\footnote{133} Modern accounts commonly regard Ravenna as impregnable because of the lagoon within which the city stood (in fact a diverted arm of the Po, made to flow around the city walls, while another arm passed through the city itself). Several fifth- and sixth-century sources commented on the waters of Ravenna, but rarely as a defensive feature; more commonly they were noted as a curiosity or as facilitators of trade.\footnote{134} In the ninth-century, too, Andreas Agnellus attributed the security of Ravenna to the city walls, extended by Valentinian III, not to the waters of the Po, which he barely mentioned.\footnote{135}

The firmest assertion of the security provided for Ravenna by the Po comes from Procopius, commenting on Theodoric’s siege of Odoacer. By contrast, he considered Rome poorly defended, because of the excessive length of its walls and its location on a plain.\footnote{136} Yet Procopius did not associate Ravenna’s defences with the city’s former role as an imperial residence or with its current role as seat of the Byzantine generals governing Italy. Instead he offered the following observation on the strategic location of Ravenna. In 545 Belisarius abandoned Ravenna as his base of operations for the war against the Goths:

> alarmed both for Rome and the whole Roman cause, since it was impossible to lend assistance from Ravenna in any case ... Indeed he repented having ever come to Ravenna at all ... since by shutting himself up in that place he had given the enemy a free hand to determine the course of the war as they had wished.\footnote{137}

To Procopius, Ravenna seemed suited to a limited siege, but was a poor location from which to control affairs in the Italian peninsula; and its defensive


\footnote{135}Agnellus, *Lib. Pont.* 40 (walls), 54 (Po as topographical location).


qualities were undermined by the ease with which its food and water supplies could be blockaded. It is unlikely that the fifth-century emperors would have been unaware of these deficiencies had they occupied Ravenna primarily as a refuge.

That praise of Ravenna’s defences is muted in ancient sources is not surprising, for the city was besieged and occupied repeatedly in the fifth and sixth centuries. Only chance saved Honorius from abandoning the city during Alaric’s siege of 410; the usurper John was defeated in Ravenna in 425; Avitus’s patricius Remistus was killed at Classis in 456; Nepos took the city, by force or surrender, from Glycerius’s control in 474, but was later unable to maintain himself there after Orestes had forced him from Rome; Orestes’s brother Paulus was defeated at Ravenna by Odoacer, who in turn did well to hold out for two and a half years before being starved into submission by Theoderic in 493; the Goths besieged in Ravenna by Belisarius in 540 surrendered more quickly.138

The record of Rome in the same period is certainly no better: the city was taken not only, infamously, by Alaric in 410 and by the Vandals in 455, but also by Ricimer in 472 and by Nepos in 474; Rome changed hands three times during the Byzantine War. Other cities, including Milan and Aquileia, also fared badly during this time. But contemporaries would have been foolish to feel sanguine about the protection offered by Ravenna. In later centuries Ravenna, but not Rome, would fall to the perennial assaults of the Lombards.

The marshes of Ravenna, the very feature usually assumed to be the main attraction and chief defence of the city, were the cause of its repeated downfall. Because of the high water table and salination of land around Ravenna, the city enjoyed no natural supplies of fresh water, had very restricted resources for local agriculture and food production, and probably had limited wood for fuel or building materials. The dependence of the city on importation of water, food and fuel made it particularly susceptible to siege. Theoderic, who knew well the limitations of Ravenna’s defences, did not cultivate the defensive qualities of Ravenna’s swamps, but rather undertook large-scale public drainage works, and encouraged private landowners to do likewise.139 The waterways around (and through) Ravenna were integrated into the defensive system of the city, as any natural feature would be; but this is not the same as saying that the streams and marshes were regarded as impenetrable, or that they were the feature for which Ravenna was selected or maintained as a seat of government.140

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139 Squatriti, ‘Marshes and mentalities’ (above, n 17), 2, 9–11 and nn. 23, 24, 31, 32; Christie, ‘Defence of a capital’ (above, n. 17), 133.

THE ROLES OF ROME AND RAVENNA

Neither Ravenna nor Rome was the exclusive residence of the western imperial court, which was less stationary than its eastern counterpart. Honorius was the first emperor for a century to reside in Rome for a significant period, and he may have raised expectations that he would make Rome his permanent seat; nevertheless, he established Ravenna as an alternative residence for the last fifteen years of his rule. Valentinian III initially followed Honorius in occupying Ravenna, while using Rome as a ceremonial site, perhaps to cultivate relations with the aristocracy and church there; he regularly resided in Rome from 440 and relocated there permanently in 450. Between 450 and 476 the weight of evidence points to Rome, not Ravenna, as the main imperial residence. Five of the last ten emperors were elevated at Rome; four were raised at Ravenna, but only two did not subsequently transfer their rule to Rome; four are not known to have visited Ravenna at all.\textsuperscript{141} Anthemius, the most fully documented of the post-Theodosian emperors, is attested only at Rome. Contemporaries and sixth-century eastern writers regarded Rome as the western seat of government after 440.

Ravenna nevertheless hosted important functions. The city’s intermittent role as an imperial stage was an extension of its military establishment; the emperors raised there were all supported by the generalissimos Ricimer, Gundobad or Orestes. Ravenna was not the only important military base in northern Italy; so too was Milan, another former imperial residence and a major city, yet Milan hosted no imperial accessions or other ceremonial occasions and was rarely, if at all, visited by any emperor.\textsuperscript{142} Ravenna enjoyed greater strategic significance because of its eastern orientation, offering relative proximity to Constantinople and an outlook on the Dalmatian coast, a potential beachhead into Italy.\textsuperscript{143} 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.

Granting Ravenna’s value for communication and military movements, why was unstrategic Rome the preferred imperial residence? Given the long period of imperial absence from Rome, both Rome and Ravenna were, in different senses, new imperial residences in the fifth century. Rome was, of course, revered as \textit{the} city — \textit{urbs magna, rerum caput, Roma aeterna, urbs orbis} —, elevated to the status of a goddess in Roman literary imagination, an

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\textsuperscript{142} Kent, \textit{RJC} X, 30–1; Ricimer resided there during the civil war with Anthemius; cf. above, nn. 92, 122, 127.

\textsuperscript{143} Dalmatia: Olymp. \textit{fr.} 43.2 = Philost. \textit{HE XII} 13; Prisc. \textit{fr.} 39.1; Wozniak, 'East Rome' (above, n. 40).
image annexed by the confident Christianity of the fifth century in the writings of Prudentius and Pope Leo I. Roma personified, often paired with Constantinopolis, is common on coins and diptychs. But Rome's attraction to the late emperors cannot have been only her symbolic value.

The most obvious advantage to the emperors of residence in Rome was political: proximity to the senatorial aristocracy of the city. In the city the emperors and their courtiers had direct access to their richest, and most politically powerful, subjects. The senatorial aristocracy of Rome, though alienated from the military emperors of the third century, became increasingly involved in imperial politics throughout the fourth century. In the fifth century the aristocracy's near dominance of positions of public honour, the consulate and the patriciate, and of the highest palatine offices, is an index to its superior position as a constituent of the imperial polity. The imperial elevations of the senators Petronius Maximus and Olybrius, events quite at odds with the political trends of the late Empire, are only the most extreme manifestation of the involvement of the fifth-century Roman senatorial aristocracy in imperial politics. The presence of the emperor at Rome facilitated political influence with this nobility.

When, in the fourth century, the imperial court took up residence in the provincial capitals of Trier and Milan (and indeed at Constantinople), new

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The distribution of the western consulate between imperial, senior military, and civilian (mostly aristocratic) holders shifted roughly throughout the fifth century. Between 395 and 440 the western consulate was distributed roughly evenly between the three categories (fifteen imperial, thirteen military and fifteen civilian consulates). For the remaining fifteen years of the reign of Valentinian III, civilian consuls dominated: four imperial consulates (including Fl. Bassus Herculanus, consul 452, husband of Justa Grata Honoria), two military consulates and nine civilian consulates. All civilian consuls whose social background is known were members of the most powerful Roman families. From 456 to 476 there were four imperial consulates (all on accession) and six civilian (aristocratic) consuls, but only one military consul (Ricimer, consul 459). After 476 aristocrats held the western consulate almost exclusively; Cameron and Schauer, 'Last consul' (above, n. 112), 138 (largely by default, as neither Odoacer nor Theodoric nominated themselves or any of their generals as consuls, with the exception of Theodoric's intended successor Eucharic, consul 519). Bagnall et al., Cons. LRE, s.aa.
‘aristocracies of service’ came into existence, as the scions of local magnates sought career opportunities at the nearby court.146 There is no sign of such a new regional aristocracy at fifth-century Ravenna, nor of families with a tradition of court service relocating there; rather, attested senior palatine officials were drawn from Rome. Indeed, there is no evidence for large-scale landholding around Ravenna, except presumably for the Church of Ravenna, prior to the mid-sixth century.147 Fifth-century Ravenna lacked both the municipal and social infrastructure appropriate to an imperial capital. The resources and patronage of the court were committed to Rome.

Imperial residence in Rome served to reassure senatorial aristocrats that their interests informed the policy of the court, particularly in the light of the prolonged disturbance caused by Geiseric. Valentinian III began to reside regularly at Rome soon after the Vandal capture of Carthage and the commencement of piratical raids around the Mediterranean; Avitus took up residence at Rome immediately after Geiseric’s raid; Sidonius’s panegyrics to Avitus and Anthemius make the defence of Rome from the Vandals the reason for the emperors’ rule. The cessation of Rome’s role as seat of government coincided not only with the termination of the imperial office in the West, but also with the death of Geiseric (25 January 477) and the end of his destabilizing policies; his successors were distracted from piratical assaults on imperial territory by domestic concerns, and generally maintained peaceable relations with the Empire and the rulers of Italy.148 The decline of the Vandal threat left Odoacer and Theoderic free to concentrate on the prospect of northern hostility, from the Franks and Burgundians in Gaul and from the eastern Empire through Illyricum, and therefore to reside in the north. The ambiguity of their constitutional position also may have made residence away from Rome more politically prudent, but this is by no means certain in view of the healthy relations attested between the Roman aristocracy and the kings.

The emperors strove to build ties with the aristocracy and urban populace of Rome. Gestures, empty or not, were made to renew the ancient image of shared power between the princeps and the Roman Senate.149 The emperors

146 Matthews, Western Aristocracies (above, n. 112), 41–4, 51–87, 184–5.
147 Contra Pietri, ‘Les aristocraties de Ravenne’ (above, n. 2), 645–56, most senior officials whose origins are attested were Roman, and their presence in Ravenna represents only the need to attend the court when in office. Schäfer, Der Weströmische Senat (above, n. 145), 185–211, 299–307. The Byzantine regime generated a local aristocracy: T.S. Brown, Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, AD 554–800 (London, 1984), Evidence for large landholdings: Squarriti, ‘Marshes and mentalities’ (above, n. 17), 10.
149 For example, Valentinian III promulgated the Codex Theodosianus through the Senate (Gesta senatus, in Mommsen and Meyer (eds), Theodosiani libri (above, n. 18), I.2, 1–4); the embassy sent to Attila in 452 was in the name of the principis ac senatus populique Romanus (Prosp. Tiro, Chron. 1567; cf. L’Année Epigraphique 1950, no. 30). Majorian, Severus and Anthemius attributed their elevations to the Senate (Nov. Maior. 1 (by Senate and army); Hyd.
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exploited the city as a magnificent backdrop to consular and other celebrations, and established a dynastic mausoleum (the significance of which was not lost, four centuries later, on the Carolingian monarchs of Italy, who appropriated the building as their personal chapel). Identifying themselves with the cult of Saint Peter, the emperors patronized the lavish papal recasting of the Roman city-scape. Some, like Anthemius, won the support of the urban populace through such appropriations of the urban rhythms of Rome.

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Ravenna was not the main residence of the last western emperors, nor did it play the role of decadent retreat from which enervated rulers watched their realm dissipate. Rather, Rome served as the main seat of government for the final decades of the Empire in the West, elevated by a new dynamic between the senatorial aristocracy and the imperial court. At the same time, the legitimacy and efficacy of the later western emperors depended increasingly on Constantinopolitan support. This trend had begun in the time of Theodosius I; after the lengthy interruption of Odoacer and the Ostrogoths, it would be harshly brought to its logical conclusion in the post-war settlement imposed on Italy by Justinian, downgrading Italy to a province. The role of Ravenna in late antiquity is to be understood in this context, as a result of the shift of political power to the East, to which Ravenna acted as a conduit, rather than as a symptom or cause for the loss of the western provinces.

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Sources for which an edition different from those given in Martindale, The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (above, n. 2), xiii–xxxvii


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