Having been encouraged by my friend Luca to consider a topic involving Fortuna, and encouraging myself to treat it in a way that might appeal to colleagues with many different interests in ancient history, I have produced a paper with more, and more confusing, points of focus than I expected. Acknowledging this while appealing to the convivial nature of this occasion, I will begin by recalling a conversation of many years ago with my daughter Helen. For some reason, she suddenly came out with the question, or rather the suggestion, that if she had been conceived a month later than she actually was, she would be a month younger, was that not so? I think that my reply set her back on her heels; it was that, well no, that was not quite so. A month later it would not be her that would have been conceived, but a quite different person in her place; she would not exist and someone else would. As things were, and happily, she existed and, whether happily or unhappily, someone else did not. At this point, my Helen seemed very thoughtful, as well she might; one’s own non-existence is an elusive concept, for the simple reason that one’s failure to exist would prevent one from having any concepts at all; it is not possible to think about it, for one is not there to do so. Yet as any gardener or otherwise observant person will know, the propagation of species is an immensely wasteful operation. The number of plants that come into existence is a tiny proportion of those that might exist — just think of the thousands of acorns lying around their parent oak, or the number of dandelion tufts blowing in the air; a lot of oak trees and dandelions do grow, but not nearly as many as there are seeds; and which particular specimens will they be? The gardener, like the historian, deals with the results of an extraordinarily selective, not to mention arbitrary process.

There’s a sort of “logic of non-existence” in play here, and I am intrigued by it. You have probably seen an argument against abortion, to the effect that if you had applied certain generally accepted criteria (improvident, drunken, syphilitic husband) to a certain couple in the spring of the year 1770, you would have aborted Beethoven (not, of course, that you would have known it). But what if Beethoven’s father had simply been drunk or very tired that night, or Beethoven’s mother had successfully pleaded a headache? Beethoven would still not have existed but we could have no complaint, except, possibly,
displeasure at Beethoven senior’s drunkenness. His wife would have been well within her rights in declining her husband’s attentions. There are so many ways of not being born that it seems arbitrary to choose one of them in particular as the basis for so far-reaching a moral argument. None of us would want to argue that every possible person who might be born should be, in the hope of producing Beethoven.

As with persons, so with events. When I studied philosophy all those years ago, we read an interesting book, Gilbert Ryle’s *Dilemmas*. One of the chapters concerned the prevention of accidents by making road improvements; being set in Britain, the solution is a new roundabout, and one is installed. The number of accidents does indeed diminish, and this can be put down to the improvements. Clearly, accidents have been avoided, but it seems not to make sense to ask which particular accidents have been avoided. It is hard to make sense of the idea of negative particular accidents. Certain events have not happened, and that is all there is to it; there is no category or list of particular events that have not happened. It is the same with coincidences; they do happen and they are sometimes very remarkable, but there are far more coincidences that do not happen. The logical situation is;

(a) a 100% certainty that something (or other) will happen,

(b) an almost 100% certainty that any particular event will not happen. It is the logic of state lotteries. Someone is going to win the lottery but it will not be me. Every week, millions of people will make that prediction, buy their tickets, and be perfectly correct; they do not win. Just one, the eventual winner, will have predicted wrongly. The relevance to the historian is clear enough, as he or she deals with the causes and consequences of what did happen, amid the vertiginous array of things that did not happen.

Of course, if the situation were always as desperate as this, we would not be able to cope with life at all (road improvements, after all do continue to be made); one has to put some order into it, to generate some sense of probability that will help us to choose between what is more and less likely to come about. In the case of the roundabout, if one cannot say that particular accidents have been prevented, perhaps one can say that certain types of accident have been made less likely, that is to say there is a pattern within the array of things that happen and things that do not happen; in real-life situations, some things are more likely to happen than others (a lottery, being designed to have no such pattern, is not at this point a good analogy). We may say that the roundabout has deterred or made less likely the sort of driving that causes accidents. That is to say we may have affected intentions or patterns of behaviour, but that is a long way from saying that we have prevented particular accidents.
What historians do in their profession is a special case of what we do all the time in dealing with the world; we look for patterns that will reduce the odds against us but will also contain the particularities through which all events in the world come about. The analysis of a game of soccer is a case in point; I sometimes use this example in teaching, for it illustrates the relationship between event and process that also characterizes historical analysis. Let me pose the fictional case of a soccer game between the first-choice teams of Manchester United and Sheepy Parva (I do not know whether that real village in my home county of Leicestershire has a soccer team; for the sake of the example I’m pretending that it has). The winner can be predicted but not the individual goals, but that is enough for us to work with (even if it is not so for the Sheepy Parva goalkeeper). I remember seeing a TV show in which the protagonists in a fictional soccer game were the Goodies, a now forgotten comedy team of those days, and an entire team of Long John Silvers, who did nothing except stand around on their wooden legs, converse with their parrots in exaggerated accents, fall over and be unable to get up. The Goodies won rather easily, but one could not have predicted the particularly fortunate, and elegant, goal scored by a headed rebound from the crossbar.

In analysing a situation, whether retrospectively as a historian, or prospectively with a view to choosing a course of action, we look for a level of generality where a certain logic does apply, while retaining a respect for the particularities of what we observe — a respect which is absolutely a part of a historian’s duty. In both of these circumstances, to pose the question, what might otherwise have happened than what did, or to ask what alternative possibilities there are in choices before us, is a way of discovering what is important. We are looking, as that great futurist H. G. Wells put it, at the “Shape of Things to Come”. There is nothing special about this; it is how we deal with the world all the time.

As the word itself shows, “logic” pertains to discourse and analysis, not to events, which are physically, not logically, caused. History, on an everyday “realist” understanding of its content, consists of events, and these are physical, not logical entities; they do not produce syllogisms, they collide. An obvious example is a battle, for example the battle of Hadrianople of August 378, as we have it narrated in Book 31 of Ammianus Marcellinus. The actual event, as experienced by its participants, is an outburst not of logic, but of physical violence. It is the mental processes, the anticipation and planning, the responses to the battle and analyses of it that are subject to the rules of logic — as the Roman government balances the advantages in terms of acquiring manpower resources in making a deal with the Goths, moving on to the maladministration of the crossing of the river that allowed the Gothic forces to amass and increased the fear and resentment of
both sides in the confrontation, Valens’ failure to wait for the forces of his western
colleague Gratian before committing himself to an engagement, the failure of
negotiations on the morning of the battle. All this can be done in words that do
correspond in principle to the intentions (and fears) of the participants, or to the failure of
these intentions, as Ammianus endeavours to explain the battle and its outcome, and by
selecting his facts, to explain its consequences. The battle itself remains a physical
matter, a confrontation of bodies and sharp steel; much as a train timetable possesses a
logic not inherent in the actual trains, only the analysis of it is logical, even if we still
cannot see why the Romans lost the battle, except through the Tolstoyan conception of
the sheer confusion of the day — or, as Ammianus would say (and does, in the very first
sentence of Book 31) through an unfavourable turn of fortune’s wheel. But Ammianus is
not just saying that this is how things “happened to turn out” in the sense of the Greek
τυγχάνω/τύχη; in his use of the idea of “fortuna”, as in the very first sentence of his
extant text at the beginning of Book 14, where he talks of the “raging storms of savage
fortune”, spreading their miseries across the world, Ammianus thinks of Fortuna almost
as an active force; the agent even, in another passage, of Nemesis the daughter of Justice,
as she “controls the urn from which men’s lots are cast and regulates the vicissitudes of
what befalls them, often bringing their enterprises to a different end from that which they
devised and confounding their various actions by changing the outcome” (14.11.25;
transl. Hamilton, slightly adapted).

My second example is Thucydides’ account of the Sicilian campaign. Here we are
confronted by two different levels of explanation, one of them inherent in the planning,
the other in the circumstances on the ground; the interest in them is in how they relate to
each other. In his famous inserted chapter in Book Two of the history (2.65), expressing
the author’s later reflections on the changes in Athenian political life after the death of
Pericles, Thucydides blames the failure of the campaign on the tendency of the Athenians
to be persuaded to unwise courses of action by “orators” (known to us as demagogues)
unrestrained by the influence of Pericles and desiring only to please the people; the
Sicilian campaign, he wrote, was the greatest mistake of the democracy, a judgment
supported by his narrative of a decision-making process that led not only to a mistaken
choice of policy but to the mismanagement of the campaign even after it was dispatched.
The whole project, in Thucydides’ opinion, was both ill-conceived and ill-managed.

Later, however, in Thucydides’ narrative of the attempted investment of Syracuse, it
all comes out rather differently, in the failure of the Athenians to complete their wall of
circumvallation to permit the investment of Syracuse. The Athenians’ failure to complete
their wall, leaving open the way to Syracusan counter-measures in the form of a cross-
wall, led to the failure of the investment of the city and the transformation of the
Athenians’ position from besiegers to besieged, but it was a very close-run thing; “by such a narrow margin did Syracuse escape from danger”, says Thucydides (7.2.4). But this was a failure in the field (on the ground, literally!); what if the Athenians had completed their wall as they should have been expected to? How does this explanation of the failure of the Athenians match with the opinion, appearing earlier in the text though conceived later in his mind, that it was a failure of the decision-making process in the Athenian democracy?

The answer, I suppose, is that, in history as in life (as Ronald Syme would have said) anything can happen and that it is the role of planning to take account of all possible contingencies. The emperor Julian might have borne this in mind in planning his Persian campaign of 363. Brilliant in the conception (I need not go into the details), the plan nevertheless required everything to go right to permit a quick dash to Ctesiphon while king Shapur was distracted. But things did not go right. Julian’s army was held up on the route, Shapur appeared on the scene and Julian, in what Ammianus presents as a fit of carelessness, allowed himself to be killed in a skirmish. He engaged in the skirmish, “forgetting his breastplate”, and was fatally wounded by a spear driven into his side by an Arab fighting with the Persian army.

For Ammianus, as I have argued, this was a tragic outcome in the strict sense, in that Julian’s downfall is brought about by his own flaws of character as abundantly illustrated in the preceding narrative; his impetuosity, his precipitate trust in his own success, his belief in the gods and in fate. Indeed, Ammianus uses the idea of fate as well as his conception of Julian as a tragic character, to avoid passing a direct judgement on the emperor whom he so admired. If in Thucydides there is a sense of “tyche” as the intrusion of unpredictable events upon people’s expectations, in Ammianus, and perhaps in the Roman mind in general, the corresponding notion of “fortuna” acquires a somewhat more judgmental function; not as good or bad luck, but as something more like a moral agency, such as he evokes when, in a passage I just mentioned, he refers to fortune as the moral agent of Nemesis, or when he attributes the growth of the power and prosperity of Rome to a rare alliance of Virtue and Fortune, “who are so often at odds” (14.6.3). The idea of Rome earning her success by her virtuous conduct is the same mindset that we see in the endlessly repeated legend attached to the Roman emperors, “p.f.” for “pius felix”; the emperor owed his success to his piety and achieved it through his continued piety. Constantine the Great has it on his triumphal arch at Rome, in the same inscription that commemorates his victory over Maxentius as due to “inspiration of the divinity and the greatness of his mind” (and, I might add, the strength of his army) (ILS 694). Allied with Virtue, Fortuna is a benign force, and not one devoid of purpose or intention in bringing about what is deserved; a Roman testator can refer to his estates
as his “fortunae” *(CIL 6.10229)*, just as a modern person can make his or her fortune on Wall Street or by establishing a successful website or, no doubt, in many more useful ways.

In its more everyday sense, the notion of “tyche” may simply express an awareness of what actually comes about in the context of what does not, of the force of sheer events; as bringing about what should or is expected to happen, but equally what is not expected to happen, or is beyond prediction; it is allowing for the presence of a world of events whose relationship with each other is not one of logic. Like a commentary on a sports encounter that may turn out unexpectedly (in baseball, a single mighty blow can change an entire game), historical analysis applies logical discourse to physical events; it is analogous to a political response to present circumstances — in history, analysis precedes interpretation; in well-conducted social policy, analysis precedes rectification. The writing of history is necessarily a product of hindsight, for its material consists in what has actually come about. Thucydides undoubtedly thought that the Athenian planning in Sicily ought to have allowed more for the unexpected, but when he came to think about it he put the causation on a different level, even though the failure to complete a wall of circumvallation has little to do with democratic procedures at Athens.

Historians have naturally been preoccupied by the question of how logic can be applied to physical events. There have been debates and mighty assertions, as in Ranke’s pronouncement that history is concerned only with what “actually happened”; debates about the “logic” of history, about objectivity and scientific method, about the proper concerns of history. I want to emphasise that these debates are not just about history but about the general understanding of human development and changes in society, of which history is a special case. For some (I’m thinking of Hegel) historical logic is sought not in events, which are physical and possess no logic, but in the ideas that drive them. These ideas are rational, or if not rational, they operate in a rational context, as men apply their capacities to achieve a steady improvement through the political process; and history is logical, in so far as it is ideas and intentions that cause events, and the events express the logic of the intenders — it’s broadly what is called an “idealist” philosophy. Objections are easy to think of in a more doubtful age; it is a “progressive” ideology based on ideas of rationality and freedom that may have worked in Hegel’s own post-Enlightenment society and in the steadily improving nineteenth century, but not elsewhere, and not at all times. It assumes an inherent drive to a better life and (as Gibbon would say) an improved society, which is expressed in the historical process. One can easily imagine a (somewhat un-Platonic) drive towards a worse form of life, which would not in itself be a refutation of idealist theory, in so far as the historical
outcome would still be a logical expression of those who intended it. What might harder to explain is the disintegration of a society in a way that no-one particularly intends, for example the fall of the western Roman empire. One could perhaps sustain the argument from intentionality by turning attention to other participants who did intend the outcome and were able to influence it. This is not inherently a very promising approach, though one can see the possibilities in such concepts as an “age of anxiety”, or an “age of piety” replete with holy men on pillars, in which historical developments are driven by intentions that just happen not to be rational in any traditional sense. Gibbon, after all, came close to saying that Christianity destroyed the Roman empire.

An opposite approach is (and, I think, was at the time) suggested by evolutionary biology. (It was not so much evolution itself that was Darwin’s “discovery”, as the mechanism, natural selection.) The evolution of species is of all things a historical process, for it takes place in time, as species adapt to their changing environments in order to survive; indeed in some ways it is an apparent change, as species unequipped for survival disappear and the more successful pass on the characteristics, including the ability to adapt, which are necessary to ensure their survival. This goes some way to yielding a “logic of events”, though in a sense it’s a “logic of failure” — a failure of species to survive. I have read somewhere that something like 98% of all known species are extinct (not a great argument for intelligent design!). It does not need emphasizing that the basic mechanism of natural selection is the status of all living organisms as food for the stronger, while they themselves feed upon the weaker. A condition of what does exist seems, again, to be the failure of so much else to do so.

An application of this way of thinking to the logic of human societal development is the “positivism” of Auguste Comte (d. 1857, two years before the publication of The Origin of Species). Comte envisaged a “science of society”, that is to say, in a word invented by him, a “sociology”, a logic of social development based, like science, on a procedure of empirical observation that would reveal the laws of social change in the same manner as a science. This procedure of empirical observation and inference as yielding certain laws of change was known as “positivism” (another term introduced by Comte). It is interesting to read the remarks of R. G. Collingwood on Mommsen, as Mommsen’s own contribution to research in Roman history made impossible the continuation of History of Rome, as it was overtaken by a “historical positivism” that Mommsen had himself promoted. The early volumes of the History of Rome were much more of an “idealistic” production than his later writings on institutions, epigraphy and the law, which is why Mommsen never continued his History beyond Julius Caesar (the later volume on the provinces of the empire is a very different matter). The “great man” imposing his intentions on society was succeeded by systems of government and
administration; yet even Julius Caesar "merely completed what organic development had prepared" (Whitman 1990, p. 217).

An inheritor of Hegelian method and at the same time a subverter of it was of course Marx; he too searched for an inherent logic of events, but found it in displacing the idea of intention (enlightened or otherwise) as the driving force, in favour of economic circumstances. Here indeed was a logic (a dialectic) of material things — dialectical materialism.

Marx begins with the fundamental condition of man, as a biological mechanism seeking survival by commanding the resources of the world around him. (The argument from first principles reminds me of the opening of Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, with the difference that Aristotle was looking for what distinguished men from animals, not what they had in common.) The fundamental quest is for food and shelter, which leads to the production and manufacture of these things; these activities in turn generate the specialization and diversification of skills and function; hence social differences, expressed in due course as divisions of class, as the people who can provide these services entrench their advantages. “Class” is an economic definition, based on the differing relationships of men to the modes of production and distribution. As Marx wrote in his Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, published in 1859, the same year as The Origin of Species;

> The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being [this is written directly against Hegel] but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

So too, the intellectual life of men, and therefore their intentions, derive from their social conditions and are a function of it, at the same time as the intentions of individuals are subsumed by the group. One can see the objections, but my point is the more general one, that Marx offered a material conception of the historical process, with a logic deriving from its quasi-biological nature.

The premise of my argument is perhaps rather obvious, that what actually happens is a small sub-section of what might happen; that historical development, like the propagation of species, is an extremely wasteful process, and that it is very difficult, in history as in life, to comprehend the scale of what does not happen. This is not an invitation to ask “what if?” of any particular situation, useful as this question is in helping us to distinguish the more from the less essential in a situation — much as decision-making bodies have to form views as to what are the more and the less likely consequences of what they decide, and to eliminate the most predictable mishaps. My point is rather that
the possibilities of what may happen are so vastly greater than what does happen that we must be careful always to pose the question “what if?” in relation to a level of discourse that does allow for it. There has got to be a pattern.

So for instance in looking the Roman Principate, I do not think it very productive to ask how things might have turned out differently if certain particular things had come about, if for instance Julius Caesar had not been assassinated (he had plenty of warning, after all, and must have known that mischief was afoot), or if Octavian had, as some urged him to, declined his nomination as Caesar’s heir, or had not been able to seize the consuls’ army in 43, or if Sextus Pompeius had won the battle of Naulochus, or if Octavian had been unsuccessful in calling Lepidus’ bluff after it. These are a few of the innumerable moments at which something else might have happened, each with its own consequences for the future, and it is this future that we would then have to explain, with a whole set of further “what if?” questions deriving from this different future. There is a perceptive book by a former Yale graduate student of whom we are very proud, Josiah Osgood’s Caesar’s Legacy. Covering the literature of the triumviral period, Osgood has a way of “de-familiarising” familiar sources in order to appreciate people’s attempts to read the future when no-one really knew what was going to happen and it would be very easy to choose the wrong side. No-one could have been sure in the 30’s BCE that Octavian would rise to the top of the heap of dynasts (think of Nepos’ Life of Atticus or the so-called “Laudatio Turiae” as proofs of the difficulty of making this judgment); nor could they have predicted the particular form that Octavian’s reconstruction of the res publica would take.

It has become habitual, and it is perfectly valid, to discuss the Augustan Principate in terms of the alternative views offered by Theodor Mommsen in the 19th and Ronald Syme in the 20th century. Was it, as Mommsen thought, a structure based on public law (Recht) inherited from the Republic, or was it a structure of power (Macht) deriving from the ambitions of the dynasts of that same period, “res publica” being just an instrument of power? Did Augustus just put the finishing touches to the plans of Julius Caesar (whom Mommsen, remember, denied was an autocrat), or was his achievement of a different order?

The contrast between these interpretations reflects differences in the political thinking of the periods in which they were conceived. Mommsen saw law and legal thinking, and the tendency towards the codification of the law, in the setting of the movement towards a German unification based, partly at least, on a unified system of law, while Syme saw the rise of dictators using ideologies as a front for the acquisition and exercise of power, riding roughshod over legal systems. One is reminded of the preface of Tacitus’ Annals on the history of power in the Republican period, and of the imagined debate between the
supporters and critics of Augustus inserted into an account of his funeral, again in Book One of the *Annals*. Both positions, for and against, are expressed within the framework of thought and action established by Augustus, but that is already far along the road, and it may not be the only possible framework that could have been established.

We see the Principate through Velleius Paterculus, Tacitus, Cassius Dio and the other historians who describe it (and are its products), as an expression of Augustus’ reframing, or manipulation, of the constitution. In the *Res Gestae* Augustus claimed to have returned the *res publica* to the senate and people of Rome (I note that the Greek version of the *Res Gestae* makes no attempt to translate this very Roman concept). He does not claim, as he is often reported to have claimed, to have “restored the republic”, but just to have returned it to its correct ownership – as if “Res Publica”, like a kidnapped heiress, had simply been in the wrong hands for a time, and was now being surrendered to her family by a magnanimous ransomer. Leaving aside the aptness of this, or the validity of Augustus’ claim to have had no more power than anyone else in any magistracy, I would emphasise that neither his success nor this particular outcome was predetermined. There is a tendency to regard the development of the Augustan regime after 31 BCE as a progressive evolution along a settled track, requiring only minor adjustments along the way, but in my opinion that is really not so. The so-called “Settlement of 27”, in which Augustus returned his powers to the senate, in order to receive back the most essential of them, proved unsatisfactory, especially in the way it treated the consulship. Senators were not going to be content to see the consulship every year in the hands of Augustus himself and a supporter, offering a dead end to their own prospects of *nobilitas* (they had all read, or could have written, Gelzer’s *Nobility of the Roman Republic*); what sort of “res publica” was this? Discontent with the “Settlement”, produced a conspiracy, and an assertive re-casting of Augustus’ *imperium*; there is also the matter of Augustus’ illness, which carried off his nephew Marcellus. The years 23 to 19 were turbulent in various ways, and Augustus was absent for much of the time (perhaps, as I have often thought, to give senate and people a reminder of what the Roman Republic had actually been like). The last “constitutional” amendment to Augustus’ position was in 19, but if a date is needed I would think only of the Secular Games of 17 as marking the start of a secure Principate. Before that time, there was much that was very uncertain. Was Augustus’ “constitutional” solution to the crisis of the late Republic going to work, or would it be no more successful than Julius Caesar’s?

If this is so then Vergil, who died in 19 after finishing the unrevised *Aeneid* that we have, wrote all his poems (*Eclogues*, *Georgics*, *Aeneid*) in different periods of uncertainty, the first two in that period so neatly “de-familiarised” by Josiah Osgood, the third in the unsettled early years of the “Principate”. I agree with Anton Powell in his
remarkable book *Vergil the Partisan*, that Vergil should be seen as an active proponent of a regime not yet established, rather than as a satisfied panegyrist of one that was. Vergil cannot have known, as he wrote these poems in the 30’s and 20’s, that all was settled. What may look like a contented reflection of the Augustan program may be much closer to a promotion of it.

Take Anchises’ famous prophecy delivered to Aeneas in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*; “others” (Greeks, of course) will achieve mastery in the speculative sciences and fine arts, Romans—“tu, Romane, *memento*,” as if it were a clause of the Twelve Tables—will assume as their duty the arts of war, with which they will subdue the proud, bring about order and establish law. Now Anchises is not saying—he cannot be saying—that the Romans *could* not have mastered the fine arts if they had chosen to. It would be a self-contradiction to say so, the *Aeneid* being a masterpiece incorporating Greek models (Apollonius Rhodius as well as Homer, and Vergil being the student of a Greek philosopher). He must mean, and I think that Jasper Griffin was right in this, that they, the Romans, would renounce these things for a higher duty. The *Aeneid* itself is a story of renunciation, above all, in the great renunciation of Dido by Aeneas. No one could possibly have heard or read this passage without thinking of Mark Antony’s enthrallment by Cleopatra, a foreign queen whom this Roman had emphatically *not* renounced. The same theme or prospect, of a future that did not come about, pervades the presentation of the battle of Actium (on the shield of Aeneas described in Book Eight, another prophetic context, though one not understood by Aeneas) as a conflict of Apollo and the gods of Italy against the monstrous deities of Egypt.

It is hard to think outside the framework of reference provided by Augustus. From Vergil through the *Res Gestae* to Tacitus and Cassius Dio, we view his achievement through the sources that commemorate it, and we ourselves are the products of his success. But for this, to pick up where I began, even different people from ourselves would exist. Even when they are critical, our sources accept its terms, while the Roman empire itself produces the tradition of law and legal history, and the entire language with which we consider these issues (the fullest source for the *Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus* is after all the Digest of Justinian). There is of course a Roman, Latin-speaking world to which Greeks were very active contributors (Timagenes, Nikolaos of Damascus, Strabo, Josephus, and I might mention Paul of Tarsus), but it is very easy to turn this perspective, as it were, inside out. There is also a Greek world, say in the writings of Plutarch, to which Rome seems peripheral. I find Plutarch the Greek a figure much easier to grasp than Plutarch the Roman. Thinking of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* of Greek and Roman figures, it seems not at all impossible to imagine the outcome of the civil wars of the later Republic as a Hellenistic kingdom in the east, with the Latin west as an allied or independent partner (or one could
see it vice versa). Alexandria was perhaps a bit peripheral to have formed the centre of this kingdom, but a modest displacement to Antioch (with the elimination of Herod the Great) might prove satisfactory. It was not far from Tarsus, where Antony first met Cleopatra. It was in a Roman province, and in the fourth century it became a significant Roman capital city. And there it is; Byzantium and the west half a millennium before their time. It will of course need a new religion – but who could have predicted the conversion of Constantine?

To illustrate the dangers of premature assumptions on this subject (my last) I quote from a description, published in 1979, of the program of the Dölger-Institut of Bonn, and of its Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, as set out by Franz Dölger in the 1950’s. The purpose of the Lexikon was to show “how the many-sided and by no means fully unified ancient culture that flourished in the Mediterranean world in the first three centuries turned into the late antique, Christian culture of the fourth to seventh centuries”. That this is described as a “hitherto neglected question” is certainly not true of the problem in itself, which no-one could possibly consider neglected in the 1950’s. It has therefore to be interpreted within which the particular terms in which it is framed. Consider then the assumptions that are embedded in it, in particular the assumption that somehow the transformation of ancient culture into Christian culture was bound to happen; the Classical world of the Roman empire is already pregnant with the Christian world of later centuries. One does not need to delve very deeply into the logic of history to see that the conversion of Constantine, on which so much did depend, was in no sense bound to happen. It is sometimes said that if Constantine had not been converted to Christianity then he might have been converted to something like Mithraism with, it is implied, somewhat similar consequences for the future of Europe. Here again we enter the logic of the things that do not happen in relation to the things that do, but there is no “short-list” of possibilities for us to choose between. If Constantine had not found himself in Britain at the time of his father’s death in 306, had he not found himself in the specific circumstances of civil wars in which all sides were making a bid for divine support, anything on earth might have happened. There is no reason to assume that, had Constantine not been converted to Christianity, something rather like it would have come about instead.

I know that Constantinople is often thought of as the new capital city, founded by Constantine to be the specific vehicle of his own Christianity – an “expressly Christian city”, in the words of one writer of recent times (R. Browning). My own work on the early history of Constantinople has shown me how difficult it is to substantiate that concept; in fact, has suggested that a city as such is not well suited to convey it — but this is an entirely different question, except to say that the whole process of city foundation seems to reach
back into a much older tradition of public expression. I set out here the description of a 7th century Christian source, the so-called *Chronicon Paschale*, remarkable in my opinion for its conspicuous lack of anything resembling a Christian iconography:

Indiction 3, Year 25, consulship of Gallicanus and Symmachus [330].

In the year 301 from the Ascension to heaven of the Lord and year 25 of his reign, Constantine the most pious, father of Constantine II Augustus and of Constantius and Constans Caesars, after building a very great, illustrious, and blessed city, and honouring it with a senate, named it Constantinople, on the 5th day before the Ides of May [May 11], on the second day of the week, in the third Indiction, and he proclaimed that the city, formerly named Byzantium, be called second Rome. He was first to celebrate a chariot-racing contest, wearing for the first time a diadem of pearls and other precious stones. And he made a great festival, and commanded by his sacred decree that the anniversary of his city be celebrated on the same day, and that on the 11th of the same month Artemisios the public bath Zeuxippon be opened, which was near the Hippodrome and the Regia of the Palace. He made for himself another gilded monument of wood, bearing in its right hand a Tyche of the same city, itself also gilded, and commanded that on the same day of the anniversary chariot races, the same monument of wood should enter, escorted by the troops in mantles and slippers, all holding white candles; the carriage should proceed around the further turning-post and come to the arena opposite the imperial box; and the emperor of the day should rise and do obeisance to the monument of the same emperor Constantine and the Tyche of the city.


An earlier writer, the historian Zosimus, is no less intriguing in his description of the installations made by Constantine in the newly developed Augusteum, the public square and monumental centre succeeding the colonnaded agora, known as the Tetrastoon, of the Severan period. Constantine (forget for the moment anything about his being a Christian emperor) caused to be built in the Augusteum matching temples, one on each side with steps leading up to the platform on which they stood. In one temple he installed the Tyche, or Fortune, of Rome; a corresponding image is among those carried on the occasion of the consecration of the city as described in the *Chronicon Paschale*, and makes every possible sense given the promotion of Constantinople as a new Rome. The second temple had an image of Rhea or Cybele, which Zosimus says was recovered from mount Didymus near Cyzicus, where it had been dedicated by Jason and the Argonauts! There was however a difference, or rather an interesting adaptation. According to Zosimus, the forearms and hands with which Rhea/Cybele had held her lions had been removed and put back the other
way round, so that the palms now faced upward. Without the lions, as Zosimus said, the outstretched arms made the goddess look as if she were praying (in the well-known “orans” posture), but it is pretty clear that he was mistaken in this interpretation. If the upturned hands had originally held a figure of Victory and an orb, “Cybele” would appear exactly in the pose of the Tyche of Constantinople, balancing the figure of the Tyche of Rome that appeared in the matching temple. Among the many parallels that he had drawn between the two imperial cities, Constantine was no doubt hoping to achieve that same alliance of Virtue and Fortune that, in Ammianus’ opinion, had made Rome great.

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