

Megalopolis as the Quintessence of the Mutual Influence of Roman Law, Science, Culture, and Architecture in the Transition from Republic to Empire: Legal Fluctuations as a Condition for Releasing the Creative Potential of the State

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Abstract

The article is devoted to an interdisciplinary analysis of the transformation of Roman law in the transitional period from the Republic to the Empire through the category of the megalopolis as a special legal-architectural and cultural phenomenon. It is shown that Roman law during this period acted not only as a conservative regulator ensuring the stability of the political-legal order, but also as a technology of institutional engineering creating conditions for the release of the creative potential of society. Based on the philosophical and legal heritage of the Roman Stoics (Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero), modern studies in the field of legal history, neurobiology and the theory of creativity, as well as on the example of Francis Ford Coppola's feature film *Megalopolis* (2024), the image of the megalopolis is reconstructed as a model of a legal environment in which the law does not suppress, but structures and protects the creative activity of passionate individuals. The thesis is substantiated that the fluctuations of law in the era of the crisis of the Roman Republic became a condition for the creative bifurcation of the state system, opening the way to a new imperial configuration capable of integrating diverse cultural codes and architectural practices. Comparison of the Roman experience with examples of legal modernization in Singapore and the UAE makes it possible to conclude that an effective legal environment is a necessary condition for the formation of a megalopolis as a space of innovative development, where the protection of private property, contractual freedom and personal autonomy becomes a key resource of humanistic progress.

Keywords: Roman law; megalopolis; transition from Republic to Empire; Stoicism; creative potential of the state; institutional engineering; legal environment; creative economy.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from the republican model of state structure of Ancient Rome to the imperial form of power was not only a political and institutional turning point, but also part of a deep civilizational transformation that affected the foundations of legal consciousness, cultural norms, architecture, and the mechanisms for realizing the creative potential of society. Roman law, being the foundation of the Western legal tradition, acted as a structural regulator of the creative energy of the passionaries — those whom modern researchers (W. Isaacson, R. Sapolsky, etc.) define as subjects of creative thinking capable of *creative destruction* and the formation of new institutional orders.

A modern cultural-legal interpretation of this process is also reflected in art. In the feature film *Megalopolis* (directed by F. F. Coppola, 2024), through aesthetic-legal, architectural and philosophical language, the idea of the city-state is reconstructed as a space in which law does not suppress the creative will of the individual, but ensures its realization for the benefit of the civilization of the future. Such an optic makes it possible to view the megalopolis as a model of a legal order capable of releasing the energy of creation, which brings Coppola's concept closer to the Roman understanding of *lex*, *libertas* and *ratio*.

The category of the megalopolis in this context becomes an intellectual platform for studying the interrelation of:

- The legal culture of Ancient Rome (Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero);
- The architectural-spatial formation of power and everyday life;
- The neuropsychological and behavioral foundations of law (C. Jung, R. Sapolsky);
- The creative economy and entrepreneurial law in the context of modern passionaries (E. Musk, S. Jobs, etc.).

Roman law is presented here not only as a historical phenomenon, but also as a universal methodology of long-term state development, explaining why some civilizations provide spaces of the future with freedom, while others suppress it with destructive narratives (“no pain, no gain”, “a fool grows rich only in dreams”, etc.), blocking entrepreneurial and scientific initiative.

Thus, the megalopolis is considered a legal-architectural and cultural derivative of Roman law, capable of becoming:

1. A material environment for the development of the creative potential of citizens;
2. A legal instrument for preserving what has been created (private property, inheritance, contractual structures);
3. A civilizational framework — the foundation of a sustainable future built on freedom and responsibility.

Relying on the works of M. Beard on the nature of Roman power, the ideas of Lee Kuan Yew on legal modernization, the experience of transformation in the UAE (Sh. Maksud) and the Singaporean model of transition “from the third world to the first,” the study shows that the legal environment is capable of radically transforming the quality of life of society, just as the institutions of Ancient Rome transformed architecture and urban governance.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in substantiating the thesis that Roman law should be interpreted as a technology of institutional engineering that allows:

- The release of the potential of creative individuals,
- The protection of the results of their labor, and the transformation of the state-legal system towards humanistic progress.

The transition of Ancient Rome from a republican form of government to an imperial one marked a tectonic shift in the state-legal structure, accompanied by profound changes in society, culture, and the state’s capacity for creative development. This period is characterized by the search for new

mechanisms of legitimacy of power and the adaptation of traditional legal institutions to previously unseen scales of territorial governance. The present study undertakes an interdisciplinary analysis of this transitional stage through the lens of contemporary science, philosophy, and art. The focus is Roman law as a phenomenon of creative regulation capable of both liberating and restraining the passionary potential of society.

A special place in the analysis is occupied by Francis Ford Coppola’s film *Megalopolis* (2024), conceived by the director as a modern allegory of the fall of the Roman Republic and the birth of a new utopia. This film itself is the result of a cross-temporal analysis: Coppola deliberately drew parallels between the crisis of ancient institutions and the challenges of modernity, using the language of architecture, urbanism, and culture. Thus, *Megalopolis* functions as an artistic study of the essence of Roman law and its role in revealing the creative potential of outstanding individuals in society — from Gaius Julius Caesar in antiquity to the innovative entrepreneurs of our time (in the spirit of Elon Musk or Steve Jobs).

The relevance of the work is due to the need of theoretical-legal science to comprehend the legacy of Roman law not only as a historical phenomenon, but also as an instrument of social engineering capable of shaping an environment for innovative development. We rely on recent research (2018–2025) in the field of legal history, behavioral neurobiology, and the theory of creativity, and we also draw on classical sources — the philosophical-legal writings of Roman Stoics (Seneca, Marcus Aurelius) — to identify trans-historical patterns. The striving for interdisciplinarity corresponds to the tradition of Stoicism, whose representatives combined extensive knowledge of nature, human beings, and the state. As Marcus Aurelius noted, “to change your opinion and follow what corrects your error is more consistent with freedom than stubbornly clinging to your mistake.” This principle of openness to truth, rather than to the momentary opinion of the majority, underlies scientific inquiry and legal reforms aimed at the benefit of society.

The aim of the study is to show that Roman law in the transitional period played the role of a creative stabilizer and catalyst of development, and that its reception in the modern cultural space (as exemplified by the film *Megalopolis*) serves as a manifesto in defense of the freedom of creativity, entrepreneurship, and scientific inquiry. We hypothesize that an effective legal environment is a necessary condition for the realization of the passionary potential of society, whether in the ancient Roman megalopolis or in modern states striving to move “from the third world to the first.” To test this hypothesis, the study consistently examines: (1) the evolution of Roman legal institutions on the threshold of Empire, (2) Stoic philosophy of law as an ideology of creative resilience, (3) the content and subtext of the film

Megalopolis in comparison with Roman statehood, (4) the influence of the legal environment on creativity and innovation (from antiquity to the 21st century), (5) the lessons of history (Rome, Singapore, UAE) for legal engineering of the future.

The methodological basis of the work consists of historical-legal and comparative analysis, as well as elements of cultural studies and psychology of law. Ideas about the social behavior of primates and humans (R. Sapolsky and others) and about the role of the collective unconscious in the creative process (C. G. Jung) are used to explain how legal norms can either release the creative energy of individuals or suppress it. The integration of such diverse perspectives is intended to substantiate the conclusion that Roman law represented not merely a set of conservative norms but a flexible and living system — a kind of “yeast” of civilization, a necessary ingredient launching the process of creative development of society.

I. Transition from Republic to Empire: Transformation of Roman Law and Space

The ancient megalopolis of Rome at the turn of the 1st century BCE was experiencing a crisis of *polis* institutions inherited from the Greek republican tradition. The geographical and demographic scale of Roman possessions ceased to correspond to outdated mechanisms of divided authority. The republican model, based on the annual rotation of magistrates and competition between aristocratic families, encountered challenges in governing a “world power” with a multi-ethnic population. Fragmentation of authority and at times ineffective governance (especially in distant provinces) revealed a public demand for concentrated leadership and renewal of the legal foundations of the state. According to modern assessments, the Roman state of the 1st century BCE turned out to be a unique historical case — an empire that existed for a long time without a monarchy. Thus, Professor C. Noreña notes that the Roman Republic managed to create and maintain an enormous Mediterranean space by relying on distributed points of decision-making and a complex system of checks and balances, largely due to the development of public-law mechanisms that formalized expansion as a lawful process.

A key role in this process was played by Roman public law (*ius publicum*) — laws and *senatus consulta* that gradually reinterpreted the concept of power and citizenship as borders expanded. The adoption of momentous laws (for example, the bills of the Gracchi brothers, the legislative initiatives of Sulla and Caesar) formed a kind of “narrative of superiority” of the Roman civic community, justifying Rome's right to govern distant territories and extract resources from them. Public-law discourse became the ideological glue that held the empire together in the absence of a single ruler. However, by the mid-1st century BCE, internal competition for power intensified; civil wars showed that the old republican constitution no longer guaranteed

stability and justice. Fluctuations of law — frequent repeals and revisions of laws — accompanied this crisis, but simultaneously tempered the system, making it capable of radical restructuring.

The phenomenon of *cursus honorum* — the passage of Roman statesmen through a sequential “ladder of offices” — deserves attention as a legal-social mechanism for cultivating creative leaders. In Rome, a clearly regulated career trajectory existed: military service, the offices of aedile, quaestor, praetor, consul, and finally, curule censor. By the age of forty, having passed all stages, a Roman acquired enormous administrative and life experience. It is no coincidence that many architects of the transitional epoch — Julius Caesar, Marcus Tullius Cicero, Marcus Licinius Crassus, Gnaeus Pompeius, later Octavian Augustus — were men of encyclopedic knowledge and skills. Such breadth of mental development, supported by the Roman ideal of *honor* (duty and dignity), allowed them to boldly undertake legal reforms for the public good. The “path of honor” was not a mere formality: it integrated bearers of innovative ideas into the legal tradition, disciplined their ambitions, and at the same time opened space for initiative. For example, Gaius Julius Caesar, having reached the consulship, used his accumulated authority to carry out a number of progressive laws: on land distribution for veterans, on calendar reform (introduction of the Julian calendar), on expanding the Senate by including provincial elites. These measures combined creative restructuring of society (a new reckoning of time, integration of new elites) with the legal legitimization of new orders. It can be said that Caesar, himself a talented commander, orator, and writer, applied law as an instrument of creative destruction: old republican structures were broken, but in their place arose a more viable one, later formalized by his successor Octavian Augustus.

Roman law in this period demonstrated remarkable adaptability. On the one hand, core values were conserved (inviolability of private property, the sacredness of laws, the principle of differentiation between public and private law). On the other hand, a vulgarization of law occurred — a simplification of strict norms to meet the needs of a rapidly changing society, especially in the provinces. The legal system proved capable of absorbing local customs, transforming as expansion progressed: mixtures of Roman and local norms (*ius civile* vs. *ius provinciale*) operated in the provinces, creating favorable conditions for local development and loyalty of new imperial subjects. Thus, Roman law served as a structural framework that held together the giant organism of the state without hindering its growth. Imperial authority, established in 27 BCE, simplified the administrative vertical, but did not abolish legal continuity: the Senate continued legislative activity, new sources of law appeared (imperial edicts, *senatus consulta*, later *rescripts*).

It is important to emphasize that the transition to monocracy did not mean the suffocation of creativity and initiative — on the contrary, the era of the early Empire (1st–2nd centuries CE) became a time of intensive construction, scientific achievements, and cultural flourishing, known in history as *Pax Romana*. Augustus and his successors consciously used law to stimulate creative activity: they encouraged patronage, erected grand public structures (forums, temples, roads) supported by legal mechanisms (contracts, protection of property, a system of public works). “I found Rome brick and leave it marble,” reads a statement attributed to Augustus. Behind this metaphor lies profound legal meaning: the marble image of the capital is the result of protected investments and the labor of architects, craftsmen, artists. If there is a legal environment guaranteeing enforcement of obligations and protection of the results of labor, then even the boldest architectural projects will be realized; if the legal environment degrades, creative designs remain on paper.

The figure of Marcus Licinius Crassus — one of the “triumvirs” and the richest man of his time — is telling. Crassus accumulated wealth in real estate and finance, effectively applying principles of private entrepreneurship on a state scale. According to Pliny, Crassus’ wealth reached 200 million sesterces. He boasted that he could fully equip an army with his own funds — and indeed he twice financed military campaigns: against the rebellious slaves under Spartacus (71 BCE) and the ill-fated campaign against Parthia (53 BCE). Crassus acted as a kind of “architect of the shadow economy” of Rome: he bought burned houses, created the first fire brigade, lent money at interest, invested in infrastructure. For all his ambition, he became a balancing force at the end of the Republic, supporting Caesar against the senatorial oligarchy and financing socially useful projects. His example demonstrates how a legal climate (contract protection, the possibility of enrichment not through illegality but through entrepreneurship) cultivates people ready to invest in the common good. History remembers Crassus as tragically lost at Carrhae, but had he died earlier, he might have been remembered as the “first tycoon” of Rome, proving the power of private initiative.

Thus, in the transitional period, the Roman state went through a creative bifurcation: old institutions were tested and transformed, releasing new forces for development. The legitimacy of power shifted from the abstract people and the Senate to the concrete personality of the princeps, yet legality (legal order) remained a universally valued foundation. Legal thought did not fade — on the contrary, the golden age of Roman jurisprudence (1st–3rd centuries CE) began, when the greatest minds (Labeo, Salvius Julianus, Paulus, Ulpian) creatively systematized the law. Their works laid the foundation upon which European nations would later build modernity.

In general, the experience of Ancient Rome shows that legal conservatism does not contradict progress if norms are able to respond in time to new challenges. Roman law, being in essence rational and casuistic, possessed internal flexibility — through the activities of praetors, the Senate, and emperors — allowing innovative ideas (expansion of citizenship, infrastructure megaprojects, social reforms) to be embodied in reality. This is the quintessence of its influence: a stable legal form, filled with new content, transformed the state itself into a “megalopolis” that embraced half the world.

II. Stoicism and Law: The Philosophy of Freedom and Creativity in an Era of Change

The bust of Lucius Annaeus Seneca (1st century CE), a Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman. Seneca endured exile and disgrace, becoming one of the wealthiest people in Rome and the tutor of Emperor Nero; he embodied the ideal of a sage whose inner freedom did not depend on the vicissitudes of fate.

The transitional period in Rome was a time not only of political adventures but also of profound philosophical quests. It was precisely then that Stoic philosophy took deep root among the Roman elite, offering a moral compass for life in an age of instability. The Stoics taught one to follow nature, reason, and virtue, regardless of external storms—be it war, tyranny, or the crowd with its fickle opinion. Their ideas proved to be remarkably in tune with the tasks of legal construction and personal creativity.

Thus, Marcus Tullius Cicero, being an eclectic philosopher, in his treatise *On the Laws* (52 BCE) derived the norms of justice from the very cosmos of rational order—that is, he affirmed the existence of natural law standing above the decrees of the crowd. In practice, Cicero applied Stoic principles during the Catiline conspiracy: acting according to law and in the name of the common good, he exceeded procedure (the execution of the conspirators without trial), but justified this by the higher requirement of *salus populi* (the welfare of the people). This dilemma—legality versus legitimacy—later received a tragic development when Cicero met his death at the hands of the triumvirs. Nevertheless, his life path illustrates the ideal of the Stoic politician for whom honesty and service to a public ideal are more important than personal triumph.

The Stoic stance manifested itself even more vividly in the figures of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Lucius Annaeus Seneca—a philosopher, writer, and statesman—literally lived out the paradox of a Stoic fate. He experienced exile (in 41–49 CE under Emperor Claudius), lost half of his property, yet did not break. Returning to court, Seneca became the mentor of the young Nero and, in fact, together with the prefect Burrus, wisely and moderately governed the vast Empire for five years (54–59 CE). That period entered history as the

quinquennium Neronis—the first five years of Nero's reign, when Seneca's reforms ensured prosperity (tax reductions, humanization of legislation). Seneca possessed colossal wealth—according to contemporary accounts, about 300 million sesterces, which made him a representative of the top 0.1% of the population. He was even called “Seneca the rich” (*Seneca praedives*). At the same time, he continued to write treatises on moderation and contempt for excessive luxury. Contemporaries accused Seneca of hypocrisy, and he responded by pointing to their “ignorance” of how to spend wealth correctly for the benefit of society. In the end, Seneca faced the ingratitude of his pupil: when the Pisonian conspiracy broke out (65 CE), Nero, suspecting Seneca, ordered him to commit suicide. And the philosopher carried out the order without resistance, steadfastly accepting death as a final opportunity to confirm his loyalty to his convictions. His fate—rise, fall, and voluntary departure—resembles the tragedy of a misunderstood genius. Seneca lost everything he had accumulated, yet managed once again to achieve greatness and, most importantly, to leave to posterity a rich philosophical legacy. He was, in the words of one researcher, “one of Rome's super-rich who denounced the vices of luxury while remaining its captive himself.” Nevertheless, it was precisely the Stoic worldview that allowed him to withstand the blows of fate and realize his talents as dramatist, orator, and thinker for the benefit of Rome. The Stoic concept of inner freedom, independent of external changes, created psychological preconditions for the creative longevity of passionaries like Seneca.

Marcus Aurelius—the philosopher-emperor of the 2nd century—consolidated in his *Meditations* an entire code of Stoic life for a ruler. In the context of our topic, his reflections on the relationship between majority opinion and truth are of particular interest. “The aim of life is not to be on the side of the majority, but to escape finding oneself in the ranks of the insane,” wrote Aurelius. These words sound prophetic when applied to the fate of genuinely innovative ideas. The majority often rejects the new as madness—until time sets the record straight. Aurelius also advised keeping the mind flexible: “Change your opinion if you see that you were wrong; to follow what corrects your error is more free than stubbornly clinging to delusion.” In this lies the greatest wisdom for a reformer: to recognize mistakes and adjust course in time.

Applied to creative innovation, these principles mean that genuine progress often goes against the opinion of the crowd and demands of a leader the readiness to change attitudes and to learn new things. A telling example is the story of Francis Coppola's film *Megalopolis*. The director—a classic of world cinema—invested more than 120 million dollars of his own funds into this project and created an ambitious work uniting history, philosophy, and science fiction. However, the general audience received the film rather coolly: at the

box office it failed, collecting only about \$14 million. Coppola, in order to avoid financial ruin, had to sell part of his property. In Marcus Aurelius' terms, he found himself not on the side of the majority, but on the side of the few—and was proclaimed a “madman” of contemporary Hollywood. But should this be considered a defeat? From the standpoint of Stoicism—no. For, like Seneca, Coppola remained true to his vision, sacrificing material well-being for a higher goal (the creation of a work of art). In the long run, such principledness may prove justified: the ideas embedded in *Megalopolis* are capable of influencing the minds of future generations, even if contemporaries undervalued them. It is no coincidence that in one of the film's episodes a distinctly Stoic note sounds: “the meaning of life is not to be in the majority...”

The resilience to the blows of fate cultivated by the Stoics is extremely important for creative passionaries. Their path is rarely strewn with roses: misunderstanding, ridicule, and even overt hostility from their environment are typical phenomena. The legal environment must compensate for these risks by offering protection to the talented individual from the crowd and from the arbitrariness of the powerful. In Roman history we see the beginnings of such protection: for example, the principle of appeal to the people more than once saved citizens from the arbitrariness of magistrates; the institution of the tribune of the people gave a voice to the oppressed. In the imperial period, the independence of the praetorian prefecture, which was built on principles of law, and the authority of senatorial norms also served as certain restraining mechanisms against tyranny. However, the informal protection of a thinker remained, above all, his inner conviction. The Stoic worldview became for many intellectuals an “anti-narrative shield” against cynicism and malice. To use an allusion, modern innovators also need a similar shield—whether in the form of a system of ethical values or the support of like-minded people—in order not to fall victim to “Machiavellian” intrigues and ruleless competitive struggle.

It is noteworthy that Carl Jung in the 20th century developed a consonant idea: he wrote that creativity is the way in which the unconscious “looks out” into the world, sending signals to it. An artist or inventor seems to draw inspiration from the collective unconscious, bringing forth something new that is not always clear to contemporaries. Jung pointed out that “the creation of the new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity.” The rational mind often breaks a holistic picture into parts and is afraid to go beyond established boundaries, whereas creative intuition unites opposites and breaks through to truth. According to Jung, in order to protect this fragile intuition from destructive external influences, it is important for a person to achieve wholeness (“individuation”)—an inner support that allows one not to depend on other people's-imposed

narratives. This can be interpreted as a psychological precondition for the legal guarantee of creativity: if the state creates conditions in which the individual is free from constant fear and pressure (that is, protected by law), then it is easier for them to attain harmony with themselves and realize their archetypal designs.

In antiquity, the equivalent of such support was philosophy—the same Stoic philosophy, which taught seekers of truth not to fear either popular opinion or the anger of a tyrant, trusting in the divine reason that governs the universe. In the modern era and to this day, that role is played by human rights, an independent judiciary, and the presumption of innocence—all those legal guarantees that allow an innovator to feel relatively protected from a “blow in the back.” Of course, life is more complex than theory, and business practitioners often employ strategies described by Machiavelli or Sun Tzu against inconvenient competitors. Yet even here law can intervene: antitrust legislation and laws against unfair competition are direct confirmation of this. Contemporary research emphasizes that the legal system must remain open to “creative destruction”—the very phenomenon described by economist J. Schumpeter. Otherwise, innovation will suffocate under the weight of cartel collusion and bureaucracy. The Stoic injunction—not to fear going against the majority if truth is on your side—can serve as a motto for all legal reformers and creators who are forging new paths.

II. Francis Ford Coppola's *Megalopolis*: Roman Law and Utopia Through the Prism of Art

The feature film *Megalopolis* (2024) deserves special attention as a cultural text bearing the imprint of the Roman legal idea. Coppola conceived it back in the 1980s, but managed to realize it only decades later, when he had accumulated sufficient personal funds and creative resolve. The film's concept is to retell the story of the Catiline conspiracy (63 BCE) and the fall of the Roman Republic in the language of modernity. The action is transposed to an alternative twenty-first-century New York called “New Rome.” The main character is an architect-visionary named Cesar Catilina (played by Adam Driver). The character's very name is a speaking combination: Cesar Catilina unites allusions to two historical figures at once—Gaius Julius Caesar and Lucius Sergius Catilina. Both names are associated with the end of the Republic, albeit in different ways: Caesar is the triumphant leader who in fact laid the foundations of imperial power; Catiline is an aristocrat-revolutionary whose conspiracy Cicero suppressed in the name of preserving the old order. In the film, Cesar Catilina advocates building a utopian city of the future, the “Megalopolis” project, which is supposed to revive New Rome and make all its inhabitants happy. His opponent is the city's mayor, Franklyn Cicero (played by Giancarlo Esposito). This antagonist also bears a symbolic name: Franklyn Cicero is obviously an echo of Marcus Tullius Cicero, the emblem of republican legality. In the film, the mayor is depicted as a corrupt

and reactionary politician who uses all possible means to obstruct Catilina's audacious plan. The clash of these two characters metaphorically reflects the conflict between an old legal system clinging to the status quo and an innovative drive striving to rebuild society on new principles.

The artistic details reinforce the legal-historical allegory. The city is governed by a narrow elite of patrician families who declaratively adhere to strict moral norms but in practice are mired in vice, while the common people of “New Rome” live in poverty. This clearly evokes the image of the late Republican Rome: a handful of senatorial families preaching Stoic ideals of virtue yet effectively appropriating provincial wealth, while the plebs in the capital starves without grain distributions. In the film, the architect Catilina belongs to the patricians, yet he sees the system's hypocrisy and dreams of creating a new just space where technology and architecture will ensure prosperity for all. To this end, he invents a revolutionary building material called “Megalon” (for which he is even awarded a Nobel Prize in the film's world). His project is essentially a new social contract in which urban planning becomes a continuation of law: an ideal city presupposes ideal laws. It is no coincidence that Catilina in the film possesses almost supernatural qualities (the ability to “stop time”—a cinematic device likely symbolizing the genius's clairvoyance). He opposes the schemes of Mayor Cicero, who weaves intrigues to retain power (hints at Machiavellian tactics). In the climax, a kind of “coup” takes place: the new megapolis does begin to be built. But—and this is an important realistic point—the ending remains open. Critics have noted that by the end of the film, Catilina's dream city is still not completed; the idea hangs in uncertainty. This reflects the main idea: utopia is not achieved instantly; it is a process of struggle and negotiation between idealism and the status quo. In real Roman history it was analogous: the Empire did not arise at once, but through a series of compromises, partial failures, and half-measures, until Augustus' principate took shape as a more or less stable model.

Megalopolis is full of hidden references. The very choice of New York (Manhattan) as a prototype of “New Rome” points to a parallel between contemporary America and ancient Rome as superpowers facing the dilemma: preserve republican freedoms or yield to the temptation of authoritarian efficiency. Coppola began to develop the script back in 2001, but 9/11 and the subsequent climate of fear derailed production at that time. This correlates intriguingly with the catastrophe inside the plot: in the film's backstory, New York has undergone some destructive event (an analogue of the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE or any major upheaval), after which the plan for a grand reconstruction of the city emerges. That is, crisis becomes a condition of transformation—just as in Rome the civil wars became the condition for the transition to the Empire. The director essentially applied a method of historical

extrapolation, inviting the viewer to reflect on whether modern civilization can withstand a similar transformation and at what cost.

Coppola did not hide the fact that he saw in his film both a warning and a call. A warning—a *caveat*—that elites consumed by corruption and power struggles can destroy a great city (an empire) if no new vision arises. But also a call: to make room for visionaries, people of creative genius who, like the architect Catilina, are capable of proposing a utopian yet salvific development project. In one interview, Coppola noted that he sees a resemblance between ancient patrons—*maecenases*, patrons of talent—and modern entrepreneurs who invest in radical innovations. The director, as it were, addresses society: cherish your “builders of the future,” even if their ideas at first seem insane. For within them may lie solutions to problems that the old system is incapable of resolving. *Megalopolis* can also be read as a message to lawmakers: stop clinging to dogmas and look to the lawgivers of history themselves—Caesar, Augustus, Cicero—who were not afraid to reform the law for the common good.

From a commercial standpoint, the film was a failure, receiving mixed reactions. Yet many critics recognized the grandeur of its concept and its aesthetic innovativeness. In essence, *Megalopolis* is already fulfilling its educational function: it compels the public to discuss issues far beyond the usual scope of cinema—from the architectural design of cities to the role of morality and law in social life. Such cross-cultural and cross-temporal inquiry, undertaken in the language of film, confirms that the ideas of Roman law and the transition to a megalopolitan civilization have not lost their relevance. They continue to serve as material for reflecting on the structure of the future. As one reviewer remarked, Coppola’s film is “an American fable set in a retro-futurist Manhattan standing in for Rome at the fall of the Republic, which in turn stands as a prototype of the modern United States.” In this mirror-maze of time, we see science, art, and law merging into a single narrative. The audacity to build an ideal city equals the audacity to create a perfect rule-of-law state. Both require a mental breakthrough, but also reliance on the lessons of history.

IV. The Legal Environment as a Factor of Creative Development: From Roman Passionaries to Twenty-First-Century Innovation

The history of Rome provides compelling evidence that legal reforms can unleash the colossal creative potential of a society. The stabilization of power under Augustus led to economic growth, a flourishing of architecture (for example, the construction of the Forum of Augustus, the Pantheon later under Hadrian, magnificent roads and aqueducts), and the development of the arts (the Golden Age of Latin literature: Vergil, Ovid, Horace). An implicit social contract was in force: the state guarantees peace and law, and citizens realize

their potential for the prosperity of the Empire. Law acted as an arbiter and protector: it upheld *ius commercii* (freedom of trade), protected private property, and ensured the enforcement of contracts through an effective judicial system. This system, despite the authoritarian nature of the political superstructure, stimulated economic and intellectual activity. Modern economic analysis confirms that the rule of law and the guarantee of rights are necessary ingredients of sustainable growth and innovation. A commission chaired by Nobel laureate Michael Spence in 2008 concluded that, along with investment, resources, and open markets, a key factor of development is good governance, including effective institutions and transparent rules. As Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong put it figuratively, in preparing the “dish” of prosperity, in addition to the ingredients one needs the hand of a skillful chef. In the context of the state, such a “chef” is a capable leader relying on the right legal “recipe.”

The examples of Singapore and the UAE, mentioned earlier, graphically illustrate this idea. Under Lee Kuan Yew’s leadership, Singapore achieved a leap “from the third world to the first” within a single generation, relying above all on institutional reforms: a ruthless fight against corruption, an independent and competent judiciary, the stimulation of entrepreneurship, investment, and education. The rules of the game were radically changed—and this generated a cumulative effect in the economy and social sphere. Analysts note that after 1965 Singapore deliberately bet on the rule of law, equal application of laws to all, and the protection of property rights as the basis for attracting capital. In essence, Lee Kuan Yew implemented what may be called a “Roman approach”—the construction of a state on principles of meritocracy and legality, which gave him the moral right to demand full devotion from citizens. The result is one of the highest standards of living in the world in the absence of natural resources. A similar story can be observed in the United Arab Emirates: here, on the wave of the oil boom, there was likewise a legal design of the future. Thanks to the initiatives of its leaders (above all Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum in Dubai), special economic zones were created, commercial, tax, and labor legislation was updated, and guarantees were introduced for foreign investors. The UAE openly adopted the best legal models from Western countries, implementing them on its own soil—much as the Romans once borrowed and refined Hellenistic institutions. Today, the UAE is a recognized center of innovation in the Middle East. It is indicative that Dubai was among the first in the world to begin utilizing AI in lawmaking and the administration of laws, striving to make the legal system proactive, anticipating problems rather than belatedly reacting to them. This reminds us of the role of the praetors in ancient Rome, who annually issued edicts, adapting the principles of law to new challenges—the prototype of flexible regulation.

Modern technological passionaries—such as Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Bill Gates, and others—are likewise products of a particular legal culture. An analysis of the biographies of the greatest innovators (including Walter Isaacson's works on Jobs, Einstein, and Musk) shows that their success largely depended on the surrounding ecosystem, shaped by legal and social norms. The rise of Silicon Valley in the 1970s–1980s is explained by a combination of factors: the availability of venture capital and investors' willingness to take risks, U.S. bankruptcy law, which is relatively lenient toward entrepreneurial failures, protecting them from a lifelong stigma; antitrust policy, which did not allow giants to crush startups; and, of course, the patent system, which protected the intellectual property of inventors. All these elements are a product of law and policy. That is why, as researchers note, "the law must preserve opportunities and incentives for creative destruction at all stages of innovation." If at some point a prohibitive signal is switched on, the sprout of the new may never break through the asphalt of the old.

Take Steve Jobs as an example. His famous creative spirit (the fusion of art and technology) unfolded because he operated in a free market environment: young Jobs and Wozniak could, without asking permission, assemble a computer in a garage, then found Apple, and rapidly scale it via an IPO thanks to a developed stock market. In 1985, corporate governance (the Board of Directors) removed Jobs from leading his own company—a trauma for a creator, but the legal framework (the existence of alternatives) allowed him to found a new firm (NeXT) and the studio Pixar without fear of persecution from Apple. Years later, Apple, in crisis, brought Jobs back—and he, freely disposing of innovations, released the iMac, iPhone, and iPad, overturning several industries. Behind all this lay the operation of various laws—from antitrust (in the 1990s Microsoft, under government pressure, could not completely strangle Apple) to patent law (Apple strategically protected its interface and design). Jobs' creative genius flourished, but without a certain legal ecosystem even genius would have remained in the garage. It is no accident that biographer Isaacson emphasizes the importance of teamwork and collaboration in innovation: no outstanding project is created alone. There is always a group of like-minded people, and therefore a social environment that requires rules of interaction. As one review aptly noted, the main lesson of the history of the digital revolution is that "innovation is often the product of group collaboration." This echoes the aphorism: "one chimpanzee is not a chimpanzee." Psychologist Robert Yerkes, who studied primate behavior, remarked: "even a single chimpanzee is already not a chimpanzee," meaning that outside the community, the key traits of the species do not manifest. His student, Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz, added: "and what can we say about humans!" Indeed, human intellect and creativity are revealed only in interaction with others and thus within certain rules. When these rules (norms)

are fair and understandable, synergy arises, a group dynamic that nourishes innovation. When arbitrariness and distrust prevail, collective activity collapses, each person retreats into their own "bunker," and society stands still.

Elon Musk is an example of a modern "passionary" whose activity vividly demonstrates the role of law and the state. Musk's SpaceX managed to break into the space industry only because in the 2000s the U.S. government (NASA) implemented a legal reform, opening commercial launch programs (COTS) to private companies. The legislation regulating space activities was updated, which allowed private actors to launch rockets into orbit under FAA oversight. Government contracts (legally secured) provided SpaceX with the necessary resources for development. At the same time, Musk constantly has to navigate legal obstacles: certifications, environmental standards, patent disputes. His car company Tesla owes its rise, in particular, to a carefully designed system of green quotas and credits introduced by California legislation (which stimulated the production of electric vehicles). When Musk faces restrictions—for example, bans on direct sales of Tesla in certain states due to the dealer lobby—he engages in legal battles or lobbies for changes in the law. Musk often criticizes "regulators that slow down progress," yet at the same time he benefits from the fruits of legal order: he defends his rights in court, demands that partners fulfill contracts, and insists on fair play from competitors. All these examples underscore that the legal environment can be both an accelerator and a brake on innovation.

Neurobiologists (for example, Robert Sapolsky) point out that stress and a sense of insecurity severely suppress creativity, shifting the brain into survival mode. If a society is in a state of chronic fear (of war, repression, arbitrary rule), one cannot expect technological breakthroughs from it. Rome in the first century BCE was close to such a point—civil wars were destroying trust. Only by restoring *ordo* (order)—even at the price of one person's power—did society breathe more freely, and a new flourishing began. In this sense, the maximalist idea of "Roman anarcho-capitalism" (sometimes heard in futurological forecasts)—that the future supposedly lies in the absence of the state with full market freedom—appears both understandable and dangerous. Historical experience (of Rome and later eras) shows that without the state as guarantor of basic rules, the "game" quickly degenerates into a violent redistribution incompatible with creativity. Even large Silicon Valley corporations, exhibiting traits of anarchic freedom, are forced to appeal to the state when it comes to protecting intellectual property or creating infrastructure (neither SpaceX nor, even more so, biotechnology could develop without state cooperation). Consequently, the likely ideal is not the abolition of the state, but its transformation into a client-centered service

based on legality and acting as a catalyst, not an obstacle, for creative people.

In *Megalopolis* precisely this kind of utopia is outlined: the state, represented by the new city, ensures the maximum self-realization of its inhabitants. Money there could presumably be replaced by other units of value (for example, “credits of trust” or energy resources)—an idea shared by some futurists who predict an economy in which robots perform routine tasks and people are valued for their ideas. Of course, this is still far off, but we already see certain trends: the emergence of cryptocurrencies and blockchain smart contracts is an attempt to rethink trust without intermediaries; the spread of DAOs (decentralized autonomous organizations) represents experiments in governance based on code rather than hierarchies. All this once again actualizes the Roman question: what law will underlie new structures? Will we, taking into account the lessons of the reception of Roman law, be able to build a global legal order that does not “strangle” innovation with bureaucracy yet does not allow the world to slide into the chaos of corporate wars?

An optimistic view suggests that law evolves in a spiral. Roman law did not disappear—it was reborn in the form of the European legal tradition and then was absorbed into international norms. In essence, it continues to live in our collective unconscious as an archetype of a just order. If contemporary societies, like the Romans once did, can develop a new *ius commune* (common rules) for the digital age, then humanity’s creative energy will receive a new impulse. Otherwise, the risk of a “new Middle Ages”—when local forces tear the fabric of the global world—may slow progress for many years.

The scholarly analysis carried out in this article makes it possible to formulate several manifesto-like conclusions:

1. Roman law provided an example of a successful creative regulator: it flexibly adapted to challenges, providing the legal basis for great achievements (from road construction to the integration of conquered peoples). Its principles (the rule of law, contractual discipline, protection of property) became the preconditions for centuries-long development of Western civilization.
2. Creative personalities (passionaries) in history succeeded when they relied on a favorable legal environment. Julius Caesar, relying on laws and offices, changed the course of history. Seneca, taking advantage of five years of political benevolence, laid the foundations for humane governance of the empire. In modern times, innovators thrive in states with strong legal institutions. There is a direct correlation: the stronger the legal guarantees (especially of personal freedom and property), the greater the chances that the “architects of the future” will be able to build a “megalopolis” of their ideas in reality.
3. The state should be regarded as an engineering project that constantly requires improvement in order to unlock the potential of its citizens. The experience of Singapore, South Korea, the UAE, and others shows that well-designed legal reforms can, in just a few decades, lead peoples from poverty to prosperity. This is consonant with how the Romans, by changing laws, saved their republic (even though they transformed it into a different form). Modern leaders implementing similar reforms are in fact continuing the work of the great Romans—building a megalopolis of the human spirit where knowledge, creativity, and entrepreneurship become the engines of progress.
4. Freedom of creativity must be protected from destructive narratives and practices. Just as cities physically need protection from barbarians, creative communities need protection from cynical manipulators and predatory competition. Legislation inspired by humanist ideas must block practices that kill creativity (be it corruption, unfair competition, or political repression of dissenters). At the same time, it must not turn into excessively suffocating guardianship, otherwise initiative will fade. Here lies a delicate balance, which in Rome for a long time was ensured by a dualism: strict laws against crimes and minimal restrictions in economic activity. Modern states should remember that “bad habits” (as Russian proverbs put it) such as envy of others’ success or contempt for intellectual labor can and should be eradicated through education and legal awareness.
5. Coppola’s *Megalopolis* can also be read as a scholarly-legal manifesto: “Create structures in which creating is a joy.” The director-visionary acts as an advocate for the future, calling for the combination of city planning with the strengthening of moral foundations and legal guarantees. It is no coincidence that the main character is an architect, not a politician. Architecture is a metaphor for creation, where every detail must rest on a solid framework. Law is precisely that framework, the “through-running backbone” of any utopian project. Without it, even the most magnificent ideas will collapse like a house without a foundation.

In conclusion, let me recall the words of Marcus Aurelius: “Life is short—make use of the present with reason and justice.” For states this means not postponing reforms “until later,” but valuing every moment of stability to take steps forward. The Romans did not always act decisively and paid for delays with crises. Yet

their greatest achievement was, ultimately, their timely rethinking of law, which allowed the Empire to exist for centuries and pass its legacy on to posterity. Today, in the twenty-first century, humanity stands on the threshold of new megalopolises—digital, global, and perhaps even interplanetary. As two thousand years ago, the questions of legitimacy and legality arise: on what will power be based, and how will the creators of the new world be protected? Here we are aided by looking both forward and backward at once: a through-analysis of history and modernity. It teaches that the fate of the “megalopolis”—whether a city, a state, or the entire planet—depends on whether we can create a legal environment that liberates the best forces of the human being rather than shackling them. This will be the quintessence of the influence of Roman law on the epochs to come.

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