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978-1-107-02840-1 - Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the *Variae*, 527–554

M. Shane Bjornlie

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## POLITICS AND TRADITION BETWEEN ROME, RAVENNA AND CONSTANTINOPLE

The *Variae* of Cassiodorus have long been valued as an epistolary collection offering a window into political and cultural life in a so-called barbarian successor state in sixth-century Italy. However, this study is the first to treat them as more than an assemblage of individual case studies and to analyse the collection's wider historical context. M. Shane Bjornlie highlights the insights the *Variae* provide into early medieval political, ecclesiastical, fiscal and legal affairs and the influence of the political and military turbulence of Justinian's reconquest of Italy, and of political and cultural exchanges between Italy and Constantinople. The book also explores how Cassiodorus revised, updated and assembled the *Variae* for publication and what this reveals about his motives for publishing an epistolary record and for his own political life at a crucial period of transformation for the Roman world.

M. SHANE BJORNIE is Assistant Professor of Roman and Late Antique History at Claremont McKenna College. His research interests include ethnography, late antique letter collections, ancient political culture and the 'decline and fall' of the Roman Empire.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Att. Sett.</i>	S. Leanza, ed., <i>Atti della Settimana di Studi su Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro</i> (Soveria Mannelli, 1986)
<i>Cassiod.</i>	S. Leanza, ed., <i>Cassiodoro: dalla Corte di Ravenna al Vivarium di Squillace, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi</i> (Soveria Mannelli, 1993)
<i>CC Just.</i>	M. Maas, ed., <i>Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian</i> (Cambridge, 2005)
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i>
<i>Cités Ital.</i>	M. Ghilardi, C. Goddard and P. Porena, eds., <i>Les cités de l'Italie tardo-antique (IVe–VIe siècle): Institutions, économie, société, culture et religion</i> (Rome, 2006)
<i>CIC</i>	<i>Corpus Iuris Civilis</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>Crisis Oik.</i>	C. Chazelle and C. Cubitt, eds., <i>The Crisis of Oikoumene: The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean</i> (Turnhout, 2007)
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>MGH AA</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
<i>MGH CM</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Chronica Minora</i>
<i>MGH Form.</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Formulae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi</i>
<i>MGH Poet.</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Poetae Latinae Aevi Carolini</i>
<i>MGH SRM</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum</i>
<i>MGH SRG</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum Rerum Germanicarum</i>
<i>Ostrogoth.</i>	Barnish, S., and F. Marazzi, eds., <i>The Ostrogoths from the Migration Period to the Sixth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective</i> (Woodbridge, 2007)

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PG	<i>Patrologia. Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i>
Phil. Soc.	A. Smith, ed., <i>The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity</i> (Swansea, 2005)
PL	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i>
PLRE	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
Teoderic.	<i>Teoderico Il Grande e I Goti d'Italia: Atti del XIII Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo</i> (Spoleto, 1993)
TLRE	A. Jones, <i>The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey, AD 284–395</i> (Baltimore, 1964)
TTH	<i>Translated Texts for Historians</i>

Unless otherwise noted, all primary sources have been translated by the author.

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This book began with an interest in explaining the dramatic departures of Cassiodorus' epistolary collection, the *Variae*, from other paradigms for the publication of letter collections in ancient and late antique writing. Doing so has required questioning the validity of a number of trusted models for the political, literary and social context of the *Variae*. As a result, this book offers a substantial departure from the *communis opinio* concerning Cassiodorus, the *Variae* and sixth-century Italy. However, for all that is new in this book, much derives from steadily accumulated advances in the understanding of how the ancient literate elite wrote and read epistolary collections, the impact of literature on political culture and the sensitivity of communities to the transmission of political ideas and ideology. Even with the support of new scholarly approaches to old problems, suggesting a new model for understanding Cassiodorus and the *Variae* has required the interest, generous encouragement and frank criticisms of a good many people.

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