

1 | From Rome to Constantinople*

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The transfer of an imperial capital seems a drastic step, but conceptually simple. Indeed, we know about capitals. They are permanent, having been there if not forever, then for many centuries: London, Paris and Lisbon, for instance. Others, such as Washington, DC, and Brasilia, have been created in more recent periods. They could be transferred from one city to another, as in the case of Bonn and Berlin, St Petersburg and Moscow. Or things may be a little more ambiguous: Amsterdam is capital of the Netherlands, but The Hague (‘s Gravenhage) is seat of the government and, most of the time but not always as a matter of principle, royal residence. In the case of Rome, things are even more complicated.

Rome was no state; it was no people; it was not the capital of an Empire. It was a city, but it was also far more than that. Rome *was* the Empire, and that is what it remained until the fifteenth century, for the Byzantine Empire is a modern appellation. Those we often call ‘the Byzantines’ called themselves citizens of the Roman Empire, and the Byzantine Emperors were called Roman Emperors until the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century.¹ In its classical age there was hardly a straightforward name

* This chapter is based on a lecture in honour of the late Martin Ostwald, given on 26 May 2015. Martin was a great scholar, a generous friend of many, and a regular visitor whose contribution to ancient history at Tel Aviv University is recalled here with profound gratitude. I am grateful to Joan Lessing and Jonathan Price for inviting me to speak in memory of Martin. This is also a fitting occasion to express my deep appreciation of the fact that I was elected to act as Fred & Helen Lessing Professor of Ancient History from 1995 until 2015, successor to Zvi Yavetz, a fine scholar and excellent friend. It has been an honour and a pleasure to be allowed to submit this paper as part of the proceedings of a remarkable conference organized by Margalit Finkelberg, Aharon Oppenheimer, Jonathan Price and Yuval Shahar at Tel Aviv University on 26 and 27 May 2015. I am grateful to my colleagues Avi Laniado and Yuval Shahar for useful suggestions and references.

¹ Mango, 1980: 1: ‘The Byzantine Empire, as defined by the majority of historians, is said to have come into being when the city of Constantinople, the New Rome, was founded in 324 AD . . . As for the epithet ‘Byzantine,’ serious objections could be and have often been raised concerning its appropriateness. For better or for worse, this term has, however, prevailed . . . In reality, of course, there never existed such an entity as the Byzantine Empire.’

for the Roman state, for *civitas* was a fluid term that could simply indicate any tribe or city, but could also refer to its citizens. The expression that most often is used for the 'Roman state' in Latin is *nomen Romanum*, the Roman name. It indicated all that was Rome: the people, the state, the Empire and its reputation.

Cicero is the first to use this term frequently: 'For so great is the dignity of this empire, so great is the honour in which the Roman name is held among all nations.'² Here it can still be interpreted as merely a term for 'reputation'. That is no longer the case when Cicero says: 'Who has such a hatred, one might almost say for the Roman name, as to despise and reject the *Medea* of Ennius or the *Antiope* of Pacuvius, and give as his reason that though he enjoys the corresponding plays of Euripides he cannot endure books written in Latin?'³ Another clear instance is: 'Plans have been formed in this state, O judges, for destroying the city, for massacring the citizens, for extinguishing the Roman name.'⁴ Here *civitas*, *urbs*, *cives* and *nomen Romanum* are used in one and the same sentence in four different meanings, all designating essential aspects of Rome.⁵ The expression *nomen Romanum* occurs quite frequently in Augustan literature, notably in the work of Livy, where I count more than twenty instances. It is found again in phrases that may indicate 'the Roman reputation' or 'fame',⁶ but also in the sense of 'power': 'Go, and with the help of the gods, restore the unconquerable Roman name!'⁷ It is encountered frequently as well as a term for 'the Roman people': 'But, they added, the immortal gods, taking pity upon the Roman name [i.e. the people], had spared the innocent armies.'⁸ It can be used in a more abstract sense for 'the existence' or 'identity' of Rome: 'the Volsci, their ancient foes, had armed for the purpose of extinguishing the Roman

² Cic. *Ver.* 2.5.150: *tanta enim huius imperi amplitudo, tanta nominis Romani dignitas est apud omnes nationes ut ista in nostros homines crudelitas nemini concessa esse videatur.*

³ Cic. *Fin.* 1.4.6: *quis enim tam inimicus paene nomini Romano est, qui Ennii Medeam aut Antiopeam Pacuvii spernat aut reiciat, quod se isdem Euripidis fabulis delectari dicat, Latinas litteras oderit?*

⁴ Cic. *Mur.* 80.6: *Inita sunt in hac civitate consilia, iudices, urbis delendae, civium trucidandorum, nominis Romani extinguendi.*

⁵ See also Cic., *Phil.* 2.20.13

⁶ E.g., Livy 4.33.5: *nominis Romani ac uirtutis patrum uestraeque memores*; 10.36.12: *numen etiam deorum respexisse nomen Romanum uisum*; 35.58.5; also, in a similar sense: Tac. *Ann.* 4.24.6.

⁷ Livy 7.10.4: *perge et nomen Romanum inuictum iuuantibus dis praesta*; also: 25.38.10.

⁸ Livy 27.33.12 (208 BC, senators speaking): *ceterum deos immortales, miseritos nominis Romani, pepercisse innoxii exercitibus*. Also: 10.11.12. Similarly: Sall. *Cat.* 52.24; Plin. *NH* 17.2.2; Nepos, *Vit. Han.* 7.3.

name.⁹ In the fourth century the Isaurians are described as inhabiting a region ‘in the middle of “the Roman name”’.¹⁰ Here, of course, it refers to the Roman Empire in a territorial sense.

All the same it is telling that there was no more concrete term for the Roman state or the Empire. Rome was eternal, of course.¹¹ It still is. However, nowadays we think of Rome as a city being eternal. Cicero, when he called Rome eternal, thought of the Roman Empire being eternal, but he never distinguished between city and Empire.¹²

And yet, the capital of the Empire was transferred from Rome to Constantinople in the fourth century. That might seem a conceptual impossibility, but it happened. It was part of a major eastward shift of power, economic and military. That, however, is not the subject of this short chapter, which discusses the historical background to the transformation of the city of Byzantium into Constantinople.

When this happened there had been in fact a tradition of about four centuries suggesting that it might occur. There was a rumour to that effect at the time of the rule of Julius Caesar:

Nay, more, the report had spread in various quarters that he intended to move to Ilium or Alexandria, taking with him the resources of the state, draining Italy by levies, and leaving the charge of the city to his friends.¹³

The fact that there was such a rumour does not mean, of course, that Caesar actually contemplated it, but it proves that the idea, or rather the fear, existed. It was thinkable to transfer the essence of what was the city of Rome to another city.

The second case arose not long after Caesar’s death: few stories are as familiar as that of Antony and Cleopatra, at least in one seventeenth-century version. There were rumours among the Romans that Antony, if victorious, intended to bestow their city upon Cleopatra and transfer the seat of power to Egypt.¹⁴ Here we might notice already that the element of

⁹ Livy 6.2.2: *hinc Uolsci, ueteres hostes, ad extinguendum nomen Romanum arma ceperant*; also: 6.17.4; 23.26.3. Sall. *Iug.* 58.3.3.

¹⁰ HA *Tir. Tryg.* 26: *in medio Romani nominis solo regio eorum*.

¹¹ See my paper ‘Roma Aeterna’ in Isaac 2017.

¹² For a different emphasis: van Dam 2010: Ch. 1.

¹³ Suet. *Iul.* 79.5: *Quin etiam varia fama percubuit migraturum Alexandream vel Ilium, translatis simul opibus imperii exhaustaque Italia dilectibus et procuratione urbis amicis permissa*. Also: Nic. Dam. *Life of Augustus* 20: ‘Some said that he had decided to establish a capital of the whole empire in Egypt, and that Queen Cleopatra had lain with him and borne him a son, named Cyrus, there. This he himself refuted in his will as false. Others said that he was going to do the same thing at Troy, on account of his ancient connection with the Trojan people.’

¹⁴ Dio 50.4.1; Nic. Dam. *Life of Augustus* 68.

an East–West antagonism is clearly perceived, an antagonism which ultimately, more than four centuries later, led to the division of the Empire into an eastern and a western half. It is remarkable to note that Horace was worried when Augustus financed buildings in Ilium.

Yet, warlike Roman, know thy doom,
 Nor, drunken with a conqueror's joy,
 Or blind with duteous zeal, presume
 To build again ancestral Troy.
 Should Troy revive to hateful life,
 Her star again should set in gore.¹⁵

Rumours like those in the times of Caesar and Antony were spread as well during the reign of Caligula (AD 38–41):

and within four months he perished, having dared great crimes and meditating still greater ones. For he had made up his mind to move to Antium, and later to Alexandria, after first slaying the noblest members of the two orders.¹⁶

Again, in the reign of Nero, in 68, there were reports that Nero planned to kill the senators, burn down the city and sail to Alexandria.¹⁷ At a less sensational level Tacitus reports what Nero actually did: 'Eager to make a brilliant name as learned and eloquent, Nero successfully backed Ilium's application to be exempted from all public burdens, fluently recalling the descent of Rome from Troy and of the Julii from Aeneas and other more or less mythical traditions.'¹⁸

In the early third century, after the death of Septimius Severus there is said to have been a plan to divide the Empire into two parts, the West going to Caracalla with Rome as capital; the Propontis would serve as boundary and Byzantium as military frontier city. Geta, the younger son, would obtain the East with Antioch or Alexandria as capital and Chalcedon as frontier city.¹⁹

There was then a definite anxiety concerning the central role of Rome as the essence of its Empire attested from the early years of the principate

¹⁵ Hor. *Carm.* 3.3 (trans. John Conington): *sed bellicosus fata Quiritibus | hac lege dico, ne nimium pii | rebusque fidentes avitae | tecta velint reparare Troiae. Troiae renascens alite lugubri | fortuna tristi clade iterabitur | ducente victrices catervas | coniuge me Iovis et sorore.*

¹⁶ Suet. *Cal.* 49.2.5: *intraque quartum mensem periit, ingentia facinora ausus et aliquanto maiora moliens, siquidem proposuerat Antium, deinde Alexandream commigrare interempto prius utriusque ordinis electissimo quoque.*

¹⁷ Dio, *Ep.* 63.27.2. ¹⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 12.58.1.

¹⁹ Hdn. 4.3.4–9. Caracalla visited the Troad in 214: Dio 77.16.7. Unlike other senior Romans he identified with the Greek side in the Trojan conflict. He dedicated a bronze statue to Achilles and honoured him with sacrifices; he also had his freedman Festus cremated there, with a great *tumulus* constructed over his bones, in imitation of the burial of Patroklos.

onward. In most cases these rumours focused on rulers who were hated (or slandered) in particular and who died a violent death: Antony, Caligula, Nero, but not, for instance, Augustus or Claudius. At another level, Tacitus' observation has been quoted often:

Welcome as the death of Nero had been in the first burst of joy, yet it had not only roused various emotions in Rome, among the Senators, the people, or the soldiery of the capital, it had also excited all the legions and their generals; for now had been divulged that secret of the empire, that emperors could be made elsewhere than at Rome.²⁰

For clarification of these long-standing ideas about the place of Rome within the empire, we might recognize traditions about the origins of the city of Rome in the far distant past. The foundation myths of Rome emphasized a Trojan origin, most famously celebrated by Vergil in the reign of Augustus, but already attested in poetry of the third–second centuries BC.²¹ Not only Rome but the house of Caesar also claimed to be of Trojan origin.

Well before the reign of Augustus, in the days of the republic, Troy already played a special role as the ancestral home of the Romans. Pyrrhus, who claimed to be a descendant of Achilles, regarded this tradition as an indication that he would defeat Rome, a Trojan colony.²² Scipio Africanus visited Troy in 190 BC, emphasizing that the Romans were descendants of the Trojans.²³ A century afterward, Sulla honoured the city. Subsequently, Caesar visited it:

Then marvelling at their ancient fame, he seeks / Sigeum's sandy beach and Simois' stream, / Rhoeteum noble for its Grecian tomb, / And all the hero's shades, the theme of song. / Next by the town of Troy burnt down of old / Now but a memorable name, he turns / His steps, and searches for the mighty stones / Relics of Phoebus' wall.²⁴

²⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 1.4: *finis Neronis ut laetus primo gaudentium impetu fuerat, ita varios motus animorum non modo in urbe apud patres aut populum aut urbanum militem, sed omnes legiones ducesque conciverat, evulgato imperii arcano posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri.*

²¹ In *Enn. Ann.* (Ennius c. 239 BC–c. 169 BC), cf. Fabrizi 2012. It is also found in *Plut. Rom.* 1.1.7 where it is asserted that the city was named after Roma, a woman among the refugees from Troy (cf. *Aeneid* 5.604–99).

²² Paus. 1.12.1. For an account of the development of the tradition of Rome's Trojan origins: Gruen 1992: 6–51.

²³ *Livy* 37.37. It could be argued that Livy, writing in the age of Augustus, invented this statement attributed to Scipio. However, this is not a very likely assumption and, clearly, Scipio's visit was a recorded fact for which no other motive can easily be advanced.

²⁴ *Luc. Phars.* 9.964–99 (trans. Ridley): *Sigeasque petit famae mirator harenas et Simoentis aquas et Graio nobile busto Rhoetion et multum debentis uatibus umbras. circumit exustae nomen memorabile Troiae magnaue Phoebae quaerit uestigia muri.* Cf. Sage 2000: 211–32.

Augustus visited Troy,²⁵ and afterward Claudius again honoured the city in a manner typical of the astute, but somewhat pedantic historian that he was.

He allowed the people of Ilium perpetual exemption from tribute, on the ground that they were the founders of the Roman people, reading an ancient letter of the senate and people of Rome written in Greek to king Seleucus, in which they promised him their friendship and alliance only on condition that he should keep their kinsfolk of Ilium free from every burden.²⁶

It will be clear from this little survey that there are two kinds of reports: those concerning historical leaders who were regarded as bad news and who are described as intending to abandon Rome and move power eastward. Then there are the more responsible characters who are reported as having merely paid their respect to the old city of Roman origins.

The rumours did not disappear. In the third–fourth centuries the Christian author Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325) predicted that what previously wicked rulers had only planned eventually and inevitably would happen in fact.²⁷

The cause of this destruction will be that the Roman Empire which now rules all the earth – it is a terrible thing to say, but I will say it because it will happen – that the Roman Empire will be destroyed and that power will return to Asia, that the Orient will rule and the West will be reduced to slavery.

²⁵ Dio 54.7: Augustus visited when he was in the area in 20 BC. See Frisch 1975: 83: Augustus stayed in the house of a leading citizen, Melanippides son of Euthydikos. Following his visit, he financed the restoration and rebuilding of the sanctuary of Athena Ilias, the *bouleuterion*, and the theatre. After work on the theatre was completed in 12/11 BC, Melanippides dedicated a statue of Augustus in the theatre to record this benefaction.

²⁶ Suet. *Claud.* 25.3: *Iliensibus quasi Romanae gentis auctoribus tributa in perpetuum remisit recitata uetere epistula Graeca senatus populi que R. Seleuco regi amicitiam et societatem ita demum pollicentis, si consanguineos suos Ilienses ab omni onere immunes praestitisset.*

²⁷ Lactant. *Div. Inst.* 7.15.11: *Cujus vastitatis et confusionis haec erit causa, quod Romanum nomen, quo nunc regitur orbis (horret animus dicere: sed dicam, quia futurum est) tolletur de terra, et imperium in Asiam revertetur, ac rursus Oriens dominabitur, atque Occidens seruiet.* For this passage, see also Olbrich 2006: 488–9 with note 31. Olbrich sees this passage as referring to the end of the city of Rome and suggests that such predictions led to the transfer of the capital of the Empire. If Rome, the city, would fall, the Empire would continue to exist if Rome was no longer the capital. I do not find this likely. Myth and solemn predictions seem a frivolous reason for the transfer of an imperial capital. More specifically, *nomen Romanum* can hardly refer to the city as such, and the somber tone of the passage does not suggest that the transfer of the capital is the subject of the prediction. Similarly I find Olbrich's interpretation of *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.1 (of 17 December 320) rather speculative. I am not persuaded by the argument that Constantinople was founded out of fear for the end of the city of Rome – with the end of the Empire as a concomitant result – and that oracles and myth played a central role in defining an ideology which steered Constantine's decisions (Olbrich 2006: 490–1).

We may note, incidentally, that Lactantius was close to Constantine. It will be appropriate here to refer to a text written more than four hundred years earlier, namely Polybius' *History*, where he recalls Scipio Aemilianus' famous tears at the destruction of Carthage.²⁸ Scipio is said to have mentioned the fall of earlier empires and then, crying, to have quoted, 'The day shall be when holy Troy shall fall and Priam, lord of spears, and Priam's folk.'²⁹ When asked 'what he meant by these words, he did not name Rome distinctly, but was evidently fearing for her, from this sight of the mutability of human affairs'.³⁰ Thus we find ruminations about the end of Rome in two authors as far apart as Polybius and Lactantius. Rome may fall one day like Troy in the past, besides other empires – the ones mentioned by Scipio, according to Polybius, are mostly in the East: Assyrians, Medes, Persians, besides Macedonia. The explicit idea that power will return to the Orient did not occur, of course, to Polybius, who wrote before Rome conquered the Near East. The idea of an east-west clash developed after Rome expanded farther east, to Anatolia, Syria and Egypt.

Eventually it happened. In 330 Constantine founded Constantinople.³¹ Yet there are reports that the choice of Byzantium for the purpose had been far from certain. There were rumours that the first location had been closer to the traditional location of Roman origin, namely at Troy. We see this in Zosimus (c. 500):

Since he could not bear to be blamed, so to say, by everybody, he sought a city which could be a counterweight to Rome and where he had to build a palace. When he found himself between Sigeion in the Troad and ancient Iliion he found a suitable place to build a city. He laid the foundations and built part of the wall, high enough so that those who sail to the Hellespont even today can see it. However, he changed his plans, left this project unfinished and went to Byzantium.³²

²⁸ On this passage, see Momigliano 1975: 22–3: 'How many tear-drops are implied in the simple Greek word ἐδάκρυν "he wept"?'

²⁹ Polyb. 38.22: ἔσσεται ἡμᾶρ ὅταν ποτ' ὀλώλη Ἴλιος ἱρή καὶ Πρίαμος καὶ λαὸς ἑμμελίω Πριάμοιο. φασὶν οὐ φυλαξάμενον ὀνομάσαι τὴν πατρίδα σαφῶς, ὑπὲρ ἧς ἄρα ἐς ἀνθρώπεια ἀφορῶν ἐδεδῖει.

³¹ Olbrich 2006: 483–509; Melville-Jones 2014: 247–62.

³² Zos. 2.30.1: Οὐκ ἐνεγκῶν δὲ τὰς παρὰ πάντων ὡς εἰπεῖν βλασφημίας πόλιν ἀντίρροπον τῆς Ῥώμης ἐζήτει, καθ' ἣν αὐτὸν ἔδει βασιλεία καταστήσασθαι· γενόμενος δὲ Τρωάδος μεταξύ <Σιγείου> καὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἰλίου καὶ τόπον εὐρὼν εἰς πόλεως κατασκευὴν ἐπιτήδειον, θεμελίου τε ἐπήξατο καὶ τείχους τι μέρος εἰς ὕψος ἀνέστησεν, ὅπερ ἄχρι τοῦδε ὄραν ἔνεστι τοῖς ἐπὶ τὸν Ἑλλάσποντον πλέουσιν· ἐλθῶν δὲ εἰς μετὰμελον καὶ ἀτελὲς τὸ ἔργον καταλιπὼν ἐπὶ τὸ Βυζάντιον ἦει. Also: Zonar. 13.3.1ff., who asserts that Constantine began to build his city on the promontory of Sigeum before he decided that it was going to be Byzantium.

Also, extensively in Sozomen (400–50):

The Emperor [Constantine] always intent on the advancement of religion erected splendid Christian temples to God in every place – especially in great cities such as Nicomedia in Bithynia, Antioch on the Orontes, and Byzantium. He greatly improved this latter city, and made it equal to Rome in power and influence; for when he had settled his empire as he was minded, and had freed himself from foreign foes, he resolved on founding a city which should be called by his own name, and should equal in fame even Rome. With this intent he went to the plain at the foot of Troy on the Hellespont, above the tomb of Ajax, where, it is said, the Achaians entrenched themselves when besieging Troy; and there he laid out the plan of a large and beautiful city, and built gates on a high spot of ground, whence they are still visible from the sea to mariners. But when he had proceeded thus far, God appeared to him by night and bade him seek another site for his city. [Trans. Edward Walford (Bohn)]³³

Constantine is reported first to have thought of Serdica (Sofia),³⁴ Chalcedon³⁵ and perhaps even Thessaloniki. It is probably significant that the two really major cities of the East are not mentioned: Antioch and Alexandria. There is disagreement about the historical truth of these reports, but the least that can be said is that they reflect an idea that had been around for over almost four centuries.

In this connection it is important – as has been observed frequently – that in the third century the emperors frequently resided for long periods in various cities. According to Herodian, referring to the second century, ‘Rome is wherever the Emperor is’ (addressed to Commodus).³⁶ Diocletian, Maximian and the other tetrarchs instead travelled between – and resided in – a series of smaller but still sizable cities nearer the frontiers, which were aggrandized with major public building projects such as palaces and hippodromes (often side by side as though they were little Romes), basilicas and baths: these included Trier, Milan, and Aquileia in the west; Spalato, Sirmium, Thessalonica and Serdica in the Balkans; Nicomedia and

³³ Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 2.3.2: ἔγνωκεν οἰκίσει πόλιν ὁμώνυμον ἑαυτῷ καὶ τῇ Ῥώμῃ ὁμότιμον. καταλαβὼν δὲ τὸ πρὸ τοῦ Ἰλίου πεδίου παρὰ τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον ὑπὲρ τὸν Αἴαντος τάφον, οὐ δὴ λέγεται τὸν ναύσταθμον καὶ τὰς σκηνὰς ἐσχηκέναι τοὺς ἐπὶ Τροίαν ποτὲ στρατευσαμένους Ἀχαιοὺς, οἷαν ἔχρην καὶ ὅσῃν τὴν πόλιν διέγραψε. Sozomenus thus emphasizes the original Christian nature of the project and the dominant element of Constantine’s enormous personal ambition. Neither must be accepted without question.

³⁴ Dio Continuatus, frg. 15 (*FHG* 4: 199); Zonar. 13.3.1–4 (Bonn 3. pp. 13–14).

³⁵ Cedrenus (Bonn 1. p. 496); Zonar. 13.3.1–4 (Bonn 3. pp. 13–14) and further references in Dagron 1984: 29–30, n. 3.

³⁶ Hdn. 1.6.5: ἐκεῖ τε ἡ Ῥώμη, ὅπου ποτ’ ἂν ὁ βασιλεὺς ᾗ.

Antioch in the east. It is therefore conceivable that Constantine at first saw his foundation as belonging to this category.³⁷

Why Byzantium was chosen over more important cities is a matter of speculation. Before Constantine made his decision, there was no particular reason to believe Byzantium was destined for this particular greatness and centrality.³⁸ It has been called ‘the key to the Pontus’.³⁹ It is well known that the site had important strategic advantages, but also problems, described briefly and to the point by Polybius: ‘The Byzantines occupy a site, as regards the sea, more favourable to security and prosperity than any other city in the world, but as regards the land it is in both respects more unfavourable than any other.’⁴⁰ He then describes how it controls access to the Black Sea and occupies fertile land. The currents in the Bosphorus supplied it with excellent fish.⁴¹ However, it was hard to defend on the west side. The site was being surrounded by Thracians with whom the Byzantines were engaged in constant warfare. The prevailing winds made it difficult to approach and supply by sea from the South. It had no natural fresh water supply. A factor not emphasized in the ancient sources, but undoubtedly important as well and relevant for Constantine’s choice, was its controlling position on one of the two land bridges between Europe and Asia Minor.⁴² The history of the city before the fourth century is a subject of great interest but less immediately relevant for the present discussion.⁴³

Recent studies have suggested modifications in the traditional interpretation of claims, made first by Christian authors, that Constantine’s city was

³⁷ Bréhier 1915: 243–345; Alföldi 1947: 10–16. Alföldi argues that at first Constantinople was not conceived as a rival to Rome, but as a residence, just as Milan, Sirmium, Trier, Cologne, Antioch, and Nicomedia. Great building projects do not mean that a city is intended to be a rival to Rome. According to Dagron 1984: 46–7, the sources agree on one point: Constantine conceived a city after the image of Rome. He wanted that Constantinople would have the same power as Rome and share with Rome the leadership of the Empire. See also Melville-Jones 2014: 248; Grig and Kelly 2012: 7. For tetrarchic imperial residences: Millar 1977: 40–53. For the city of Rome from late antiquity to the Middle Ages: Krautheimer 1980.

³⁸ van Dam 2010: 50–2. ³⁹ *HA Gall.* 6.8.2: *claustrum Ponticum*.

⁴⁰ Polyb. 4.38.1: Βυζάντιοι κατὰ μὲν θάλατταν εὐκαίροτατον οἰκοῦσι τόπον καὶ πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν καὶ πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν πάντη τῶν ἐν τῇ καθ’ ἡμᾶς οἰκουμένη, κατὰ δὲ γῆν πρὸς ἀμφοτέρω πάντων ἀφύεστατον.

⁴¹ Strabo 7.320.

⁴² Darius crossed the Bosphorus not far from Byzantium on his way to Scythia (Hdt. 4.87). See also the sources cited by Merle 1916: 10. There was also the road from Byzantium to the Strymon: Thuc. 2.97.

⁴³ Dagron 1984: Ch. 1: ‘La fondation de Constantinople: Byzance avant Constantin’, with sources and literature in note 1; van Dam 2010: 50–1. For Byzantium as a Greek settlement, see Isaac 1986: 215–37; for the advantages of the site: 215–16. See also Malkin and Shmueli 1988: 21–36. Byzantium was granted the status of a Roman citizen colony only in the reign of Septimius Severus: Hsch. 38 (Praeger p. 16); Chron. Paschale (Bonn p. 495); cf. Dagron 1984: 17 and n.6.

conceived from the start as the new or second Rome and also as a purely Christian city.⁴⁴ Regarding its Christian character, it should be noted that Byzantium before Constantine had no distinguished history as a Christian city.⁴⁵ It is not even mentioned in the New Testament. These later Christian authors offer their own perspective which ignores the fact that there were both secular and non-Christian sacred buildings in the city.⁴⁶

The claim that, from the start, it was intended to replace Rome is not conclusively confirmed, given the relatively slow development of Constantinople as imperial capital. There is no contemporary evidence that Constantine always conceived his new foundation as the eastern capital of the empire, or that he intended that it should replace Rome.⁴⁷ It has been argued that Constantine may not have had a fully formed plan already in 324.⁴⁸ True, there are claims that Constantine decided in 324 to found it as ‘the new Rome’⁴⁹ or ‘the second Rome’,⁵⁰ but these sources are of a later date. In fact, the name that stuck was Constantinople.⁵¹ The city actually took time to develop into an imperial capital.⁵² A *praefectus urbi* as existed in Rome was not appointed until 359.⁵³ The city became the undisputed centre of the Late Roman Empire only in the reign of Theodosius I. This has been demonstrated by an analysis of the *subscriptions* of imperial constitutions, preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*, showing that over 240 laws had been issued at that time, out of a total of more than 600 included in this compilation, which were enacted from Constantinople.⁵⁴ Half a century after its foundation Constantinople formally became ‘the New Rome’,⁵⁵ even though Rome, in the fourth century and during the first half of the fifth, retains a privileged position in the literary documents of the time that mention it, especially those produced by pagan, Latin-writing authors.⁵⁶ Eutropius is a relatively early historian who mentions the ascent of Constantinople:

⁴⁴ The first time reservations on this point were expressed was not so recent: Bréhier 1915: 256–7. For Constantine’s Christian buildings there: Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 3.47.4–49 with comments by Cameron and Hall, 297–9 and Melville-Jones 2014: 257. Oros. 7.28; August. *de Civ. D.* 5.25.

⁴⁵ Bréhier 1915: 257–8. ⁴⁶ Bréhier, 1915: 258–66. ⁴⁷ See n. 39.

⁴⁸ Melville-Jones 2014: 249, who also discusses the coinage, 250–1 with note 6.

⁴⁹ Them. *Or.* 3.42, for which see Melville-Jones 2014: 252. See also Theophanes, *Chron.* AM 5821 with the comments by Mango and Scott 1997: 46.

⁵⁰ A possible early exception might be Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius, *Carmina* 4.5–6, for which see Melville-Jones 2014: 6. The later sources are Socrates, *HE* 1.16; Sozom. *HE* 2.3.5.5 (c5); Novella 655 (c6).

⁵¹ Melville-Jones 2014: 249.

⁵² For the expansion of the city and its population and the consequences of this expansion in the period following the foundation as Constantinople, see Van Dam 2010: 52–3.

⁵³ Socrates 2.41; *CTH* 1.6.1. ⁵⁴ Cañizar Palacios 2014: 280–310.

⁵⁵ Cañizar Palacios 2014: 281–2. ⁵⁶ Cañizar Palacios 2014: 286–93.

He [Constantine] was the first that endeavoured to raise the city named after him to such a height as to make it a rival to Rome.⁵⁷

That still is a somewhat ambiguous, rhetorical assertion. Eutropius had a vested interest, for he was *magister memoriae* in Constantinople in the second half of the fourth century.

Conclusions

Reality trumped ideology again and again. Old fears became reality.

Rome was not a capital city. It was not supposed to be one. It was the state, the Empire, the collective citizenship, all in one. In theory it could not be duplicated or transferred. Paradoxically, there was fear and there were rumours for centuries that precisely this would happen, even at a stage when there was no such danger. Eventually it happened indeed, and when it did – another paradox – this may not have been the intention from the start. Before Constantinople was founded, there had been fears for more than three centuries that a new capital was to be located at or near the mythic cradle of Rome: Troy. These fears were combined with a pronounced view of an East–West antagonism which, somehow, was translated over time into the actual split of the Empire into an eastern and a western part, a Latin-speaking and a Greek-speaking half. Not so long before this took place, the new capital was planted on a suitable site without Roman historical significance, replacing an old Greek city.

Although the sources have been interpreted along different lines, it now seems very likely that Constantine did not declare from the start that he was founding a ‘New Rome’ or ‘Second Rome’, a city to replace Rome. Also, *not* having declared that he was in fact doing so, it did not become a reality in his days, but only under his successors. Like so many foundations, at first it was just another city on an important site, although an old and venerable one, renamed after the man who refounded it. Yet Constantine’s decision had drastic results: it initiated the transfer of the centre of the Empire eastward, to the Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire, even though it took more than a generation before this became a reality, whatever had been intended. It is conceivable, although a matter of speculation, that Constantine, in selecting Byzantium for his new city of Constantinople, consciously avoided the antagonism that would have been the result if he

⁵⁷ Eutr. *Brev.* 10.8.1 (trans. H. W. Bird): *primusque urbem nominis sui ad tantum fastigium evehere molitus est, ut Romae aemulam faceret.*

had truthfully declared that he was establishing a New Rome or an alternative Eastern Rome on or near the site of Roman origins. Christians later claimed he had founded a Christian city – that was only partially true. Again, it is possible that Constantine avoided fierce conflict by refraining from establishing a fully Christian, second Rome.

The fear that Rome would come to an end never materialized (Rome is still there),⁵⁸ but the shift of the centre of power eastward took place, not as the result of a one-time decision by a ruler, but through historical dynamics and preceded by centuries of suspicion and tension. The decision rather reflected a development that occurred, inevitably, over time. Emperors who called themselves Roman continued to reign in the East over subjects who called themselves Romans, although Greek was their language, until the fifteenth century, a thousand years longer than in the Western Roman Empire, where the last Emperor, Romulus Augustu(lu)s, abdicated in 476.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ For the city from the fourth century until the fourteenth, see Krautheimer 1980. Phantasies of reviving the Roman Empire belong in recent history to fascist rule in Italy. These have left their depressing imprint on the modern city.

⁵⁹ The sad figure of Romulus Augustulus as last Emperor of the Roman West has attracted a good deal of attention in the scholarly literature, e.g., Momigliano 1973: 409–28; Croke 1983: 81–119; Nathan 1992: 261–71.