Italian heritage and the shifting frontiers of *Romanitas*, from Claudius to Trajan

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My contribution begins with a gratuitous attack on a straw man. This maneuver requires some justification. The goal is not (or at least not exclusively) to bolster my rhetorical position by vanquishing an artificially inflated but inevitably flawed interlocutor. Rather, my aims are heuristic: I begin by demolishing an argument that usually would be passed over in silence (or dismissed with a casually insincere “*pace*” in the footnotes) in order to shed light on an inherent tension between two of the underlying assumptions that inform even the most theoretically underdeveloped discussions of the connection between collective identity and the apprehension of the past. The material around which my discussion is organized concerns the memory of Italy’s “pre-Roman” past under the Principate, beginning in the time of Claudius.

The straw man in question is represented by a 1988 note by the Dutch classicist and historian of religion A. W. J. HOLLEMAN, who asked the question, “Did the emperor Claudius have Etruscan blood in his veins?”¹ His answer, it turns out, was an only mildly qualified “yes.” HOLLEMAN built upon previous speculation about the true origins of the *gens Claudia*, which was prompted by the discovery of the name *clavtie* among the Etruscan inscriptions in the Banditaccia necropolis of Cerveteri.² As he sees it, Etruscan ancestry for Claudius would explain not only that emperor’s well-attested interest in Etruscan culture and history, but even two of his four unhappy marriages, first to Plautia Urgulanilla, whose Etruscan heritage is well documented, and then to Valeria Messalina (the Valerii being—on HOLLEMAN’s view—another family of early Etruscan extraction). There follows some further speculation that the scandalous sexual conduct attributed

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¹ HOLLEMAN 1988.

² HOLLEMAN 1984 and 1986. For the inscriptions, *CIE* 6213-17; PALLOTINO 1969.

to these wives, particularly the latter, could be taken as evidence of their own awareness of, and conformity with, ancestral Etruscan custom, which Claudius, as an informed traditionalist, may even have knowingly fostered.³

Serious scholars should disregard HOLLEMAN's speculations about an Etruscan identity for Claudius as misguided and unpersuasive.⁴ Apart from the arbitrary weight placed upon a couple of inscriptions from Caere as (linguistically improbable) evidence for the supposed origins of the Roman *nomen* Claudius,⁵ the most important problem with these arguments is their extraordinary lack of foundation. This is not simply an argument from silence. If so eminent a figure as the emperor Claudius thought himself to be descended from Etruscans, we might expect this belief to have made some mark upon our sources, but there is none. In his life of Tiberius, Suetonius makes no mention of possible Etruscan origins for the patrician Claudii. He is able to report one variant of the commonly-held tradition that the family immigrated to Rome in the early Republic, saying that they may instead have come at the instigation of Titus Tatius in the time of Romulus.⁶ The biographer is unwavering (and consistent with other sources) in assigning their origins to the Sabine town of Regillum, however. As will be discussed further below, Suetonius showed a keen interest in the origins of the families of his Caesars and was scrupulous in reporting such divergent accounts as he came in contact with. If an alternative narrative about ancestors from Caere had inspired Claudius to write his celebrated history of the Etruscans (let alone tolerate the infidelity of his wives), Suetonius of all writers should have known about it, and undoubtedly would have reported it.⁷

³ It should not need saying that the ancient stereotype of Etruscan women's unrestrained sexuality, which can be traced back at least as far as Theopompus, *FGrH* 115 F 204, ap. ATHEN., 12, 517d-18b, is more revealing of the gendered obsessions of ancient ethnographers in their thinking about *truphē* than of authentic cultural practice. See SORDI 1981.

⁴ FARNEY 2007, p. 127-9. *Pace* VANDERSPOEL 1990; TURCAN 1998, p. 163-4; FISHWICK 2002, p. 345-6.

⁵ KEANEY 1991, p. 209-13; cf. PALLOTTINO 1969, p. 84-5; TORELLI 1999, p. 249-55.

⁶ SUET., *Tib.*, 1, 1; cf. LIV., 2, 16, 4; DION. H., *AR*, 5, 40. See WISEMAN 1979, p. 57-76.

⁷ WALLACE-HADRILL 1995, p. 62-4.

According to Tacitus, the familiar story of Sabine origins was actively promoted by the Claudii themselves following their ascension to the central position within the imperial house. He records that the funeral for Claudius' cousin Drusus in 23 CE involved a procession of ancestral portraits not only in the Julian line going back to Aeneas, but also of the *Sabina nobilitas*, including Attus Clausus and his descendants the Roman Claudii.⁸ More importantly, in his version of the speech Claudius delivered on the admission of the Gauls to the senate, which suggests familiarity with if not strict adherence to the records of the actual address as preserved on the fragmentary tablet of Lyon, Tacitus has the emperor himself explicitly claim Sabine origins (*origine Sabina*) for Clausus and the rest of his ancestors.⁹ The rustic, Sabine origins of the Claudii may even have been reflected in the coiffures depicted in some Julio-Claudian portraiture.¹⁰

HOLLEMAN does not address any of these points. In his earlier papers on the origins of the Claudii, he does offer an explanation for why the family's Etruscan connections are not reflected in the ancient accounts of their arrival in Rome, however. He suggests that Sabine origins for the Claudii, as well as for other leading patrician families, were "faked" early on as a means to avoid being caught up by the intense feelings of anti-Etruscan hostility that would have swept through Rome following the expulsion of the Tarquinian kings.¹¹ While still unpersuasive, this argument at least has the advantage of being unfalsifiable. If taken seriously, however, it creates an obvious problem for any subsequent attempt to explain Claudius' Etruscophilia in terms of gentilicial origins. Once we have been asked to believe that a politically prominent family was able to successfully erase the truth of their Etruscan origins from the collective memory of early Roman history, how can we then accept the claim that those long-forgotten origins still had the power to shape the motivations and intellectual interests of one of the best-

⁸ TAC., *Ann.*, 4, 9, 2.

⁹ TAC., *Ann.*, 11, 24, 1; cf. *CIL* 13, 1668 = *ILS* 212. MALLOCH 2013, p. 358-9; GRIFFIN 1982, p. 409.

¹⁰ FARNEY 2007, p. 99. Cf. SUET., *Tib.*, 68, 2.

¹¹ HOLLEMAN 1984, p. 507; 1986, p. 378.

known descendants of that family? The idea that the patrician Claudii somehow preserved a crypto-Etruscan identity for themselves over the course of several centuries, maintaining the secret knowledge of their origins while publicly professing Sabine descent, strains credulity beyond the breaking point. One might attempt to skirt the contradiction by claiming that Claudius rediscovered the secret of his family's origins in the course of his research, but that would entail abandoning the notion that those enquiries were somehow motivated by "Etruscan blood" in the first place.

Turning to the larger picture, I would like to suggest that these logical contradictions are but extreme manifestations of a more deep-seated tension in the way scholars typically approach the interrelationship between ethnic identity and tradition or social memory. On the one hand, we tend to assume that membership in a particular group normally entails an interest in the preservation and propagation of that group's history and traditions.¹² This is the principle that HOLLEMAN relies upon when he uses Claudius' twenty books of *historia Tyrrhenicon* to support a claim of Etruscan origins for the *gens Claudia*. On the other hand, scholars are also ready to acknowledge the contrived nature of ethnic identity itself, insofar as the criteria by which individuals assign themselves and admit others to these groups tend to become unstable in the face of shifting external circumstances.¹³ This is what makes it possible for HOLLEMAN to dismiss the well-established accounts of the Sabine origins of the Claudii as a convenient fiction in the first place.

These two impulses are not necessarily incompatible with one another, but there is an underlying tension here that a concept like the "invention of tradition" does more to highlight than resolve.¹⁴ The terminology of "invented traditions," moreover, entails an implied emphasis on origins, in moments of ethnogenesis or the birth of nations. In this paper, however, my focus is

¹² See in general FENTRESS & WICKHAM 1992, p. 87-143; SMITH 1999, p. 57-88. For ancient Mediterranean, HALL 1997, p. 34-107; GEHRKE 2001.

¹³ See in general BARTH 1969; ERIKSEN 2010, p. 43-69. For the ancient Mediterranean, DENCH 1995, p. 175-217; GALLIA 2016.

¹⁴ HOBBSBAWM 1983; cf. ANDERSON 1991, p. 187-206.

not on creation but decay, skipping ahead to the stage of the cycle in which the communities that had called forth particular understandings of the Italian past were once again being reimagined. As conceptions of Roman identity continued to expand in the wake of the municipalization of Italy, the connection between local elites and explicitly differentiated pre-Roman pasts lost much of its impetus and original meaning. This process of unraveling led to a shift in the way that Italian heritage operated under the Principate.

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We should begin with the matter of national (or more properly, local) pride. Among the Etruscans, at least, the cultivation of a distinctive local identity had persisted long after the Roman conquest. Epigraphic evidence attests to the continued use of the Etruscan language well into the first century BCE.¹⁵ These continuities manifested themselves at Rome largely through the privileged position given to Etruscan haruspices within the operation of Roman state religion. The most famous Latin authors of Etruscan heritage, such as A. Caecina, Tarquinius Priscus, and Nigidius Figulus, made their marks by conveying the specialized religious knowledge of this *disciplina Etrusca* to a wider audience.¹⁶ Within Etruria itself, the display of inscribed *fasti* of haruspices in Tarquinia attests to the continued local importance of the priesthood under the Principate.¹⁷

There must also have been a more secular and properly historical dimension to this heritage, but it was less prominent, and consequently is more difficult to assess.¹⁸ For Romans of Etruscan descent, interest seems to have focused primarily on matters of genealogy. This is suggested, for example, by Horace's flattery of Maecenas' descent from a line of kings as well as Perseus' skewering the vanity of those who traced their distant ancestry through an Etruscan

¹⁵ CIE 378, BENELLI 2001, p. 10-11; Bradley 2007, p. 307-8.

¹⁶ TURFA 2012, p. 3-36; HEURGON 1961, p. 279-93; HARRIS 1971, p. 6-8.

¹⁷ TORELLI 1975, p. 105-35.

¹⁸ CORNELL 1976; HEURGON 1961, p. 305-15. Cf. the reasonable skepticism of HARRIS 1971, p. 4-31. I will resist speculating about the reference to *Tuscae historiae* in a much-debated fragment of Varro, ap. CENS., 17, 6.

stemma.¹⁹ The key evidence, however, are the so-called *elogia Tarquiniensia*, a set of fragmentary Latin inscriptions from Tarquinia similar in style to the *elogia* from the Forum of Augustus.²⁰ These short biographies focus on the history of the city prior to the Roman conquest. So far as we can tell, they do not represent a genuine gazetteer of the *summi viri* from early Tarquinian history, however. They are instead limited to the careers and accomplishments of a single family, represented by a certain Velthur Spurinna and two of his descendants. TORELLI reconstructs a single monument with these texts as *tituli* on the base of a statue group, in a manner similar to that of Julio-Claudian dynastic monuments familiar from other contexts.²¹

Letter forms support a first century CE date, which taken along with the prominence of descendants of the Spurinnae during this period suggests that this monument fits within a well-known pattern in the material transformation of Italy under the Principate. As the imperial house asserted its monopoly on euergetic self-promotion within the city of Rome itself, the remaining members of the senatorial elite began to turn instead to the towns of Italy as sites in which to display their prestige and accomplishments.²² Comparable in this regard is the circular tomb of the Plautii Silvani (Urgulanilla's family) on the outskirts of Tibur, with its not-incidental resemblance to Augustus' mausoleum and its detailed *cursus* inscriptions—reminiscent of the emperor's bronze *Res Gestae*—which record the awards of triumphal *ornamenta* bestowed upon successive generations of the family.²³ The main difference, of course, is that the *elogia* in the forum of Tarquinia looked back to a time when the Spurinnae operated outside the control not just of emperors, but of Rome itself.

A further difference is that triumphal ornaments would also be celebrated with a statue in the city of Rome, such that the military accomplishments recounted on the tomb of the Plautii

¹⁹ HOR., *Carm.*, 1, 1, 1; PERS., 3, 27-29.

²⁰ TORELLI 1975; CORNELL 1978; cf. *Inscr. Ital.* XIII, 3, p. 1-36, 57-67.

²¹ TORELLI 1975, p. 25-44; cf. CORNELL 1978, p. 169. Cf. ROSE 1997.

²² ECK 1984. Other *elogia* in Italy: cf. *AE* 1905, 14 = *ILS* 8965; *AE* 1959, 32.

²³ *Inscr. Ital.* IV, 1, p. 59-65, n. 122-5 = *CIL* XIV, 3605-8. Cf. *CIL* X, 6087 = *ILS* 886; *AE* 1959, 282; VON HESBERG 1992, p. 100-107.

also became part of the general framework of Roman memory beyond their commemoration in the suburban context of Tibur.²⁴ Among the Etruscans, the veteran commander Vestricius Spurinna, whom Pliny the Younger befriended and looked up to as a mentor, would also receive this honor under Nerva, and presumably he commemorated that fact in some manner in his ancestral homeland as well.²⁵ It is unlikely, however, that the atavistic achievements commemorated on the monument of the Spurinnae in Tarquinia were ever celebrated beyond that local context, at least in such a way that they would have become more widely known among Spurinna's fellow senators in the capitol.

For such a thing to occur, the exploits of Velthur Spurinna and his progeny would need to have been recorded in a work like Claudius' *History of the Etruscans*. We know almost nothing about this work beyond the fact that it was written in Greek, comprised twenty books, and, along with Claudius' history of the Carthaginians, was recited annually in the museum of Alexandria.²⁶ There are no proper fragments explicitly attributed to the history, although this has not prevented modern scholars from seeing its influence behind every reference to Etruscan events in the works of authors who are deemed likely to have read it. For example, Tacitus' iconoclastic mention of Rome's capture by Lars Porsenna is regularly discussed as something he may have picked up from reading Claudius' history.²⁷

The most likely reflections of the contents of Claudius' work come from the mouth of the emperor himself.²⁸ In the above-mentioned address concerning the admission of the leading men of Gaul to the senate, Claudius offers his own divergent account of early Roman history, which he claims to derive from Etruscan sources:

²⁴ DIO, 55, 10, 3; GORDON 1952, p. 305-30.

²⁵ PLIN., *Epist.*, 2, 7, 1-2; *PIR*¹ V 308. Spurinna's Etruscan connections are disputed by SYME 1991, p. 542-3.

²⁶ *FRH* 75 T 2 = SUET., *Claud.*, 42, 2.

²⁷ TAC., *Hist.*, 3, 71, 2; SYME 1958, p. 397-8, also 708-10. See, in general, BRIQUEL 1988.

²⁸ BRIQUEL 1988, p. 449-52.

Between this king and his son, or grandson (for even this is disputed by the authorities), was interposed Servius Tullius, a child of the captive Ogresia, if we follow our own authorities, but if we follow the Etruscans, a most loyal comrade of Caelius Vivenna and companion in all his misfortune.²⁹

Presumably following the death of the warlord Caelius, this faithful lieutenant, whose Etruscan name Claudius informs us was Mastarna, was driven from Etruria with the remainder of Caelius' army and settled in Rome on the Caelian hill, so named after their former commander. As Servius Tullius, Mastarna went on to obtain the kingship "with great benefit for the *respublica*" (*summa cum rei p(ublicae) utilitate*).

This story is of great interests to Etruscologist, especially because some of the exploits of Macstarna and Caile Vipinas were also depicted in one of the famous murals of the François tomb from Vulci.³⁰ It needs to be stressed, however, that Claudius did not introduce these persons into his speech purely as antiquarian curiosities. What Claudius, perhaps drawing on his "Etruscan" sources, offers is a work of synthesis, which combines for his audience the less familiar Etruscan narrative of Caelius and Mastarna with the better-known, though not entirely stable, Roman tradition about king Servius Tullius.³¹ Unlike the *elogia* of Tarquinia, which present an account of early Etruscan history entirely in its own terms, Claudius' Etruscan narrative is remade to fit within, and thus become a part of, the broader history of Roman institutions.

Such an approach to Etruscan history constitutes a key element in the overarching argument of Claudius' speech, which is that Rome had always benefited from the contributions of newcomers, even in its earliest days under monarchy.³² This willingness to innovate and welcome outsiders is to be understood as a source of Rome's strength, and thus justifies the present move

²⁹ CIL XIII, 1668 = ILS 212, col. 1, l. 17-20: *huic quoque et filio nepotivae eius nam et | hoc inter auctores discrepat insertus Servius Tullius si nostros | sequimur captiva natus Ogresia si Tuscos Caeli quondam Vi|vennae sodalis fidelissimus omnisque eius casus comes.*

³⁰ PALLOTTINO 1987; HEURGON 1961, p. 63-8. DION H., AR, 3, 65, 6 may reveal familiarity with an earlier account of the Servius-Macstarna syncretism.

³¹ MOMIGLIANO 1961, p. 11-16.

³² FARNEY 2007, p. 229-33. Cf. MOMIGLIANO 1961, p. 44-5; GRIFFIN 1982, p. 412-14.

to admit the *primores Galliae* as senators. To fall back on Tacitus' more pithy turn of phrase in his reworking of Claudius' address, *omnia ... quae nunc vetustissima creduntur, nova fuere*.³³ In light of the specific policy implications of the speech, this sentiment serves to reinforce the second principle laid out in the opening pages of my chapter, which is the inherently malleable nature of the attachments that were supposed to give the pre-Roman history of Italy its contemporary salience under the Principate. Even if we assume that Claudius' interest in the Etruscans was sparked by some strong sense of a personal connection to his material, the perspective he brings to bear in this speech is one that places Mastarna *et al.* in the context of broader changes in Roman society, which he, as emperor, was continuing to push forward.

The general outlines of these transformations have been sketched previously by DESSAU, SYME, and others.³⁴ As Rome's empire grew, so too did the Roman citizenship expand. Under the Caesars, the admission of provincials to the senate marked the trailing edge of this process of political incorporation. Claudius' policies, with regard both to the citizenship and the adlection of provincial aristocrats, marked an important watershed, or, as SHERWIN-WHITE described it, in a phrase with unfortunate reverberations in contemporary political discourse, "The Flood Tide."³⁵ Looking beyond the emperor's myopic pedantry in certain passages and his petty venting of spleen in others, Claudius' speech does more to address the concerns of aristocrats from Vienne and Lyon than those of the Roman or Italian senators whom we usually assume (perhaps incorrectly?) he was trying to convince.³⁶ In the face of such large-scale transformations, the particularistic differences between Etruscan and Roman or Umbrian and Sabine mattered less than that between Italian and Provincial. These also happen to be the precise terms in which Claudius frames the problem: "what then, is not an Italian senator preferable to a provincial?" (*quid ergo? non Italicus senator provinciali potior est?*).

³³ TAC., *Ann.*, 11, 24, 7: "Everything that is now thought of as very ancient was once new." The basic argument derives from LIV., 4.3-5; MOMIGLIANO 1961, p. 16-18; MALLOCH 2013, p. 341-2.

³⁴ DESSAU 1910; SYME 1999; 1958, p. 584-97; SHERWIN-WHITE 1973. Cf. DENCH 2005, p. 117-36.

³⁵ SHERWIN-WHITE 1973, p. 251.

³⁶ Cf. OSGOOD 2011, p. 165-7; SYME 1958, p. 460-1.

The perspective here is one that had already begun to take shape in the Augustan period, in which the whole of Italy, extending all the way to the Alps, comes to represent the dominant political and cultural category.³⁷ Finer-grained distinctions within this larger grouping would continue to matter on the local level, and here we should be thinking of discrete municipal identities as much as ethnic groups. Evidence for this type of local differentiation can be found, for example, in the use of a local system of time reckoning “from the foundation” in a Latin inscription from the Umbrian town of Interamna Nahars or, less esoterically, the sometimes-violent rivalry of neighboring towns such as Pompeii and Nuceria in Campania.³⁸ To the extent that Cicero’s ideas about the dual *patriae* of municipal Romans ever took hold, however, the articulation of such local distinctions may not have mattered that much to those with the means to benefit from the opportunities offered by Rome (and its empire).³⁹

Tota Italia is a broad and somewhat abstract framework out of which to form a new identity, of course, and it should probably come as no surprise that the best attested early proponents of this new collective category were those most recently granted admission to it, namely authors like Vergil and others from the tenth and eleventh Augustan regions, previously known as the province of Gallia Cisalpina.⁴⁰ This vision of Italy below the Alps as a unified peninsula gradually took hold, so that by the time that Tacitus composed his account of the uproar that prompted Claudius’ speech, lingering resentments about the Veneti and Insubres flooding

³⁷ LAURENCE 1998; GIARDINA 1997, p. 17-43

³⁸ *CIL* XI, 4170 = *ILS* 157: *post Interamnā conditam*; BRADLEY 2007, p. 313; cf. HARRIS 1977. *TAC.*, *Ann.*, 14, 17, 1. GIARDINA 1997, p. 53-4.

³⁹ *CIC.*, *Leg.*, 2, 5; cf. *Balb.*, 28-30.

⁴⁰ E.g., *VERG.*, *Georg.*, 2, 136-76; *PLIN.*, *Nat.*, 3.38-42; CHILVER 1941, p. 13-15, 208-12; cf. THOMAS 1982, p. 39.

into the curia had long since been rendered moot.⁴¹ Transpadane origins could hardly appear exotic when even the emperors came from overseas.⁴²

Important nuances can be traced in Pliny the Younger's reflections on the role of Italian identity in the life of a Trajanic senator. In a frequently cited letter recommending a suitable husband for the daughter of Arulenus Rusticus, he refers to the Transpadane region, a homeland he shares with his interlocutor, as "that Italy of ours" (*illa nostra Italia*), transferring to his home district the virtues of modesty, frugality, and old-fashioned rusticity which had long since been displaced from the city itself in Roman moral discourse.⁴³ First projected onto the Sabine countryside by Romans anxious about dissolute urbanity, these traditional virtues eventually migrated all the way to Brescia at the foot of the Alps, and even the great commercial center of Patavium by the Venetic coast was burnished by a reputation for strict morals.⁴⁴ Pliny's appropriation of these values for "his" Italy serves both to foster a sense of solidarity among his fellow Transpadanes (as in this letter) and to justify the political prominence of men from that region.⁴⁵ It is notable, however, that these claims about the moral integrity of Pliny's country are oriented entirely toward the present. He does not go much beyond generic platitudes about the integrity of humble country folk and says nothing about the pre-Roman (whether Celtic, Etruscan, or Ligurian) past from which these "ancient" virtues originated.⁴⁶ The antiquity imagined here is a distinctively Roman concept, rather than a uniquely local or even Italian one.

⁴¹ TAC., *Ann.*, 11, 23, 3: *an parum quod Veneti et Insubres curiam intruperint...* ? MALLOCH 2013, p. 350-1. On the remarkable success of senators from the North, see ALFÖLDY 1999, p. 261-6; SYME 1991, p. 635-46; CHILVER 1941, p. 93-111 (with caution).

⁴² Although the Ulpian may have claimed ancestors from Umbria (SYME 1958, p. 602-4, 786; FARNEY 2007, p. 238) Italica was a far cry from Italia: cf. DIO 68, 4, 1 (written under the Severans). Also relevant here is the elder Pliny's gloss on Narbonensis, *Nat.*, 3.31: *Italia verius quam provincia*.

⁴³ PLIN., *Epist.*, 1, 14, 4.

⁴⁴ PLIN., *Epist.*, 1, 14, 6. Cf. MART. 11, 16, 8; TAC., *Ann.*, 16, 5, 1. See DENCH 2005, p. 172-93; FARNEY 2007, 109-11.

⁴⁵ On Pliny's Transpadane friends, comprising a network of acquaintances from a neighborhood in and around Comum and Mediolanum, SYME 1985, p. 30; 1991, p. 620-21. See also LOMAS 2012, p. 198-202 on the importance of *vicinitas* in Cicero's correspondence.

⁴⁶ Cf. WILLIAMS 2001: 70-93.

Pliny's interest in the local traditions of other parts of Italy, as reflected in his letters, is remarkably minimal. The connection to Italy most often represented in the *Epistulae* is that of a landowner to his estates rather than that of someone with an emotional investment in a *patria* with a common heritage.⁴⁷ Pliny seems to approve of Trajan's enforcement of the rule that senators must own estates in Italy "lest office-seekers regard the city and Italy not as their fatherland but like travelers as a guesthouse or way-station."⁴⁸ The conjunction of *urbem Italiamque* as a singular *patria* is suggestive of the new, regionally unspecific, ideology of the unified Roman Italy. Pliny's principal concern, however, is the effect that Trajan's rule has had on property values, especially in the *suburbana*. He closes the letter somewhat paradoxically by advising his addressee (Nepos, a fellow senator!) that the time is ripe to sell off any unprofitable Italian properties and reinvest the profits in the provinces.

For his own part, Pliny was careful to diversify his Italian holdings, with estates in Etruria and Laurentum, as well as his native Comum.⁴⁹ These properties sometimes drew him into local affairs. For example, Pliny became patron of Tifernum Tiberinum, a town near his Tuscan estate, and repaid the honor by dedicating a temple there.⁵⁰ Despite such ties, however, he conveys virtually no interest in the local history or traditions of the place, although he claim to have yielded to the "warning of the haruspices" when called upon to enlarge the shrine in Tifernum.⁵¹ The closest he comes is a vague comment about the salubrity of his *Tuscanum*, where men live to an advanced age, and hearing their stories about the old days makes one feel "as if one had been born in another era."⁵²

⁴⁷ See, e.g., PLIN., *Epist.*, 8, 2; 9, 37; KEHOE 1988.

⁴⁸ PLIN., *Epist.*, 6, 19, 4: *honorem petituos urbem Italiamque non pro patria sed pro hospitio aut stabulo quasi peregrinantes habere.*

⁴⁹ PLIN., *Epist.*, 5, 6; 2, 17; 4, 6; 5, 14. Regional diversification was recognized as a hedge against bad weather: 3, 19, 4.

⁵⁰ PLIN., *Epist.*, 4, 1; CHAMPLIN 2001.

⁵¹ PLIN., *Epist.*, 9, 39, 1: *haruspicum monitu*. Haruspicy is elsewhere held up for ridicule, when it is implicated in one of the legacy-hunting schemes of the scoundrel M. Aquilius Regulus: *Epist.*, 2, 20, 3-5, cf. 6, 2, 2.

⁵² PLIN., *Epist.*, 5.6.6: *hinc senes multi: videas avos proavosque iam iuvenum, audias fabulas veteres sermonesque maiorum, cumque veneris illo putes alio te saeculo natum.*

Regarding his friend Vestricius Spurinna, whose ancestors' statues were on display in Tarquinia, Pliny betrays no appreciation of or interest in his Etruscan heritage. The letter on Spurinna's exemplary approach to retirement presents him as a charming and vigorous man of letters who took stimulating walks and composed learned verses in Greek and Latin (*utraque lingua*—proof that Ennius' *tria corda* had long since been displaced from Roman literary culture).⁵³ Pliny did call attention to the Umbrian heritage of one of his friends, the poet C. Passennus Paulus, but only because he wanted to portray Paulus as following in the footsteps of his relative and fellow *municeps* Propertius.⁵⁴

The perspective of these letters may be used to suggest the emergence of a cosmopolitan elite, whose ties to the Italian regions in which they lived and owned property were more attenuated than the connections they formed with one another. They still fulfilled their obligations to their hometowns and neighbors and paraded their devotion to their particular *patria / regio / Italia*, but these ties were not as exclusive as they might once had been. As Pliny's attention to literary pursuits suggests, the strongest bonds of cultural identity they forged were Roman.

Similar developments can also be seen reflected in the family tree of P. Clodius Thrasea Paetus, the stoic senator and celebrated victim of Nero.⁵⁵ Tacitus informs us that part of what made his disapproval of the emperor's theatrical histrionics so galling to those in power was the fact that Thrasea himself was also known to take to the stage in his native Patavium as part of the *ludi cetasti*, an ancient festival with origins that went back to Antenor, the Trojan founder of the Veneti.⁵⁶ But this Patavian, with deep ties to ancient local traditions, took his second cognomen from his father-in-law A. Caecina Paetus, who was an ethnic Etruscan with a family that hailed

⁵³ PLIN., *Epist.*, 3.1.7. Cf. GELL., *NA* 17, 17, 1; FEENEY 2016.

⁵⁴ PLIN., *Epist.*, 6.15.1; *PIR*² P 141; CHAMPLIN 2001, p. 124. Famous literary figures are again intertwined with reverence for one's *patria* (this time probably Milan) at *Epist.*, 4, 28, 2. On Propertius and Assisi, see CAIRNS 2006, p. 1-33; BRADLEY 2007, p. 314-5.

⁵⁵ *PIR*² C 1187; SYME 1991, p. 568-87

⁵⁶ TAC., *Ann.*, 16, 21, 1; LIV., 1, 1, 1-3; cf. CATO, *FRH* 5 F 58, ap. PLIN., *Nat.*, 3.130; STRAB., 5, 1, 4; WILLIAMS 2001, p. 77-8.

from Volaterrae.⁵⁷ Thrasea's own son-in-law, Helvidius Priscus, came from the Samnite backwater of Cluviae in Carecina.⁵⁸ A homeland that spanned so broad a swathe of the Italian peninsula cannot have offered a compelling justification for these attachments. What brought these men together instead was a shared ethical and political outlook.

The background of the Flavian emperors can be regarded as another version of the same tale. The familiar image of Vespasian as a hearty commander of Sabine stock was easy to spin into hagiographic verses such as Silius' *bellatrix gens bacifero nutrita Sabino*.⁵⁹ As with Pliny's morally loaded *Italia noster*, this image of rustic simplicity was deliberately promoted by the emperor. He even had a country accent to set himself apart from the refined urban aristocracy of the capitol.⁶⁰ Not all Italian notables behaved in this manner, however. Compare the efforts of the Vitelli, a *gens* of obscure Apulian origins, who, upon attaining an ascendant position under Augustus, were granted an ancient patrician (though originally Sabine) heritage as the supposed descendants of Roman colonists.⁶¹ Vespasian, in contrast, was secure enough in his Sabine identity that he could laugh at his flatterers' attempts to provide a heroic genealogy involving Hercules and the founders of Reate.⁶²

The real story, diligently researched and presented by Suetonius, turns out to be more complicated. Some maintained that Vespasian's great-grandfather was an immigrant to Reate from Transpadana who made his money as a contractor of migrant agricultural labor.⁶³ As the family's fortunes rose, they circulated broadly, acquiring connections beyond the Sabine heartland. Although born in Falacrinae, Vespasian was brought up on the Cosan estates of his

⁵⁷ *PIR*² C 103; *PLIN.*, *Epist.*, 3, 16; *CIL* XI, 6689, *AE* 1957, 220. Cf. SYME 1983, p. 106-7.

⁵⁸ *PIR*² H 59; *TAC.*, *Hist.*, 4.5; cf. *CIL* IX, 2827.

⁵⁹ *Sil.*, 3, 596: "a warlike race reared in olive-bearing Sabinum." Cf. *JUV.*, 3, 84-5. DENCH 1995, p. 80-98; FARNEY 2007, p. 96-101.

⁶⁰ *SUET.*, *Vesp.*, 22; cf. *QUINT.*, *Inst.*, 11, 3, 30-31.

⁶¹ *SUET.*, *Vit.*, 1-2; cf. *PLUT.*, *Popl.*, 3, 3.

⁶² *SUET.*, *Vesp.*, 12.

⁶³ *SUET.*, *Vesp.*, 1, 4. The story is given credence by SHAW 2015, p. 73.

paternal grandmother.⁶⁴ His father, Flavius Sabinus, would eventually die among the Helvetii, having turned Swiss banker after making his fortune as a tax collector in Asia.⁶⁵ The value of these connections is retrospectively self-evident, of course: one did not become emperor without a substantial network of friends.⁶⁶ What it meant to be “Sabine” in such contexts, beyond the respected brand of a cognomen, is difficult to say.⁶⁷ Perhaps this is why Vespasian was uninterested in burnishing his Reatan genealogy. Local history, which had long been a way to bestow glory upon the families of Italian aristocrats, had less salience for an emperor who could attribute his position to the cosmic power of *Fortuna* instead.⁶⁸

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To conclude, let us return once more to Claudius’ interest in the Etruscans. Insofar as this cannot have been motivated by ethnic chauvinism, what does it reveal about Italian identity under the Julio-Claudians? The fact that Dionysius of Halicarnassus had planned to compose a work on a similar topic points to a partial explanation for Claudius’ interests in the expansive horizons of antiquarian and historical scholarship that had come about with the wholesale reorganization of knowledge under the early Principate.⁶⁹ Once again, a justification for an imperial policy helps to flesh out the picture. In the year before Claudius exercised his censorial authority to admit the long-haired Gauls into the senate, Tacitus records another proposal which he made before that body:

He addressed the senate over the college of haruspices, so that Italy’s oldest knowledge should not fade away through negligence, saying that they had often been called upon in difficult times for the republic, and by their guidance rituals were reformed and subsequently conducted more correctly. The leaders of Etruria, of their own accord or

⁶⁴ SUET., *Vesp.*, 2, 1.

⁶⁵ SUET., *Vesp.*, 1, 1-3.

⁶⁶ SYME 1958, p. 593-4. See in general NICOLS 1978.

⁶⁷ Cf. FARNEY 2007, p. 215.

⁶⁸ SCOTT, 1936, p. 3-17.

⁶⁹ DION. H., *AR*, 1, 30, 4. WALLACE-HADRILL 2008, p. 231-58; BRADLEY 2007, p. 310-11.

under pressure from the Roman senate, maintained this knowledge and fostered it through family lines. This happens with less urgency now, what with public lethargy about respectable pursuits and because foreign superstitions are gaining strength. Everything was favorable at the moment, of course, but thanks were owed to the gods' goodwill and sacred rituals maintained in uncertain times should not be wiped out by prosperous ones.⁷⁰

Scholars are right to cite this passage, which also likely derives its contents from a Claudian oration, as further evidence for the emperor's special interest in Etruscan culture. It has even been suggested that the celebrated statue of Claudius set up in Caere reflects Etruscan gratitude for the special favoritism shown them by this emperor.⁷¹ In reading Tacitus' account, however, two additional features stand out. The first is that Etruscan knowledge has once again been subordinated to Roman interests. Haruspicy is justified by the benefits it has bestowed upon Rome, just as the arrival of Mastarna/Servius was lauded as *summa cum rei p(ublicae) utilitate*. Its preservation was therefore subject to senatorial compulsion if the local Etruscan aristocracy was no longer sufficiently motivated.⁷²

The second, related impression one gets is a sense of encroaching doom for the Etruscan *disciplina*, which was imperiled not only through neglect but also by competition from new forms of religious knowledge (*quia externae superstitiones valescant*). Set in this light, the fetishization of Etruscan culture represents not so much a revival of a pre-Roman identity as a last, desperate attempt to preserve an aspect of Italian culture that was already in the process of disappearing as

⁷⁰ TAC., *Ann.*, 11, 15: *rettulit deinde ad senatum super collegio haruspicum, ne vetustissima Italiae disciplina per desidiam exolesceret. saepe adversis rei publicae temporibus accitos, quorum monitu redintegratas caerimonias et in posterum rectius habitas; primoresque Etruriae sponte aut patrum Romanorum impulsu retinuisse scientiam et in familias propagasse. quod nunc segnius fieri publica circa bonas artes socordia, et quia externae superstitiones valescant. et laeta quidem in praesens omnia, sed benignitati deum gratiam referendam, ne ritus sacrorum inter ambigua culti per prospera oblitterarentur.*

⁷¹ OSGOOD 2011, p. 156. TORELLI 1971, p. 500-1 warns against associating the emperor too closely with the so-called "throne of Claudius," a relief from Caere depicting a collection of statues of personified Etruscan cities; cf. MOMIGLIANO 1961, p. 83-4, n. 22.

⁷² BRIQUEL 1995, p. 34. Cf. CIC., *Div.*, 1, 92.

the world changed around it.⁷³ How much of this reflects Claudius' own perspective and how much should be attributed to Tacitean hindsight remains unclear. A modern reader, mindful of those marginal groups that ethnographers go out to study (like CAMPBELL among the Sarakatsani) only a generation or two before they vanish completely, could easily wonder whether Claudius' interests portended a similar fate for the Etruscans.

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⁷³ Cf. NORA 1989.

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