

Journeys to Byzantium? Roman Senators Between Rome and Constantinople

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Abstract

For over a thousand years, the members of the Roman senatorial aristocracy played a pivotal role in the political and social life of the Roman state. Despite being eclipsed by the power of the emperors in the first century BC, the men who made up this order continued to act as the keepers of Roman civilization for the next four hundred years, maintaining their traditions even beyond the disappearance of an emperor in the West. Despite their longevity, the members of the senatorial aristocracy faced an existential crisis following the Ostrogothic conquest of the Italian peninsula, when the forces of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I invaded their homeland to contest its ownership. Considering the role they played in the later Roman Empire, the disappearance of the Roman senatorial aristocracy following this conflict is a seminal event in the history of Italy and Western Europe, as well as Late Antiquity.

Two explanations have been offered to explain the subsequent disappearance of the Roman senatorial aristocracy. The first involves a series of migrations, beginning before the Gothic War, from Italy to Constantinople, in which members of this body abandoned their homes and settled in the eastern capital. The second suggests these individuals remained in Italy were gradually superseded by newcomers to the peninsula, Germanic Lombards or Byzantine military officers.

An examination of the prosopographical evidence for this period reveals that many members of the Roman senatorial aristocracy did travel to Constantinople from Italy, but the overwhelming majority returned once their business was completed. Their journeys included activities of a political, religious, and military nature, but did not involve permanent settlement. In light of the prosopographical evidence, it is recommended that future research attempts focus on Italy, not Constantinople, when examining the fate of the Roman senatorial aristocracy.

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Journeys to Byzantium? Roman Senators Between Rome and Constantinople

Introduction

In 489, the Ostrogoths, under their king Theoderic, arrived to contest the rulership of the Italian peninsula. For the next four years, Theoderic and his Ostrogoths fought the forces of the patrician Odovacer, and ultimately defeated him and took his capital, Ravenna, in 493. Following his victory, Theoderic settled his triumphant people throughout Italy, alongside the indigenous population.¹ Despite the fact that the newcomers held a significant amount of power over the indigenous people, one segment of their society, the Roman nobility of the Italian peninsula, continued to maintain its positions of social and political influence well into the sixth century.

Theoderic ruled for over thirty years, and other Ostrogothic monarchs continued to rule in succession until 553, when the armies of the Byzantine Empire finally extinguished their kingdom after the long and tumultuous Gothic Wars. However, the reestablishment of imperial power in Italy did not bring back the circumstances that had existed previously under the Ostrogoths. The emperors in Constantinople governed Italy not as the center of their empire, but as a distant province under the authority of a military governor in Ravenna, the *exarch*.² Just over a decade later, in 568, the Italian aristocracy endured yet another blow to their survival, with the arrival of another group of newcomers, the Lombards. The Lombards fought the imperial armies over the coming decades, and before the century was over, they had established themselves in the north of

¹ Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7-8.

² Amory, 9-12.

Italy, as well as in the south around Spoleto and Benevento.³ Trapped between these newcomers to the Italian peninsula and the might of Constantinople, the Roman nobility lost much of their power to Lombard warleaders and Byzantine commanders.

Two explanations have been proposed to explain why the Roman aristocracy did not maintain positions of social and political influence throughout the sixth century and into the early seventh century. One theory is that the Roman aristocracy in Italy disappeared in the chaos of the Gothic War, casualties of the long and bitter struggle. A particular subset of this theory is that some members of the Roman aristocracy left their homes during and after the Gothic Wars, departing Italy for the safety of Constantinople, to join the ranks of the aristocracy established there by Constantine I at the foundation of the city in 330.⁴ An alternative view is that the Roman aristocracy remained in Italy until its demise, and that the Byzantine victory over the Goths and the Lombard invasion were responsible for their transformation from a socially and politically influential group to an insignificant one.

This thesis will investigate members of the Italian aristocracy in the late fifth and sixth centuries, with a focus on the individuals who traveled between Italy and Constantinople, in order to test the validity of the emigration hypothesis. It will show that the prosopographical evidence demonstrates that few of these journeys involved permanent emigration, despite the numerous journeys which members of the senatorial aristocracy undertook. The vast majority of their travels were short trips, of a diplomatic,

³ J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire Volume 2* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1889), 145-149; Thomas Brown, "The Transformation of the Roman Mediterranean, 400-900," in *The Oxford History of Medieval Europe*, ed. George Holmes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 9-10.

⁴ For the foundation of the senatorial aristocracy of Constantinople, see Gilbert Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), 119-210.

religious, or military nature, after which they returned to Italy. It will be argued that because of this evidence, understanding the fate of the Roman aristocracy requires that Italy, rather than Constantinople, be the focus of future study.

Methodology

In order to situate the problem of the Italian aristocracy's fate in context, it is necessary to examine the historiography on the subject, some of which argues that the Italian aristocracy moved permanently to Constantinople, and some of which argues that responsibility for their transformation into a marginalized group lies with the Byzantine victory in Italy and the Lombard invasion. However, the most critical part of this paper involves the examination of various members of the Italian aristocracy who went to Constantinople. The goal is to show who these individuals were, their motives for traveling to the imperial capital, and that they did not remain in Constantinople permanently.

It is important to understand that these six selected individuals are only a small portion of a much larger group of 22 Italian aristocrats who travelled to Constantinople in late fifth and sixth centuries. They have been chosen because there is more evidence about their lives than about the many others whose prosopographical entries comprise both the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* and the *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, and because their travels from Italy to Constantinople and back again represent a consistent pattern of movement between both locations from the late fifth through the sixth centuries. Some went to Constantinople for diplomatic reasons, while others went for religious purposes. Since the lives of these individuals are relatively well

documented, the information about them can be used to place their travels to Constantinople in their proper historical context in order to understand the circumstances of their journeys.

Terminology

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to define some of the terms that will be used throughout this study. Since the individuals discussed in this paper do not venture into the northern reaches of Theoderic's rule, where regional boundaries blur, the term 'Italy' will not be used in the context of the boundaries of the modern-nation state, but refer to the peninsula only. The term 'Italian' is used to denote an individual or group of individuals that can trace their habitation in peninsular Italy to the time before the arrival of Theoderic in 489, and lived under his rule and that of his successors down to 554 (even if they left Italy during the Gothic War). It in no way denotes any concept of modern-day nationalism. It is a convenient term to distinguish the indigenous population of the peninsula from the newcomers that arrived in 489 and afterwards, as well as the Germanic peoples who came to Italy before the arrival of the Ostrogoths. Since the Italians examined below were all members of the Roman Senate, occupying one of the most prestigious social positions to which a Roman could aspire, the terms 'upper classes', 'aristocracy/aristocrats', and 'nobility' refer to the members of the Roman Senate mentioned specifically, and the group as a whole. This aristocracy, and especially the class of *illustres* at the top of the senatorial hierarchy, was defined by the holding of public office or imperial nomination to their position. In addition, members of the Roman aristocracy also shared a strong connection through their devotion to classical

literature, particularly Latin, as well as their extensive land ownership in Italy, Sicily, and Africa.⁵

Consequently, the term ‘Ostrogoth/Goth’ refers to the group of individuals who arrived in Italy following 489, lived under the rule of the Ostrogothic monarchs until the 550s, and identified with the reigning Ostrogothic king. The term ‘Byzantine’, although an anachronism that has endured down through modern scholarship, will be used to identify those individuals or groups of individuals who worked under the direction of the emperor in Constantinople. ‘Lombard’ will be used to specifically designate the group of individuals which entered Italy in 568. The term will not be used to refer to individuals or small groups which fought in Italy during the Gothic War under imperial command. Finally, the two most important definitions for this paper in regard to the Italian aristocracy: the term ‘disappearance’ will be used in the context of emigration, specifically to Constantinople. The second term, ‘transformation’, will mean a change from a socially and politically affluent condition, to one in which the Italian aristocracy is marginalized by other forces, such as the Byzantines and the Lombards.

Historiography: “Emigration to Constantinople”

The emigration thesis was posed as one part of the larger disappearance school as far back as the late 19th century. In Thomas Hodgkin’s *Italy and her Invaders*, the author considers the fate of the Roman population of Italy, and in particular the Roman aristocracy, at the point when the Lombards had come to dominate Italy. He asserts that many factors had worked from the fifth to the seventh century to strip Italy of its most

⁵ For a more detailed overview of senatorial identity, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 155-166.

powerful and influential inhabitants. Many of these influences involved military activity, notably the invasions of Alaric, Attila, and Gaiseric, as well as the long and bloody Gothic War. However, others included “[...] emigration to Constantinople, the tendency of all men of good birth and education to flock to the seat of officialism [...] at Constantinople [...]—all these causes had doubtless worked a terrible depletion [...] even before the unspeakable Lombard came to hasten the process.”⁶

Hodgkin’s theory is broad both in scope and timeframe. He does not put forth an exclusively military solution to the problem of disappearance, but also claims emigration to Constantinople as a factor.⁷ Rather than restricting emigration of the Roman aristocracy to the period of the Gothic War, he includes as possible motivations events from not only the middle of the fifth century but as far back as 410. Unfortunately Hodgkin does not name particular individuals that made the permanent trip to Constantinople between 410 and period of Lombard domination after 568. As he himself states, the question of the disappearance of the Roman aristocracy cannot be answered satisfactorily due to the paucity of evidence on the subject.⁸ His conclusion regarding the Roman aristocrats and their emigration to Constantinople, despite a lack of particular cases for such emigration, is one early hypothesis from this particular subset of the ‘disappearance school’.

A more modern example of the emigration thesis comes from the works of Ernest Stein. In 1939, his article describing the disappearance of the senate of Rome included a

⁶ Thomas Hodgkin, *Italy and her Invaders, Volume 6 Second Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), 589.

⁷ Hodgkin, 580. Hodgkin references Paul the Deacon’s statements about the slaying of many noble Romans during the reign of Alboin (565-572/3).

⁸ Hodgkin, 580.

section on the recruitment of senators in Italy, and how the process was disrupted throughout the Gothic Wars. While these problems persisted, Stein mentions that a group of senators escaped eastward to Constantinople around 552, and decided to take up residence there.⁹ This claim is restated in his 1968 work, *Histoire du Bas Empire*, wherein he argues that after the issue of the Pragmatic Sanction in 554, many senators decided to remain in Constantinople and not return to Italy.¹⁰ Stein refers to Ludo Moritz Hartmann for his opinions on emigration to Constantinople. Hartmann does discuss emigrants in the capital during the reign of Anastasius around 500, as mentioned in a panegyric delivered to the emperor by Priscian the Grammarian.¹¹ However, Priscian does not mention specific individuals, and this passage cannot be taken as evidence that emigration contributed to the disappearance of the Italian aristocracy, since the Italian aristocracy was documented in Italy well after 500. Therefore, like Hodgkin, Stein's assertions that members of the Italian aristocracy emigrated do not include specific names of people that left Italy and settled in Constantinople.

Another example from the emigration school is Brian Croke's unpublished dissertation from 1978. Croke makes the argument that Italian aristocrats were settling permanently in Constantinople even before the Gothic War. He states that there was a continuous movement by members of the nobility from the west to Constantinople, and

⁹ Ernest Stein, "La disparation du Sénat de Rome á la fin du VI^e siècle," *Opera Minora Selecta*. (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968), 308-322. Originally published in *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres de l'Académie de Belgique*, t. XXV (1939).

¹⁰ Ernest Stein, *Histoire du Bas Empire*, Volume 2 (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968), 617-618, 618 n.1.

¹¹ Ludo Moritz Hartmann, *Geschichte Italiens im Mittelalter Band 1* (Gotha: Friedrich Andres Perthes, 1897), 192-193, 207 n.11. For Priscian's panegyric, see S.L. Endlicher, ed., *Prisciani Grammatici, De Laude Imperitoribus Anastasii*, (Vienna: P.J. Schalbacher, 1828), 239-245. For the date of Priscian's panegyric, see Alan Cameron, "The Date of Priscian's 'De laude Anastasii'," *GRBS* 15 (1974): 313-316; Brian Croke, "Poetry and Propaganda: Anastasius I as Pompey," *GRBS* 48 (2008): 447-466.

that this pattern of emigration increased during the Gothic War, when a number of notable refugees arrived in the imperial capital. His only evidence for such emigration, however, is the fact that a house in Constantinople, owned by Symmachus, the western consul in 485, burned down in the Nika Riots of 532. Croke also asserts that it was to this Symmachus, and his friends, that the famous grammarian Priscian was referring when he discussed a group of westerners pushing the emperor Anastasius to reconquer Italy. On the basis of this particular Symmachus, Croke claims, “there were doubtless other old aristocratic western families who lived on in Constantinople.”¹²

However, in the context of the emigration hypothesis, Croke’s assertion becomes more problematic. The question arises as to who these ‘old aristocratic western families that lived on in Constantinople’ were. It is certainly true that many Italian aristocrats visited Constantinople in various capacities during the late fifth and early sixth centuries, particularly while the Ostrogoths controlled Italy. It is also true that many Italian aristocrats continued to travel to Constantinople during the war, as will be discussed below. However, it is clear that many did not stay in imperial capital permanently.

¹² B. Croke, “The Chronicle of Count Marcellinus in its Contemporary and Historiographical Context” (PhD diss., Oxford University, 1978), 119-120; Brian Croke, *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 86-88; Brian Croke, “Justinian’s Constantinople,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Mass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 60-86. The assertions and evidence on this subject given in both Croke’s 1978 dissertation as well as his 2001 volume are virtually identical. The chapter in the 2005 volume differs slightly, but retains the basic argument. It should be made clear that Croke’s account of western aristocratic families in Constantinople has less to do with the transformation of the Italian nobility than it does with identifying certain Latin-speaking communities in Constantinople. His argument is that Count Marcellinus, as a man from Illyria, was a Latin author writing specifically for the Illyrian community in Constantinople. Therefore, Croke finds it necessary to distinguish Latin-speaking groups in Constantinople from one another in order to prove his point about Marcellinus’ chronicle and the specific nature of his audience: Marcellinus was not necessarily writing for Latin speakers outside the Illyrian community, rather than Latin speakers from Italy or Africa. In addition, the particular identification of the Symmachus mentioned above, whose house burned in the Nika Riots, is uncertain; see Michael Whitby & Mary Whitby, trans., *Chronicon Paschale, 284-628 A.D* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 120. The footnote on this particular incident mentions how ‘several Symmachi were western consuls, most recently (in 522) Symmachus brother of Boethius, who might have had property’ in Constantinople.

In his 1979 book, Jeffrey Richards, similar to Stein, cites the promulgation of the Pragmatic Sanction in 554 as the beginning of the end of the senatorial aristocracy in Italy. Unfortunately, after two decades of war, restoration of imperial rule had not brought relief to the population of the peninsula. The government in Constantinople began to turn Italy into a mere province, rather than restore it to its earlier position as the center of the empire. The previous administrative framework was swept aside and replaced with an eastern bureaucracy and military presence, headed by the emperor's representative at Ravenna, the *exarch*. The senatorial aristocracy, diminished under conditions of war and the changes in administration, moved eastward to find better circumstances at the emperor's court in Constantinople.¹³ Richards also claims that the senatorial aristocrats who did flee to Constantinople had no reason to return to Italy after the issue of the Pragmatic Sanction, because of the influx of eastern officials. From this point on, the Italian aristocracy was drawn to Constantinople.¹⁴

T.S. Brown gives a similar explanation for the disappearance of the senatorial aristocracy in his 1984 book, which examines the conditions of Italy under Byzantine control. Brown gives a lengthy account of a process he calls "senatorial drift" to Constantinople, and mentions how "western senators had earlier maintained family links with the east."¹⁵ He also mentions the presence of such an influential figure as Anicia

¹³ Jeffrey Richards, *The Popes and the Papacy in the Early Middle Ages, 476-752* (London: Routledge, 1979), 139. However, between 598-603, the *patricia* Rusticana in Constantinople retained lands in both Italy and Sicily, indicating that not all land in Italy had fallen into the hands of Byzantine officials and Lombard warriors. See Dag Ludvig Norberg, ed., *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistularum, Libri I-XIV*, CCSL Volumes CXL & CXL A (Turnholt: Brepolis, 1982), IX.83, XIII.26.

¹⁴ Richards, 247.

¹⁵ T.S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554-800*, (Hertford: Stephen Austin and Sons, 1984), 28.

Juliana, as well as several senators that fled to Constantinople during the Gothic War.¹⁶ T.S. Brown cites Croke for his work on Latin speakers in sixth century Constantinople, but does not note that Croke's 'Italian' hypothesis rests on Anicia Juliana and Symmachus only. In addition, Anicia Juliana was born in Constantinople, so why she would be placed in the same category as refugee senators is unknown. She may have had ties to 'Italy' and 'Italians', but she did not move from Italy to Constantinople, and therefore cannot be counted in "the steady flow of aristocrats from west to east" that Croke describes later in the same paragraph.¹⁷

Similar to Jeffrey Richards, T.S. Brown states that many members of the Roman aristocracy, such as Cassiodorus, Liberius, Cethegus, Decius, and Albinus, were a part of a circle of Italians that spent time in Constantinople lobbying Justinian to follow a policy in Italy which they thought was most beneficial to themselves.¹⁸ This relationship between the Italian aristocracy and the imperial court continued after the war. Brown notes that "[...] Justinian granted free access to the court of Constantinople in 554, and that this produced a steady flow of those [...] characterized as 'the rich, the ambitious and the syncophantic' to the imperial capital."¹⁹ Other than the fact that these specific men were in Constantinople at various times throughout the Gothic War, the evidence

¹⁶ T.S. Brown, 27-30. See Ioannes Thurn, ed., *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia* (Berolini et Novi Eboraci: De Gruyter, 2000), 368.31. Anicia Juliana 3: A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, & J. Morris, ed., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 635-636.

¹⁷ Croke "The Chronicle of Count Marcellinus," 119.

¹⁸ Croke, "The Chronicle of Count Marcellinus," 28-29. The idea that these particular Italian aristocrats fled to Constantinople and supported the war effort in Italy is well-known. Some scholars do not maintain that this emigration was permanent, or that this emigration was the cause of the disappearance of the senatorial aristocracy in Italy. See Johannes Sundwall, *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des ausgehenden Römertums* (Helsingfors: Helsingfors Centraltryckeri Bokbinderi Aktiebolag, 1919), 306-308.

¹⁹ Croke, "The Chronicle of Count Marcellinus," 28-29.

indicates that many of them returned to Italy after the war, despite their wartime activities in Constantinople and elsewhere.

Brown also mentions the *patricia* Rusticiana as evidence of an Italian aristocratic presence at Constantinople.²⁰ Rusticiana is one of the few individuals living at the very end of the sixth century thought to have lived in Rome before traveling to Constantinople. It is also a distinct possibility that she remained in the imperial capital and did not return to the west, despite the fact that she owned property in Italy and Sicily.²¹ Her origins in Rome are alluded to in a letter she received from Gregory the Great in 598. The subject of the letter deals with Rusticiana's efforts to ransom captives in Italy, but Gregory was more interested with why she remained in Constantinople so long: he wanted Rusticiana to return to Rome.²² The last recorded letter from Gregory the Great to Rusticiana, when she became ill, is dated to 603.²³ Unfortunately it is not known if she died in Constantinople. While it is clear that Rusticiana did travel from Rome to Constantinople, there is a significant problem with using her as evidence for a large eastward migration of Italian aristocrats: she is the only known member of the Italian aristocracy to move east and (as far as the evidence reveals) not return, despite the fact that she lived in Constantinople well after the period of the Gothic War. Her presence alone in Constantinople is not enough to argue that emigration to the imperial capital contributed to the disappearance of the Italian aristocracy, when there are more

²⁰ Rusticiana 2: A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, & J. Morris, ed., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire Volume 3 Part B* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1101-1102, see also Rusticiana 2: Charles Pietri & Luce Pietri, ed., *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire Volume 2 Part 2* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2000), 1948-1950.

²¹ Norberg, VIII.26, IX.83.

²² Norberg, VIII.22.

²³ Norberg, XIII.26.

examples of Italians returning from Constantinople, such as Cassiodorus, Liberius, and Cethegus.

Patrick Amory, while not specifically addressing the settlement question, does give an explanation for why some Italian aristocrats chose to leave Italy during the Gothic War. His assessment is based on the nature of the situation faced by the Italians after the outbreak of hostilities, and how there was little room to maneuver between the Ostrogoths and the Byzantines while in Italy. Amory states that, in a manner similar to other Italians, the members of the Roman nobility had to decide where their loyalties belonged. They were confronted with Justinian's conception of empire and the promise of wealth and security in Constantinople, free from the problems in Italy. When the time came for the Italian nobility to depart, no member of that group could return until Justinian's armies had thoroughly defeated the Ostrogoths, as the many executions of senators had proven. Amory thinks that these men wanted to return to their own homes, and that because of this, it makes sense that men such as Cethegus were advocating that Justinian destroy the Ostrogoths once and for all. By 550, they faced two possibilities: total victory in Italy, or permanent exile from home.²⁴ Since the evidence on an Italian such as Cethegus will be discussed below, it is not necessary to single him out here. However, in light of his eventual return west, Amory's assertions about why Italian aristocrats left home for Constantinople appear correct. Ultimately, Amory differs from the permanent settlement advocates because his explanation is based around the idea that the Italian aristocracy desired to return, and were working toward that end. However, many of these Italian aristocrats had no idea if Justinian's campaign against the

²⁴ Amory, 145.

Ostrogoths would succeed, and may have contemplated remaining in Constantinople before the final conquest of Italy by Byzantine forces.

Due to the persistence of the theory about permanent settlement in Constantinople, some modern authors have put it forth without so much as a footnote. For example, G.J.M. Bartlink's article on Gregory the Great's knowledge of Greek mentions that Latin studies were strengthened in Constantinople around the time of the Ostrogothic kingdom because of the eastward movement of Roman families.²⁵ However, he only goes on to mention two women who corresponded with Gregory around the end of the sixth century, one of whom is identified as Rusticana. If there were many of these families, Bartlink either chooses to remain silent on their identities, or his assertion is speculation as well. John Moorhead gives a similar account in his discussion of the Italian aristocracy throughout the Gothic War, arguing that there was movement to Constantinople from Italy, and a reluctance to return.²⁶ The problem with the argument of the 'disappearance school' is that there is very little evidence for permanent emigration to Constantinople, yet the theory still remains a persistent solution in answering the question about the fate of the Italian aristocracy.

S.J.B. Barnish's work on this subject occupies a type of middle ground between disappearance by emigration and transformation. He offers various explanations for the transformation of the Italian aristocracy such as the presence and persistence of disease

²⁵ G.J.M. Bartlink, "Pope Gregory the Great's Knowledge of Greek," trans. Paul Mayvaert, in *Gregory the Great*, ed. John Cavadini (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 120.

²⁶ John Moorhead, *The Roman Empire Divided, 400-700* (London: Pearson Education, 2001), 134. It is interesting that Moorhead acknowledges the return journeys of the Italian aristocracy in an earlier work. See John Moorhead, *Justinian* (London: Longman, 1994), 109-110.

and endemic fighting, as well as economic collapse.²⁷ Moreover, the only assertion he makes about the possibility of permanent settlement in Constantinople is not based on any particular individual. He states that some senators “[...] may have transferred their allegiance, or had it transferred, to the Senate of Constantinople.”²⁸ However, this is dependent on a section of Justinian’s Pragmatic Sanction, and he states only that it “[...] may imply that those Italian senators who chose to attend the court thereby made Constantinople their official residence, and needed permission to reside in Italy.”²⁹ This section of the Pragmatic Sanction leaves open the possibility that some Italians moved to Byzantium, but does not provide any evidence that such movements did in fact occur as a result.

Historiography: “Return to Italy”

Providing a contrast to those scholars who explain transformation in terms of permanent movement are those who think that such a change occurred due to the events that took place in Italy between the beginning and the end of the Gothic War. Peter Brown, in his seminal work *The World of Late Antiquity*, does not assert that the Italian nobility moved from Italy permanently; he describes their transformation in the context of the Byzantine victory. Citing the events of the sixth century, he remarks that the wars of Justinian in Italy were not simply inconvenient for the Italian aristocracy, they were downright disastrous, especially with the imposition of direct rule from Constantinople

²⁷ S.J.B. Barnish, “Transformation and Survival in the Western Senatorial Aristocracy, c. A.D. 400-700,” *PBSR* 56 (1988): 150.

²⁸ Barnish, “Transformation and Survival,” 150.

²⁹ Barnish, “Transformation and Survival,” 150, n. 181.

and the coming of an efficient imperial bureaucracy.³⁰ As to their ultimate fate, Brown concludes that the secular elite in the West disappeared. He argues that the senatorial families that did not simply die off sought the protection of the bishops, and were replaced by groups of mixed Roman and Germanic heritage, and that their lifestyle, which was predicated on the ideal of *otium*, required a certain separation from politics. The conditions of Italy during and following the Byzantine conquest made this lifestyle more difficult to practice, but some Italians, such as Cassiodorus, continued living this ideal from the 540s to the 580s, in a monastery he founded on his estate at Vivarium in the south of Italy.³¹

Chris Wickham, in his 2005 *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, describes how the cultural markers of the Italian aristocracy, such as literary activity, ultimately disappeared. This process began in or around 500 in the West, when the aristocracy became far more militarized.³² In this way, aristocratic identity itself was changing.³³ What is interesting to note about this idea is that Wickham thinks “senators changed identity, then, rather than necessarily declining to extinction.”³⁴ Wickham, like the

³⁰ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150-750* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), 132. See also: Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000, Second Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 195. Brown’s assertions about the fate of the Italian aristocracy in this volume are virtually the same as that stated above: “[...] the old aristocracy was no longer necessary. The new ‘Roman’ empire brought with it a new social order. [...] With the reconquest of Justinian, the aristocrats were pushed aside. They were replaced by an alliance between ‘the emperor’s men’—East Roman officials and army officers—and the petty gentry of the provinces [...]”

³¹ Peter Brown, “Late Antiquity,” 174.

³² T.S. Brown, 36-37.

³³ Wickham, 205-206; Amory, 158.

³⁴ Wickham, 206-207; Peter Brown, “Western Christendom,” 195, “[...] new class of provincial gentlemen formed the backbone of the ‘Roman’, that is, the imperial, order in Italy. They were military men, with little traditional culture. In this respect, they differed little from their opposite numbers, the ‘barbarian’ Lombards and their Italian collaborators in the hinterland of Italy. [...] *What was threatened, in this social revolution, was the very existence of a leisured class, and of the styles of culture and religion that went with such a class.*” (Italics mine)

scholars mentioned above, stresses social continuity in Italy up to the eve of the Gothic War.³⁵ As T.S. Brown states, it is only during and after the conflict, after the imposition of a new, Byzantine military hierarchy and the coming of the Lombards that this group of Italian aristocrats fades from view.³⁶

Wickham's explanation is perhaps the most unique regarding the transformation of the Italian aristocracy because of the type of change involved: the Italians survived the tumultuous period from the mid-sixth century onward, and blended in with the groups which subsequently wielded power. However, this type of continuity would be difficult to prove as a result of the changes in circumstances themselves. Sources for the senate begin to disappear toward the end of the sixth century, and then cease altogether after the beginning of the seventh.³⁷ Despite the difficulties in proving this theory, Wickham still asserts that this process only occurred when fighting broke out in Italy, and that the changes to the Italian aristocracy occurred in Italy, and not because of settlement in Constantinople.

Though some authors assert that the transformation of the Italian aristocracy was the result of changes within Italy following the Gothic War, the idea that Italian aristocrats fled permanently to Constantinople still has its supporters. Accepting this argument means that settlement in Constantinople is still perpetuated as an option when explaining the fate of the Italian aristocracy. The goal of this investigation will be to

³⁵ cf. Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). At 67, Ward-Perkins remarks that Southern and Central Italy are areas of aristocratic continuity at least until the sixth century; see also Bertrand Lançon, *Rome in Late Antiquity: Everyday Life and Urban Change, AD 312-609*, trans. Antonia Nevill (New York: Routledge, 2000).

³⁶ T.S. Brown, 61-81.

³⁷ Richards, 246.

present the prosopographical evidence in order to show the problems with the emigration hypothesis.

Prosopography

The following section will examine various individuals from the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* and the *Prospographie Chretienne du Bas-Empire*, two outstanding prosopographical reference works, with the goal of demonstrating their patterns of movement from Italy to Constantinople. After reading through the entries from both works from the beginning of Theoderic's reign in Italy in 493 to 600, 22 individuals from the Italian aristocracy have been identified as having traveled from Italy to Constantinople. 18 Italians went for diplomatic reasons concerning relations between the Ostrogothic kings or the bishops of Rome and the emperors in Constantinople. The other three appear to have exclusively carried letters from various bishops of Rome to numerous recipients in the imperial capital. The final individual, whose position in Constantinople is known due to a few letters of Gregory the Great, was Rusticiana, mentioned above. It is difficult from the limited evidence about her to determine if she in fact remained in Constantinople permanently.³⁸

The evidence for these journeys comes from a variety of sources from the late fifth to the early seventh centuries, such as the *Variae* of Cassiodorus, Procopius' *History of the Wars*, and the *epistulae* of Gregory the Great, among others. In most cases, the individuals that traveled to Constantinople are shown only in brief segments of the sources: it is known that they went there, and nothing more. Unfortunately for the

³⁸ For a complete reference to these individuals, please refer to the Appendix at the end.

purposes of this study, this is due to the focus of the authors themselves. None of these authors were composing works on travel or emigration, so the instances in which evidence for travel and emigration are found are highly incidental. Very few entries in the *PLRE* and the *PCBE* contain evidence for the activities of those Italian aristocrats while they were in Constantinople, and the few individuals used below have been selected as case studies because there is some, albeit limited, evidence for their activities in Constantinople, as well as evidence which shows they returned to Italy.

The prosopographical section includes various individuals that fit into a pattern of diplomatic travel between Italy and Constantinople. The vast majority of those who participated in such journeys were undertaking diplomatic missions. The individual case studies were selected because of the available evidence for the lives of each person, which enables us to understand the contexts of their trips to Constantinople in greater detail. The first two case studies show members of the Italian aristocracy traveling to Constantinople to negotiate the terms of Theoderic's rule in Italy.³⁹ Their journeys were the first of many made by Italian aristocrats on behalf of Ostrogothic monarchs, and both their journeys as well as their careers in Italy reveal the circumstances of their departure to Constantinople and returns to Italy.⁴⁰

³⁹ For more detailed information on diplomatic culture, see Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411-533* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 172-219; R.W. Mathisen, "Patricians as Diplomats in Late Antiquity," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 79 (1986), 35-49.

⁴⁰ For Italian aristocrats and their careers under the Ostrogoths, see John Moorhead, "Boethius and Romans in Ostrogothic Service," *Historia* 27 (1978), 604-612.

The first individual, Flavius Rufius Postumius Festus, made one of his trips to Constantinople soon after the arrival of the Ostrogoths in Italy.⁴¹ The author of the *Excerpta Valesiana* records the events of 490:

In the consulship of Faustus and Longinus, Odovacer the king left Cremona and marched to Milan. [...] and a battle was fought above the river Addua, and people were slain on both sides, and Pierius the comes domesticorum was killed [...] and Odovacer fled to Ravenna, and soon Theoderic the patrician followed him, coming into Pineta and erecting a ditch, besieging Ravenna with Odovacer shut in for three years, and it came to the point where a modii of wheat sold for six solidii. And Theoderic sent an ambassador, Festus, the head of the senate, to the emperor Zeno, hoping to wrap himself in the royal garment.⁴²

Even before Theoderic had completely defeated Odovacer, he was already planning his rise to royal power, and he chose Festus, the head of the senate, for this assignment. This decision is the first in a long trend for both Theoderic and his successors, in making use of members of the Italian aristocracy as liaisons with Constantinople. Unfortunately for Festus, he was unable to complete his mission because of Zeno's death.

Despite his lack of success, Festus did get another chance to negotiate on behalf of Theoderic for control of the royal insignia. In 498, this time with Anastasius, Festus was successful. "Peace was made with the emperor Anastasius through Festus concerning the anticipation of the kingship, and he returned all the trappings of the

⁴¹ Fl. Rufius Postumius Festus 5: Jones, "Prosopography Volume 2," 467-469, see also Festus 2: Pietri, "Prosopographie Volume 2 Part 1," 812-814. For the Ostrogoths in Italy: Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 278-284; Sam Barnish, "Cuncta Italiae Membra Componere: Political Relations in Ostrogothic Italy," in *The Ostrogoths: From the Migration Period to the Sixth Century*, ed. Sam J. Barnish & Federico Marazzi (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2007), 317-337; see 317-319.

⁴² Jaques Moreau, ed., *Excerpta Valesiana* (Lipsiae in aedibus: B.G. Teubneri, 1961), 11.53.

palace, which Odovacer had sent to Constantinople.”⁴³ Once again, Theoderic turned to Festus to carry out this important diplomatic mission in Constantinople on his behalf.

There is some evidence to indicate what Festus did while he was in Constantinople. On this particular occasion, Festus was involved in garnering greater support for a particular religious festival, as well as a courier for the patriarch to the bishop of Rome.

In this year Festus, a Roman senator, who had been sent to Anastasios on certain public business, requested that the commemoration of the holy apostles Peter and Paul should be celebrated with greater festivity, a usage that has survived until now. Makedonios, who wanted to use Festus to send his synodical letter to Anastasios, bishop of Rome, was prevented by the emperor.⁴⁴

Festus’s opinion clearly carried weight even in far away Constantinople since the religious festivities he supported continued in the same fashion down to the era of Theophanes, just over three hundred years later. In addition, the fact that Festus was in communication with the patriarch of Constantinople, and trusted by him to deliver his synodical letter to the bishop of Rome indicates that he also moved in high religious circles as well as secular. The patriarch was not the only religious figure who found Festus a reliable conduit to Rome. He also received a letter from the representatives of the church of Alexandria, denoting the attempts of their leadership to defend orthodoxy on the side of Rome against the teachings of the fourth century theologian Eutyches.⁴⁵ It

⁴³ Moreau, 12.64.

⁴⁴ Cyril Mango & Roger Scott, trans., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 220; Carolus de Boor, ed., *Theophanis Chronographia, Volumen I* (Lipsiae in aedibus: B.G. Teubneri, 1883), 142-143.

⁴⁵ Otto Guenther, ed., “Collectio Avellana: Epistulae imperatorum, pontificum, aliorum, A.D.367-553,” in *CSEL 35, Vol 1*, 1895-1898, 102; for a brief sketch of Eutyches and his Christological views, see William Bark, “Theoderic vs. Boethius: Vindication and Apology,” *AHR* 49 (1944), 410-426; see 411.

is clear that Festus was occupied by a substantial amount of diplomatic and religious business while in Constantinople.

There is a substantial amount of evidence confirming that Festus returned to Italy following his stay in the imperial capital. After Festus arrived in 498, Theophanes describes his activities involving the Laurentian Schism, a dispute lasting eight years, which involved competing claims to the bishopric of Rome.⁴⁶

In this year Festus, as he was going back to Rome, promised the emperor Anastasios that he would persuade Pope Anastasios to accept Zeno's Henotikon, but he found the pope dead on his return. By corrupting many with money he secured the election, contrary to Roman practice, of a certain Laurentius as bishop, who was ordained by one faction. The more orthodox separated themselves and ordained Symmachus, who was one of the deacons. As a result many disorders occurred, including murders and rapine, for a period of three years, until Theoderic [...], who was at the time controlling Rome, though he was an Arian, summoned a local synod, confirmed Symmachus as bishop of Rome, and ordered Laurentius to be bishop of the city of Nuceria. But Laurentius did not stay quiet and, after creating trouble, was deposed by Symmachus and sent into banishment. And thus the discord ceased.⁴⁷

Here the emperor himself relied on Festus to convince the bishop of Rome over a matter of church doctrine. It is important to recognize that Festus acted as both a representative of the Ostrogothic monarchy to Constantinople, as well as a representative of the emperor to the bishop of Rome: both these incidents reveal that Festus did not remain in Constantinople after he completed his mission on behalf of Theoderic. He returned to Italy where he was very active in contemporary political affairs.

⁴⁶ W.T. Townsend, "Councils Held under Pope Symmachus," *Church History* 6 (1937), 233-259; P.A.B. Llewellyn, "The Roman Church during the Laurentian Schism: Priests and Senators," *Church History* 45 (1976), 417-427; John Moorhead, "The Laurentian Schism: East and West in the Roman Church," *Church History* 47 (1978), 125-136; Richards, 77-83.

⁴⁷ Mango & Scott, 220-221; de Boor, 143; Pauli Diaconi, *Historia Romana*, ed. Amedeo Crivellucci (Roma: Tipografia del Senato, 1914), XVI.2.11-18.

Even after Symmachus had occupied the see of Rome for four years, the influence of Festus was enough to dispute Symmachus's claim against a rival contender. His abilities were such, and the ensuing contest of such intensity, that Theoderic himself finally had to render judgment on the matter. He was clearly heavily involved in the dispute, but eventually his candidate Laurentius ultimately lost the see of Rome to his competitor. The author of the *Laurentian Fragment*, a description of Symmachus' tenure as bishop of Rome written by one of his opponents, explains the end of the struggle.

The spirit of the king failed toward this plea; he gave orders to the patrician Festus, suggesting that all of the honors of the church be changed by Symmachus, and that it be plain there was one pontiff at Rome. When Laurentius found out, he did not desire the city to be shaken with long-lasting struggling, and he voluntarily retired to the estate of the aforementioned Festus without delay, and there, on the pretext of heroic self-restraint, he was assigned the end of his life.⁴⁸

Festus had little choice but to accept the judgment of Theoderic concerning the dispute over the see of Rome. Despite his loss, and his involvement on the losing side of the controversy, he was still in a position to maintain Laurentius out of his own resources. In fact, even after Theoderic had ruled against his side, the king still held him in high regard, and called upon Festus to work for him in the future. This evidence from the end of the Laurentian Schism shows that Festus' involvement was substantial, and confirms that he returned to Italy following his mission to the imperial capital.

Cassiodorus, one of Theoderic's officials, records a request from the king between 507 and 511, concerning the departure of his neighbor, the patrician Agnellus

⁴⁸ L'Abbe L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis, Tome Premier*, ed. E. De Boccard (Paris, 1955), 46. For a description of the *Laurentian Fragment*, see John Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 116.

for Africa.⁴⁹ In the letter, Theoderic praises Festus for his rank as well as his reputation for assisting those in need. These are the reasons Theoderic gave to justify why Festus holds the position of the leading member of the senate. Since he was such a great example of justice, Theoderic asks Festus to watch over the household of the patrician Agnellus, who was leaving for Africa at the behest of Theoderic. The Ostrogothic king hopes that Festus would work hard to secure Agnellus' family and property from any harm while he was away.⁵⁰ The contents of this letter reveal the nature of the task Festus undertook, and the opinion Theoderic had of the old senator. He not only calls upon Festus to follow his instructions faithfully in safeguarding the property of Agnellus, but also showers him with glowing praise. However, it is possible that while the assignment was real, the kind words were a formality. Whether or not the king truly viewed Festus in this way is of secondary importance. The fact remains that, nearly two decades after Theoderic first asked Festus to journey to Constantinople, he had returned to Italy, participated in the events surrounding the Laurentian Schism, and worked faithfully for the Ostrogothic government.

The second case study is a contemporary of Festus, Flavius Anicius Probus Faustus Iunior Niger.⁵¹ He had a similar career to Festus under the Ostrogoths from the late fifth to the early sixth century. Interestingly, the reason Theoderic sent Faustus Niger to Constantinople was the same reason he sent Festus in 490 and 498. The emperor Zeno

⁴⁹ Moorhead, "Theoderic," 209, states that Festus' candidate for the Roman episcopate, Laurentius, may have gone to one of Festus' estates near Agnellus' properties, which was very close to the religious community of Castrum Lucullanum founded by Eugippius. It is possible Festus and Eugippius interacted at some point, given the proximity of their respective residences.

⁵⁰ Theodor Mommsen, ed., *Cassiodori Senatoris Variarum* (Berolini, 1894), in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Auctores Antiquissimi* 12, (München, 1981), I.15.

⁵¹ Fl. Anicius Probus Faustus iunior Niger 9: Jones, "Prosopography Volume 2," 454-456, see also Fl. Anicius Probus Faustus Iunior Niger 4: Pietri, "Prosopographie Volume 2 Part 1," 756-759.

had died in Constantinople, and Anastasius had acceded to the throne. Unfortunately, Theoderic had sent Faustus Niger to the east in order to negotiate for the royal title without knowing of Zeno's death. Once he discovered this, he went to Ravenna and had Odovacer killed without waiting for Faustus Niger's embassy to be completed.⁵² Like Festus, Theoderic saw merit in sending Faustus on a diplomatic mission to secure regal authority from Constantinople. Although this is Faustus Niger's only recorded trip to Constantinople, it shows that he was traveling there for the purpose of a diplomatic mission.

There is a substantial amount of evidence for the life Faustus Niger after his trip to the imperial capital, which shows he did not stay there permanently after the completion of his mission. Faustus returned to Italy to participate in the same ecclesiastical controversy that Festus did: the Laurentian Schism. The author of the *Liber Pontificalis* describes Faustus' role in supporting Symmachus when violence broke out in Rome over his reinstatement.⁵³ In addition to the evidence in the *Liber Pontificalis*, Cassiodorus's *Variae* contains many letters sent to Faustus at the behest of Theoderic while working for the government following his return to Italy. Between 507-511, Faustus was involved with matters of finance for the Ostrogothic government, receiving directives concerning tax relief and crop supply in the provinces.⁵⁴ These are a few examples of aspects of government that Theoderic delegated to Faustus Niger in the

⁵² Moreau, 12.57.

⁵³ Louise Ropes Loomis, trans., *The Book of the Popes (Liber Pontificalis)*, (New York: Octagon, 1979), 118-119; Theodorus Mommsen, ed., *Gestorum Pontificum Romanorum Volume 1: Libri Pontificalis* (Berlioni, 1898), in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Gesta Pontificum Romanorum* (München, 1982), LIII.5.

⁵⁴ For tax relief, see Mommsen, "Variae," I.14, and S.J.B. Barnish, trans., *The Variae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), II.38; Mommsen, "Variae," II.38; for crop supply in the provinces, see "Variae," I.34.

decade after his return from Constantinople. Faustus Niger, like his contemporary Festus, continued to work in Italy for the Ostrogothic government well after his embassy to Constantinople. His trip to the imperial capital was temporary in nature, as his long career in Italy shows.

The experiences of both Festus and Faustus at the beginning of Theoderic's reign are the benchmark for the pattern of travels made to Constantinople by the Italian aristocracy throughout the Ostrogothic period. Their careers demonstrate how the Ostrogoths sent Italian aristocrats to Constantinople to act as mediators between themselves and the imperial court. This was a practice that continued throughout the time of Ostrogothic rule in Italy, beyond the outbreak of war in 535. They were trusted enough to manage official affairs under Ostrogothic rule, and regarded in sufficiently good standing with the eastern court to engage in high-level negotiations. However, these embassies were always temporary in nature, and the ambassadors did not remain in Constantinople permanently, as the evidence clearly indicates for the lives of both Festus and Faustus Niger.

The next two case studies involve individuals who traveled to Constantinople later in the reign of Theoderic, whose careers under the Ostrogoths were very similar to their earlier contemporaries Festus and Faustus Niger. They differed where their trips to Constantinople were concerned: these men traveled to the imperial capital for religious, not political reasons. The king sent, among others, two brothers, Flavius Theodorus and Flavius Inportunus, to Constantinople in 525 on a mission to preserve the Arian churches

there.⁵⁵ However, both men were well-established figures among the Italian nobility before this.

The earliest political activity of Theodorus appears in the *Excerpta Valesiana* in the reign of Theoderic, when the king decided to make a change in his administration. “He made Liberius the praetorian prefect, whom he had assigned in the beginning of his reign, a patrician, and provided a successor for him. And Theodorus, son of Basilius, succeeded into the administration of the prefecture.”⁵⁶ His brother, Inportunus, was the subject of two letters in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus, dated between 509-511. In the first, Theoderic bestows the patriciate on him after Inportunus completed his term as consul. The letter goes on to state that becoming a patrician is a great honor for a young man like himself, since typically men attained that rank later on, in old age.⁵⁷ It is clear that both men had similar backgrounds to Festus and Faustus Niger. Both brothers held offices like their older contemporaries. However, the similarities did not end there. Later on in their careers, Theodorus and Inportunus continued the tradition of serving as Ostrogothic ambassadors to Constantinople, albeit in a slightly different capacity than previous embassies.

The author of the *Liber Pontificalis* describes how Justin I inflamed tensions with Theoderic by converting Arian churches to Chalcedonian churches. These developments in Constantinople led Theoderic to send an embassy to Justin, in order to reach a

⁵⁵ Fl. Theodorus: Jones, “Prosopography Volume 2,” 1097-1098, see also Theodorus 12: Pietri, “Prosopographie Volume 2 Part 2,” 2170-2171; Fl. Inportunus: Jones, “Prosopography Volume 2,” 592, see also Fl. Inportunus 1: Pietri, “Prosopographie Volume 2 Part 1,” 1052.

⁵⁶ Moreau, 12.68.

⁵⁷ Mommsen, “Variae,” III.5.5. Mommsen, “Variae,” III.6 also discusses his patriciate.

settlement.⁵⁸ Theodorus and Inportunus traveled as part of a larger group of Italian aristocrats, which accompanied John I, Bishop of Rome, to Constantinople in 525 on behalf of Theoderic for the sake of the Arians in Constantinople.⁵⁹ This was an extremely serious situation that required specific individuals to carry out the king's objectives. Both Theodorus and Importunus were men were of high rank, and as the examples from the late fifth century show, Theoderic had used men of such stature in ambassadorial capacities before. Therefore, these individuals were continuing a long-standing pattern of Theoderic: sending Italians to Constantinople to negotiate with the emperor.

While the embassy was in the city, it was largely successful in convincing the emperor to return the disputed churches to Arian control.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, events in Italy were not going well for other Italians. Even though John and his delegation achieved Theoderic's objectives, conditions in Italy became progressively worse for certain members of the Italian nobility, like Boethius and Symmachus.⁶¹ Like their contemporaries, the members of the delegation faced Theoderic's wrath when they returned from Constantinople, when the Ostrogothic king sentenced them to prison.⁶²

⁵⁸ Loomis, 132-133. Mommsen, "Liber Pontificalis," LV.1-2.

⁵⁹ John Moorhead, "The Decii under Theoderic," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 33 (1984), 107-115; Wolfram, 331-332; Lim, Richard, "Christian Triumph and Controversy," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, & Oleg Grabar. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2001), 196-218; see 209-210.

⁶⁰ Loomis, 112.

⁶¹ Loomis, 133-136; Mommsen, "Liber Pontificalis," LV.3-4. For the latter part of Theoderic's reign, see John Moorhead, "The Last Years of Theoderic," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 32 (1983), 106-120; Claire Sotinel, "Emperors and Popes in the Sixth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 267-290, see page 274.

⁶² Loomis, 136-137; Mommsen, "Liber Pontificalis," LV.6.

Despite falling victim to Theoderic, the trip made by Theodorus, Inportunus, and the others to Constantinople is important because it reveals that when the Italian aristocracy made journeys to Constantinople very late in Theoderic's reign, they were still very temporary in nature. They served the rulers of Italy in the imperial capital on a mission of a religious nature, similar to what Festus and Faustus Niger had done over a quarter century before in a political capacity. However, the evidence shows that they returned to Italy following the completion of their mission.

The final two individuals in this case study, Petrus Marcellinus Felix Liberius and Flavius Rufius Petronius Nichomachus Cethegus, respectively, made their trips to Constantinople at the outbreak and in the middle of the Gothic War. They went to the imperial capital under different circumstances, but both journeys were still part of the tradition of traveling to Constantinople on diplomatic business.

It is important to note that the nature of the relationship between the Italians and the Ostrogoths became more problematic on account of the Gothic War. The situation with the Byzantines also changed, and instead of maintaining past ties with Constantinople on behalf of the Ostrogoths, the Italians begin to advocate for their own self-interest and to serve the emperor instead of the Ostrogothic king.⁶³ Despite the fact that the political circumstances had changed from the days of Theoderic's reign, the reasons for traveling to Constantinople remained the same, with both men traveling to Byzantium on a diplomatic mission. Also, the pattern of returning to Italy remained constant.

⁶³ John Moorhead, "Italian Loyalties during Justinian's Gothic War," *Byzantion* 53 (1983), 575-596. For a discussion of the relationship before the outbreak of the war between the Byzantines and the Ostrogoths, see Frank E. Wozniak, "East Rome, Ravenna, and Western Illyricum: 454-536 A.D.," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 30 (1981), 351-382; see 363-382.

Petrus Marcellinus Felix Liberius had a long and varied term of service with both the Ostrogoths and the Byzantines.⁶⁴ Even before his career with the Ostrogoths, his record goes back to the time of Odovacer, and before Theoderic arrived in Italy. It was because of this service, as well as his devotion to Theoderic's enemy, that Liberius first caught the attention of the Ostrogothic king.⁶⁵ It was not long after this that Theoderic made Liberius his praetorian prefect.⁶⁶ Yet again, Theoderic chose an Italian for a high-ranking position in his government, just as he selected Festus and Faustus Niger for their assignments in Constantinople, as well as their other responsibilities in his government. The circumstances in which Liberius found himself in Constantinople involved another Ostrogothic king, Theodatus, in 534.

Before those events unfolded, Theoderic's heir, Athalaric, died in 534, and his mother Amalasuntha aided her cousin Theodatus in gaining the throne.⁶⁷ Unfortunately for the Ostrogothic queen, Theodatus chose to turn against her. It is at this point that Theodatus sent Liberius and other senators to Constantinople.

[...] Theodatus confined Amalasuntha and kept her under guard. But fearing that by this act he had given offense to the emperor, as actually proved to be the case, he sent some men of the Roman senate, Liberius [...] and certain others, directing them to excuse his conduct to the emperor with all their power by assuring him that Amalasuntha had met no harsh treatment at his hands [...].⁶⁸

In this instance, Theodatus continued a practice that had endured since the earliest days of Theoderic's reign in Italy, just as Liberius followed the monarch's instructions like his

⁶⁴ Petrus Marcellinus Felix Liberius 3: Jones, "Prosopography Volume 2," 677-681, see also Petrus Marcellinus Felix Liberius 4: Pietri, "Prosopographie Volume 2 Part 2," 1298-1301; J.J. O'Donnell, "Liberius the Patrician," *Traditio* 37 (1981), 31-72.

⁶⁵ Mommsen, "Variae," II.16.2-3.

⁶⁶ Mommsen, "Variae," II.16.4.

⁶⁷ Moorhead, "Justinian," 74-76.

⁶⁸ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, trans. H.B. Dewing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), V.iv.15.

predecessors. Even at this time, when the relationship between Ravenna and Constantinople was strained, the Ostrogoths continued to send Italian aristocrats to the imperial capital on diplomatic assignments.

On his way from the capital to Italy, an envoy of the emperor named Peter encountered Liberius on the road to Constantinople.⁶⁹ Procopius states that Liberius explained the troubling situation in Italy. He repeated the tale in Constantinople before the emperor. “When the envoys from Italy arrived in Byzantium, they all, with a single exception, reported the whole matter to the emperor, and especially Liberius; for he was a man unusually upright and honorable, and one who knew well how to show regard for the truth.”⁷⁰ Procopius’s description of Liberius is very similar to that expressed by Cassiodorus’ letter: an honorable man, and one who was extremely capable in executing his duties. Theoderic and Theodatus recognized his value, which is why the latter sent Liberius to Byzantium in a diplomatic capacity.

Instead of returning to Italy right away, like his predecessors, Liberius remained in the emperor’s service. Liberius had an extensive career under Justinian, with his assignments taking him to several different areas of the Mediterranean, including Egypt and Sicily.⁷¹ Eventually he returned to Italy, after remaining abroad for nearly twenty years. The circumstances of his return are recorded in the appendix of one of the emperor’s *Novellae*. This edict was promulgated as a part of the Pragmatic Sanction of 554, which was Justinian’s attempt to bring order to Italy following Gothic War, and to

⁶⁹ Procopius, “Wars,” V.iv.21.

⁷⁰ Procopius, “Wars,” V.iv.23-25.

⁷¹ Liberius in Egypt, see Procopius, *The Anecdota or Secret History*, trans. H.B. Dewing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), xxvii.17-19, xxix.1-12; Liberius in Sicily, see Procopius, “Wars,” VII.xxxix.6-8, VII.xl.12-13, VII.xl.18, VIII.xxiv.1.

conciliate the ecclesiastics and secular aristocrats of the peninsula.⁷² The law confirms property given by three of the Ostrogothic monarchs, Amalasuntha, Athalaric, and Theodatus, as well as by himself and the empress Theodora, into the hands of their possessors. The exception to the law is property that Justinian gave to Liberius.⁷³ It is not clear whether this particular edict had to do with his service to the emperor, or if there was some other reason, but the property might have been a significant reason to entice Liberius to remain in Italy. When he died, he was buried at Ariminum, where his epitaph described various aspects of his government service in the West.⁷⁴

The evidence for Liberius shows that he had the longest career of any of the individuals examined here. He made his trip to Constantinople at a crucial stage in the events surrounding the origins of the Gothic War, and remained in the service of Justinian for nearly two decades afterward. His journey to Byzantium indicates that he was performing a task that had been undertaken many times before by Italian aristocrats: diplomatic work at the eastern court. The reasons Liberius went to Constantinople were consistent with those of Italian aristocrats who traveled there before him. The result of his journey was also the same as his predecessors. He did not settle in Constantinople permanently.

The final individual in this examination, Flavius Rufius Petronius Nichomachus Cethegus, continued the pattern of diplomatic travel to the imperial capital by Italian

⁷² T.S. Brown, 46.

⁷³ Rudolfus Schoell & Guilelmus Kroll, ed., *Corpus Iuris Civilis Volumen Tertium: Novellae* (Berlioni, 1895), Appendix 7.1.

⁷⁴ Oscar Bohn, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum Volume 11* (Berolini: Walter De Gruyter, 1963), no. 382.

aristocrats.⁷⁵ However, long before his trip, Cethegus was already well known in Italy. Ennodius, bishop of Pavia, describes the virtues of Cethegus in his *Paranaesis Didascalica*, in 512. “There is the patrician Cethegus, [...] a consular, who [as] a youth, passing over gray-haired good sense, holds both the flavor of those advanced in years without prejudice, and the honey of boyhood.”⁷⁶ His career is not well known, however, until the siege of Rome in 545.⁷⁷

Procopius describes Cethegus’ activities following his departure from Rome during the Gothic War. “At the time there arose a suspicion of treason among the commanders of the emperor’s army in Rome against Cethegus, a patrician and leader of the Roman senate. For this reason he departed hastily for Centumcellae.”⁷⁸ It is unknown why the imperial officers suspected Cethegus of treason during the siege, or why, under such circumstances he eventually went to Constantinople. However, Procopius’s account does present Cethegus as the head of the Roman Senate, an important and influential figure in this tumultuous period, like Festus in an earlier generation.

It is only after his journey to Centumcellae, that Cethegus finally made his way to Constantinople in 548. The author of the *Liber Pontificalis* describes his arrival. “Then some of the senators, Citheus, Albinus and Basilius, patricians and exconsuls, went to Constantinople and appeared before the emperor in their distress and desolation. And the

⁷⁵ Fl. Rufius Petronius Nicomachus Cethegus: Jones, “Prosopography, Volume 2,” 281-282, see also Fl. Rufius Petronius Nicomachus Cethegus 1: Pietri, “Prosopographie Volume 2 Part 1,” 428-430.

⁷⁶ Rosalba A. Rallo Freni, ed., *La Paranaesis didascalica di Magno Felice Ennodio* (Messina: Casa Editrice G. D’Anna, 1981), VIII.4. For date, see Cethegus in *PLRE* V. 2, 281.

⁷⁷ Moorhead, “Justinian,” 103-104.

⁷⁸ Procopius, “Wars,” VII.xiii.12.

emperor comforted them and enriched them as befitted Roman consuls.”⁷⁹ The fact that Cethegus traveled to Constantinople shows that even under the more dire circumstances of the Gothic War, Italian aristocrats still went to Byzantium on diplomatic business. The only difference between Cethegus and his predecessors was that he did not come at the behest of the Ostrogothic monarch. Other than this detail, the reasons for Cethegus’ journey to Constantinople were not significantly different from those of his predecessors.

It should also be mentioned that the author of the *Liber Pontificalis* makes no mention of the incident during the siege of Rome: surely the emperor would not have looked so kindly on a man that committed treason, as Procopius alleges. Cethegus clearly was on a diplomatic mission to the emperor, as Procopius himself confirms later, in his account of Vigilius’s arrival in Constantinople.

[...] Vigilius, the chief priest of Rome, together with the Italians who were in the city at that time [...] was giving the emperor no respite from his entreaty to stand forth with all his power as champion of Italy. But Justinian was influenced most of all by Gothigus, a man of patrician rank who had long before this time risen to the dignity of the consular office; for he, too, had recently come to Byzantium for this very purpose.⁸⁰

If Cethegus had traveled to Byzantium in order to convince Justinian to conduct the war in Italy more forcefully, then his mission was borne out of Ostrogothic hostility. It is true this situation was a striking departure from the more amicable decades when Italian aristocrats came to Constantinople on diplomatic and religious missions for the Ostrogoths. However, even though the Gothic War changed the circumstances for

⁷⁹ Loomis, 158-159; Mommsen, “*Liber Pontificalis*,” LXI.7. ‘Citheus’ is identified as ‘Cethegus’; see Jones, “*Prosopography Volume 2*,” 281.

⁸⁰ ‘Gothigus’ is identified as ‘Cethegus’; see Jones, “*Prosopography Volume 2*,” 281; Procopius, “*Wars*,” VII.xxxv.9-10.

traveling to Constantinople, Cethegus still followed in the tradition of other Italian aristocrats acting as diplomatic agents to the eastern court.

In addition to his activities concerning the war, Cethegus also participated in the Three Chapters controversy during his time in Constantinople, along with other individuals from Italy, notably the bishop of Rome, Vigilius.⁸¹ Cethegus' involvement in this dispute provides a unique opportunity to understand what type of activity an Italian aristocrat engaged in during his stay in Constantinople, and indicates that Cethegus' stay in Constantinople may have lasted for some time. However, his stay was still not permanent, like his other contemporaries.

Justinian worked to condemn certain works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ibas of Edessa, and Theodoret of Cyrus, and while this eventually brought about the Fifth Ecumenical Council, he also ordered Vigilius, the bishop of Rome, to come to Constantinople in order to condemn the three bishops. His goal was to force Vigilius into agreeing with his own interpretation of the Council of Chalcedon, in order to reconcile the Monophysites with their Chalcedonian opponents and bring religious unity to the empire, and he had no qualms about using violence against the bishop of Rome to achieve his aims.⁸² In his earliest appearance in the controversy, Cethegus stood as a witness for Vigilius, as the bishop swore to condemn the works in dispute.

The most blessed Vigilius promised under oath to the most pious lord, the emperor, in our presence, that is, to me, [...] Cethegus the patrician, by the virtue of the holy nails by which our Lord God Jesus Christ was crucified, and by the four holy gospels [...] of like spirit, of like desire, to destroy, to try, [...] to act, as

⁸¹ Richards, 139-161; Sotinel, 282-284. Sotinel suggests the reasons for Vigilius' departure from Rome to Constantinople via Sicily are unclear.

⁸² Francis Dvornik, "Emperors, Popes, and General Councils," *DOP* 6 (1951), 1-23; see 21; Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 121-125; Moorhead, "Justinian," 124-125; Peter Brown, "Rise of Western Christendom," 183-184.

much as we are able, so that those three chapters, that is, Theodore of Mopsuestia with his writings, and the letter which was delivered by Ibas, and the depositions of Theodoret against the orthodox faith and against the twelve chapters pronounced by holy Cyril, may be condemned and anathematized. [...] Flavius Cethegus, the patrician, signing as a witness, attests to this document.⁸³

Just as Procopius describes how Cethegus was an influential voice about the war in Italy, the fact that he was responsible for such a serious declaration involving the bishop of Rome also shows how he involved himself in far more than military affairs. The oath of Vigilius, however, did not signal the end of his work on the matter. Cethegus continued to press the bishop of Rome regarding the Three Chapters, with the help of others.

The holy synod said: [...] we came to the most blessed [...] Vigilius, together with the most glorious patricians Belisarius, Cethegus, and Rusticus; and [...] we came a second time to the same blessed man [...]. Now on both days we stated the response from the most pious lord, that is, so that he might come to an agreement with us concerning everything, and so that he might consider the three chapters, by speaking against those who want a pledge of security, with the result that, by common agreement, he accepted the goal of everyone, for the sake of the three chapters.⁸⁴

It is not absolutely clear if Cethegus was a leading figure in the negotiations or not, since he appeared only a few times in the record of the Three Chapters controversy. Many individuals took part in the events surrounding the issue, especially in the task of convincing the bishop of Rome to condemn the suspect documents. However, his presence at the discussions with Vigilius in the above passage, when added to his advocacy for the war in Italy, indicates that Cethegus was extremely active following his journey to Constantinople, and moved in the highest political and religious circles.

After remaining in Constantinople for most of the 550s, Cethegus ultimately returned to the west, and lived in Sicily. The only remaining evidence for his activities

⁸³ J.D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, Tomus 9 (Florence, 1763), IX.363-364.

⁸⁴ Mansi, IX.197.

following his return are letters from Pelagius I, bishop of Rome, over two particular matters: the episcopal elections in Catania and Syracuse. Cethegus supported the elevation of a Catanian deacon, Helpidius, to the see in Catania.⁸⁵ In addition, while aiding in the election of Eleutherius as bishop of Syracuse, he was involved in guaranteeing the property of the Syracusan church against acquisition by members of the new bishop's family.⁸⁶ Like many of his earlier contemporaries discussed above, Cethegus was seriously engaged in the religious issues of the time, well after he returned from his journey to Constantinople.

Cethegus' journey to Byzantium is another case of an Italian aristocrat traveling to Constantinople for diplomatic purposes. Only the circumstances are different: Cethegus undertook his trip while the Gothic War was ongoing, unlike his other contemporaries. While he was in Constantinople he did participate in negotiations surrounding the Three Chapters controversy, in which he proved a tough and capable advocate. Despite his successes in Constantinople, he did not remain there. He chose to return west, and live out his remaining days in Sicily. Even though he did not return to Rome, it is clear that Constantinople was not enough of an attraction to remain there permanently.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to examine the various frameworks used in understanding what happened to the Italian aristocracy at the end of Late Antiquity, and

⁸⁵ Philippus Jaffé, ed., *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum, Tomus Primus* (Lipsiae: Veit et Comp. 1888), No. 982, 992.

⁸⁶ Jaffé, No. 992, 1003.

analyze their validity from an empirical standpoint. Both the disappearance/emigration school and the transformation school assert different answers to this question. However, the emigration school requires a large amount of positive evidence to show Italian aristocrats moved to Constantinople and remained there permanently in order to be a valid hypothesis. The presence of one confirmed emigrant, Rusticana, is not enough to prove that mass amounts of Italian aristocrats left Italy for the imperial capital.

After examining the entries of individuals in the *PLRE* and the *PCBE*, it is clear that the majority of the 22 journeys undertaken by members of the senatorial aristocracy to Constantinople between 493 and 600 consisted of some sort of temporary business, usually diplomatic or religious in nature, and did not involve permanent settlement. The journeys of Festus and Faustus Niger in the 490s, as well as that of Liberius in 534 attest to this particular pattern: the Ostrogoths and the Byzantines needed to discuss matters of great political significance, such as Theoderic's recognition as king, and the treatment of Amalasuntha. Religious reasons were also preeminent for traveling to Constantinople, as Theodorus and Inportunus show when they escorted John I to the capital in 525: Theoderic was concerned for the welfare of Arians in Constantinople. Liberius' trip on the eve of hostilities between the Ostrogoths and the Byzantines was a diplomatic move on the part of Theodatus. Even after the outbreak of the Gothic War in 535, diplomatic trips remained the most prominent reason for traveling to Constantinople. Cethegus, among others, made the trip for this reason, seeking the favor of Justinian during the conflict with the Ostrogoths. Despite the fact that his journey took place in more the more difficult times of the war, Cethegus did return West: he did not permanently settle in Constantinople.

Through the journeys of these men, as described above, it is possible to see how the emigration thesis does not hold up under scrutiny, and these case studies show that despite the wide variety of reasons Italian aristocrats made the trip to Constantinople over the course of late fifth and sixth centuries, they ultimately decided to leave the eastern capital and return West. The case studies examined here were chosen because the experiences of these six individuals touch on a larger issue that occurs in the sixth century: the fate of the Roman aristocracy. Since they were not relocating to Constantinople, it is more likely that the Roman aristocracy was transformed from a politically and socially powerful group into a marginalized one on account of the rise of the Byzantines and Lombards. Since there is little evidence which demonstrates permanent settlement in Constantinople, the most logical argument for the fate of the Italian aristocracy must deal with their transformation in Italy, and it is in Italy that subsequent research on this subject should be directed.

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Appendix--Data

Name in PLRE (Volume No./Page No.)

Fl. Rufius Postumius Festus 5 (2/467-469)
 Fl. Anicius Probus Faustus Iunior Niger 9 (2/454-456)
 Irenaeus 4 (2/625)
 Senarius (2/988-989)
 Fl. Theodorus (2/1097-1098)
 Agapitus 2 (2/30)
 Agapitus 3 (2/30-32)
 Fl. Inportunus (2/592)
 Petrus Marcellinus Felix Liberius 3 (2/677-681)
 Opilio 4 (2/808)
 Vigilius 4 (2/1166)
 Agapitus 1(3A/23)
 Fl. Anicius Faustus Albinus Basilius 3 (3A/174-175)
 Fl. Rufius Petronius Nicomachus Cethegus (2/281-282)
 Decius 1 (3A/391)
 Rusticius 2 (3B/1102-1103)
 Pamphronius (3B/962-963)
 Gregorius 5 (3A/549-551)
 Paulinus 12 (2/847-848)
 Marcellinus 3 (3A/812-813)
 Symmachus 4 (3B/1213)

Name in PCBE (Volume No./Part No./Page No.)

Travel

Festus 2 (2/1/812-814)	Diplomatic
Fl. Anicius Probus Faustus Iunior Niger 4 (2/1/756-759)	Diplomatic
NA	Diplomatic
Senarius (2/2/2020-2021)	Diplomatic
Theodorus (2/2/2170-2171)	Diplomatic
Agapitus 14 (2/1/47-48)	Diplomatic
Agapitus 13 (2/1/46-47)	Diplomatic
Fl. Inportunus 1 (2/1/1052)	Diplomatic
Petrus Marcellinus Felix Liberius 4 (2/2/1298-1301)	Diplomatic
Opilio 3 (2/2/1556-1557)	Diplomatic
Vigilius 6 (2/2/2298-2299)	Diplomatic

NA	Diplomatic
Fl. Anicius Faustus Albinus Basilius Iunior 14 (2/1/266)	Diplomatic
Fl. Rufius Petronius Nicomachus Cethegus 1 (2/1/428-430)	Diplomatic
NA	Diplomatic
Rusticus 11 (2/2/1956-1959)	Diplomatic
NA	Diplomatic
Gregorius 9 (2/1/945-949)	Diplomatic
Paulinus 18 (2/2/1664-1665)	Correspondence
NA	Correspondence
Symmachus 9 (2/2/2147)	Correspondence