

RUTILIUS NAMATIANUS

The Greatness of Rome in the Days of Ruin, 413CE

Source: William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: Rome and the West, pp. 322-325. Scanned in and modernized by Dr. Jerome S. Arkenberg, Cal. State Fullerton.

Rutilius Namatianus, a native of Gaul but in ca. 413 CE the City Prefect of Rome, wrote this poem in praise of the city that he had seen plundered by Alaric. He was a pagan, one of the circle of literary men who fixed their eyes on the glorious past, and had no pleasure in Christianity. His tribute to the greatness of Rome is clear evidence that even the awful calamities of Honorius' reign did not shatter men's faith in the abiding majesty of the Eternal City.

Give ear to me, Queen of the world which you rule,
O Rome, whose place is amongst the stars!
Give ear to me, mother of men, and mother of gods!
Through your temples we draw near to the very heaven.
You do we sing, yea and while the Fates give us life,
You we will sing.
For who can live and forget you?
Before your image my soul is abased—
Graceless and sacrilegious,
It were better for me to forget the sun,
For your beneficent influence shines
Even as his light

To the limits of the habitable world.
Yea the sun himself, in his vast course,
Seems only to turn in your behalf.
He rises upon your domains;
And on your domains, it is again that he sets.
As far as from one pole to the other spreads the vital
power of nature, so far your virtue has penetrated over the
earth.
For all the scattered nations you created one common
country.
Those that struggle against you are constrained to bend to
your yoke;
For you proffer to the conquered the partnership in your just
laws;
You have made one city what was aforesaid the wide world!
O! Queen, the remotest regions of the universe join in a hymn
to your glory!
Our heads are raised freely under your peaceful yoke.
For you to reign, is less than to have so deserved to reign;
The grandeur of your deeds surpasses even your mighty
destinies.