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The Roman Empire as a paradigm in politics and literature

This thematic issue is not simply about political appropriations of Rome and its empire in later times (e. g. Byzantium as a New Rome, the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, the US as the final goal of the *translatio imperii* from the East to the West, etc.). Instead, it is dedicated to the role specific paradigmatic patterns related to the Roman Empire played in political imaginaries and literature. It starts with two articles dedicated to imperial themes and *topoi* in Augustan poetry. Francesca Boldrer (“*Qua maxima Roma est: Properzio, il principato augusteo e le trasformazioni dell’elegia romana*”) shows how the Augustan principate influenced the elegy as a poetic genre that had come into prominence during the last decades of the Republic and, within the inner development of Propertius’ elegy, assumed a more specifically aetiological character, thus opening up an intriguing dialogue between elegy and Augustan politics. Elisabetta Pitotto (“Potere imperiale romano e strumenti eulogistici greci: Virgilio, *Eneide*, VI 860-886 e Orazio, *Odi*, IV 2 come casi di studio”) enquires into celebratory themes and *topoi* as an element of Augustan poetry that is at the heart of an emerging new era of Roman literature. She shows that, in accordance with the classicizing tendency of the period, the two poets do not limit themselves to imitating the celebratory patterns of their Hellenistic precedents, but creatively rework traditions that go back as far as to Ibycus, the court poet of Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos, in the 6th century BC.

Paolo Di Benedetto (“Costruire e ri-costruire la storia e l’identità d’Asia in età imperiale: le Amazzoni in Ionia e in Eolide”) offers an exciting insight into the cultural self-understanding of Greeks under Roman rule. Specifically, the myth of the Amazons, who in the Greek collective imagination represented the “Other”, was revived in Greek cities of Asia Minor as a foundation myth reaffirming the cultural identity of the Greeks, their antiquity and “priority”.

Two contributions are dedicated to “paradigmatic” Rome as seen through the eyes of Christian authors. David Movrin (“He is Human, Too”: The Empire and Its Emperors in Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii*”) takes up a telling detail from Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii*, where the hermit saint is corresponding with Constantine, Constantius and Constans. While Eusebius had presented the emperor as a sort of a bishop, the Greek *Vita Antonii* offers a different image of the secular ruler; its author seems to be sceptical of imperial power and looks for a spiritual alternative to earthly rule. Movrin shows that Sulpicius



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Severus followed this pattern in his *Vita Martini*. Matej Petrič (“Krščanski imperij in cerkvena zgodovina: primer Rufina iz Akvileje”, “Christian Empire and Church History: The Case of Rufinus of Aquileia”) deals with another creative response to Eusebius, the appendix on the events of 325–395 that Rufinus of Aquileia added to his Latin translation of Eusebius’ *Church History*. Rufinus departed from Eusebius’ idea of Church history as a serious, impartial historiographic genre by privileging oral sources and replacing documentary material with accounts of miraculous events.

The next section is dedicated to the reception of the Roman Empire and of Roman ideas on empire in modern political thought. As Gregor Pobežin (“Sallust and Jean Bodin: the Inevitable Loss of the Commonwealth”) demonstrates, Jean Bodin, a prominent political thinker of 16th century France, comparable in resonance to Leonardo Bruni and Niccolò Machiavelli, followed a number of his contemporaries in his admiration for Sallust, who was then read as a theoretician of sedition and a world in turmoil. As Pobežin shows, however, there are little grounds in Sallust for Bodin’s legal and historical framing of absolutist sovereignty. Brane Senegačnik’s contribution (“La via romana e la possibilità di un’identità culturale aperta”) is a reappraisal of *Europe, la voie romaine* by the French philosopher Rémi Brague (1992), who argued that the essential trait of the Roman Empire that determined the evolution of European culture was its “eccentricity”, the reliance of its identity on foreign sources. This pattern, as Senegačnik suggests following Leszek Kołakowski, might seem viable in real history as far as it is based on a minimal common denominator of cultural identity and on universal anthropological realities, which are transcendent in nature.

In her article (“Kleopatra, Imperialismus und Orientalismus: Ungezähmte Orientalin, tapfere Herrscherin oder elegische Herrin?”), Darja Šterbenc Erker traces the origins of the image of Cleopatra as *femme fatale* to her role as an anti-paradigm in Octavian’s propaganda war against Mark Antony. She explains the ways in which the complexities of the image of the Oriental queen as presented in Propertius, Virgil and others was diluted when the historical character, transformed through the lens of Western imperialism and Orientalism, entered film and popular culture in the 20th century.

The initiative for this collection of papers originated in the research project “Empire and Transformation of Genre in Roman Literature”, funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (J6-2585). A live conference on the topic was planned for 2021 but had to be called off for obvious reasons. In spite of this, the virtual exchange of ideas between the contributors amounted to forming an *ad hoc* research group that is supposed to come together again, in person, at a forthcoming international event.