INTRODUCTION

Rome Was

Consider Rome, our common fatherland, our mother: she lies there – O shameful spectacle! – trampled by all whom she, the conqueror of all lands and seas, once trampled.

Francesco Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: Italica Press, 2005)[1]

In 1341, Francesco Petrarca, the most important early intellectual protagonist of the Renaissance in Europe, traveled to Rome at the invitation of the city's Senator to accept the honor of the poet's laurel wreath. This imagined revival of the ancient Roman ritual honoring the best poets was both an acknowledgment of Petrarch's early literary fame and an act of faith in his future for the poet and his powerful patron. At the age of thirty-seven he had written many celebrated sonnets in Italian, a number of Latin poems that demonstrated a rare Ciceronian Latinity, and he was at work on *Africa*, his great epic in the manner of the Latin poets. His studies of ancient authors and his Latin letters imitating their style were all the more intense and provocative because he and his patrons increasingly acknowledged that the grandeur of ancient Rome was a distant memory.

The Capitoline Hill where the prize was given made this abundantly clear as it looked out over the ruins of the ancient Roman forum. Once the monumental center of the Roman Republic and Empire, graced by temples, basilicas, triumphal arches, the Senate house, and many statues honoring the gods and emperors, the forum in Petrarch's time had been reduced to a place of smoking lime pits, grazing cows, and the ruins of Rome's former glory.

[1] Francesco Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (New York: Italica Press, 2005), vol. 2, XV, 7, p. 267. Petrarch's lamentations on the sad and decrepit state of Rome in his own day were expressed often in his vast correspondence. This example is found in a letter to Stefano Colonna, the senator of Rome, from circa 1350.

The ancient center of Rome, still the location of a modest twelfth-century palace that housed the office of the Senator, stood isolated from the main population center of the city surrounding the forum. The largest metropolis of the ancient world when it boasted an estimated population of 1 million, Rome had been reduced to a large town of roughly 30,000 people by the time of Petrarch's visit. In an earlier letter to Pope Benedict XII from late 1334 or early 1335, Petrarch expressed the melancholy sentiment evoked by the decline of the ancient capital with the poignant lament: "Meanwhile in murmur sad the words rang forth: Rome was."[2]

Three hundred years later, the intellectual successors and disciples of Petrarch had a decidedly different view. Visitors to Rome in 1650 saw a city dominated by Michelangelo's colossal dome. It crowned new St. Peter's Basilica, a monumental classicizing temple for a new age that dwarfed the ancient Pantheon. At least a hundred new palaces and dozens of churches, many designed with the classical orders of architecture and decorated with statues and paintings proudly recalling Roman imperial grandeur, lined broad new streets and piazzas where processions modeled on ancient triumphs were reenacted. The Capitoline Hill, too, was renewed with the ancient bronze statue of the emperor Marcus Aurelius at its center flanked on both sides by new classicizing palaces designed by Michelangelo. It had become "a monumental symbol in which the haunting dream of ancient grandeur became concrete."[3] Following the dreams and words of the fifteenth-century Roman humanist, Flavio Biondo, Rome had been restored and reborn as Europe's most dramatic urban stage and a central example of the Renaissance of Empire in early modern Europe.

Rome was not alone. By 1650, colossal palaces, majestic domed churches, villas that imitated those of ancient Rome, and equestrian statues dotted both urban and rural landscapes throughout Western Europe. In Madrid, Paris, and London, European monarchs, together with their viceroys, governors, navies, and armies, sought to emulate and move beyond the ancient Romans who had once ruled over their lands. A political Renaissance of Empire had witnessed the rise of numerous new empires or imperial states. The Spanish Empire had acquired global territories that made it larger than the ancient Roman Empire. By 1800, moreover, the major European maritime empires

[2] Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *The Life of Petrarch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 11. The quote is part of a long metric epistle, or letter in Latin verse, also sometimes described as a poem. It urged the pope to return to Rome and also reflected the early conviction of Petrarch that Rome should be the seat of the Empire. It is found in Maud Jerrold, *Francesco Petrarca Poet and Humanist* (New York: Kennikat, 1906), p. 97.

[3] James S. Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1966), p. 65.

of Spain, Portugal, Britain, and France had to varying degrees left a lasting and deep imprint on a substantial part of the world. Imperial power and pretension in the West had risen to a degree that Petrarch could not have imagined. Rome was again. More accurately, there were numerous new Romes all vying for the imperial mantle and all claiming to be the rightful successor to ancient Roman glory.

This revival of imperial ambition, this dream of a Renaissance of empire as an intellectual, cultural, and political project, was nothing less than the dominant master narrative that drove European political life for the entire early modern period – that is, for at least four centuries. Empires that matched or surpassed ancient Rome in territorial domination, military strength, large revenues extracted from their subject peoples, and the power to impose new laws, cultural aesthetics, and religious beliefs were the driving ambitions of rulers of the great age of early modern empire – Charles I of Spain (1500–1557), Philip II of Spain (1527–1598), and Louis XIV of France (1638–1715), to name the most formidable among them. Global empires were the ultimate prize of early modern political contest.

At the heart of this imperial revival lies a historical question that has occupied contemporary historians for some decades: Why the West? Why was it that Western Europe, a politically fragmented and economically unprepossessing part of the world with one-sixth of the population of China in the fifteenth century, rose to dominate the world in the period from roughly 1500 to 1900? China, a politically united power of 300 million people in the fifteenth century, certainly looked more likely to assume that role.

Although many other explanations have been offered, one largely neglected answer is the Renaissance of Empire. The revival and imitation of the memory, texts, cultural forms, intellectual accomplishments, and political aspirations of the Roman Empire animated imperial pursuit and distinguished Western Europe from any other part of the early modern world. What I argue here is that the widespread dissemination of imperial literary, political, and aesthetic ideals deriving from ancient Roman precedents created a common political culture and ambition throughout Western Europe that provided the broad foundations for the first global empires of Spain, Portugal, France, and Britain.

"Political culture" is a term used here to describe a broad collective political mentality and set of practices that developed among the European ruling class between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not to be confused with a uniform political theory or a consistent set of formal policies or juridical definitions. Early modern empires, unlike their modern successors, were guided less by formal political theory than by a set of examples and

historical models derived from Roman antiquity and embodied in a growing body of humanist texts. This literature was characterized by an evolving set of ideas and reflections on empire that were inspired by the revival, study, and imitation of the texts, rulers, and example of ancient Rome above all others. Numerous empires rose and fell in the early modern period, and there was certainly a wide range of political forms and models, but all of these empires shared the common reference of ancient Roman imperial memories and models. Empire was increasingly seen as Europe's birthright as the successor to ancient Rome both pagan and Christian.

As a scholar of later European imperialism noted, "the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea of having an empire*." A related axiom is that "Empire follows Art," with art being broadly defined to include the literary and plastic arts.[4] In the case of early modern Europe, it was the *longue durée* of the Imperial Renaissance, of political ideas and artistic forms taken from the ancient Roman empire, that were repeatedly used as both inspiration and justification for European political ambition over the course of four centuries. It may be "Guns, Germs, and Steel" that answer the question of *how* the West dominated much of the early modern Atlantic world – of the most obvious material tools and causes that explain Western domination. But it was the political mentalities and culture nurtured by the ideas and art of the Imperial Renaissance that largely answer the question of *why* European rulers and peoples thought they should.[5] They were as central to the building of empires as the more formulaic explanations of sails, credit, gold, guns, and steel even if they do not lend themselves as easily to a deterministic-oriented analysis concerned with causation.

Renaissances and Empires

The Renaissance has most often been treated as an intellectual, political, and cultural movement focused on the revival of ancient Roman and Greek civilization, which emerged in Italy in the middle of the fourteenth century and spread to other parts of Europe to varying degrees over the next three centuries. On the intellectual level, this was a movement characterized by the revival, translation, imitation, and dissemination of ancient Roman and Greek texts on an unprecedented level. Culturally, in the time-honored accounts,

[4] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 10–13. The close relationship between Renaissance ideas and cultural forms has seldom been adequately acknowledged or fully incorporated into studies of early European empire, a gap in the literature that this study aims to fill.

[5] Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

it sought to imitate or revive the Vitruvian orders of classical architecture, to rediscover the ability to represent the natural world and human form in art, and to recreate the styles and insights of ancient authors. Politically, it was defined by the revival of two primary political systems from the ancient Roman world: the Republican and Imperial forms of government.

All of these themes, and many others, have been studied and debated, but not all have been treated equally or applied with the same analytical depth to varying European polities. In the realm of political interpretation, most especially, the emphasis on the revival of the ancient Roman Republican political tradition dominated Renaissance scholarship in the wake of World War II and the Cold War. So, for example, the most important single explanation for the interest in Italian Renaissance history in the United States in the twentieth century was the perception that the republicanism of the Florentine and Venetian city-states prefigured the rise of the "republican ideal" in Western Europe and the United States.[6] This was a Renaissance to celebrate like a heroic and virtuous ancestor. The threats to republicanism by the corruptions of power, internal division, and external enemies became an object lesson in the need for republican vigilance.

In regions of Italy with little or no Renaissance republican tradition, the political dimension of the Renaissance has been treated generally as the regional struggle between competing princely dynasties or despots like the Sforza in Milan, the d'Este in Ferrara, the Gonzaga in Mantua, the kings of Aragon in Naples, the Montefeltro in Urbino, and the various popes. In the rhetoric of earlier Renaissance history, these territories and their rulers could be characterized in terms of tyranny or despotism in contrast to the republican ideals of Florence and Venice. But a new political ideal of imperial revival was beyond their grasp, if not their dreams, and they had little impact on the great empires that rose later.

The popes, above all others, have represented the despotic Renaissance. In the prevailing view, the Imperial Renaissance in Rome was politically compromised by the military failures and limits of Alexander VI and Julius II, bankrupted by the extravagance of Leo X, and ultimately overshadowed by the Reformation. The Imperial Renaissance, in this scholarly tradition, was largely over by 1527 and the sack of Rome, although papal imperial ambitions continued, especially in the realms of artistic or architectural production in the Baroque period.[7]

[6] For a succinct summary of Renaissance history in the United States, see especially Edward Muir, "The Italian Renaissance in America," in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 4 (Oct. 1995), pp. 1095–1118.

[7] Charles Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1998.

It follows that many scholars in the Anglo-American tradition would make little connection between the Italian Renaissance and political developments in other major European territories where republicanism was at best marginal and monarchs had greater aspirations than did makeshift Italian despots. Beyond the Alps, the Renaissance, and Italy more generally, was displaced in the conventional accounts by the Reformation or treated primarily as a cultural and intellectual movement void of a serious unified political program. The narrative teleology was not about Renaissance Empire but about national identity and national monarchies culminating in nation-states.

Adding further to the weakening of the Renaissance as a central aspect of early modern European political developments, even the traditional republican narrative has been called into question in recent decades. The strength and purity of the republican political program in Florence and Venice has been strongly qualified. Leonardo Bruni has been found, literarily, in bed with the Medici. His republican public writings, the foundations of the famous civic humanism thesis of Hans Baron, often contradict his private letters that are more pragmatic and accommodating to oligarchs. Florentine and Venetian oligarchies alike also engaged in imperial expansions such as the conquest of Pisa and the Veneto, respectively, without bothering to spread political liberty to the new colonies. In short, there was a good deal of imperial pursuit in the Renaissance republics, a fact that contemporary historians versed in democratic imperialism are quick to recognize.[8] After all, the ancient model most admired by Venice and Florence, Republican Rome, was itself a republican empire. Democratic Athens in the Golden Age also had its colonies.

This deconstruction of the republican narrative of the Renaissance has coincided with a broader questioning of the Renaissance and its place in the Grand Narrative tradition of Western history over the past generation. The Renaissance as a field has been a contested and fragmented territory in recent decades with varying revisions appearing in the thematic, chronological, and geographical emphases of the scholarship.[9] Although the volume

[8] Peter Burke, *The European Renaissance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998). The author opens his book asking the basic question: Why another book on the Renaissance? Part of his answer is that authors and groups that had been previously marginalized needed to be incorporated into the picture. See also James Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Apr. 1995), pp. 309–338.

[9] The chronology of the Renaissance has lengthened considerably over the past generation. While the postwar generation followed a much shorter chronology that usually had the Renaissance end where the Reformation began, around 1520, the contemporary boundaries

of Renaissance scholarship remains high, what is noticeably lacking in any major recent work is a unifying political theory or interpretation that ties the cultural and intellectual revival together with the political developments of European global empires.

This study proposes to offer just that. It argues on a broad level that it was the Renaissance of Empire on two primary levels that had the longest and most profound impact on both Western Europe and the parts of the world colonized by the new empires in the early modern period. On the level of intellectual and cultural life, the revival of ancient texts and cultural forms associated with the Roman Empire reshaped the political mentalities, architecture, and arts of the capital cities and courts of Europe like no other movement did. On the related political level, the ambition to revive real territorial empires equal to or greater than the Roman Empire contributed to the establishment of numerous new global empires that constituted the concrete manifestation of the intellectual and cultural Renaissance.

Far more influential in shaping the political mentalities and programs of European monarchs than the civic humanism and Renaissance republicanism of Northern Italy were imperial humanism and Renaissance imperialism.[10] The imperial humanists applied their rhetorical and grammatical skills to the tasks of recovering, editing, commenting on, imitating, and creating new versions of ancient Roman texts that were used to propagate an imperial political program and set of ideals. Working for princes, popes, monarchs, and emperors as tutors, secretaries, historians, and poets, they truly created a "cultural program and political outlook that reshaped European (and world) history."[11] Together with scholastic political philosophers and theologians, these scholars provided much of the intellectual framework for early modern

now stretch well into the seventeenth century. The Renaissance Society of America, for example, defines the period as roughly between 1300 and 1650.

[10] Certain imperial characteristics notwithstanding, the Renaissance Republics also had a larger degree of political representation, complete with institutions and laws, than their despotic, princely, or imperial neighbors. The Renaissance in Florence and Venice were distinct because of their republican politics, even if rhetoric did not always reflect reality. The simple fact that the *ideal* of civic humanism was created and held up as a possibility significantly transformed the political landscape in early modern Italy and beyond. Regardless of their imperial characteristics, the Florentine and Venetian Republics, as well as the Dutch Republic in the sixteenth century, did experience a political Renaissance and a form of civic humanism that was distinct from the centers of the imperial Renaissance that are the focus of this book. The subject of the lion's share of Renaissance scholarship over the last century, Florence and Venice are left to the side here, as is the Dutch empire.

[11] Quoted in Hankins, "The Baron Thesis." This is a paraphrase of Najemy's claim for civic humanism cited by Hankins.

empires that eventually swallowed up their smaller Republican counterparts like great predatory sharks.[12]

Seen from this perspective, the Renaissance in Florence does not end when the Republic falls. Rather, when Charles V, the first early modern emperor, conquered Republican Florence and installed the Medici as his de facto governors, the Republican Renaissance was overtaken by the Imperial Renaissance. Similarly, the Renaissance in Rome does not end with the ascendancy of the empire of Charles V. It is simply merged with the larger empire that more often than not takes up the role of protector and patron.

This should come as no surprise. As Petrarch's biography of Julius Caesar so clearly demonstrates, the Renaissance and Renaissance humanists, from their very beginning, also held a fascination with the imperial tradition that was always the other political option for Europeans committed to a revival of Roman antiquity. The imperial theme, with its great political lure and temptation of reviving large-scale empires, subsequently came to dominate the political imaginations of European Renaissance princes just as it had dominated ancient Rome throughout the centuries after Caesar.

Clearly, this Renaissance of Empire largely supplanted the republican tradition and the Renaissance republics by the middle of the sixteenth century. It was the revival of empires, not republics, both imagined and real, that came to dominate the literary, artistic, and political agendas of Europe's most powerful states, political writers, and monarchs. This Imperial Renaissance, moreover, continued to shape the political ambitions and agendas of both Catholic and Protestant monarchs and empires throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, taking the Renaissance of Empire seriously requires us to substantially revise and expand our traditional understanding of the impact and longevity of the Renaissance itself. From this political vantage point, the Renaissance as a cultural, intellectual, and political movement spans the better part of four centuries from roughly 1340 to roughly 1715, with powerful echoes beyond. It is thus the most influential political drama of the early modern period.[13]

[12] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). Kristeller emphasized the importance of scholasticism as one of the major schools of Renaissance thought, along with humanism and neo-Platonism.

[13] Empire studies are clearly a hot field at the moment. See, for example, the special volume of the journal *History and Theory* entitled *The History and Theory of Empires*, ed. Philip Pomper, Vol. 44, No. 4 (December 2005). Interest in the theme of Empire across time and place has been spurred in part by the strong perception among many political scientists and historians that contemporary America continues to be motivated by imperial ambition as the direct heir of the European imperial tradition. This is perhaps most overtly stated, albeit from opposite sides of the political spectrum, by Niall Ferguson in his recent work *Empire*

This Renaissance may not have the same political appeal or inspire the same admiration as the Republican Renaissance, but it constitutes a critical part of the political and cultural legacy of the early modern period. The analysis and narrative of the Imperial Renaissance that follows here does not aim to celebrate Western triumphalism, but it does aim to reconstruct and resurrect a central early modern narrative that has been largely buried or minimized in the prevailing scholarship. This Renaissance was and remains central to understanding early modern European and global history – to understanding the intellectual and cultural patterns that constituted a substantial part of the genetic code of early modern empires and their ruling class. As such, it is a cautionary tale about the deep and expansive roots of imperial ambition in the West.

This theme, by the very nature of its broad chronological and geographical sweep, is history on the "grand scale" reminiscent of Fernand Braudel in spirit, if not in form.[14] It is a topic that demands a panoramic and macrohistorical perspective. The chapters that follow subsequently employ a multilayered methodological approach that draws on various analytical tools from cultural, intellectual, and political historians. As a historical essay on the long Renaissance, it privileges those themes, texts, and locations that were central to the revival of Roman imperial antiquity.

Because the project covers a large topic over a long span of time, it is not the purpose here to offer thick historical detail for all of the empires covered. Rather, I aim to first establish the major intellectual themes, aesthetics, and

(New York: Basic Books, 2004) that primarily focuses on the modern British Empire, and by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their work *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) that sees modern global capitalism as the contemporary embodiment of imperialism. Other works such as that by Harold James, *The Roman Predicament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), point to the lingering reference to the old models of empire for builders of modern Europe. Still others, like Nigel Hamiltons's recent *American Caesars* (New Haven, CT:Yale University Press, 2010), indulge in a Roman conceit with deep roots in the Renaissance by overtly modeling the study of the most recent twelve American presidents after the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* by the ancient Roman writer Suetonius. Like these books, most recent work on empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries focuses on the British and American capitalist model of empire. What this literature often lacks, however, is a firm grounding in the expansive Renaissance intellectual and cultural roots of the imperial tradition in the West and more specifically in Renaissance Italy. It is one of the aims of this book to add this early modern perspective to modern debates and perceptions of the lingering lure of imperial ambition in the West.

[14] Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). The last paragraph of the introduction reads, in part: "I hope that I shall not be reproached for my excessive ambitions, for my desire and need to see on a grand scale. It will perhaps prove that history can do more than study walled gardens. If it were otherwise, it would surely be failing in one of its most immediate tasks which must be to relate to the powerful problems of our times."

locations of the Imperial Renaissance in Italy and then to examine how this cultural movement took root in, shaped, and was shaped by the major emerging empires of Spain, France, and Britain.

Two basic interrelated assertions or assumptions guide this work: first, that the long Imperial Renaissance has not been adequately studied, articulated, or acknowledged in the historical literature on the Renaissance to date; and second, that this Renaissance has subsequently not been fully incorporated into the history of early modern empires as the unifying intellectual and cultural movement that it constituted for Spain, France, and Britain.

Much work already exists on individual empires, but there is no work that seeks to analyze and understand the various empires as part of a single movement inspired and driven by a central intellectual, cultural, and political program with roots in the Italian Renaissance. The study that comes closest to this agenda and that provides both important points of comparison and contrast is Anthony Pagden's *Lords of All the World*.

Like this study, that work focuses its attention on Spain, Britain, and France as the three dominant global European empires of the early modern period. Like Pagden, I exclude the Holy Roman Empire, Russia, Venice, and the Ottoman Empire as empires that did not share the basic characteristics of the global empires: to varying degrees they were not major players in imperial competition for New World colonies and trade with the accompanying navies to advance this agenda; they did not witness the proliferation of art and architecture inspired by the ancient Roman Empire; and they did not share to the same extent the circulation of imperial humanist texts and ideas shared by the major empires.[15]

Importantly, the major political observers and actors of the period from Machiavelli to Louis XIV also understood the widening gulf between the new empires and the others. Machiavelli, for example, commenting on the German lands, called the Holy Roman emperor a "shadow of an emperor" who exercised "no direct power" there.[16] Almost two centuries later, Louis XIV ridiculed the German emperor as having no real empire to back up the

[15] Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 4. Pagden notes that competition for American colonies, above all else, caused the Spanish, French, and British to measure themselves against one another and to borrow from one another "in their continuing attempts to understand the evolving shapes of the empires which they had created." Russian, German, and Scandinavian incursions into America, by comparison, were "too transitory to arouse much interest." In addition to Pagden's work, see *Theories of Empire, 1450–1800*, ed. David Armitage (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998) – a collection of essays that, like, Pagden's work, privileges the political theory of empires in the period.

[16] N. Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, vol. 1, p. 379.