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AMICVLVS

— A SECRET HISTORY —



VOL. I: ROMA AETERNA

AMICVLVS

A SECRET HISTORY

Book I: ROMA AETERNA

(Pages 1-51 of full book)

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(CHAPTER PAGE 1: WHITE LETTERING ON BLACK FIELD: INSERT BEFORE PAGE 1)

PROLOGUE

“ORBIS RESTITUTUS”

PAGE ONE (TWO PANELS)

Panel 1 – The face of the sun against a clear blue sky. A thick black billow of smoke is crossing it, indicating something, or many things, are burning below.

CAP1:

March, A.D. 538

CAP2:

It is a new day.

Panel 2 – Wide shot: The Italian countryside north of Rome. Fields and farmhouses give way to one another with the Via Flaminia slicing through the center of the picture toward the city of Rome in the background. It would be a perfect picture of pastoral bliss if not for the fact that parts of it are burning, other parts already burnt to ash and blackened remnants, and the bodies of dead warriors and horses, both Roman and barbarian, are everywhere, lining the road all the way to the city.

CAP1:

(From the private journals of the historian Procopius of Caesarea, A.D. 500-562):

CAP2:

It is a day given to us by God.

CAP3:

Mother Italy, long enslaved to Gothic tyranny, smiles in His restored light.

PAGE TWO (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1 –The Ponte Milvio, viewed from the bank of the Tiber. The bridge, the water and the riverbanks are covered with the mangled corpses of Gothic soldiers. In the foreground, sprawled on his back on the bank, a dead Goth stares up at the sky, an arrow through his eye. A wide slick of blood, as if something has been dragged away through the grass, leads away from the bridge off- panel right. (See Picture Model 2.11).

CAP:

The armies of His adversary lie helpless before His might and mercy.

Panel 2 – Outside the walls of Rome. Hadrian’s Mausoleum looms in the background. In the foreground, we see a colossal marble statue head, half-embedded in the ground. A dead Goth lies crushed beneath it. He has been dead for much longer than the Goths on the Ponte Milvio. The trail of blood leads past him through the grass. (See Picture Models 2.21-2.23.)

CAP:

The jewel of His kingdom is in our hands, newly burnished in barbarian blood.

Panel 3 – The Porta Flaminia, Rome. It is burnt, battered but intact, having just withstood a massive siege. Dead men and horses lay strewn across the blood-spattered ground. A number of Gothic corpses dangle by the neck from ropes on the battlements. Tendrils of smoke drift up from behind the wall. The slick of blood from Panel 1 continues through the partly-opened gate. (See Picture Model 2.31).

CAP1:

O, praise to God and His holy Instrument, the army of Justinian, Belisarius and the East!

CAP2:

His long-lost Western children weep for joy at their Heavenly Father’s bosom! His forlorn Eastern children rejoice at their Eternal Mother’s rescue!

Panel 4 – Wide Shot: a massive mound of bodies, piled in the center of the forum. It is charred and smoldering, a bonfire prematurely guttered out. The blood slick ends at the base of the pile, and the black oily smoke crossing the sun emanates from this. The once great monuments surrounding it are ruined and fire-blackened as well. Smoke and ash billow everywhere. Beside the pile of bodies a **DYING GOTH** lies on his back, half raised on his elbow, his hand stretched out, pleading, as a man standing over him runs his sword through him. Both are in shadow. (See Picture Models 2.41 – 2.44.)

CAP:

This day will resound in hymn and heart from East to West, from The Pillars of Hercules to the Golden Horn, from every corner of our reformed realm, with these words: “Rome is redeemed...”

DYING GOTH (BURST):

AAAAAGGGHH!

PAGE TWO (CONT'D)

Panel 5 – Wide Shot: POV facing BELISARIUS/Soldiers. A group of dirty, bloodstained, unsavory-looking Byzantine soldiers stare out from amid the smoke. In the forefront stands a Byzantine general, **COUNT BELISARIUS**. He is in his mid-30s. The look on his face is dead and blank, a thousand-yard stare or a serial-killer face. He casually wipes the blood from his sword with the hem of his cloak. The DYING GOTH's hands still claws up from the bottom of the panel. The panel is overlaid with a gray pall. A statue of a Roman emperor on his horse (Marcus Aurelius) rises behind them out of the smoke, cracked, blackened and befouled, symbolizing a glory of centuries past that has withered and rotted, never to come again. (See Models 2.51-2.54.)

CAP:

“Rome is reborn.”

PAGE THREE (TWO PANELS)

Panel 1(Inset) – Close-up, POV PROCOPIUS: a pair of hands writing in a book in the foreground of the panel. The hands are well-kept and pristine, the pages of the book white and clean beyond anyone or anything we've seen in this world so far. In fact, the hands and the book are so clean they should seem to *glow* slightly. Over the book, in the background, we see the forms of the soldiers heaving the GOTH onto the pile of corpses. They should appear like shadows in the smoke.

The hand holding the stylus should be at the end of writing some words in Greek. These words are the only ones on the page. The words are: **και εγώ Προκόπιος ὁ Καισαρεύς**

CAP:

And I, Procopius of Caesarea --

Panel 2 – Wide shot: **PROCOPIUS OF CAESAREA**, sitting on a column base amid a crowd of gaunt, emaciated and shell-shocked Roman civilians, who stand by watching the executions. He is BELISARIUS's secretary, dressed in a long white tunic with long sleeves and a cloak thrown back over his shoulders. He is Greek, in his late thirties, with mid-length hair and a short beard. He sits on the column base like a Socratic philosopher, chin in his hand, his book and stylus across his knees. He is so rapt with hero worship for BELISARIUS and lost in his visions of Roman glory that he is oblivious to the carnage all around him. The glow from **Panel 1** should surround him faintly. He should appear brighter, more vivid and cleaner than the wrecked world around him, to the point that it appears he can't even be touched by it. (See Models 3.21-3.22.)

CAP:

-- am blessed by God to have witnessed this day.

PAGE FOUR (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1 – Close-up: PROCOPIUS, facing us with his eyes closed, daydreaming. Behind him and all around him, in vivid color, is his daydream: The emperor **JUSTINIAN** and **BELISARIUS** in profile, in a resplendent, gleaming marble audience hall. The emperor, in his late forties, dressed in gold and purple silk, stands with **BELISARIUS** kneeling at his feet. **BELISARIUS** is wearing clean white patrician's robes here. **JUSTINIAN** is handing **BELISARIUS** a parchment with his marching orders. The emperor's costume is the template on which all other imperial dress, including **ROMULUS**'s will be based. (See Model 4.11 –4.12.)

CAP1: Here, at the pinnacle of our triumph, I gaze back in awe across five years of conquest.

CAP2: Five years since Justinian graced my lord the Count Belisarius with this holy endeavor.

Panel 2 – Close-up: Same as Panel 1, except someone has intruded on PROCOPIUS's dream. PROCOPIUS has been jarred out of his dreaming by a man in grimy mail standing before him. We only see his hand and a glimpse of him at the waist in the edge of the foreground. PROCOPIUS looks up at him with slight confusion and concern.

CAP1: The history these wars will make -- that **I** will write...

CAP2: Is thrilling to imagine.

SFX:

Clnk (rattle of mail)

No dialogue.

Panel 3 – PROCOPIUS's POV. looking up at **BELISARIUS**: The **COUNT**, glowering down wearily at us. The same grim, blank look is in his eyes as before. He holds a parchment in his filthy hands much like the one **JUSTINIAN** gave him.

No dialogue.

Panel 4 – **BELISARIUS** and **PROCOPIUS**, in an imitation of the image in Panel 1. **PROCOPIUS** kneels at **BELISARIUS**'s feet as **BELISARIUS** bestows orders upon him. The soldiers and civilians encircling them look on blankly at the scene. Only **PROCOPIUS** maintains the pomp and gravity of the ceremony from five years earlier. His glow should stand out prominently against the gray, dull destruction.

CAP:

There is still much to work to be done.

Panel 5 – **PROCOPIUS**, his back facing us, gripping the parchment and watching a column of Byzantine troops wending their way toward the distant mountains in the light of dusk. Torchlight dots the procession to the horizon. **PROCOPIUS** is slightly luminescent in the dark.

CAP:

Having broken the Gothic army at Rome, my lord must pursue their king Witigis north to his capital at Ravenna before their corruption can be expelled from our lands for good.

PAGE FIVE (THREE PANELS)

Panel 1 –PROCOPIUS and his guard retinue, all on horseback, facing front, riding. All are very serious in their duty. PROCOPIUS’s eyes are alight with a zealous excitement, and he wields his parchment like a baton as he rides. A stream of refugees, Italian and Gothic, passes him on the road on either side. They are dirty, wretched, their eyes cast down as they walk. Like previous panels, PROCOPIUS shines against this pre-Medieval world like a beacon, in a world of his own.

CAP1:

Yet the south remains in chaos.

CAP2:

I travel to Neapolis, where I must assist General Herodian in its restoration to Roman order.

Panel 2 – Wide shot: Neapolis (Naples) and the bay of the same name, seen from a ridge above. PROCOPIUS stands there, arms crossed, holding his chin in thought. He is staring at an island in the bay containing a fortified monastery. Parts of the city have sustained considerable damage very recently. (See Models 5.21 -5.22.)

CAP1:

This land has been left fallow for too long. It yearns for Rome’s civilizing seed.

CAP2: Yet a task remains before I begin sowing. I must find out why the crop first failed. I must find the one who let it die, who let it fall.

Panel 3 – PROCOPIUS, facing us, waist-up. He clutches his orders even tighter, and his eyes have hardened into a scowl.

CAP:

I must find Romulus.

PAGE SIX (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1 – Close-up of a worn, badly-stamped bronze coin depicting **ROMULUS AUGUSTULUS**, last emperor of the Western Roman Empire. Most of the images on this page are archaeological reproductions or mythologized paintings, cast in shadow, indicating how very, very little we know about these events, and how little his contemporaries knew, or cared. The coin lies amid a pile of other coins, scattered in the dirt from a split purse. (See Model 6.11.)

CAP1:

“Romulus Augustulus, last emperor of the West.”

Caption 2:

A twelve-year old boy, playing at being Caesar. It would have been laughable had it not ended so tragically.

Panel 2 – Close-up; official portrait of three figures: **ROMULUS**, his father, **FLAVIUS ORESTES**, and **ROMULUS’S MOTHER**, based on the Diptych of Stilicho (See Model 7.21.)

CAP1:

His father, the general Flavius Orestes, set him on the throne after driving the rightful emperor, Julius Nepos, into exile.

CAP2:

That they were unprepared to rule their stolen nation is a gross understatement.

Panel 3 – Depiction of the Scirian German general **ODOACER**. (See Model 6.31.)

CAP1:

Romulus reigned for nearly a year before his father’s treachery came back to haunt them.

CAP2:

Odoacer, leader of the German Scirii, demanded his payment for helping them overthrow Nepos.

CAP3:

One-third of Italy for his own kingdom.

Panel 4 – DEPICTION OF THE BATTLE OF TICINUM. (See Model 6.41-6.42.)

CAP1:

Orestes threw his promise in the barbarian’s face, and prepared for war. Their armies met on the plains of Ticinum.

CAP2: By reputation, Orestes was a ferocious adversary, armed with tactics he learned in the service of the dreaded Attila.

PAGE SIX (CONT'D)

Panel 5 – A highly-idealized scene of ROMULUS on his knees, surrendering his crown to ODOACER, based on a public-domain image from **THE YOUNG FOLKS' HISTORY OF ROME** BY CHARLOTTE MARIE YONGE (SEE Model 6.51.)

CAP1:

It is something of a mystery why he fared so poorly.

CAP2:

When it was over, Orestes was dead, his army shattered. Romulus surrendered his crown to Odoacer on his knees.

Panel 6 – Close-up: depiction of a shredded Roman banner lying in the mud and rain. It is a dull red with the Chi-Rho symbol on it. (See Model 6.61.)

CAP1:

Either from pity or contempt, the barbarian allowed Romulus to live, banishing him for life to the south of Italy.

CAP2:

No one knows what became of him after that.

PAGE SEVEN (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1 – Close-up: PROCOPPIUS’s hand holding the ROMULUS coin. The copper coin shines dully as if reflecting the brightness of the historian’s hand. Beyond this, we see a table covered with documents. In the background, GENERAL HERODIAN stands by the table holding PROCOPPIUS’s orders in his hand, as if reading them. (See Model 7.11 – 7.12.) In reality, he is looking at PROCOPPIUS, somewhat resentfully. The light is dim, with daylight bleeding in from a source off-panel left. The background is in a hazy gray soft focus.

CAP1:

This spare account is almost all that is known of Rome’s fall. Sixty years of darkness has obscured it even more.

CAP2:

As a history, it is poor. As an epitaph to an empire, it is unacceptable.

Panel 2 –PROCOPPIUS and HERODIAN in profile at the table from Panel 1. PROCOPPIUS still sits, holding the coin before his face. HERODIAN still glares at him, no longer pretending to read. The coin glows a bit more brightly, as if it has taken some of the historian’s light. A pair of open double doors is in the background of the panel, opening onto late afternoon sunlight. Absently, PROCOPPIUS holds out a wine glass for a slave standing at panel left to refill. The slave is a wretched figure, wearing a tunic that is little more than a stained sack. As before, PROCOPPIUS stands out against the faded grayness of the rest of the room.

CAP1:

Fortunately, there is a bit more to the story.

CAP2:

We know that Romulus was sent to Neapolis, to live out his days in the villa of the ancient general Lucullus.

Panel 3 – PROCOPPIUS faces us, emerging from the shadows of the villa as he passes through the double doors into fading sunlight. HERODIAN and the slave hover in the doorway, gray and ghostlike, staring after him. PROCOPPIUS’s glow has dimmed a bit.

CAP:

The villa sits on the tiny island of Megaris, in the middle of the bay. Since the time of Lucullus, it was converted to a fortress, and then to a monastery.

Panel 4 – Wide shot: the Bay of Naples. We are viewing it from behind PROCOPPIUS, looking out at the island monastery as the sun descends behind it. PROCOPPIUS’s glow has faded even more. (See Models 7.41 – 7.46.)

CAP1:

It is home to the brotherhood of Saint Severinus. They are famous in this region as scholars and keepers of knowledge otherwise lost.

CAP2:

Perhaps Romulus’s secret is among them.

PAGE SEVEN (CONT'D)

Panel 5 –PROCOPIUS in silhouetted profile against the darkening sky, his eyes fixed in an unblinking glare as he gazes into the setting sun. The glow about him has almost disappeared. However, the coin he still holds in his right hand glows with an orange-red fire.

CAP:

Tomorrow I will visit the monastery, and speak to their abbot.

Panel 6 – Close-up: PROCOPIUS's hand holding the coin. The glow about the historian has completely vanished. The historian's hand has clenched into a tight fist. The glow from the coin has deepened from orange to a baleful red, and the light from it bleeds through his fingers.

CAP:

I have no doubt he will give me what I want.