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**IMPERIAL APPELLATIVES IN THE WORKS OF  
SYMMACHUS**

– Abstract –

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, we aimed at analysing a specific category of vocabulary of power, namely, the imperial appellatives in the writings of Q. Aurelius Symmachus (cca. 340-402), a late Latin author. There are relatively few contributions in historiography that are merely close or connected to our endeavour, being limited, on one side, to specific analysis of a key concept in the work of some authors<sup>1</sup>, and on the other side, being limited to creating some “monographies” of some *virtutes*<sup>2</sup>. In the Romanian academia, we could mention the article signed by Nelu Zugravu and Mihaela Paraschiv regarding the vocabulary of power in *brevaria*<sup>3</sup>. Hence, as of now there is not rigorous analysis, in historiography, of imperial appellatives – defined as such, that is exclusively limited to the oeuvre of an author. Our process it is even more important as it is about the works of Q. Aurelius Symmachus. Although there is a recrudescence of interest for this writer in the international literature, especially during the last decades, strongly related to the revisionist inquiry on Late Antiquity, where Symmachus is one of the key-authors in this new interpretative paradigm, our national academic environment does not have any important work dedicated to this important orator, political man from the second half of the IV<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, our contribution has a double importance: we realized the first systematic analysis of a distinctive category of the official power lexicon – imperial appellatives – and we have introduced, for the first time in the national historiography, a Late Antique author – Q. Aurelius Symmachus.

By giving me the opportunity to actively attend and contribute in its meetings, the Center for Classic and Christian Studies from Iasi, led by prof. dr. Nelu Zugravu, played an important role in helping me to define and deepen my historiographical interests concerning this unique period of Roman history. Under prof. dr. Nelu Zugravu`s supervision I have written a dissertation on the language of power in Symmachus` writings, *Orationes* and *Relationes*, that offered a first analysis of this new and interesting topic. Hence, this research has also a broader, institutional relevance, being in line with the historiographical interests

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Stéphane Ratti, *La civilitas e iustitia dans le Bréviaire d'Éutrope: des qualités de famille?*, in *REA*, 98, 1996, p. 197-205; Dominico Lassandro, *Sacratissimus imperator: L'immagine del princeps nell'oratoria tardonatica*, Edipuglia, Bari, 2000; Giacomo Raspanti, *Clementissimus imperator: power, religion and philosophy in Ambrose's De obitu Theodosii, and Seneca's de Clementia*, in Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (edited by), *The power of religion in Late Antiquity*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, p. 44-67; Catherine Ware, *The Severitas of Constantine: Imperial virtues in Panegyrici Latini 7(6) and (6)7*, in *JLA*, 7/1, 2014, p. 86-109.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Jean Gaudement, *Indulgentia principis*, A. Giufrè, Milano, 1967; Mellisa Barding Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Nelu Zugravu, Mihaela Paraschiv, *Vocabulaire de la sphère du pouvoir dans l'Épitome de Caesaribus*, in *C&C*, 10, 2015, p. 535-570.

promoted by the Centre, which is the only institution in the country dedicated to the Late Antiquity studies.

During the last two decades, the traditional approach of researching the discourse of power in the Roman world have been completely reassessed, thanks to new innovative thinking perspectives, that represent three „turns”: *communicative turn* („representation and perception of power”)<sup>4</sup>, *representational turn*, with roots in *linguistic turn* – that had implications even in the epistemological foundation of our field (promoted by Hayden White)<sup>5</sup>, and, more recently, *spatial turn*, which analyses the strong connection between the ideology and the conceptualization of political space<sup>6</sup>.

Our work is inspired by methodological acquisitions offered by the first two historiographical paradigms. For this purpose, our endeavour is part of a larger preoccupation regarding the representation and perception of sovereign power, respectively participation of the political bodies in defining the ideological themes. In Symmachus’ writings, we followed this research path through studying the imperial appellatives. Our approach is set, therefore, in a specific historiographical perspective, recently framed, that emphasizes the open dimension of communicating the power discourse in Roman world.

Before presenting the structure of this thesis, we will look, briefly, at the imperial appellatives in order to clarify several aspects. The imperial appellatives are those protocolary codes of addressing, specific titles, that were generalized during the Late Antiquity, through which the sovereigns were invoked in various contexts: aulic, official, public, in inscriptions, in panegyrics or historiographical writings – imperial biographies (*breviaria*, *SHA*). We often find these imperial appellatives as personalized traditional virtues (i.e., *clementia vestra*), but is not limited to this. They can be used in a wide range of associations, for instance with political *nomina* (i.e., *imperator clementissimus*). For this matter, we must make a distinction

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., Luke de Blois *et al.* (edited by), *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power. Proceedings of the Third Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, c. 200 B.C. – A.D. 476)*, Netherlands Institute in Rome, March 20-23, 2002, J. C. Gieben Publisher, Amsterdam, 2003; Janneke De Jong, *Emperors in Egypt. The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power in Greek Papyrus Texts from Egypt, AD 193-284*, Drukkerij Quickprint, Nijmegen, 2006; Erika Manders, *Coining Images of Power. Patterns of Representation of Roman Emperors on the Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2012; Johannes Wienand (ed.) *Contested Monarchy, Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Daniel F. Gargola, *The Shape of the Roman Order. The Republic and its Spaces*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2017; Clifford Ando, *The Space and Time of Politics in Civil War*, in Cristina Rosillo-Lopez (edited by), *Communicating Public Opinion in the Roman Republic*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2019, p. 175-188; Michael Koortbojian, *Crossing the Pomerium. The Boundaries of Political, Religious, and Military Institutions from Caesar to Constantine*, Princeton University Press, Princeton & London, 2020.

between the imperial appellatives *per se*, and those appellatives that we find in protocolary addresses.

The present study is structured into seven chapters.

In the first chapter, we will focus on three distinctive parts of research in order to provide a proper introduction into Symmachus' biography and writings. Thus, in the first part of the chapter, we will analyze the general ideological and political context in which the senatorial elite from the fourth century's *Vrbs* evolve, so that we can better understand that specific *milieu* in which Symmachus advanced in his public career. In the second part, we will present his *cursus honorum*, based on the honorary inscription erected by his son, Memmius, on *mons Caelius*, where the Symmachi resided, identifying the main pragmatic means through which he built his political and social status, in Rome or at the imperial Court. In the last part of this chapter, we will present, thematically, the historiographical reception of Symmachus' writings, emphasizing their open historical character, especially political character, denied initially in historiography.

In the second chapter, we aimed at providing the reader with an up-to date historiographical digression, on the new directions in researching the discourse of power, in the Roman world. The scope of this approach is to establish those particularities of the imperial ideology, its forms of expression, on one side, and to illustrate that type of discourse through certain particular *media*: coins, epigraphs and *panegyrici*.

In the third to seventh chapters, the main part of the thesis, we will analyze the imperial appellatives from Symmachus' writings. We will group the 27 listed appellatives into five categories, in a way that will emphasize the complex image of sovereign power, as it is rhetorically constructed in his works: military, religious, moral etc. We have analyzed separately each of these honorary concepts, respecting the following model: 1. etymology, 2. their history in the official vocabulary, from their first mention up until the fourth century, prioritizing their presence in the main *media* of communication (monetary, epigraphical, literary writings with historiographical or encomiastic character), and 3. their contextual analysis in Symmachus' works, considering their role in the larger rhetorical, ideological framework in which the author uses them (*topoi*, literary, ideological motifs).

For the scope of writing this thesis, I have consulted more bibliographical resources, distinguishing for this matter a *corpus* dedicated to Symmachus' oeuvre, namely one regarding the historiography of imperial ideology, both of which we have tried to make use of judiciously, critically and, inevitably, selectively. In order to achieve a better documentation for this study, especially on modern historiography, during the academic semester between

2017 and 2018 I was granted an Erasmus+ scholarship with which I had the opportunity to study at Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro' library of Classic and Christian studies.

In the main part of this work, for the texts of the author that we analyzed, we have used the French edition of Jean-Pierre Callu, who edited the complete writings of Symmachus in the prestigious collection Budé from Les Belles Lettres (Symmaque, *Correspondance*, I-IV, texte établi, traduit et commenté par Jean-Pierre Callu, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2002-2003; Symmaque, *Discours – Rapports*, texte établi, traduit et commenté par Jean-Pierre Callu, Les Belles Lettres, 2009).

With regard to researching the evidences of official appellatives in the vocabulary of power, I have used more sources. Of great use in our **quantitative process** were the online collections of Greco-Roman sources, that allowed us, through the built-in searching option, to create a statistical mini-database with the occurrence frequency of the searched words, for a specific author or by period (e.g., <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/> [*Perseus*]; <https://latin.packhum.org/browse> [*PHI Latin Texts*]; <https://digiliblt.uniupo.it/> [*digilibLT*]).

For the **comparative analysis** of appellatives, we used numerous sources, especially from the fourth century. Amongst them, we mention: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum Libri Qui Supersunt*, I-III, introduction and English translation by John C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Nos. 300; 331;335), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1935-1940; *Panegyrici Latini*, (a cura di) Domenico Lassandro e Giuseppe Micunco, Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, Torino, 2000; *Histoire Auguste. Les empereurs romaines du IIe et IIIe siècles*, édition bilingue latin-français, traduction du latin par André Chastagnol, Éditions Robert Laffont, Paris, 1994; Festus Eutropius, *Breviarum ab Urbe condita. Breviar de la întemeierea Romei*, a bilingual critical edition, parallel Latin-Romanian text, introductory study, explanatory notes and comments by Gheorghe I. Șerban, Editura Istros, Brăila, 1997; Festus, *Breviarum rerum gestorum populi romani. Scurtă istorie a poporului roman*, editio bilinguis, traducere de Marius Alexianu și Roxana Curcă, ediție îngrijită, studiu introductiv, note și comentarii de Nelu Zugravu, Editura „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, Iași, 2003.

For **epigraphical evidences**, we have also used multiple online databases (Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg. Forschungsstelle der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften – <http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/inschrift/suche> [*HD*]; Electronic Archive of Greek and Latin Epigraphy. International Federation of Epigraphic Database under the patronage of Association Internationale d'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine, Roma – [http://www.edr-edr.it/Italiano/index\\_it.php](http://www.edr-edr.it/Italiano/index_it.php) [*EDR*]; Epigraphik Datenbank Clauss-Slabby



<http://www.manfredclauss.de/> [EDCS]; Last Statues of Antiquity, University of Oxford – <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/database/browse.php> [LSA]).

To register **the numismatic testimonies**, we have consulted *RRC* (<http://numismatics.org/crro/>) for the Republican period, and volumes I-IX from *RIC* (H. Mattingly, E.A. Sydenham et al. (eds.), *Roman Imperial Coinage, I-IX*, Spink & Spon, London, 1923-1951) for the Imperial period. Lastly, for the **evidences from the juridical texts**, we have used *Codex Theodosianus*, until the year 400 (*Code Théodosien Livre XVI. Les lois religieuses des empereurs romains de Constantin à Théodose II (312-438)*, I, text latin Theodor Mommsen, traduction Jean Rougé, introduction et notes Roland Delmaire avec la collaboration de François Richard, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2005; *Code Théodosien Livre I-XV, Code Justinien, Constitutions Sirmondiennes. Les lois religieuses des empereurs romains de Constantin à Théodose II (312-438)*, II, text latin Theodor Mommsen, P. Meyer, P. Krueger, traduction Jean Rougé et Roland Delmaire, introduction et notes Roland Delmaire avec la collaboration de Olivier Huck, François Richard et Laurent Guichard, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2009).

We mention that, from a methodological standpoint, we used **textual analysis** as a historical research method on which we elaborated the current study. Beside this, we have also used in the chapters III-VII and in conclusions: i. **statistical method**, in order to indicate the frequency with which the appellatives are mentioned in Symmachus' works; later, we created synoptic tables with their occurrence in each writing and word clouds, to illustrate them graphically; ii. **comparative method**, through which we tested them against other sources from the fourth century; iii. **diachronic method**, with which we indicated the period when they were incorporated into the vocabulary of imperial ideology.

Throughout the work at this doctorate thesis, I have benefitted, during all these years, from the assistance, help and guidance of more people without whom this work would have been much more modest. First and foremost, I would like to give a special thank you to Mr. professor Nelu Zugravu, for his tenacious belief in this project, for guiding with scientific exigence my progress in studying different aspects of Late Antique civilization and, for the chance that he offered me to participate at national and international conferences, as well as to publish articles and reviews in the academic journal that he edits, *Classica et Christiana*.

Allow me to bring my acknowledgement to those that helped me realise this project. I would like to thank the members of the guiding commission for the critical observations they made throughout different stages of elaboration of this thesis, that made it a better work. I

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I want to express my whole gratitude to my parents, who helped me financially and especially morally. This work is dedicated to them.

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At the end of our research, it is critical to present the original conclusions that we have reached by studying the imperial appellatives in Symmachus writings. In the first part of this chapter, we're going to present these results. In the second part, considering all the observations made, we propose an interpretation of the imperial appellatives bearing in mind their importance in documenting the political communication in Late Antiquity.

The systematic research of the terminology of imperial ideology in the writings of ancient authors may bring about important contributions regarding the reconstruction of the main themes of the official propaganda of that time. Starting from this idea, I have chosen as the subject of my doctoral dissertation the imperial appellatives in Q. Aurelius Symmachus's works. The originality of our endeavour consists in two novel aspects. First, we have analysed in historiography, for the first time, a specific category of vocabulary of power – imperial appellatives, and second, we have introduced in the national historiographic literature a Latin author that has never been studied before.

In the three writings of Symmachus, *Orationes*, *Relationes* and *Epistulae*, we counted 27 appellatives. We grouped them into five distinctive categories, where each of them underlines a certain dimension of sovereign power: 1. appellatives that express the majestic and perennial character of the imperial power (*aeternitas*, *perennitas*, *maiestas*, *inclytus*, *venerabilis*, *maximus*, *bonus*, *optimus*); 2. appellatives from moral sphere (*clementia*, *pietas*, *humanitas*, *serenitas*, *tranquillitas*, *mansuetudo*, *indulgentia*); 3. appellatives from the sovereign power sphere (*Augustus*, *moderator*, *defensor*, *dominus*, *imperator*, *princeps*); 4. those regarding the sacrality of emperor (*fortuna*, *numen*, *felicitas*); 5. military appellatives that emphasize military qualities of the emperor (*victor*, *triumphator*, *invictus*).

We analysed each appellative, individually, in the context where it is mentioned in Symmachus works. First, in order to frame the evolution of these terms in the official discourse, we focused on their occurrences, from their first attestations in Latin language to period when they start to be used in the main official *media* of communication, until the fourth century: epigraphical, numismatic, literary (encomiastic, historiographic and juridical). Therefore, the analytical model that we adopted proposed these areas of research: 1.

**etymological**, where we established the initial significance of the terms from Latin language; 2. **diachronic** through which we studied the appellatives evolution in the official vocabulary; 3. **comparative**, in which we looked into the involved official communication *media*, where the use of appellatives is dominant (numismatic, literature, epigraphs), their representation patterns in Symmachus' works, in the literature of that time; 4. **statistical**, with the help of which we counted the occurrences of each appellative, the dominant category of appellatives.

The overall image of the sovereign power, that we depict from analysing the 27 official formulas could be represented best if we consider the categories of appellatives that predominate. From this perspective, the representation of the sovereign, that Symmachus shapes in his writings, is as follows: appellatives that refers to the majesty and perennality of sovereign power (8), appellatives from moral sphere (7), appellatives from the sphere of sovereign power (6), appellative that regards the sacrality and appellatives that ascribe military qualities to the emperor (3). Thus, the senator uses a pool of various honorific formulas, especially noticing those that refer to the prestige of his reign, that dominates this period, taking certain forms (*aeternitas*, *perennitas*), to his more traditional moral qualities or his political titles. The charismatic, religious and military dimensions of sovereign power that is very well represented in the official discourse of the time, have the least weight here. Given all this, we could state that, in order to picture the image of the sovereign power, Symmachus adopts a balanced political vocabulary, in which the appellatives that are dominant to that time alternate with the traditional ones.

If we consider the representation of the emperor in each of the senator's writings, we notice the following situations:

In *Orationes*, the collection of eight speeches that were preserved, in fragments, dominant are the appellatives that emphasise the majestic and perennial traits of the imperial power (*venerabilis*, *maiestas*, *inclytus*, *maximus aeternitas* [5]), followed by those from sphere of sovereign power (*augustus*, *imperator*, *moderator*, *defensor* [4]), moral (*clementia*, *pietas*, *indulgentia* [3]), religious (*numen*, *fortuna* [2]), those that show military qualities of the emperor (*invictus* [1]).

In *Relationes*, Symmachus' administrative correspondence, where 49 petitions were published during his mandate as *praefectus Vrbi* (384-385), we see, instead, a predominance of the appellatives from moral sphere (*clementia*, *mansuetudo*, *serenitas*, *tranquillitas*, *humanitas*, *pietas* [6]), followed by those describing the majestic and perennial traits of the imperial power (*aeternitas*, *perennitas*, *maximus*, *bonus* [4]), from religious sphere (*numen*, *fortuna* [2]) and only one political appellative (*princeps*).

In *Epistulae*, the senator's private correspondence that encompass 903 letters, dated between 365 and 402, we have the following statistical situation: appellatives that emphasise the majestic and perennial character of sovereign power (*aeternitas, optimus, bonus, maximus* [4]), appellatives from the sphere of sovereign power (*princeps, dominus, Augustus* [3]), religious (*numen, felicitas* [2]) appellatives from moral sphere (*clementia* [1]).

That being said, in each of the three Symmachus' writings, a specific, nuanced image of sovereign power stands out, where certain attributes of it predominates over the others. We could also see certain patterns, namely the importance that certain categories of appellatives have. For this matter, the most important one is that which emphasize the sovereign's majesty and perenniality (*Orationes* – 5; *Relationes* – 4; *Epistulae* – 4). There is an exception of this order in *Relationes*, where the appellatives from moral sphere are prioritised. Of those, we can find them in *Orationes* (3), and *Relationes* (6), but less in *Epistulae* (1). Lastly, the religious ones appear in all the three writings, counting two of them in each work.

This image related to the emperor shall not be absolutized. Instead, it should be completed by the data we find in the statistical table, that assess the usage frequency (see the Annexes). Thus, although some appellatives belong to a category that is less representative in a text, they are frequently mentioned. For instance, in *Relationes*, *numen* is the third most mentioned appellative, after *clementia* (45) and *princeps* (30), with 24 occurrences. Although *princeps* is the only political *nomen* mentioned in petitions, except for the official title, it appears no less than 30 times. This fact brings into our attention the importance that rhetorical and literary contexts have in understanding the use of imperial appellatives. Moving forward, we propose a larger historical framework to interpreting them, through the conceptual perspective of political communication and the specific forms that they take in Symmachus writing.

Greg Woolf noticed, in a recent paper, that there are multiple facets of exercising power in the Roman world, consisting of the projection of influence on different spheres, in relation to the Senate colleagues, with the emperor, or establishing cordial relations with various *power brokers* (i.e., barbarian generals), inside or outside of the senatorial circle *via fama* and *amicitia*. In this context, the rhetorical abilities are essential<sup>7</sup>. The ideological power, in and of itself, is rather conservative, having a dynamic oriented towards reproducing the traditional social and political order. Thus, political power is redefined during the Late

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<sup>7</sup> Greg Woolf, *The Rulers Ruled*, in Katheli Berthelot (dir.), *Reconsidering Roman Power: Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian Perceptions and Reactions*, Publications de l'École française de Rome, Roma, 2020 – <<http://books.openedition.org/efr/4602>>.

Antiquity rather as a *web of influence*, emulating the clientship, personalized through a moralizing, ethical language.

In this context, the scope of our thesis has been limited to only one aspect of these *web of influence*, namely to investigating the mediated ideological relations between the sovereign and the senatorial body, as it is understood in the specific contexts (encomiastic, official-administrative or within *amicitia*) of Symmachus' writings, *Orationes*, *Relationes* and *Epistulae*.

The political communication generated by this situation demanded, first and foremost, a rigorous “cartography” of political language in those three writings. The starting point of our investigation consisted of registering the imperial appellatives, beginning with their history in the official vocabulary and continuing with the role they later played in the propagandistic economy of sovereign power representation in Symmachus' works.

First observation that we could make is referring to the official chronology of those appellatives, in order to determine the traditional or innovative characteristic of the political vocabulary used by the author. Hence, of 27 analysed appellatives, the overwhelming majority, namely 21 of them (*aeternitas*, *perennitas*, *maiestas*, *optimus*, *bonus*, *maximus*, *clementia*, *pietas*, *humanitas*, *mansuetudo*, *indulgentia*, *Augustus*, *dominus*, *imperator*, *princeps*, *numen*, *felicitas*, *fortuna*, *victor*, *triumphator*, *invictus* [77.11%]), have a relatively well documented and long tradition in the official vocabulary, being integrated, therein, between the Late Republic and the beginning of the third century (*i.e.*, *invictus*).

Therefore, the power's vocabulary that Symmachus used in his writings has, first of all, a traditional characteristic, which also presents some particularities, such as recapitalizing on traditional political language of the Late Republic period, or the use of appellatives that, for this period, involve a clear religious, Christian reappraisal. In other words, Symmachus is an orator of his time, that has both to consider the official ideological aspirations of the emperors and the identity of the senatorial body that he is part of, although the latter is less obvious, or to consider the new Christian terms that become more influential in the discourse of power. This observation is very important, more so for when we will explain why Symmachus so often uses imperial appellatives and what their role is in the political situations in which they are used (see *infra*).

Before focusing on the reason why this ceremonial type of language is used, we will first assess the patterns of sovereign power representation as we find them from analysing each individual appellative in Symmachus' workings. In order to better understand these

communicational situations in the political realm, we will discuss them one by one, in each of the author's writings.

**Orationes.** Symmachus' speeches, held at the imperial court (*Or.* I-III) or in Senate (*Or.* IV-VIII), display a formally diverse encomiastic picture, through stylised or conventional content, influenced, of course, by the moment and place where the speeches have been read. Yet, the representation of sovereign power within them frame a balanced image of the emperor. Thus, the most frequently mentioned appellatives are those in which the majesty and the perennial character of imperial power are emphasized (*venerabilis, maiestas, inclytus, maximus, aeternitas*), five of them, seconded by the political ones (*Augustus, imperator, moderator, defensor*), four of them. They are followed by those from moral sphere (*clementia, pietas, indulgentia*), three, and religious (*numen, fortuna*), two appellatives. Finally, the sovereign's military qualities are emphasized by the traditional *cognomen ex virtute, invictus*.

The most frequently mentioned appellative by Symmachus here, from the category of those that emphasize the majestic and perennial character of the sovereign power, is *venerabilis*, with five occurrences. Its usage in some of the rhetorical context contributes to presenting the sovereign power in light of his privileged religious position, of the splendor of coronation ceremony, of imperial duty's prestige but also in light of administrative-judicial dimension of the emperor's governing, *i.e.*, the reinstitutionalization of *iustitia*. The invoked reasons are: *lux imperialis*, „cosmic kingship”, *iustitia imperatoria* or *bonus imperator*. *Aeternitas, maiestas, inclytus* and *maximus* are mentioned only once. *Aeternitas* and *maiestas* reveal the moral and civic reputation of the emperor while evoking the literary *topos* of *recusatio*. *Inclytus*, in turn, highlights the predestined *gloria* of the emperor for Empire, thus contributing to the instauration of a *novum saeculum*, being, therefore, a *novi saeculi spes*. Finally, *maximus* is mentioned when enumerating the benefits of the emperor's governance, the restauration of *libertas eloquii* by *civilis princeps*.

The most used appellatives from the sovereign power sphere are *Augustus* (seven occurrences) and *imperator* (three). The rhetorical context in which the former is presented in *Orationes* refers to the prestige of this political *cognomen* or to the imperial duty but also to the quasireligious position of the emperor, that is projected even upon the power to control nature's elements and forces, which in the literature is called „cosmic kingship”. The ideological motifs that accompany them reinforce this idea. Hence, the prestige of the concept *Augustus* or of the imperial position are underlined by multiple syntagms such as: *mundi gubernacula designatus, libertas forensis eloquii, gloria* or *novi saeculi spes*. Its quasireligious, cosmic dimension is “betrayed” by the *topos* of *lux imperialis* or of his reign

upon the forces of nature. In turn, *imperator* is documented to have another traditional connection with *bonus imperator*, referring to the emperor's exemplary military image as commander, his clement nature on the battlefield or even his civil image (*civilis princeps*). There are numerous *topoi* that contribute to this image as the orator invokes rhetorical motifs and syntagms like *clementissimus imperator*, *civilis princeps*, *bonum saeculum*, *pater patriae*, *securitas temporis*, *restitutio rei publicae liberae* or *auctor libertatis*. Lastly, *moderator* and *defensor* are appellatives that are each only mentioned once. The former is used with the purpose to highlighting the exemplary military qualities of the emperor, enforcing, thus, the traditional *topos* of *invictus princeps*. The latter frames the emperor's image as protector of the imperial world order, from both the military and civil point of view, thus, his reign's *beneficia* is contributing to the instauration of a *novum saeculum* for the Empire.

The most used appellatives in moral sphere are *clementia* (3), *pietas* (2) and *indulgentia* (1). The emperor's *clementia* is used in contexts that evoke *virtutes imperatoriae*, the expectations about a *novum saeculum* for Empire or, more specifically, it expresses the ideal of cordial political relations between the Senate and the sovereign. Relevant *topoi* that state such relations refer to *civilis princeps*, *felicitas temporum* or *restitutio concordiae*. *Pietas* is used in order to describe the harmony of the imperial house (*concordia Augusti* between Valentinianus and Valens) or to describe the emperor's position as *pius filius* towards his father.

The appellatives from the religious sphere, mentioned by the author, are *numen* (2), and *fortuna* (1). With regard to the first one, Symmachus uses it in traditional contexts. Thus, *numen* highlights the divine power that guides him (*concordia Augusti*), recalling the famous senatorial mention of *instinctu divinitatis*, from the arch of triumph dedicated to Constantinus, and *fortuna*, also used in a classical religious context, in which Symmachus compares the devotional *officia* towards the emperor with those towards divinity, through rigorous adherence to rituals. *Numen vestrum* is openly attributed to the emperor while the orator is preoccupied with maintaining the righteousness of the traditional cults. Therefore, the first refers to *concordia Augusti* between the members of *domus augusta* and the second refers to the emperor's privileged religious status, capable of ensuring a *novum saeculum*.

Finally, *invictus* is mentioned two times, in different contexts. In the first of them, the commendable military image of the emperor contributes to his prestigious act to initially deny the imperial role so that later, in the second context, to openly underline its benefits for the Empire, through his successful military campaigns (*invictus moderator*).

**Relationes.** In Symmachus' administrative correspondence as *praefectus Vrbi*, we see two communicational situations. On a formal level, in *inscriptiones* and *subscriptions*, he undertakes, of course, the official administrative expressions. In *inscriptiones*, this is rather abbreviated, limited to *dominus noster* [...] *semper Augustus* format, in which it is underlined, thus, only the emperor's position through the two political *nomina*. *Dominus noster* gains momentum in the fourth century as emperor's official *praenomen imperialis* par excellence, describing his almighty, privileged statute. The possessive pronoun *noster*, as Dora Alba Musca noticed, personalises the power relations. As we know from Symmachus' *testimonia*, this is idealised, at least from the senatorial perspective, as paternal, cordial relations, so the emperor is a generous *pater patriae* of Empire, whose *cura* takes on different forms, depending on the expectations of each social power group. *Semper Augustus*, in turn, highlights the prestige and perennality of the imperial duty. In petitions, when he officially addresses the imperial college, the senator prefers to use the formula *domini imperatores* [...] *incliti victores ac triumphatores semper Augusti*. Therefore, we can see that this *titulus* is structured into two distinctive parts, political and military. The appellatives from the sphere of sovereign power are *dominus imperator semper Augustus*, hence reflecting the *epigraphic habit* of the time. *Cognomina ex virtute*, in their turn, expresses the importance of military ideal, during this period, in representing the emperor, in this context referring to his *gloria* (*inclitus*), the victories conquered on the battlefield (*victor*) and his uncontested military supremacy – especially in relations with *gentes barbaricae* (*triumphator*).

In petitions, the emperor's image is framed by *praefectus* by using the appellatives from the moral sphere (*clementia, mansuetudo, serenitas, tranquillitas, humanitas, pietas*), six, on count, followed by those that emphasize the sovereign` perennality and majesty (*aeternitas, perennitas, maiestas, bonus*), counting four, from the religious sphere (*numen, fortuna*) – two, and a political one (*princeps*).

Of the appellatives from the moral sphere, *clementia* is the propagandistic *leitmotiv* of these *relationes* as it is used 45 times. Its spread along these petitions is the following: political petitions – 11, those related to jurisdiction – 6, administrative ones – 5, petitions referring to *annona* – 2, *collegia* and public edifices – 1. So, in the exception of *rel. III*, this appellative is presented in each category of *relationes*, expressing in the best way the ideal of the clement, moderate and human emperor, who has to govern his relations with his subjects in various contexts. The motives and ideological themes that characterise the prefect's correspondence are telling in this matter, referring, in general, to the emperor's *felicitas*, to his reign, his virtues, even to *iustitia*, but also to his privileged statute. We mention, for this



purpose, those *topoi* that paint this image of the sovereign: *gloria (principis)*, *gloria temporum*, *divinus animus vester*, *largitas vestra*, *virtutes caelestes*, *bona tempora vestra*, *bonus princeps*, *fama vestra*, *felicitas temporum*, *felicitas (vestra)*, *saeculum vestrum*, *fama bonorum temporum*, *iustus princeps*, *fama saeculi*, *boni principes*, *sacra humanitas*, *virtutes vestrae*, *optimus imperator*. The other appellatives, *mansuetudo* (5 occurrences), *pietas*, *serenitas*, *humanitas* (2) and *tranquillitas* (1), contribute, on their own, on a smaller scale, to building the imperial behaviour.

Second most important preoccupation of Symmachus in his petitions is to point out the prestige, but especially the perennality of the emperor. In this context there are two appellatives that stand out, namely *aeternitas* (22) and *perennitas* (19).

*Aeternitas* is presented in all categories of *relationes*: political petitions – 6, juridical ones – 4, administrative – 2, those referring to public monuments – 2, *collegia* – 2 and religious petitions – 1. They state a complex image of the sovereign, similar to the one related to *clementia*. Therefore, *topoi* used with this appellative make a reference, in turn, to the imperial ideal, the sovereign's *beneficia*, their privileged religious statute, their personal *felicitas* or of their reign, in general: *boni principes*, *beneficia (principis)*, *consilium caeleste*, *saeculum vestrum*, *virtutes divinae*, *securitas populi Romani*, *princeps venerandus*, *fama saeculorum ac temporum bonorum*, *sensus divini vestri*. *Perennitas* sees a relatively similar distribution as *aeternitas*, referring to *topoi* from the same sphere as well; we won't mention them again (see Annexes). *Maiestas* (8) and *bonus* (6) reiterate, on a significantly narrower scale, the associations that we find with the previous appellatives.

With regards to the appellatives from the religious sphere, *numen* stands out, being the second most mentioned official epithet by Symmachus, with 26 occurrences. We find it mentioned in most of the majority of *relationes* types, being distributed relatively equally as follows: petition regarding Symmachus jurisdiction – 5, political and administrative petitions – 4, *annona*, *collegia* and those regarding public edifices – 1. This large pool of contexts in which it's inserted, is also reflected in the diversity of rhetorical motives that is associated with: imperial ideal, equitable administration of justice by the emperor, their personal prominence or of his reign, *boni principes*, *virtutes caelestes principum*, *saecula optima*, *fama principis*, *felicitas temporum*, *saeculum vestrum*, *amor bonorum temporum*, *sacrae aures*, *aequitas temporum vestrorum*, *sacra humanitas*, *sacrosanctitas principis*. Hence, the open usage, by Symmachus, of a term from a traditional religious realm, pagan, could be understood in a way rather neutral, being influenced by the conventions of a bureaucratic-administrative type of communication, in which the senator, in order to recognise the

emperor's legitimate aspirations for a privileged religious statute, uses the traditional vocabulary that belongs to this sphere of his identity, that is still specific to a certain part of the Senate. From this point of view, the senator is not looking to persuade, rather on the contrary. *Felicitas* is only mentioned three times. It catches our attention the contexts in which this is used, where Symmachus particularises the emperor's *felicitas* with a specific type of *beneficium*. In two cases, he takes into consideration the *annona* crisis that threatens Rome and, in the other case, he offers personal privileges to a former soldier (*cornicularius*).

Finally, the political appellative used by Symmachus par excellence in *Relationes* is *princeps*, mentioned 30 times. We notice its high presence in *rel.* III (11 occurrences), where Symmachus tries to convince the emperor of his just position within the *Ara Victoriae* conflict. Its presence in correspondence may be characterised as follows: petitions with regard to jurisdiction – 6, political – 5, administrative – 3, *annona*, religious – 1. It is, therefore, Symmachus' preferred political appellative when he invokes emperors, including *divi*. Of course, the contexts where it is mentioned do reference *bonus imperator*, being able to distinguish certain normative behaviours of him, such as his moral excellence (*virtutes imperatoriae*), his equitable use of justice (*iustitia*), *beneficia* that he guarantees (*i.e.*, *munera*), his care towards subjects (*defensores salutis publicis*, *parentes humani generis*). Beside this, we also could also find reminiscences from main slogans of official propagandistic discourse, that reference the *fama temporum / sua*, *bona saecula*, *humanitas saeculi* or *felix saeculum*.

***Epistulae.*** In Symmachus' private correspondence, the imperial appellatives present less variety as they are less numerous - only eight of them; by comparison, in *Orationes*, we counted 15 and *Relationes*, 19. Hence, most of them are part of the category that emphasize the majesty and perennality of the imperial might (*aeternitas*, *optimus*, *maximus*, *bonus*), counting four. They are seconded by (*princeps*, *dominus*, *Augustus*), three. Lastly, they are accompanied by only one appellative from the moral sphere of the emperor, *clementia*.

*Aeternitas* is the most frequently used appellative from the sphere that shows the emperor's prestige, with six occurrences. Its usage in different contexts reveal Symmachus' expectations towards the emperor, namely the imperial patronage, the cultivation of a privileged relation (acceding to *comitatus*), resolving Rome's *annona* crises, his paternal concern for *provinciales*. They are rhetorically mediated by the usage of multiple *topoi*, such as *beneficium principis*, *auctor beneficii*, *bonus tempus*, *iustitia*, *dominus noster*, *salus principis* or *providentia principis*. *Optimus* and *maximus*, both with two occurrences, reference the protective care of the emperor towards the members of *amplissimus ordo*,

expressed by Symmachus in rhetorical contexts or through specific terms that refer to *concordia Augusti* (Stilichon – Honorius), *dignatio principis*, towards the senators through *officia*, *iustitia temporum*, *fama temporum* or *aequitas temporum*. Lastly, *bonus* is attested in connection to the senator's hope for the emperor to resolve the *annona* crises in *Vrbs*. For this matter, he addresses him by emphatically calling him *clementissimus et ad salutem publicam genitus imperator*, *dominus orbis*, invoking *beneficia sua*.

Regarding the appellatives from the sovereign power sphere, they are by far the most used protocolary expressions that Symmachus addresses to the emperor. Thus, *princeps* is evoked 44 times. Important to mention are the adjectives that accompany it, *invictus*, *aeternus*, *fortissimus*, *clemens / clementissimus*, *divinus* or *veneratus*. These epithets frame the sovereign's complex image, that personalized the imperial ideal (*bonus imperator*) from the perspective of the Senate's expectation. The context in which the appellative is used help us to better understand the use of these adjectives. For this matter, Symmachus invokes it with the occasion of mentioning his imperial correspondence (*divinae litterae*), of ceremonies from the court (*dies imperialis*, *adventus*, the consulate), when obtaining indulgences, the emperor's concern for senators, his pursuit to obtain the political rehabilitation (*defensio panegyricus*), *annona* crises that threaten Rome, *commendaticiae* or *legationes senatuum*. The specific rhetorical language through which the above interests are mediated are extremely rich and diversified, the preferred syntagms are: *clementia temporum*, *indulgentia (principis)*, *beneficium (principis)*, *bona tempora*, *aequitas (principis)*, *providentia principis*, *fama temporum*, *gloria aeterna*, *salus divini principis*, *beneficia principis*, *patronus honorum nostrorum*, *iustitia principis*, *serenissima tempora*, *clementia principis*, *auctor beneficii*, *securitas imperii*, *abundantia (annona)*, *amor principis*, *sermo divinus*.

*Dominus* is the second most frequently used appellative, with 26 occurrences. Moreover, it is used in association with other appellatives that belong to the moral sphere. *Dominus* is used with appellatives that express the prestige of the imperial or military duty as such: *clementissimus princeps*, *augustissimus princeps*, *augustus*, *(dominus) noster*, *invictissimus princeps*, *aeternus princeps* or *(dominus) et princeps noster* or abbreviated, as we can find in *Relationes*, *d(ominus) n(oster)*.

The contexts in which it is invoked are as diverse as those of *princeps*, overlapping sometimes: *salutationes (officium amicitiae)*, the ceremonies from the court (*dies imperii*, *adventus*, consulate), imperial patronage, juridical processes (*negotium Siciliense*) or the imperial correspondence. The ideological motives that accompany these *epistulae* refer to

*concordia publica, sanctum divinumque iudicium (principis), beneficium principis, fama, iudicium parentis publici, auctoritas principis (juridical), bona tempora; aevum principis.*

*Augustus* is the least mentioned appellative, appearing only three times. The contexts in which it is used describe different interactions between the senator and the imperial Court, which evolve from Symmachus' attempt to gain his political influence to the imperial patronage or *concordia* with the *de facto* leader of the Empire, Stilichon, during the crisis caused by Gildo. For this matter, he invokes *clementia principis* which refers to the emperor as *patronus honorum nostrorum, i.e.*, appointing members of the senatorial order to *officia*.

At last, *clementia*, the only appellative from the moral sphere, is used by Symmachus only four times, during an exchange of a recommendation letter (*commanditicia*), with respect to the cultivation of *amicitia*, supply crises and the consulate ceremony. Within these three contexts, Symmachus refers to the imperial power through multiple traditional *topoi* associated with it in the official speech, that reference his benevolence, *beneficia* that he guarantees, him being a saviour (*salus princeps*), his concern towards his subjects (*providentia*) or his absolute power (*dominus noster*), that can resolve any problem.

Up until now we documented the language of power in his oeuvre. Therefore, in the representation of sovereign power we could, indeed, reveal certain patterns that, on one hand, underline specific statutes of the emperor, emphasised by Symmachus in his writings, and on the other hand, the constant recurse that he makes to the ideological motifs and themes deeply established in the official discourse. Next, we will focus on the specific circumstances in which Symmachus positions himself towards the imperial power in order to see what type of political communication he adopts.

**Orationes.** The *laudationes* that Symmachus held at the imperial court, from Augusta Treverorum, in honour of Valentinianus I and his successor, Gratianus, shall be interpreted in a larger picture of the events that happened. The senatorial embassy, lead by the young orator in 368, was missioned to represents the interests of the senatorial body in relation to Pannonian emperor. Thus, the encomiastic speeches (*Or. I-III*) that he held on this occasion, point out, in a way, the diplomatic effort to communicate the senators' support and loyalty towards the sovereign. Its official form, as *panegyrici*, is conventional, specific to that time and, furthermore, the most recommended in such sensible political situations; Symmachus' rhetorical abilities were even more important. Within these discourses we can see the official forms through which this message was transmitted. In *Or. I* (26<sup>th</sup> of February 368), the orator underlines that Valentinianus is predestined to imperial *officium (mundi gubernacula designatus; futurus Augustus)*, the martial qualities that recommend him, his noble

descendance, from Gratianus Maior, *recusatio imperii* (his *verecundia*), his aggressive military policy (*tibi nullae sunt feriae proeliorum*) or *concordia Augusti* with his brother, Valens (*similis pietas*). Therefore, here, Symmachus adopts the genre's traditional prescriptions. In *Or.* II (1<sup>st</sup> of January 370), instead, based on his own experience (*autopsia*), he focused especially on those *beneficia* that the emperor guarantees to Empire, namely restating the superiority of Roman military, the submission of barbarians beyond the Rhine *limes* (*alamanni*). On a civic plan, the emperor's reign marks the return to the free public life, ensuring *securitas imperii* (*libertas forensis eloquii, triumphum pacis egisti*). Ultimately, in *Or.* III (25<sup>th</sup> of February 369 / 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 370), he legitimises the young Gratianus' appointment as emperor's successor, expressing his hope in his capacity to ensure a *novum saeculum* for the Empire (*spes novi saeculi*). Furthermore, his fragile age constitutes an advantage (*annos vincis officiis*). In his discourses' *corpus* that he held in front of the Senate (*Or.* IV-VIII), the one that stands out is *Or.* IV, entitled *Pro Patre* (May/June 376), held during his father' appointment, Avianus, as consul for the following year (*consul designatus*). Here, Symmachus praises the reinstated *concordia* between *amplissimus ordo* and Gratianus, after the disturbing events associated with Valentinianus' rulership, the punishment of Maximus, the main responsible for the senators' persecutions. Even more important to keep in mind is the fact that the emperor, presented by the orator as *patronus* of the senatorial body, treated them to their right with high *officia* (*humanitatem vestram qui postulatis, clementiam principum qui dederunt*).

The power dynamic that Symmachus describes in *panegyrici*, in general, and in *Orationes*, in particular, is not dictated only by the interests from the imperial Court as the orator is, in this context, merely a speaker of these ideological *desiderata*. As Guy Sabbah mentioned, they presuppose a „fonction vehiculaire”, having an important role in defining the official discourse, mediating between the general aspiration of the emperor and the particular interests of various groups of power, in our case, the Senate. Moreover, as Sabine MacCormack remarks, panegyrics may contribute to the edification and interpretation of the official messages, promoted on coins or official art. In this context, the senator's “capacité de invention politique” is recognised, so he brings along an active political „agency”, to put it in terms that are popular in archaeological literature today. This dialectic, mediated rhetorically between the court's expectations and those of various social groups from across the Empire, can be well put by using Guy Sabbah's formula, through two levels of political communication. A „communication descendante”, in which the orator takes, interprets and communicates the imperial Court's aspirations, as we previously saw on Symmachus with

regard to Valentinianus and his heir. A „communication descendante” in which the panegyrist rhetorically mediates the expectations of the groups of power that he represents in certain contexts. Moving on, we will further focus on the latter type of communication.

Throughout the speeches held at the imperial court as well as in Senate, Symmachus promotes a senatorial agenda on the normativity of power exercise. The sphere of this normativity, rhetorically mediated, mainly includes the relations between the emperor and *amplissimus ordo* and the role of Senate in governing the Empire, *via* the sovereign patronage. Regarding the first aspect, in *Or. I, 20*, for instance, Symmachus proposed a veritable code of imperial conduct. On one hand, he recommends the emperor to be *severus* in judging the political cases, and, on the other hand, he advises him to be *clemens*, with regard to personal *iniuriae* that appear. Furthermore, the emperor’s *ira* should be channelled on the real enemies of his reign, *inimici* that do not obey him: *Tu in casibus, tuis clemens, severus in publicis turpe existimas principi motus odii habere privati. Merito ergo a nobis amplius amaris, quia pro te minus irasceris. Nescis uti manu regia contra domesticas simultates. Si erubescis tuas iniurias ultum ire, audi, imperator, quod te acuat: nostri inimici sunt qui rebellant.* Considering the nature of power relations during this time, which are personalised, *iniuriae* could very easily be transformed into *crimenes maiestatis*, as it happened later, with regard to the trials of high treasons that some senators were accused of, under Valentinianus I. Symmachus’ preoccupation with an exemplary moral behaviour is not gratuitous at all. Thus, in *Or. IV, 10*, he salutes Gratianus’ decision to exemplarily punish (*damnatio capitis*) the main organizer of anti-senatorial trials, Maximinus, through a moralising language. In the interpretation proposed by Symmachus about the events, they were exceptions from *exempla saeculi mores*, being the work of some *improbi* animated by *invidia*. So, those from the administrative hierarchy alone are guilty and not the emperor: *delicta potestatum fuisse, non temporum.* The cooperation ideal, on this plan, between the Senate and the emperor is suggestively expressed by the orator as a convergence of interests (*senatus causa iungeretur tuae*), so the emperor applies (sic!) *severitas* in the particular cases of certain *offensae nobilitatis*: *[p]ostquam ventum est ad communes querellas adhibuisti severitatem qualem reliqui principes maiestatis tantum negotiis exhibebant. Actum erat, clementissime imperator, de iniuria tua, nisi nobilitas fuisse offensa.*

Regarding the Senate’s role in governing the Empire, this shall be an active political factor, collaborating with both the emperor and with the main elective body, the army (*senatus castrensis*). In *Or. IV, 7*, the function of the new elective body is presented, as imagined by Symmachus, in which the senators propose suggestions for *officia*, which are,

afterwards, confirmed by the sovereign: *eligunt pares, confirmant superiores*. In turn, the soldiers emulate these cordial relations with the senators: *[i]dem castris quod curiae placet*. In this way, the new configuration of public space ensures the system's legitimacy, expressing that *consensus universorum*: *[q]uis hoc non putet orbis terrarum esse iudicium?* In this context, the relevant political bodies indicated by Symmachus are the emperor, the Senate and the army.

With the appointment of Symmachus' father in consulate, by Gratianus's regime, a new phase is inaugurated, this time one of collaboration with the imperial power, a reason for which the orator may openly praise *restitutio concordiae*. The relation between the Senate and emperor is, of course, personalized, channeled by feelings of affection towards him – *principes nostri*, being imagined here through the metaphor of body: *[a]t nunc idem principes nostri quod proceres volunt. Unum corpus est rei publicae adque ideo maxime viget, quia capitis robusta sanita valetudinem membrorum tuetur*.

**Relationes.** The senator's administrative correspondence during his mandate as *praefectus Vrbi*, illustrate the best a „communication ascendante”. In order for us to better understand this type of political communication we have to consider the context in which this correspondence happened. *Relationes* is the public version of Symmachus' administrative correspondence with the imperial court from Mediolanum. That being said, they are not just some simple administrative *testimonium* but they are elaborated, stylised literarily, rhetorically, as per the required exigences of the epistolary genre. As Maggi Creese noticed, they document Symmachus' intention to produce political change, making use, for this purpose, of his identity as orator. The audience of this correspondence is not, indeed, limited to the bureaucratic hierarchy (*contra*, J.-P. Callu). As it is suggested to us by the petitions' content, one of the persuasion strategies that Symmachus adopts is to convince them that he represents the unitary will of the senatorial body and of *plebs urbana*. Moreover, the two (political) bodies, in turn, must be persuaded of his just actions. Therefore, in order to balance the asymmetrical relation of power within the imperial Court, the senator sets himself up as an active imperial magistrate, that has the *Vrbs*' political support. Additionally, taking advantage of his oratorical *fama*, he strives to gain favourable responses to his remitted petitions. For these purposes, he tries to mediate the difficult administrative, civil, juridical problems, by using different rhetorical strategies that emphasise the political and cultural continuation between the imperial present and the republican past. As a privileged agent, able to manipulate this type of discourse on “memory”, Symmachus tries to obtain a positive political response, by using his own private and collective *auctoritas*, the Senate's, in his relation with

Valentinianus II. In this context, the imperial appellatives that we analysed account also for an important active function, not just a protocolary one, within the larger rhetorical scheme of persuasion, adopted by the prefect.

*Epistulae.* The Symmachus' private correspondence (365-402) brings in discussion, to some extent, the possibilities and limitations of the epistolary genre, for this time, in cultivating the *amicitia* relations. Even here, Symmachus adopts more *personae* from his position of loyal correspondent *via salutationes (officium amicitiae)*, or *patronus*, who recommends, *via commendaticiae*, his *clientes*. The imperial figure that he evokes in his epistolary exchanges with his *amici* or important *palatini*, with only one exception (*Ep. X, 2*), is no longer directly involved in political communication. Through *Epistulae*, Symmachus' contribution is, on one hand, to document the political discourse that mediates the formal interaction through *amicitia* between the imperial or senatorial elite members. On the other hand, the contexts in which the sovereign power is invoked suggests how important it is to adequately master the official language when communicating with other agents of the emperor. From this point of view, we can affirm that in this situation we find an indirect ascendant political communication, *via palatini*, in which Symmachus' grievances are remitted and legitimised in the name of traditional consensus, accepted by the normative exercise of power. Therefore, the imperial appellatives used by the author emphasise the specific spheres of activity, in association with the emperor's exercise of power. To give only one example, in one of his *epistulae* to Ambrosius (*Ep. III, 33*), aiming at convincing him to release his protégé, *vir optimus* Marcianus, from paying the *pretia annonarum* when he was *proconsul Africae* (393-394), Symmachus, in order to legitimise his request, invokes *clementia imperialis*, as imperial policy recommended in such situations – to rehabilitate some of the partisans of former political opposition by giving certain *beneficia*, here, of fiscal nature.

Approaching towards the end of our interpretative endeavour, considering the larger ideological context, we will consider the imperial appellatives as an epiphenomenon of official communication within the ceremonial political culture in Late Antiquity.

*Paideia*, as Peter Brown noticed in his book, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity Towards a Christian Empire*<sup>8</sup>, offers the Empire's elite from the IV<sup>th</sup> century a common political idiom through which the power relations with the imperial Court could be negotiated. As we showed, in the second chapter, we generally find, within successive imperial cultures, a

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Toward a Christian Empire*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1992, *passim*.



constant preoccupation with obtaining the consensus of different relevant parts of public life, through various communication *media*, or public ceremonies (*adventus, panegyrici*). Thus, as Clifford Ando remarked, Rome offered discursive, “conceptual spaces”, through which the political, social and economic categories could validate the aspirations of sovereign power. Hence, the imperial ideology, without encouraging the involved collective or individual political actors to mechanically adapt to a certain ideal, imposed itself through a much more subtle mechanism, namely, it offered them the chance to actively “socialize” within certain normative boundaries, by openly participating in building the consensus. These interactions define, on one side, the statute of those involved in interactions with their peers but also vertically, with other power actors, and on the other side, they ensure the continuity of the political system, by implicitly recognizing its legitimacy. To borrow the sociological concept that belongs to Pierre Bourdieu, the imperial culture may be defined as an *habitus* that super-organizes the relations of power between different actors, on the horizontal and vertical levels of power. Unlike the modern variants, that are “infrastructural”, totalitarian, the Roman variant lack the unique source of authority, the “scripture” – Clifford Ando, as they are extremely decentralized.

In this interpretation, the political actors are “liberated”, escaping from the tyranny of supra-historical forces that shape their decisions, as it is postulated in Marxism, for instance, or from the mere cynicism motivated only by the individual interests, equally reductionist. Endowed with *agency* and, especially, with the correct understanding or intuition of power relations that they engage in, they can actively and creatively contribute to defining their statute on the map of political affairs. We mention here that the function of the ideological discourse has two sides: one of them is to guarantee its legitimacy and the other is to communicate the accepted forms of interacting with the sovereign.

It is the last point upon which we will further focus. As demonstrated until now, we can observe in Symmachus’ works a specific political communication, one that is open, rhetorically constructed, that evolves between the emperor and the Senate, in Late Antiquity. The interpretation of such „communicative actions” necessitates a complex theoretical fundament. But, in order to be able to offer an answer, in this sense, we considered that for our purpose, of great importance are Jürgen Habermas’s observations on the rules of communication. The theory that he proposes for this matter is the “theory of communicative actions” through which he tries to explain the foundation that guarantees the universality of

communication between diverse social actors<sup>9</sup>. As he noticed, regarding their intention: "[i]n communicative action, participants are not primarily oriented toward their own individual successes, they pursue their individual goals on conditioning that they can harmonize their plan of actions on the basis of common situation, definitions"<sup>10</sup>. Thus, for the communicational action (political) to be successful it is vital that the participants do not jeopardize the common normative boundaries that they share (*Verständigung*) – e.g., *paideia*, at Peter Brown. As we have seen, based on the *testimonia* offered in his writings, Symmachus highlights, any time it is necessary, the legitimacy of his statements by calling the common political imperial tradition that he shares with his audience. Furthermore, this is his main rhetorical strategy through which he legitimises his aspirations. Starting from this common fundament, it becomes possible to reach the understanding, and later the unity (*Einigung*) or the accord (*einverständnis*) between participants. But what is that „pre-theoretical knowledge of competent speaker” that allows the successful delivery of a dialogue? In the case of Symmachus, it is, first and foremost, the traditional political vocabulary, inspired by the official discourse of power formed during the Imperial period and the active role of Senate, that he represents, in governing the Empire during the Republican or early Imperial period. As we underlined in the second chapter, the most important particularity of the discourse of power in the Roman world is its ambition to build the legitimacy by actively engaging the participation of the main political bodies in reaching the consensus. Therefore, Symmachus’ decision to communicate with the imperial authority is based on a revered tradition, accepted and never openly contested, of defining the limits of power exercise *via* the aspirations that the emperor himself claims. In the case of our author, we followed this dialogue through the imperial appellatives, which delimitate the specific spheres of competence that belong to the emperor. We can state, in consequence, that between Symmachus and the sovereign, the established political communication was based on common, shared, accepted presuppositions. As the German philosopher emphasised, it is a rationally motivated agreement (*Zustimmung*).

The merit of the theory put forward by Jürgen Habermas is that it goes beyond the limited models that emphasise mainly the importance of private interests of the participants involved in a communicative action, as analysed in other theories of communication, and draws attention upon the context that mediates such interactions („formal pragmatics”). In the case of the political communication in Late Antiquity (that is extremely formal and

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<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., translated by Thomas MacCarthy. Beacon Press, Boston, 1984-1987.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, *What is Universal Pragmatics?*, in Maeve Cook (edited by), *Jürgen Habermas. On the Pragmatics of Communication*, MIT University Press, Cambridge MA, 1998, p. 48.

ceremonious), this observation is even more important as it shows the essential role that the political tradition played in defining these relations of power. The imperial appellatives are not, therefore, merely simple protocolary formulas but they show, orient and define, sometimes in an imperative way (see *Relationes*), the sovereign power's sphere of actions in the interest of a specific political actor, individual or collective, based on a common understanding, *consuetudo*.

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