

HUI216

Italian Civilization

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15.0 Announcements

- A new topic [19] has been added
- Required readings of Week 8 have been posted
- Past announcements have been archived
- The review page has been updated
- The review session is scheduled for Wednesday, Mar. 22: format and purpose
- The midterm will be on March 27, for students with last names beginning A-K; on March 29, for last names L-Z

15.1 Valerio Massimo Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): the beginning

- The year is 476: we are in the Italian Northwest, inside the camp of an elite Roman military unit, organized and trained in the traditional way
- At dawn, the camp receive the visit of a group of barbarians, sent by Odoacer to relieve the Roman commander of the Legion of his duties
- When the commander declares that he will take order only from Flavius Orestes, chief of the imperial armies and father of the young Emperor Romulus, a bloody fight ensues
- It appears that Odoacer, who until then had been fighting on the side of the Romans against other barbarians, plans to destroy the powerful Legion (whose soldiers are mostly Roman citizens from Italy and the provinces, with the addition of a few chosen, very loyal foreigners), before capturing the imperial family, so that he can take over the Empire

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Aurelius

- A veteran of the Legion, Aurelius, is dispatched to Piacenza to alert the 13-year-old Romulus and his parents
- In Piacenza, before the arrival of reinforcements from Ravenna, the Villa of the imperial family is attacked by Wulfila, one of Odoacer's Lieutenant
- Wulfila strikes Orestes mortally, while Romulus, his mother Flavia and his tutor, the Briton Ambrosinus, are captured and taken on a three-day journey to Ravenna
- Aurelius gets to the imperial villa just in time to hear the last words of the dying Orestes, who orders him to save his son and the Roman Empire: "I beg you, legionnaire... save my son, save the Emperor. If he dies, Rome dies. If Rome dies, everything is lost."

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Odoacer

- In Ravenna, Odoacer, a great admirer of the Roman Empire since his youth ("The Empire was the only world worth living in, for a human being"), receives Romulus and his mother inside a Roman Palace, sitting on the sculpted ivory throne of the last Caesars
- He claims that Orestes deserved to die because he did not keep his promise, that he would place a third of Italy under his command
- He accuses the Romans of being a race weakened by centuries of immorality, power and corruption, and declares that he alone has the skills required to be a real leader, all the qualities that the child Emperor Romulus lacks. He then asks Flavia to marry him, a move that would give his authority the semblance of legitimacy.
- Flavia, despite her difficult position, rejects this offer. Showing all her contempt for Odoacer, she compares the barbarians to smelly wild animals

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): first attempt to rescue Romulus

- In the middle of the next night Ambrosinus is awakened by Aurelius, who has used the sewer system to enter the well guarded palace
- Aurelius tries to rescue the Emperor and his mother, together with the tutor, but the guards sound the alarm
- While trying to protect her son, Flavia is murdered by Wulfila, and before Aurelius can get too far from the palace, he is wounded and Romulus is recaptured
- Odoacer decides to confine Romulus to a secluded place, easier to control: the island of Capri. He will then send back the imperial insignia to Constantinople, to the Eastern Roman Emperor, in exchange for the titles of Roman patrician and chief General of the West

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Livia

- While Romulus and his tutor Ambrosinus are being taken to the Bay of Naples, to be transferred by ship to Capri, Aurelius slowly recovers from his wounds, thanks to the cures of Justin, once a renowned physician before Italy was ravaged by the barbarians, and the attentions of Livia, a strong, beautiful woman who has spent years hiding from the barbarians in the lagoons along the shores of the Adriatic Sea, where Venice will one day be
- Livia and Aurelius embark on a dangerous mission to save Romulus, and insure his safe passage into the territories controlled by the Eastern Roman Empire
- While they travel south to follow the barbarians who are escorting the young Emperor, a romantic relationship develops between them

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): the sword of Caesar

- In Capri, inside the Villa of the Emperor Tiberius, Romulus finds the mythical sword of Julius Caesar, whose blade was forged with the metal from a meteorite
- The sword had been removed from his original location, inside a Roman temple, and hidden, so that it would not be stolen by the barbarians attacking the city
- Aurelius manages to free some of his comrades, whom he finds imprisoned in Misenum, inside the empty reservoir of the Aqua Augusta aqueduct
- With their help, he reaches the island of Capri

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Constantinople

- After Romulus is rescued and brought back to the Italian peninsula, Ambrosinus tries to convince Aurelius that Constantinople is a snake pit, where power, greed and corruption produce incessant fighting within the court
- Romulus there would become a defenseless political pawn, easily manipulated and dispensed with, if the logic of power so required
- Before Romulus can be put on a ship to Constantinople, former Eastern Emperor Zeno comes back into power and, to strengthen his position, decides to establish an alliance with Odoacer
- If he were to offer protection to Romulus, his new ally would withdraw his support

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Britannia

- Hunted down by the barbarians led by Wulfila, Aurelius and his small group of heroes finally listens to the suggestions of Ambrosinus, who has a different plan
- Romulus shall be taken to England, where he will grow into the powerful and just leader that the Britons so desperately need, oppressed as they are by the various Saxon warlords
- His destiny will be similar to that of the young son of Aeneas: he will be the founder of a new, great civilization
- After all, as Ambrosinus remarks when Romulus is saying that it is all over, that their world is no more, "Rome is an ideal and ideals cannot be destroyed." And he adds that Rome's identity does not relate to one race, one people or a single ethnic group

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): the collapse of the Empire

- To appear to be in control of the situation, Wulfila takes another boy, similar in height and weight to Romulus, and replaces all the guards in Capri, pretending that Romulus has never left the custody of the barbarians. This move should avoid the risk of rebellions, until he can find and kill the real Romulus
- Trying to reach the Alps, Livia can see firsthand the results of the devastation caused by the attacks of the barbarians
- Bridges and roads have been destroyed or are in disrepair, and the local communities that survive intact in a few urban settings, protected by city walls, live in isolation, too concerned with self-preservation to think about Italy and the Empire. Already the common Latin language is changing into a variety of local dialects

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Merlin

- Traveling on land across Switzerland, Germany and France, Aurelius and the others finally get a ship and reach England
- There they establish contacts with the locals, thanks to Ambrosinus, also known as Merlin, and they settle in the abandoned camps of the last Roman legion of Britannia, whose standards bear the image of a dragon
- When they prepare to fight their last battle against Wulfila, who has caught up with them, Aurelius puts under his corset, as a good luck charm, a small parchment scroll with the words written by the last great poet of Rome, Rutilius Namatianus

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Rutilius Namatianus and his poetic verses on Rome

- Listen, O fairest queen of your world, Rome, welcomed amid the starry skies, listen you mother of men and mother of gods, thanks to your temples we are not far from heaven. You do we chant, and shall, while destiny allows, forever chant. None can be safe if forgetful of you. Sooner shall guilty oblivion overwhelm the sun than the honor due to you leave my heart; for your benefits extend as far as the sun's rays, where are the waves of the circling Ocean-flood. . . . You, Rome, Africa has not kept away with its scorching sands nor did the Bear [the far north], armed with native cold, repulse you. As far as habitable nature has stretched toward the poles, so far has earth opened a path for your valor. For nations far apart you have made a single country; under your dominion conquest has meant profit for those who did not know justice; and by offering to the vanquished a share in your own law, you have made a city of what was before a world . . .

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): Pendragon

- After the final, victorious battle, Aurelius and Livia adopt Romulus, who will become the king of the Britons under the name of Pendragon
- His son will be the famous King Arthur, and the legendary sword of Julius Caesar, thrust into a stone, will be known as Excalibur
- With the birth of these legends, the story told by the narrator and by Merlin, comes to an end

15.1 Manfredi, *The Last Legion* (2002): final comments

- The inclusion of various theories, cultural and historical elements
 - the descriptive approach of modern cinema
- A reduction of complex, separate phenomena/events/cultures, is conducted secretly behind the scenes
- The need for evidence is replaced by conspiracy theories
 - from myth to reality and back (see Eco's *Pendulum*)

15.2 Edward Gibbon (1737-1794): optional readings

- On Gibbon's life and works, see one of these sites
 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Gibbon
 - <http://alumnus.caltech.edu/~zimm/gibho1.html>
- On *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, see
 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_History_of_the_Decline_and_Fall_of_the_Roman_Empire
 - <http://alumnus.caltech.edu/~zimm/gibho2.html>
- The works of Gibbon can be downloaded at Project Gutenberg, or can be read online at various sites
 - <http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/g#a375>
 - <http://www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/home.html>

15.2 Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (published posthumously in 1796): on his temporary conversion to Catholicism

- The blind activity of idleness urged me to advance without armour into the dangerous mazes of controversy; and at the age of sixteen, I bewildered myself in the errors of the church of Rome.
- . . . it was necessary for my father to form a new plan of education, and to devise some method which, if possible, might effect the cure of my spiritual malady.
- After much debate it was determined . . . to fix me, during some years, at Lausanne in Switzerland.
- Mr. Frey, a Swiss gentleman of Basil, undertook the conduct of the journey: we left London the 19th of June, crossed the sea from Dover to Calais, travelled post through several provinces of France, by the direct road of St. Quentin, Rheims, Langres, and Besancon, and arrived the 30th of June at Lausanne, where I was immediately settled under the roof and tuition of Mr. Pavilliard, a Calvinist minister.

15.2 Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (1796): on his 1764 visit to Rome

- My temper is not very susceptible of enthusiasm; and the enthusiasm which I do not feel, I have ever scorned to affect.
- But, at the distance of twenty-five years, I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the eternal city.
- After a sleepless night, I trod, with a lofty step, the ruins of the Forum; each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell, was at once present to my eye; and several days of intoxication were lost or enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute investigation.

15.2 Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (1796): on his decision to write about Rome

- It was at Rome, on the 15th of October 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed fryars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.
- But my original plan was circumscribed to the decay of the city rather than of the empire: and though my reading and reflections began to point towards that object, some years elapsed, and several avocations intervened, before I was seriously engaged in the execution of that laborious work.

15.2 Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (1796): on the goals of his work on Rome, its success

- Rome is familiar to the school-boy and the statesman; and my narrative was deduced from the last period of classical reading.
- I had likewise flattered myself, that an age of light and liberty would receive, without scandal, an inquiry into the human causes of the progress and establishment of Christianity.
- I am at a loss how to describe the success of the work, without betraying the vanity of the writer. The first impression was exhausted in a few days; a second and third edition were scarcely adequate to the demand; and the bookseller's property was twice invaded by the pirates of Dublin.
- My book was on every table, and almost on every toilette; the historian was crowned by the taste or fashion of the day; nor was the general voice disturbed by the barking of any profane critic.

15.2 Edward Gibbon: key ideas to use as a guide to the required reading

- The pedagogical value of history
 - history is still seen as a natural archive of examples of virtue and sin, to be imitated or avoided
- Human happiness and progress are linked to the advancement of democracy
 - the principles of the Enlightenment
- Politics and morality are interconnected
 - the idea of personal responsibility is prevalent
- Roman civilization acquires a universal, almost biblical nature: its history belongs to humankind
- The footnotes (not reported in the reading) show a modern treatment of references and primary, secondary sources