

PREFACE TO BOOKS I-X¹

1. Although I won the favour of the eloquent not by any genuine merits, but by the conversations we shared, or disinterested acts of kindness, they have been urging me to collect in one volume words poured out in my several offices to unfold the nature of items of business. Thus, future generations may appreciate both the difficulties of my labours, undertaken for the public good, and the unmercenary conduct of an upright man.

2. I have replied that their love would in fact do me harm, since writings now thought acceptable, thanks to the urgency of petitioners, would seem inept to those who read them later. I have added that they should recall the words of Flaccus [Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 390^f who warns of the danger that hasty speech can incur. 3. You see that everyone wants a rapid response, and do you then suppose that I produce perfection? A composition which delay has not adorned with choice conceits, or which is unfolded with no subtle selection of words, is always uncouth. Speech is our common gift: it is only style that shows up the uneducated. 4. Authors are allowed nine years to write in [*Ars Poetica*, 388]: I am not even given a few hours. As soon as I begin, I am harassed and shouted at, and business, not to be too meticulous, goes on with excessive speed. One man loads me with the number of his detestable appeals; another punishes me with the mass of his miseries; others besiege me with the frenzied riot of their disputes. 5. Why do you demand the eloquence of official composition amongst all this, when I can scarcely keep up the supply of words? Even my nights are beset by complex anxieties, lest the cities should lack their food supply. This is what their inhabitants expect more than anything: their concern is not for their ears but their bellies. Hence I am forced to travel in spirit through every province, and constantly investigate my commands. It is not enough to order civil servants to do

¹ Cassiodorus wrote a separate preface for books XI-XII.

² Q. Horatius Flaccus, 65-8 B.C., a famous Roman poet, was much read in late antiquity.

something, unless the minister's diligence can be seen to enforce it. Do not, I beseech you, harm me by your affection. Persuasion that bears more risk than glory must be refused.

6. But they instead wore me down by this kind of argument: 'Everyone knows you to be the Praetorian Prefect, on whose office the public services always wait like footmen. For the army's supplies are demanded from it; without thought for the season, the people's food is requested from it; on it too is thrown a great weight merely of judicial cases. The laws, then, have placed on it a vast burden, by deciding that, for the sake of the honour, almost everything should relate to it. For what time can you steal from public toil, when all that the common good demands unites in your one breast?' 7. We also mention that you are often burdened by assisting the Quaestorship, when your many ponderings deprive you of leisure time; and, as though you were a labourer in the lesser offices, the princes give you business from other ministries which the proper magistrates cannot unravel. This, however, you accomplish by selling no favour; instead, following your own father's example, you accept from petitioners only toil. Thus, by granting to suitors without a fee, you purchase all things with the gift of integrity. 8. Of course, the glorious councils of kings also have the power to occupy you for the public good during the greater part of the day, so that it would be a burden to expect from men at leisure what you evidently sustain by unceasing toil. But the fact that, under such conditions, you can produce words worth reading may serve you all the more in winning praise.

'Then, your work may inoffensively educate uncultivated men who must be trained³ for the service of the state in conscious eloquence: those in calm waters may more happily acquire the style that you practise while tossed among the dangers of disputants. 9. Similarly - and this you cannot ignore while preserving your usual loyalty - if you allow such royal favours to pass unnoticed, you have preferred that generous haste should confer them in vain. Do not, we beg of you, recall to silence and obscurity those who were worthy to receive

³ I have followed Traube's suggested emendation of *praeparatos* to *praeparandos*.

illustrious honours by your proclamation. For you took on the duty of describing them with true praise, and of painting them, in some measure, with the pigment of history. If you hand down their fame to posterity, in accordance with ancestral custom, you have nullified death for those who perished gloriously.⁴ 10. Then again, you employ the king's authority to correct evil characters, you shatter the insolence of the transgressor, you restore respect to the laws. And do you still hesitate to publish what you show may have such utility?

'If I may say so, you would also be concealing the mirror of your own mind, in which every age to come might behold you. For it often happens that men beget sons unlike themselves; but it is hard to find discourse that does not conform to character. That child of one's own choosing is, then, much the more certain one, for what is born from the secret place of the heart is supposed with greater truth to be its parent's offspring. 11. Moreover, you have often spoken panegyrics to kings and queens with general applause; you have composed the history of the Goths in twelve books, anthologising their successes. Since things went well for you on those occasions, and you are already known to have published your prentice pieces in oratory, why do you hesitate to give these also to the public?''⁵

12. I am conquered - I confess it to my shame. I could not resist so many men of wisdom, when I saw myself being reprov'd out of love. Now forgive me, my readers; and, if there is anything rash and irregular, ascribe it rather to my advisers, since my own verdict clearly agrees with my accuser. 13. And therefore, I have put together all that I could find of my compositions made on various public affairs while I held the posts of Quaestor, Master, and Prefect. They are arranged in twelve books, so that, although the reader's attention may be stimulated by the diverse subject matter, his mind, nonetheless, shall be more effectively hurried on when he approaches the end. 14. Now I have not allowed others to endure what I have often rushed into in the

⁴ This passage probably echoes Tacitus, *Agricola* 1.1, 46.4.

⁵ The surviving fragments of the panegyrics date to 519 and the end of 536: perhaps recently published, but hardly 'prentice pieces'.

granting of honours: hasty and unpolished declamations, which are so suddenly demanded that it seems they can hardly even be written down. Therefore, I have included *formulae* of all posts of honour in the sixth and seventh books, that I might thus take some belated thought for myself, and bring speedy aid to my successors.⁶ In this way, what I said about people in the past also suits those to come, since I have set out what is fitting not about individuals, but about the offices themselves.

15. Now, as the title of the books, that tell-tale of the work, herald of the contents, summary of the whole treatise, I have assigned the name of *Variae*; for, since I had various persons to admonish, I had to adopt more styles than one. For in one manner you must address and persuade men glutted with much reading; in another those titillated with a small taste; in another those who are starved of the savour of letters, so that it may sometimes be a kind of art to avoid what would please the learned. 16. Accordingly, it is a fine rule of our ancestors, that you should speak with such fitness as to sway the hopes your hearers have already conceived. For it was not in vain that the wisdom of the ancients defined three modes of oratory: the humble, that seems to creep along in true lowliness; the middle, which is neither swollen with magnificence, nor thin and impoverished, but is placed between the two, enriched with its own beauty, and contained in its own bounds; and the third, which is raised to the highest peak of argument by choice conceits. Clearly, different persons may thus enjoy the eloquence which suits them; and, though it may flow from a single breast, it does so in separate streams. For no one can be called eloquent unless he is armed with this threefold style, and equipped like a man for any case that may arise. 17. In addition, I sometimes address kings, sometimes ministers, sometimes people of low rank; some of my words to them were rapidly poured out, but others I could produce after thought. Thus, a compilation of such diversity should rightly be entitled *Variae*. But I hope that, as I have evidently received these modes from the ancient rules, even so they may unlock the merits of the promised composition.

⁶ Cassiodorus' Latin is markedly more careful in Books VI-VII; cf. Vidén, 140-4.

18. Therefore, I modestly promise to produce the humble; the middle I guarantee without dishonesty; but the high, which, because of its nobility, is appointed for solemn compositions,⁷ I do not believe that I have reached. But, since I am to be read, this illegitimate defence in advance must cease. For it is unfitting to be thus disputing about myself; I should rather submit to your judgement.

[The pressure of friends, and the modesty of a reluctant author, are rhetorical commonplaces, and need not be taken at face value.]

⁷ The MSS offer several readings; *in edita dictione* is Fridh's conjecture, followed here; Mommsen conjectures *in editiore*; one MS has *in edicto*.

I.3 KING THEODERIC TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS PATRICIAN CASSIODORUS (a.507?)

1. Although what is naturally praiseworthy enjoys its own honour; although tried integrity wields official power, since it begets high offices on the soul - for all good things are united with their fruits, and virtue unrewarded is incredible - nonetheless, the peak of my good opinion is a lofty one, for he whom I promote is seen to be rich in outstanding merit. 2. For, if a just man's choice should be considered impartial, or a temperate man's nominee to be endowed with self-restraint, he who has earned the approval of the judge of every virtue is clearly fitted for every reward. For what greater honour can be sought than to find a witness to one's praise where there is no suspicion of prejudice? Assuredly, a ruler's verdict is formed from acts alone, and a soul strengthened by kingly power cannot stoop to flattery.

3. Of course, the actions that blended you with my consciousness must be recalled: when you realise that each deed is a pleasing fixture in my mind, you will receive the reward of your toil. Why, you were a loyal subject at the very outset of my reign: when the hearts of the provincials were going astray in those uncertain conditions, and sheer novelty allowed contempt for an untried master, you diverted from rash resistance the minds of mistrustful Sicilians, preventing their crime, and my need to punish it.¹ 4. Wholesome persuasion, not stern vengeance, put matters right. You averted a fine from a province, which, in its loyalty, deserved to avoid it. There, in military dress, you upheld the civil laws; as a judge without avarice, you weighed up both the public and the private good; neglecting your own property, making no invidious profit, you gained the riches of good character, and gave no entrance to quarrels, no room to detraction. In a land which seldom exports silence and patience, the voices of your praisers fought for you. For we know, by Tully's [Cicero's] testimony, how quarrelsome the

¹ The elder Cassiodorus was probably governor of Sicily, c.489/93; he was perhaps appointed by Odoacer.

Sicilians naturally are, so that it is their usual custom to accuse their governors on mere suspicion. 5. But I was not content with that glorious result: I gave you the conduct of Lucania-and-Bruttium to control [as governor], lest the fortune of your native land should not experience the good which a foreign province had earned.² You, though, lavished your usual loyalty, and put me under an obligation through the very gift by which I had thought to repay you everything - you increased the debt where it might have been discharged. In all things, you played the magistrate free from all error, crushing no man through spite, and exalting no man through favour and flattery. As this is a difficult achievement anywhere, in one's own country it is glorious. There it is inevitable either that kinship should lead to favour, or that prolonged disputes should arouse hatred. 6. Again, it gives me pleasure to recall the acts of your Prefecture, a most renowned blessing to the whole of Italy, in which you ordered all things with foresight, and proved how easy it is to render taxes under an honest magistrate.³ No one grudges what he pays up under an equitable administration, since a properly ordered levy is not considered a loss. 7. Now enjoy your blessings, and receive twofold your personal profit, which you spurned with public approval. For this is a glorious gain in life, when you enjoy the praise of your fellow citizens, and your masters bear witness to your merits.

8. Stimulated, therefore, by this most lavish praise, I confer on you, as a just recompense, the honour of the Patriciate, so that what to others is a reward shall to you be merely the payment of your deserts. Most eminent of men, triumph in your praise and good fortune. You have compelled your master's heart to this confession: he must admit his gift to be really your own property. May heaven make this honour perpetual:⁴ thus, although I have granted it as a recompense, I may at

² This governorship must date c.491/505.

³ This Prefecture must date c.503/6.

⁴ The accepted *Sint haec divina perpetua* does not make very good sense in context; I follow Traube's emendation of *sint* to *duint* (index, s.v. *divina*). Certain MSS read *Sint haec divino perpetrata auspicio* - 'may Providence approve the honour conferred'.

another time bestow still greater rewards on your virtues.

I.4 KING THEODERIC TO THE SENATE OF THE CITY OF ROME (date as I.3)

1. Truly I desire, fathers of the Senate, that your garland should be coloured with the flower of the various offices; I desire that the Spirit of Liberty should behold a thronged and grateful Senate. Yes, an assembly of such offices is an honour to the ruler, and all that you view with joyful satisfaction is rightly ascribed to my credit. 2. But this is my special wish: that the lamps of high honours should adorn your order, when those who have grown in power at court duly render the harvest to their fatherland. My gaze inspects these men; I rejoice to find in them a treasure of good character, in which, as if by coin portraits of honours, the kindness of my serenity is expressed.

3. Hence it is that I have rewarded the illustrious Cassiodorus, a man famous for the highest distinction in the state, with the exalted rank of Patrician: thus the honour of a great title may proclaim the merits of my servant. He is not a man borne on in the game of fortune by brittle luck, who has flitted by sudden promotions to the highest dignity; rather, since virtues are usually of gradual growth, he has ascended to the peak of glory by the regular steps of office. 4. For, as you know, his first entry to the administration was based on the foundation of the Countship of the Private Estates.⁵ He did not waver there with a beginner's weakness, nor go astray through the fault of inexperience, but, on the sure footing of self-restraint, he lived an example to all. He soon received the honour of the Sacred Largesses, and grew as much in renown for his conduct as he had advanced in office. 5. Why need I tell of the good order he restored to the provinces, or mention the records of the justice he instilled into men of every condition? He lived with such integrity that he both established

⁵ Like the Sacred Largesses, this office was apparently granted by Odoacer, between 476 and 490. The elder Cassiodorus was starting his career as one of the seven top ministers!

impartiality by his commands, and taught it by personal example. For an uncorrupt magistrate is a ready advocate of the right: his noble conduct shames the disreputable. For who will shun the crime whose accomplice he sees aloft on the tribunal? When the avaricious man condemns corruption, when the unjust decrees that the laws must be observed, he vainly assumes the mask of feigned severity. He to whom an untroubled conscience does not give authority lacks the spirit of government, since excesses are held in fear only when they are thought to offend the magistrates.

6. Trained, then, in these exercises under the preceding king [Odoacer], he came to my palace with a well earned reputation. For you remember - and, by now, I am reminding you of recent events - with what moderation he sat on the Praetorian summit, when placed there. Borne up to the height, from that position he despised the vices of the successful all the more. 7. Indeed, no gift of fortune so elated him, as is the way with many, that he raised himself on the actor's boots of great power; rather, he directed all things with justice, and did not make my favour hated in his person. He caused greater things to be hoped for himself, while confining his greatness within the bounds of moderation. For hence comes that most welcome harvest of proven integrity, the fact that, although a man may have reached the heights, all still judge him to deserve more. He well joined the royal income with the general happiness, generous to the treasury, and just but obliging to the tax-payers. 8. The commonwealth then experienced a man of honour from the assembly of Romulus [the Senate]; a man who, while making himself glorious by his self restraint, achieved something still greater, in bequeathing to his successors a model of upright action. For he who is able to succeed men of reputation is ashamed to do wrong. As you are aware, then, he was terrible to public servants, mild to the provincials, greedy of giving, too proud to receive, a hater of crime, a lover of justice. A man who had made it his rule to refrain from the property of others found this easy to observe. For it is a sign of an unconquered soul to love the profit of good fame, and to hate the gains that come from law-suits.

9. But it is those unacquainted with the noble characters of his father and grandfather who have the right to wonder at these traits.

Truly, fame also celebrates the previous Cassiodori. Although that name may run in others, it still belongs especially to his family. An ancient stock, a race much praised, its members are honoured among civilians, outstanding among soldiers, since they have flourished alike in health and strength. 10. Now the father of this candidate held with credit the office of Tribune-and-Secretary under the emperor Valentinian [III], an honour then given to outstanding men, since only those in whom no censurable fault can be found may be chosen for the emperor's privy affairs. 11. But, since like spirits always choose each other out, he was allied by bonds of great affection to the Patrician Aetius for the service of the state - Aetius, whose counsel the master of the empire then followed in all things, because of his wisdom, and his glorious labours in the state. Together with Aetius' son Carpilio, he was therefore charged, and not in vain, with the office of envoy to that mighty warrior Attila.⁶ He beheld without terror one whom the empire feared; trusting in his honesty, he despised those terrible frowns and threats, and did not hesitate to meet in argument a man who, as the prey of some mysterious madness, was patently seeking the dominion of the world. 12. He found the king arrogant; he left him pacified, and demolished his libellous accusations with such honesty that he decided to ask for favour, although it was to his advantage to have no peace with so rich a realm. By his steadfastness, Cassiodorus gave hope to frightened politicians; and those who were armed with envoys of such character were not thought unfit for war. He brought back a peace unhoped for. The benefits of his embassy are clear, since it was received as gratefully as it had been earnestly desired. 13. Soon the righteous ruler was offering him gifts of revenues, and the honour of illustrious rank. But instead, he was enriched by his native self-restraint, and, receiving an honorary office, chose the pleasures of Bruttium in place of reward. The emperor could not refuse this longed-for peace to one who had given him safety from a ferocious enemy; he released with sorrow from his service one whom he knew

⁶ This embassy is not otherwise attested; it should date between 435 and 449. On Attila, see glossary.

he needed. 14. For grandfather Cassiodorus, distinguished by that honour of illustrious rank which could not be denied to his house, delivered Bruttium and Sicily by armed resistance from Vandal invasion: hence he deservedly held the chief place in those provinces which he defended from so savage and unpredictable an enemy. To his virtues, then, the state owed it that those inner provinces were not seized by Genseric, whose rage Rome afterwards endured.⁷ 15. But the Cassiodori have also flourished with their kindred honoured in the east. For Heliodorus, who, as I saw, administered Prefectures in that state with distinction for eighteen years, was known as a member of the family.⁸ It is a house glorious in either realm; joined with grace to the twin Senates, as though it were endowed with two eyes, it has shone with the purest radiance. Has any noble family anywhere spread itself wider than this one, which has earned honour in either realm?

16. This Cassiodorus himself, moreover, has lived in his province with the honour of a governor, and the tranquillity of a private person. Superior to them all in his nobility, he drew the hearts of all men to himself: those who, by their rights of freedom, could not be enslaved, were instead bound to him sweetly by successive benefits. 17. Indeed, he is also so distinguished by the wealth of his patrimony that, among other blessings, he surpasses princes in his horse-herds, and averts envy by his frequent gifts. Hence, my candidate regularly equips the Gothic army, and, improving on good principles, has preserved the inheritance he received from his parents.

18. My esteem for him has recounted all this in order, so that each of you may understand that he who resolves to live by honourable principles can renew the fame of his kindred at my court. And therefore, fathers of the Senate, since it pleases you to honour the good, and since your assent accompanies my judgement, vote

⁷ 'Grandfather Cassiodorus' is father of the ambassador, grandfather of the new Patrician, and great-grandfather of the author. His defence of Bruttium and Sicily may have been in 440; the Vandal king Genseric sacked Rome in 455.

⁸ A Heliodorus is attested as a Praetorian Prefect, or Urban Prefect of Constantinople in 468; Cassiodorus' *praefecuram* must be translated as plural; cf. *PLRE* II, 531f.

favourably for the promotion of a man who has won general goodwill. For it is more an exchange than a reward, that those who have adorned you with praiseworthy actions should be thanked with a reciprocal favour.

1.10 KING THEODERIC TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS PATRICIAN BOETHIUS (a.507-12)

1. While the whole people should be granted the common justice that wins the honour of its name by extending its equitable control equally among the great and humble, those who remain in the service of the palace will seek it with special confidence. For on men of leisure the royal generosity bestows its gifts gratuitously; but customary rewards are paid as a kind of debt to the dutiful retainer.

→ 2. The horse and foot guards, who keep constant watch over my court, have made this complaint to me in a joint petition - the usual result of serious grievance - they do not receive *solidi* of full weight as their customary wages from the Prefect's treasurer, and they suffer heavy losses in the number of coins. Therefore, your wisdom, trained by learned texts, is to expel this criminal falsehood from the company of truth, so that no one shall be tempted to diminish that purity.

3. For, among the world's incertitudes, this thing called arithmetic is established by a sure reasoning that we comprehend as we do the heavenly bodies. It is an intelligible pattern, a beautiful system, an integral study, an unchanging science, that both binds the heavens and preserves the earth. For is there anything that lacks measure, or transcends weight? It includes all, it rules all, and all things have their beauty because they are perceived under its standard. It is a pleasure to observe how the decad [*denarius*], like the heavens, turns on itself, and is never found to be lacking. That same reckoning increases on new terms, constantly added to itself by repeating itself, so that,⁹ although the decad is not exceeded, it has the power to build the large

⁹ Fridh (1950, 72f.) rejects Mommsen's emendation of *ut* to *et*.

I.27 KING THEODERIC TO SPECIOSUS²¹ (a.509)

1. If I am ruling the manners of foreign tribes in accordance with the law; if every land that is joined to Italy obeys the Roman code, how much more is it right for the very seat of social order [*civilitas*] to hold the laws in high reverence, so that, through this example of restraint, the beauty of high offices may shine out? For where can we look for the spirit of restraint if violence defiles the Patricians?

2. Now it has been reported to me by a complaint of the people of the Green faction - since they have resolved to come to my court, and request the usual help - that they were violently attacked by the Patrician Theodorus and the illustrious Consul Inportunus; in consequence, one of them is mourned as dead.²² 3. If this is true, I am much moved by the savagery of the deed, that rage should arm itself and harass the harmless people whom civic affection ought to cherish. But because the condition of lesser men justly claims the ruler's aid, I command by this order that the illustrious persons named above must make no delay, but send, with you to see to it, men properly briefed, to the tribunal of Caelianus and Agapitus, both of illustrious rank.²³ Their court of inquiry must end in a careful and legal verdict.

4. But lest, perchance, men of exalted rank should be offended by the babbling of the mob, a distinction must be drawn as to such impertinence. A man who has injured a reverend senator as he passes by his insolence, cursing him when he ought to bless him, must be held responsible for a crime. But who looks for serious conduct at the public shows? A Cato never goes to the circus. 5. Anything said there by the people as they celebrate should be deemed no injury. It is a place that protects excesses. Patient acceptance of their chatter is a proven glory of princes themselves. Those who are involved in such enthusiasm

²¹ Speciosus may have been a *comitiacus*.

²² On the circus factions, cf. III.51.5,11; on Theodorus and Inportunus, III.6. Inportunus is the current Consul, and giver of games and races.

²³ Cf. note to I.23.

should answer me this question: if they hope that their opponents will keep quiet, they clearly desire their victory, since men break out into insults only when they are blushing for a shameful defeat. Why, then, do they choose to be angered at what they know they have certainly desired?

I.45 KING THEODERIC TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS PATRICIAN BOETHIUS (c.506)

1. I should not reject requests made by neighbouring kings to please their vanity, since a small expenditure can often purchase more than great riches. For sweetness and pleasure many times produce what weapons fail to do. May it then serve the state, even when I seem to play. For it is for this reason that I am looking for toys, to achieve a serious purpose by their means.

→ 2. Now the lord of the Burgundians [Gundobad] has earnestly asked
→ me to send him one time-piece which is regulated by a measured flow
of water, and one whose nature it is to receive the light of the mighty sun, together with those who can operate them. So, by obtaining and enjoying these pleasures, they will experience a wonder which to me is a common-place. It is very proper that they should long to see something which has astonished them through the reports of their ambassadors.

3. I have learnt that you, clothed in your great learning, are so knowledgeable in this that arts which men practise in customary ignorance, you have drunk from the very spring of science. For, at long distance, you so entered the schools of Athens, you so mingled in your toga among their cloaked assemblies, that you turned Greek theories into Roman teaching.²⁴ For you have discovered with what deep thought speculative philosophy, in all its parts, is pondered, by what mental process practical reasoning, in all its divisions, is learnt, as you transmitted to Roman senators every wonder that the sons of

²⁴ Cf. Cassiodorus on himself: 'He turned Gothic origins into Roman history' (IX.25.5).

Cecrops [Athenians] have given the world. 4. For it is in your translations that Pythagoras the musician and Ptolemy the astronomer are read as Italians; that Nicomachus on arithmetic and Euclid on geometry are heard as Ausonians [Italians]; that Plato debates on metaphysics and Aristotle on logic in the Roman tongue; you have even rendered Archimedes the engineer to his native Sicilians in Latin dress.²⁵ And all the arts and sciences which Greek eloquence has set forth through separate men, Rome has received in her native speech by your sole authorship. Your verbal splendour has given them such brightness, the elegance of your language such distinction, that anyone acquainted with both works would prefer yours to the original.

You have entered a glorious art, marked out among the noble disciplines, through four gates of learning.²⁶ 5. Drawn in by authors' works, you have come to know it where it sits in the inner shrine of nature, through the light of your own genius; it is your practice to understand its problems, your purpose to demonstrate its wonders. It labours to display events that men may wonder at; altering the course of nature in a wonderful way, it takes away belief in the facts, despite displaying images to the eyes. It causes water to rise from the deep and fall headlong, a fire to move by weights; it makes organs swell with alien notes, and supplies their pipes with air from outside, so that they resound with great subtlety. 6. By its means, we see the defences of

²⁵ Pythagoras: philosopher, mathematician and musical theorist, fl. c.530 B.C.; he probably left no writings, but Boethius may have translated works of his school. Ptolemy: astronomer, musical theorist, mathematician and geographer, fl. A.D. 127/48; no Boethian translation from him survives. Nicomachus: a 1st/2nd c. A.D. mathematician; Boethius' *De Institutione Arithmetica* adapts his introduction to arithmetic. Euclid: a mathematician, fl. c.300 B.C.; fragments of Boethius' translation of his *Elements* may survive. Plato: a philosopher, c.429-347 B.C.; Boethius planned a complete translation of his *Dialogues*, of which nothing survives, if it was ever begun. Aristotle: a philosopher and scientist, 384-322 B.C.; Boethius planned, but did not finish a complete translation of his works. Archimedes: a Sicilian Greek mathematician and engineer, c.287-212 B.C.; no Boethian translation from him survives.

²⁶ *Tu artem praedictam...introisti*. Since engineering has been mentioned only briefly among many arts, I have conjecturally emended *praedictam* to *praedicatam*. On the *quadrivium*, cf. Boethius, *De Arithmetica*, *praef.* and I.1.

endangered cities suddenly arise with such solidity that machinery gives the advantage to a man who despaired at their lack of strength. Waterlogged buildings are drained while still in the sea; hard objects are disintegrated by an ingenious device. Objects of metal give out sounds: a bronze statue of Diomedes blows a deep note on the trumpet; a bronze snake hisses; model birds chatter, and those that had no natural voice are found to sing sweetly. 7. I shall say a little about the skill which imitates the heavens without sin. This has set a second sun to revolve in the sphere of Archimedes; by human ingenuity, this has constructed another circle of the Zodiac; by the light of art, this has shown how the moon recovers from its waning, and set turning by an invisible mechanism a tiny device pregnant with the world, a portable sky, a compendium of the universe, a mirror of nature which reflects the heavens.²⁷ Although we know the course of the stars, our eyes cheat us, and we cannot see them moving in this way: indeed, their transit is static, and you cannot see in motion what you know by true reason is passing swiftly. 8. What it is for man actually to create this device! - even to understand it may be a remarkable achievement.

Since you are adorned by your glorious acquaintance with such matters, send me, therefore, the time-pieces, at public expense, without cost to yourself. Let the first be one where a gnomon marks the day, and shows the hours by its meagre shadow [a sun-dial]. In this way a small, unmoving circle represents the revolution of the sun's amazing vastness, and equals the sun's flight, although it knows no motion. 9. If the stars were aware of it, they would be envious, and perhaps turn their courses, not to be the butt of such a joke. What has become of the great wonder of hours produced by the light, if it is a mere shadow that indicates them? Where is the glory of that unwearied rotation, if even a piece of metal fixed in a constant place can accomplish it? O the inestimable quality of a science which is mighty enough to disclose the secrets of nature, while it claims to be only playing! 10. The second time-piece must be one by which the hours are known without the sun's

²⁷ The sphere of Archimedes was a precursor of the orrery - a mechanical model of the planetary movements; cf. Cicero, *De Republica* I.21ff., Claudian, *Carmina Minora* li.

therefore been doubted, but I am unconvinced.]

I.46 KING THEODERIC TO GUNDOBAD, KING OF THE BURGUNDIANS (date as I.45)

1. We should welcome those gifts which are evidently in great demand, since things which can gratify our desire are not to be despised. For the whole purpose of some precious objects is to gratify a want.

Therefore, I greet you with my usual friendship, and have decided to send you, by X and Y, the bearers of this letter, the time-pieces with their operators, to give pleasure to your intelligence. One is the type which seems to epitomise human ingenuity, since, as we know, it traverses the space of the entire heaven; in the other, the sun's course is known without the sun, and the length of the hours is marked off by trickling water. 2. Possess in your native country what you once saw in the city of Rome. It is proper that your friendship should enjoy my gifts, since it is also joined to me by ties of kinship.³⁰

Under your rule, let Burgundy learn to scrutinise devices of the highest ingenuity, and to praise the inventions of the ancients. Through you, it lays aside its tribal way of life, and, in its regard for the wisdom of its king, it properly covets the achievements of the sages. Let it distinguish the parts of the day by their inventions; let it fix the hours with precision. 3. The order of life becomes confused if this separation is not truly known. Indeed, it is the habit of beasts to feel the hours by their bellies' hunger, and to be unsure of something obviously granted for human purposes.



³⁰ Gundobad had commanded the imperial army in 472-4; his son Sigismund had married Theoderic's daughter Areagni.

II.1 KING THEODERIC TO THE MOST PIOUS EMPEROR ANASTASIUS (a.510)

1. Solemn custom prompts me to give a name to the roll of honour, to give Rome its special glory, the Senate house its earthly distinction, so that, through the course of years, the grace of high offices may run on, and the memory of the ages be consecrated by royal generosity. May a felicitous year receive a good omen from its Consul Felix; may a period that is renowned by such a name enter the gate of days; and may the fortune of the year's beginning bless its remainder.

2. For what could you suppose more desirable than for Rome to gather her own sucklings back to her breasts, and to count the Gallic Senate amongst the assembly of the venerable name.¹ The Senate acknowledges the glory of Transalpine blood; not for the first time has it entwined its crown with the flower of Gaul's nobility. Along with the other offices, it knows how to recruit its Consulars from there. The law of time, and a pedigree rich in consular robes make Felix an hereditary bondsman of honours. For what worthy man does not know him to be felicitous in his own character, one who displayed his merits at the first opportunity, by hastening to the motherland of virtues [Rome]. Prosperity followed his good judgement; promotions came when he gained his liberty; and I was not content to leave inglorious a man who deserved to attain the chief honour of the state. 3. He clearly merits my generosity, since, while in the flower of his youth, he reined in that unstable time of life by maturity of character, and, with the rare blessing of self-restraint, when bereft of his father, he became the child of dignity. He subdued avarice, the enemy of wisdom, he rejected the enticements of vice, he trampled down the vanity of pride. So he triumphed over excess, and, by his character, publicly displayed his

¹Fridh follows the MSS in reading *venerando*; I prefer the conjecture of Cujas and Mommsen, *venerandi*. 'The Gallic senate' may allude to the Council of the Gauls, or more generally to the senatorial class in Gaul.

Consulship before its time.²

4. Now I, who am won over by good morals, and pleased by proven honesty, bestow the consular insignia on this candidate, so that my generosity may stimulate desire for virtue; for something which is lavishly rewarded will not lack its enthusiasts. And so do you, who can be delighted in impartial goodwill by the prosperity of either commonwealth, add your support and your vote. He who is worth the elevation of such an office deserves to be chosen by the judgement of us both.

[The appointment [for 511] seems entirely the work of Theoderic, with Anastasius' assent an optional extra. Contrast the words Procopius gives to Witigis' envoys (*Wars* VI.vi.20): 'the Goths have conceded that the dignity of the Consulship should be conferred upon the Romans each year by the emperor of the East'.]

LETTER OF THE KING THEODERIC TO THE VENERABLE BISHOP SEVERUS³ (c.508)

Who is a better choice for the laws of equity than the man who is honoured with the priesthood? In his love of justice, he can show no favour in judgement, and loving all men equally, has no place for envy. Therefore, I inform you that I have sent your holiness, through Montanarius, 1500 *solidi*, deeming the action well suited to your merits. In so far as you know any of the provincials to have suffered loss from the passage of my army in this year, you are to distribute the money to them, making an estimate of the damage; thus, no one affected by his losses will be a stranger to my bounty. For I do not intend a sum which should be rationally distributed to be given without discrimination, lest what I have plainly been compelled to send to sufferers should be bestowed without need on the uninjured.

² In the parallel letter to Felix, Theoderic praises his frugal and efficient management of his estates, perhaps with some irony (II.2.3f.).

³ Severus was probably bishop of a city on the route from Italy to Gaul, much used by Gothic troops fighting the Franks.

II.24 KING THEODERIC TO THE SENATE OF THE CITY OF ROME (a.507-12)

1. It is well known that the Senate has bestowed a rule of life on the people, for we read that you established what gives glory to the Roman name. For this purpose you were called fathers at the very beginning: that you might order men's lives as if they were your sons. For your decrees have produced loyalty in the provinces, and given laws to private persons; you have taught your subjects to obey justice gladly in all its parts. And therefore it is unfitting that a sign of resistance should arise where exemplary self-restraint should instead shine out. My clemency, whose heartfelt desire it is to preserve measure in all things, has decided to bring this matter to your notice. Your ignorance may nourish ever more excesses, but error cannot endure once you know of it.

2. Now, I have learnt by report from the provincial governors sent to the magnificent Praetorian Prefect that the first period of tax payment has been so exempted that clearly little or nothing has been paid in by the senatorial houses. They allege that, by this difficulty, the weak, who should have been given assistance, are ground down; for it happens that, when the harshness of the civic tax-collectors [*exactores*] is despised by the powerful, it turns to the weak and plays havoc among them, and it is he who is zealous in his own payments who instead pays another's. Moreover, they add much graver charges, that each, according to his whim, deigns to cast something to those who ask his taxes -- that is, all this loss is reportedly inflicted on the town councillors -- and those whom my policy had revived for the public service, are ruined by lawless injuries.¹⁰

¹⁰ Cassiodorus seems to distinguish the damage inflicted by the council's tax-collectors on those below them from that which town councillors suffer themselves when, despite their extortions, they still fail to make up the tax deficit. The payments 'cast' are probably in substandard coins; cf. II.25.2, Traube, index, s.v. *abicere*. The later emperors tried repeatedly to support the councils, 'the sinews of the state', as Majorian called them in 458 (*Novel* 7.1).

3. And therefore do you, fathers of the Senate, who owe the state an effort equal to my own, take order with such justice that, whatever any senatorial house may declare, it shall pay in three instalments to the appointed agents¹¹ in the provinces. 4. Or indeed, if you so wish - and this is something you have often requested as a favour - you may pay the entire sum to the treasury of the Vicar's office.¹² Thus, no town councillor shall have to labour with repeated and useless summonses, and instead lose out by your paltry payments, with the detestable result that a man who, in his loyalty, can barely support his own obligations, is weighed down in his weakness by another's burdens. 5. While maintaining official courtesy [*civilitas*], I cannot hide this fact: that, without the cruelty of war, men are borne down and stripped of their property, and perish the more, the quicker they are to serve the state. Know that I have also brought this to the attention of every provincial in an edict [II.25], so that he who knows himself borne down by the weight of another's obligation may be free to burst out into public notice. I know that I am giving a safeguard to the exhausted; from me they will bring back a harvest of justice.

II.25 AN EDICT OF KING THEODERIC (date as II.24)

1. Although the voice of grief is filled with protest, although losers cannot contain themselves, and an injured spirit feeds on lamentation, nonetheless, when my authority gives scope, freer speech is gained. For I hate the oppression of the wretched; I am moved even by the troubles of the uncomplaining; and what the sufferer's pretence has concealed quickly reaches my ears. Rightly so, since all men's injuries affect me, and what I experience in the losses of the poor, I see as wounding to my love.

¹¹ *destinatis procuratoribus per provincias trina illatione persolvat*: I doubt Traube's interpretation of the *procurator* (index, s.v) as a senator's agent.

¹² Like XII.8, this grants the privilege of *autopragia*, direct responsibility for one's taxes; a landlord would collect them with his rents.

2. Now I have recently learnt by report from the provincial governors, that certain houses of the very great are not fulfilling their obligations in due order. Hence it is that, when there is an effort to procure the instalment due, the larger sum is exacted from little men. Then, by the arrogance of the major tenants [*conductores*], the *solidi* due in tax are not handed over in proper order; instead, coins of bad weight are tossed to the collectors. Nor have they paid over in customary form the entire tax that they used to render. The result is that the town councillors, for whom I wish to take thought, experience heavy losses under coercion from the efforts of the tax enforcers; and - if it can be right to say so - they are even deprived of their own estates, when pressed with another's debts by the aggressive collectors of arrears [*compulsores*].

3. In order to eradicate this wrong, I have also sent instructions to the most-reverend Senate [II.24], and now decree by edict that any landowner or town councillor who feels himself burdened by another's obligations is to make haste to an audience with my serenity; he will know how utterly the excesses of the past have disgusted me when he sees them followed by benefits. The purpose of a just prince is, therefore, made plain to you - although it is constantly displayed by many evidences. Now either conceal with silence your grief and suffering, or open in a spirit of justice a road for your complaint. The fate of this decision will now lie in your hands; it is open to you to choose what you perceive will profit you.

II.27 KING THEODERIC TO ALL JEWS LIVING AT GENOA (a.507-12)

1. As it is my desire, when petitioned, to give a lawful consent, so I do not like the laws to be cheated through my favours, especially in that area where I believe reverence for God to be concerned. You, then, who are destitute of His grace, should not seem insolent in your pride.

Therefore, by this authority, I decree that you add only a roof to

the ancient walls of your synagogue, granting permission to your requests just so far as the imperial decrees allow.¹³ 2. It is unlawful for you to add any ornament, or to stray into an enlargement of the building. And you must realise that you will in no way escape the penalty of the ancient ordinance if you do not refrain from illegalities. Indeed, I give you permission to roof or strengthen the walls themselves only if you are not affected by the thirty year limitation.¹⁴ Why do you wish for what you ought to shun? I grant leave, indeed; but, to my praise, I condemn the prayers of erring men. I cannot command your faith, for no one is forced to believe against his will.¹⁵

[Following the reconquest of Africa, Justinian confiscated Jewish synagogues in that province (*Novel* 37.8). At the siege of Naples in 536, the Jewish inhabitants fought bravely on the Gothic side.]

II 32 KING THEODERIC TO THE SENATE OF ROME (a.507-12)

1. I welcome dedication to the public service, fathers of the Senate, since, while approving the commendable spirit of the citizens, I find an opportunity to confer well-merited favours. For what is so like a senator as to devote zeal to the public service, that he may profit the country for which he was born?

2. Now, the magnificent Patrician Decius, compelled by love for the commonwealth, with an admirable aim, has frequently requested what my power and policy could scarcely have imposed on me.¹⁶ He has promised to drain the marsh of Decemnovium,¹⁷ which ravages the

¹³ Cf. Theodosius II, *Novel* 3, 3 and 5.

¹⁴ Probably, this means 'If no-one, for thirty years, has legally challenged the right of your synagogue to exist on that site, and in that form'; cf. I.18.

¹⁵ Cited in 1577 in a plea for religious toleration by the humanist J. Bodin.

¹⁶ Note that the inscription below refers to the work as imposed by Theoderic; it may thereby have strengthened Decius' title to the land reclaimed.

¹⁷ Decemnovium was the stretch of the Via Appia which ran for 19 miles north of Terracina through the notorious Pomptine (Pontine) marshes.

III.1 KING THEODERIC TO ALARIC, KING OF THE VISIGOTHS (a.507, early/mid.)

1. Although the countless numbers of your clan gives you confidence in your strength, although you recall that the power of Attila yielded to Visigothic might,¹ nevertheless, the hearts of a warlike people grow soft during a long peace. Therefore, beware of suddenly putting on the hazard men who have assuredly had no experience in war for many years. 2. Battle terrifies those who are unused to it, and they will have no confidence in a sudden clash, unless experience gives it in advance. Do not let some blind resentment carry you away. Self-restraint is fore-sighted, and a preserver of tribes; rage, though, often precipitates a crisis; and only when justice can no longer find a place with one's opponent, is it then useful to appeal to arms.

3. Wait, therefore, until I send my envoys to the Frankish king [Clovis], so that the judgement of friends may terminate your dispute. For I wish nothing to arise between two of my marriage kinsmen² which may, perhaps, cause one of them to be the loser. There has been no slaughter of your clansmen to inflame you; no occupied province is deeply incensing you; the quarrel is still trivial, a matter of words. You will very easily settle it if you do not enrage yourself by war. Though you are my relative, let me set against you the notable tribes allied to me, and justice too, which strengthens kings and quickly puts to flight those minds which it finds are so armed against it. 4. And so, giving first the honour of my greeting, I have seen fit to send you X and Y as my envoys. They will convey my instructions, as requisite, and, with your approval, will hasten on to my brother Gundobad and the other kings, lest you should be harassed by the incitements of those who maliciously rejoice in another's war. May Providence prevent that wickedness from overcoming you. I judge your enemy to be our

¹ In 451, at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains; see Jordanes, *Getica* 180-217, probably deriving from Cassiodorus.

² Theoderic was married to Audeflada, sister of Clovis, and had married his daughter Theodegotha to Alaric.

common trouble. For he who strives against you will find in me his due opponent.

III.2 KING THEODERIC TO GUNDOBAD, KING OF THE BURGUNDIANS (date as III.1)

1. It is very wrong to see a clash of wills among royalties who are dear to us, and to look on, hiding our feelings, in the hope that some misfortune will arise for one of them. If our kinsmen go bloodily to war while we allow it, our malice will be to blame. From me you hold every pledge of high affection; the two of us are united; if you do anything wrong on your own account, you sin gravely by causing me sorrow. 2. It is our part to restrain by reason young men of royal power; for, if they feel that their evil ambitions genuinely displease us, they will be unable to retain their rash purposes. Heated by the energy of youth they may be, but they will respect their elders. Let them realise that we are opposed to their quarrels, and are resolved that neither should overstep the mark. For harsh words are our duty, lest our kinsmen should push matters to extremes.

3. Therefore, I have seen fit to despatch X and Y as envoys to your fraternity, with the aim of sending further, and in company with the tribes allied to me, to the king of the Franks, if my son Alaric approves. So, the dispute being carried on between them may be terminated by friendly and reasonable mediation. For it befits such mighty kings not to seek out regrettable quarrels among themselves, with the result of injuring us too, by their own mischances. 4. Therefore, let your fraternity labour, with my assistance, to restore their concord; for no-one will believe that they have gone to war without our wish unless it is very clear that our battle has been rather to prevent a fight. Now I have entrusted to the bearers of this letter some oral messages to be given you, that thus your wisdom may set all in order; by God's help, it usually achieves those things which it studiously reflects on.

III.17 KING THEODERIC TO ALL THE PROVINCIALS OF THE GAULS (c.510)

1. You who have been restored to it after many years should gladly obey Roman custom, for it is gratifying to return to that state from which your ancestors assuredly took their rise. And therefore, as men by God's favour recalled to ancient liberty, clothe yourselves in the morals of the toga, cast off barbarism, throw aside savagery of mind, for it is wrong for you, in my just times, to live by alien ways.

2. Hence, pondering your needs with my innate benevolence, I have decided to send - fortunately, let us hope - the distinguished Gemellus, Vicar of the Prefect, a man of proven loyalty and industry, to settle the province. I trust that he will be incapable of doing any wrong, as he is aware that sinners displease me deeply. 3. Therefore, you have my commands to obey his ordinances, since I believe that his decisions will be to your benefit.

Little by little, you must take on law-abiding habits. A virtuous innovation should not be troublesome. For what can be better than for men to trust in the laws alone, and to have no fear of future chances? The public laws are the surest comforts of human life; they help the weak, and rein in the powerful. 4. Love them, since your security comes, and your good conscience grows from them. For the barbarians live at their own will, where he who can get what pleases him more often finds his own death. Now show yourselves secure in your riches: let ancestral treasures long hidden away be brought to light. For a man is the more noble, the more he gleams both with upright character and with shining wealth. 5. For it is for this reason that I have sent you a Vicar of the Prefecture: that I may be seen to have despatched a rule of civil life along with such an office. Enjoy now what once you only heard of. Realise that human beings are valued less for bodily strength than for wisdom, and that those who can furnish justice to others prosper deservedly.

[Despite these claims for the restoration of Roman law and civilian rule, the province remained under military control. Gemellus was outranked by at least one of Theoderic's Gothic generals (Marabodus, probably Count of Marseilles), with whom he had to

co-operate in legal matters (IV.12, 46). We should not suppose that Gaul had been in a state of total anarchy under the Visigoths.]

III.18 KING THEODERIC TO THE DISTINGUISHED GEMELLUS (c.510)

1. Favours are deserved by those who have preferred my clemency, so that they may prove the rightness of their judgement by their personal gains. But if such men should be provided for by official generosity, how much more fitting is it for them to possess their own? For this is the plain and common gift of justice.

2. Now the distinguished Magnus, rejecting association with the enemy, and remembering his birth, has returned to the Roman empire, his own country. Allegedly, it has happened that his wealth may have been ruined by his absence. And therefore, I decree by this order that anything belonging to him in any way, whether in land, or in town slaves, or in country slaves, which he can prove to be now lost, he is to recover without delay. By my authority, he is to retain all the rights of ownership that he had, and is to suffer no challenge over property long in his possession, since my purpose is to bestow new wealth on him as well.

[The order conforms to the laws of *postliminium*, which guaranteed their rights and property to returning captives. Magnus probably belonged to a leading Gallo-Roman family, and may have been related to bishop Ennodius of Pavia. His rank suggests that Theoderic had already honoured him; compare Felix II.1, perhaps also a connection.]

III.20 KING THEODERIC TO THE SAIO TRAVILA AND THE DEPARTMENTAL OFFICER [APPARITOR] FERROCINCTUS (a.507-12)

1. Among those glorious cares of state, which, with God's help, I revolve in ceaseless thought, the relief of the humble is dear to my heart, that I may raise up against the power of the proud the carrier of

governor of Bruttium. In rhetorical style, it crushed this private allegation, by denying that credence should be given to a deceitful appellant against the assurance of the public court.

4. Therefore, I soften the harshness of the penalty with my leniency, decreeing that, from the day this decision is published, you will suffer six months exile, in such a way that no one, after my decision, may charge you with infamy by any construction, since it is right that the prince should wipe away the spots that appear on a tainted reputation. But, when this time has passed, you are to be restored to your native district and all your property, and you are to have all your original legal rights; for I decree that you, whom I mean to detain in temporary exile, are not to groan with the brand of disgrace. At the same time, I threaten a fine of three pounds of gold against anyone who tries to violate my present decision, either by resisting, or by otherwise interpreting it. 5. But, since I do not wish this decree to affect the innocent, lest a man should have no benefit from his own ignorance, by present authority I free from fear those who may have been unconsciously involved, at any time or place, in the same case. For he who does not have a criminal conscience is like a man with an alibi.

[This ruling may have been devised to save Venantius' face; also to protect Aed. status by removing him from the province while Venantius was still governor. If so, it illustrates the limitations of royal power.]

III.51 KING THEODERIC TO THE PRAETORIAN PREFECT FAUSTUS (a.507-12)

1. The rarer good faith and honest character are among public performers, the more precious is any commendable feeling that may be shown among them. For a man likes to discover something worthy of praise where he had not thought to find it.

Now, some time ago, my judgement bestowed a reasonable salary on Thomas the charioteer, an immigrant from the east, until I should have tested his skill and character. But, since he has become the champion in this contest, and has willingly left his own country, and

chosen to support the seat of my rule, I have decided to confirm him in the monthly allowance; otherwise, his pay from me would still be uncertain, although I know that he preferred the realm of Italy. 2. For he, in his many victories, has 'flitted on the lips' of many, riding more on popularity than on chariots. He took up a constantly defeated faction of the people; and those to whom he had himself caused grief, he strove to make happy again, now overcoming the drivers by skill, now surpassing them in the speed of his horses. From the frequency of his triumphs, he was called a sorcerer - and among charioteers, it is seen as a great honour to attain to such accusations. For, when victory cannot be attributed to the quality of the horses, it is inevitably ascribed to magical cheating.

3. Racing is a spectacle that drives out dignified manners: it invites frivolous quarrels, it drains away honesty, and is a gushing spring of strife. Antiquity, indeed, held it to be sacred, but a quarrelsome posterity has made it a scandal. For the first to hold races, it is said, was Oenomaus, in Elis, a city of Asia.²⁷ Later, Romulus, when carrying off the Sabine women, gave Italy the show in a rustic guise, as no buildings for it had yet been founded.

4. But Augustus, the lord of the world, raised a work equal to his power, and laid out a construction [the Circus Maximus] in the Murcian valley that is a marvel even to the Romans. A vast mass, firmly girded in by hills [the Palatine and Aventine], encloses a space which contains images of the universe. Hence, they placed twelve gates for the twelve signs of the zodiac. These are opened suddenly and together, by ropes let down from small herms, showing that everything, as men suppose, is done with forethought, there where a carved head is seen at work.²⁸ 5. The colours, moreover, are designed as a fourfold image of the seasons: the Green is dedicated to the fertility of spring, the Blue to the clouds of winter, the Red to fiery summer, and

²⁷ Oenomaus, legendary king of Elis in the Greek Peloponnese, held lethal chariot races against his daughter's suitors; Asia may be a mistake for Achaëa (Greece), or Apia (the Peloponnese).

²⁸ A herm is a four-sided pillar, topped by a head or bust.

the White to the frosts of autumn. Thus, the entire year is indicated, passing, as it were, through the twelve signs. This is done so that the works of nature may be mimicked by the ordered fantasy of the public shows. 6. The two-horse chariot was invented as an imitation of the moon, the four-horse of the sun. The out-riders' horses, on which the circus attendants announce the heats to be run, imitate the speed of the morning star, the sun's fore-runner. Thus it came about that, while they believed they were honouring the stars, they profaned their faith by this absurd representation. 7. Not far from the gates, a white line has been drawn, straight as a ruler, to either parapet: when the four-horse chariots set out, their contest begins from that point, lest, while they try to smash each other in their excessive speed, the people should lose the pleasure of its spectacle.²⁹ The whole race is run with seven goals, an image of the week's recurring seven days. The goals themselves, like the zodiacal divisions, have three peaks, around which the swift four-horse chariots wheel like the sun. 8. They³⁰ signify the limits of east and west. The central cisterns [the Euripus] give an image of the glassy sea; hence, marine dolphins there pour in the waters. Moreover, lofty obelisks are raised to the heights of heaven; yes, and the taller is dedicated to the sun, the lower to the moon, while the mysteries of the ancients are marked on them by Chaldaean signs [hieroglyphs], as though by letters. The backbone [*spina*] of the course represents the fate of unhappy captives, when Roman generals, trampling the backs of their enemies, obtained the joyful reward of their labours.

9. Now the napkin [*mappa*], which is seen to give the signal for the races, came into use by this chance. When Nero³¹ was prolonging his dinner, and the people, greedy for the spectacle, was making its customary demand for haste, he ordered that the napkin he was using to wipe his hands should be thrown from the window, to give

²⁹ Humphrey, 85: a break line 'at which the chariots were allowed to leave their lanes and head for the inside position'.

³⁰ I have followed Meyer's conjectural emendation of *Eoae* to *eae*.

³¹ Emperor, 54-68; 'contorniate' medallions, struck for the games in late imperial Rome, sometimes commemorate his public displays and love of racing.

permission for the requested contest. Hence, the practice that the display of the napkin should be seen as a sure promise of races to come.

10. The circus gets its name from a circuit; the races are, so to speak, sword-circlings [*circenses quasi circu-enses*]: this is because, in primitive antiquity, which had not yet transferred its shows to splendid buildings, they were held in green meadows, among swords and streams. Nor is it by chance that the rule of the contest is for a decision in twentyfour heats, as the hours of day and night are assuredly summed up in this number. Nor should it be thought a meaningless device that the circuits of the goals are marked by the taking down³² of eggs, since that very act, pregnant with many superstitious beliefs, asserts, as an egg does, that it will give birth to something. And therefore, you may understand that the flighty and inconstant behaviour, which men have ascribed to mother birds, is born thence.

11. It would be a long task to describe all the other features of the Roman circus, since they all seem to relate to separate reasons. However, this I declare to be altogether remarkable: the fact that here, more than at other shows, dignity is forgotten, and men's minds are carried away in frenzy. The Green chariot wins: a section of the people laments; the Blue leads, and, in their place,³³ a part of the city is struck with grief. They hurl frantic insults, and achieve nothing; they suffer nothing, but are gravely wounded; and they engage in vain quarrels as if the state of their endangered country were in question. 12. It is right to think that all this was dedicated to a mass superstition, when there is so clear a departure from decent behaviour.

Compelled by pressure from the people, I cherish the institution: such gatherings are what they pray for, while they delight in rejecting serious thoughts. 13. For few men are controlled by reason, and few are pleased by a right purpose. The mob, rather, is led to what was

³² I have followed Mommsen's reading, *ereptionibus*; Fridh has *erectionibus*.

³³ I have followed Fridh in retaining *potius*. Mommsen conjectures *ocius*; Meyer *protinus*; Alan Cameron (1973), supported by Accursius, prefers *potior* - see his 96, n.3, for discussion.

plainly invented for oblivion of its cares. For it supposes that whatever serves its pleasure must also be linked to the happiness of the age. Therefore, let us grant the expenses, and not be forever giving from rational considerations. Sometimes it is useful to play the fool, and so control the joys the people long for.

[Chariot races had close associations with imperial ceremony, and ancient links with solar cult. On circus design and symbolism, see Humphrey, esp. 84-91, 264f., 265ff., 281, 288, 290; on the Circus Maximus in general, ch.3-5; on the circus of Constantinople, Dagron, ch.11. Dudley, 213f., translates a poem on the symbolism (*Anthologia Latina*, no.377, ed. Baehrens). Cassiodorus' contempt for the race-goers' enthusiasm is conventional; his words may owe something to Juvenal, *Satire* XI.197-201, and Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVIII.4.29-31.]

III.52 KING THEODERIC TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS CONSULARIS³⁴ (a.507-12)

1. As I have learnt from the all too bitter submission of the suppliants, a boundary dispute has arisen between the distinguished gentlemen Leontius and Paschasius, with the result that they have decided to vindicate the bounds of their estates not by the laws, but by force. This amazes me, that something which must be defined by the witness either of boundary stones, mountain ridges, river banks, or of artificial marker ditches and other evident signs, has been so hotly contested in law. 2. What would they do if they held land in regions of Egypt where, when the flood rises, the fast waters of the Nile erode the boundary marks, where mud covers everything and the surface of the ground is made indistinguishable? Hence, they should not resort to weapons, even if the lawsuit set in motion should fail, defeated by lack of reparation. For this matter is carefully sorted out by geometrical figures and the surveyor's art, just as every word is specified by letters.

³⁴ On this letter and surveying in late antiquity, see Dilke, 44ff. Consularis is otherwise unknown.