The 2,000-Year History of Rome and Its Lessons Today

Edward Watts: This is a lecture that comes out of the current book project, the book that was just published about a year ago. It's based on a question that for me, has always animated the work that I'm doing because, I'm interested in Roman history not because Rome fell, but because Rome survived, because Rome succeeded, not because of what it didn't do, but because of what it did do. And so I was particularly interested in a question that actually nobody asks. How did the Roman state survive for nearly 200 years? There's lots and lots of books that talk about how Rome fell. There's lots of books even that talk about how Rome started. But there aren't many books that say, "Great, how does this state survive for so long?" That's the question I really wanted to answer. But I want to start with a caveat, so I just came back from about two months at the University of Auckland, where one of my colleagues there brought up a question that I think is a really important question that I need to use as a jumping off point for this discussion because he basically said, "What are you talking about when you're talking about the Roman state?"

I'll tell you what I'm talking about when I'm talking about the Roman state. For early historians of the Roman state, they look at this and they say, "This doesn't really look like a state." I think they're right. Today, what I'm going to use, the word state to represent, is just simply the Roman political community. This is, I think, a term of convenience more than a definition that I'm going to fight for. If you don't agree with me, we can talk about this in the questions, and I promise I'll fold super fast. But I think it's important to speak about this as a political community and not a nation state. Mainly because there are moments where the Roman state does basically become pretty close to a nation state. But then there's really a good span of almost 500 years between the turn of the 3rd century and the middle of the 7th century where it does function basically as a nation state, and then it stops, and it falls into crisis, and it doesn't work that way, and then it comes back again.

I can't defend the idea of the Roman state as a nation state because it's not like there's a steady progression from something primitive to a nation state and the Roman state stays there. There's a progression, and then there's a falling back, and then there's another progression, and then in the 11th century, the nation state becomes an empire. It becomes very messy to think about this as anything but basically a political community. How did Romans understand it? Well, we have a Roman who tells us what I think summarizes in a nutshell, what Romans believe this political community to be. Here I have such a temptation to, like, wander over there, but I won't. This comes from the work of a historian named Appian. Appian is a very interesting figure because he's a Greek speaker. He was born in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. He sees himself as Greek.

He sees himself as Egyptian. But when he was in his 20s, he left Egypt. He went to Rome. He started a career in Rome. He was a Roman citizen. He eventually became a priest in a Roman temple, the Temple of Venus in Rome, which is, if you've been to Rome, that giant temple that's across the valley from the coliseum. He was one of the first priests in that temple. This is a guy who is Greek, Egyptian and Roman, all of those things at once. He describes how you can be all of those things at once. When he writes his history, he writes the history not sequentially, starting with the earliest thing and ending with the latest thing. He writes it instead based on when various parts of the Roman Empire become part of the Roman Empire. He uses a term ethne, which means literally nations, but really he's talking about the people who live in a particular region.

He writes the history of each ethnos separately until they become part of the Roman state. Then when they become part of the Roman state, they're incorporated into the Roman arche, which literally means empire, but effectively what he's talking about is the Roman state. What's interesting is the work moves geographically around the Mediterranean as each ethnos becomes part of the arche. Then once Egypt is conquered by the Emperor Augustus, then the history

changes because now every ethnos is part of the arche. Then it becomes a linear history that moves chronologically like histories we're accustomed to. What Appian is saying is that arche is a unit that contains all of these ethnic. The empire is a unit that contains a whole bunch of different nations. When you're part of it, you don't lose that identity of what ethnos you come from, you gain an identity.

Becoming Roman is not about, like, converting to Christianity, where you stop being pagan and you start being Christian. Becoming Roman is like I don't even know how to describe it. It's like, I'm from New Jersey. I'm no longer living in New Jersey, but you can hear I'm from New Jersey. But I live in California and I'm part of the United States. Those are added identities to my New Jersey identity, and it makes total sense to us, and it made total sense to them. Membership in this Roman political community means that you're part of something bigger than your hometown or even the home region you come from. When we think of the Roman state in this way, we get this massive history of this entity that billions of people become invested in belonging to. The durability of this is astonishing. This political community starts in the 8th century BC as a Latin speaking pagan monarchy set in seven hills above the Tiber River in Central Italy, and it ends in 1204 AD as a Greek speaking Christian empire centered on the city of Constantinople.

It begins during the beginning of the Iron Age in Italy. It ends when people are using gunpowder in wars in Eurasia. This is how long it lasts. In these two millennia, like, everything about the Roman state changes. It's religion, it's language, its center of political gravity. But That political identity remains. That state, that arche, that unit that everybody attaches themselves to, it's still there. How did it endure for so long? Now, the question, I think, becomes much more interesting. It's less trivia and more, how do you build something like this. How do you build a structure that people, first of all, want to belong to, and then second of all, can belong to while still retaining every connection to who they were in the past. That seems like an amazingly important question, but it's one Roman historians don't ask. The reason we don't ask it is in large part because the span of time is so long.

When Roman historians divide our work up into specializations, these are only some of the specializations that we have. If you work on early Rome, you're really working on the period from the 8th century BC to about 509 BC. 509 BC is the revolution that leads to the beginning of the Roman Republic. We'll talk about that a little bit later. The Early Republic is almost 250 years, running 509-287, the Middle Republic, 287 to 133, the Late Republic, 133 to 30 BC, the High Empire, 210 years, almost as long as the United States has lasted. 30 BC to 180 AD, the late Empire, another 215 years, 180 to 395. Then you get this catch all that is Byzantium, which is another 1,100 years of history that then Byzantinist divide up. There's a reason why these divisions exist, because they make sense. On one level, they make a lot of sense. Because the stuff that we do when we do this work is very different in each of these periods.

Let's move back. Scholars working on early Roman history, this is the stuff you have. This is a set of post holes on the on the Palatine Hill. These are thought to be where Romulus originally set up the city of Rome. He didn't. But these are representatives of the housing that people lived in. We know this because when they buried their dead, they did it in these little huts that represents, where they lived. They bury the ashes and then, precious, like, keepsakes in these little huts to represent the after life, so it looks like this life. But usefully, we can map the little post holes and say, "Hey, it looks pretty much like what you'd need if you wanted to build that." We have some writing, but it's stuff like that, the Lapis Niger. It's not amazingly detailed stuff. As you move later, in the High Empire, we have incredible materials. We have things like these wall paintings that come from the Villa of Livia.

We have, of course, massive monuments like the coliseum, so massive that nobody in that Early Roman period could ever conceive of something like that existing and definitely couldn't conceive of how to build it. The art is just spectacularly beautiful. But we also have all kinds of other stuff from the High Empire that allows us to reconstruct what's going on there, stuff related to daily life. That's a bowl given out by people running for election, you get free food, you finish the food. You

see the name of the guy who paid for the food on the bowl. This is, a fragmentary text that's written. It's painted on a wall. These are coins, again, with writing. We have all stuff that not only is, history about what happened, but also just the remains of daily life in written form. Then you move to Byzantium, and you have a whole other set of evidence.

You have spectacular things like Hagia Sophia that exist basically structurally intact. You have art and religion, that is Christian and Greek, but still engaged with actively by people in these towns and communities. We even have autographed manuscripts of texts written by their actual author. This is a history written by the historian Michael Attaleiates. Attaleiates actually, we have a signature, it's on this. We have the autographs of Roman emperors from the later period. All of this stuff makes sense to divide. If you're working with, like, let's rebuild a hut based on some drilled things in bedrock and a representation in clay, you are not doing the same work as somebody working with the autographed manuscript of a historian, and yet, it's the same state. It makes sense that we have these divisions, but it also creates problems when we have these divisions.

Because when we impose a division on the past that's convenient for us, we're also separating the stories of individuals who lived through those moments. We miss the fact that when we throw down that curtain that says, "It's 287 BC, now we're in the Middle Republic, nobody in 287 BC is like, my God, I'm so excited. I made it to the Middle Republic." It doesn't make any sense to them to do that, and it doesn't make any sense for us to try to reconstruct their lives by doing that. There's a reason we do it, but there's also something we lose when we do it. At each point in these processes, we have something constant. All of these people believe that they are part of a Roman political community. That's a constant. When we draw these lines, the lines make sense. But when we draw these lines, we lose that. We lose that sense that you could be in Constantinople in the year 1100 and still feel like you are connected to Romulus or Julius Caesar, or Cicero or Constantine, because your political community is still there.

It's still intact, and you are invested in it. What we see is those connections are things Romans themselves frequently reference because that Roman identity is meaningful to them. I'll give you just some examples from various points where you can see someone saying this Roman identity is meaningful to me. In the Royal period, we have this tomb painting from Volsci, and it's painted by an Etruscan, but it represents Mastarna who is identified with Rome's sixth king Servius Tullius, fighting alongside someone named Gnaeus Tarchunies Rumay. Gnaeus Tarquinius of Rome, and so there, the identity of Rome matters. It's referenced. He is Roman. That's why his Etruscan name is Cneve Tarquinius Rumay, because he's Roman. You move later, and under the empire, here's a coin from 12 AD. It shows the Emperor Tiberius. Again, I'm so tempted to bounce over there and do this, but you can see on there, ROM ET AVG.

This is a coin from the city of Lyon in France, and it represents a altar to Rome and Augustus in the city of Lyon. Because people in Lyon, yes, they're Gallic. They live in the city of Lugdunum but yes, they are also identifying quite strongly with Rome. This is now almost 900 years later. This is a coin of the Emperor Leo VI, that's minted in Constantinople. On the front, you can see it listing him as Lyon Basileus Rome, so Leo, the emperor of the Romans, and on the back, Leo N Theo, so Leo in God, Basileus Romeon. In God, the emperor of the Romans. Nine hundred years later, this idea is still there. It's still the language they're using.

It's not just the identification as Romans that mattered, it's also the knowledge that this connection that you in the present enjoy to all those people in the past should help the way you think about the world you're in at this moment. For example, in 48 AD, the Emperor Claudius, in Lyon, we have this. This is actually the text of a speech given by the Emperor Claudius to the Roman Senate in 48. We actually have it. It is an ancient document. You can go to Lyon and see it. In this, he references Mastarna, the Etruscan king. He says that Mastarna is a reason why I, in 48 AD, can let people who are now from what's now France join the Roman Senate, which is supposed to be up to that point, made up only of Italians. He says, "We as Romans have always introduced talented people into our society when it's necessary". Here's my example of it, Mastarna.

Look to the past to understand the present. Leo does the same thing in 900 when he says, "I'm putting together a law code. My law code is not just what I think we should do. It's something where I take everything from the earliest times until now. That's my law code". The past matters in shaping the present.

These connections matter because they allow the state to bring in new people and new ideas and new traditions and to change, but to do it in a fashion that does not break the connection with the past. That connection with the past is not religious, it's not linguistic, it's not geographic. All those things change in those 2,000 years. It's political. That political connection is what gives you this way of understanding the present in dialogue with that past, because all Romans across this immense span of time understood something pretty fundamental about how their society works. They are stakeholders. They're shareholders in a multigenerational political enterprise. They don't own it. They inherit it, and the goal is to pass it on in better shape than you got it to your kids. We would call this citizenship. Romans are very clear about how citizenship matters, what it actually represents, and how this state is connected to it.

I have a quote from Cicero. This is one of my absolute favorite quotes. I use it all the time because it's, in a sense, the most concise way to understand what Roman political life is like. "A republic is the property of the people." It's very concise in English. It's even more concise in Latin. Res publica, res populi. Res publica means the public thing. Res populi means is a thing of the people, a thing belonging to the people. What is the Republic? It's something that belongs to its citizens. Who are its citizens? They're people joined together by consensus about what's lawful and what's good. That, in a nutshell, is the thing that unifies Romans across all those generations that ownership, that fact that the state belongs to them.

That idea that the state belongs to its citizens is not novel for Romans. There are other states in antiquity that do this. What is novel for Romans is the idea that you can take people who aren't born Roman, and you can give them an equal share in that state.

We have a speech given in 144 AD by a 27-year-old orator named Aelius Aristides, and he's from Asia Minor. He comes to the city of Rome for the dedication of the Temple of Venus and Roma. That's the Temple of Venus and Roma. Appian is probably there. This gives you a sense of the moment we're in. In that speech, he celebrates what it means to be part of this empire, and he says, "Rome created an empire whose eternal duration the whole world prays for because Rome alone, of all those who have ever gained an empire", and the word he's using here is archy, of course. "It rules over men who are free because it made citizenship expansion a worthy goal and caused the label Roman to mark a common nationality that people across this entire space could share." When Aristides is writing about this, citizenship is not yet universal for everybody, but it is available to the people who are talented, the people who can contribute to Rome.

Then in 212 AD, it becomes universal.

The terms of that universality are really interesting because we have the text. This is the law in which the Emperor Caracalla extends citizenship to everybody in the Roman world. This is the actual text of the law. In it, it says, "I grant Roman citizenship to all aliens". By aliens, he just means non-Romans, "throughout the Roman world with local citizenship remaining intact". That's what Appian is talking about. You now are a member of this larger political community, but you don't lose who you are. If you're Athenian, you're still Athenian, but you're also Roman. This is how you create a political community. You don't make people choose to be Roman or what they were before. You add Roman to what they were before so that you can create a membership in that political community that's personally meaningful to them. From that point forward, the Roman state belonged to every free person who lived in it.

Everybody who's not a slave is a shareholder in this state. That's really important because there's 60 million of them. The Roman state at that time is basically the size of Australia.

Then we get something else really interesting happening about a century later. The Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, and Christianity becomes a overlay onto this. Again, it's part of this system. You could be not Christian and still be a Roman citizen. But at the time that Constantine converts, Christians try to figure out exactly what does it mean to be Christian in a Christian empire, and they come up with a system that is an even more clear articulation of what Appian had already talked about. This idea of becoming Roman while also being other things. I'm going to show a text again. This is a text. It's a chronicle written by the Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, roughly at the time Constantine converted to Christianity. This is an early fourth-century AD text. What Eusebius was really interested in doing is taking the histories of all of these diverse people across the world and lining them up so you could say, in this year, this happened in Rome.

This happened in Judea. This happened in Persia, this happened in Macedonia, this happened in Lybia, this happened in Egypt. You have just columns saying, Persia, Judaism. Meaning the Old Testament. Rome, Greece. Asia Minor, Egypt. As you move through time, what we see is these columns start disappearing. Right here, we see a column that was the column that represented the Seleucids, the regime in Syria that rose after Alexander the Great's Empire fell apart. At the top of this, the column is still there on this page, but it says, the Syrian Kingdom has disappeared. The Syrian Kingdom has died. There's a column with a heading that says this is the Syrian Kingdom's column, but there's nothing in it because the regime has died. The next page, the circle is there, but there's nothing in it, and the column is empty. The next page after that, it's gone.

Then the last one to disappear is the Jewish kingdom. Judaism disappears as a separate category with the destruction of the temple by the Emperor Titus in 70. We see in there, this says that the temple is destroyed. Then after that, we have just one column, a Roman column. What we should understand from what Eusebius is doing is not, this is genocide. That's not what he's saying. What he's saying is now these separate columns like a stream that comes together into a river. They are now Roman. It's not that their history doesn't exist. It's that their history has now merged with Roman history. After 70, there is just Roman history. This is Appian's model as well, except now you can see it visualized. This is the way that you get stuff like, why do Romans preserve Greek history? Because it's their history. Why are Romans interested in Egyptian history?

Because it's also part of their history. Egyptian history eventually merges with Roman history. Greek history eventually merges with Roman history. All of these traditions in the past are still valid. They're still meaningful. They're still part of the story. But the story now has become a Roman story because all of these people are part of this Roman archy. Roman political history then is the story of 80 generations of Roman citizens and the state that they collectively pass on from their ancestors to their heirs. This is how you get this unity. Romans are bringing new people in. They're bringing new historical traditions in. The history of that political entity becomes a history of all 60 million people in this space the size of Australia. As the Roman state starts to shrink, beginning in the fifth century, there isn't any sense of, hey, I live in Greece.

This isn't me anymore. You're still Roman because you now are the heirs of that political tradition. That political community is shrinking, but you're still in it. Just like your grandfather and your great-grandfather. It doesn't matter if your great, great, great, great, great, great, great-grandfather was Spartan and not Roman. That's still there. It's just Spartan history merged with Roman history. If this is the case, how should we look at some of these famous moments of political change that people might say, that's the end of the Roman state? I think we can see and we can understand them as evolutions instead of revolutions. Let's start with the transition from the Roman monarchy to the Republic in 509 BC. Roman kings traditionally had been elected. You didn't become king because your dad was king. You became king because there was a period after the king died where Roman notables, called patricians, would come together and they would basically give on-the-job interviews to people.

People would be king for five days. You'd then decide, hey, that guy was terrible. We're not giving the job to him. But eventually, the patricians would agree on somebody. They would nominate

them, and then the plebeians. Everybody who's not patrician. It's important to emphasize everybody who's not patrician, some of those everybody's who are not patrician are richer than patricians. They're more powerful than patricians. They are just simply not hereditary aristocracy. The patricians would pick the king, the plebeians would vote yes or no, and if the plebeians voted yes, then that's your king. It's a process of voting and deliberation. But the last two Roman kings hadn't been chosen this way. Servius Tullius, who we met earlier, he was born a slave. Patricians were not going to pick him. He took power following the assassination of his predecessor.

Instead of going to the patricians and saying, hey, pick me, which he knew they wouldn't, he just simply said, I'm king, if the plebeians approve, he held a vote. They said yes, and so he's king. It's not the same process, but it's not totally foreign to that process either. The next king did something that is totally foreign to that process. He campaigned with patricians and said, Servius Tullius is terrible. He's doing all these horrible things. Get rid of him. I will do these things for you. Patricians are like, that's great. He killed Servius Tullius and then just declared himself king. Neither patricians nor plebeians formally did anything to approve Tarquinius Superbus, and Tarquinius Superbus governed in that way. He hired only his family members. The regime was devoted to really making himself and his family members rich. Eventually, one of his family members raped a woman named Lucretia.

This prompted a revolt where Lucretia's relative, a man named Brutus, overthrew Tarquinius Superbus and created the Roman Republic. This seems like a pretty major revolution. You overthrow a king, you create a republic. It's what we did. It's what the French did. It looks like it should be a break in the way the state works. But then we look at what actually stays the same. Romans remain citizens of their state. The new Republic is headed by patrician magistrates called consuls. They are selected by patricians. They're voted on by plebeians. Their term of office is one year instead of life, but that process looks pretty familiar if you look at how Roman kings were chosen. The vote took place in an assembly that was created by Servius Tullius. The Republic, then, is, in a sense, the replacement of the king by two consuls who serve one-year terms instead of a lifetime term.

But they're answerable to an assembly that already existed and was created by one of the kings, and the process is basically an adaptation of what was used to choose a king. The Republic even created something called the rex sacrorum, which is the King of Sacred things to handle religious rituals that kings once did because now they don't have kings, they have consuls. The rex sacrorum actually lived in a place called the Regia, the house of the Kings, which you can now see in the Roman forum if you go there.

This is not actually a break in the state. This is an evolution of the state. The institutions in this state change. In the way they manifest themselves. But the basic institutions are pretty much still there. You just have an adaptation of what's going on. The state is still functioning. It's not a break. The same is true when the Republic transforms into the empire. The Republic very quickly developed into a system of government that over time, became more inclusive of plebeians until in 287. The political division between patricians and Plebeians basically fell away. And so that's why the Middle Republic starts in 287 BC. Over time, though, the Republic became so successful that it conquered lots of territory, as we know, and then economic inequality crept in as people administering this territory became extraordinarily wealthy. The Republic failed to solve this problem.

Popular frustration developed into violence. Then in 44 BC, the violence crescendoed with the death of Julius Caesar. This provoked a civil war that lasted about 15 years. And when Augustus finally won that civil war, he needed to decide how to keep the state functional. Like those who founded the Republic, what Augustus decided to do was to basically evolve the existing structures rather than replace them. Augustus wrote a text that was published across the empire at the time of his death. This is called the Res Gestae, which is basically the stuff I did. It's Augustus' version of his propagandistic version of what it is he's doing. We have this is a text of this from Ankara. If

you go to Rome and you go to the Arapaaccus Museum, you can see a much nicer, more legible Latin text of it. But it was published everywhere. It's not a rare text.

It's basically what Augustus says. What Augustus says is, "In my sixth and seventh consulships, so 28 and 27 BC, after putting an end to the Civil War and I obtained everything by universal consent, I handed over the Res Publica from my power to the dominion of the Senate and the Roman people."

What Augustus says is, the Empire isn't an empire at all. It's just the Republic. I just gave the Republic back because now things were stabilized. Augustus describes his position as exceeding everybody else in influence. But I possessed no more official power than others who are my colleagues in several magistracies. What Augustus means by this is he doesn't create a job that is emperor and says, the emperor does this and this. What he does instead is he says, I want military control over all the provinces for a 10 year period. But that military control over all the provinces, there are other people with military control. They just have them in individual provinces and they don't have them for 10 years. It's not a new power. It's basically just an extension of existing powers. He has the power of a tribune of the plebs. This is an ability to propose laws and preside and interact in an assembly for plebeians.

There are 10 other tribunes of the plebs, too. He has the same powers as them. They don't control armies for 10 years. But he has the same powers as them, just like he has the same powers as the people who control armies. He has the ability to veto any law, either in the Senate as through his power as a magistrate connected to the Senate or through his power as a tribune of the plebs. There are other people with these powers, but they are not also commanding armies. He can propose any new law. Now, again, there are other people who can do this, but they can't do all of these things. What Augustus effectively did is he then added in a couple of other things that, again, are not unprecedented. What Augustus did is he created a system where he could use his money to bestow favors on whoever he wanted his private money. Now, his private money included all of the property that once belonged to the Pharaohs of Egypt.

His private money is literally like his private fortune is the budget of a middle sized country. But it is his. Again, it's not different from what other people did in the Republic. It was not rare for rich people to give money to people that they liked or causes that they favored. They didn't have as much money. Also, they didn't have the ability to propose laws and veto laws and serve as a tribune and command armies for 10 years. Basically, Augustus hasn't lied. He spends a lot of money to benefit his people, but people in the Republic did this, too. He hasn't lied about the nature of his power. He just hasn't told the whole truth either. This is a job that, again, is defined by the things that were there in the Republic. It's just he's collected a bunch of things that individuals never collected together before and defined his job according to things that existed in the Republic on terms that existed in the Republic.

But the combination was never seen as something that anybody would allow to happen before. When Augustus says, I restored the Republic, he's technically right, but literally but conceptually wrong. He did create something new. But he created something new, not by saying, I'm creating something new, but by saying, I'm combining a bunch of existing things, and I'm just going to do them in a different way. But there is really one fundamental thing that we have to understand about the nature of imperial power. Augustus and every subsequent emperor were magistrates, and they acknowledge this. They were citizens. We have this from the words of emperors themselves. Much later than Augustus, the emperors Valentinian III and Theodosius II say that a reigning sovereign must be subject to the laws because our authority is dependent upon that of law, and it's only by accepting that laws apply to every Roman, including emperors, that emperors are able to forbid others to do what we ourselves do not do.

Emperors acknowledge explicitly, they are not kings. They are fellow citizens. This is a job they hold as a magistracy. It's a very special magistracy, but it is a magistracy, and they hold it for the

benefit of those fellow citizens. Just as with the transition of monarchy to republic, so, too, does the transition from republic to empire represent an evolution. It doesn't break this idea that citizens own that political community. They still do. Even emperors are functioning as citizens. We can even see this when we turn to one of these famous moments in Roman history that people have long said ends the Roman state. This is 476 AD when supposedly the Western Empire ended. The baseline story of this is citizenship expands. As citizenship expands, the state needs to do more for those citizens. One person cannot handle all of this, and one government center in Rome cannot effectively deal with all of the concerns of 60 million citizens across such a big territory.

The government expands, and eventually the emperors divide power so that there's an Eastern emperor and a Western emperor. They don't see these as separate regimes. But in 395, we have the last emperor who runs both the East and the West at the same time die. No one at the moment thinks the East and the West are going to go two separate ways, but the trajectory of the two really does change. Across the 5th century, the West starts losing territory, the East doesn't. The East remains strong. By the time you get to 476, your map looks like this. The West has lost all of this stuff, and it's centered basically on Italy and a little bit of Austria and Croatia. It's not anywhere near the size of what it was before. The Western regime, as it shrank, also was subject to a whole lot of political upheaval. There are a lot of coups in the last 20 years before 476.

Then in 475, the general Orestes, who's of barbarian descent overthrows the Western Roman Emperor Julius Nepos, replaces him with Orestes young son, a man or a kid named Romulus Augustulus. The Emperor Nepos flees to Croatia, sets up a resistance regime in Croatia. Then in 476, less than a year after becoming emperor, Odoacer overthrows Orestes and deposes Romulus Augustulus. Now, this is important because this is how a contemporary alive at that time describes what happened. He says, After Orestes killed and Odoacer takes control of the state, Augustus, the son of Orestes compels the Senate to send out an embassy. The embassy goes to Constantinople to the emperor Zeno, who's in charge there. The embassy says that the Senate has chosen Odoacer to safeguard their own affairs and that Zeno should entrust him with the government of Italy.

Odoacer, in that account, is not ending the Roman Empire. You actually look at what who is doing the action here? It's not Odoacer or Orestes calls the Senate together. The Senate then sends a message to Constantinople saying, we don't want an emperor in Italy anymore. We want Odoacer to run things. This is totally done by Roman institutions in a Roman context, cooperating and communicating with a Roman emperor. Odoacer governs this way. Odoacer the Senate continues to exist under him. Senators still voice the concerns of citizens. Citizens still exist. They're still important. When the Eastern court communicates to Odoacer we're not going to do this because we recognize that Nepos, the guy that was sent to Croatia, is the legitimate emperor, Odoacer says, Okay. He puts Nepos on his coins to acknowledge, that's what I was told to do by the Roman emperor in Constantinople.

Then when Nepos dies, Zeno, the emperor in Constantinople, starts appearing on coins minted in Italy. There's nothing going on in Italy that you look at and say, Well, wait, that's not Roman anymore. This continues even after Odoacer is overthrown in 493. A Gothic general sent by Constantinople to get rid of Odoacer, a man named Theoderic goes in, fights a campaign in Italy. He cannot dislodge Odoacer, but Odoacer can't defeat him. They agree to a power sharing arrangement and at a dinner to celebrate the power sharing arrangement. Theoderic jumps across the table and stabs Odoacer and kills him. Your little image there, this is a medieval version of it, where they're jousting, Game of Thrones style. They weren't jousting they're at a dinner table, and he just jumps and gets him. But even though Theoderic is Gothic, we still see this continuity with how things work in Italy as if it were Roman.

The historian Procopius writing in Constantinople, writes that Theoderic governed two nations ethna. There's that word again. Goths and Romans in one. He's echoing that same old concept of, there's an arcade, a political structure that has multiple types of people in it. Goths and Romans

are part of that political structure. We're also told that, he basically governs like one who's an emperor and preserves laws and protects the land and protects Romans against barbarians. He's doing everything that someone who has the language that's used here is that of a Roman figure. But that's from Constantinople. What about Italy? In Italy, the Bishop Ennodius of Pavia writes that, under Theoderic, the Roman Empire has returned to its former boundary, and the wealth of the rest Publica grows along with private prosperity. This is exactly the term that you would expect when you're talking about a Roman state.

The regimes of Odoacer and Theoderic are again, another evolution of the Roman state. This is not a breaking point. This is continuity. It's evolution. It's the same thing that has been going on for a long time. The citizens are still there. The institutions are still there. The laws are still there. The coliseum is still there. They're sponsoring games in the Coliseum. That's why nobody in 476 said, hey, the empire ended today because it didn't. Why do we think that? Well, we think that because in 518, a new emperor, Justin I took power in Constantinople, and he and especially his nephew, the future Emperor Justinian, decided that it was an abomination, that Romans were not in control of the entire Mediterranean, and they wanted to change that. Theoderic Italy became a major target. One of their supporters around the Year 520, wrote a text, and it is the text that defines 476 as the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

It's almost 50 years after, but it is the text that defines it, and it's interesting to look at how it does it. Odoacer, king of the Goths, took control of Rome. The Western Empire of the Roman people perished with this Augustulus with Gothic kings subsequently holding Rome. Superficially, that looks right. But, let's look at a little more detail. Odoacer king of the Goths, took control of Rome. Well, Odoacer never was a king, and he wasn't a Goth.

Goths subsequently hold Rome. No Goth ruled in Rome until 493. That's almost a generation after 476. What's going on here? What's going on here is in Constantinople, they want to justify going back to Italy to take Italy back from the Gothic invaders who had stolen it from Romans. That is a total fiction. That's not how Italy worked after 476, and there is nothing about Goths in 476 related to what happened in that court. What they're trying to do is not say, Odoacer overthrew the last Roman who was in charge. Therefore, the state is empty, and we can go and attack it. What they're trying to say is, this was conquered from us by Goths in 476. The state passed directly from Romans to Goths. That means we can go and attack the Goths and take it back. It is a total fabrication. But this became the story we learned because Justinian fought that war, Justinian won that war.

The Gothic regime disappeared. The story of Roman reconquest is the story we tell, not the story of Roman persistence and evolution in Italy. But that's what they thought was going on. If these few moments don't represent the end of the Roman state, why do I say it ended in 1204 AD? What's different about 1204? Unlike the Roman revolutions of 509 and 30 BC and Odoacer's coup in 476, the Crusader capture of Constantinople was a foreign conquest that actually shattered the Roman state. Citizenship no longer mattered after the Crusaders took that city. A bit of background in this. The fourth Crusade happened at a really dangerously unsettled period in the Mediterranean because the Roman state was enduring a really significant political crisis, following the death of the last successful emperor Emmanuel Colnes in 1180. The crisis was so significant that the rights of citizens got trampled.

One of the successors of Emmanuel I did sort of wholesale executions with, like, secret police arresting people in their houses and taking them out and killing them. That's not supposed to happen to Roman citizens. They own the state. They shouldn't be victimized by the state. There was also then a successor of Andronicus who decided that he wanted to marry the Queen of Hungary and taxed Bulgaria to pay for the wedding to the Queen of Hungary. Now, Bulgaria, at this point, was a part of the Roman state. But when Bulgarians sent envoys to him to say, This really isn't fair, why should we have to pay for your wedding? He insulted the envoys and instead inflicted more taxes on them, so they rebelled. You can see in the 1180s, the sense of the state

belonging to its citizens is starting to break down. This is happening at a very dangerous moment because at the same time this is going on, a group of Crusaders are also really struggling to mount their crusade.

The first three crusades in the 1090s in the middle of the 12th century, and then, you know, the later part of the 12th century, these proceeded by land from Europe through Roman territory to the Holy Land. The fourth crusade, though, is going to do something different. They arranged with Venice to have Venice construct a bunch of ships and hire a bunch of warriors, and they agreed that they would pay based on an expected number of Crusaders who would show up. They were then going to sail to Egypt, attack Egypt, and invade Israel from the South. The problem is they showed up in Venice and they don't have enough people. But the Venetians had already built the ships, and the Venetians had a contract, and the Venetians say to them, you need to pay for this. The Crusaders who, because they're Crusaders traveled with their silver and traveled with jewels and stuff, they sell all of their stuff.

It's still not enough. The Venetians say, you can fight for us. They take off from Venice. They sail to the Croatian city of Zadar. The city of Zadar is Christian. Crusaders are not supposed to attack other Christians. They do. They take the city of Zadar. They sack it. It's still not enough money. The crusaders then say, wait a second. I knew this guy. I was at a Christmas party of Philip of Swabia, and this guy shows up, and he says that he's the heir to the Roman Empire. If we can get this guy, the son of the emperor Isaac Anglos, who his brother has deposed and taken out of power, whoever can get this guy can certainly go to Constantinople and use him to take provisions and other things because this man is the rightful heir. Now, the interesting thing about this is they believe this. A Western Crusaders who live in kingdoms where whoever the father is, their son should inherit that title.

If you could find the son of the deposed Roman emperor, of course he has the right title. Of course you just bring him back into his throne and everybody will accept him because it's an injustice that a son doesn't succeed his father. They summon the kid. Alexius Angelus shows up with the Crusaders. He's a dumb kid. He's like a teenager. He doesn't know anything about anything. They ask him to make promises for the amount of money they're going to get for restoring him to power. He does, what does he know about how much money there is in Constantinople? They said, Okay, this is awesome. They set off for Constantinople. While they are going towards Constantinople, the Roman Emperor Alexius III, and I apologize, there are so many Alexia. The Romans don't make it easy in 1204. The reigning Emperor Alexius III writes to the Pope. He says to the Pope, "Call back the Crusaders because they're trying to invade my territory that doesn't belong to them and use weapons against Christians, which they're not supposed to do."

The Roman throne, the emperor reminds the Pope, does not belong, and it should not pass to Alexius Angelus for any reason, because power in the Roman state is not conferred through hereditary succession, but through the election of the best men in the state. What is that? That's a res publica. The state belongs to its citizens. The representatives of those citizens have a voice in who's in charge. This is not the property of the emperor. It's something that is a magistracy that he runs and he holds because of the consent of the people who are stakeholders in that state. What that emperor is doing is he's evoking this very old idea of a cooperative political community with ownership. But that doesn't mean anything to the Crusaders. They don't come from a place where that has any significance at all. The Crusader fleet arrives outside Constantinople on June 3rd of 1203, and they put their Alexius Anglos on top of a ship, and they announce to everybody, Your rightful emperor is here.

Not a single person on Earth or from that country showed that they sided with him. Because of course they didn't. This is not how they think about political power. The Crusaders then are forced to attack Constantinople and impose Alexius on the people of Constantinople. They do this. But Alexius doesn't have the ability to pay what he promised the Crusaders. He starts extorting large amounts of money from Roman citizens. They don't consent to him being there. They definitely

don't consent to paying this money to Crusaders. There is a uprising, and Alexius falls from power in January 27th of 1204, and the Crusaders then prepare to attack the city. On April 13th of 1204, the Crusaders break into the city of Constantinople. Our sources tell us they plunder with impunity. They occupy houses in the city, and then they start fanning out in all directions, seizing everything inside, and then asking people where they can find more treasure to steal.

Now, this sounds like it is exaggerated, but if you go to the Treasury of San Marco, and this is just one example. San Marco in Venice, stolen from Constantinople in 1204. These are the three best things in the treasury of San Marco, all stolen from Constantinople in 1204. If you go around churches in France, or you go to the Louvre, and you go to some of the objects d'art on the third floor of the Richelieu Wing, and you look around, you see fragments of the True Cross in reliquaries written in Greek, stolen from Constantinople in 1204. We have the evidence trail. This happened. But it's not just that they stole stuff. They stole the state too. When the Crusaders take Constantinople, they have to figure out, okay, what are we going to do with this? They have a meeting, and they basically elect a man named Baldwin, the new emperor of Constantinople, and then they take all of the Roman territory and they divide it up as the property of other Crusaders.

At some point in this process, actual representatives of the Roman citizen body come in and they ask to have a meeting with Baldwin, the new emperor of Constantinople, to try to figure out, is there a way to negotiate this so it actually could be a continuity. He sends them away. He sends away the representatives of the city, the representatives of the military and civil bureaucracy, and the commanders and counts of the provinces. These were the people who represented the citizens in the Roman state, and they don't matter now at all. You send them away like they're a nuisance, and you have a bunch of Frenchmen sit in a room in Constantinople and divide up what's left of the Roman Empire. There is Roman resistance to this. It coalesces in three places. One is the city of Trebizond, which is in the extreme eastern part of Asia Minor. One is the city of Nicaea, which is in northwestern Asia Minor, and one is in Epirus, which is in the western part, right now, what's now Greece and Albania.

These are Roman states, and they are Roman resistance states. But they are fragments of the citizen body. The representatives that once could speak on behalf of everybody in that citizen body are now scattered between these different states. There are still Roman states, but these are fragments of a broken whole. This is not the same thing because that citizen body, that political community has fractured. This is why I think that state ends in 1204. But again, I'm less interested in why things end than in why they endure. I think this is where the lessons come from Roman history because what Roman history shows us is how citizenship can be something that ties an incredibly diverse people together as their society changes in utterly immense ways. Here are some of the lessons I think Rome shows. Rome is always willing to take in new people and new ideas that can make important and long lasting contributions to Rome.

When they make those contributions, Rome acknowledges it. But Romans, both new and old, they never lost that connection to what it meant to be Roman, and they never lost that connection to the traditions that defined their society and defined their state. New citizens and new ideas and new religions and new technologies They propel Roman power forward, but there's always a check on this so you don't go too far. That's that attachment to tradition. That's the idea that we inherited something, and we are obliged to make sure that we give it to our children in a better condition than we got it. That means we can't just scrap everything. We can't just disrupt for disruptions sake. It has to be considered. Sometimes the old way is better than the new way. Rome's success is balancing that dynamic of embracing the new and maintaining the old. Rome's decline in the 12th and 13th century came about because the traditions were things that they went away from.

Then the state was no longer able to endure the challenges the Crusaders faced. This, I think, is the secret to Rome's great success, but I think it's also the secret that societies around the world need to remember because this balance between the new and the old is essential to every society, maintaining its strength, its integrity, and its dynamism. The key thing to deciding how you regulate

this is citizenship. This idea that you are an owner of the political community you belong to. You can and should speak about the nature of change when it's moving too slowly or when it's moving too quickly. It's very important that modern states embrace both the prerogatives of citizenship and also the responsibilities that citizenship confer on us. We need to be active. We need to be involved. We need to be invested. Sometimes that means doing things and sometimes that means saying things, and sometimes that just means being aware.

But this is something Romans didn't lose until the end. This is what allowed them to last for so long. This is a lesson that I think all of us can internalize and think about as we figure out how to deal with a world in which so much is changing so quickly. I'll thank you for that.