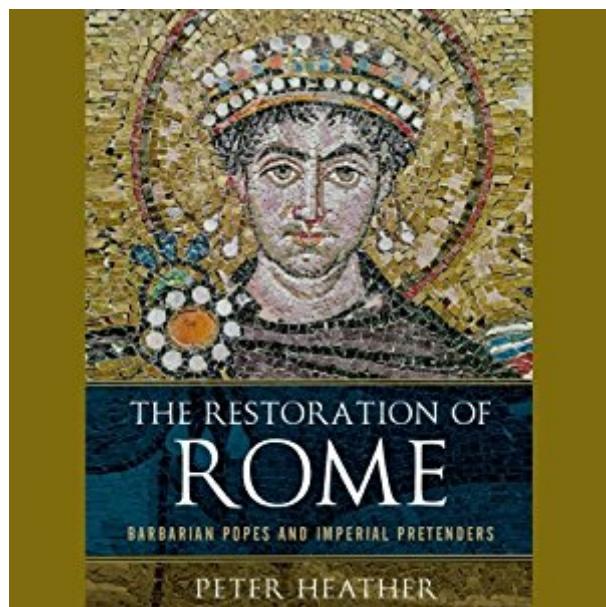


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# The Restoration Of Rome: Barbarian Popes And Imperial Pretenders



## Synopsis

In AD 476, the last of Rome's emperors, known as "Augustulus", was deposed by a barbarian general, the son of one of Attila the Hun's henchmen. With the imperial vestments dispatched to Constantinople, the curtain fell on the Roman empire in Western Europe, its territories divided among successor kingdoms constructed around barbarian military manpower. But, if the Roman Empire was dead, Romans across much of the old empire still lived, holding on to their lands, their values, and their institutions. The conquering barbarians, responding to Rome's continuing psychological dominance and the practical value of many of its institutions, were ready to reignite the imperial flame and enjoy the benefits. As Peter Heather shows in dazzling biographical portraits, each of the three greatest immediate contenders for imperial power - Theoderic, Justinian, and Charlemagne - operated with a different power base but was astonishingly successful in his own way. Though each in turn managed to put back together enough of the old Roman West to stake a plausible claim to the Western imperial title, none of their empires long outlived their founders' deaths. Not until the reinvention of the papacy in the 11th century would Europe's barbarians find the means to establish a new kind of Roman Empire, one that has lasted 1,000 years. A sequel to the best-selling Fall of the Roman Empire, The Restoration of Rome offers a captivating narrative of the death of an era and the birth of the Catholic Church.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Peter Heather is without doubt a great historian who has done much to revisit some of the theories that used to be common currency regarding the end of the Roman Empire. In this book, he seeks to demonstrate how, after three failed attempts by "imperial pretenders" to "restore" the Roman

Empire, "barbarian popes" finally managed to succeed in the "Restoration of Rome", although in a quite different form. Written with a large audience in mind, this book is an entertaining and, at times, a brilliant read backed up by the author's rather exceptional scholarship. The three first parts of the book are vignettes telling the stories of Theodoric, Justinian and Charlemagne, and, according to the author, how each of them attempted, and failed to restore the Empire. The fourth part is about the ascendancy of the papacy and how it managed to dominate and become the head of the Church in the western part of what had been the Roman Empire. This is where I started having some problems. One of the lesser ones is the use of profanity. This allegedly "people's prose" is supposed to make the book's contents more accessible or even more endearing to a large audience. One of the mildest is the author's rather sweeping judgement about Justinian being a "bastard", because of the Nikea massacre that saved his throne (and his life) and his long wars which he pursued with little consideration about the sufferings of the populations. He even gets compared to Hitler, Staline and Pol pot. Needless to say, passing judgement on a historical figure in such an anachronistic way is quite amazing for a historian of this calibre who clearly knows better than to compare apples and oranges and call them fruit.

What follows are some of my initial thoughts on Peter Heather's new book *Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes & Imperial Pretenders*. It is the third in a series of books on H's views on Late Antiquity. Peter Heather's new book *Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes & Imperial Pretenders* is the sequel to his popular *Fall of Rome* (2005). While aimed at a broad audience, Heather also has many titbits and, indeed, sometimes controversial conclusions for academics. Heather engages with many on-going disputes in the field of Late Antique history. The study, however, would have benefitted with further engagement with recent scholarship that contradicts many of his main points. His bibliography is missing many important articles and recent works that are fundamental if one hopes to put together a narrative on the poorly covered fifth century. While sections of this book are interesting, particularly his chapters on the two Theoderics and Justinian's "reconquest" of the "lost" western provinces in the sixth-century, as a whole this is the weakest of Heather's trilogy. Indeed, as he move away from his area of expertise the quality declines dramatically. His chapters on Carolingians and the rise of the papacy are convoluted and often unrelated to his main thesis. I will, however, leave my comments to his opening chapters on Theoderic's rise and Justinian's wars of reconquest. While recognizing that he was aiming at a larger audience, his Theoderic offers a portrait of a stereotypical barbarian rex that could have been found in something published a century earlier.

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