Virtues of community in the wake of the Gothic War:  
Aspects of administrative literacy from Cassiodorus to Gregory the Great  
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The general purpose of this paper is to illustrate a landscape that might be thought of as the social and political context for administrative literacy (or more broadly as ‘chancery’ culture) in Rome’s ecclesiastical setting during the 6th century. It is hoped that the paper will bring into sharper profile some of the contexts and uses of administrative literacy in the church of Rome, and just as importantly, some sense for how contingent administrative literacy was upon social and political changes ongoing in Italy during this period. More specifically, this paper is concerned also with the impact of the Gothic War on textual strategies visible in administrative documents across the century. In order to survey this landscape, this paper will approach administrative literacy from two perspectives: a narrower focus on the circumstances of textual production during the Gothic War and a broader consideration of the impact of the Gothic War on the intended role of administrative literacy in the later decades of the 6th century.

As a preliminary, it is helpful to appreciate exemplars of administrative literacy as texts; that is, not only as the product of the collective educational backgrounds or scribal practices of members of a ‘chancery’, but texts as self-contained entities with rhetorical personalities and specific authorial purpose. Few extant exemplars of administrative literacy from 6th-century Italy may be thought of as random survivals. It is possible that some collections of materials, such as the Epistulae Theodericianae or the Ravenna Papyri, may be thought of precisely in such
terms as random survivals, although this is less often the case. Some texts, such as the Liber Pontificalis or the Epistolae romanorum pontificum genuinae edited by Thiel have more complex histories in which the accumulation of materials over generations may have dislocated or obscured the authorial intention and rhetorical personality of an ‘original’ corpus. Other texts, however, such as the Collectio Dionysiana of Dionysius Exiguus, the Variae of Cassiodorus, the Collectio Avellana and the Registrum epistolarum of Gregory the Great demonstrate both structural coherency and temporal immediacy in such a way as to distinguish them as ‘publications’ with authorial purpose and personality. Of course, a tripartite typology of 6th-century sources such as this is overly simplistic and prone to qualifications in individual cases, but it is at least a starting point suggestive for limitations that may be imposed on the interpretation of the products of administrative literacy.

At first glance, the relevance of the Gothic War to an understanding of administrative literacy in the church of Rome may not seem immediate. It is fairly regular practice in modern scholarship to attribute the administrative habits of the late-antique church to the influence of earlier imperial administrative practices and to attribute many of the substantial changes that would later characterize the medieval ecclesiastical chancery of Rome to the administrative acumen of Gregory the Great at the end of the century. On the one hand, this tendency in scholarship is not without merit: many officers of Rome’s church received some exposure to the kind of education that typically served as preparation for civil administration and some even held posts in the civil administration prior to adopting a religious vocation. The report of Cassiodorus’ Variae and Justinian’s Novellae would both seem to confirm that teaching in grammar, oratory, medicine and law continued at Rome at least to the end of Justinian’s reign. Arator is but one example of a highly educated individual with experience in civil legal affairs whom the church at
Rome adlected into its administration prior to the Gothic War; and no less a figure than Gregory the Great, who served as either praefectus urbi or praetor urbanus prior to joining ecclesiastical orders, reminds that the conduit from civil to church administration was still viable even at the end of the 6th century. Although figures such as Arator and Gregory should be regarded as exceptional and it is necessary to restrain how much credit is given to the volume of personnel that a civil administrative conduit might have channeled into the administration of the church, it is nonetheless true that even a generational trickle of individuals with civil administrative experience into positions of leadership in the church of Rome would be enough to sustain some measure of continuity with the practices of civil and imperial administration.

On the other hand, it is somewhat surprising that the impact of the Gothic War on church administration has not received more sustained attention given the report of sources that amply testify to the upheaval experienced at Rome as a result of the conflict. Not only had Rome experienced the privations of military siege no fewer than three times during the conflict, but the combination of warfare and plague in Rome’s hinterlands would have impacted greatly the resources needed to sustain the urban population. Procopius relates that as a result of Totila’s sack of 549, Rome stood empty of citizens for forty days, something that had not been experienced probably since the siege of Brennus in 390 BC. Although we are right to suspect hyperbole of biblical (or Livian) proportions in Procopius’ report, the cumulative events described by Procopius should be enough to warrant consideration of the impact of the Gothic War on the continuity of administrative habits. The Constitutio Pragmatica may perhaps offer a more sober picture of the state of affairs. Issued by Justinian in 554, presumably to signal the end of the conflict, the Constitutio serves as a litmus for the nature and scale of disruption caused by the war. Of the twenty-seven articles of the Constitutio, all seem directed at the repair of
instability caused during the conflict. The *Constitutio* offers correctives to issues as diverse as the implementation of Justinian’s new laws, the standardization of weights and measures, the use of earlier imperial coinage, the spoliation of public buildings, the continued distribution of the *annona* to professionals such as grammarians and lawyers, and the liberty of senators to travel freely. Many of these measures may be seen simply as the implementation of a new regime, but far greater attention is given to restoring property ownership, patterns of taxation and the status of enslaved persons. Issues such as these would naturally be a concern for the imperial administration of Italy, but it would have been just as serious a concern for the ecclesiastical administration at Rome, which depended on stable and predictable conditions for property ownership, rental collections and civil status in order to maintain its own institutional cohesion. That the imperial government recognized the administrative role of the church at Rome is clear enough from the *Constitutio*, which delegated to local bishops the burden of distributing the obligation of *comptiones* to land owners and similarly entrusted to the bishop of Rome and the Senate the standards for weights and measures to be used throughout Italy. From the report of later 6th-century sources, such as the *Registrum* of Gregory, which does not mention the Senate at Rome, it would seem that in the immediate wake of the Gothic War, the church of Rome was posed with the challenge of re-assembling nearly the entirety of urban administration.

The *Collectio Avellana* may represent the first use of administrative literacy by the church of Rome to address its concerns about the resolution of the Gothic War. What can be said about the dating of the text certainly suggests as much. The latest letter of the collection dates to 553, the year after the defeat of the last substantial Gothic opponent to Justinian (the Gothic king Totila) and the year before Justinian issued the *Constitutio Pragmatica*. Although this should not be taken as positive proof that the collection was published in 553, it should be noted that this
particular letter was addressed to Justinian by Pope Vigilius, who died only several years later in 555. It may be more persuasive to assume that the assembly of the collection would have been prompted by Vigilius’ death, at precisely the moment when eastern officials from Constantinople were consolidating the governance of Italy at both Ravenna and Rome and when the ecclesiastical administration at Rome would be particularly concerned with the role that it would assume in Justinian’s Italy. The troubled circumstances in the elevation of Vigilius’ successor, Pelagius I, certainly suggest that some form of legitimation, however rhetorical, was needed at precisely this moment. According to the Liber Pontificalis, Pelagius’ ordination was unconventional and because of the lack of suitable clergy at Rome who might have stood in candidacy for the role, the nobility and many citizens in Rome initially withdrew from communion with Pelagius until he proved his worth (with the assistance of Narses, Justinian’s agent in Italy). Perhaps tellingly, one of the main concerns of the Collectio is the presentation of the Papacy’s doctrinal autonomy. This is represented by a significant portion of correspondence portraying exchanges between the church of Rome and Constantinople. However, at another level, the Collectio Avellana also demonstrates the ability of the church to muster the resources of administrative literacy to control the production of its own history, despite the various ruptures that may be assumed on the report of Procopius and the Constitutio Pragmatica. In addition to demonstrating the capacity of the church of Rome to assert its own history, it is also a record of a centuries-old dialogue (often an antagonistic dialogue) with imperial authority at Constantinople.

As a record of exchanges between the church of Rome and other sources of authority in the Roman Mediterranean, especially imperial authority at Constantinople, the Collectio both advertises the autonomy of the church to a local audience and also potentially demonstrates to a
wider audience involved in the reorganization of Italy how the church of Rome had served a didactic (or even disciplinarian) role in its partnership with imperial authority since the time of Constantine. While the Collectio demonstrates the assertiveness of the church in positions taken by various pontiffs in theological issues, it also suggests partnership in certain aspects of administrative literacy that it shares with formal imperial administrative writing. The very fact that, since the time of Constantine, Empire and Christian Church had been engaged in a mutually legitimating discourse naturally suggests that the two would adopt language (rhetoric) and habits for producing that language consistently (educational backgrounds, scribal practices, record keeping, etc.) that would reinforce the idea of a special discourse that was shared between Church and Empire.

This discourse is particularly evident in a specific use of vocabulary that the Collectio Avellana shares with two other contemporary examples for administrative literacy: the Variae of Cassiodorus and the Novellae of Justinian. These three sources, each exemplars of administrative literacy, on the surface have very distinctive natures, which may account for the fact that they are often considered in separate trajectories in modern scholarship. Where the Collectio may be seen as the accumulation of materials in a papal ‘archive’, the Variae are typically regarded as a voice that resonated only prior to the Gothic War, and a voice that had more to do with the day-to-day administration of the Gothic court at Ravenna. Where the Collectio presented the concerns of the church at Rome for ecumenical and doctrinal affairs, the Variae were concerned with taxes, legal disputes, and ‘barbarian’ diplomacy. Similarly, the Novellae are often regarded only in the context of their representation of Justinian’s authority in Constantinople and in the eastern Empire. It is significant, however, that these three sources represent distinct social entities each attempting to legitimate their own presumed role in maintaining a universal and ecumenical society at
precisely the time when the Gothic War had challenged the very foundation of what determined which social and political actors might claim agency in the re-ordering of society in Italy: the *Collectio Avellana* representing the episcopal institution of Rome and presumably its personnel, the *Variae* representing the dispossessed bureaucratic elite from the former Gothic court, and the *Novellae* representing the aims and ambitions not only of Justinian, but also those officials entrusted with imperial authority in Italy.

The contemporaneity of these three sources is suggestive. The place of the *Collectio Avellana* in the Gothic War has already received attention. Cassiodorus’ *Variae* must also be located within the context of the Gothic War, although probably at a stage of the conflict earlier than the *Collectio*. The *Variae* are carefully silent concerning the war, even in the two prefaces where Cassiodorus explained the purpose of the letter collection. However, later sources from Cassiodorus further removed from the war make it clear that the Gothic War represented a dramatic rupture in the social and political realities to which a generation of palatine elite had become accustomed. In the preface to his *Institutiones*, Cassiodorus recalled how peaceful endeavors had been abandoned on account of ‘raging wars and turbulent struggles in the Italic kingdom.’ Sometime during the immediate stages of the Gothic War, Cassiodorus collected, revised and composed the letters that he called the *Variae*. Earlier scholarship has assumed that Cassiodorus assembled the *Variae* between 538 and 540, by which reckoning the capture of Ravenna figured as the terminus of his political aspirations. This view naturally has cast the *Variae* as mementos of a former public life and, inadvertently, has obscured ambitions for the rehabilitation of the bureaucratic elite that Cassiodorus might have had after the fall of Ravenna. More recent analysis of the political context suggests that Cassiodorus may have produced the *Variae* later in the 540s, in response to the vacillating fortunes of the Gothic War and the
troubled circumstances of Justinian’s reign. In addition to the uncertainty concerning the date of the *Variae*, it is not known for certain where Cassiodorus assembled the collection. Individual letters do not disclose whether, as original documents, they may have been written on behalf of Gothic kings in residence at Rome, Ravenna or, perhaps more likely, itinerantly as the court moved between the various *palatia* owned by the Amal family throughout Italy. Similarly, a range of possibilities have been suggested concerning where Cassiodorus assembled the individual letters as a collection—at Rome during the siege of Witigis, at Ravenna under the siege of Belisarius, at Cassiodorus’ estates in Calabria (Vivarium) or perhaps as a political exile in Constantinople. Regardless of the precise date and location of ‘publication’, the *Variae* are a product of the Gothic War, a period in which the relative successes of Amal governance faced the revisionism of eastern imperial propaganda and the animosities of those political exiles, particularly the senatorial elite of Rome, who had reasons to disavow prosperity under a ‘barbarian’ regime. From the report of Cassiodorus’ *De anima*, a philosophical treatise which he appended to the letters, assembling the *Variae* had been a troublesome and lengthy process. The difficulty of completing the *Variae* should not be imagined in terms of the effort required to collect the 468 letters that Cassiodorus included in the collection. Cassiodorus’ analogy for the completion of the *Variae* as being ‘received in the quiet of the harbor to which I had come, if not with praise, at least freed from care’, implies having weathered at least the threat of social and political censure before arriving at sanctuary. Whether the safe harbor that Cassiodorus imagined in the *De anima* was Constantinople, where sources locate him as late as ca. 550, or at Vivarium, where Cassiodorus eventually retired and dedicated himself to religious scholarship, the context in which he produced the *Variae* was one of social and political conflict.
Justinian’s early *Novellae* are similarly contemporary with the Gothic War. In fact, the *Novellae* would have had particular importance as instruments of diplomacy between Constantinople and the Amal court at the beginning of the conflict and it is almost inconceivable that the text of new laws being produced in Constantinople would not have been received through official channels in both Rome and Ravenna. Although the political authority of the Amals in Italy had been independent of Constantinople, the pretense of two partnered ‘republics’ was mutually advantageous to the Amals and Constantinople. The political rituals facilitating that façade, including the delicate maneuvering that attended the joint annual appointments of eastern and western consuls, also assumed subscription to eastern imperial laws. Between 535 and 540 CE (that is, during the first phase of the Gothic War while Cassiodorus served as praetorian prefect in Italy), Justinian’s court published 112 *Novellae*. Of these, some were addressed exclusively to concerns in regions of the eastern Mediterranean, where it may be assumed that they would not have reached Italian shores. Nonetheless, the *Constitutio Pragmatica* of 554 states that the new legislation had been sent to Italy ‘long before’ (*quasi am sub editali programmate in Italiam dudum misimus*), probably indicating at the time of original promulgation. Similarly, awareness of Justinian’s *Novellae* in the administrative letters of Gregory the Great, at the end of the 6th century, suggest that the laws had arrived in Italy and had quickly replaced the *Theodosian Code* as the basis of law during the course of the Gothic War. As Marios Costameys has recently observed, although the *Theodosian Code* would continue to provide a foundation for legal codes in regions of the former western Roman Empire, administrative writing in Italy (including Cassiodorus’ *Variae*) demonstrate only passing awareness of the *Theodosian Code* and its post-Theodosian *Novellae*, suggesting that Justinian’s *Novellae* had asserted themselves as the standard for law at least as early as the outbreak of the
Gothic War. At least one of the *Novellae* with which Gregory the Great was familiar dated to 539 CE and probably arrived in Italy soon after Ravenna’s capitulation to the eastern forces of Belisarius. The fact that Justinian’s court produced such a continuous and voluminous body of new laws at precisely the moment when war was redefining political life in Italy makes it tempting to read both the *Collectio Avellana* and the *Variae* as responses to Justinian’s interventions in Italy.

Where the intersection of this trio of administrative literacy becomes most apparent is, as mentioned, in the application of a particular vocabulary—the vocabulary for virtues drawn from a long tradition in classical philosophy. Although this is not the place for a detailed examination of the use of this vocabulary in each text, the frequency with which these three texts deploy the virtues is striking and should probably occasion a much more sustained study. A simple count of the virtues in the *Novellae* of 535-40 reveals the following profile of virtues: 78 uses of *iustitia*, 55 of *providentia*, 51 of *virtus*, 28 of *pietas*, 28 of *clementia*, 19 of *aequitas*, 10 of *fortitudo*, 9 of *sapientia* and *prudentia*, 7 of *humanitas*, 5 of *liberalitas*, 3 of *continentia*, 3 of *benignitas* and 2 of *moderatio*. For the *Variae*, the profile is far more numerous and diverse, but nonetheless suggestive: 172 uses of *prudentia* and *sapientia*, 170 uses of *iustitia*, 121 of *pietas*, 105 of *virtus*, 68 of *aequitas*, 63 of *clementia*, 39 of *moderatio*, 38 of *benignitas*, 37 of *humanitas*, 27 of *providentia*, 16 of *liberalitas*, 15 of *continentia*, 9 of *fortitudo* and 5 of *temperantia*. Although the comparison is only suggestive, it is nonetheless possible to appreciate correspondences between the *Novellae* and the *Variae* as part of a strategy for portraying the ethical rectitude, respectively, of imperial power at Constantinople and of the western bureaucratic elite in Italy at a time of extreme political uncertainty.
With respect to the *Collectio Avellana*, although the letters are largely doctrinal in nature, a sampling of letters from the Ostrogothic period (from bishops Gelasius to Vigilius, or roughly 492-555 CE) reveals a style in which the kind of ethical vocabulary found in the *Variae* and the *Novellae* is prominent: 128 uses of *pietas*, 108 of *clementia*, 52 of *sapientia* and *prudentia*, 31 of *iustitia*, 28 of *humanitas* and a handful of instances each for *benignitas*, *aequitas*, *continentia*, *moderatio* and *fortitudo*. On the surface, the prevalence of *pietas* and *clementia* seems to be a noteworthy point of comparison with the *Variae*, but it should be noted that the appearance of the virtues in the *Variae* has much more in common with traditional philosophical usage. For example, *pietas* in the *Collectio* has the particularly Christian meaning of religious piety, as opposed to the paternal and imperial sense found in the *Variae*. Similarly, *providentia*, which has a particular resonance in imperial ideology, and which receives important attention in both the *Variae* and the *Novellae*, is absent from the *Collectio*. Nonetheless, it is still possible to suggest the orientation of the *Collectio* toward imperial discourses. A substantial body of correspondence in the *Collectio* representing the Ostrogothic period is addressed to emperors: Anastasius, Justin and Justinian. Of the virtues most prominently represented in the *Collectio* (*pietas*, *clementia*, *sapiential prudentia*, *iustitia* and *humanitas*), roughly half of the appearances occur in letters addressed to emperors (63 for *pietas*, 62 for *clementia*, 18 for *prudentia* and *sapientia*, 10 for *iustitia*, 13 for *humanitas*). In other words, it is difficult to ascertain whether the ethical language found in the *Collectio* was simply a feature common to administrative literacy in the period or, perhaps more likely (and like the *Variae*), a response to the influence of the eastern imperial court. Indeed, in addition to papal letters addressed to emperors, the *Collectio* also includes a healthy dossier of letters addressed to various bishops in Rome from the same emperors. Letters
from Justinian are particularly prominent in this respect. In these letters, *clementia*, *pietas* and *humanitas* again find most frequent expression.

Although Boethius’ *De consolatione Philosophiae* offers testimony to interest in philosophical topics in 6th-century Italy, his presumed exceptionalism and his unfortunate demise at the hands of Amal politics have simultaneously marked the period as a caesura with philosophical tradition. By contrast with the philosophical works of Boethius, the study of which often remains detached from consideration with a wider historical culture, the *Collectio Avellana* and the *Variae* at least suggest a broadly construed familiarity with traditions derived from political philosophy. Although the presence of philosophical vocabulary in the *Collectio Avellana* has not received direct attention in scholarship, some studies have explained the virtues in the *Variae* as a result of Cassiodorus’ dependency on a chancery tradition that was sustained in Italy throughout Late Antiquity. Naturally, given the potential attachment of administrative literacy and practices in the church of Rome to civil administration, the same might be assumed concerning the *Collectio*. Nevertheless, although much scholarship reads the *Variae* in terms of the survival of a long tradition in the writing practices of late-antique imperial chanceries, sources representing generations of administrative literacy prior to the *Variae* and the *Collectio Avellana* do not readily support this assumption. The *Theodosian Code* and the post-Theodosian *Novellae* of the western Empire, in particular, have been offered as antecedents for the style that Cassiodorus employed while addressing the daily needs of the Amal court. By contrast, the programmatic nature of Cassiodorus’ conceptualization of political virtues and ethical wisdom suggest more credit should be given to the author than the Amal court. The treatment of virtues in the *Variae* also strongly suggests a broad contemporary interest in philosophical concepts in the early 6th-century. Rather than read the *Variae* or *Collectio* as artifacts embedded with earlier
imperial language, more consideration should be given to their role as interlocutors in a
discourse of contemporary 6th-century texts. Even a cursory reading of the *Theodosian Code*
reveals that engagement with the imperial virtues is noticeably thin by comparison to the *Variae*
and *Collectio*. The relative dearth of ethical vocabulary in the *Theodosian Code* may be
understood as the result of the editorial process used by jurists in compiling the *Code*. Likewise,
although the post-Theodosian *Novellae* employ the same ethical vocabulary at times, the kind of
networking of ethical concepts as explanations for administrative decisions on the basis of the
virtues (as found in the *Variae*) is lacking. It is worth noting that the *Edictum Theoderici*, a
collection of laws widely regarded as a summary of material from the *Theodosian Code* and
post-Theodosian *Novellae*, and which Theoderic likely commissioned prior to Cassiodorus’
political career, refers to the virtues in only five instances, none of which include *pietas*, one of
the virtues most heavily emphasized in the *Variae* and the *Collectio*.

In the final assessment, it would seem that Justinian’s *Novellae* offered a more direct
influence on the use of ethical vocabulary in the *Collectio* and the *Variae*. There is a high degree
of likelihood that the use of this vocabulary in the *Collectio Avellana* was itself influenced
through contact with eastern imperial sources and diplomacy, although particular ethical
concepts, such as *pietas*, adopt a particularly Christian usage in the *Collectio* that is not found in
the *Variae*. Furthermore, although Cassiodorus’ connection to at least two bishops of Rome
(Agapitus and Vigilius) is well attested, it is not anywhere obvious that he would have had
access to documents in an ecclesiastical archive at Rome. Although Cassiodorus became well-
known throughout the Middle Ages as a Christian exegete, his religious works should be
associated with the period in which Cassiodorus lived in Constantinople as a political refugee,
and later after his return to Italy when he founded the monastery at Vivarium. Indeed, the period
in which letters of the *Collectio Avellana* emerged as a collection in Italy may even correspond with the same period that Cassiodorus spent in Constantinople. Thus, it would seem that Cassiodorus and the church of Rome produced two distinct responses to the Gothic War. Although both texts may have appropriated at least one feature of the rhetoric of imperial enactments from Constantinople (their ethical vocabulary), it does not seem likely that the *Variae* or *Collectio* influenced one another.

Finally, acknowledging Justinian’s *Novellae* as a potential influence on the use of ethical vocabulary in the *Collectio* or the *Variae* should not imply that Cassiodorus intended the *Variae* to mirror the style of government represented by the *Novellae*. Quite the contrary, Justinian’s legal program and policies proved to be controversial and disruptive even before his military intervention in Italy created a political context for the compilation of either collection. Instead, the *Collectio* and the *Variae* may be viewed as a response to the *Novellae* in a period of intense political upheaval, but also as an elaboration on a broader 6th-century discourse on the ethics of government. The complexity with which the virtues frame Cassiodorus’ portrayal of the Amal government and of the governmental elite surpasses the traditional rhetoric embodying imperial virtues as found in the *Novellae*. Virtues such as *pietas*, *clementia* and *humanitas* appear far more programmatically in the defining the *res publica* of the Amals as a community knit together by reciprocal obligations. Similarly, the extent to which the *Variae* elaborate the agency of ethical actors (both Amal rulers and the bureaucratic elite) and ascribe sources for ethical wisdom (*natura* and *antiquitas*) represents a development of the late-antique portrayal of community that surpasses anything found in either the *Collectio Avellana* or Justinian’s *Novellae*. As such, the *Collectio* and the *Variae*, although mutually autonomous as texts, each provide outstanding examples for the responsiveness, dynamism and creativity of administrative
literacy in 6th-century Italy. More importantly, the extent to which the *Collectio* and *Variae* participate in the language of virtues suggests an attempt in each text to independently find a middle ground from which to communicate with eastern imperial authority in ideologically urgent circumstances. In both cases, the ethical terminologies of the *Collectio* and the *Variae* attempt to impute long-term continuities with the language of empire used in Constantinople. On the one hand, the *Variae* suggest conditions of government in Italy before Justinian’s disastrous intervention; while the *Collectio* offers the language of a deeply habituated dialogue between the church of Rome and Constantinople regarding the spiritual salvation of the Roman Empire. However, it must be recalled that other ‘documentary’ sources with similarly ‘normative’ aims produced in Italy in the same generation (such as the *Edictum Theoderici* and the *Liber Pontificalis*) do not share in this discourse. Again, it would seem that the Gothic War is the key element to understanding the products of administrative literacy produced in the mid-6th century.

One means of testing this hypothesis would be to examine the administrative literacy of texts further removed from the immediate context of the Gothic War. Both the *Ravenna Papyri* and the *Registrum epistolarum* of Gregory the Great could serve this purpose rather admirably. The collection of 59 documents preserved in the ecclesiastical archive of Ravenna (the *Ravenna Papyri*) date widely, from 443-44 to 700/05, thus spanning the period before and after the Gothic War and making them quite useful comparanda for a consistent habit in administrative literacy. Additionally, the preservation of protocols, signatory witnesses, case narratives, transcriptions from previous legal documents and inventories make them particularly valuable as witnesses to the quotidian habits of legal and administrative literacy. That being the case, the absence of ideological discourse framed by the virtues is noteworthy. Of course, it is possible to explain the removal of these documents from the same ethical discourse seen in the *Variae* and *Collectio* by
noting how the documents of the *Papyri* were intended for the resolution of disputes among small parties that were adjudicated by a level of administrative personnel far beneath the agents of Cassiodorus’ *officium* or the church of Rome.

By contrast, Gregory’s *Registrum epistolarum* certainly capture something of the range of topics and addressees found in the *Variae*. With respect to geographic representation, the *Variae* and the *Registrum* have very similar ambit—letters sent by Cassiodorus and Gregory to towns and personages throughout Italy, to royal courts in the regions of the former western Roman Empire and to the eastern court at Constantinople. Similarly, although Gregory’s letters represent the interests of the church of Rome (as opposed to the Gothic court at Ravenna), they also speak to the full bloom of administrative burdens placed on the church of Rome since the Gothic War. Although the subsequent Lombard invasions posed serious disruptions in administration and personnel for the church of Rome, Gregory’s letters demonstrate a remarkable degree of institutional resilience and cohesion. The *scholae* of *defensores*, *notarii* and deacons often attributed to Gregory’s organization of church administration have definite affinities with the *scholae* of administrative personnel available to the Gothic court. This is evident in both the wide range of financial and administrative activities in which functionaries of Gregory’s church engaged, but also their geographic distribution and the fluidity with which they could be assigned to competenses that were defined by the needs of the institution, not the legal jurisdictions of the offices held. Diplomatic overtures, tax and rent collection, legal dispute resolution, protection of the vulnerable, correction of recalcitrant institutional agents and even the support of military personnel can be found in both the *Variae* and the *Registrum*.

Given the similarity in administrative coherence visible in both texts, and the claims that each body of documents would need to make in order to sustain that coherence in so many
distinct regional contexts, it might be assumed that the administrative literacy of the *Registrum* would demonstrate continuity with that of Cassiodorus’ generation. What is known of Gregory’s education and experience in civil administration prior to becoming bishop of Rome certainly would not pose obstacles to the transfer of secular administrative language to the ecclesiastical sphere. And in regard to its participation in an ideological discourse framed by the virtues, the *Registrum* seems to have a profile that is at least superficially similar to texts produced in the generation of the Gothic War: 157 uses of *iustitia*, 120 of *pietas*, 94 of *virtus*, 66 of *prudentia*/*sapientia*, 63 of *aequitas*, 25 of *clementia* 20 of *continentia*, 20 of *moderatio*, 20 of *benignitas*, 15 of *providentia*, 10 of *humanitas*, and 8 of *fortitudo*. A full comparative assessment would require far more detailed analysis of the verbal scripts in which these virtues appear in Gregory’s writing, but it is nonetheless possible to make some general observations which, in fact, suggest that Gregory’s remove from the Gothic War had impacted his use of administrative literacy. As a collection of more than 850 letters, the *Registrum* is far larger as a document than the *Variae*, the *Collectio* or even the imperial *Novellae* and by sheer numeric comparison, Gregory’s use of the rich vocabulary of virtues seems much diminished. Of course, Gregory’s letters only represent 15 years of correspondence, in which case it might be argued that his application of the virtues is commensurately dense, but more substantial qualifications may be made in terms of how Gregory uses this vocabulary. For example, many of the virtues represented most strongly appear either frequently or even primarily as forms of address: *pietas*, *clementia*, *sapientia*, *prudentia*, *humanitas*, *continentia* and *benignitas*. In this context, these virtues serve as honorifics of individuals addressed by Gregory, rather than the subject of a given statement. Additionally, *liberalitas* disappears completely and one of the most strongly represented virtues (*virtus*) assumes a completely new association. In Gregory’s writing, *virtus* no longer indicates the
martial vigor or ‘manliness’ found in the Variae, but rather it has become associated with the spiritual strength of holy persons (for example, as in the case of virtutes apostolorum). With these caveats taken into account, what is striking nonetheless is the preponderance of iustitia and aequitas as virtues that Gregory consistently emphasized in proportion much closer to the Variae. This in itself may indicate the expanded role of the church of Rome as an administrative institution in late-6th century Italy, where the governing authority needed to consistently justify its prerogatives and mandate with great care. Nonetheless, Gregory’s engagement with other virtues seems to represent a profile very different in character from the Variae and Novellae, in particular. Although Gregory was a regular correspondent with Constantinople and he was aware of imperial Novellae, both from Justinian’s generation and from promulgation still flowing from the eastern capital, mapping the discourse of the eastern imperial court onto administrative literacy at the church of Rome was not immediately urgent for him. Gregory’s administrative writing does not assume the need to carefully justify the role of the church of Rome in Italy, probably because by Gregory’s day, that role had become fait accompli. However much Gregory might mention Italy as part of the res publica (far less, it may be added, than in the Variae), it is clear enough that the presence of the Lombards had altered the political and ideological realities of Italy to such an extent that Gregory need not have any concern for the crafting language that would suggest a shared ethical background with Constantinople. With the same ease that Gregory could refuse the Empress Constantina a relic from the tomb of Peter, so too could he be assured that Constantinople would was no longer in a position to challenge the role of the church of Rome in Italy.