“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

The Perception of Roman History and Culture in Augustine, *De civitate Dei*

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

Supervisor:
Prof. univ. dr. Baumgarten Alexander

Doctoral candidate:
Grijac Lavinia-Alexandra

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Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* (*De civitate Dei*), Augustinian philosophy, Late Antique studies, the dialogue between Roman pagans and Christians, the earthly city (*civitas terrena*) and the heavenly city (*civitas caelestis*), Augustine's perception of classical culture, Augustine's use of classical sources, Augustine's presentation and perception of Roman history, the necessity of philosophical examination of history and religion, history (*historia*), Roman history, tradition (*traditio*), *mos maiorum*, Roman institutions, history of Roman religion, Varro's tripartite theology, Roman culture, Roman studies, classical Roman authors, Roman education, Roman historiography, Cicero, Scaevola Pontifex, Varro, Sallustius, the hiding of truth, the Temple of Concord, glory (*gloria*), deification, Romulus, *exempla*

Summary

In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine gives his answer to the Roman pagans, who identified the major cause for the collapse of Rome with the spread of Christianity, as they saw the symbolic capital of their empire sacked by the Visigoths under Alaric I (410 AD). Approximately two years after the sack, already in the second book of his project (*De civitate Dei*, 2.3), Augustine observes how common this accusation is, a sign of the dialogue and conflict between pagans and Christians unfinished in the fifth century still, despite the fact that Christianity became the state religion in 380 AD, the end state after a century of anti-Christian persecutions (the third century), followed by many decades in which imperial legal measures oscillated between supporting and removing this religion. This extended context was sufficiently evident both for him and his opponents, so that Augustine does not consider the critique of strictly contemporary pagan practices necessary anymore in his current project, and within this context his answer takes an initially surprising shape: he proposes a critical return to the textual sources proper to the image of the glorious, pre-Christian Rome that his opponents looked at in nostalgia and in hope that their current empire's reinforcement could be achieved through the return to one of its traditional past institutions: the Roman polytheistic religion. But his opponents, more precisely those with an education, so Augustine tells us, were not invoking that glorious pre-Christian past in an honest way, but instead were keeping silent about testimonies which could point to the existence of other causes for a much older decadent state of Rome, all in order to incite those without an education to an even stronger hate towards Christians (*De civitate Dei*, 2.3 and 4.1). To Augustine, this manipulative behaviour of the Roman pagan intellectual elite betrays the fact that its members do not truly love *historia*, a "repository" and "index" of facts and things that truly took place and were attested through the experiences, lived or shared, of the authors of the past. Thus, Augustine assigns the first half of *De civitate Dei* to a "historical" research through which the pagans' accusation of Christianity would be invalidated by the sufferings and shortcomings attested by the very same history of Rome, to whom both parties had access by virtue of the imperial liberal education that they shared.

Considering *De civitate Dei* a grand "dialogue" shaped by the circumstances and premises described above, our thesis analyses, describes and interprets Augustine's perception of Roman history, as well as his perception of Roman culture in a more general sense, as in the first half of his work Augustine reunites under the single term of *historia* three domains we now perceive distinctly, namely history proper, history of religion and history of philosophy. In order to focus more precisely on his perception of what can be considered characteristically "Roman", we chose to focus our attention on the first two senses of *historia*, thus mainly discussing the Augustinian perception of Roman history and history of Roman religion, as can be deduced especially through Books I-VII, XVIII and, selectively, the remaining books of his work. The dialogical aspect of *De civitate Dei*, a feature we frequently refer to and insist on, results not only from the context of the dialogue between the Roman pagans and the Christians represented by Augustine, but also from the manner in which Augustine plans and "builds" the renewed meeting between his audience and the late Republican and Augustan authors, whom his opponents see as guides of Romanness, enabling its restoration in the present and its revitalization through a return to its "origins".

One of the working premises of Augustine in *De civitate Dei* is that understanding of the collective, for example the Roman people as a whole, is possible through and supported by the analysis and understanding of the individual, for example the particular cases of the remarkable figures of Roman history (see, for example, *De civitate Dei*, 1.15, 4.3, cf. 10.6 and 10.14). Therefore, a wide range of examples becomes relevant for our research, starting (in historical order) with the example of the founding brothers, Romulus and Remus, and the example of Junius Brutus, who is most strongly tied to the beginning of the Republic, and, in addition to such examples, of great importance are the intellectual and spiritual "portraits" that Augustine paints of the Roman authors themselves, invoked frequently even through direct addressing (this applies, for example, in the cases of Varro in *De civitate Dei*, 6.6 and 7.5, Scaevola Pontifex in *De civitate Dei*, 4.27, but also Cicero, when the character Scipio from *De re publica* is being addressed directly in *De civitate Dei*, 2.12). In this "narrative play" we see an element through which an initial link can be established between *De civitate Dei* and the great works to which it is a thematic "successor", namely Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *Republic* (CHAPTER 1); however, building upon the idea of *De civitate Dei* as dialogue especially in PART I of our thesis, we take the interpretation of this aspect further and argue that Augustine "calls" in front of his opponents their very own Roman authorities and offers them a frame in which they can talk "directly" through their texts and decisions, but Augustine does this in a specific, unique manner, so that his opponents, on their own, will

ultimately see a separation from these authorities as desirable. This separation imposes itself due to another premise that Augustine works with implicitly in *De civitate Dei*, namely the preference and the appreciation of any truly educated, knowledge-loving person for truth and for those who become role models through achieving a harmonisation of their public and private selves, as proof of practising what they preach and, implicitly, as proof of adhering within to the things expressed without. In this context, Augustine exploits any dissonance, sign of hesitation, internal contradiction or even "doubling" of the self that can be identified in the texts of the Roman authors, such as Cicero or Varro, as well as in different historical decisions, such as the decisions of the Senate or the ancestors (*maiores*); in the same way, Augustine re-employs his own critique of his opponents centred around the hiding of truth, applying it to the cases of the authors and predecessors themselves, as Augustine identifies similar acts of hiding the truth in regards to them, as was the case with his opponents. Thus, their authorities also become culpable of hiding the truth through exclusion, censorship, biased selection or the "covering" of truth with things of a different significance, serving as "obstacles" put in the way of the seeker of truth, including things such as the divine status given to Romulus, the temple of Concord built after the elimination of the Gracchi brothers or the description and "qualification" of certain otherwise problematic events or individuals by association with the supremely positive term of "glory". All of these things happen in *De civitate Dei* on the basis of the rejection of the pagans' accusation, to demonstrate that the security, stability and success of the empire did not depend on the practising of the traditional Roman religion, and to this end Augustine invokes not only the contents of Roman history and those of the history of its religion, but also some of the most important figures who transmitted such contents, the authors themselves becoming telling testimonies – it is amidst these ideas, interconnected in a striking and complex way, that the Augustinian perception of Rome's history, including that of its traditional religion, crystallises, according to our interpretation.

An additional dimension of Augustine's perception joins the one described above, one that we discuss in PART II and to whom the last chapters of PART I prepare a thematic transition, in parallel with their own analysis. The historical examples invoked in *De civitate Dei*, alongside Augustine's observations and critiques of Rome's authors and authorities, build an image of Roman culture in which the corporeal and spiritual evils suffered by this people are due primarily to the failure of Roman polytheism to offer its people an indication of the supreme good and guidance toward achieving it, through the sharing of moral laws and judgement criteria both stable and accessible to every person (see, for example, *De civitate*

Dei, 2.6): these would have ensured that the Romans had the means to regulate their behaviours and actions, so that they would maintain internal coherence and a life in shared agreement. Conscious of the lack of such guidance from the pagan gods, but also of the necessity within God's plan that the Romans of the past would not know the path toward the blessed life, Augustine offers a particular thing especially to the Romans themselves, but also to all his readers, namely a context within which the Romans, on their own, established a supreme goal for themselves, one to strive towards, collectively and individually, the goal of glory, providing alongside it their own criteria of recognising and awarding it, thus giving their own *civitas* structures and laws to ensure its unity and long-term functioning. In other words, Augustine integrates Rome in his project of the two cities, earthly and heavenly, rationalising Rome's past in such a way that all the decisions of the Romans, ever since the foundation, consequently allow a commentary from the perspective of the successes and shortcomings of the manner in which the Romans supplemented their community with elements that (so Augustine considers) a religion should have otherwise normally supplied. This type of "inspection" of the Romans becomes simultaneously a "test" of their chosen supreme goal and its structures, leading ultimately to the idea that a structuring reason or principle that man, as an imperfect being with a finite life, chooses for himself will unavoidably "additionally" cause cases of exceptions, unfair privilege and contradictory behaviours within the society in which said reason or principle is being followed.

In PART I, as a first step, we establish the first implicit part of Augustine's vision (in the aforementioned order, the implicit premise of the preferableness of truth and harmony between a person's public and private selves) by referring it to ancient thought as illustrated by two examples. Firstly, we invoke the example of Plato in two distinct roles, that of author of dialogues and that of guardian within his ideal city, underlining the surprising coexistence of, on one hand, an aversion to anything that means untruth and imitation and, on the other hand, the permission granted to the guardian to invent myths in order to educate the citizens (CHAPTER 2). We then invoke Seneca's example for the general idea of philosophy as a way of life and the desirability of harmonising one's deeds with one's words, as well as the idea of the profession of philosopher and the subjects that he ought to put focus on, as otherwise he would risk becoming harmful to the community (CHAPTER 3). In turn, Seneca's example introduces that of Cicero, to whom Seneca, too, referred in the letters we commented on in the previous chapter, which leads to our discussion in CHAPTER 4, about Cicero's method of composing his dialogue-treatises and the difficulties that arise in any attempt, in current and past studies, to search for opinions that Cicero personally supported; on our part, we find

ourselves on that part of the debate that considers such a search legitimate, even if, ultimately, it does not lead to any proper identification of the author's personal beliefs (as Cicero himself would have wanted it). In CHAPTER 5 we show how this type of research was meaningful and necessary within the plan of Augustine's work, who most openly states his rhetorical strategy of invoking and analysing authors in *De civitate Dei*, 10.29, when he addresses Porphyry directly, but clarifies afterwards that he is, in fact, referring to the audience for whom Porphyry is an authority. Augustine undertakes the task of reconstructing Cicero's personal opinions in *De civitate Dei*, 4.26 and 4.30, as well as 5.9, in order to revoke his status as an authority on religious subjects in the end, because of the presence in his works of the *possibility* that he did not believe in the existence of a divine nature: in our interpretation, the "search" for Cicero from Book IV contains what can be, in fact, considered the conclusion of the "search" from Book V, therefore we discuss them in reverse order in CHAPTERS 6-7. More precisely, in CHAPTER 6 we discuss Augustine's research from Book V, adding to our analysis a detailed presentation of the relevant contents from Cicero's religious trilogy (*De natura deorum*, *De divinatione*, *De fato*) in order to emphasise every aspect Augustine implies in his relatively short research on this difficult problem, tackled within a discussion on the theme of destiny. In that context, Augustine refers to the discourses of the characters Cotta from *De natura deorum* and, in particular, Marcus from *De divinatione* and then *De fato*, to arrive at the end of *De civitate Dei*, 5.9 to the reduction of Cicero to the type of the fool from *Psalm* 13, 1, because of the internal contradiction Cicero associates himself with through Marcus's discourse that suggests the idea of the impossibility of foreknowledge in humans as well as in gods; in turn, Augustine perceives this as a negation of the divine nature of the gods, even if in Cicero's case it remains an admitted possibility rather than a firmly held belief. The reduction of Cicero to the type of the fool, thus to the type of person who holds contradictions within himself, "already" points towards the result of the exclusion of Cicero from the group of religious authorities addressed in Book IV, where Augustine (in the order we chose) "completes" Cicero's portrait as an author in *De civitate Dei*, 4.30, where he offers a commentary on the things discussed by the character Balbus in *De natura deorum*, 2.70-71; in CHAPTER 7, we analyse this commentary alongside another reference Augustine makes in *De civitate Dei*, 4.26, to *Tusculanae disputationes*, 1.65, in order to demonstrate that the recurring aspect in all of Augustine's "searches" of Cicero is the latter's traditionalism, resulting in the image of a Cicero who is willing to sacrifice truth and, paradoxically, even the existence of divine nature itself on the "altar" of his country, to defend its ancestral institutions (therefore, its polytheist religion as well) and their inherent value. One phrase is

particularly representative for the search of Cicero in Book IV, namely "Cicero the augur laughs at augury" (4.30): we focus on interpreting this phrase in CHAPTER 7, in the manner described above, as well as in CHAPTER 8, where we offer one more way to interpret the phrase by establishing a link between it and Augustine's commentary regarding the auguries taken before the construction of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (4.29). In our interpretation, Cicero was in that discussion's context the most at hand example for one of the two categories of Romans described by Augustine at the end of *De civitate Dei*, 4.29, with specific reactions to the problem of auguries of that kind, more precisely for the category of past Romans who were conscious that Roman auguries held no power of prediction and could not guarantee, in that case, the stability of the imperial borders, but, even so, continued to consider the worshipping of the gods necessary. This particular case allows us to dedicate a more extensive part of our discussion to the topic of the group of references to recent Roman history (from the third and fourth century) made by Augustine in *De civitate Dei*, 4.29 – an important subject, given the fact that such references are very rare in *De civitate Dei* overall. A recurring theme in *De civitate Dei* becomes evident at this stage of our work, namely a particular kind of traditionalism seen as the negligence of truth by an educated person or an author, caused either by his lack of power to oppose it or his lack of will to oppose it, or a combination of the two: in relation to this, we discuss an important and particularly telling case in CHAPTER 9, where we analyse Augustine's portrait of Scaevola Pontifex (4.27), starting with the tripartite theological model Scaevola proposed and justified in ways that attracted a detailed critique from Augustine. Scaevola withheld from the citizens of Rome philosophical doctrines he considered implicitly true, given that he perceived as real the threat that they posed to the state religion if they were accepted and implemented, potentially leading to change or even removal of key features of the religion (regarding the cults of deified humans and the presence of anthropomorphic representations of the gods) – this example of a Roman authority who hides the truth, withdrawing it from the sight of the citizens, is further completed in the next chapters of our work through other such examples, so that we gradually reconstruct Augustine's general vision regarding the authorities who transmitted testimonies of pre-Christian Roman polytheism. In CHAPTERS 10-12, we discuss the case of the senators, who hid the truth about their conflict with reformers and brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus by placing symbolically a temple dedicated to the goddess Concordia in front of the people, but specifically in front of the orators capable of influencing them. More precisely, in CHAPTER 10 we analyse the way in which Augustine presents the events surrounding the Gracchian reforms in *De civitate Dei*, 3.24-26, by interpreting the

selections Augustine made regarding the information he transmitted and possible similarities with the account of other historians, in order to show the original elements of Augustine's account. Then, in CHAPTER 11, we analyse the Augustinian critique of the deliberate dedication of the temple to the goddess Concordia and not to Discordia, and establish a connection between this critique and the wider context of Augustine's correspondence with various Romans, pagan or (recently) converted to Christianity; as a person who received education just like them, Augustine shared with these Romans a sensibility to any kind of internal contradiction perceivable within a religion. Lastly, in CHAPTER 12, we discuss the meaning of the construction of the Temple of Concordia as an obstacle in the way to truth, an obstacle that Augustine considers ultimately useless, based on the violent conflicts that took place afterwards in Roman history; here we also provide a commentary of Augustine's decision to group together three political figures usually discussed separately, on one hand, Lucius Appuleius Saturninus and Gaius Servilius Glaucia, and, on the other hand, Marcus Livius Drusus. A different, important mention of the Gracchi brothers, more precisely the mention of the death of Tiberius, can be found in *De civitate Dei*, 2.21, where based on its implications, but also on the texts of Cicero and Sallustius, Augustine rejects the Ciceronian definition of the state as the shared agreement of the citizen regarding goals pursued: in CHAPTER 13, we discuss how this rejection takes place, adding the reference to Cicero's *Republic* from Book XIX to the discussion proper to Book II, to show how Augustine rejects the definition rather on the grounds that it is inadequate for describing historical realities. At the same time, much like the invoked authors, Augustine accepts the death of Tiberius as a historical mark for the beginning of an observable decadence of Rome, but he does this without adopting a tragic narrative of decline that would imply an idealised view of the times prior to that event. CHAPTER 14 builds up a transition to the group of chapters dedicated primarily to Varro's case (CHAPTERS 15-18): in this chapter, we offer examples that let us deduce the desirability of justifying different events or actions within Roman history through divine intervention; in that regard, we focus mainly on the repeating of the Roman games and the dreams of Titus Latinius, mentioned by Augustine in *De civitate Dei*, 4.26. We then link this aspect to a desire that can be identified in the texts of the Late Republican authors, namely the desire to find a reason behind all the things accumulated in their history and, in parallel, we discuss how a tradition is formed, invoking the cases of Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *Republic*, to arrive at the idea that justifications of that type are assimilated and, in the end, even perpetuated within a people's culture without critical examination, and thus mythical and historical content frequently becomes impossible to distinguish thoroughly from

each other, especially regarding the distant past. Thus, the difficult mission that Varro, too, had before him becomes intelligible, which marks the subject of CHAPTER 15; Augustine was conscious of this mission, when he discussed Varro's case, as Varro was one of the great Roman authors who at the end of the Republic attempted to rationalise Rome's past and the institutions of his city, such as he had found them, with forms and practices that do not always point to the existence of a universal reason and a quality of necessity behind them. However, Augustine perceives negatively the "sacrifices" Varro, as well as the other authors discussed thus far, had to do in order to maintain the structures and contents of their city's tradition even as they were trying to rationalise them: we examine this subject in CHAPTER 16, by analysing Augustine's interpretation of the structure of Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, which in Augustine's eyes betrays the fact that, among other aspects, Varro subordinates divine things to human things. In CHAPTER 17, we discuss how Varro, within his own model of a tripartite theology, uses the contents of natural theology to reinforce civil theology, while the theology of the poets is being quickly dismissed as in the case of Scaevola Pontifex, but Augustine criticises this action, relating it to the idea of disrespecting the superiority of truth and observing that behind this at first glance commendable rejection lies a privilege given to civil theology, despite the fact that it incorporates the immoral contents of the mythical or fabulous theology. In the end, in CHAPTER 18 we analyse the way in which Augustine identifies a certain blameworthy flexibility (that we propose to identify as the Roman *varietas* in the last chapters) in Varro's beliefs, based on his oscillating attitude regarding the ancestors' decision to introduce idols to the Roman religion, one more case in which his preference for tradition and civil theology becomes evident, despite his acknowledgement of the superiority of natural theology. These characteristics transform Varro into a bivalent example, on one hand positive because of his capacity to recognise and select true doctrines, and on the other hand negative because of his parting with the truth discovered through them, the parting itself being on one hand voluntary, and on the other hand involuntary, as a result of the constraints imposed by the tradition that demands its own perpetuation.

Building upon the aforementioned ideas, the beginning of PART II is marked by CHAPTER 19's parallel between Varro and Seneca, one that Augustine constructs in Book VI of *De civitate Dei*, relating both authors to the concept of freedom. In Augustine's perception, Seneca is "more free" than Varro, because one can observe in his example, as can be established based on the fragments of his work *De superstitione*, a more significant transparency in expressing the truth and a higher degree of embracing it, although not entirely: Seneca, too, succumbs to tradition in the end, recommending the external simulation

of adherence to the beliefs of the state religion, even as the person in question continues internally to believe some of them to be false. In a similar manner, as we argue in CHAPTER 20, Varro recommends that exceptional Romans believe themselves descendants of gods for the enhancement of their civil spirit and strength of action, even if the belief in the divine nature they claim is not itself held in a true sense; this idea results from the chapter in which Augustine paraphrases Varro, bringing him over on his side of the debate in *De civitate Dei*, 3.4, after a short, but telling rhetorical sequence that connects chapters 3.3 and 3.4, where Augustine offers an image of his audience that assumes he, Augustine, too will adhere to the consensus of not believing in the divine descent of men like Romulus and Julius Caesar. The invoking of this consensus particularly caught our attention, and thus, in search of a solid confirmation that such consensus really existed, we tackled the subject of the divine nature of humans and, through it, the subject of deification in the Roman world, examining in CHAPTERS 21-22 the cultural and historical context of this practice, as well as – and especially – the Ciceronian model of deification, constructed in *De re publica* in order to explain and validate the divine nature of Romulus. In our approach, we divided the steps through which Cicero constructs this model according to the life period that the associated divinity of the founder refers to, thus we discuss the innate divinity and the one attributed to Romulus during his lifetime in CHAPTER 21, while in CHAPTER 22 we discuss the divinity he obtained after his death, through deification and various narratives surrounding his death, in certain cases implying an apotheosis. In all these steps, the emphasis is on the agreement shared by the necessarily-wise *patres* regarding the divine nature of Romulus, in a period of time qualified by Cicero, through Scipio, as completely "historical" and no longer "mythical", so that one can surrender to this belief perpetuated by tradition and accept it. On the other hand, in CHAPTER 23, we contrast the things discussed by Scipio in *De re publica* with the brief, striking dismissal of the belief in the divine nature of Romulus at the start of Cicero's *De legibus*, where the character Marcus suspends indefinitely the inspection of the difference between myth and history by invoking the consensus that things such as the apotheosis of Romulus are not believed within his circle in the dialogue. Consequently, in this chapter we argue that there is a similarity between the invoking of the consensus in *De legibus*, 1.1-5 and the one made in *De civitate Dei*, 3.4, from a rhetorical standpoint, but also based on their contents and ideas; additionally, we discuss what makes Augustine's portrait of Romulus radically different from the one Cicero constructs on *De re publica*, despite the fact that Augustine accepts the structure of rewarding glorious deeds with a deification, meaning a divine nature awarded by the community, just as the pagan part of Book XVIII's universal

history suggests, given the fact that it is presented as a list of deifications, following Varro's teachings. Augustine makes Romulus conscious of the possibility to be deified, making the founder actively (and thus not in an unselfish way) seek this reward, and in the same manner his brother Remus desired this glory: this orientation towards the same supreme goal, one that is different from knowledge of God, makes the founding brothers, as well as their conflict, representative of the internal relation between the members of the earthly city. This, in turn, makes them differ from the brothers Cain and Abel, who illustrate the relation between the earthly city and the heavenly city, in which the beginning of the earthly city is marked by Cain's deed of making himself his own principle and foundation. We discuss the parallel between the Romulus–Remus dyad and the Cain–Abel dyad in CHAPTER 24, followed by our analysis in CHAPTER 25 of the principal source for Augustine's attributing a personal and even innate desire for glory to both founding brothers, that source being Sallustius's historical model, in which man as a being and especially the Roman naturally desires to obtain glory, as an extension of his earthly life through his memory being perpetuated by those he leaves behind. We identify not only in *De civitate Dei*, but also in *De Trinitate*, that Augustine accepts the desire of glory as a type of universal human desire, but wants to replace it with the universal desire of happiness; in the same chapter, we also point out the numerous elements from the Sallustian model that Augustine integrates into his perception of Roman glory. We return to the example of Romulus in CHAPTER 26 and explain the causes and the implications of the fact that Augustine perceives the deification of Romulus as an act of awarding deceptive glory or praises (*adulatio*), through which the faults and crimes of the founder are "covered" by the divine title and honours received. In this context, we analyse the instances where Augustine underlines the fallible and biased character of human judges, emphasizing the privilege given to Romulus in Roman history and religion compared to other humans, but also compared to other gods; to this analysis we add that of the significance of the fact that the identity between Romulus and Quirinus is present in Augustine's discourse, an important aspect, because it is a belief held by a certain part of his opponents. In CHAPTER 27, we examine Augustine's understanding of the example of Junius Brutus and we argue that a particularly telling parallel can be established between the figure of the founder and this prominent figure of the Republic's beginning. Here we see that Augustine applies the same kind of vision both of them, but in the case of Brutus this vision is expanded through the integration of the Vergilian image of Brutus from the *Aeneid*, 6.820-823, as well as through the emphasis put on his personal unhappiness; this transforms Brutus into a first example used by Augustine in order to establish the idea that the problem of happiness cannot be addressed

inside a community directed toward the goal of human glory. Despite the fact that a large part of the Sallustian model is adopted and integrated in Augustine's vision, he does not follow it uncritically: instead, as we show in CHAPTER 28, he produces a commentary of it and suggests solutions regarding its various weak points, such as the idealisation of the archaic period and the dependency on the existence of an external enemy so that the Romans could manifest maximum virtue; moreover, Augustine completes Sallustius's model by including examples that address the problem of luxury (*luxuria*), emphasised in a rival historiographical tradition. The Romans in Augustine's perception did not always follow the principle of glory in a stable and fair way, despite the fact that they themselves chose and established this principle for themselves, and so, to describe and understand this characteristically Roman flexibility in following a principle (or a set of principles), we introduce to our discussion in CHAPTER 29 the term *varietas* as it appears in *De consensu evangelistarum*, I.XXIII.31, a work with whom *De civitate Dei* shares numerous subjects, arguments and even references. The Roman variability can be observed in Book II, within a discussion about laws: a first example is that of the laws against defamation of people by poets, despite the fact that the poets continue having the permission to portray the gods in inadequate and immoral representations; a second example is that of the laws that impose restrictions on actors, such as their exclusion from political life, despite the fact that they play a crucial part in maintaining the worship of the gods in the city. Only in the case of poets, like Vergilius, can *varietas* have a positive meaning, similar to that of artistic freedom, allowing poets to express opposite ideas or doctrines within the same discourse. Lastly, in CHAPTER 30, we discuss how Augustine in Books I-X prepares a substitution of the desire for glory with the desire for happiness, where the shift from one to another is mediated by the desire for individual immortality, a desire that can be observed in Roman thought, including the texts of Cicero and Sallustius. From this perspective, the first half of *De civitate Dei* gains a new meaning, becoming an inquiry into all things contained in pagan *historia*, a type of *cognitio historialis*, to confirm or deny the fact that it includes a way to true happiness; this inquiry is similar to the one made by Porphyry, according to Augustine's presentation of him in *De civitate Dei*, 10.32. Augustine shows that this way is contained in a different *historia*, namely the sacred history contained in Scripture, therefore the latter half of his work is mainly an exposition of Christian doctrine for the Romans who are ready to take on the search of true glory – divine glory – with the same ardour that they, as a people, employed previously in their search for human glory.

In conclusion, in our present work we argue that Augustine's perception of Roman history and culture in *De civitate Dei* coincides significantly with the self-perception of the

educated Romans with whom he engages in this grand "dialogue", but it also coincides with a traditional image of Romanness to whom they wanted to return, hoping, as Augustine portrays them, to restore Roman glory through a return to its ancestral institutions, such as its polytheistic religion. The coincidence of these things is maintained strategically mainly throughout the first half of the work, providing an even more solid ground for Augustine's observations and critiques of different figures, events and religious practices of the Roman past, but also of the condition of Roman authors and authorities who transmitted testimonies of this past. Augustine also gradually prepares his audience to accept a substitution of human glory that was pursued in the past with divine glory revealed as a goal after the appearance of Christianity, and Augustine achieves this while simultaneously recognising the merits and efforts of the Romans as such and keeping a part of the structures to whom his audience was traditionally accustomed functional in the context of this kind of reorientation. In our work, we show to what extent the coincidence between Augustine's perception of Romanness and the Romans' self-perception is maintained, as well as the important diverging points, choosing the most representative examples to discuss following the numerous subjects Augustine addresses. In addition, in APPENDIX 1, we offer to those interested further in this subject a guide to make the reader's navigation of this complex work of Augustine's easier: in it, we indicate every reference Augustine makes to important Romans from Rome's history in *De civitate Dei*, alongside the purpose or the context of each example invoked.

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