BOETHIUS

The Roman philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 480–524) was a near contemporary of Saint Benedict and Cassiodorus. He was born into a famous Roman senatorial family, and on his father’s early death was adopted into another at least as renowned. Q. Aurelius Memmius Symmachus took the young boy under his wing and brought him into a circle of privilege and power. Boethius married Symmachus’s daughter Rusticana, with whom he had two sons. Driven perhaps by the Platonic ideal of the philosopher-king, Boethius took a public office as consul in 510. His sense of earthly fulfillment may have peaked in 523, when he was appointed master of the offices (a sort of prime minister and chief of staff) by the Ostrogothic king Theoderic at Ravenna, the outpost capital of the western Empire.

Then fortune’s wheel took its inevitable turn. Although Theodoric himself was an Arian, his reign had been marked by religious tolerance and deference to the traditions of the ancient Roman senatorial class; now, however, he seems to have grown suspicious of a collusion between Roman aristocrats and the imperial authority in Constantinople. In an atmosphere of fear and mutual recrimination, Boethius’s principled defense of a fellow senator led to his own downfall. He composed his famous Consolation of Philosophy (De consolatione philosophiae, c. 524–526) while he was under arrest in Pavia and awaiting execution. Eventually canonized as Saint Severinus, he is buried (like Saint Augustine) in San Pietro in Cielo d’Oro at Pavia.

In the history of ideas, Boethius is perhaps the most significant of a small handful of thinkers in his time who transmitted the world of ancient Greek and Roman learning to the Middle Ages. One of the last pre-Renaissance intellectuals to command a thorough knowledge of Greek philosophy in the original language, he was convinced of a fundamental harmony between Aristotle and Plato and set out to convey this through a comprehensive program of Latin translations. Today we have his translations and commentaries on Aristotle’s logical works (principally Categories, De interpretatione, and Prior Analytics); his original works on the categorical and hypothetical syllogism; and his translation of Porphyry’s Isagoge, a major work of Alexandrian Neoplatonism that introduced the vexed question of universals into medieval philosophy. Boethius was also very much concerned with the survival of the liberal arts curriculum in Latin. Although his De arithmetica was substantially derived from Nicomachus of Gerasa (second century), it includes an illuminating excursus on the profound interrelationship among the mathematical arts: arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy—four connected paths of study for which, it appears, Boethius here coined the term quadriivium. Like Augustine, Boethius wrote an influential treatise on music as Pythagorean number theory that became a standard during the Renaissance.

The extent of Augustine’s influence on Boethius, and particularly on Boethius’s doctrines of the Trinity as expounded in the theological tracts, or opuscula sacra, remains a matter of some discussion among scholars; more generally, the precise nature of Boethius’s Catholicism is also a matter of scholarly discussion. In his sophisticated disquisitions on classical learning, Boethius seems utterly unconcerned with their relation to the Christian faith; and he writes as something of a detached logician even in his avowedly theological works (among others, De trinitate, De fide catholica, and a tract against the heresies of Eutyches and Nestorius). His crowning achievement, The Consolation of Philosophy, is marked by this same bracketing off of the Christian perspective.

In the Consolation, Boethius—like Dante—casts himself as the protagonist. As he languishes in prison lamenting his ill fortune and lost glory, a magnificent lady, Philosophia, appears to instruct and console him by reminding him of the eternal Platonic truths. She chides him for having invested himself in the transient and temporal; she coaxes him toward an appreciation of rational design in the universe; she reaffirms the lasting good of the human soul in contemplative union with divine form. Though reflecting in part both Stoic and Aristotelian science, the Consolation makes plain its author’s strong Neoplatonic tendencies, particularly in the ninth meter of Book 3, O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas, a brilliant lyric distillation of Plato’s Timaeus. At once appealing as moral philosophy and as literature, Boethius’s elegant Latin prosimetrum (five books of alternating verse and prose) enjoyed huge popularity throughout medieval Europe and was translated into all the major vernaculars, including Italian, by 1500. His personifications of Philosophy and Fortune began a long and colorful iconographic tradition.

Dante, whose Convivio echoes the Consolation in many places, surely felt an affinity for Boethius as a fellow martyr for
Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy, Textus Boetii: Anitij Manlij Torquati Seuerini Boetij . . . consolatio philosophica*. Lyon: Simon Vincent, 1510. Reproduced from original held by Department of Special Collections of the University Libraries of Notre Dame.

the truth and a fellow exile. In *Paradiso* 10, Boethius is shown among the contemplatives in eternal beatitude.

*See also* Dante Alighieri; Liberal Arts; Neoplatonism; Plato and Platonism; Theodoric

**Bibliography**


GARY P. CESTARO

**BOHEMOND OF TARANTO**

Bohemond (or Bohemund; Bohemond I, prince of Antioch, c. 1050 or 1058–1111) was the eldest son of Robert Guiscard by Robert’s first wife, Alberada. He developed in the shadow of his father’s transformation from a Norman brigand-mercenary to the founder, as duke of Apulia, of a powerful new state in southern Italy. Bohemond emerged early as his father’s chief lieutenant, notably during Robert Guiscard’s daring invasion of the Byzantine empire in the early 1080s.

Bohemond was bypassed in the succession to his father’s Apulian realm in favor of Roger Borsa, Robert’s eldest son by his second wife. However, Bohemond forcibly extorted from his half-brother a territorial enclave that included Bari. Beyond that, he had inherited his father’s grandiose dream of carving out a realm in the east at the expense of Byzantium. The great project that was to become the First Crusade was clearly a perfect opportunity for Bohemond. When Pope Urban II called for crusaders to champion Christendom against Islam, Bohemond was among the western barons who responded. He was an archetype of the self-seeking opportunist, hungry for a principality of his own in the east.

Bohemond set out in the autumn of 1096 for Constantinople, where the crusaders had agreed to meet. The Byzantines, who knew him all too well, inevitably suspected that he had ulterior motives; but Bohemond went out of his way to be deferential to Emperor Alexius I Comnenus (Alexios Komnenos). Pledging loyalty, he sought for himself the Byzantine post of *domestikos* of the east, and he became a leading negotiator between the crusaders and Alexius. He accepted Alexius’s terms—an oath of fealty and a promise to surrender to the emperor any conquered cities or lands that had previously belonged to the empire—but Alexius had no illusions about Bohemond’s sincerity or goals. As the expedition proceeded beyond the taking of Nicaea, Bohemond’s self-interest became increasingly evident, and at a very early point he seems to have set his sights on the important Syrian city of Antioch, one particularly desired by Alexius. Bohemond was a leader in the prolonged, brutal siege of Antioch (1097–1098), and by clever manipulation he was able secure its surrender to himself. He refused to share it with the other leaders, and—by now outspoken in his hostility to Alexius—he made it the center of his own principality. Bohemond remained in Antioch while the rest of the crusaders’ forces went on to storm Jerusalem (1099).

Bohemond soon found himself beleaguered by both Byzantines and Turks; he was even briefly taken prisoner by the Turks, and he felt that his hold on Antioch was precarious. Convinced that Alexius was his supreme obstacle, Bohemond developed a characteristically daring scheme of attacking Byzantium directly,