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The Rhetoric of Corruption  
in Late Antiquity

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by

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The Dissertation of Tim W. Watson is approved:

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### The Rhetoric of Corruption in Late Antiquity

by

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Faced with the ubiquitous presence of immorality and corruption in the written sources of the late Roman empire, modern scholars have often viewed such accounts as direct reflections of conditions during this period. The historian Ramsay MacMullen, for example, attributes to the fourth-century expansion of the imperial bureaucracy the spread of an ethos of venality and the displacement of aristocratic networks of patronage by the indiscriminate exchange of favors for money. Christopher Kelly, on the other hand, sees such descriptions as merely a rhetorical manifestation of elite anxieties over their loss of influence in an increasingly heterogeneous society. I argue that neither of these views is wholly correct. Instead, the rhetoric of corruption served the traditional upper classes of the empire as a tool of fashioning self and group identity. This can be seen in the writings of three contemporary elite authors, the conservative Roman senator, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, Antioch's official teacher of rhetoric, Libanius, and the

bishop of Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianzus. In his letters and speeches, Symmachus focuses primarily on two classical vices, corrupt solicitation and luxury, in order to re-establish the boundaries of proper senatorial conduct. In constructing corruption in this manner, he demonstrates the appropriate mixture of business (*negotium*) and leisure (*otium*) in a senator's life, and clarifies what constitutes a dignified *otium*. Libanius uses the language and imagery of corruption as a means of reinforcing the traditional connection between education and virtue. The self-control developed specifically in the labors of rhetorical training curbed the inclination to turn public office into a source of personal profit. Lastly, Gregory of Nazianzus interweaves Christian imagery and biblical references into classical depictions of corruption and vice in order to fashion the ideal bishop as a philosopher and thereby grant special distinction to the hierarchy of the Christian church. Yet, in spite of their differences, central to the rhetorical strategy of all three authors is a conception of nobility that privileged virtue over wealth and birth. Ultimately, then, the rhetoric of corruption served as a means of assimilation in an era of unprecedented social mobility.

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## Introduction

### Towards a Rhetoric of Corruption

Corruption permeates the ancient sources, both Greek and Roman, poetry and prose. In classical Athens, the Peloponnesian War and the corresponding accumulation of wealth and proliferation of στάσις provoked some to reflect on the “disintegration and degeneration” not only of the political system of democracy but also of the institution of language itself.<sup>1</sup> During the succeeding century, prominent politicians frequently accused their opponents of bribery in the law courts and endured allegations of venality in the performances of the comic poets.<sup>2</sup> Rome, too, was witness to vivid descriptions of systemic and individual corruption. There was a consensus among Roman moralists that the wealth initially derived from imperial expansion in the second century BCE infected the Republic with ambition and greed, rendering the senate and people of Rome susceptible to bribery, exposing the conquered provinces to extortion, and ultimately resulting in violence and civil war.<sup>3</sup> During the principate, the educated elite of the Roman empire viewed the threat posed by venality as no less potent, focusing their anxiety in the figure of the emperor.<sup>4</sup> Greed and luxury became attributes of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Kallet 2001 on Thucydides and Euben 1986 on Euripides’ *Orestes* (quote from 224).

<sup>2</sup> Strauss 1985 and Taylor 2001a and b.

<sup>3</sup> Lintott 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Switala 1979.

rhetorical bad emperor, who spread his personal corruption through his courtiers to the city of Rome and the empire as a whole. Indeed, many of the sources of the late Roman empire, both Greek and Latin, as well as pagan and Christian, depict the culmination of this process, describing a state that had completely succumbed to the temptation of venality from its two-fold core, the imperial court and Roman senate, to the provincial periphery.<sup>5</sup>

Modern scholars, faced with the ubiquitous presence of immorality and corruption in the sources, have been inclined to view such accounts as descriptions of real behavior. The frequency of accusations of venality in Athens meant that the Athenians were indeed venal, and the laments of the Roman moralists are conclusive evidence of widespread decadence in ancient Rome. The most significant proponent of this interpretation in late antique studies is Ramsay MacMullen. Although his impressive *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* has now passed the twentieth year since its publication, MacMullen has reiterated his adherence to this earlier thesis in a recent discussion of the effectiveness of Roman government under the emperors.<sup>6</sup> Thus, he continues to maintain the existence of a shift from the responsible exercise of influence by the Roman elite on behalf of friends and dependents during the early empire to the indiscriminate exchange of favors for money under the later Roman empire of the fourth and fifth centuries. MacMullen sees the reasons for the increasing dominance of this “ethos of corruption” in the late empire

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<sup>5</sup> MacMullen 1988.

<sup>6</sup> MacMullen 2006. MacMullen’s thesis has recently been introduced to a much wider audience through Murphy 2007: 91 – 120.

as twofold: first, the expansion of the size and influence of the Roman state during and after the third century, and second, the occupation of many of these newly-created governmental posts by common soldiers and freedmen. Such practices as bribery and extortion had always existed among the “slaves, freedmen, supply sergeants, and petty accountants” of the empire, he argues, but only in the Roman imperial government of the fourth and fifth centuries do such individuals occupy positions of substantial authority.<sup>7</sup> The resulting treatment of public and private power as sources of profit drastically reduced the efficiency, and therefore the effectiveness, of the Roman state in both the administration and the defense of its empire.

Although MacMullen’s general exploration of the exercise of power in the Roman empire is instructive and has marshaled behind it the author’s vast and impressive command of the primary source material, his specific thesis has provoked considerable scholarly criticism over the last two decades. Recent scholarship has urged caution when employing such a morally laden term as “corruption” and emphasized the necessity of examining this theme within its proper cultural and historical contexts.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in his study of late Roman bureaucracy, Christopher Kelly confidently asserts, “In the end, few would disagree that it would be both inapplicable and ill conceived to attempt to understand corruption in any historical bureaucracy through the imposition of patterns

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<sup>7</sup> MacMullen 1988: x.

<sup>8</sup> Both of the articles on corruption in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* emphasize this necessity. See, most recently, Kleinig and Heffernan 2004.

and prescriptions derived from modern Western morality and institutions.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, in attempting to assess the impact of such a culturally embedded notion as corruption on the equally slippery, and very modern, concept of administrative efficiency within the unfamiliar context of governance in the later empire, MacMullen is doing precisely that. Furthermore, he has inadvertently involved current scholarly debate over the nature of late Roman government in a series of related controversies in the social sciences that one scholar has collectively termed the “Great Corruption Debate.”<sup>10</sup>

This debate has its origins in the late 1960s when a number of “revisionist” political scientists examining the processes of modernization “found that corruption could, at least occasionally and sometimes systematically, have a beneficial impact on a range of important goals: ‘nation-building’, economic development, administrative capacity, and democratization.” Although subsequent studies in the literature of political science and economics have often contested and consequently moderated this perspective, the revelation that practices considered “corrupt” by modern Western standards might in some ways promote government efficiency and prove beneficial to the goal of modernization has cultivated the prevalence of cost-benefit analyses among social scientists. However, regardless of the centrality of this sort of analytical methodology in the social sciences, there remains little agreement concerning the practical consequences of political corruption, let alone consensus on its definition. As a result, scholars who

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly 2004: 3.

<sup>10</sup> Hutchcroft 1997: 643f. See also Heywood 1997 and, more recently, Saxonhouse 2004.

study this phenomenon frequently place themselves in “rival camps,” regarding such behavior as “either an overall good or an overall bad.”

It is possible to detect within contemporary late antique scholarship a growing body of literature concerning governance and law that reflects certain aspects of this social scientific debate. While MacMullen has adopted a position more consistent with the traditional, moralistic approach, scholars who write with his work in mind, such as Christopher Kelly and Jill Harries, have largely eschewed the terminology linked with notions of “corruption” and advocate the effectiveness of late Roman government and the efficacy of its laws.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, these more recent studies employ many of the same sources as their more traditional counterparts, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis, but arrive at virtually opposite conclusions. For example, Kelly’s *Ruling the Later Roman Empire* also examines the exercise of power in late antiquity, specifically those very phenomena MacMullen blames for the increasing impotence of the central government, that is, the expansion of the imperial bureaucracy, the charging of fees for government services, and the purchase of bureaucratic offices. However, Kelly views this “shift in the pattern of power” away from the traditional influence exercised by patronage and personal connections as deepening imperial control and heightening its effectiveness through a greater degree of regulation and rationalization.<sup>12</sup> The numerous accounts of corruption in the sources are more a rhetorical manifestation of aristocratic

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<sup>11</sup> Kelly 2004 and Harries 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly 2004: 108.

anxiety than a reflection of reality, since “by and large it was not in the long-term interests of the majority of provincial bureaucrats to charge extortionate prices. For the most part, these were local men with local concerns.”<sup>13</sup> At the heart of this debate lies a quandary faced by all students of ancient history. Even if agreement can be reached on what exactly constituted “corrupt” behavior, there is simply not enough data to arrive at a conclusive evaluation of the costs and benefits of such phenomena in the late Roman empire. This, in turn, gives rise to the tendency of ancient historians to adopt their individual perspectives from the sources themselves. Thus, Kelly’s sympathies lie with John Lydus, the sixth-century bureaucrat whose writings provide the foundation for his study, and MacMullen’s viewpoint bears a striking resemblance to the hostile, and highly rhetorical, reactions of the traditional elite.

Although neither of these two positions can be demonstrated conclusively given the relatively scanty nature of the evidence, the approach taken by scholars such as Kelly does have the virtue of a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the sources. In his 1993 review of *Corruption and the Decline of Rome*, Bryan Ward-Perkins questions the actual existence of a novel and pervasive ethos of venality in the late Roman state: “I am unconvinced that what [MacMullen] claims to have been a substantial change is more than a different and more explicit rhetoric and language of corruption in the late Empire.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, on several occasions MacMullen himself highlights the remarkable

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<sup>13</sup> Kelly 2004: 145.

<sup>14</sup> Ward-Perkins 1993: 265.

homogeneity of a diverse array of late antique sources on the topic of corruption.<sup>15</sup> What he neglects to mention, however, is the literary nature of his evidence and its place within a well established and increasingly elaborate rhetorical tradition. Kelly, on the other hand, rightly views such descriptions of corrupt behavior as “part of a complex and highly charged rhetoric of execration.”<sup>16</sup> He argues further that many of the literary figures of the fourth and fifth centuries who had been indoctrinated into the hegemonic system of classical education (παιδεία), including both pagans and Christians, employed accusations of venality in response to the growing imperial bureaucracy and the alternative means of accessing the central government that it offered. Kelly’s discussion of this widespread literary phenomenon, however, is largely directed against MacMullen and seeks to disassociate this particular brand of moralizing from any sort of attempt to reconstruct an objective reality for the late Roman empire. Thus, there is a great deal of room left to discuss more precisely the role that this “rhetoric and language of corruption” played in late antiquity. I intend to uncover this rhetorical phenomenon in the literature of the late Roman elite and to examine its role both in the (re)construction and demarcation of a corporate aristocratic identity and in the self-representation of the individual author within that identity.

The fourth century was witness to a number of historical trends that threatened the privileged position and social cohesion of the traditional elite strata of the Roman empire,

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<sup>15</sup> MacMullen 1988: 164, 175, 185, and 193.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly 2004: 165-181, quotation from 167.

that is, the senatorial order of Rome and the curial classes who dominated the eastern Greek cities. In 324, following his victory over Licinius, Constantine founded a new capital on the site of Byzantium and created a new senate as part of his efforts to garner political support in the east.<sup>17</sup> Although the members of this body were initially of lower status than those of the senate in Rome, Constantine's son, Constantius II, partitioned the senatorial order in the mid-fourth century based solely upon geography, an action that could not have been taken unless the collective status of the senate of Constantinople had been raised to equal its Roman counterpart.<sup>18</sup> In addition to establishing a second aristocratic institution of equivalent standing in the east and circumscribing both bodies geographically, the emperors of the fourth century normalized and extended the practice of bestowing senatorial status upon those who held military offices and positions in the expanding imperial bureaucracy. Moreover, the means of access to and advancement in the imperial administration was diversified to include more than the traditional practice of exercising personal influence through the extensive networks of patronage that continued to permeate late Roman society.<sup>19</sup> The appointment and promotion of individual bureaucrats could now be based upon such distinct, and often contradictory, criteria as proficiency, seniority, inherited right, and money, in addition to the more customary criterion of personal influence. Consequently, not only did the number of senators in the

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<sup>17</sup> Heather 1998: 184-191.

<sup>18</sup> Skinner 2008 argues that the partition of the senatorial order between Rome and Constantinople occurred not in the late 350s (the traditional date is 357), but following the division of the empire in 337, and posits a more significant role for the policies of Constantine in laying the groundwork for this development.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly 1998, 162-175 and, more fully, Kelly 2004.

late empire rapidly and markedly increase, but the enlarged order was also far less socially homogeneous than in previous centuries.

These changes greatly impacted the social fabric of the long-established πόλεις of the eastern empire as well. The *curiales*, who occupied the apex of the civic hierarchy and were responsible for tax collection and various municipal services (λειτουργία), were offered unprecedented opportunities for social advancement outside their native cities, either through the numerous positions available in the central palatine ministries or the provincial administration, or by direct enrolment in the senate of Constantinople.<sup>20</sup> As touched upon above, local elites who pursued these new career paths were granted the equestrian title of *perfectissimus* or one of the three grades of senatorial status, *clarissimus*, *spectabilis*, or *illustris*, in ascending order; thus, they became *honorati*. Although many such individuals remained in Constantinople as professional politicians, a substantial number only briefly held imperial positions or received honorary titles, and therefore enjoyed the benefits of high status in their own communities. During the fourth century, these included immunity from curial obligations; thus, as the *honorati* grew in numbers, there were fewer *curiales* to sustain municipal services and, of greater concern to the central government, to collect local taxes. Historians of late antiquity, taking their cue from the sources themselves, have long seen this phenomenon as a factor in the

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<sup>20</sup> Heather 1994: 21 – 33.

decline of the empire.<sup>21</sup> More recent scholarship, however, has begun to cast this development in a more positive light. Peter Heather points out, “The so-called ‘decline of the curials’ is as much a story of local elites coming to participate more fully in imperial structures, and hence a sign of success.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, because their privileged status granted them easier access to both the governor and the imperial court, these resident *honorati* ascended to the top of the civic hierarchy and drastically altered pre-existing networks of patronage and influence. The cities of the Greek east therefore saw the rise of a new class of elites, but one largely derived from the traditional curial aristocracy. Nevertheless, boundaries of class had to be reset and long-established codes of conduct reinforced.

The expanding imperial administration, however, was not the only source of social ambiguity and anxiety in the Roman empire of the fourth century. Over the course of his long reign, the emperor Constantine had not simply ended the persecution of the Christian community and restored its property, he had initiated a relationship between the central government and the Christian church that forever altered the social fabric of this newly enfranchised religion.<sup>23</sup> Ecclesiastical organization converged with the structure of the imperial administration, tempting bishops to manifest worldly ambition as each

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<sup>21</sup> The standard narrative is still that of A. H. M. Jones, who, based primarily upon evidence from the *Codex Theodosianus*, portrayed the central government in a continuous struggle during the fourth and fifth centuries to prevent *curiales* from flooding the imperial bureaucracy; Jones 1964: 732 – 763.

<sup>22</sup> Heather 1998: 205f.

<sup>23</sup> Hunt 1998: 238 – 276. Hunt draws a distinction between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the “secular” imperial administration, but given the religious imagery that famously dominated court ceremony and ritual in late antiquity, I am loath to use the term “secular” in this context; see MacCormack 1981.

competed for prestige and increased status within the church hierarchy. The central government provided funds for the construction of churches and the maintenance of Christian charity, and granted members of the clergy tax privileges and immunities from local civic duties. As the recipient of personal patronage from both Christian emperors and an increasing number of Christian aristocrats, the church became the proprietor of a rapidly increasing amount of wealth and property. A substantial portion of the revenue and resources of the church was to be devoted to the works of Christian charity, providing assistance to the poor, maintaining monks, widows, and virgins, and caring for the sick and prisoners. As these efforts became more organized, the bishops and clergy who administered them increasingly usurped and modified the traditional Greco-Roman practice of beneficence, and attained the prestige and influence that accompanied local civic patronage.<sup>24</sup> The bishop became, in the words of Peter Brown, the “governor of the poor.”<sup>25</sup> Under these circumstances, the hierarchy of the Christian church offered to the educated urban elite an alternative route to public standing and financial privilege that was more lasting and secure than a career in the imperial bureaucracy, and retained a large degree of independence from courtly influence. However, the emerging role, and increasing perception, of the church as an institution devoted so much to worldly affairs provoked anxiety amongst an increasing number of prominent and classically educated

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<sup>24</sup> Brown 1992: 89 – 103. On the role of Christian almsgiving specifically, see Finn 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Brown 2002: 79.

Christians, who sought to distance the image of themselves and their religion from the corrupt and corrupting material world.

In order to explore the full breadth of these trends on the rhetorical construction of corruption during this period, I shall examine one author from each of the elite strata discussed above: Q. Aurelius Symmachus (c. 340 – 402), a leading voice in the senate at Rome; Libanius (314 – 393), a member of one of the leading families of Antioch’s city council; and Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330 – 391), a second-generation Christian bishop from the curial elite of Cappadocia. I have selected these three figures in particular for two reasons: first, they were close contemporaries, and therefore permit a synchronic view of the rhetoric of corruption across the empire, shortly before the permanent political division of its eastern and western halves in 395, and the disruptive Germanic migrations in the West that began in earnest during the first decade of the fifth century. Second, all three were renowned for their rhetorical ability and their steadfast defense of the classical literary tradition. As such, they acted as conduits for classical conceptions of corruption into late antiquity (and beyond), and thus provide insight into how this rhetorical construction changed over time.

The study that follows is organized into four chapters, each focusing on a specific narrative of corruption within the lives of the chosen authors. Because these narratives cross the boundaries of genre, I have incorporated evidence from orations, letters, and even poetry into my investigation. I begin with Symmachus, devoting the first two chapters to this staunch defender of the Roman *mos maiorum*. Chapter 1 traces the theme

of corrupt solicitation (*ambitus*) over the course of the senator's career. Throughout his corpus, this peculiarly republican crime is linked with its cognate, *ambitio*, and cast as a disruptive element to the political and social order of Rome, a threat to the harmony (*concordia*) and reputation (*fama*) of the senatorial order. In this context, *ambitus* serves as a foil for traditional senatorial values such as *verecundia* and *pudor* that the Roman elite believed were cultivated in the exercise of patronage. Thus, in refashioning this classical vice, Symmachus intervened to curb the ambitions and influence of both the rapidly growing number of senatorial bureaucrats and those members of the more established families of the Roman senate whose conduct he deemed un-senatorial. Whereas chapter 1 focuses on the affairs of state (*negotium*), chapter 2 addresses corruption in the sphere of senatorial leisure (*otium*). Here, Symmachus draws on the vices of idleness (*desidia, ignavia, inertia, languor, segnitia*) and luxury (*luxuria, luxus*) both to valorize *otium* over *negotium* during a period of increasing senatorial participation in imperial administration and politics, and to fashion an *otium cum dignitate* for himself and his friends during the lengthy periods between offices.

From the symbolic core of the Roman empire, I turn next to the provinces of the Greek east and the imperial centers of Antioch and Constantinople. Chapter 3 explores the connection between political corruption and the decline of traditional Greek education (παίδεια) in the writings of Libanius, Antioch's official sophist. Within his vast corpus of orations and letters, this professor of rhetoric constructs a narrative that attributes the erosion of intellect and the undermining of self-discipline to the growing popularity of

the rival studies of shorthand writing and Roman law. As secretaries and legal experts gained prominence in local society and attained positions within the imperial administration, political confusion replaced prudent governance, violent abuse supplanted eloquent civility, and administrative philanthropy gave way to officially sanctioned extortion. In this way, Libanius refashions the literary and rhetorical education offered in his classroom as a valuable asset to those who sought a career in the expanding government apparatus.

Finally, chapter 4 looks at the rhetoric of corruption within the literarily fashioned life of Gregory of Nazianzus. This Christian curial and second-generation churchman employs the language of luxury and greed, ambition and envy to meld the classical image of the philosopher and the late antique figure of the Christian bishop. By interweaving Christian imagery and biblical references into more traditional descriptions of corruption and vice, Gregory establishes the boundaries of an *otium cum dignitate* that is simultaneously classical and Christian, and depicts an ecclesiastical hierarchy that is immune to the venal practices so commonly associated with the imperial court and administration during this period.

This study in no way claims to be an exhaustive treatment of the depiction of corruption in late antiquity. Rather, by examining specific facets of this rhetorical construction within a representative sample of the elite strata of the fourth-century Roman empire, it argues for the continued vitality and importance of traditional aristocratic views of good governance and social organization. The writings considered

here neither offer a direct reflection of reality, as per MacMullen, nor represent what Kelly refers to as “hectoring, cartoon rhetoric,” that is, an impotent reaction to socio-political change rather than an active participant in it, but instead provide a glimpse into the evolution and transmission of classical elite values into the medieval west and Byzantine east.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kelly 2004: 184.

## Chapter One

### The Bounds of Ambition: Symmachus and the Aristocracy of Service

Among the numerous recommendations within the epistolary corpus of Q. Aurelius Symmachus is one written on behalf of Antistianus, an otherwise unknown Roman senator (*vir ordinis nostri*). In this letter, 9.38, Symmachus prevails upon an anonymous imperial official to grant his colleague retirement (*portum privatae quietis*) from a lengthy tenure in office, probably as *defensor civitatis* for his hometown (*diu patriae suae functus defensionem*).<sup>27</sup> While the letter begins and ends with Antistianus' virtues, the honesty of his life (*probitate vitae*), the honorable fulfillment of his obligations (*honestis officiis*), and his trustworthiness and diligence (*fide atque industria*), it is in fact the nature of his desire (*qualitas desiderii*) that indicates his recommender writes truthfully rather than to curry his favor (*ex vero potius quam in gratiam eius*). To encourage a favorable outcome for this request, Symmachus implicates his recipient in this shared world of senatorial values:

*quae res tibi commendabilem faceret, etiamsi meus non interveniret adfatus. Soles enim pro tua virtute diligere cupidos otii et nescios ambiendi.*

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<sup>27</sup> Roda 1981a: 160 – 162 and Callu 2002: 108 discuss Antistianus' possible position as *defensor* and the law codes relevant to this office.

This fact would commend him to you, even if my words were not intervening. For you are accustomed, in accordance with your virtue, to cherish those who long for leisure and are ignorant of soliciting.<sup>28</sup>

The late Roman senatorial aristocracy often articulated a preference for *otium* in their lives and literature. Naturally, this attitude also infiltrated the works of various non-senatorial authors of the period; thus, the historian Ammianus Marcellinus criticized Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus, the wealthy and influential head of the ancient gens Anicia, because he “languished like a fish out of water if he was not in office.”<sup>29</sup> Modern historians who have examined this phenomenon focus primarily on the *cupido otii*, interpreting it either as a direct reflection of an aristocratic retreat from the dangers of public life or as an affectation studiously cultivated by a politically resurgent senatorial elite.<sup>30</sup> No one to my knowledge, however, has dealt directly with its corollary, the *nescium ambiendi*.

In this chapter, I shall examine the definition and function of *ambitus* in the literary corpus of Symmachus. This peculiarly republican form of corruption appears twenty-five times in the writings of this senator of the late empire, occurring sixteen times in the correspondence.<sup>31</sup> The letters also reveal six instances of the verb *ambire*, divided equally between its gerund and infinitive forms. Yet, as O. F. Robinson has

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<sup>28</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 9.38. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>29</sup> Amm. Marc. 27.11.3: *Atque ut natantium genus, elemento suo expulsum, haud ita diu spirat in terries, ita ille marcebat absque praefecturis*, trans. by Hamilton 1986; see also *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* 55.

<sup>30</sup> Cracco Ruggini 1986 best represents the former view, while Matthews 1975: 1 – 31, the latter.

<sup>31</sup> Lomanto 1983: 51f.

pointed out, *ambitus* “was essentially a crime of the Republic,” encompassing various forms of electoral bribery and, consequently, subject to an extensive series of laws.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the last of these, the *lex Iulia de ambitu* of 18 BCE, fell under the scrutiny of the third-century CE jurist, Herennius Modestinus, who succinctly observed, “This law is obsolete in the City today, because the appointment of magistrates belongs to the supervision of the emperor, not to the good-will of the people.”<sup>33</sup> Symmachus himself counts among the advantages of his age (*nostrī saeculi bona*) the absence of “the shameful wax tablet, the sorting ballots corrupted by mobs of clients, the venal ballot-urn; elections now are settled between the senate and the emperors. They select equals and encourage the more distinguished.” (*abest cera turpis, diribitio corrupta clientelarum cuneis, sitella venalis; inter senatum et principes comitia transiguntur: eligunt pares, confirmant superiores*).<sup>34</sup> To the senate of fourth-century Rome, the sordid and degrading elections of the assemblies, with their “tribes polluted by freedman and plebeian dregs” (*tribus libertina ac plebeia faece pollutas*), seemed a thing of the distant past, obsolete and withered (*obsoleta atque arida*). Why, then, is *ambitus* so prominent in the correspondence of one of its leading members?

I argue that Symmachus (and, no doubt, many of his peers in the Roman senate) used and adapted the cultural and literary construct of classical *ambitus* to refine the

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<sup>32</sup> Robinson 1995: 84 – 86.

<sup>33</sup> *Dig.* 48.14.1 pr.: *Haec lex in urbe hodie cessat, quia ad curam principis magistratuum creatio pertinet, non ad populi favorem.*

<sup>34</sup> *Symm. Or.* 4.7.

boundaries of senatorial status at a time when they were becoming increasingly permeable. This term, and the act that it signified, is rooted both linguistically and conceptually in the vice of *ambitio*. Together, these cognates play an important role in the Roman historiographical tradition, where charges of *ambitio* are frequently leveled against subversive plebeians, demagogic generals, and *populares* opponents of the senate.<sup>35</sup> I propose that this connection between “ambitious” behavior and the *humiliores* of Roman society remained strong among the classically imbued senatorial aristocracy of late antiquity, making the language of *ambitus* particularly effective in demarcating a corporate elite identity and defending traditional conceptions of *nobilitas*.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the Symmachean corpus, *ambitus* is portrayed as a disruptive element to the political and social order of Rome and its senate. It disturbed the observance of the traditional state cult, interfered in the proper administration of the city, and threatened the dignified *concordia* and, as a result, the *fama* of the senatorial order. In this way, Symmachus intervened not only to curtail the potentially destructive rivalries of his social equals, those members of the more established families of the Roman senate, but also to curb the corrosive ambitions of the rapidly growing number of *arriviste* senators from the imperial bureaucracy.

### **De Verbo Dubio: A Brief History of Ambitus**

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<sup>35</sup> See McDonnell 1986 and Lintott 1990.

<sup>36</sup> For Christian involvement in the construction of *nobilitas*, as well as that of Ammianus and Symmachus, see Salzman 2001.

The Romans themselves, it seems, found *ambitus* to be “dubious,” for this word is included with its cognate *ambitio* in a short treatise on Latin words of uncertain form or usage attributed to the second century CE grammarian, Flavius Caper. According to the *De Verbis Dubiis*, one speaks of *ambitio* “while it is happening,” *ambitus*, “after it has been done.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, *ambitus* was viewed as a direct manifestation of *ambitio*, more specifically of that *ambitio* associated with an excessive desire for political power and influence. Yet, rather than narrowing the range of meaning of this word, the linguistic connection illustrated by this treatise only serves to increase its ambiguity. While modern historians frequently translate this word as “electoral corruption” or “corrupt solicitation,” and at times more explicitly as “bribery,” it remains a term that eludes precise translation, encompassing not only illicit forms of pursuing political office, but also circumlocutory and verbose discourse, vainly ostentatious deportment, and exaggerated and bombastic rhetoric.<sup>38</sup> Still, the rich array of meaning conveyed by *ambitus* for the most part derives from its association with *ambitio*, signifying various shameless and dishonest means of obtaining favor. In order to understand the meaning and function of so elusive a word in the writings of Symmachus, first it will be necessary to examine briefly its wider role in Rome’s history and literature.

*Ambitus* is sparse in the extant Roman annalistic tradition, appearing explicitly only once within the first ten books of Livy. Yet this single reference is significant, since

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<sup>37</sup> Keil 1880: 107: *Ambitio, quando fit; ambitus, cum factus est.*

<sup>38</sup> *OLD* s. v. 2. *ambitus* 2; cf. *ambitio*. This, of course, excludes the literal definition of “going around,” the circumference of a circular object, and the rhetorical period.

it fits within the broader context of political struggle between the plebeian and patrician elites that dominated the republican period. According to the Augustan historian, the first law *de ambitu* was passed in 358 BCE.<sup>39</sup> Attributed to a tribune of the people, C. Poetelius, and confirmed by the senate, this plebiscite sought to check the *ambitio* of new men particularly, “who were accustomed to frequent the weekly markets and village meeting-places” (*qui nundinas et conciliabula obire soliti erant*), both focal points for the *tribus rusticae*.<sup>40</sup> The *lex Poetelia*, however, was not the first attempt to restrain canvassing. Seventy-four years earlier, in 432, the tribunes of the people had passed the first enactment against *ambitio* in collusion with the *principes plebis*.<sup>41</sup> Some among these plebeian leaders had believed the canvassing and machinations (*ambitione artibusque*) of the *patres* had obstructed their path to office, and that they would be successful “if the plebs were allowed a respite from the intermingled entreaties and threats of the patricians” (*si plebi respirare ab eorum mixtis precibus minisque liceat*). To this end, they had urged the tribunes to propose a law prohibiting candidates from adding white to their clothing while seeking office, essentially preventing them from becoming *candidati*. A similar concern over the influence of the *nobiles* surfaced in 314, when conspiracies among the local elite of Capua (*occultae principum coniurationes*) prompted

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<sup>39</sup> Livy 7.15.12 – 13.

<sup>40</sup> Frayn 1993 draws a distinction between *macella*, daily markets that catered more to the elite, and the mainly rural clientele of the *nundinae*.

<sup>41</sup> Livy 4.25.9 – 14.

the senate to appoint a former plebeian consul, C. Maenius, as dictator.<sup>42</sup> After the suicide of the leading Campanian conspirators, Maenius transferred the proceedings to Rome on the assumption that “coalitions formed for the sake of obtaining offices were contrary to the interests of the state” (*coitiones honorum adipiscendorum causa factas aduersus rem publicam esse*). The *nobilitas*, however, unifying behind their indicted peers, “denied that this was a crime of elites, for whom the path to office lay open in the absence of deceit, but of new men” (*negare nobilium id crimen esse quibus, si nulla obstetur fraude, pateat via ad honorem, sed hominum nouorum*). These investigations ultimately were quashed by the very coalitions and factions (*coitionibus factionibusque*) that they had been established to eliminate. Although scholars have questioned the historical veracity of these three narratives, as well as the motivations ascribed by Livy to their participants, together they reflect a very real and persistent Roman anxiety over the extent and form of personal influence and patronage in politics.

The sources of the late Republic abound in accusations of *ambitus* and record an extensive series of *leges de ambitu*.<sup>43</sup> While it became increasingly common to use the courts as a political battleground and an arena for personal rivalries, laws curbing electoral corruption advertised their sponsors to the Roman people as champions of the *mos maiorum* and expert moralists. The textual evidence makes it clear that *ambitus* involved much more than money, depicting laws that penalized various types of bribery

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<sup>42</sup> Livy 9.26.5 – 22.

<sup>43</sup> See Lintott 1990 and Gruen 1974: 159 – 161, 212 – 224, and the index under “*Ambitus*” and “Electoral bribery.”

agents (*divisores, sequestres, sodales*), eliminated attendants (*nomenclatores, adsectores*), and forbade candidates from holding or attending banquets and distributing gifts, such as free gladiatorial shows and seats at the games. However, many of these activities fell within the traditional bounds of the elite institution of patronage. How, then, did Roman aristocrats distinguish between the growing scope of *ambitus* and patron-client relations during this period? M. Tullius Cicero notes in his *De Oratore* that, on occasion, an advocate may be able to draw a distinction in court between the virtuous exercise of *liberalitas* and *benignitas* and the criminal activities of *ambitus* and *largitio*.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the renowned orator previously had put theory into practice in his successful defense of both a consul-elect, L. Licinius Murena, and Cn. Plancius, an equestrian candidate for the aedileship. In the case of the former, Cicero adeptly secured the acquittal of an individual who had most likely violated the very law that he himself had authored, the *lex Tullia de ambitu*. He accomplished this, in part, by appealing to both Roman tradition and the patron-client relationship between the poor (*homines tenues*) and their fellow tribesmen of substance who are honorable and generous (*bonis viris et beneficis*).<sup>45</sup> Thus, while Cicero insists that his client abstained from bribes and gifts of any sort, the shameful dispensing of money, he also systematically redefines each charge, the *sectatores*, the *spectacula*, the *prandia*, as the customary duties of a patron: “All of these are the obligations of friends, the profits of the poor, and the duties of candidates” (*omnia haec*

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<sup>44</sup> Cic. *De Orat.* 2.105: *et de ambitu raro illud datur, ut possis liberalitatem atque benignitatem ab ambitu atque largitione seiungere.*

<sup>45</sup> Cic. *Pro Mur.* 67 – 77, quote from 73.

*sunt officia necessariorum, commoda tenuiorum, munia candidatorum*). Yet, for all the rhetorical dexterity of the *Pro Murena*, Cicero himself admitted in his later treatise that even the ideal orator was rarely (*raro*) successful in making such a fine distinction.

Augustus himself authored the last of these *leges de ambitu* in 18 BCE as part of an extensive program of moral reform and a propaganda campaign that identified *libertas* with *securitas*. Indeed, the senatorial historian Tacitus notes that, among the provinces, senatorial rule was already associated with *ambitus*, lending credence to the claims of Caesar's heir:

*Neque provinciae illum rerum statum abnuebant, suspecto senatus  
populique imperio ob certamina potentium et avaritiam magistratum,  
invalido legum auxilio quae vi ambitu postremo pecunia turbabantur.*

Nor did the provinces reject that state of affairs, for they were suspicious of the administration of the senate and people because of the rivalries of the powerful and the greed of the officials, while the protection of the laws was inadequate, as they were constantly thrown into chaos by violence, improper influence, and finally money.<sup>46</sup>

Like his more politically savvy predecessor, Tiberius understood the importance of the duty of restraining *ambitus* to the image of the *princeps*. Tacitus mentions on three occasions in his *Annales* Tiberius' efforts to suppress the disorder and injustice that accompanied this vice. The most significant of these occurred at the very beginning of his reign in 14 CE, when the elections were transferred from the Campus Martius to the senate:

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<sup>46</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.2.

*nam ad eam diem, etsi potissima arbitrio principis, quaedam tamen studiis tribuum fiebant. Neque populus ademptum ius questus est nisi inani rumore, et senatus largitionibus ac precibus sordidis exsolutus libens tenuit, moderante Tiberio ne plures quam quattuor candidatos commendaret sine repulsa et ambitu designandos.*

For up to that day, though the most important rested with the emperor's choice, some were settled by the partialities of the tribes. Nor did the people complain of having the right taken from them, except in mere idle talk, and the Senate, being now released from the necessity of bribery and of degrading solicitations, gladly upheld the change, Tiberius confining himself to the recommendation of only four candidates who were to be nominated without rejection or canvass.<sup>47</sup>

During the succeeding consular elections, Tiberius maintained this image, urging the candidates not to throw the elections into chaos by canvassing (*hortatus ne ambitu comitia turbarent*) and promising them his support (*suam curam*).<sup>48</sup> To Tacitus, however, skeptical of both this particular *princeps* and the principate as a whole, Tiberius' behavior served only to demonstrate his own *dissimulatio* and accentuate the bitterness of the senate's inevitable descent into *servitium*. This connection drawn by the historian between the repression of *ambitus* and the loss of senatorial freedom also appears in the context of the senate's judicial functions. Dissatisfied with the legal deliberations of the *patres*, the *princeps* frequently sat at the end of the praetor's tribunal; thus, "many decisions were given in his presence, in opposition to improper influence and the solicitations of great men (*adversus ambitum et potentium preces*). This, though it

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<sup>47</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.15, trans. by Brodribb and Church 1942.

<sup>48</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.81.

promoted justice (*veritas*), ruined freedom (*libertas corrumpatur*).<sup>49</sup> Within this critique of Tiberius' administration, however, lie hints of another equally senatorial perspective. For even Tacitus must admit that the *ambitus* and *preces* of the *potentes* corrupted *veritas* and that the senate gladly (*libens*) relinquished the disgraceful necessity of courting of the plebs. In fact, Velleius Paterculus, also a Roman senator and historian, credits Tiberius with banishing strife (*sedition*) from the forum, canvassing (*ambitio*) from the Campus Martius, and discord (*discordia*) from the curia.<sup>50</sup> Thus, by the *exemplum* of this *optimus princeps*, "favoritism is vanquished by equity, solicitation by virtue (*superatur aequitate gratia, ambitio virtute*)."

Velleius' paean to the subjugation of *gratia* and *ambitio* proved premature, however, for senators remained politically active in the courts and elections continued to be highly contentious into the second century. Indeed, evidence for the occurrence of *ambitus* at Rome during the principate of Trajan is found within the published letters of Tacitus' contemporary and friend, Pliny the Younger. *Letter* 6.5 discusses the convoluted aftermath of the trial of Julius Bassus, who had been accused of extortion (*repetundae*) and other crimes following his tenure as governor of Bithynia-Pontus in 100 – 101.<sup>51</sup> Although condemned, he had received the more lenient of two proposed sentences (thanks, in part, to Pliny), and in response, the Bithynians indicted one of their own

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<sup>49</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.75.

<sup>50</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.126.2 and 4.

<sup>51</sup> Pliny discusses the trials of Julius Bassus and Varenus Rufus with Cornelius Ursus in a series of four letters, *Ep.* 4.9, 5.20, 6.5, and 6.13.

advocates, the proconsul Varenus Rufus. Pliny also spoke on behalf of Varenus, helping him obtain senatorial permission to summon witnesses from the province, a power traditionally accorded only to the prosecution. This decree, however, seemed unjust to an obstinate minority (*quibusdam iniquum et quidem pertinaciter visum*), especially the famously severe Licinius Nepos.<sup>52</sup> At the next session of the senate, this former praetor reopened the question, proposing to debate *sub exemplo legis ambitus de lege repetundarum* whether or not the substance of this decree should be added to the law. A fierce quarrel ensued between Nepos and a current praetor, Juventius Celsus, who rebuked his opponent for establishing himself as the *emendator senatus*. Thus, as during the republic, individual senators under the empire also sought to demonstrate their moral integrity as a form of symbolic capital.<sup>53</sup> Such demonstrations, however, could not only provoke discord within the senate, as was the case here, but also attract the unwanted and dangerous attention of the emperor, whose authority was based to a substantial degree on his own exemplary morality.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Pliny had watched these proceedings with disapproval, as certain senators “were praying for the emperor’s favor (*propitium Caesarem*), frequently for one or the other, sometimes for both, as though at some public show (*ut in ludicro aliquo*).” It was far more proper for the senate to prove its adherence to the *mos maiorum* as a unified body and in collaboration with their virtuous *princeps*.

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<sup>52</sup> Pliny, in fact, attempts to downplay Nepos’ *severitas* in a letter to Romatius Firmus, one of the judges in the Centumviral court, *Ep.* 4.29.

<sup>53</sup> Edwards 1993: 24 – 28.

<sup>54</sup> Of course, the importance of morality in fashioning the imperial image varied from emperor to emperor, but I think it is safe to say that Trajan assiduously cultivated a reputation for moral rectitude.

Letter 6.19 can be seen as a counterpart to 6.5. Although the subject of this letter is ostensibly the rising price of land in Italy, especially around Rome, in it Pliny devotes considerably more attention to the cause of this sudden increase, a campaign against *ambitus*. During the most recent elections, the senate had pronounced “the most honorable proposals that ‘Candidates should not hold banquets, distribute gifts, or deposit money (*Candidati ne conviventur, ne mittant munera, ne pecunias deponant*).’” Pliny notes that the first two of these practices were conducted both openly and excessively (*tam aperte quam immodice*), while the last, although carried out covertly, was quite well known (*quamquam occultaretur, pro comperto habebatur*). Vigilantly taking advantage of senatorial consensus (*vigilanter usus consensu senatus*), Pliny’s friend and ally, Homullus, proposed that Trajan be made aware of this collective desire (*desiderium universorum*) and petitioned to remedy this vice just as he had others (*sicut aliis vitiis*). In response, the *princeps* restrained the “shameful and disreputable” expenditure of candidates by invoking the canvassing law (*sumptus candidatorum, foedos illos et infames, ambitus lege restrinxit*). Additionally, he ordered that those seeking office invest a third of their patrimony in Italian real estate, thus prompting an intense rivalry for real estate throughout Italy and selling in the provinces, and allowing Pliny to return to the opening of his letter in ring composition.<sup>55</sup> While this letter explicitly discusses concern over the rising price of land, there is a deeper and unexpressed tension here as well, since, in curbing one form of *sumptus*, Trajan had unintentionally incited another. Pliny’s

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<sup>55</sup> For a more thorough discussion of ring composition in the letters of Pliny, see Hoffer 1999, esp. 13.

rhetoric smooths over this tension by mocking these overly ambitious candidates, even questioning their *Romanitas*. “Like foreigners” (*quasi peregrinantes*), he writes, they had regarded Rome and Italy “not as their fatherland but as an inn or stable” (*non pro patria sed pro hospitio aut stabulo*), and now “they ran to and fro” (*concurtant*) in a degrading contest of salesmanship (*certatim quidquid venale audiunt emptitant, quoque sint plura venalia efficiunt*). Pliny ends his letter, tongue-in-cheek, by suggesting to his recipient that, if he is sick of his Italian estates, now is the time to sell them and purchase land in the provinces. Thus, Pliny skillfully draws attention away from fundamental Roman anxieties over personal influence and aristocratic expenditure and accentuates his account of a unified senate and its virtuous *princeps* successfully restraining that more insidious manifestation of *sumptus*, *ambitus*.

This “golden age” of the early and mid-second century, defined in part by the harmonious relationship between senate and *princeps*, rapidly deteriorated after the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 into a period of economic instability, military dictatorship, and almost incessant warfare. As with most things throughout the tumultuous third century, the evidence for *ambitus* is sparse; however, this may not be due simply to the paucity of the sources. During this crisis, the emperor was increasingly absent from Rome and, when present, showed little respect for the traditional authority and prestige of the senate, at times even regarding the senatorial order with open hostility.<sup>56</sup> Instead, *equites* occupied most civil and military offices, diminishing the aristocratic competition for

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<sup>56</sup> See Talbert 1984: 488 – 491.

*honores* that formerly had encouraged *ambitus*. The jurists of the third century, increasingly influential and authoritative, reflect this state of affairs in their writings. As mentioned above, Herennius Modestinus concludes that this particular crime no longer occurred in Rome itself, but also notes its continued presence in the *municipia* to obtain local magistracies and priesthods.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, he expands the scope of the *lex Iulia de ambitu* to include those who have instituted a new tax (*novum vectigal instituerit*) and any defendant or plaintiff who enters the house of a judge (*reus vel accusator domum iudicis ingrediatur*). The spurious *Pauli sententiae*, compiled in the late third century, also mention *ambitus* in the election of provincial magistrates and priests, threatening deportation to an island for those who assemble a mob *suffragiorum causa*.<sup>58</sup> Yet, in spite of the persistence of this crime outside the city of Rome, *ambitus* disappears from both Roman law and Latin literature more generally, resurfacing in the imperial rescripts of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, as well as the literary corpus of Symmachus.

### **A Portrait of the Senator as a Young Man**

Among the Roman senatorial elite, ambition was a youthful indiscretion. During the waning days of the republic, Sallust admitted that, as an *adulescentulus* motivated by his desire to serve the state (*studio ad rem publicam*), he had been corrupted by this vice

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<sup>57</sup> *Dig.* 48.14.1.

<sup>58</sup> *Sent.* 5.30a.

(*inbecilla aetas ambitione corrupta*).<sup>59</sup> Thus he exchanged his *pudor*, his *abstinentia*, indeed *virtus* itself for *audacia*, *largitio*, and *avaritia*, those *malae artes* that he had so recently despised. Under the empire, Pliny equated *ambitio* with youth in a letter describing his recent stay with the veteran statesman Vestricius Spurinna. In 3.1, he praises this veteran commander who thrice held the consulship for his peaceful and well-ordered retirement (*placida omnia et ordinata*), juxtaposing it with the disordered and chaotic existence (*confusa...et quasi turbata*) suitable only to *iuvenes*. For *senes*, Pliny maintains, “activity is ill timed and ambition shameful” (*industria sera turpis ambitio est*). Symmachus, too, reflects this traditional association in a letter to the venerable senator and fellow *littérateur*, Julius (or Junius) Naucellius.<sup>60</sup> This late antique Nestor had announced that he was preparing for a rare visit to Rome from his literary haven at Spolegium and requested one of Symmachus’ urban *domus* as lodging. Symmachus, however, already had allotted this residence to some unnamed guests (*hospitibus*) and encouraged his friend to stay in his own childhood home:

*Siquidem domus, quae tibi prius ambitioso per aetatem iuventae et habitanti cum liberis satisfecit, senilem moderationem distributis in alias domus filiis non debet offendere.*

Since indeed that residence, which satisfied you earlier when you were eager for honor throughout your youth and while you were living with your children, should not offend the sobriety of your old age now that your sons have dispersed into other homes.

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<sup>59</sup> Sall. *Cat.* 3.3 – 4.

<sup>60</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 3.14.

Yet, although Symmachus adhered to this customary elite distinction between *iuventa ambitiosa* and *senilis moderatio*, in the letters he is noticeably defensive of his conduct throughout the whole of his public life, assiduously cultivating an image free of ambition and deeply embedded in the senatorial institution of *amicitia* and aristocratic *verecundia*. While such letters were no doubt written in response to specific historical incidents in the senator's life, they also constitute part of a broader rhetorical strategy within the Symmachean corpus that privileges the traditional values of the Roman senatorial elite in the administration of the empire.

Early in his political career, probably between his tenure as *corrector* of Lucania and the Bruttii in 365 and the embassy to the court of Valentinian I at Trier in 368, Symmachus wrote his first letter to the influential tutor of the young emperor Gratian, the Gallic poet Decimus Magnus Ausonius. He begins with a forceful condemnation of *ambitus*:

*Olim te mihi fecit optabilem cultu fama litterarum tuarum, sed diu officium scribendi per verecundiam distuli, ne in aula positum viderer ambire: cuius morbi ita crebra est adfectatio ut diligentes existimationis viri pro alienis vitiis erubescant.*

For a while now, the renown of your literary endeavors has made me wishful of paying you my respects, but I long put off the courtesy of writing because of modesty, so that I would not seem to solicit someone well-placed in the imperial court. The affliction of this disease is so common that men who value their reputations blush for the vices of others.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 9.88.1. Roda 1981b: 273 – 280 first argued that Ausonius was the recipient of this anonymous letter. This theory currently enjoys a great deal of scholarly consensus. However, for a recent attempt to disprove this argument, see Coskun 2002: 120 – 128.

The young senator, however, is quite confident that his letter will not be misinterpreted as the product of a shameless ambition, for Ausonius had apparently approached him first. Thus, “kindly invited” (*benigne accitus*), Symmachus enters the “open gates” of the poet’s friendship (*patentes amicitiae tuae fores*), promising more frequent letters to his new friend to compensate for the “delays of a modest silence” (*pudentis silentii moras*).

This anonymous letter in many ways embodies the ideals and conventions of the elite institution of *amicitia*. The relationship depicted within is based first and foremost upon a mutual appreciation for literature and facilitated by Symmachus’ old teacher of rhetoric (*per doctorem*) and Ausonius’ friend and colleague, Tiberius Victor Minervius.<sup>62</sup> It is a *iusta cognatio*, established through the proper channels and with the right motives, not one based on political expediency and the lust for power. Moreover, in spite of his desire, Symmachus rightly waited for the older and more influential Ausonius to write him, demonstrating the senatorial virtues of *verecundia* and *pudor*. In stark contrast to his own behavior, the young senator describes a virtual epidemic of flattery and vice at the imperial court. This is a perception that must have been widespread among the traditional elite of the senate and to which Ausonius himself later attests through an old observation of Cicero: “At the court, I say, he who reveals his face, conceals his

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<sup>62</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 9.88.3. For the career of Tiberius Victor Minervius and his relationship to Ausonius, see Booth 1978 and 1982.

thoughts” (*in comitatu, inquam, qui frontes hominum aperit, mentes tegit*).<sup>63</sup> Yet, just beneath Symmachus’ insistent claims to virtue and confident avoidance of vice lies that tenacious and unspoken aristocratic anxiety, “for friendship is obliging and by affection changes from sober consideration to more flattering opinions” (*gratiosa quippe est amicitia et a severo examine in blandiores sensus caritate mutatur*).<sup>64</sup> Thus, the difference between *amicitia* and *ambitus* continued to be slight into the late empire. Indeed, during a period in which alternative means of achieving influence threatened the traditional dominance of the elite culture of friendship, the need to maintain such a distinction must have acquired even greater urgency.<sup>65</sup>

Symmachus, of course, was not entirely free of ambition, pursuing the traditional *cursus honorum* to which senators of established Roman families were expected to adhere.<sup>66</sup> Thus, three years after returning from the court at Trier, he obtained the proconsular governorship of Africa (373 – 374). Upon retiring from this post, Symmachus wrote to an anonymous correspondent concerning “the wicked deeds of the envious or shameful decrees of the ungrateful” (*vel facta improba vel ingratorum foeda decreta*) that robbed him of the honor of public statues.<sup>67</sup> Drawing extensively from

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<sup>63</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.32.4. This is almost a direct quote of Cic. *Pro Planc.* 6.16. Cf. also Sall. *Cat.* 10.5: *Ambitio multos mortalis falsos fieri subegit, aliud clausum in pectore, aliud in lingua promptum habere, amicitias inimicitiasque non ex re sed ex commodo aestumare, magisque voltum quam ingenium bonum habere.*

<sup>64</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 9.88.2.

<sup>65</sup> Kelly 2004: 138 – 185.

<sup>66</sup> Heather 1998: 191 – 195.

<sup>67</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 9.115.

classical exempla, both Roman and Greek, the insulted aristocrat adopts in this letter an attitude of equanimity before *nequitia* and contempt for such monuments and “the public falsehoods of inscriptions” (*nihil moror statuas et publica falsa titulorum*). Instead, he declares, “In conscience alone is the reward and care for virtue” (*in sola conscientia est fructus et ratio virtutis*). In addition to Matthews’ “language of enmity,” then, Symmachus also deploys the Roman moralizing tradition within the rhetorical strategy of 9.115, redirecting the aims of proper elite ambition and effectively cloaking the dishonor he had suffered.<sup>68</sup>

Symmachus’ contemporary and fellow resident of Rome, Ammianus Marcellinus, illustrates that this particular aspect of the *mos maiorum* retained symbolic capital even among the increasingly diverse fourth-century elite. In the first of his extant digressions on the Roman senate and people, the historian criticizes the zealous pursuit of statues, “petty and insignificant things” (*exigua haec...et minima*), and categorizes senators who fall prey to this *vitium* among the few whose “disorderly fickleness” (*levitate paucorum incondita*) detracted from the *gloria* of Rome:

*Ex his quidam aeternitati se commendari posse per statuas aestimantes, eas ardentem affectant, quasi plus praemii de figmentis aereis sensu carentibus adepturi, quam ex conscientia honeste recteque factorum.*

Of these, some passionately strive for statues, calculating that through them they are able to entrust themselves to immortality, as if they will

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<sup>68</sup> Matthews 1986. Cf. Plin. *Pan.* 55, esp. 9: *Arcus enim et statuas, aras etiam templaque demolitur et obscurat oblivio, negligit carpitque posteritas: contra contemptor ambitionis et infinitae potestatis domitor ac frenator animus ipsa vetustate florescit, nec ab ullis magis laudatur quam quibus minime necesse est.*

attain more compensation from senseless bronze figures than from the awareness of their honorable and virtuous deeds.<sup>69</sup>

His exemplum is the elder Cato, who famously preferred that the virtuous (*boni*) wonder why he had not earned (*meruisse*) a statue than grumble that he had.<sup>70</sup> Although Symmachus adopts in part this Catonian image, his concern extends beyond his own *conscientia* to that of his recipient and those of similar good character: “But if I am to aspire to any honor of public testimony, I ought to be content with your opinion and those like you” (*quodsi mihi ullus honor testimonii publici adfectandus foret, iudicio tuo et similibus contentus esse deberem*). Indeed, Symmachus claims that the highest praise (*summam laudis*) is to obtain the approval (*probaret*) of a single good man (*optimus*). In this way, the rising senator casts himself as striving for the “long and difficult ascent to true glory” (*ad ascensus verae gloriae tendere longos et arduos*) that Ammianus thought proper for Rome’s *patres*.

### **Ambitus and the New Golden Age**

On the occasion of L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus’ nomination to the consulship of 377, the younger Symmachus followed his father’s *gratiarum actio* with a speech of his own, boldly reclaiming a dominant position for the senate within the body politic before a naturally receptive audience of his peers. What remains of this oration,

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<sup>69</sup> Amm. Marc. 14.6.8.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Plut. *Cat. mai.* 19.6.

the *Pro Patre*, offers an explicit contrast between the harmonious new administration of the youthful, but well-educated Gratian and the reign of fear and tyranny perpetrated by the officials appointed under the soldier emperor Valentinian I.<sup>71</sup> In the first extant portion, *ambitus* is a prominent theme, serving to accentuate the novelty of contemporary political circumstances. “These things are new (*nova*), which we are attempting,” Symmachus maintains, “but your kindness (*humanitas*) is an extraordinary (*inusitata*) assurance of my success.”<sup>72</sup> He continues:

*Egistis comitia non petentis; consulatum istum bonorum ambitus  
impetravit: vos recepistis candidati officia, nos designati.*

You have conducted the election of an individual who was not seeking office; the canvassing of the virtuous obtained that consulship. You have assumed the obligations of a candidate, we, those of a designate.

To Symmachus, his father’s consulship represented the realization of that ideal state envisioned in the writings of Velleius Paterculus and the younger Pliny. His election was held within the curia and affirmed both the *concordia* of the senate and the *pios mores* of the candidate. *Ambitus* is present, but Avianius’ lack of ambition transferred the *officia* of canvassing to a unified senatorial order and underlies the strikingly paradoxical image of the *bonorum ambitus*. Moreover, just as Symmachus’ *gratiarum actio* accords with “the law of men and gods” (*ius hominum et deorum*) as a performance of filial piety, the

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<sup>71</sup> On the complex relationship between Symmachus, the senate, and Valentinian I, see Humphries 1999.

<sup>72</sup> *Symm. Or.* 4.2.

unanimous request of the senate indicates a return to the traditional elite values of *verecundia* and *pudor*:

*Ubi sunt, qui falso animis inbiberunt, magis efficacem esse audaciam factionis quam voluntates bonorum? Nempe fugit repulsa virtutem et contra ambitus omnis ignavus est. Quod honeste poscitur, feliciter impetratur. Hoc ius patriciae genti tempora reddiderunt: postulatio vestra iudicium est. Impetrabilius cuncta nunc petitis, quam aliquando iussistis.*

Where are those who mistakenly regard the impudence of faction as more effective than the good will of the virtuous? Surely rejection puts virtue to flight and, conversely, improper influence is wholly lazy. That which is honorably requested, is successfully obtained. The times have restored this right to the patrician stock: your desire is the proof. You seek all things now with greater success than when you formerly designated them yourselves.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, in spite of the allegedly unprecedented atmosphere of his oration, Symmachus speaks of a restoration of traditional “patrician” morality, using terminology that is evocative of Tacitus’ Tiberius and the indolent *ambitio mala* that infected Sallust.<sup>74</sup>

Naturally, the true author of this “rare” (*raro*) golden age of consensus is Gratian, who, unlike the disingenuous *princeps* of the *Annales* or even his own father, shares the desire and purpose of Rome’s senate (*qui idem vellent, idem statuerent quod senatus*).

This harmony between *princeps* and senate, however, ended a lengthy (*olim*) period dominated by the anxiety (*sollicitudo*) of a *dominus* who was undeserving of his position (*quod ipse non merebatur*) and therefore distributed offices to individuals of

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<sup>73</sup> Symm. Or. 4.4.

<sup>74</sup> See p. 8 above, and Sall. Cat. 11.1 – 2: *Sed primo magis ambitio quam avaritia animos hominum exercebat, quod tamen vitium proprius virtutem erat; nam gloriam honorem imperium bonus et ignavos aequae sibi exoptant, sed ille vera via nititur; huic quia bonae artes desunt, dolis atque fallaciis contendit.*

equal disrepute. Under Valentinian's regime, Symmachus details the emergence of yet another novel species of *ambitus*: "Not to be loved was a certain kind of new canvassing" (*genus quoddam erat novi ambitus non amari*).<sup>75</sup> This atmosphere of imperial diffidence and thwarted *amor publicus* quickly raised the dregs of the human race to the very peak of the administration (*mortalium pessimos ad amplissimas potestates*). Thus, in accordance with traditional Roman political theory, the character and behavior of the emperor created a ripple effect throughout the western half of the empire.<sup>76</sup> As Valentinian gathered about him those who were "hostile" (*diversa*) and "displeasing to all" (*omnibus displicebant*), the *mores publici* fell prey to the seduction (*hanc inlecebram*) of this new *ambitus*. "So it used to happen," Symmachus concludes, "that the good, for whom all things were unfavorable, were either overwhelmed by the plots of the wicked or corrupted by their examples" (*ita accidebat, ut boni, quibus adversa omnia erant, aut opprimerentur improborum insidiis aut mutarentur exemplis*).

Fundamental to the distinction that Symmachus draws between the *bonorum ambitus* fostered by Gratian and the "hateful" canvassing of the previous regime are deep-seated Roman notions of class and social status. To the established families of the senate at Rome, the persecution suffered during the magic and adultery trials must have seemed a tragic, yet natural consequence of the composition of Valentinian's government. From 364 to 376, professional soldiers and career bureaucrats dominated the imperial

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<sup>75</sup> Symm. Or. 4.5.

<sup>76</sup> See Edwards 1993: 24 – 8 and Switala 1979; cf. Plin. Pan. 45 – 46.

court and administration, retaining their offices for unusually long tenures and penetrating even the traditional *cursus honorum* of the senatorial elite.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, throughout Italy and North Africa, a substantial number of the emperor's fellow Pannonians occupied administrative positions that customarily served as the starting point for senatorial careers, while at Rome, the tyrannical Fl. Maximinus was only one in a series of non-senatorial vicars and urban prefects. With the exception of a single Roman senator, the notoriously ambitious Petronius Probus, and one eastern lawyer, the opportunistic Domitius Modestus, the consulship too remained exclusively in the hands of the emperors, their sons, and their generals.<sup>78</sup> According to the *Pro Patre*, the young Gratian inherited this burdensome patrimony (*hereditatis onera*) of “depraved officials” (*malos iudices*) and a state corrupted by “wicked and foreign morals” (*improbi atque externi mores*).<sup>79</sup> However, by late April or early May of 376, six months after the death of Valentinian, the new ruler had repudiated many of his father's most noxious supporters, executing Maximinus and Fl. Simplicianus and imprisoning Doryphorianus,

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<sup>77</sup> More recent scholarship has sought to bring balance to the aristocratic bias that I am examining in this chapter by emphasizing the potential efficiency such individuals could bring to government; see Lenski 2002: 56 – 67, Matthews 1975, ch. 2, and, more generally, Kelly 2004, and Heather 1998 and 1994.

<sup>78</sup> In a letter of 370, Symmachus (a little too) exuberantly congratulates Probus on his appointment as consul for the following year, including among the proofs of his sincerity the fact that “political office, for a long time rare and exceedingly troublesome for the senatorial order, looks at last to a distinguished man of civil society” (*quia honor iam pridem togato ordini rarus nimisque difficilis tandem summam civium partium virum respicit*), *Ep.* 9.112. Seeck 1883: xxv n. 49 demonstrates conclusively that the recipient of this anonymous letter must have been Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus.

<sup>79</sup> *Symm. Or.* 4.10; cf. *Or.* 6.3, where Symmachus speaks of Valentinian's reign as a period “when many worthless men began [their careers] practically from the highest offices” (*...cum plerique hominum viliorum prope a summis potestatibus inchoarent*).

all of whom had served as *vicarii* of Rome during the *maiestas* trials.<sup>80</sup> Senators and literary men began once again to appear in political office both at court and throughout the western empire.

Drawing upon traditional literary imagery of the elite ideal of *concordia*, Symmachus portrays the developments of the first year of Gratian's reign as the restoration of a Saturnian golden age (*haec est illa Latii veteris aetas aureo celebrata cognomine*).<sup>81</sup> By the end of the extant oration, the *princeps* has piously reassumed his role as the *paterfamilias* of the aristocratic household that Symmachus equates with the Roman state (*pie regimur et quaedam pignora principum sumus, neque alia inter cives quam inter filios iudicii discretio*). Idleness (*ignavia*), the primary motivation for *ambitus*, is reformed by the rewards of virtue (*praemiis virtutis*), and the consulship is reserved for the honorable (*honorati*) and learned (*eruditi*). The new emperor's policies, his promotion of those "worthy of love" (*dignus amore*) as well as his *clementia* toward "the displeasing" (*quisquis displicet, non necatur*), are cast as an *emendatio* of Valentinian's corrupting regime; "for those who naturally lacked a love of virtue follow hope" (*nam quibus ab natura recti amor defuit, spem sequentur*). Earlier in the *Pro Patre*, Symmachus had offered an imperial refashioning of Livy's early republican parable of the belly and the limbs.<sup>82</sup> The *princeps* and the *proceres* were now unanimous

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<sup>80</sup> Amm. Marc. 28.1.57. For the timing of this repudiation, see Matthews 1975: 64ff.

<sup>81</sup> Symm. Or. 4.15.

<sup>82</sup> Symm. Or. 4.6; cf. Livy 2.32.8 – 12.

in their desires, thereby forming a healthy head that watched over the well being of the extremities and thus allowed the Roman state to thrive (*Unum corpus est rei publicae adque ideo maxime viget, quia capitis robusta sanitas valetudinem membrorum tuetur*). Within this atmosphere of political *concordia*, the consular elections in effect had been restored to the senate (*amor vester praerogativa est consulatus*) and, as a result, the “good” now occupied the imperial administration (*magistratus boni capiunt*), distinguished from their senatorial equals (*aequales*) only by their merits (*merita*). Chief among them, of course, was Symmachus’ father. Thus, the burgeoning orator concludes, he may be silent about *ambitus*, for “political office has returned to morals” (*ad mores rediit honor*).

### **The Reluctant Prefect**

Upon entering the urban prefecture in late spring of 384, Symmachus composed two *Relationes*, one to Valentinian II and a second to Theodosius, dutifully thanking each emperor for his appointment.<sup>83</sup> In both, the new prefect takes great pains to demonstrate that this honor did not result from his own ambition. Indeed, the very opening of the first *Relatio* defines and accentuates the virtuous circumstances of Symmachus’ promotion through a concise series of oppositions:

*Quieto mihi et iam pridem a desideriiis honorum remoto praefecturam multis cupitam sponte tribuistis. Ago gratias tot bonorum erga me principum voluntati, sed intelligo, quanto plus sollicitudinis habeat*

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<sup>83</sup> See Sogno 2006: 42 – 43.

*magistratus, qui ex iudicio, quam qui ex gratia venit. ille enim ut meritis datus spem sui debet aequare, iste ut per beneficium quaesitus a periculo expectationis alienus est, domini imperatores.*

While I was in retirement and far-removed from longings for office, you voluntarily bestowed upon me the prefecture coveted by many. I give thanks for the goodwill of so many good rulers towards me, but understand how much more anxiety an office that comes from deliberation holds, than one that comes from favoritism. For the former, since it is granted for merits, should equal the hope within it, while the latter, since it is sought as a favor, is free from the danger of expectation, Lord Emperors.<sup>84</sup>

Symmachus had long enjoyed a *quies* not only free of the traditional *sollicitudo* felt by the conscientious magistrate, but also in contrast to the excessive *desideria* and *cupido* for public office exhibited by many of his contemporaries. It is due in part to this lack of ambition, he implies, that the emperors selected him, doing so of their own accord (*sponte*) and motivated by *voluntas*. According to Symmachus, his position derived solely from the careful consideration (*iudicium*) of the emperors on the basis of his own *merita*, and was therefore untainted by imperial favoritism (*gratia*) and unseemly solicitation (*per beneficium quaesitus*). Although the senator expresses the same confidence in his own integrity as he did ten years earlier after being robbed of his honorific statues in North Africa (*mihi ad conscientiam satis est non adfectasse publicam curam*), he also echoes the *Pro Patre*, maintaining that the *virtutes* of *bonos magistratus* are contingent on the support (*favor*) and character (*mores*) of the *principes*.<sup>85</sup> In the

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<sup>84</sup> Symm. *Rel.* 1.1.

<sup>85</sup> Symm. *Rel.* 1.2.

second *Relatio*, too, Symmachus ostensibly subordinates concern (and responsibility) for his own reputation to that of the emperors (*nam in bonis magistratibus maiorem gloriam quaerit temporum fama quam iudicum*), describing his term in office as a *causa communis* between himself and his numinous patrons.<sup>86</sup> Yet this pressing appeal for the *favor perpetuus* of the eastern emperor betrays an anxiety over his *prior fama* equal to that of the first. For the new *praefectus urbi* once again emphasizes the unique circumstances of his appointment and his complete lack of ambition:

*Praefectos saepe fecistis et immensa aetate facietis, sed quos adsiduitas et usus ingesserit; me dudum proconsularem virum cedentem iam diu potentium moribus ante capere magistratum quam expectare voluistis.*

You have often appointed prefects and you will appoint many more over the course of your boundless reign, but unremitting service and experience recommended them. I, on the other hand, was just recently of proconsular rank, submitting for a long time to the caprice of the powerful; you wanted me to occupy the office even before I desired it.<sup>87</sup>

Although such expressions were indeed “conventional” and even “well-worn,” Cristiana Sogno also rightly points out the “strongly dramatic” character of his language in these two *Relationes*.<sup>88</sup> However, while Sogno views this as a manifestation specifically of the newly appointed prefect’s tenuous political position, his anxieties no doubt derived from broader social developments as well.

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<sup>86</sup> Symm. *Rel.* 2.3.

<sup>87</sup> Symm. *Rel.* 2.2.

<sup>88</sup> Sogno 2006: 42f.

The sudden and, in some cases, violent change in the composition of Gratian's court early in 376 naturally had been well received by the Roman senate. This drastic turn of events, however, overshadowed the more subtle continuation of a distasteful trend that had been fully institutionalized during the reign of the elder Valentinian, the extension of senatorial status to imperial bureaucrats.<sup>89</sup> In the context of the uninterrupted growth of this "aristocracy of service" under Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius, more established members of the senatorial order like Symmachus must have continued to experience anxiety over the imperial bureaucracy and their relationship to it.<sup>90</sup> In rhetorically negating his own ambition in the first two *Relationes*, the senator hints at this, noting to the young Valentinian that the urban prefecture is *multis cupitam* and claiming that Theodosius had appointed previous prefects based upon *adsiduitas* and *usus*. Of course, Roman senators were no strangers to *cupido*, as Ammianus illustrates in his history, and the prefecture of Rome was generally bestowed upon only the most prominent senatorial families. Yet Symmachus' choice of terminology in the second *Relatio* is so antithetical to the traditional elite pattern of brief and intermittent terms in office that it becomes possible to read into this letter a muted disapproval of this particular imperial policy.

The dutiful yet outspoken prefect did not conceal his opinion for long. In *Relatio* 17, Symmachus delicately requests the emperors appoint "better men" (*meliores viri*) in

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<sup>89</sup> See Heather 1998: 188 – 191 and Salzman 2002: 36 – 39.

<sup>90</sup> See, e.g., *CTh* 6.10.2 – 3, which were issued in 381 and together extended senatorial status to all *notarii*.

the future to head the minor offices of the urban prefecture. “To manage these,” he writes, “diligent and proven men should have been employed, so that each could accomplish his own duty with faultless ease” (*quibus regendis industrios et probatos oportebat adhiberi, ut suum quisque munus inculpata facilitate promoveat*). Symmachus, once again manifesting that *sollicitudo* characteristic of *boni magistratus*, makes no direct accusations against those currently in office (*sed nolo culpae praesentes*), but notes that the burden of the administration has fallen on his shoulders alone, since the rest of his officials have abandoned their duties (*cedentibus reliquis*). Boldly, if tactfully, he admits that this state of affairs has arisen not from the “happiness of the times,” which possess a “rich vein of good men” more worthy of such posts (*habet temporum felicitas digniores; bonorum virorum vena fecunda est*), but from the emperors themselves, who were too busy to approve (*probare*) such individuals personally. He concludes the letter with some conventional senatorial wisdom: “You will take better care for your city in the future, if you choose men against their will” (*melius urbi vestrae in posterum consuletis, si legatis invitos*). Several prominent scholars have commented on the seeming incongruity of such a principle to administrative efficiency.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the urban prefect says nothing of proficiency or experience, assuming that bureaucratic *facilitas* derives instead from *industria* and *probitas*. To the traditional elite of the Roman senate, however, offices were *honores* to be attained by those who demonstrated the character and self-control necessary to govern others. Symmachus felt so strongly about this principle that he

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<sup>91</sup> Jones 1964: 383f., Vera 1981: 132, and Matthews 1986: 165.

risked disputing the judgment of the emperors, an act he soon discovered was equivalent to sacrilege.<sup>92</sup>

In *Relatio* 21, Symmachus returns to the virtuous circumstances of his own appointment, shifting from a broader repudiation of ambition to the specific claim that he had ascended to the prefecture of Rome “without solicitation” (*sine ambitu*). Publicly censured by an imperial edict for misusing a recent decree intended to restore stolen temple properties in order to imprison and torture Christian priests, the astonished urban prefect attributes this “crude lie” (*crudum mendacium*) once more to a plot hatched by rivals (*insidias aemulorum*) and motivated by envy (*livor*). Symmachus responds to this purported drama at the imperial court in equally dramatic language, envisioning a single “inventor of that stage play” (*scaenae istius fabricator*) who shamelessly wept (*flevit*) as he misrepresented (*simularet*) the prefect’s “lawful investigation” (*iusta inquisitio*), which had not yet even begun, as a series of “tragic examinations by torture” (*tragicas quaestiones*). For, “without such cunning” (*sine his argutiis*), he argues, the “tranquil mind” (*serenum animum*) of the emperor could not have been induced to denounce “in terms more severe” than is his custom (*asperioribus, quam pietati tuae mos est, litteris*) a prefect who was chosen *sine ambitu*.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, although Symmachus also cites a letter of support from Damasus, the current bishop of Rome, and the prudently sealed records of the urban prefecture, he devotes almost equal space to his (senatorial) perspective on

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<sup>92</sup> *CTh* 1.6.9, addressed to Symmachus as *praefectus urbi* on December 28, 384: *Disputari de principali iudicio non oportet: sacrilegii enim instar est dubitare, an is dignus sit, quem elegerit imperator.*

<sup>93</sup> *Symm. Rel.* 21.2.

the nature of imperial administration and his role within it. As in the first two *Relationes*, the maligned senator dismisses the affront (*iniuriam*) done to the *praefectura* and his own *conscientia* and instead conveys his concern for the reputation of the emperor himself.

“For those who tarnish officials of the highest rank,” he maintains, “seem to reproach the emperor’s testimony as frivolous” (*nam qui summi loci iudices decolorant, sacri testimonii facilitatem videntur incessere*).<sup>94</sup> What Symmachus writes next comes somewhat as a surprise:

*Iam dudum me divus genitor numinis tui praecipuo honore dignatus est, ille meritorum arbiter singularis, cuius imperium cum moribus recepisti. Paternum sequere, tuum tuere iudicium: qui praefecturam sine ambitu meruimus, sine offensione ponamus.*

Long ago your Divinity’s deified father deemed me worthy of a distinguished office; he was a remarkable judge of merits, whose authority you received along with his character. Follow your father’s judgment, guard your own: let we who earned the prefecture without corrupt solicitation set it aside without disgrace.<sup>95</sup>

No doubt written with great irony, this passage brazenly refashions the emperor’s father into an exemplary *meritorum arbiter* for the young Valentinian. The prefect immediately follows this problematic exhortation with a theatrical demonstration of aristocratic virtue; for, he not only claims to have “merited” his prefecture *sine ambitu*, he offers his

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<sup>94</sup> Note that Symmachus carefully distinguishes criticism of *summi loci iudices* from that of lesser officials, such as he himself had offered in *Rel.* 17.

<sup>95</sup> *Symm. Rel.* 21.4.

resignation as proof.<sup>96</sup> It is possible then, that Symmachus is offering in this passage both his *fama* as a conscientious magistrate and his skills as a renowned orator and imperial propagandist in exchange for the emperor's support.

On two occasions in the *Relationes*, Symmachus expresses anxiety over the *ambitus* of others. These letters, I argue, can be included among the conservative senator's efforts to restore the traditional *mores* of a resurgent Roman senate in collaboration with the two legitimate imperial courts at Milan and Constantinople.<sup>97</sup> *Relatio* 44 describes the urban prefect's defense of the civic administration from "clandestine petitions" (*obreptivis supplicationibus*), which had previously reduced the numbers of the *mancipes salinarum* and therefore threatened the operation of the vital salt-pans at Ostia. When the guild petitioned the emperor to restore those members who had been retired and relieved of their duties (*secreti atque excusati*), they found that most were protected by the support of Gratian's influential *magister officiorum*, Macedonius (*muniri Macedonii suffragio*). Although Macedonius had fallen from power after the untimely death of his imperial patron in 383 and the *mancipes* had independently arranged with a fellow guild, the *navicularii*, to supplement their membership,

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<sup>96</sup> Since this *Relatio* was written while both Praetextatus and Damasus were still alive, and Symmachus did not, in fact, step down from his office for at least another two or three months, I am inclined to view this offer of resignation as a rhetorical device. McGuckin 2001a: 165 and 2001b: 357 note in the case of Gregory of Nazianzus that the pretense of abandoning one's post was a strategy taught to him by the sophist Himerius during his school days in Athens. An example may be found in Himerius' *Eclogue* 21, in which the sophist resigns from his official chair of rhetoric and is only persuaded to return by the public intervention of the learned proconsul of Achaëa, Strategius Musonianus. On the life and career of Himerius, see Barnes 1987.

<sup>97</sup> Sogno 2006, ch. 2 argues that this characterized the first phase of his tenure as urban prefect, but I maintain that he maintained this attitude throughout and after his prefecture with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Symmachus nevertheless was required to seek Valentinian's approval to annul "rescripts unjustly elicited" (*inique elicita rescripta*). Thus, he concludes:

*Erit iam sacrosancti numinis vestri et illorum antiquare suffragia, quos ostenditur ambitus liberasse, et his obstruere aditum supplicandi, quos sui corporis adiudicavit adsensus.*

It will now be the responsibility of your sacred Divinity to reject the support of those who are shown to have been exempted by corrupt solicitation, and to block the possibility of petitioning for those whom the agreement of their own guild assigned as it did.

There are two points in particular worth noting here. First, Symmachus again rather forcefully promotes a senatorial perspective in the operation of the central government, this time attempting to counteract the influence of "corrupt" parvenus and career bureaucrats like Macedonius. The *ambitus* that they abet disrupts the established order, permitting those who exploit it to escape their duties to the Roman state. To halt the spread of this corruption, Symmachus advises that such individuals should not be granted access to the court, effectively severing the connection between the corrupted and their corruptor. Second, according to this dispatch, it required the combined efforts of two *corpora*, the *praefectus urbi*, and the emperor himself to counteract at Rome the *suffragium* of a single, now disgraced imperial official (albeit the *magister officiorum*) in distant Milan.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps, then, Symmachus' anxiety was not entirely unjustified. Indeed, the ascetic Christian convert, Sulpicius Severus, claims that the venality of Macedonius reverberated throughout Gaul and Spain as well, after the "heretical" bishops, Instantius

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<sup>98</sup> Ironically, Symmachus was to conduct Macedonius' trial at Rome, but the former *magister officiorum* proved elusive; cf. *Symm. Rel.* 36.

and Priscillian, were able to elicit from him a rescript (*rescriptum eliciunt*) favorable to their cause through bribery (*largiendo et ambiendo*).<sup>99</sup>

Of greater concern to Symmachus than corruption within the civic administration, however, was the threat of *ambitus* to the senate itself. In his efforts to restore senatorial *dignitas* and the old Roman *mores*, the urban prefect found a far more willing (or perhaps more capable) collaborator in Constantinople. *Relatio* 8 offers thanks to Theodosius from that *ordo reverendus* for a “healthful” imperial rescript (*orationis salubritate*) and seeks his confirmation of the resulting unanimous (*nullo dissentiente*) decree from the senate. This *oratio* had proposed both restrictions on spending for games, which Symmachus claims “shameful ostentation” (*foeda iactatio*) had overwhelmed, and a restoration of senatorial procedure to its “ancient form” (*vetus forma*), in which the order of speaking was based on offices held (*honorum fortuna*), not entertainments provided (*ratio munerum*). In so doing, the prefect believes, Theodosius “has restored the good sense of antiquity to our morals and expenditures” (*et moribus et sumptibus nostris sanitatem veterem reddidistis*) and “returned virtues to their own dominion” (*ad regnum suum redisse virtutes*). Yet, in spite of all this, Symmachus has one additional request of the emperor, that a warning (*comminatio*) be added to this law, “lest any solicitation corrupt these decisions or those which you have ordained with divine wisdom on behalf of the

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<sup>99</sup> Sulp. Sev. *Chron.* 2.48.5: *Tum vertere consilia, ut, quia duobus episcopis, quorum ea tempestate summa auctoritas erat, non illuserant, largiendo et ambiendo ab imperatore cupita extorquerent. Ita corrupto Macedonio, tum magistro officiorum, rescriptum eliciunt, quo calcatis, quae prius decreta erant, restitui ecclesiis iubebantur.* Of course, Sulpicius was born into a prominent aristocratic family in Aquitania and received an education at Bordeaux no doubt similar to that of Symmachus, so the linguistic parallels are not as conclusive as they first might appear.

dignity of the senatorial order” (*si ullus aliquando ambitus haec vel illa corruperit, quae consilio caelesti pro ordinis dignitate sanxistis*). This *Relatio*, then, depicts the eastern emperor as yet another golden age *princeps*, sharing the principles of Rome’s senatorial elite and inspiring consensus within the curia. As urban prefect, however, Symmachus’ voice rises above the rest, enabling him to demonstrate an even more stringent adherence to the Roman *mos maiorum* and thereby accrue greater social capital than his peers. Indeed, with the right imperial patron, Symmachus could achieve immortality through Roman law as a champion of senatorial dignity and elite values; for, unlike the benefits of fortune, “laws alone, which proceed for the common good, are never allowed to fall” (*solae leges, quae in bonum commune procedunt, numquam patiuntur occasum*).

Unfortunately, Symmachus lacked the support of the Milanese court, where the young Valentinian II was subject to the competing interests of various court officials, his empress mother, Justina, and the bishop Ambrose. During his tenure as urban prefect, Symmachus had been publicly rebuked twice and failed in yet another attempt to restore the Altar of Victory to the curia and state funding and financial privileges to the traditional Roman cults. Thus when his comrade (*consors*) and fellow “defender of ancient virtue” (*antiquae probitatis adsertor*), Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, died in December of 384, the disillusioned and beleaguered prefect resigned shortly thereafter.<sup>100</sup> During these trying times, Symmachus sent a letter to Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, asking his close friend to return to Rome so that together (*adiutu inter nos mutuo*) they

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<sup>100</sup> Symm. *Rel.* 10.1.

might alleviate the rather serious troubles (*graviores offensiones*) that he currently endured alone (*solus experior*).<sup>101</sup> Foremost among these was a proposal of the Vestal Virgins to dedicate a statue to Praetextatus, which Symmachus and a few other like-minded traditionalists opposed as inappropriate to the reputation of the Vestals and contrary to custom (*neque honestati virginum talia in viros obsequia convenire neque more fieri*). However, fearing that open dissension among the *pontifices* would expose them to attacks by rivals (*sacrorum aemulis*), the conservative senator contented himself with a written response. “I replied only in writing that this precedent was to be avoided,” he confides to Flavianus, “lest an honor just in its origin quickly fall to undeserving individuals through corrupt solicitation” (*exemplum modo vitandum esse rescripsi, ne res iusto orta principio brevi ad indignos per ambitum perveniret*). Thus, even amidst personal tragedy and political defeat, Symmachus maintained his vigilance against the threat posed by *ambitus* to the *dignitas* of traditional senatorial institutions.

### **Princeps Senatus**

The years following Symmachus’ prefecture were difficult, involving periods of self-imposed exile in southern Italy and political disgrace stemming from his support of the usurper, Magnus Maximus.<sup>102</sup> Yet, thanks to his friends at the eastern court, including Flavianus, then *quaestor sacri palatii*, and the powerful *magister officiorum*, Fl. Rufinus,

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<sup>101</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 2.36.1.

<sup>102</sup> See Sogno 2006: 63 – 76.

he was able to repair his relationship with Theodosius by the fall of 390, when he was appointed to the consulship of the following year. When Valentinian II was found dead in his quarters at Vienne and the Frankish *magister militum*, Fl. Arbogastes, proclaimed the rhetorician Eugenius emperor in the summer of 392, Symmachus wisely avoided direct involvement with this latest usurper. Although Flavianus had accepted the consulship of 394 from Eugenius and committed suicide after the usurper's defeat, from the battle at the Frigidus until his death (probably in 402), Symmachus exercised his greatest influence at the imperial court and, consequently, in Rome, acting as the *princeps senatus*. During this period, he voiced his concern over *ambitus* on two occasions, both involving the dignity and prestige of the senate.

In *Ep.* 6.22, to his son-in-law, the younger Nicomachus Flavianus, Symmachus discusses the shameful behavior involved in the debates over the composition of a senatorial embassy. "But as regards our fatherland," he writes, "the corrupt solicitation at the heart of an embassy has set a more destructive fire among the other woes caused by a grain shortage" (*patriae vero nostrae inter cetera frumentariae penuriae mala legationis ambitus nequiores facem subdidit*). Initially, the senate had chosen two distinguished court officials (*duobus aulae summatibus*), Postumianus and Pinianus, to serve as ambassadors. After a few days, however, "private interests" (*studia privata*) added a third member, Paulinus. From this, a struggle ensued to the point of "heinous" physical violence (*nefarias pugnas*), while Symmachus himself was absent (*me absente*). "It shames me to say," he remarks, "what slanders and abuse the elite members of the senate

hurled at themselves” (*pudet dicere quae in se optimates senatus crimina et maledicta proiecerint*). Although he hears the disputes of the factions (*partium quaestiones*) have been suspended in anticipation of his judgment (*meo detulisse iudicio*), the *princeps senatus* laments that, “in the meanwhile, the reputation of the senate is ruined and the offense has also been added to the unfortunate state of affairs in Rome” (*interim senatus fama laceratur et infortunatis etiam crimen accessit*). Naturally, Symmachus’ *verecundia* prevents him from going into any further detail. Thus, this letter is yet another expression of the traditional elite notions of propriety and self-control to which this conservative senator stubbornly adhered. *Ambitus* again stems from placing *studia privata* before the interests of the state and ultimately undermines the *concordia* of Rome’s “best men.” Indeed, the breakdown of consensus within the curia seems an even greater source of anxiety to Symmachus than the annonarian crisis itself that was the impetus for the corrupted *legatio*.<sup>103</sup> Yet, unlike his preceding references to *ambitus*, the figure of the emperor is noticeably absent from this portrait. In fact, the most immediate victims of these senatorial machinations were two representatives of the imperial court, who were compelled to share their *honor* with a member of the ancient and powerful *gens Anicia*.<sup>104</sup> The image of the senate in the late fourth century, then, differs drastically from that under the “tyrannical” officials of Valentinian I. Furthermore, Symmachus has fashioned himself in this letter as the *princeps* of this resurgent senatorial order,

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<sup>103</sup> For the gravity of such crises, see Sogno 2006: 52f.

<sup>104</sup> *PLRE* 678 (12).

demonstrating both a concern for *ordo* and *patria* and a devotion to the Roman *mos maiorum* greater than that of the corrupt and ambitious scions of the still influential Anicii.

This epistolary image of a largely independent senate that had relapsed into an unseemly competition for *honores* is a reflection of the contemporary political environment. On January 17, 395, Theodosius died, leaving the western empire to his ten-year-old son, Honorius, under the regency of the half-Vandal *magister militum*, Fl. Stilicho. During the next seven years, until Symmachus' death early in 402, Stilicho faced persistent Gothic rebellion, the revolt of the Moorish *comes Africae*, Gildo, and increasing tension with the court at Constantinople, where another boy-emperor, Arcadius, was carefully managed by his zealously territorial courtiers. Under these circumstances, the senate at Rome must have seemed to the court at Milan a valuable, if difficult, ally. Indeed, this political context is just as likely as the usurpation of Eugenius to have prompted an offer from the imperial court to restore the office of the censorship to the senatorial order.<sup>105</sup> This obscure episode in the relationship between court and curia is interwoven within four letters of Symmachus concerning his publication of two “little orations” (*oratiunculas*), and constitutes the last written manifestation of this conservative senator's anxieties surrounding *ambitus*.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hartke 1940: 85 – 103, esp. 98, hypothesizes that Eugenius made this offer to gain the support of the senate after his negotiations with Theodosius had failed. This view finds support in McGeachy 1942: 32 – 34, Cristo 1975, which reproduces much of McGeachy's argument verbatim, and Rivolta Tibergera 1992: 109 – 111. However, Matthews 1975: 267 and Marcone 1987: 20 – 21 assume that the affair occurred during the reign of Honorius.

<sup>106</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 4.29 and 45, 5.9, and 7.58.

Evidence for the censorship after the collapse of the republic is sparse, yet nevertheless demonstrates that the office continued to exert both symbolic and concrete power in the hands of Rome's emperors. Although Augustus had held a public census on three occasions, Claudius was in fact the first emperor to adopt the title of censor, assuming the office in 47 with Vitellius as his colleague.<sup>107</sup> Vespasian and Titus repeated this collegial precedent in 73/74, in order to exert control over the composition of the senatorial and equestrian orders.<sup>108</sup> This association of censorial authority with imperial power reached its peak under Domitian, who received the title of *censor perpetuus* in 84, "being the first and only man, whether private citizen or emperor" to be granted such an honor.<sup>109</sup> However, as late as the third century, the Greek senator and historian, Cassius Dio, is able to observe of the emperors that "by virtue of holding the censorship they investigate our lives and morals as well as take the census, enrolling some in the equestrian and senatorial classes and erasing the names of others from these classes, according to their will."<sup>110</sup> These scattered references in the sources persist into the late empire, when the Latin terms *censura* and *censor* often referred more generally to severity in moral judgment.<sup>111</sup> Of particular interest among the later evidence is a

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<sup>107</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 27.5. For Claudius and Vitellius, Tac. *Ann.* 12.4 and *Hist.* 1.9, and Dio Cass. 60.29. See also Levick 1990: 98 – 101 and F. X. Ryan, "Some Observations on the Censorship of Claudius and Vitellius, A.D. 47 – 48," *AJP* 114 (1993) 611 – 618.

<sup>108</sup> Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 3.66 and 7.162, Suet. *Vesp.* 8 and *Titus* 6, and Censor. *De die natali* 18. See also Levick 1999: 171.

<sup>109</sup> Dio Cass. 67.4.3, trans. by Cary 1925.

<sup>110</sup> Dio Cass. 53.17.7.

<sup>111</sup> Marcone 1987: 70.

passage in the troublesome *Historia Augusta*, which current scholarly consensus attributes to a single author with senatorial sympathies writing in the late fourth century.<sup>112</sup> According to the biography of the two Valerians, the emperor Decius had requested by letter that the senate recommend a candidate for the censorship.<sup>113</sup> The senate convened on October 27, 251 and unanimously (*omnes una voce*) selected its absent *princeps*, P. Licinius Valerianus, on the basis of his pedigree (*primus genere, nobilis sanguine*), erudition (*doctrina clarus*), and character (*emendatus vita, moribus singularis, exemplum antiquitatis*). Indeed, the *patres conscripti* proclaimed, “Valerian’s life is a censorship” (*Valeriani vita censura est*). Upon receiving this *senatus consultum*, Decius summoned Valerian and informed him of the senate’s decision before the entire court (*omnes aulicos*). Addressing the emperor, the *princeps senatus* tactfully declined the honor:

*apud vos censura desedit, non potest hoc implere privatus. Veniam igitur eius honoris peto, cui vita impar est, impar est confidentia, cui tempora sic repugnant, ut censuram hominum natura non quaerat.*

The office of censor falls to you; a private citizen cannot fulfill it. Therefore, I ask to be released from this office, to which my life is ill-matched, my confidence unequal, and the times so contrary that human nature does not strive for the censorship.

Modern scholars who have discussed this attempted revival of the censorship almost universally agree that the account is unreliable, noting the emperor’s death in August of

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<sup>112</sup> See Syme 1968 and 1971, Barnes 1978, and Honoré 1987.

<sup>113</sup> *HA Valer.* 5 – 6.

251.<sup>114</sup> Yet the mysterious *scriptor* of the *Historia Augusta* was most likely a contemporary of Symmachus, and the thematic parallels within the writings of these two authors – the deference shown by the emperor to the senate, the display of *concordia* among the senators and of *verecundia* by their absent *princeps* – invite comparison between this account and that of the late fourth-century *princeps senatus*.

In 397 and 398, Symmachus circulated among several of his prominent and erudite friends copies of two recently published speeches, which had been delivered on separate occasions within the curia and celebrated the autonomy of the Roman senate. The more recent of these *oratiunculae* contested the fitness of a candidate for the urban praetorship (*ad urbanos fasces resultantem tenuit candidatum*), the otherwise unknown son of Polybius, a former proconsul of Asia who had enjoyed an unusually long tenure, serving continuously from 380 to 390.<sup>115</sup> Although by the fourth century the office of praetor was for the most part ceremonial, it was generally held by young aristocrats and resulted in their adlection to the senate (with imperial confirmation, of course).<sup>116</sup> Thus, in opposing the candidacy of Polybius' son, the *princeps senatus* asserted a senatorial prerogative revived by Constantine to deny this particular candidate entry into the order, though for reasons regrettably unstated in any of the four pertinent letters. Not coincidentally, Symmachus' second oration, delivered "some time ago" (*dudum, iam*

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<sup>114</sup> Cf., e.g., Syme 1971: 251 and Marcone 1987: 70.

<sup>115</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 4.45 and 5.9 (quoted) are the only evidence for this individual, although Ambrose wrote a letter of recommendation on behalf of his father to the bishops of Bordeaux and Agen (*Ep.* 87). Cf. Rivolta Tibergera 1992: 107f. and Marcone 1987: 84.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Matthews 1975: 13 and Salzman 2002: 34.

*pridem*), represents an even more forceful demonstration of senatorial independence and *auctoritas*, arguing against an offer from the court to permit members of the Roman senate to hold the title of censor once again.<sup>117</sup> Yet, although “at that time the authority of the whole senate put this matter to flight” (*quam tunc totius senatus fugavit auctoritas*), the conservative senator nevertheless felt compelled to justify to most of his recipients what from the title of the oration alone seemed like “a rejection of ancient severity for vice” (*Nec mihi vitio vortas priscae severitatis repulsam*).<sup>118</sup>

Symmachus’ argument for refusing the censorship revolved around its “specious” nature and the very real risk of *ambitus* that attended it. In 5.9, addressed to the influential Milanese courtier and Christian philosopher, Fl. Mallius Theodorus, the *princeps senatus* alludes to his rationale: “For certain things that are attractive in name alone are extremely harmful in their experience and use” (*Nam quaedam solis speciosa nominibus usu et experiundo plurimum nocent*).<sup>119</sup> Although Symmachus requires this particular “defender of antiquity” (*vetustatis patronus*) to read for himself the underlying rationales for his opinion, he elaborates upon them in another letter, 4.29, to Protadius, a Gallic aristocrat with literary interests, and a likely pagan, who spent most of his time in

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<sup>117</sup> Rivolta Tiberger 1992: 110 points out that the term *dudum*, found in Symm. *Ep.* 4.45, often refers to a lengthy interval of time in the Symmachean corpus, synchronizing this letter with the *iam pridem* of *Ep.* 5.9. It is based largely on these two temporal references that she and previous scholars link the offer to restore the censorship to the usurpation of Eugenius.

<sup>118</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 4.45 and 5.9.2.

<sup>119</sup> *PLRE* 900 (27).

Trier and southern Gaul.<sup>120</sup> Offering his correspondent (and us) a tantalizing glimpse of this work, he writes:

*Hanc partem: 'quae tempestate resecata est' totius ordinis nostri antetulit auctoritas, ne sub specioso nomine fores inpotentiae ambire solitis panderentur. Plures utilitatis et honestatis adsertiones in ipso corpore orationis invenies.*

The authority of our entire order preferred this passage: "...which has been curtailed by time," lest under a specious pretext the gates of passion be opened to those accustomed to solicit corruptly. You will find more assertions of utility and honor in the body of the oration itself.<sup>121</sup>

Here again, Symmachus exhibits his by now characteristic concern for the dignity and prestige of the Roman senate, which has been threatened once more by the prospect of an excessive and shameless competition for the honor of office; but in this case, the honor lacks substance. What he likely argued in this oration, then, is that the office of censorship offered by the court would not have had the authority and influence of the original republican magistracy.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, it was this argument in particular that seems to have met with the unanimous approval of the senatorial order. Thus, like the fictive times of Decius, the late fourth century was also unfavorable to restoring the title of censor to individual senators. Yet, in contrast to the account of the *Historia Augusta*, in which the modesty of Valerian diverges from a unanimous *senatus consultum*, Symmachus leads an equally unified senate against a potential outbreak of unrestrained

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<sup>120</sup> *PLRE* 751 (1). For Protadius' religious affiliation, see Salzman 2002: 296 n. 106.

<sup>121</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 4.29.2.

<sup>122</sup> I assume here that the relative clause, *quae tempestate resecata est*, modified *censura* in the original context of this oration.

behavior, and perhaps even violence (*inpotentia*), engendered by those who would employ *ambitus* in seeking this now empty title. This *princeps senatus* and his peers recognized that they would be risking the reputation and harmony of their order for what amounted to a largely symbolic gesture from the imperial court.

Moreover, in publishing these two orations and widely circulating them for consideration, the *princeps senatus* was also acting to reinforce an empire-wide consensus among elites and foster traditional senatorial morality outside the bounds of Rome. Thus, to Theodorus he writes, “The argument of my oration, I hope, will merit that even a defender of antiquity such as you may lend a hand to the authority of the order” (*Merebitur, ut spero, orationis adsertio ut tu etiam vetustatis patronus auctoritati ordinis manum porrigas*).<sup>123</sup> In addition to this Christian native of Milan, Symmachus distributed copies of his work to a fellow Roman, Felix, two brothers from the Gallic aristocracy, Minervius and Protadius, and an Alexandrian, Hadrianus.<sup>124</sup> Although these individuals, with the possible exception of Protadius, had attained their status by holding important positions within the imperial bureaucracy, as *lectores* for the most distinguished orator of the age, they now were also assured a place in the prestigious and empowering cult of letters. Indeed, in his letter to Hadrianus, Symmachus informs the senatorial bureaucrat that he had previously send his two orations to Felix and Minervius, “men of the highest rank, possessed of the priesthood of virtues and letters” (*inlustres*

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<sup>123</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 5.9.2.

<sup>124</sup> On Felix: *PLRE* II 458 (2), Minervius: *PLRE* 603 (2), and Hadrianus: *PLRE* 406 (2).

*viros virtutum ac litterarum praeditos sacerdotio*), and effectively invites him to share in this *sacerdotium*.<sup>125</sup> However, this relationship between the *princeps senatus* and his readers was reciprocal: “They themselves will provide access to the volume; for they so zealously nourish my reputation that they are unable to begrudge me the support of the virtuous” (*Ipsi voluminis copiam facient; ita enim studiose famam meam nutriunt, ut suffragia bonorum mihi nesciant invidere*).

### **Conclusion: Ad Legem Iuliam de Ambitu**

During Symmachus’ tenure as *princeps senatus*, the first of a series of reinterpretations of the *lex Iulia de ambitu* was issued, in early 397, by the emperors Honorius and Arcadius to the *praefectus praetorio Orientis* and consul, Fl. Caesarius. Within this imperial constitution, the full linguistic range of *ambitus* (*ambierit, ambitione, ambitum*) is deployed to suppress the use of “corrupt solicitation” either to attain an office (*dignitas*) that granted the title of *illustris*, the highest of three senatorial ranks, or to ascend to those offices (*honores*) “which are not granted except by our judgment to men tested by us.”<sup>126</sup> The penalty for this crime was the immediate confiscation of the perpetrator’s property and exile. Moreover, this constitution was to be

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<sup>125</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 7.58. For the attribution of this letter to Hadrianus, see Bonney 1975: 357 – 374.

<sup>126</sup> *CTh* 9.26.1: *Impm. arcadius et honorius aa. ad caesarium praefectum praetorio. si quis ad illustrem palatii nostri ambierit dignitatem atque ad eos honores ascendere ambitione temptaverit, qui non nisi probatis nobis viris nostro iudicio deferuntur, cuiuslibet ille sit loci ordinis dignitatis, amissis bonis et fisco nostro protinus vindicatis deportationis multetur exilio. neque aliud inter coeptum ambitum atque perfectum esse arbitretur, cum pari sorte leges scelus quam sceleris puniant voluntatem. dat. xiiii kal. mar. constantinopoli caesario et attico cons.*

applied indiscriminately to the attempted (*coeptum*) and completed (*perfectum*) act, “since the laws punish with the same penalty both the crime and the inclination (*voluntatem*) behind it.” Thus, the author of this law draws a direct connection, both linguistically and semantically, between *ambitio*, the act “while it is happening,” and *ambitus*, the act “after it has been done,” thereby granting imperial sanction to a moral principle shared by Symmachus and his more traditionalist peers in the Roman senate.<sup>127</sup>

The subsequent constitutions collected under this title in the *Codex Theodosianus*, originally issued in 400, 403, and 416, sought to curb more directly the ambitions of the rapidly expanding aristocracy of service by forbidding the iteration of offices.<sup>128</sup> The first two of these laws dealt specifically with the officials who staffed the imperial administration (*officia*) and, in the case of 9.26.2, the chiefs of those staffs (*principatum*). In 416, however, this limitation was extended to several of the magistracies themselves, including the governorship, the vicariate, and the consulship (*proconsularem aut vicariam potestatem vel consularitatis fasces aut vexilla praesidalia*). The rationale behind these laws is most explicitly articulated in 9.26.3, which states, “Offices that have been held are not sought again without the detriment of laying waste to the public good” (*non absque publicae dilacerationis incommodo officia peracta repetuntur*). It is assumed both here and in 9.26.2 that an individual who was admitted more than once to the same office had achieved his position “through backdoor petitions” to the imperial

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<sup>127</sup> See n. 11 above.

<sup>128</sup> *CTh* 9.26.2 – 4.

court (*subrepticis supplicationibus*).<sup>129</sup> The punishment for such a transgression, however, varies according to the law, ranging from the annulment of the appointment and the repayment of what is owed to deportation and the confiscation of property. Interestingly, the earliest of these constitutions is especially concerned to persuade the *primates officii* of the sincerity of its penalty of deportation: “Thus the chiefs of staff, whose interest it is to prevent improper soliciting, will not doubt that this punishment has been set forth” (*ita ut primates officii, quorum interest ambientibus obviare, hanc propositam poenam non dubitent*).

The reappearance and redefinition of *ambitus* in the imperial laws of this period and the writings of Symmachus are, in fact, manifestations of the same socio-political forces. The fourth century had witnessed an unprecedented expansion of the senatorial aristocracy, as a growing number of positions in the civil and military administrations conferred membership to the order.<sup>130</sup> Although this resulted in an increasingly heterogeneous late Roman aristocracy, encompassing provincial elites and “barbarian” military officers, the older families of the senate at Rome nevertheless continued to exert a potent influence on elite identity throughout the empire.<sup>131</sup> Thus, even the notorious soldier emperor, Valentinian I, sought a classical education for his son and heir, Gratian, and *arriviste* aristocrats from the Gallic rhetorician, Ausonius, to the Frankish *magister*

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. *CTh* 9.26.2: ...*cum publicae disciplinae semel gesta sufficiant, ac si quispiam promotorum denuo ad id munus irrepserit...*

<sup>130</sup> Heather 1998: 188 – 191 and 195 – 197.

<sup>131</sup> Salzman 2002: 42 – 60.

*militum*, Richomeres, assiduously cultivated networks of elite *amicitia* and patronage that included members of the more established Roman families.

Yet, amongst this ever more diverse and widespread elite, the hegemony of traditional notions of *nobilitas*, rooted in the supposedly static and unchanging *mores* of Rome's *maiores*, was far from assured. Symmachus' language of *ambitus*, deeply embedded within the Roman tradition of moralizing rhetoric, participated in the wider struggle over the definition of *nobilitas* that occurred during this period. In his orations and letters, this conservative and outspoken senator maintained the classical link between corrupt solicitation and an excessive and unseemly ambition, constructing *ambitus* in opposition to the aristocratic virtues of *verecundia* and *pudor*. Moreover, *ambitus* is depicted as a serious threat not only to the dignified *concordia* of the senate, but also to the harmonious unanimity between the senatorial elite and the emperors that characterized the ideal form of the Roman imperial state. Indeed, according to the *Pro Patre*, this vice had played a significant role in poisoning the relationship between the senate and the court of Valentinian I.

After the death of the emperor Theodosius in early 395, the dynamic between court and curia changed substantially. A succession of boy emperors at Milan, usurpers in Gaul and North Africa, and the mounting Gothic threat within the borders of the empire necessitated an increasing reliance of the western court on the support of the Roman senate. It is tempting, then, to view the series of laws issued during this period to restrain *ambitus* and the iteration of offices as a result of pressure from members of the

older and more traditionalist families of Rome, many of whom had also filled the offices of the burgeoning imperial administration under the more favorable conditions following the reign of the elder Valentinian. Regardless, the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth witnessed the restriction of office once again to those who cherished a *nescium ambiendi*, effecting in Roman law what Symmachus had promoted through his rhetoric of corruption.

## Chapter Two

### The Business of Leisure: Symmachus and the Aristocracy of Virtue

In the fall of 375, both Symmachus and his father, L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus, experienced a period of *otium*, though each under different circumstances. While the younger Symmachus had retired into private life voluntarily following his tenure as proconsul of Africa (373 – 374), the elder had fled Rome after an angry mob burned down his Transiberine *domus* during a wine shortage.<sup>132</sup> Yet this is not the version of events the young senator presents in his *Pro Trygetio*, a speech delivered before the senate on January 9, 376 in which he praises his colleagues and the new emperor, Gratian, for having recalled his father to the city. Naturally, to Symmachus, Avianus' behavior was wholly consistent with the traditional values of the Roman elite:

*Cesserat quidem sponte ille per verecundiam paucorum facilitati, et quo melior ad vos rediret, curarum vacuus animum litteris excolebat.*

In fact, he had yielded willingly and with modesty to the recklessness of a few, and in order that he might return to you a better man, he was cultivating his mind through literary pursuits while free from the cares of state.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Amm. Marc. 27.3.4; cf. Symm. *Ep.* 1.44 and 2.38. According to the account of Ammianus, “a certain worthless commoner” (*vilis quidam plebeius*) had started a rumor that Avianus Symmachus had said he preferred to use his wine to mix concrete than to sell it to the plebs at a reduced rate. For this interpretation, see Rougé 1961: 59 – 77; cf. Plin. *HN* 36.181.

<sup>133</sup> Symm. *Or.* 5.1. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

It is to this period that scholarly consensus has assigned most, if not all, of Symmachus' published correspondence with his father; and indeed, within this group of letters both father and son present themselves as engaged in that virtuous and salutary form of elite Roman leisure, the *otium litteratum*.<sup>134</sup> However, the *otium* of these two aristocrats differed in one other important respect: Avianius stayed close to Rome among the communities of Latium, whereas his son sojourned in Campania, a region traditionally associated with dissipation and vice. It is presumably for this reason that Symmachus signals in the very first letter of his collection his intent to demonstrate the social utility of his own *otium* by citing the second-century BC moralist Cato the Elder: "For it is agreeable to exhibit no less consideration for leisure than business" (*libet enim non minus otii quam negotii praestare rationem*).<sup>135</sup>

This passage, which found its way from the introduction of the *Origines* into the works of such disparate authors as Cicero, Columella, and Justin, neatly epitomizes the Roman elite's preoccupation with the corrupting potential of leisure.<sup>136</sup> The word *otium* itself expresses this anxiety throughout the Latin literary tradition, ranging in signification from an honorable (*honestum*) and dignified (*cum dignitate*) withdrawal from state affairs that was devoted to literary and philosophical activities to the pejorative

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<sup>134</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.1 – 12. For the chronology of these letters, scholars still defer to Seeck 1883: lxxiii – lxxiv; cf. Bruggisser 1993: 37 – 39.

<sup>135</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.1.2; cf. Bruggisser 1993: 51 – 54.

<sup>136</sup> Cic. *Planc.* 66 and *Att.* 5.20.9, Columella *Rust.* 2.21.1, and Just. *Epit.* praef. 5. For general discussions of leisure in Latin literature, see Balsdon 1960, André 1966, Laidlaw 1968, and Toner 1995.

sense of idle and therefore wasted time.<sup>137</sup> Whereas the former manifestation of *otium* was productive of *virtus* and hence created a better man, as we have seen already in the case of the elder Symmachus, the latter, through its association with pleasures (*deliciae, voluptates*), luxury (*luxuria, luxus*), and indolence (*desidia, ignavia, inertia, languor, segnitia*), corrupted the soul and rendered the Roman male weak and effeminate.<sup>138</sup>

Indeed, so deep was this aristocratic anxiety that the younger Seneca equated *otium sine litteris* to a sort of living death.<sup>139</sup> The primary distinction here lies in productivity; thus, a Roman aristocrat such as Symmachus felt compelled to provide an account (*ratio*) of his *otium* and to assure both family and friends that his leisure, as much as his labor, bore fruit. For, in so doing, he demonstrated the self-control (*temperantia*) that was essential to elite Roman identity, legitimized his rightful inheritance of Rome's *mos maiorum*, and ultimately justified his position at the apex of the Roman social order.<sup>140</sup>

Yet, even at its most literary and dignified, *otium* was always conceived as a preparation for public life; as P. Bruggisser so eloquently puts it, “*le calme des Muses prépare au combat politique.*”<sup>141</sup> As a result, overindulgence in and an excessive desire for *otium*, in the words of Catullus, rendered it *molestum*, seducing the elite Roman male

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<sup>137</sup> On the *otium cum dignitate*, see Cic. *Sest.* 96ff., *De or.* 1, and *Fam.* 1.9.21; cf. Wirszubski 1954 and André 1966: 291 – 306.

<sup>138</sup> Cic. *Tusc.* 5.78: *sed nos umbris, deliciis, otio, languore, desidia animum infecimus, opinionibus maloque more delentum mollivimus.*

<sup>139</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 82.3: *otium sine litteris mors est et hominis vivi sepultura.*

<sup>140</sup> On the connection between “private” morality and “public” conduct among the Roman elite, see Edwards 1993, esp. 24 – 32.

<sup>141</sup> Bruggisser 1993: 53.

away from the masculine world of public duty and political office in the same manner that it had previously brought about the ruin of kings and prosperous cities.<sup>142</sup> In this sense, *otium* itself becomes a form of corruption. Symmachus inherits this attitude toward leisure from his classical predecessors, but refashions the traditional opposition between *negotium* and *otium* using the terminology and rhetoric of corruption in order to valorize the former over the latter. This is most apparent in his first address to the emperor Valentinian I, where the senatorial orator uses the moralizing discourse of leisure to define the virtues of this soldier-emperor in terms of unremitting and incorruptible *negotium*.

Although the fourth century witnessed to some extent the reemergence of the Roman senate in the affairs of state, many of the established families of the senatorial order nevertheless continued to pursue the traditional *cursus honorum* and intersperse brief tenures in office with lengthy periods of leisure. Thus, whereas Symmachus locates the “business” of Valentinian on the periphery of the empire, waging war against Rome’s enemies, he and his senatorial peers passed much of their time within the peaceful and pleasant confines of Campania, a traditional venue for elite *otium*. There, amidst the corrupting and emasculating pleasures of *amoenitas* and *luxuria*, Symmachus portrays himself and his correspondents as engaged in maintaining an *otium cum dignitate* dedicated to the personal concerns and duties of their class, namely, the study of literature

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<sup>142</sup> Catull. 51.13 – 16: *Otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est: / otio exsultas nimiumque gestis: / otium et reges prius beatas / perdidit urbes*. On the interpretation of this controversial passage, see especially Frank 1968 and Greene 1999.

and writing of poetry, the exchange of letters with family and friends, and the management of their vast estates. Through the language of self-indulgence and luxury, then, this eloquent and influential senator sought to resolve one of the fundamental anxieties of the traditional aristocracy of Rome by crafting an *otium negotiosum* suitable to the changed (and changing) conditions of the late empire.

### ***Otium tibi molestum est: Leisure as Corruption***

Like his epistolary predecessor, Pliny the Younger, Symmachus constructs *otium* as a reward earned through service to the state; accordingly, when leisure is chosen in lieu of such service, he casts it in unambiguously pejorative terms.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, so important is this sentiment to Symmachus' literary persona that he incorporates it into the programmatic first letter of his correspondence.<sup>144</sup> In this letter, the young senator celebrates in verse the history of Bauli, a community on the far western edge of the Bay of Naples where he resided at his wife's villa in the fall of 375. After noting its foundation by the divine Hercules and engaging in the traditional scholarly pursuit of etiology, Symmachus lists three of Bauli's "noble proprietors" (*proceres dominos*), Q. Hortensius Hortalus, the famed orator and opponent of Cicero, Septimius Acyndinus, a consul of 340, and Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus, his own father-in-law:

*Huc deus Alcides stabulanda armenta coegit*

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<sup>143</sup> On Pliny's construction of *otium*, see Leach 2003.

<sup>144</sup> For the most recent conclusions on the publication of Symmachus' correspondence, see Salzman 2004: 81 – 83, and 2006: 359 – 360.

*Eruta Geryonae de lare tergemini.  
 Inde recens aetas corrupta boaulia Baulos  
 Nuncupat occulto nominis indicio.  
 Ab divo ad proceres dominos fortuna cucurrit,  
 Fama loci abscurus ne pateretur heros.  
 Hanc celebravit opum felix Hortensius aulam,  
 Contra Arpinatem qui stetit eloquio.  
 Hic consul clarum produxit Acindynus aevum  
 Quique dedit leges Orfitus Aeneadis.*

Here the god Alcides brought together his flocks to be stabled,  
 flocks torn away from the home of the three-bodied Geryon.  
 As a result, a more recent age has altered ‘Boalia’  
 and calls it Bauli, with a suggestive hint of its [original] name.  
 Fortune has descended from this god to distinguished masters,  
 so that this famed place not endure obscure owners.  
 Hortensius, fortunate in his wealth, lived in this hall,  
 the man who competed in eloquence against the man from Arpinum.  
 Here, the consul Acyndinus has led an outstanding life,  
 and here Orfitus [lived], who ruled over the descendents of Aeneas.<sup>145</sup>

Fundamental to the poetic presentation of each former resident, and the primary reason  
 for their distinction, is their role in state affairs. Although Macrobius identifies  
 Hortensius as one of Cicero’s notorious *piscinarii*, aristocratic cultivators of fishponds  
 who neglected all else, Symmachus deems his wealth *felix*, a term that encompasses both  
 good fortune and productivity.<sup>146</sup> Acindynus is *clarus* in his consulship, a fact that  
 Symmachus elaborates upon in another poem earlier in this letter, while Orfitus is

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<sup>145</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.1.5; the translation is from Salzman 2004: 89. On the possible symbolism of Hercules in this poem, see Bruggisser 1993: 60 – 77.

<sup>146</sup> Macrobius *Sat.* 3.15.6: *nobilissimi principes Lucullus, Philippus, et Hortensius, quos Cicero piscinarios appellabat*; cf. Cic. *Att.* 1.18.6, 1.19.6, 1.20.3, and 2.1.7: *nostri autem principes digito se caelum putent attingere si nulli barbati in piscinis sint qui ad manum accedant, alia autem neglegant*; and Varro *Rust.* 3.3.10: *Quis enim propter nobilitates ignorat piscinas Philippi, Hortensi, Lucullorum?*

commemorated for his two terms as urban prefect.<sup>147</sup> The final and current resident, of course, is Symmachus himself, who had been elevated to “youthful glory” by his recent tenure as proconsul of Africa in 373 (*Hos inter iuvenile decus, sed honore senili, bis seno celsus, Symmache, fasce cluis*). Nevertheless, though he claims rather speciously that this office is characteristic of an “old man,” this young senator’s time at Bauli differed from that of his predecessors in one key aspect; he had not yet earned his leisure: “But the lingering ease of Bauli does not yet seek you; let public service produce an ever watchful young man” (*Sed te Baulorum necdum lenta otia quaerunt; cura habeat iuvenem publica pervigilem*). These verses, then, operate on many levels, demonstrating Symmachus’ literary skills, celebrating his family and its patrimony, and even venerating a traditional Greco-Roman deity. But most importantly, they glorify a long-standing tradition of senatorial *negotium* and Symmachus’ rightful place within it by evoking an image of *otium* that is purposefully negative.

Nor did Symmachus restrict such imagery to stimulating his own zeal for public service. In one of his many letters addressed to Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, Symmachus expresses disbelief after hearing that his dear friend is planning a Campanian *peregrinatio* from the imperial court in order to alleviate a bout of melancholy (*senium*).

Although Flavianus was, in fact, far from the familiar senatorial locales of Rome and

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<sup>147</sup> For Septimius Acindynus, see Symm. *Ep.* 1.1.2 – 3, and *PLRE* 11; for Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus signo Honorius, *PLRE* 651. Ammianus Marcellinus judged Orfitus exceedingly skilled the law, but too deficient in the liberal arts for an individual of his status (14.6.1). His second urban prefecture was followed by accusations of embezzlement that resulted in temporary exile and possibly left contested the very property in which Symmachus then resided; cf. Amm. Marc. 27.3.2 and 7.3, Symm. *Ep.* 9.150 and *Rel.* 34, and Salzman 2006: 368f.

Campania and bereft of family and friends, he nevertheless currently enjoyed the regard of the emperor Theodosius (*in optimi principis dignatione*) and therefore possessed both the good things of the Roman state (*patriae bona*) and the joys of imperial affection (*pignerum gaudia*).<sup>148</sup> And so Symmachus concludes:

*Quare abice Baianas cogitationes et virtuti infructuosam quietem. Omni otio labor hic tuus laetior est. Amplectamur moneo sub amante militiam.*

And for this reason abandon thoughts of Baiae and a repose unfruitful for virtue. This labor of yours is more delightful than every manner of leisure. Let us embrace service with love, I advise.

As G. A. Cecconi has noted, the chiasmic structure of this passage expresses both the *virtus* associated with service to the Roman state and the traditional elite tension between *otium* and *negotium*. These, however, are not the only aristocratic sentiments apparent here: although *labor* and *militia* must certainly take precedence over *omne otium*, not all *quies* was unproductive of virtue, as we have already seen. Thus, when Symmachus exhorts Flavianus to cast off *cogitationes* of Baiae in particular, he does not choose his epithet haphazardly, for this town is intimately connected within the Latin literary tradition to the corrupting vice of *luxuria*. In this way, he gently yet unequivocally reminds his friend and colleague that *otium* cannot be dignified if valued above *negotium*.

Symmachus, however, could be much more forthright.<sup>149</sup> In a letter addressed to Antiochus, he abandons gentle exhortation for harsh censure, condemning his

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<sup>148</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 2.17; cf. *Ep.* 2.23 and, for the most recent summary of the scholarly debate involving this letter, Cecconi 2002: 197f.

<sup>149</sup> See Matthews 1986: 163 – 175, esp. 167f.

correspondent's longing (*exoptas*) to leave office and calling into question both his Romanness and his manhood.<sup>150</sup> "I recognize the lack of endurance that coincides with Greek pleasures," he writes, "which I would like you to conceal over the whole course of the year, and you should indeed remember that you have migrated into the tribes of Romulus" (*Agnosco impatientiam Graecis deliciis congruentem, quam velim toto anni orbe dissimules ac te migrasse in tribus Romuleas recorderis*). Here, Symmachus draws upon a deep-seated strain of Roman Hellenophobia that identified the Greek east as the source of pleasure and luxury, and therefore the embodiment of *mollitia*.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, he contends, Antiochus has yet to suffer anything worthy of complaint during his thus far brief tenure probably as *praefectus annonae*:

*Nondum te militares contumeliae perculerunt, nondum catervas mulierum scissa veste fugisti, nondum ante ianuas eminentium potestatum vigilem noctem saluator expertus es et iam delicato fastidio renuis magistratum?*

Not yet have the hardships of service struck you, nor have you fled mobs of women with clothes rent, nor have you endured a watchful night as a visitor before the doors of prominent power brokers, and yet you now reject your magistracy with a squeamish distaste?<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 8.41. Scholarly consensus has tentatively identified this correspondent with the Antiochus who was appointed proconsul of Achaëa by Rufinus and, in 395, granted Alaric passage into Greece; cf. Zos. 5.5.2 – 5, with the commentary by Paschoud 1986: 89 n. 6, and *PLRE* 71 – 72 (7, 8, and 10). He also received Symm. *Ep.* 8.74, a much more cordial missive, and is possibly the *vir consularis* mentioned in Ambr. *Ep.* 89.

<sup>151</sup> Edwards 1993: 92 – 97. Cf., e.g., Sall. *Cat.* 11.5: *L. Sulla exercitum, quem in Asia ductaverat, quo sibi fidum faceret, contra morem maiorum luxuriose nimisque liberaliter habuerat. Loca amoena, voluptaria facile in otio ferocis militum animos molliverant.*

<sup>152</sup> For the identification of these difficulties with the office of *praefectus annonae*, cf. *PLRE* 71 (7).

By employing the word *delicatum* in this highly rhetorical passage, a term that evokes an effeminate devotion to pleasure, Symmachus amplifies the impropriety of his correspondent's aversion to public office and duty. Consequently, Antiochus must reform his character, if he has the strength, and harden himself for a year or two (*Commuta, si vales, animum teque in annum vel biennium obdura*). In other words, he must exchange his effete Greek *animus* for a manly Roman one. This letter, then, recasts the conventional *otium/negotium* dichotomy as one between Greek and Roman identity, exploiting the traditional association of corrupting pleasures with Greek *otium* in order to valorize *negotium* and depict it as essential to *Romanitas* itself.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, it is with some irony that the figure who most embodies *negotium* within the Symmachean corpus is the Pannonian emperor Valentinian I. In the first of the two orations to this self-styled soldier emperor, the language and imagery of corruption is prominent, enhancing Valentinian's *patientia* and *industria* by contrasting his campaigns against the Alamanni with both the leisured and luxurious inactivity of the rest of the empire and a series of republican and imperial *exempla* who are depicted as not merely seduced by *otium* but engaged in an *otium sine dignitate*.<sup>154</sup> Delivered at Trier in 369 in honor of the emperor's *quinquennalia*, Symmachus' first *laudatio* takes the form of a biographical encomium and, true to its form, devotes much of its body to the deeds

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<sup>153</sup> On *otium Graecum*, see Cic. *Or.* 108 and Sall. *Ad Caes. sen.* 1.9. At *Sest.* 110, Cicero employs *Graeculus otiosus* as a term of derision.

<sup>154</sup> Although this oration closely reflects contemporary imperial propaganda, it nevertheless conveys the emperor's image from a senatorial perspective; cf. Sogno 2006: 8 – 17, Humphries 1999: 117 – 126, esp. 118 – 121, and Drinkwater 1999, esp. 132f.

(*gesta*) of its subject.<sup>155</sup> According to the then young senator and orator, after entrusting the east to his brother and imperial colleague, Valens, Valentinian swiftly (*raptim*) crossed the Rhine to campaign against the Alamanni and “defend from the shame of past idleness provinces abandoned by the luxury of previous generations” (*provincias luxu superiorum deditas veteris ignaviae pudore defendens*).<sup>156</sup> In drawing a distinction here between the *luxus* and *ignavia* of the “civilized” provinces of the empire and the warlike and “semi-barbarous” banks (*in pacati Rheni semibarbarae ripae*) of the Roman periphery, Symmachus alludes to an old tenet of Roman imperialism that connected the *segnitia* that inevitably accompanied *otium* to a loss of *virtus*, and the *voluptates* associated with *humanitas* to *servitus*.<sup>157</sup>

Valentinian, on the other hand, exhibited the martial virtue of a younger Rome uncorrupted by eastern decadence and riches: “Immediately on the march, at once into battle and, at the forefront, the imperial purple; and the royal court in winter tents, sleep under the sky, drink from the river, the tribunal in the field” (*statim itinera, statim proelia et primus in acie purpuratus; et regalis aula sub pellibus, somnus sub caelo, potus e fluvio, tribunal in campo*). Although the emperor himself is familiar with this sort of austerity and self-control by virtue of his military service, Symmachus maintains, “these things are certainly new to the empire” (*haec imperio quidem nova*). This, in fact,

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<sup>155</sup> Symm. *Or.* 1.14 – 23. On this particular form of epideictic oratory, see Quint. 3.7.10 – 18.

<sup>156</sup> Symm. *Or.* 1.14.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Tac. *Agr.* 11.4 and 21, and, for the enervating effects of simply bordering on the Roman state, Caes. *BG* 1.1.3 and 6.24. The *semibarbarae ripae* also appear in Jer. *Ep.* 3.5.

elevates Valentinian to the status of a living *exemplum* of the imperial office, a role befitting a “real man” (*vir*).<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, by establishing his court on the frontier in Gaul, “where the destruction of the entire state lay” (*qua totius rei publicae ruina vergebat*), Valentinian demonstrated that he was capable of resisting the charms of Roman *humanitas*, no slight indication of his *virtus* and *patientia*.<sup>159</sup> He chose as his lot only difficulties (*solas difficultates*), eschewing “so many provinces, some charming in their location and others peacefully pleasant, either extraordinary in the grandeur of their cities or overflowing in their multitude of peoples” (*tot provincias partim situ amoenas partim pace iucundas aut urbium maiestate mirabiles aut populorum copiis redundantes*).

From a dichotomy of space, Symmachus turns next to a dichotomy of time, contrasting Valentinian’s immediate and persistent adherence to the affairs of state with a series of exemplary yet problematic figures from Rome’s past. He begins with a series of three republican *exempla* renowned for their military prowess yet infamous in their *luxuria*. The legendary general, P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus, “should boast of Carthaginian plunder, but strayed in Sicily for a long while, dressed in a pallium” (*iactet se Punicis Africanus exuviis, sed diu in Sicilia palliatus erravit*), a type of garb associated with Greeks generally and philosophers more specifically.<sup>160</sup> Although Cicero had depicted the elder Scipio in his *De Officiis* as commendable in his *otium*, a great and wise

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<sup>158</sup> Symm. *Or.* 1.14: *Docuisti magis fortunam regiam, quid virum facere conveniret, quam didicisti ab ea, quid imperatores ante fecissent*. This passage may also be an example of political doublespeak, both praising and criticizing Valentinian’s lack of education; see Bartsch 1994, esp. chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>159</sup> Symm. *Or.* 1.15.

<sup>160</sup> Symm. *Or.* 1.16; cf. del Chicca 1984: 166, and Pabst 1989: 135f.

man accustomed “in leisure to ponder business” (*in otio de negotiis cogitare*) in the quiet seclusion of his villa at Liternum, Symmachus draws upon quite a different historical tradition surrounding the victor of Zama.<sup>161</sup> According to Livy, an author with whom Symmachus seems to have been especially familiar, a faction within the senate had accused Scipio of immoral conduct while gathering troops in Sicily.<sup>162</sup> His behavior was “not even soldierly let alone Roman” (*non Romanus modo sed ne militaris quidem*) and included strolling about the gymnasium in a pallium and sandals, immersing himself in literature, and exercising at the palaestra. Worse yet, the pleasant atmosphere (*amoenitas*) of Syracuse and the laxity (*licentia*) of their general had supposedly corrupted the entire army as well. Although Scipio ultimately acquitted himself of these charges, Livy nevertheless admits that there was some truth to them (*partim vera partim mixta eoque similia veris*).<sup>163</sup>

Symmachus then cites the frustrated campaigns of L. Licinius Lucullus against both the resilient king of Pontus and his own character flaw, his excessive greed for money (*pecuniae cupido*).<sup>164</sup> This noteworthy general, too, “should revel in the spoils of Mithridates, but almost a victor, he languished a long time in Pontic

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<sup>161</sup> Cic. *Off.* 3.1 – 4; see also Sen. *Ep.* 86.5, which depicts Scipio Africanus as worn out from cultivating the land himself in accordance with the *mos maiorum* (...*abluebat corpus laboribus rusticis fessum. Exercebat enim opere se terramque, ut mos fuit priscis, ipse subigebat*).

<sup>162</sup> Liv. 29.19 – 22; see also Liv. *Per.* 29, and Val. Max. 3.6. On Symmachus and Livy, see Pecere 1986 and Hedrick 2000: 69 – 71 and 171 – 213, esp. 177 – 183; cf. Symm. *Ep.* 4.18.5 and 9.13.

<sup>163</sup> Interestingly, the account of the *Periochae* completely dismisses these charges as *falsus rumor*.

<sup>164</sup> Vell. Pat. 2.33; see also Dio Cass. 36.14.3, and, more generally, Plut. *Luc.*

luxury” (*Mithridaticis spoliis Lucullus exultet, sed diu in Pontico luxu paene uictor elanguit*). The extant historiographical tradition portrays Lucullus as something of a tragic figure, robbed of his victory in Asia by the ambitions of Pompey and subsequently undone by his own leisured excess. Indeed, Velleius Paterculus ascribes to this otherwise great man (*summus alioqui vir*) the extravagant luxury in building, banquets, and furnishings that characterized the early empire (*profusae huius in aedificiis convictibusque et apparatibus luxuriae primus auctor fuit*). Symmachus, however, rhetorically reverses historical causality in this *exemplum*, faulting *Ponticus luxus* for Lucullus’ military failure.

Lastly, in a tale too familiar to require much discussion, the triumvir M. Antonius “should parade the trophies of the east, but, among Egyptian wedding torches, he abandoned himself to queenly love” (*Orientis tropaea ostendet Antonius, sed inter Aegyptias taedas regio amore diffluit*).

Through these three legendary figures, Symmachus succinctly maps the corruption of republican military *virtus*, first by *otium Graecum*, then by eastern *luxuria*, and finally by an *amor* that is both Egyptian and “regal.” Nevertheless, the orator points out:

*Hi sunt illi triumphales viri, delicatis negotiis frequentibus occupati, amoena litorum terrarumque opima sectantes.*

These men are well known for their triumphs, though occupied by the frequent business of pleasure, eagerly pursuing coastal charms and the spoils of the earth.<sup>165</sup>

Valentinian, by contrast, delays his well-deserved triumph in order to continue his military service on behalf of Rome (*inter tot milia laurearum nondum digrederis ad triumphum*).

Proceeding chronologically, Symmachus next provides four *exempla* from imperial history, the “next age” (*proxima aetas*):

*Ecce Baias sibi Augustus a continuo mari vindicat et molibus Lucrinis sumptus laborat imperii; Tiberius in deversoriis insularum natans et navigans adoratur; Pius otia Caietana persequitur; in Lycio et Academia remissior Marcus auditur.*

Behold! Augustus claims Baiae as his own from the unbroken sea and the expense of empire toils for the works at Lake Lucrinus; Tiberius is revered while swimming and sailing among his island lodgings; Antoninus Pius pursues leisure at Caieta; in the Lyceum and the Academy a more relaxed Marcus Aurelius is heard.

Conspicuously absent from this passage are any overt references to the specific military endeavors Symmachus so explicitly includes in his republican *exempla*. In the case of Augustus, the orator alludes to the operation against Sextus Pompey and Agrippa’s construction of naval works at the *Portus Iulius*, but the language betrays a polemical intent.<sup>166</sup> Symmachus locates Augustus at the notorious resort town of Baiae, which the

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<sup>165</sup> Pabst 1989: 136 n. 88 notes the ironic juxtaposition of *delicatis* and *negotiis*, as well as the implied double meaning of *opima*, which frequently modifies *spolia* to refer to the arms taken from one general by another and, more generally, to combat.

<sup>166</sup> Del Chicca 1984: 171f. and Pabst 1989: 135f. n. 87. For the building program of Octavian and M. Agrippa in the region of Campania, cf. Suet. *Aug.* 16 and Vell. Pat. 2.79.2.

*princeps* had claimed specifically for himself (*sibi*), and discusses his spending (*sumptus*) at a lake celebrated more for its oyster beds than its effectiveness as a harbor.<sup>167</sup>

As regards the rest of these historical figures, no attempt at all is made to alleviate an unmitigated dedication to leisure through reference to their activities on behalf of the Roman state. More recent commentators on the first *laudatio* have perceived a double reference in Symmachus' Tiberius, to both his infamous retreat on Capri and his earlier forced retirement at Rhodes.<sup>168</sup> Of Antoninus Pius' activities at Caieta, nothing is known other than his restoration of the local port.<sup>169</sup> This community, however, shared in the enticing *amoenitas* of coastal Latium and Campania, and was connected to neighboring Formiae through an unbroken series of luxury villas. Indeed, Cicero's *De Oratore* establishes Caieta among the earliest locations of these *villae maritimae*, associating it with the *relaxatio* of Scipio Africanus and C. Laelius; there, and at Laurentum, these two "distinguished men" (*tales viri*) used to collect shells and indulge in complete mental relaxation and play (*ad omnem animi remissionem ludumque descendere*).<sup>170</sup>

Symmachus' last example shifts the setting of his rhetorically constructed *otium* from the *loca amoena* of Italy to the Greek philosophical centers of the Lyceum and the Academy

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<sup>167</sup> The *Portus Iulius* was abandoned shortly after the conflict with Sextus Pompey in favor of the harbor at Misenum; cf. D'Arms 1970: 135 – 138. For the negative connotations of *sumptus*, see, e.g., Dio Cass. 48.49.1ff. and Sall. *Cat.* 13.

<sup>168</sup> Del Chicca 1984: 172 and Pabst 1989: 136 n. 87, based largely on the term *adoratur*; cf. Vell. Pat. 2.99.4 and Suet. *Tib.* 12.2.

<sup>169</sup> HA *Ant. Pius* 8.3. HA *Marc.* 19.7, however, alleges that Antoninus' daughter, Faustina, the wife of Marcus Aurelius, selected lovers from the sailors and gladiators while at Caieta.

<sup>170</sup> Cic. *De or.* 2.22.

through the figure of Marcus Aurelius. While among the Roman elite devotion to Greek learning was considered admirable under certain circumstances, the orator describes this philosopher emperor as *remissior*, a term that encompasses both relaxation and negligence.<sup>171</sup> Marcus Aurelius too, it seems, had been seduced by that immoderate *otium Graecum* which had, for a time, detained the elder Scipio from his Punic spoils.

In contrast to these carefully chosen and crafted historical *exempla*, each devoted to their own particular manifestation of *otium*, Symmachus fashions Valentinian as the embodiment of not only the Roman virtues of *patientia* and *industria*, but also the elite Roman ethos of *negotium* and *officium*:

*Tibi nullae sunt feriae proeliorum, maximeque hoc in Galliis delegisti,  
quod hic non licet otiari. Tibi nullas necessitas remittit indutias.*

For you, there are no holidays from battles, and you have chosen this in Gaul especially, because here there is no liberty to be at leisure. For you, necessity affords no armistice.<sup>172</sup>

In contrast to the *amoenitas* enjoyed by his predecessors, this emperor established his reign “where heaven and earth are equally chilling, under dense cloud cover, in perpetual cold, among a fierce enemy, and with emptiness as far as the eye can see” (*ubi caelo et terris horror aequalis est, sub crassa nube iugi frigore feroci hoste latissima vastitate*).

Indeed, in a masterful turn of rhetoric, Symmachus claims that Valentinian is so dedicated to defending the empire from the external threat of the Alamanni, a *communis hostis*, that

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<sup>171</sup> According to HA *Marc.* 20.3, Marcus Aurelius himself felt that his co-emperor, L. Verus, seemed “somewhat negligent” (*remissior*). Cf. Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 14.5, *Pan. Lat.* 12(2).13.2, and Cic. *Orat.* 320.

<sup>172</sup> *Symm. Or.* 1.16. Note the no doubt intentional use of *remittere* here, enhancing the contrast between the industrious Valentinian and the *remissior* Marcus Aurelius of the previous *exemplum*.

he had decided against helping his own brother during the dangerous usurpation of Procopius (365 – 366), which the orator portrays as a personal misfortune (*casus tui*) and slight (*tuae iniuriae*) that had provoked a private enmity (*odium privatum*).<sup>173</sup> This soldier emperor, however, did more through the proper and judicious execution of his duty to the Roman state than serve as an imperial *exemplum*; he also enabled the rest of the empire to live in peace and leisure: “You deny yourself the rest that you preserve for others” (*Quietem tibi negas, quam ceteris praestas*).<sup>174</sup>

### **The Siren Song of Campania: *Amoenitas* and *Luxuria***

As Symmachus wrote in his first oration of the many provinces “charming in their location” (*situ amoenae*) that Valentinian had passed over in favor of the inhospitable Rhine border, he no doubt had foremost in mind those places most familiar to individuals of his class, the coastal regions of Latium and Campania. The Latin literary tradition frequently describes the topography and *villae maritimae* of these locales in terms of *amoenitas*, a word that encompasses the visual enjoyment derived from both a beautiful land- or seascape and the artificial structures that took advantage of such surroundings.<sup>175</sup> Symmachus perpetuates this association in his letters, attributing this quality to the seaside resort of Formiae and coastal Campania, as well as the hilltop villas of Tibur.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Symm. *Or.* 1.17 – 22.

<sup>174</sup> Symm. *Or.* 1.16.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. D’Arms 1970: 45 – 48 and 126 – 133.

<sup>176</sup> Formiae: Symm. *Ep.* 6.77; Campania: 1.5.1, 8.23.3, and 8.25; and Tibur: 7.15.

Some among the Roman elite, however, felt that there was danger amid so much charm and pleasantness. In his *De re publica*, Cicero cites among the corrupting influences intrinsic to maritime cities not only the many pernicious incentives to luxury, but also *amoenitas* itself, which “holds many lavish and sloth-inducing enticements of the passions.”<sup>177</sup> The younger Seneca connects this particular breed of corruption to Campania specifically during the course of his epistolary attack on Baiae: “Too much loveliness emasculates minds and, without a doubt, a region is able to corrupt one’s vigor to some extent” (*Effeminat animos amoenitas nimia nec dubie aliquid ad corrumpendum vigorem potest regio*).<sup>178</sup> Symmachus inherits this facet of the classical tradition as well, depicting an explicit correlation between the bountiful pleasures afforded by *amoenitas*, the licentiousness of *luxuria*, and unproductive idleness. This particular aspect of his rhetoric of corruption centers on *privata negotia* and *officia*, especially those concerns that arise from obligations to family and friends, and ultimately to the public image and social status of the senatorial order as a whole. Thus, within his correspondence, Symmachus (re)fashions the traditional aristocratic venue of Campania as a *locus amoenus*, drawing upon both the natural beauty of the region and its mythological and historical past in order to elevate the elite struggle for an *otium cum dignitate* to the level of epic.

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<sup>177</sup> Cic. *Rep.* 2.8: *Multa etiam ad luxuriam invitamenta pernicioso civitatibus subpeditantur mari, quae vel capiuntur vel inportantur; atque habet etiam amoenitas ipsa vel sumptuosas vel desidiosas inlecebras multas cupiditatum.* This sentiment can be traced back to Pl. *Leg.* 704d – 705b.

<sup>178</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 51.10.

Reflections of this struggle appear early on in Symmachus' correspondence, forming part of his epistolary image of filial piety. Specifically, in *Epistle* 1.5, the young senator dutifully subordinates the "charms" (*amoena*) of Campania to both his desire to join his father in retirement (*secessio*) at Praeneste and his management of family property throughout the region. Written in response to Avianus' "sweet complaint" (*dulcis querella*) against his recent epistolary silence, Symmachus vindicates himself by noting his efforts on behalf of the *res familiaris*. "But the patrimony is deteriorating," he writes, "and we must attend to it in every place" (*Sed res familiaris inclinat et nobis usque quaque visenda est*). Indeed, as J.-P. Callu has noted, the travels that Symmachus describes within this and several other letters to his father – Bauli, the Lucrine Lake, Baiae, Naples, Beneventum, and Baiae again – resemble a tour of inspection far more than a pleasure voyage.<sup>179</sup> Naturally, the young senator maintains that his aim is not profit, an unseemly motive for Roman aristocrats of all periods, but to sustain the fertility of the land (*non ut quaestuum summa ditiescat, sed ut spes agri voluntariis dispendiis fulciatur*). In contrast with this activity, Symmachus juxtaposes both his father's Praenestine *secessio* and the appeal of his own Campanian surroundings:

*Quam vellem deliciis vestris improvisus obrepere! Licet Campaniae amoena praeniteant, mihi tamen esset adcommodatius agitare vobiscum et spiraculis regionis illius aestivam flagrantiam temperare.*

How I wish to steal upon your pleasures unforeseen! Although the pleasant locales of Campania may be attractive, it would be more

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<sup>179</sup> Callu 1972: 70 n. 2.

appropriate for me to spend time with you and temper the heat of the summer in the vents of that region.<sup>180</sup>

In this way, Symmachus is able to emphasize simultaneously his affection for his father and his devotion to his duty as the son of a prominent senatorial family.

Historically, the beauty and pleasures of Campania posed a threat to the virtuous conduct and reputations of elite Roman women as well. This was especially true of Baiae, where, according to Varro, old men became boys, boys became girls, and maidens became “loose” (*communes*, literally, “common to several” or “to all”).<sup>181</sup> Among the poets, Propertius described the shores of this resort town as “hostile to chaste girls” (*castis inimica puellis*), while Martial satirized a fictitious Laevina, exceedingly chaste and stern, who came to Baiae a Penelope but departed a Helen, having left her husband for a younger man.<sup>182</sup> Symmachus, on the other hand, draws upon this tradition in *Epistle* 6.67 to enhance the image of his daughter, casting her as a paragon of womanly *probitas* and a credit to her family (both old and new) even while surrounded by the notorious enticements of this region.

Initially, this letter functions as an expression of Symmachus’ delight in his daughter’s birthday gift. Yet this “splendid token” of her spinning (*opimum lanificii tui*

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<sup>180</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.5.1.

<sup>181</sup> Varro *Sat. Men.* fr. 44: *quod non solum innubae fiunt communes, sed etiam veteres repuerascunt et multi pueri puellascunt*; cf. Sen. *Controv.* 1.2.5, where *communis locus* serves as a euphemism for a brothel.

<sup>182</sup> Prop. 1.2.29; Mart. 1.62: *Casta nec antiquis cedens Laevina Sabinis / et quamvis tetrico tristior ipsa viro / dum modo Lucrino, nodo se demittit Averno, / et dum Baianis saepe fovetur aquis, / incidit in flammis: iuvenemque secuta relicto / coniuge Penelope venit, abit Helene.*

*monumentum*) has demonstrated not only her love for her father, but also her “matronly industry” (*industria matronalis*). Such conduct, Symmachus notes, is characteristic of the “women of old” (*priscae feminae*), whom “an age barren of pleasures” (*deliciarum sterile saeculum*) once bid to attend to the distaff and loom (*colo et telis*). However, while these women were aided in their virtue by the absence of enticement (*inlecebrata cessante*), even the close proximity of Baiae could not draw his daughter away from her “diligence in a sober task” (*curam sobrii operis*). He continues:

*Renuntias stagna verrentibus et residens aut obambulans inter pensa et foragines puellarum has solas arbitraris sexus tui esse delicias.*

You renounce those who ply the lakes and, sitting or walking among the daily allotments of wool and the dividing threads of the girls, you think that these alone are the pleasures of your sex.

Thus, against a rhetorical echo of the sordid activities traditionally associated with the baths of Baiae, Symmachus constructs his daughter as the overseer of an operation that resembles an imperial *gynaecium*.<sup>183</sup> Within this setting she alternated between supervising and working with the female slaves of her household to spin and weave garments.<sup>184</sup> This epistolary portrait of feminine *cura* and *industria* evokes a set of values with roots as far back as Homer, and renders its subject a far better Penelope than Martial’s Laevina. Moreover, in a potent example of Roman patriarchal ideology, such comportment made this particular aristocratic woman worthy of both her father’s love

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<sup>183</sup> For this interpretation, see Callu 2002: 39 (169) n. 2. On the *gynaecium*, see Jones 1964: 836f.

<sup>184</sup> See also Symm. *Ep.* 6.40.2, where Symmachus’ daughter is involved in manufacturing clothing for Memmius’ praetorian games.

and her husband, the younger Nicomachus Flavianus; for the perfection of her spouse (*illius perfectio adventicia*) worked in conjunction with her “native virtue” (*tua probitas genuina*) to bring Symmachus himself equal parts praise and pleasure (*aeque nobis laus et voluptas*).<sup>185</sup> By drawing upon classical associations between Baiae and corruption, then, Symmachus fashions his daughter as an ideal Roman *matrona* and, therefore, a source of honor for both families.<sup>186</sup> More than this, however, his daughter demonstrates a sturdier virtue than her legendary predecessors, since she is able to fulfill her duty to both father and husband in the face of such enticements.

As hinted at above in my discussion of *Epistle* 1.5, the exchange of letters was itself considered a duty among the Roman elite, and in an empire of such geographic magnitude, it played a vital role in not only family affairs but also the aristocratic institution of *amicitia*. A cessation of letters between friends required an explanation, and a silence born of idleness or worse, entered into willingly, was perceived as an insult to one’s honor.<sup>187</sup> Thus, in a letter to Petronius and Patruinus, two brothers of influence within the palatine administration, Symmachus is anxious not to appear “lukewarm” in his concern for the duties of friendship (*ne videatur apud me officiorum familiarium cura tepuisse*).<sup>188</sup> He asks that, “if ever my epistolary activity should cease for too lengthy an interval, you attribute the cause of my silence not to my wishes or idleness, but to public

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. Marcone 1983: 150, and Salzman 2004: 91f.

<sup>186</sup> For male and female honor in the context of the Roman family, see Lendon 1997: 45f.

<sup>187</sup> On the relationship between honor and power in the Roman world, see Lendon 1997, esp. ch. 2.

<sup>188</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 7.119.

affairs” (*si quando epistularum mearum usus intervallo longiore cessaverit, causam silentii non voluntati aut desidiae meae sed occupationibus adplicetis*). The same sentiment is found in his correspondence with the Christian Neoplatonist and future consul (of 399), Flavius Mallius Theodorus: “Recently having returned to Rome, I have deviated from my habit of writing not so much from idleness as from occupation” (*Proxime Romam regressus a scribendi consuetudine non tam desidia quam occupatione descivi*).<sup>189</sup> In the case of the former letter, J.-P. Callu speculates that Symmachus’ *occupatio* corresponds to his efforts in the senate during the revolt of the Moorish *comes Africae*, Gildo, in 397/8.<sup>190</sup> In the latter, Symmachus explicitly states that he is preparing for his consulship of 391 and specifies a Roman setting for his activities in the letter’s introduction. Amid the leisured *amoenitas* of Campania, however, the temptation to *desidia* and *luxuria* was much greater and a lack of communication therefore more difficult to justify.

In *Epistle* 8.25, probably sent to the erudite Ceionius Rufius Albinus, Symmachus forestalls an accusation of epistolary neglect stemming from his *peregrinatio* in the fall of 396:

*Credo arbitreris circumsessum me Campaniae amoenitatibus scribendi ad te hactenus neglegentem fuisse. Non est ea fortuna horum locorum, ut seriam curam sepeliant voluptates. Insolitis omnia necessitatibus strepunt et oneri cessere deliciae. Quare negotium pro otio repperi nec possum facile ad haec amicitiae munia animum retorquere.*

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<sup>189</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 5.15.

<sup>190</sup> Callu 2002: 106 n. 1. Symmachus obtained on behalf of Stilicho a *senatus consultum* declaring Gildo *hostis publicus*; cf. Symm. *Ep.* 4.5, as well as Sogno 2006: 84, and Matthews 1975: 264 – 270.

I believe you are of the opinion that I have been so negligent in writing to you because I was surrounded by the charms of Campania. The good fortune of these places is not such that pleasures bury serious concern. Everything resounds with unusual obligations and delights have given way to the burden of work. And for that reason, I have again found business instead of leisure and am not easily able to return my attention to these duties of friendship.<sup>191</sup>

From the very start of this letter, Symmachus draws his correspondent into a shared world of senatorial values and assumptions (*Credo arbitreris*). As a fellow traditionalist and a member of the venerable *gens C(a)eionia*, Albinus would have known well the allure of Campania through both his personal experience and literary endeavors. However, Symmachus quickly dispels the notoriety of this region by fashioning within it an atmosphere of noblesse oblige. In this instance, J.-P. Callu argues, the *necessitates* are twofold; the construction of an aqueduct at Caieta and, what was a more serious concern, the continuing grain shortage caused by the delay of the African fleet.<sup>192</sup> Under these circumstances, Campanian *amoenitas* and its *voluptates* and *deliciae* could offer no respite to this dutiful aristocrat, who, even in leisure, exhibits an abiding concern not only for the public welfare and the business of the state, but for the duties of friendship as well.

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<sup>191</sup> Although Macrobius portrays Ceionius Rufius Albinus as one of the learned speakers at his Saturnalia, this is the only letter between this individual and Symmachus within the extant correspondence; cf. *PLRE* 37 (15).

<sup>192</sup> Callu 2002: 125 (191) n. 2. For the aqueduct at Caieta, cf. Symm. *Ep.* 9.111, 125, and 131; and Roda 1981a: 247. Symmachus discusses the tardiness of the grain fleet in *Ep.* 7.68, and his efforts to transport grain from Apulia to Campania in *Ep.* 6.12. Calm was not restored until the spring of 397; cf. *Ep.* 6.47.

Although Campania may not have been completely impervious to the *necessitates* and *negotia* that occupied Rome's elite, it was far more often associated with relaxation, especially of the mind. Thus, Symmachus was able to write with confidence to the elder statesman, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, "No doubt you had withdrawn to Baiae for the sake of lightening your mind" (*Certe levandi animi causa Baias concesseratis*).<sup>193</sup> But this state of mental relaxation was not to be confused with idleness or sloth. In this regard, too, Campania could serve as a foil; for any Roman senator who had been properly educated was easily able to convert the historical and mythological associations of this region into a form of cultural capital that not only demonstrated the literary pretensions of both himself and his correspondent, but also imparted value to senatorial *otium*. This rhetorical practice appears early in Symmachus' correspondence in another letter to Praetextatus.<sup>194</sup> Here the young senator playfully evokes the historical and mythological tradition of Campania's corrupting atmosphere in order to chastise this "defender of old-fashioned integrity" (*antiquae probitatis adsertor*) for not writing and enhance the devotion of his "comrade" (*consors*) to the virtuous and dignified *otium litteratum*.<sup>195</sup> He begins by alternately contrasting and reconciling his own duty as a member of the college of *pontifices maiores Vestae* with Praetextatus' repose at Baiae:

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<sup>193</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.47.

<sup>194</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.46.

<sup>195</sup> The language here is from Symmachus' official report to the emperors as urban prefect on the death of Praetextatus, *Rel.* 10.1 and 3.

*Silentii nostri ratio diversa est, sed unus effectus. Me impedit pontificalis officii cura, te Baiani otii negligentia. Neque enim minus residem facit remissio animi quam occupatio.*

The rationale behind our silence is different, but the outcome is the same. The administration of my priestly office impedes me, the carelessness of Baian leisure you. For the relaxation of the mind produces no less inactivity than does employment.

Thus, Symmachus reiterates the basic tension in elite correspondence that he addresses in *Epistles* 7.119 and 5.15 mentioned above, that is, that *otium* and *negotium* manifest themselves in much the same way in the operation of *amicitia*. However, while the younger senator again justifies his own silence by evoking a higher *officium*, it is the geographical locale of Praetextatus' *otium* that offers in this case at least a potential explanation for his failure to uphold his epistolary duty:

*Nec mirum, si te illa ora totum sibi vindicat, cum ipsum Hannibalem fides certa sit bello invictum manus dedisse Campaniae. Non illius caeli aut soli illecebram retinax advenarum lotos arbor aequaverit et suada Circae pocula et tricinium semivolucrum puellarum.*

It would be no wonder, if that shore should claim you wholly for itself, since it is a proven fact that Hannibal himself, unbeaten in war, surrendered his troops to Campania. Neither the lotus tree, that snare of strangers, nor the persuasive draughts of Circe, nor the trio of half-bird girls could equal the allure of that climate or land.

Yet, Symmachus insists, it is not the charms and seductive past of the Campanian coast that occupy this elder senator and sage, but a solitude that affords him the freedom to indulge in the intellectual pursuits that were central to his public persona:

*Neque ego te pingues ferias agere contendo aut virtutem puto friguisse deliciis. Sed dum tibi legis, tibi scribis et urbanarum rerum fessus ingentem animum solitudine domas, amicitiarum munia nullus exequeris.*

Nor do I maintain that you pursue a comfortable leisure or think that your virtue has grown cold from delights. But while you read and write for your own benefit and tame your vast intellect in solitude, exhausted from civic affairs, you fail to carry out the duties of friendship.

In this way, Symmachus is able to manipulate the ubiquitous tension between *amoenitas*, *otium*, and *amicitia* in order to maintain a balance between his own devotion to the *amicitiarum munia* and Praetextatus' well-earned *otium litteratum*.

Lastly, Symmachus fashions the *amoenitas* and *luxuria* of coastal Latium and Campania as threats to a senator's duty to his class and, ultimately, to Roman society as a whole. This can be seen most distinctly in *Epistle* 8.23 to Marcianus.<sup>196</sup> The topic (ὑπόθεσις) of this self-consciously lengthy letter (*paginae longioris*) is Symmachus' *peregrinatio* to the region of Campania in the spring of 396 with his daughter and son-in-law, the younger Nicomachus Flavianus. The trip commenced from the family villa at Formiae, the *principium voluptatum*, where he spent several days (*plusculos dies*) before setting out. As in his correspondence with Praetextatus and Attalus, Symmachus again draws upon the mythological tradition of the region, in this case to enhance his own virtuous self-control. This *civitas*, he recalls, had once been inhabited by the Laestrygones, the cannibal giants of the *Odyssey*: “We have read that these beings indulged their bellies and appetites to the point of hateful savagery” (*Hos ventri et gulae*

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<sup>196</sup> Marcianus also received *Ep.* 8.9, 54, 58, and 73, and seems to have been the same individual on whose behalf Symmachus had requested the intervention of Ambrose after the usurpation of Eugenius (*Ep.* 3.33). For this letter specifically, as well as Symmachus' wider views on travel, see Salzman 2004: 81 – 94, esp. 87 – 92.

*usque ad feritatis invidiam legimus obsecutos*).<sup>197</sup> In stark contrast to this barbarous excess, Symmachus was “sparing of pleasures” (*deliciae parcus*), delaying his journey only for the healthfulness of the climate and the chill of the waters (*caeli salubritate et aquarum frigore*). Having then sailed from Formiae to Cumae, the elder statesman now divides his time between his own estate in Bauli and the villa of the Nicomachi at the foot of the *mons Gaurus* and finds himself continually abounding in friends (*amicorum subinde mihi adfluentium largiter est*). Within this environment too, however, Symmachus felt it necessary to exhibit confidence in the dignity and gravity of his *otium*:

*Non vereor ne me lascivire in tanta locorum amoenitate et rerum copia putes. Ubique vitam agimus consularem et in Lucrino serii sumus.*

I do not fear that you think I am frolicking in the exceeding pleasantness of these places and among such abundance. Everywhere we go we lead a consular life and on the Lucrine Lake we maintain our austerity.

Moreover, in a startling and rhetorically effective breach of elite *verecundia*, the senator outlines precisely the sort of behavior he sought to avoid: “There is no music on my yachts, no gluttony at my banquets, no frequent trips to the baths, nor any shameless young swimmers” (*nullus in navibus canor, nulla in conviviiis helluatio, nec frequentatio balnearum nec ulli iuvenum procaces natatus*). Although this passage is strongly evocative of classical depictions of the Bay of Naples and Baiae in particular,

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<sup>197</sup> Cf. Hom. *Od.* 10.80 – 132. Since the Greek tradition places the Laestrygones on Sicily (see, e.g., Thuc. 6.2.1), Symmachus must have done his reading on this subject primarily in Latin.

Symmachus nevertheless concludes, “Know this, that in the case of luxury, the fault does not lie in the place” (*Scias nullum esse in luxuria crimen locorum*).<sup>198</sup>

In many ways, this letter epitomizes how the late Roman senatorial elite constructed and used the corruption of “private” life as a tool for fashioning the self and reinforcing the social hierarchy. It locates leisure and its corruption in traditional elite venues; it fashions these locales and corruption itself using terminology and imagery garnered from a traditional elite education; and, perhaps most importantly, it reinforces the traditional connection between personal conduct, social status, and high office. In the period that followed the death of Valentinian I, an emperor notorious for favoring his fellow military officers and Pannonians in high office, the Roman senate had witnessed a resurgence in influence and greater access to *publica negotia*. However, in the mindset of Rome’s traditional elite, this development at the same time increased the importance of upholding *privata negotia* and preserving a dignified *otium*. Hence, in a letter to the Spaniard Euphrasius written during Symmachus’ preparations for his son’s praetorian games, the elder statesman draws upon a Ciceronian justification for the deliberate extravagance of this affair:

*Scis enim pro tua sapientia magnae urbis magistratibus angustos animos non convenire. Hoc etiam Tullius tuus praecipit luxum in privatis negotiis arguens, in publicis magnificentiam probans.*

For you know in accordance with your wisdom that parsimonious dispositions are not becoming for the magistrates of a great city. This your

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<sup>198</sup> Cf. Cic. *Cael.* 35 and 49, and Sen. *Ep.* 51.4 – 6, and 12.

Cicero also advises, denouncing luxury in private affairs but commending magnificence in public.<sup>199</sup>

Thus, among the traditional senatorial aristocracy of the fourth century, as much as among their republican predecessors, the avoidance of luxury in private life and the provision of generous benefactions for the Roman public were two sides of the same coin. Indeed, this classical dictum was particularly pertinent in a Rome that lacked an imperial presence, where individual senators once again sponsored public games and spectacles, and the urban prefect had assumed the absent emperor's responsibilities in the administration of the city.<sup>200</sup> Yet with the revival of Rome as a "senatorial city" came a corresponding revival of elite anxieties about the proper use of material wealth. One facet in particular of a senator's life that defied this Ciceronian dichotomy, however, was his duty to care for the extensive lands and copious villas that comprised his patrimony.

### **Morbis fabricatoris: Luxury and the Patrimony**

Throughout his epistolary corpus, Symmachus demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the construction activities on his numerous properties, as well as a keen interest in those being conducted by his correspondents.<sup>201</sup> Nor was he alone in this, for

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<sup>199</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 4.60.3. Callu 1982: 141 and Marcone 1987: 96 attribute this sentiment to Cic. *Flac.* 28, but there are stronger verbal links in *Mur.* 76: *Odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam diligit; non amat profusas epulas, sordis et inhumanitatem multo minus; distinguit rationem officiorum ac temporum, vicissitudinem laboris ac voluptatis.*

<sup>200</sup> See Chenault 2008, esp. 71 – 81, 138 – 150, and 162 – 176.

<sup>201</sup> Salzman 2006: 357 – 375 emphasizes the centrality of material wealth to Symmachus' literary persona, in particular his "explicit focus on his property as his patrimony" within the eleven letters to his father. For a sampling of letters on private construction, see McGeachy 1942: 144f.

the late Roman elite as a whole invested much time and travel in maintaining and embellishing their estates.<sup>202</sup> This, of course, should come as no surprise, since, within the context of the very public private lives of Rome's senatorial aristocracy, houses and villas served "both as a means of displaying status, wealth and taste and as a place in which much of the business of political life was transacted."<sup>203</sup> Yet, at the same time, the Latin literary tradition is rife with invective against excessive building, associating such overindulgence most frequently with the vice of *luxuria* and condemning it as a perversion of both the natural and social orders.<sup>204</sup> For the house of a Roman aristocrat also reflected his own self-conception and communicated his social and political ambitions, and if that reflection did not accord with the expectations of the community, it was perceived as a threat to the established social hierarchy. This rendered private construction and the maintenance of one's property problematic activities among the Roman elite, since they could be viewed as either adding prestige to an already distinguished senatorial family, or the luxurious excesses of a mind corrupted by arrogance and ambition.

The letters of Symmachus reveal an awareness of this aspect of the Roman moralizing discourse as well, referring to building in one epistle as a disease (*morbus*) and evoking on three occasions the image of Lucullus, that republican *exemplum* of

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<sup>202</sup> Vera 1986; cf. Salzman 2002: 52.

<sup>203</sup> Edwards 1993: 150. For the late Roman Empire, see Hillner 2003.

<sup>204</sup> Edwards 1993: 137 – 172.

conspicuous consumption. This last section, then, will explore the connection between Symmachus' rhetoric of corruption and his descriptions of the building activities of himself and his friends. In particular, I shall focus on three letters that deem such *opera* "Lucullan." As my discussion of the first oration to Valentinian has shown, Symmachus was well aware of the historical tradition linking L. Licinius Lucullus to eastern wealth and luxury. His villa at Naples, which had been infamous for its mountain tunnel that admitted seawater to his fishponds and earned him the nickname *Xerxes togatus*, may still have been extant in some form or another during the fourth century.<sup>205</sup> Indeed, although Lucullus also owned estates at Misenum and on the island of Nesis, it is highly likely that Symmachus had the *Neapolitanum* specifically in mind, since two of these letters concern properties explicitly in Naples. Yet, in spite of this, each letter performs a delicate rhetorical balancing act between traditional elite conceptions of corruption and virtue, thereby transforming these *opera Lucullana* into markers of senatorial influence and prestige.

In *Epistle* 2.60, Symmachus expresses his gratitude to Virius Nicomachus Flavianus for both conceding a vacant lot on the border of their adjacent properties at Naples, and offering to link the two estates with a double portico. Here, luxurious building is shrouded in the terminology of reciprocity and concerns for frugality, thereby emphasizing the adherence of both senators to the precepts of *verecundia*:

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<sup>205</sup> Cf. Varro *Rust.* 3.17.9, Vell. Pat. 2.33.4, Pliny *NH* 9.170, and Plut. *Luc.* 39.3 and 44.5. Scholars often identify the site of the *Neapolitanum* as the island of Megaris, though based primarily on medieval sources. It is to this island and its *castrum Lucullanum* that the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was exiled by Odoacer in 476; cf. D'Arms 1970: 108 and 185f.

*Tu mecum opera Lucullana partiris, et ne verecundia refutet oblatum,  
negas tui iuris videri, quod ego meum fateor non fuisse. Patere, ut saltem  
gratiam tibi debeam. Neque enim fas est mala fide me recuperare quod  
possum bona sumere.*

You share with me works worthy of Lucullus, and lest my modesty resist your offer, you deny that what I confess was not my own seems to fall under your legal right. Permit me to owe you my gratitude at least. For it is not right that I recover in bad faith what I am able to obtain in good.

Thus, in return for this concession and the concern demonstrated for his virtue, Symmachus allots Flavianus a share in the prestige of this magnificent new structure. Nor was Flavianus' gesture an insignificant one, for property boundaries were considered sacred and encroachment by greedy aristocrats also had a place in Roman moralizing discourse.<sup>206</sup> The double portico, however, which was to extend in an unbroken curve a good distance from Flavianus' own estate to Symmachus' *novae aedes*, proved to be a source of some slight consternation: "Moreover, you add enticements, by which you exacerbate my builder's disease" (*Adicis praeterea lenocinia, quibus morbum fabricatoris inrites*). "Why do you labor against my modesty?" (*Quid laboras adversum verecundiam meam?*), he asks his friend facetiously. However, what is couched in the form of a rebuke is in actuality another demonstration of senatorial virtue, for it permits Symmachus to display his own frugal nature. Hence, he concludes:

*Sed vereor ne accedente sumptu, dum vetera novis nitimur aemulari,  
intellegam maiora te velle concedere quam me posse reparare. Vale.*

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<sup>206</sup> Edwards 1993: 148. Cf. *Symm. Ep.* 6.9, which describes a boundary dispute at Baiae between Symmachus and Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus.

But I fear with this added expense that while we strive to rival ancient achievements with new, I may recognize that you wish to grant greater things than I am able to restore. Farewell.

In this way, Symmachus is able to advertise the magnitude and splendor of his current building project, while simultaneously averting potential accusations of luxury. This *opera Lucullana* will rival its republican namesake, but convey none of its pejorative associations.

Conceptions of frugality and expense are also central to *Epistle 6.70*, written to Symmachus' daughter and son-in-law, the younger Nicomachus Flavianus, possibly in the spring of 395 or 397. With this letter, Symmachus ends a lengthy period of epistolary silence, having had nothing meaningful to write during his retreat at Tibur. Now at Rome, he prolongs his "lingering ease" (*otia lenta*), describing himself as "free from all business" (*vacui omnium negotiorum*).<sup>207</sup> Although at this time an elder statesman and therefore deserving of such leisure, he nevertheless assures his correspondents that he is not completely idle (*desides*):

*Nam domi corruptorum parietum discidia sarciuntur, quia frequentationem soliditati conditor primus antetulit et antiquior ei visa est celeritas utendi quam securitas succedentium.*

For at my house the cracks of crumbling walls are being repaired, because the original builder gave preference to occupancy over structural integrity, and shortening the amount of time before his own habitation seemed more important to him than the safety of future residents.

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<sup>207</sup> For the phrase *otia lenta*, see also Symm. *Ep.* 1.1.5.

Symmachus immediately contrasts this account of his own building activities, thick with censure and contempt for the original occupant, with his approval of those undertaken by the younger Flavianus. “You are constructing new edifices that will last an eternity,” he writes, “since indeed rumor has reported that you have built structures to rival those of Lucullus” (*Vos nova et aevum mansura molimini; siquidem sermo distulit quaedam vos Lucullanis operibus aequanda fecisse*). Yet, in the seemingly disparate endeavors of these two aristocrats, there is a lesson to be imparted: “For there is equal expense in erecting solid structures once and repairing crumbling ones often” (*Par enim sumptus est semel solida conlocare et saepe integrare recidentia*). Thus, by once again grounding Lucullan luxury in Catonian frugality, Symmachus is able to draw upon the fame and glory of the Roman past, in this instance to grant prestige to his son-in-law as a dutiful *paterfamilias*.

It is in *Epistle* 7.36, however, that Symmachus gives the association between Lucullus, building, and the pleasures of luxury its fullest expression. Likely written in the fall of 396, this letter plays with the elite tension between abundance and parsimony in an attempt to lure Caecina Decius Albinus to Naples.<sup>208</sup> In it Symmachus writes tongue in cheek to this scion of the great senatorial family of the Caeionii:

*Nondum Neapolitanum litus accessimus visuri arcem deliciarum tuarum, sed tamen omnia quae Tyrrhenus adluit nominis tui plena sunt. Quid multa? Successisti in famam Luculli.*

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<sup>208</sup> *PLRE* 35 (10).

We have not yet come near the Neapolitan shore, about to see the citadel of your delights, but nevertheless all the regions that the Tyrrhenian Sea bathes are full of your name. How many? You have succeeded to the fame of Lucullus.

Indeed, so vast are Decius' estates that Symmachus wonders wryly how he is ever able to leave them; "unless by chance you flee abundance in disgust and, by the change in venue, you remedy your loathing" (*nisi forte fastidio fugis copias et mutatione castigas satietatem*), he speculates. Symmachus chooses his words carefully here, for both *fastidium* and *satietas* signify the nausea and revulsion that accompanies overindulgence, especially in food and drink. But by now a lengthy period of thrift (*parsimoniae diuturnitas*) should have reconciled Decius to his longing for abundance (*desiderium copiarum*) and draw him back to his *arx deliciarum* on the Neapolitan shore.

Symmachus concludes, however, by offering his correspondent a chance simultaneously to explain his absence in a manner befitting his status, and to redeem his *fama* from

Lucullan excess:

*Aut si libenter illic nostrae immoraris frugalitati, redeundum propere nobis est, quos non decet alienas adfectare delicias. Vale.*

Or rather if you linger there willingly to benefit our frugality, we must return in haste, since it is unseemly to pursue delights disadvantageous to you. Farewell.

This letter closes, then, in the same facetious vein in which it began. Decius is depicted as recovering from an addiction to *deliciae*; thus, it would not be proper for Symmachus, a paragon of *frugalitas*, to encourage a relapse. Therefore, the current *princeps senatus* offers to hasten to his younger friend and colleague in order to foster his recovery. Of

course, as a member of the well-established *gens Caeionia*, Decius did in fact possess a large number of properties throughout Italy as well as North Africa. Yet, by addressing his fellow *nobilis* openly and with lighthearted wit in the language of corruption, Symmachus eases the tension between boundless wealth and an idealized self-control that was inherent in the lives of the traditional Roman elite.

### **Conclusion: The Covenant of Eternal Peace**

Within his two lengthy and satirical digressions on Rome, the fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus mocks the vaunted *patres* of the Eternal City for, among other things, the frivolity of their leisure activities. “Some curse learning (*doctrina*) as a poison,” he writes, reading only Juvenal and Marius Maximus “in their boundless leisure” (*in profundo otio*).<sup>209</sup> The few houses that were “once celebrated for the earnest cultivation of their studies” (*studiorum seriis cultibus antea celebratae*) now abound “in the sports of sluggish idleness” (*ludibriis ignaviae torpentis*).<sup>210</sup> Consequently, the philosopher has been replaced by the singer, the orator by the drama teacher, and the libraries have been shut up like tombs. Senators such as these, the historian remarks, ought to read with eagerness many different works “in accordance with the greatness of their glory and lineage” (*pro amplitudine gloriarum et generum*).<sup>211</sup> In another section,

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<sup>209</sup> Amm. Marc. 28.4.14.

<sup>210</sup> Amm. Marc. 14.6.18.

<sup>211</sup> Amm. Marc. 28.4.15.

he denigrates the time-honored springtime *peregrinationes* that provide the context for so many of Symmachus' letters:

*Pars eorum si agros visuri processerunt longius, aut alienis laboribus venaturi, Alexandri Magni itinera se putant aequiperasse, vel Caesaris: aut si a lacu Averni lembis invecti sunt pictis Puteolos, velleris certamen, maxime cum id vaporato audeant tempore.*

A journey of fair length to visit their estates or to be present at a hunt where all the work is done by others seems to some of them the equivalent of a march by Alexander the Great or Caesar. If they sail in their smart yachts from Lake Avernus to Puteoli, they might be going after the golden fleece, especially if they undertake the adventure in hot weather.<sup>212</sup>

These aristocratic fops lamented poetically that they were not born among the Cimmerians when a tiny ray of sun pierced their hanging parasols, and dried themselves with the finest linens as they stepped out of the healing waters of the baths at Baiae.<sup>213</sup>

Although modern scholarship has largely dismissed the accuracy of these and the other vignettes of senatorial decadence and corruption that comprise the Roman digressions, the thematic parallels and classical references here suggest that Ammianus and Symmachus both drew from a wider late antique rhetoric of corruption, a rhetorical reality of shared meanings and assumptions. This becomes all the more apparent in the historian's justification for including such sordid material in his *Res Gestae*:

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<sup>212</sup> Amm. Marc. 28.4.18f.; trans. by Hamilton 1986.

<sup>213</sup> Hdt. 1.15f. describes the Cimmerians as a historical people driven south into Asia Minor by the Scythians during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but it is more likely that Ammianus is referring to the mythological people of Hom. *Od.* 11.14 – 19, who live near the land of the dead in a city where the sun never shines. The baths mentioned here are specifically those of Silvanus and Mamaea. Although the *Silvani lavacrum* is otherwise unattested, HA *Alex. Sev.* 26.10 discusses a *Mamaeae stagnum* at Baiae.

*Tempore quo primis auspiciis in mundanum fulgorem surgeret victura dum erunt homines Roma, ut augetur sublimibus incrementis, foedere pacis aeternae Virtus convenit atque Fortuna, plerumque dissidentes, quarum si altera defuisset, ad perfectam non venerat summitatem.*

At the time when Rome was rising from its first beginnings into worldly splendor, destined to endure so long as men exist, Virtue and Fortune, although frequently at odds, came together by a covenant of eternal peace so that she might grow to new heights; if either of these had failed, Rome would not have reached complete ascendancy.<sup>214</sup>

The covenant between these two personified deities, *Virtus* and *Fortuna*, resulted in the successful outcome of Rome's wars and supported the integrity of her laws, "the foundation and everlasting bonds of freedom" (*fundamenta libertatis et retinacula sempiterna*). Although the city, "like a frugal parent, both wise and wealthy" (*velut frugi parens et prudens et dives*), had bequeathed the administration of this legacy to the emperors, "she is nevertheless acknowledged in all regions and parts of the world as mistress and queen, and everywhere the grey hair and authority (*auctoritas*) of the senators inspire awe (*reverenda*), and the name of the Roman people is respected and esteemed (*circumspectum et verecundum*)." In this context, Ammianus' digressions can be viewed as less an indictment of the senate and people of Rome than a corrective offered to a city that remained in his mind "the home of empire and every virtue" (*imperii virtutumque omnium lar*).<sup>215</sup>

Symmachus' language of luxury and self-indulgence operates in a similar but far less caustic manner, guiding his correspondents, in the words of Ammianus, "toward the

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<sup>214</sup> Amm. Marc. 14.6.2 – 6.

<sup>215</sup> Amm. Marc. 16.10.13.

long and difficult ascent to true glory” (*ad ascensus verae gloriae longos et arduos*) through the familiar medium of epistolary exchange and the conventions of elite *amicitia*. Within his literary corpus, this influential and respected Roman senator uses this rhetoric of corruption to enhance the distinction between *negotium* and *otium*, valorizing the former over the latter and signaling that the members of Rome’s traditional elite were both ready for and worthy of participation in state affairs. Yet, unlike the emperor, *otium* remained central to the life of a senator, affording him the opportunity to fulfill the numerous personal concerns and obligations that accompanied senatorial status. Here, classical terminology and images of corruption ensured the adherence of Symmachus and his friends to the old Ciceronian ideal of an *otium cum dignitate*, and smoothed over tensions between the fulfillment of this ideal and an over-indulgence in leisure and luxury. In this way, Symmachus fashioned a late antique *otium negotiosum* for the members of his class, upholding his end of the covenant that maintained Rome’s dominance.

## Chapter Three

### **The Feebleness of the *Logoi*: Corruption and *Paideia* in the Writings of Libanius**

When Eustathius of Caria arrived in Antioch as consular governor of Syria in the summer of 388, the city's official sophist, Libanius (314 – c. 393), was initially optimistic.<sup>216</sup> Here was a governor who had studied Greek rhetoric at Athens, eschewing the study of Roman law and a career in the imperial bureaucracy, and subsequently had delivered countless speeches in the cities of Phoenicia and Palestine.<sup>217</sup> It was his literary aspirations, in fact, that induced him to pray for office specifically in Syria, having professed a desire to teach future governors how to address teachers properly.<sup>218</sup> Yet, in spite of this shared devotion to traditional Greek παιδεία, relations between Eustathius and Libanius quickly deteriorated, and the disappointed sophist soon recanted his previous commendations of the governor's education and oratorical prowess.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Eustathius (*PLRE* 311 (6)) served as *consularis Syriae* for ten months from c. June 388 to April 389; cf. Wintjes 2005: 220 – 223. Although the evidence for this chapter is derived primarily from Libanius' orations, when referring to the letters, I have adopted the numbering system of Foerster, noting any English translations in parentheses; B = Bradbury 2004, C = Cribiore 2007, and N = Norman 1992.

<sup>217</sup> *Or.* 44.2 – 4. Libanius even claims in this short panegyric that Eustathius had aroused the ire of his Athenian teacher by reading the Antiochene sophist's works.

<sup>218</sup> *Or.* 1.271: εὔχετο μὲν τήνδε παραλαβεῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν, ὅπως, ἔφη, διδάσκαλος γενοίμην τοῖς ἄρχουσιν, ὁποῖους τινὰς εἶναι χρὴ πρὸς τοὺς διδάσκοντας λέγειν.

<sup>219</sup> *Or.* 54.81. This oration, noteworthy for its length, comprises a litany of complaints ranging from breaches of etiquette to administrative and judicial abuses; cf. Norman 1965: 228ff., Pack 1935: 56ff., and Seck 1906: 147.

In his *Autobiography*, Libanius reconciles the discordant views of his two earlier orations, depicting Eustathius as an initial supporter who had shrouded his true character with the image afforded by his rhetorical background. “Not the least bit a speech-writer, but thinking himself one” (λογογράφος ἥκιστα μὲν ὢν, πάνυ δὲ εἶναι νομίζων), Eustathius nevertheless was able to conceal the profits from his bribery, the gold, silver, and clothing, from the rigorous late Roman legal machinery for ten months following his accession.<sup>220</sup> Before Libanius, however, a true devotee of Hermes and the gods of eloquence (λόγιοι θεοί), the governor could scarcely mask his greed for five days, becoming overwhelmed with anger at the sophist’s philanthropic appeal on behalf of his student, Domninus, a poor orphaned youth (ὀρφανία τε καὶ πενία καὶ νεότητι).<sup>221</sup> “He had thus resolved to be a street peddler and began to care for money,” Libanius concludes, “and he knew that I would by my very nature be opposed to that” (τῷ δ’ ἄρα καπηλεύειν ἐδέδοκτο καὶ ταλάντων ἔμελεν, ὧ τὴν ἐμὴν ἦδει φύσιν ἐναντιωσομένην).<sup>222</sup> Although Libanius left Eustathius “to govern and become a millionaire” (ἄρχειν καὶ γίγνεσθαι Κινύραν), the *consularis* nonetheless insulted (ὕβριζων) him in every way and even plotted his death.<sup>223</sup> This episode ends on a

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<sup>220</sup> *Or.* 1.271; 274: τὸ γὰρ σκότος ἀφελόντες πῶς τῆς δωροδοκίας ὑπ’ αὐγάς ἤγαγον τὴν μισθαρίαν, χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, ἐσθῆτα.

<sup>221</sup> *Or.* 1.272; cf. 54.38. Domninus (*PLRE* 266 (4)) was a young *curialis* who had inherited a liturgical burden disproportionate to his economic status. Eustathius had him illegally beaten and imprisoned.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. *Or.* 54.42ff.

<sup>223</sup> *Or.* 1.273. Cinyras, the legendary king of Cyprus, is a proverbial millionaire in Greek literature and, together with Midas and Croesus, is contrasted in *Or.* 55.21 with the exemplary Greek orators, Demosthenes, Isocrates, and Lysias.

positive note, however, and Eustathius faced both secular and divine justice for taking bribes and, what is worse, his “insolence toward eloquence” (ἡ κατὰ τῶν λόγων ὑβρις).<sup>224</sup>

Though Libanius’ encounter with Eustathius occurred toward the end of his life, this autobiographical account is well suited to begin a discussion of the rhetorical construction of corruption in the writings of Antioch’s sophist. This particular individual, he claims, “had forsaken his native land, settling elsewhere, and advanced from poverty to wealth by the profits made in three offices” (ἀνήρ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μὲν ἐκλιπῶν, ἑτέρωσε δὲ οἰκῶν, κέρδει δὲ τοῖς ἐν τρισὶν ἀρχαῖς ἐκ πενίας εἰς πλοῦτον ἐλθῶν).<sup>225</sup> This latter tendency had continued during his administration of Syria. Thus, the figure of Eustathius seemingly embodies what Ramsay MacMullen has deemed, after Christianization, “the most consequential socio-cultural phenomenon experienced by the empire in its first five centuries,” that is, “an increase in the frequency, amounting to regularity, in taking money beyond one’s salary for the performance of some act in an official capacity.”<sup>226</sup> Indeed, for MacMullen in particular, Libanius was a visionary who condemned the increasing normalization of venality in office and foresaw its corrosive effect on the efficacy of late Roman government.<sup>227</sup> As such, he defended the patron-client relationships that

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<sup>224</sup> *Or.* 1.274; cf. 58.16, which was plausibly interpreted as a reference to the conviction of Eustathius by Sievers 1868: 191.

<sup>225</sup> *Or.* 1.271.

<sup>226</sup> MacMullen 2006: 477f. This article recapitulates the thesis of MacMullen 1988, esp. ch. 3.

<sup>227</sup> MacMullen 1988: 196f.

characterized the early empire and the civic-minded values of Antioch's traditional elite, the *curiales* (Greek, βουλευταί or πολιτευόμενοι).

The image of late antique society offered here, of opposition between a corrupt imperial administration and a virtuous representative of the Greek civic elite, pervades the writings of Libanius and thus has long and deeply influenced modern interpretations of this period.<sup>228</sup> Those scholars who write in terms of this opposition, however, largely ignore the presence of a more consistent concern within Libanius' *oeuvre*, one that also manifests itself in the Eustathius episode but with a strong undercurrent of anxiety. To Libanius, the impulse to corruption and venality was wholly inconsistent with a governor who was both a recipient and supporter of traditional Greek παιδεία.

In this chapter, I shall explore this dichotomy between those who received the rhetorical training that characterized such an education and those who did not, and how this particular representative of the Greek civic elite, Libanius, used the rhetoric of corruption to maintain this distinction in the face of the rapidly expanding administrative apparatus of the late Roman empire. I shall argue that through his descriptions of corrupt behavior and corrupted individuals, Libanius emphasizes the value of traditional παιδεία, presenting the study of rhetoric, οἱ λόγοι, as a solution to what he felt were detrimental features of the changing socio-political environment of the fourth century. Even as he attests to the expansion of the bureaucracy, Libanius attributes the resulting growth of

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<sup>228</sup> For a recent attempt to decentralize this model of opposition between the imperial bureaucracy and civic elites, see Sandwell 2007: 133 – 147.

corruption to the increasing appeal and utility of shorthand writing, Latin, and Roman law. These new studies, which Libanius often characterizes as mere technical training, did not require the hard work and internal discipline of a full rhetorical education, leaving their students vulnerable to base desires for material wealth and personal gain.<sup>229</sup> The incorporation of such individuals into positions of authority consequently rendered the government a marketplace based on the impersonal exchange of goods and services, and further exacerbated the growing tension between the honorable exercise of personal influence, embodied by the deep-rooted elite institution of *φιλία*, and the increasing intrusiveness of late Roman law, which sought to intervene directly in the conventions of patronage.

In contrast, the traditional education offered by Libanius inculcated virtue through an emphasis on hard work (*πόνος*) and self-control (*σωφροσύνη*). Moreover, it did so regardless of the social background of its recipient, therefore representing a potential bulwark against the mounting threat of administrative corruption endemic to this period. Thus, while Libanius' rhetoric of corruption was certainly a reaction to the formation of rival networks of influence and the rise of new elites at both the central and local levels, it was more than simply "the hectoring, cartoon rhetoric" of a disaffected member of the traditional civic aristocracy.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, such language operated not in opposition to the

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<sup>229</sup> Criboire 2009: 237f. argues that although Libanius was not as intolerant of these disciplines as previous studies have asserted, his perception of their technical nature is essentially correct.

<sup>230</sup> Kelly 2004: 184 portrays Libanius as a mere reactionary who self-righteously promoted and justified his own interests through his letters and speeches.

changing times, but instead to reaffirm and adapt the values of the traditional Greek-speaking civic elite, and the educational system that instilled them, in order to serve those who aspired to the rapidly expanding imperial administration.

### **Corruption and the Decline of Rhetoric**

Libanius' narrative of educational decline and rising administrative corruption begins with the reign of Constantius II, who, according to *Oration 62*, was the first emperor to recognize the fundamental connection between traditional religious institutions and the study and practice of rhetoric.<sup>231</sup> It is for this reason, Libanius claims, that the emperor spurned philosophers, sophists, and “all those initiated in the rites of Hermes and the Muses” (ὅσοι τῆς πρὸς τὸν Ἑρμῆν τε καὶ Μούσας τελετῆς), favoring in their stead “certain pernicious eunuchs” (ὀλέθρους τινὰς εὐνούχους) as advisers and teachers (καὶ συμβούλους καὶ διδασκάλους) and thereby overturning the established social order.<sup>232</sup> Eunuchs were slaves of the lowest sort and almost always of foreign extraction, embodying to the more traditionalist writers of the fourth and fifth centuries such characteristics as arrogance, ambition, greed, and self-indulgence.<sup>233</sup> In this particular oration, written around 382 to defend the effectiveness of his educational

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<sup>231</sup> *Or.* 62.8: οἰκεῖα γάρ, οἶμαι, καὶ συγγενῆ ταῦτα ἀμφότερα, ἱερά καὶ λόγοι. For further discussion of this passage, see Petit 1955: 191ff. and Festugière 1959: 229ff.

<sup>232</sup> *Or.* 62.9. The most influential of these court eunuchs was Eusebius (*PLRE* 302 (11)). As Constantius' *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, this slave “enslaved” (δεδουλωσθαι δοῦλος) the emperor, *Or.* 18.152; cf. Amm. Marc. 18.4.3 and 22.3.12; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.4; Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 2.2.5 – 6; Zonar. 13.9.

<sup>233</sup> For the role of eunuchs in late antique politics, see Hopkins 1978: 172 – 196, and for the figure of the eunuch in the rhetorical tradition of invective, see Long 1996, esp. ch. 4.

system, Libanius draws upon specific elements of this rhetorical stereotype to strengthen the dichotomy between the disciplined “initiates” of traditional Greek παιδεία, the true heirs and guardians of Hellenic civilization, and the servile, barbarian eunuchs who dominated Constantius’ court.<sup>234</sup> Thus, after the emperor ceded his authority to these “barbarous men” (βαρβάρους ἀνθρώπους), it naturally follows that they persecuted rhetorical education by every means available and belittled its recipients, ensuring that no learned man (σοφός) entered into the emperor’s friendship.<sup>235</sup> Instead, they brought in monks, those “pallid enemies of the gods” (τοὺς ὠχρούς, τοὺς θεοῖς ἐχθρούς), and elevated lowly secretaries (*notarii* or ὑπογραφεῖς) to senatorial rank, “who were in no way better than their own slaves in either intellect or shorthand, and in some instances even worse in one area or both” (οἱ τῶν ἑαυτῶν οἰκετῶν οὐδὲν ἦσαν ἀμείνους οὔτε τὰς ψυχὰς οὔτε τὰς χεῖρας, εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ καὶ χεῖρους, οἱ μὲν θάτερον, οἱ δὲ καὶ ἀμφοτέρω).<sup>236</sup> Any rhetor, on the other hand, who might have received an office under Constantius’ regime, did so at the price of flattery (μισθὸν κολακείας).<sup>237</sup> Finally, these “contemptible, drunken eunuchs” (κατάπτυστοι καὶ μεθύοντες εὐνοῦχοι) reached such a degree of licentiousness and insolence (πρὸς τοσοῦτον ἦκον ἀσελγείας καὶ οὕτως

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<sup>234</sup> Norman 2000: 87f. dates *Or.* 62 to c. 382 on the basis of internal evidence.

<sup>235</sup> *Or.* 62.9; 10: οἱ δὲ τὴν μὲν τῶν λόγων παιδείωσιν ἤλαυνον πάντα τρόπον μικροὺς ποιοῦντες τοὺς ἐκείνης μετεληφότας ἀλλήλοις διακελευόμενοι σκοπεῖν ὅπως μηδεὶς σοφὸς λάθοι φίλος ἐκείνω γενόμενος.

<sup>236</sup> For a list of senators who had obtained their position in the senate of Constantinople through their skill in shorthand, see *Or.* 42.23ff. Although most of these figures did indeed rise to prominence under Constantius, the first two (Tychamenes and Fl. Ablabius) had flourished under Constantine.

<sup>237</sup> *Or.* 62.11.

ἐξύβρισαν) that they placed secretaries on the chairs of the prefects, a source of even greater concern to the residents of so vital an administrative center as Antioch.<sup>238</sup>

The change (μεταβολή) that followed was very swift, Libanius contends, and radically altered the long-established social structure of the πόλεις that comprised the Greek east:

ὁ τοῦ μαγείρου παῖς, ὁ τοῦ κναφέως, ὁ περιτρέχων ἐν στενωποῖς, ὁ  
τρυφήν ἡγούμενος τὸ μὴ πεινῆσαι, οὗτος ἐξαίφνης ἐφ’ ἵππου λαμπροῦ  
λαμπρὸς καὶ ὄφρὺς ἡρμένη καὶ πλῆθος ἀκολούθων, οἰκία μεγάλη, γῆ  
πολλή, κόλακες, συμπόσια, χρυσός.

The cook’s son, or the fuller’s, the alley dweller, the individual who considers not being hungry a luxury, this sort of person was suddenly an illustrious man upon an illustrious horse, with an arrogant brow raised and a throng of attendants, a great household, much land, flatterers, parties, gold.<sup>239</sup>

In *Oration 2*, composed a year or so earlier, Libanius elaborates on the extent of this transformation, infusing his description with a rhetoric of luxury and self-indulgence that serves to undermine the legitimacy of the wealth and influence these “servants to the governors” (τῶν τοῖς ἄρχουσιν ὑπηρετούντων) had so recently acquired.<sup>240</sup> “Some of these,” he writes, “sellers of meat, bread, or vegetables just a year ago, have become great from the property of the councilors and in no way differ from them in honor (περὶ τιμῆς), so large a quantity of gold (χρυσός) do they possess.” Others have altered the physical

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<sup>238</sup> Antioch hosted the imperial court under Constantius II, Julian, and Valens, and was the permanent residence of the *comes orientis*, *consularis Syriae*, and *magister militum per orientem*; see Liebescheutz 1972: 110 – 118 and Downey 1961: 353 – 439.

<sup>239</sup> *Or.* 62.11.

<sup>240</sup> *Or.* 2.54f.

landscape of the city, but not through the virtuous acts of euergetism that characterized Antioch's traditional municipal aristocracy. Instead, they selfishly indulged in massive private building projects (τῶ μεγέθει τῶν οἰκιῶν) that upset their neighbors by obstructing their full enjoyment of daylight. Elsewhere in this oration, Libanius speaks of "those who burst upon the scene (εἰσπεσόντες) from I know not where, put money down, and, truth be told, live luxuriously (τρυφῶσιν) on the property of the councilors."<sup>241</sup> As a result, these traditional civic elites were humbled and few in number (ταπεινοὶ καὶ ὀλίγοι), not simply poor but beggars (καὶ οὐ πένητες μόνον ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ πτωχοί), and unable to perform their customary municipal duties, such as tax collection and providing fuel for the baths. Indeed, in some cities, the same individual collects the taxes, supplies the baths (λούει τῇ χορηγίᾳ τῶν ξύλων), and then, in an ironic twist of fate, finds himself a bath attendant (βαλανεύς ὁ λειτουργῶν γίγνεται); thus, he bathes and bathes again (λούει καὶ πάλιν λούει).<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, deprived of their former honor and position in eastern Roman society, they watched as "foreigners" (ξένοι) strutted about and contracted marriages, compelled to partake in their banquets and join them in prayer for their long lives.<sup>243</sup> Yet the corruption of traditional Greek civic life

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<sup>241</sup> *Or.* 2.33 – 36; the verb εἰσπίπτειν generally connotes a sense of violence, while τρυφᾶν is a polyvalent term, signifying behavior that is at once licentious, extravagant, and effeminate. Although Libanius makes no explicit reference to ὑπογραφεῖς in this or the previous passage, the language closely parallels his invective against the influence of these functionaries in *Or.* 18.131 – 134; cf. *Or.* 31.29.

<sup>242</sup> *Or.* 2.34.

<sup>243</sup> *Or.* 2.36: καὶ τὸ μὲν τῆς βουλῆς ἀξίωμα οὐδαμοῦ, σοβοῦσι δὲ οἱ ξένοι καὶ γαμοῦσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ ὀρώμεν καὶ συνδειπνοῦμεν καὶ συνευχόμεθα γῆρας.

went deeper still, according to Libanius, since Fortune now favored even those who were formerly social outcasts (τὰ καθάρματα), permitting charioteers and comic actors, personifications of luxury, to buy their way into the civil administration.<sup>244</sup> Under such circumstances, neither the parents nor the sons of curial households were motivated to fulfill their familial obligations; overindulgent fathers were content to watch as their sons shamelessly slept through the greater part of the day and spent their nights engaged in pederasty while waiting to bathe.<sup>245</sup>

Worse still to a sophist like Libanius than this corrosive elevation of the low-class and undereducated to positions of central and local authority was the “aimless” state of dishonor (ἄτιμον περιφοιτᾶν) experienced by his students upon graduation.<sup>246</sup> At the conclusion of the original portion of his *Autobiography*, written in 374, Libanius laments to Fortune that he teaches rhetoric at a time when it is sickly, disgraced, and trampled upon (ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τε καὶ ἀτιμίᾳ καὶ προπηλακισμῷ τῶν λόγων).<sup>247</sup> It is the wealthy who are deemed happy, while men of letters are to be pitied. Approximately eight years

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<sup>244</sup> *Or.* 2.56; the plural form of τὸ κάθαρμα refers specifically to the refuse from a sacrifice.

<sup>245</sup> *Or.* 2.57: ἢ καὶ τὸν τῶν ἡνιόχων πλοῦτον ἐπαιεῖν με προσήκει καὶ ὅς ἐστιν ἑτέροις τισὶν ἐπὶ τινὶ γέλωτι καὶ τὸ πρόχειρον εἶναι ζῶνης τυχεῖν καὶ τὸ τοὺς νεανίσκους ἀναισχυντεῖν, καὶ τὸ τοὺς πατέρας ταῦτα ὀρώντας ἀνέχεσθαι, καὶ τὸ τῆς μὲν ἡμέρας τὸ πλεόν καθεύδειν, τῆς δὲ νυκτὸς ἐν τῷ μέλλειν λοῦσθαι δαπανᾶν; ἐν ᾧ δὲ μέλλουσιν, ὅ τι καὶ ὅπου δρῶσιν, οὐ λέγω; cf. *Or.* 62.24 – 25; Festugière 1959: 195 – 197.

<sup>246</sup> *Or.* 62.12.

<sup>247</sup> *Or.* 1.154: Καὶ μὴν καὶ τόδε δυστυχοῦς ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τε καὶ ἀτιμίᾳ καὶ προπηλακισμῷ τῶν λόγων λόγους διδάσκειν καθήμενον ἑτέρων ὄντων, ἐν οἷς αἱ ἐλπίδες· οὐς εἰ μὲν μὴ ἠπίστασθε, τοῦ διδάξοντος ἂν ἔδει· νῦν δὲ ἴστε μὲν οὐς μακαρίζετε· παρ’ οἷς οἱ πλοῦτοι, ἴστε δὲ οὐς ἐλεεῖτε· παρ’ οἷς οἱ λόγοι.

later, conditions had not improved. In *Oration* 62, the clearest and most troubling reflection of the “brutal outrage of the times” (τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ καιροῦ λύμην) is the number of civil servants who came from Athens (τοὺς Ἀθήνηθεν στρατιώτας), still the leading educational center in the Roman empire of the fourth century:

μετὰ γὰρ τὸν τρίβωνα καὶ τὸ Λύκειον καὶ λόγους καὶ προλόγους καί, νῆ Δία γε, Ἀριστοτέλην ἀναξυρίς καὶ ζωστήρ ὁ τῶν διακονούντων ταῖς βασιλέως ἐπιστολαῖς ἄς ἐκ <τῶν> βασιλείων ἀνάγκη φέρεσθαι πανταχοῖ τῆς γῆς.

For after their scholars’ gowns, their attendance at the Lyceum, their declamations and their introductions to them, and, indeed, after their study of Aristotle come the breeches and the belt of those who serve the emperor’s despatches which must be borne from the palace over the length and breadth of the world.<sup>248</sup>

The στρατιώται in question here are the *agentes in rebus* (Greek, ἀγγελιαφόροι), the third and final “lot of villainous underlings” (μοῖραν κακούργων ὑπηρετῶν) to frequent the imperial court, especially (though by no means exclusively) during the reign of Constantius.<sup>249</sup> In his earlier diatribe against the court of this particular emperor, Libanius referred to these imperial couriers as thieves and robbers who would say or do anything for a profit (κλεπτόντων καὶ λωποδυτούντων καὶ πᾶν καὶ λεγόντων καὶ ποιούντων ἐπὶ τῷ λαβεῖν), blackmailing citizens, resident aliens, and foreigners alike with trumped up charges and harboring the guilty for a fee. Such individuals had fled the

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<sup>248</sup> *Or.* 62.14, trans. by Norman 2000: 93. On the continued preeminence of the school of Athens in late antiquity, see Criatore 2007: 47 – 60 and 80 – 82, and, more generally, Watts 2006.

<sup>249</sup> *Or.* 18.135 – 141. Although the *agentes in rebus* are first attested in a law of 319 and were likely created under the tetrarchy, it is through Constantius II that these humble imperial couriers acquired their reputation as insidious informers; see Jones 1964: 103f., 128 – 130, and 578 – 582.

city councils and their traditional civic duties, robbing their own homelands of their services, in order to do the work of mere peddlers (τὸ ἔργον καπηλῶν). In *Oration 62*, however, Libanius sets aside these accusations of venality and civic dereliction, and instead emphasizes the low administrative rank and humble social status of the *agentes in rebus*.<sup>250</sup> Accordingly, he draws attention to the underlying social distinction between the worn, threadbare cloak (τριβῶν) associated with philosophers and the characteristically barbarian trousers and warrior's belt (ἀναξυρίς καὶ ζωστήρ) that formed part of the uniform of late Roman civil servants. These former students, having submitted fruitlessly to the compulsion (ἀνάγκη) of studying letters, οἱ λόγοι, are now compelled by the emperors to serve as simple letter carriers (οἱ διακονοῦντες ταῖς βασιλέως ἐπιστολαῖς).<sup>251</sup> Thus, at issue here once again is a reversal of the traditional social hierarchy of the eastern empire. In this case, however, it is the diligent and once celebrated students of rhetoric who are reduced to serving in the lower ranks of the imperial bureaucracy, no longer able to attain the power (ῥώμη) and prosperity (εὐδαιμονία) once afforded to a rhetorical education.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> These civil servants ranked lower than the *notarii* within the military-inspired hierarchy of the late Roman civil administration; see Jones 1964: 103f. Constantius himself apparently grew concerned about the character of those filling the ranks of this *schola*, and issued a law in 359 to the *agentes in rebus*, ordering a purge of “all who, of unworthy birth and lowest association, have aspired or been transferred to the college of the *agentes in rebus*,” *CTh* 1.9.1.

<sup>251</sup> *Or.* 62.12 and 14; on the ἀνάγκη required by the study of grammar and rhetoric and the role of the pedagogue therein, see *Or.* 58.7.

<sup>252</sup> *Or.* 62.13.

While modern scholars frequently use such descriptions as evidence for what has been termed “the flight of the curials,” few have taken seriously the moralizing rhetoric that courses through such vignettes of social disruption and decay, and none have examined it within the context of Libanius’ views on the social function of traditional Greek παιδεία.<sup>253</sup> For the sophist makes it very clear throughout his writings that his primary concern is the reputation and efficacy of οἱ λόγοι. Thus, in concluding a litany of social ills in *Oration 2*, he writes:

Εἶεν· εἰ δὲ δὴ καὶ τᾶλλα με πάντα φίλον ἐποίει τοῖς παροῦσιν, οὐκ ἄν με καὶ μόνα τὰ περὶ τοὺς λόγους εἰκότως ἐξεπολέμωσεν; οἱ πάλαι μὲν ἤστραπτον, νῦν δ’ εἰσὶ σκοτεινοί, καὶ πάλαι μὲν εἶλκον τὴν πανταχόθεν νεότητα, νῦν δ’ οὐδὲν εἶναι κέκρινται. ἀλλ’ οἱ μὲν εἰοικέναι δοκοῦσι πέτραις, εἰς ἃς ὁ σπείρων μαίνεται προσαπολλύς τὴν σποράν. καρποὶ δ’ ἐτέρωθεν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλῶν φωνῆς, ὧ δέσποινα Ἀθηνᾶ, καὶ τῶν νόμων... ἤδη δὲ καὶ ὑπογραφεῖς ἐν ταῖς μεγίσταις ἀρχαῖς, ὁ δὲ τὸ λέγειν ἀντ’ ἐκείνου μαθῶν ὑπ’ ἐκείνων τε καταγελάται καὶ αὐτὸς ὀδύρεται.

Well! Even if everything else reconciled me to the present state of affairs, would not the condition of rhetoric alone naturally cause me to be hostile? Once rhetoric flashed like lightning, but now it is obscure; long ago it drew youth from everywhere, but now it is considered nothing. It is thought to be like rocks onto which the sower sows his seed and then becomes mad that it is lost. The fruits come from another quarter, from Latin, by Athena, and the law... But now there are even secretaries in the highest magistracies, and the student of rhetoric, instead of attaining this position, is derided by such individuals and laments his own lot.<sup>254</sup>

The drastic expansion of the imperial administrative and legal apparatus during the fourth century did in fact require new skills of its members and consequently fostered the

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<sup>253</sup> On the flight of the curials, see, e.g., Jones 1964: 737 – 763, Liebeschutz 1972: 174 – 186, and Petit 1955: 321 – 358. For a more positive view of this phenomenon, see Heather 1994: 21 – 25.

<sup>254</sup> *Or.* 2.43 – 44.

growth of rival studies, particularly in the areas of shorthand writing, Latin, and Roman law.<sup>255</sup> It is this phenomenon, I argue, that lies at the heart of Libanius' larger narrative of corruption and decline, and compels Antioch's foremost sophist to establish within it a clear hierarchy, based on hard work (πόνος) and the classical ideal of self-control (σωφροσύνη), that privileges the study of rhetoric and literature over these more practical or even prestigious, but considerably less rigorous disciplines.

### **Constantius and the Secretaries**

As a skill primarily associated with that class of secretaries (τὸ τῶν ὑπογραφέων ἔθνος) so notoriously elevated by Constantius, shorthand writing is an object of special derision in Libanius.<sup>256</sup> Nor, apparently, did the sophist wait for the end of this emperor's regime to critique his support of this τέχνη and its practitioners. In an oration of 361, addressed to the city council of Antioch in order to obtain financial support for his four assistant instructors, Libanius speaks of Constantius' contempt for the teaching and practice of rhetoric, in spite of its innate goodness (χρηστὸν ἢ τῆ φύσει), and the resulting loss of glory (δόξα) for both its students and its teachers.<sup>257</sup> Since his craft "had fallen into the depths of dishonor" (εἰς ἔσχατον ἀτιμίας ἐκπεσεῖν), even those

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<sup>255</sup> See Crihiore 2009: 236 – 238 and 2007: 205 – 213; cf. Liebescheutz 1972: 242 – 255 and Festugière 1959: 411f.

<sup>256</sup> *Or.* 62.51.

<sup>257</sup> *Or.* 31.26 – 28; for an overview of the intense scholarly debate concerning the date and circumstances of this oration, see Norman 2000: 67f.

who had patiently submitted in their own youth to the many labors necessary to acquire eloquence (οἱ πολλοὺς περὶ τὴν κτῆσιν τῶν λόγων ὑπομείναντες πόνους) now regarded it as unprofitable (τὸ πρᾶγμα τῶν ἀνωφελῶν νομίζεσθαι):

οἱ μὲν ὅλως ἐπὶ τὸ γράφειν εἰς τάχος τοὺς αὐτῶν υἱεῖς ἔτρεψαν  
ἀμελήσαντες τοῦ τῆς διανοίας κάλλους, οἱ δ' ἀμφοῖν ὁμοίως  
ἐφρόντισαν, τοῦ μὲν ὡς ὄντος καλοῦ, τοῦ δὲ ὡς εὐδοκιμοῦντος, τίς ἔτ'  
ἂν ἀπόδειξιν μείζω ζητοίη τῆς κατὰ τῶν λόγων ὕβρεως;

Some direct their sons wholly to shorthand writing, heedless of the beauty of their intellect, while others give equal regard to both, since rhetoric is noble and shorthand distinguished. Who would require still greater proof of the insolence shown toward eloquence?

What Libanius objects to here, however, is not the acquisition of this skill per se, but its elevation to a status unbefitting its character. Indeed, the sophist himself commended at least two of his students for their proficiency in shorthand, as well as his erudite secretary and friend, Thalassius; but he offers such praise for the combination of these two studies, which was itself considered a “marvel” (θαῦμα).<sup>258</sup> For the true initiate of rhetorical training, the ability to write in shorthand was the garnish, not the meal. Thus, in order to reaffirm what was, in his view, the proper educational hierarchy, Libanius rhetorically fashions a dichotomy in this early speech between, on the one hand, the interrelated Hellenic ideals of goodness, beauty, and nobility (embodied in the classical term καλοκάγαθία) inherent in οἱ λόγοι and the high level of understanding required for their

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<sup>258</sup> *Epp.* 300 (C103) and 324 (C97); *Or.* 42.25; cf. *Ep.* 136. The quote is from *Ep.* 300.2.

study, and, on the other, the tenuous and easy prestige bestowed upon a mere technical skill entirely at the whim of this particular emperor.<sup>259</sup>

In his funeral oration for the emperor Julian, composed four years later in 365, the sophist elaborates upon the distinction between rhetoric and what he now terms “the craft of house-slaves” (ἡ τέχνη τῶν οἰκετῶν) as part of his larger program to idealize this champion of Hellenism at the expense of his Christian predecessor.<sup>260</sup> Here Libanius emphasizes the servile nature of shorthand writing and the impoverished intellect of those who practiced it. Accordingly, he maintains that by once again offering recipients of traditional παιδεία “the hope of honors” (αἱ τῶν τιμῶν ἐλπίδες), Julian ensured that “the most truly noble pursuits (τὰ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἄριστα) were considered the most admirable (κάλλιστα), and those befitting slaves (τοῖς δούλοις) would not have more influence than those suitable for free men (τοῖς ἐλευθέροις).”<sup>261</sup> As the new emperor traveled to Syria, he saw that such persons, “filled full of both poetry and prose, and subjects that imparted virtuous governance” (τοὺς πεπληρωμένους ποιητῶν τε καὶ λογοποιῶν καὶ παρ’ ὧν ἦν εἰδέναι, τίς ἄρχοντος ἀρετή), had been slighted under the previous regime.<sup>262</sup> In order to return Greek rhetoric to its rightful position in eastern

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<sup>259</sup> For the most recent comprehensive treatment of καλοκάγαθία, see Bourriot 1995.

<sup>260</sup> *Or.* 18; quote from §131.

<sup>261</sup> *Or.* 18.160: οὕτως αὖθις παρεσκεύασε τὰ τῶν Μουσῶν χλοῆσαι καὶ τὰ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἄριστα κάλλιστα νομισθῆναι καὶ μὴ τὰ τοῖς δούλοις προσήκοντα τῶν τοῖς ἐλευθέροις πρεπόντων δύνασθαι πλείον.

<sup>262</sup> *Or.* 18.158.

Roman society and rekindle a love of eloquence among men (ἔρωσ λόγων), he appointed as governors (literally “helmsmen,” κυβερνήται) individuals “skilled in speaking” (οἱ λέγειν ἐπιστάμενοι), replacing “those barbarians” (οἱ βάρβαροι), “who write in shorthand but lack reason, and thus overturned their ships” (οἱ γράφοντες μὲν σὺν τάχει, νοῦν δὲ οὐκ ἔχοντες ἀνέτρεπον τὰ σκάφη).<sup>263</sup> Drawing upon Plato’s famous and frequently cited metaphor of the ship of state, Libanius not only casts Julian in the role of the ideal philosopher king, but also conflates the images of the philosopher and the rhetor in a very un-Platonic manner.<sup>264</sup> Needless to say, the ignorant and mutinous sailors of these late antique political vessels, those who would deem the true helmsmen “useless” (ἀχρήστους), are the servile, uncultivated, and hence uncomprehending secretaries favored by Constantius.

One such κυβερνήτης, the learned praetorian prefect of the east, Saturninius Secundus Salutius (361 – 365, 365 – 367), received a letter from Libanius in April of 364 written in similar language and tone.<sup>265</sup> In it, the sophist praises Salutius for halting the rise of men “who honed their right hands for the purpose of writing shorthand” (τῶν τὰς δεξιᾶς εἰς τὸ ταχέως γράφειν ἀκονώντων), and for nominating to governorships in their stead orators (ρήτορες) whose abundant sweat and toil (πολλοὶ ἰδρωῶτες) on behalf

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<sup>263</sup> *Or.* 18.157 and 158.

<sup>264</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 487e – 489d. On the rapprochement of philosophy and rhetoric during the Second Sophistic, see Bowersock 1969.

<sup>265</sup> *Ep.* 1224 (B168), particularly §§4 – 7. For Saturninius Secundus Salutius, see *PLRE* 814 (3); Vanderspoeel 1995: 139 – 141 and 156.

of the victims of injustice (οἱ ἀδικούμενοι) he had witnessed while sitting in judgment on the Prefect's chair. This particular imperial official, "on account of his cultivated soul" (ἐκ πεπαιδευμένης ψυχῆς), therefore continued Julian's policy on gubernatorial appointments, consequently "saving the cities through the experience (ἐμπειρία) of their administrators, granting to some individuals prizes for their long toils (μακροὶ πόνοι), and bringing prosperity (εὐδαιμονία) to the affairs of teachers by other deeds."<sup>266</sup>

Furthermore, by holding out the hope for honors equal to the labors undertaken in pursuit of a rhetorical education (ἐλπίς τιμῶν ἴσων), Salutius, much like his imperial patron, inspired a love of eloquence (ἔρωσ λόγων) among the youth and filled those schools that adhered to the subjects and methodology of traditional Greek παιδεία. Thus, rather than bestowing upon the cities of the east great porticoes, "for such things are grand in size but lack soul" (τὰ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἄψυχα μεγέθη), this Prefect ensured that "the virtue of men's souls flourished" (τὴν τῶν ψυχῶν ἀρετὴν ἀνθεῖν), and that "there were many who wished to practice virtue" (πολλοὺς εἶναι τοὺς ἀσκεῖν αὐτὴν βουλομένους).

Within this letter, Libanius makes much of the intense labor and toil required of students of rhetoric to condition their minds (ψυχάι), in contrast to the practitioners of shorthand who merely "sharpened their right hands" (οἱ τὰς δεξιὰς ἀκονῶντες). Indeed, the "love of labor" (φιλοπονία) that characterized the recipients of traditional Greek παιδεία more generally operates in conjunction with the classical ideal of moderation

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<sup>266</sup> *Ep.* 1224.5: οὐ παντὶ φέρων ἔθνη ρήτορα ἐπέστησας τὰς μὲν πόλεις σώζων τῇ τῶν ἐπιμελητῶν ἐμπειρία, τοῖς δὲ μακρῶν πόνων ἄθλα διδούς, τὰ δὲ τῶν διδασκόντων δι' ἄλλων πραγμάτων προάγων εἰς εὐδαιμονίαν.

and self-control (σωφροσύνη) at various points throughout his literary corpus, forming the basis of the distinction between rhetoric and other subjects.<sup>267</sup> In the case of Libanius himself, these two qualities made him “incorruptible” (ἀνάλωτος) in his adolescence, were inspired by “a keen love of eloquence” (δριμύς τις ἔρωσ τῶν λόγων), and attained through his own vigilance (ἐμαυτοῦ φύλαξ ἦν), “not by the guardianship and fearful punishments of pedagogues” (οὐ φρουρᾶ καὶ φόβοις παιδαγωγῶν).<sup>268</sup> The sophist, however, not surprisingly portrays himself as exceptional here, for elsewhere the pedagogue assumes a vital role in establishing a habit of self-discipline among the youth of Antioch’s civic elite.<sup>269</sup> Thus, *Oration 58* offers the following justification for the honors (τιμαί) accorded these personal tutors, in spite of their status as freedmen, slaves, or even eunuchs:

μεγάλα γάρ, ὡς ἀληθῶς μεγάλα τὰ παρὰ τούτων εἰς τοὺς νέους,  
ἀνάγκαι τε ὦν τὸ μανθάνειν δεῖται καὶ τὸ πολὺ κάλλιον, ἢ  
σωφροσύνη. οὗτοι γὰρ φρουροὶ τῆς ἀνθούσης ἡλικίας, οὗτοι φύλακες,  
οὗτοι τεῖχος, ἀπελάυνοντες τοὺς κακῶς ἐρῶντας, ἀπωθοῦντες,  
εἴργοντες, οὐκ ἐῶντες ὁμιλεῖν, ἀποκρουόμενοι τὰς προσβολάς,  
ύλακτοῦντες κύνες πρὸς λύκους γιγνόμενοι.

For great, truly great, are the benefits conferred by these pedagogues upon young men, the compulsion necessary to the learning process and far

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<sup>267</sup> For Greco-Roman education as a form of “mental gymnastics,” see Criboire 2001. The virtues of φιλοπονία and σωφροσύνη are prominent in the agonistic inscriptions of the γυμνάσια in the Greek east during the imperial period; see König 2005: 126f.

<sup>268</sup> *Or.* 1.5 and 12; cf. *Or.* 2.12f.

<sup>269</sup> On the role of pedagogues, see Criboire 2007: 118 – 120 and 2001: 47 – 50, and Festugière 1959: 107 – 109. Even Libanius’ philosopher king, the emperor Julian, had as guardians of his self-control the “most excellent” eunuch Mardonius and another pedagogue who was “not without his share of education” (εὐνοῦχος τε βέλτιστος σωφροσύνης φύλαξ καὶ παιδαγωγὸς ἕτερος οὐκ ἄμοιβος παιδείας), *Or.* 18.11.

nobler, the quality of self-control. For these individuals are the guardians of youth's flower, both its sentinels and fortifications, driving away wicked lovers, expelling them, and shutting them out; they forbid such company, beating off their attacks like dogs barking at wolves.<sup>270</sup>

The pedagogue, in fact, surpassed the teacher (διδάσκολος) in this regard, since he was responsible for rousing his ward before dawn and, once the school day ended around noon, ensuring that his lessons were committed to memory through related “exercises, some painful but others no longer so because of practice” (τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸ πόνους τοῖς μὲν ἀνιαροῖς, τοῖς δ' ὑπὸ τῆς μελέτης οὐκ ἔτι λυποῦσιν).<sup>271</sup> But regardless of whether the student was under the compulsion of a pedagogue or driven by his own passion for eloquence, when he directed his industry and self-discipline toward the λόγοι, that is, toward the study of classical Greek authors and composition in a wide variety of forms (ιδέαι) of both prose and poetry, he developed practical wisdom and prudence (φρόνησις), the ability to deliberate well in order to determine the right course of action in human affairs.<sup>272</sup> Hence, Libanius proclaims, the keepers of “so noble a possession” (κτῆμα οὕτω καλόν) often contend with oracles in foreseeing things to come, not through divine inspiration (τὰ πνεύματα), but by their own intellect (ἡ

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<sup>270</sup> *Or.* 58.7; cf. *Ep.* 44.4 – 6 (C192); 233 (C20); *Or.* 34.29. However, the sophist brooked no criticism of his own conduct as a teacher from pedagogues, viewing it as a violation of both the educational and social hierarchies; cf. *Or.* 34 *passim*.

<sup>271</sup> *Or.* 58.9.

<sup>272</sup> *Or.* 12.92. For the distinction between “practical wisdom” (φρόνησις) and “theoretical wisdom” (σοφία), and the centrality of the former to politics and ethics, see Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1138b – 1145a.

γνώμη).<sup>273</sup> Likewise, in requesting support for the depleted city councils of the Greek east, the sophist advises the emperor Theodosius to restore not only the splendor of the lecture halls and declamations, but most importantly, “the might of rhetoric, whereby the proper course of action is found and once completed, praised” (τὸ τῆς ῥητορικῆς σθένος, ἢ καὶ τὸ πραχθῆναι προσῆκον εὐρίσκεται καὶ τὸ πραχθὲν ἐγκωμιάζεται).<sup>274</sup>

Consequently, in order to differentiate more clearly the initiates of rhetoric from the uninitiated, Libanius also deploys a language of self-indulgence that is in many ways similar to that of his Roman contemporary, Symmachus. Although the sophist says little of the country villas owned and administered by Antioch’s landed elite, a few references within the corpus to life in the countryside betray an anxiety over the corrupting potential of such leisure comparable to that of Latin writers. Libanius’ own experience as a youth attests to the incompatibility of estate life and the λόγοι, for his conversion to rhetoric at the age of fourteen compelled him to renounce “the delights of the country” (αἱ τῶν ἀγρῶν χάριτες); specifically, he mentions selling his pigeons, “an animal capable of enslaving a young man” (δεινὸν θρέμμα καταδουλώσασθαι νέον).<sup>275</sup> Yet while Libanius may have escaped such seductions, the same cannot always be said of his students.

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<sup>273</sup> *Or.* 23.21.

<sup>274</sup> *Or.* 49.32.

<sup>275</sup> *Or.* 1.4f.

In the aftermath of the Riot of the Statues in February of 387, the sophist censured the majority of his student body who had used the crisis as a “pretext for idleness” (ἡ τῆς ῥαθυμίας ἀφορμή) and fled the city to estates in the countryside.<sup>276</sup> While there, these “wretches” (ἄθλιοι) squandered their time “in food and wine, abandon and slumber” (ἐν ἐδωδῇ καὶ οἴνω καὶ ὕβρει καὶ ὕπνῳ), having withdrawn from the great benefits (ποσοῦτα ἀγαθὰ) offered by their studies “to the mother of countless evils, sloth and self-indulgence” (ἐπὶ τὴν μυρίων μητέρα κακῶν, νωθείαν καὶ μαλακίαν). As a result of their negligence in memorizing classical texts (παλαιοὶ λόγοι), they returned to the classroom fat and fleshy (πίονές τε καὶ μετὰ πλειόνων σαρκῶν).<sup>277</sup> In contrast, the few who remained in Antioch were true devotees to both their teacher and Greek letters, for their “love of eloquence” (ὁ περὶ τοὺς λόγους ἔρωσ) had persuaded them to stay.<sup>278</sup> Moreover, this corruption could go deeper still, as it did in the case of Dionysius, a former student and retired advocate living in Isauria.<sup>279</sup> While in school, “he lived with decency and self-control, and one would sooner have brought a charge of sexual misconduct against the statues than him” (κοσμίως τε καὶ σωφρόνως ἔζη, καὶ μᾶλλον

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<sup>276</sup> *Or.* 23.20 and 22; cf. *Or.* 34.12 – 14. This particular riot resulted from a sudden and extraordinary tax levy, and involved violence against portraits and statues of the imperial family. Libanius’ delinquent students were but a small part of the mass exodus that followed the riot for fear of imperial retaliation. See Wintjes 2005: 213 – 217.

<sup>277</sup> *Or.* 34.12.

<sup>278</sup> *Or.* 23.23. Libanius continued to offer lessons during the thirty-four days of this crisis, initially reduced to twelve students, but losing five more by its end; see *Or.* 34.6 and 14.

<sup>279</sup> *PLRE* 258 (6).

ἄν τις τοῖς ἀνδριᾶσιν αἰτίαν ἐπήνεγκεν ἐρωτικὴν ἢ τούτῳ).<sup>280</sup> However, when invited to serve as an advocate under the governor Palladius, Dionysius rejected the influence, reputation, and wealth that accompanied such a position for the trees and birds of his estate.<sup>281</sup> This ill-fated decision allowed him the leisure (σχολή) to commit his crime, the abduction (ἄρπαγή, Latin *raptus*) of a young woman without the consent of her parents.<sup>282</sup>

But within the context of leisure, Libanius, unlike Symmachus, does not restrict himself to the corrupting delights of the countryside. City life, too, had its distractions from the labors of παιδεία, in particular the chariot races and theatrical shows. Although Antioch was itself renowned for such spectacles, the pleasures of the hippodrome and the theater are especially prevalent in the Libanius' treatment of Constantinople in the *Autobiography*, that “city in Thrace which lives luxuriously off the sweat of other cities” (Θράκης πόλις ἢ τῶν ἄλλων πόλεων τρυφῶσα τοῖς ἰδρῶσι).<sup>283</sup> Throughout the narrative of his experiences on the Bosphorus and in neighboring Bithynia, the sophist creates yet another dichotomy through his language of self-indulgence, this time between

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<sup>280</sup> *Ep.* 1169.4 (C56).

<sup>281</sup> *Ep.* 1168.2 (C55): Διονύσιον δὲ κακοδαίμονα ἡγησάμην ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας, ἐν ἣ παρὰ σοῦ καλούμενος τὰ δένδρα καὶ τοὺς ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ὄρνιθας τοῦ παρὰ σοὶ δύνασθαι προτέρους ἔθετο. εἰ δ' ἦν ὑπακούσας καὶ δεξάμενος προσιοῦσαν τὴν Τύχην, λέγων ἂν ἠυδοκίμει καὶ ἠυπόρει, σχολὴν δὲ οὐκ ἂν εἶχεν εἰς ἀρπαγὴν. For Olympius Palladius, see *PLRE* 662 (18).

<sup>282</sup> It is clear from these two letters that Libanius believed Dionysius guilty, but since his crime was inconsistent with his character (ἦθος), he considered him a victim of Fortune. Specifically, he notes that Dionysius' father died when he was very young, leaving him to be raised by his mother and stepfather, both of whom “lived luxuriously” (τρυφώντων); see *Ep.* 1169.2 and 5. On *raptus*, see Evans Grubb 1989.

<sup>283</sup> *Or.* 1.279; cf. 215. On the entertainments of Antioch, see Liebeschuetz 1972: 136 – 149, Downey 1961: 439 – 446, and Petit 1955: 123 – 144.

Constantine's new capital, "overwhelmed by luxury" (ἡ τρυφῇ βαρυνομένη), and his beloved Nicomedia, "nurse of eloquence" (λόγων τροφός).<sup>284</sup> Initially, however, Libanius himself played the role of nurse to the youth of Constantinople. After departing Athens to settle in the capital as a private teacher in the winter of 340/341, he participated in the public competitions in declamation (τὰ ἀγωνίσματα) common to the cities of the Greek east in order to attract students.<sup>285</sup> In a few days, he claims, his class had grown to more than eighty, drawn from both outside and within the city; thus, "those who were excited about the horse races and the spectacles of the stage (τὰς τῶν ἵππων ἀμίλλας καὶ τὰ τῆς σκηνῆς θεάματα) transferred their affections to a zeal for eloquence (τὰς ὑπὲρ τῶν λόγων...σπουδάς)." But Libanius' success provoked abuse (λοιδορία) from two resident teachers, who were soon joined by the official sophist of the city, Bemarchius. Under the cover of the riots of 342, Bemarchius and his cabal of sophists and grammarians illegally imprisoned him on a fabricated charge of magic. The new proconsul Limenius, who had developed a murderous antipathy for Libanius prior to entering office, failed to achieve a conviction, but nevertheless ensured that he left the city.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> *Or.* 1.48.

<sup>285</sup> *Or.* 1.37. Cf. Wintjes 2005: 77 – 87.

<sup>286</sup> *Or.* 1.38 – 47. Libanius leaves the two resident sophists unnamed, referring to them only by their places of origin, Cappadocia and Cyzicus. For Bemarchius, see *PLRE* 160; and for Ulpian Limenius, *PLRE* 510 (2); cf. *Ep.* 206 and 557 (N23).

From Constantinople, Libanius went first to Nicaea, where he was appointed official sophist, and then to Nicomedia for the same position, but this time at the invitation of both the city council and the governor of Bithynia. The sophist describes the five years that he spent there in near idyllic terms, recalling his health in body and mind, his frequent declamations and the standing ovations he received for each, the numbers and progress of his students, his labors at night and the sweat of toil by day (νυκτερινοὶ πόνοι, μεθημερινοὶ ἰδρῶτες), the honors, kindness, and affection.<sup>287</sup> Indeed, it is in this former tetrarchic capital that Libanius claims even to have found the classical ideal of true friendship, especially in the person of Aristaenetus.<sup>288</sup> Naturally, the city of Nicomedia, which considered the sophist's public orations its greatest adornment, invites comparison with the supposed prosperity (εὐδαιμονία) of nearby Constantinople:

ὥς ἢ μὲν εὐθνηοῖτο θεάτρων ἡδοναῖς, αὐτὴ δὲ φορᾶ παιδείας καὶ ὥς ἢ μὲν οὐδὲ φυλάξει παρὸν εἰδείη καλόν, αὐτὴ δὲ καὶ ἀπὸν κτήσασθαι.

How the capital thrives on the pleasures of the theater, but this city, on the fruits of education, and how the former does not know how to keep the good it possesses, while the latter knows how to acquire even what is lacking.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> *Or.* 1.51: ἔχω μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἕτερα πέντε καὶ πάλιν ἕτερα τοσαῦτα ἐπαινέσαι, τὸ νικᾶν δὲ τούτων ἐστὶ τῶν ὑπὸ τῆ Διμήτρι, νικῶντων τοῖς ἅπασιν, ὑγίεια σώματος, εὐθυμία ψυχῆς, ἐπιδείξεων πυκνότητι, τοῖς ἐν ἐκάστη πηδήμασιν, ὄρμαθοῖς νέων, ἐπιδόσει νέων, νυκτερινοῖς πόνοις, μεθημερινοῖς ἰδρῶσι, τιμαῖς, εὐνοίᾳ, φίλτρῳ.

<sup>288</sup> *Or.* 1.56 – 57. For Aristaenetus, see *PLRE* 104 (1).

<sup>289</sup> *Or.* 1.52.

Underlying this passage is Libanius' belief in the inherent connection between the study and practice of rhetoric and the classical virtue of practical wisdom (φρόνησις), that is, the ability to discern what is beneficial in relation to human affairs.<sup>290</sup> Clearly, by expelling a teacher who had drawn so much of the city's youth away from the corrupting influence of the hippodrome and the theater, the inhabitants of Constantinople betrayed an ignorance of what is good (τὸ καλόν) and therefore mistakenly equated prosperity with the delights of theatrical spectacles. Nor were the sophists themselves exempt from such censure, overwhelmed as they were by the corrupt atmosphere of the capital. Dwelling in a city full of "counterfeits" (πλάσματα), these teachers had all the necessary trappings, the massive houses, the throngs of students, large stomachs, and the appearance of servility, "for cowering greatly facilitates prosperity (εὐδαιμονία) there and the more servile of two opponents is considered the more skilled in speaking."<sup>291</sup>

This dearth of true παιδεία in Constantinople is made even more explicit after Libanius is summoned to return by the praetorian prefect Flavius Philippus in 349.<sup>292</sup> Whereas in Nicomedia the sophist's pleasures (αἱ ἡδοναί) derived not from eating and

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<sup>290</sup> Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1140b: ὥστ' ἀνάγκη τὴν φρόνησιν ἕξιν εἶναι μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἀγαθὰ πρακτικῆν.

<sup>291</sup> *Ep.* 399.4 (B86): τῶν δὲ παρ' ἡμῖν σοφιστῶν μὴ καταγέλα, οἷς ἐστὶν ἅ σοφισταῖς εἶναι δεῖ, μέγεθος οἰκιῶν, πλῆθος νέων, γαστρὸς εὐρυχωρία, τὸ δουλεύειν εἰδέναι· μέγα γὰρ εἰς εὐδαιμονίαν παρ' ἡμῖν τὸ κατεπτηχέναι καὶ ὁ δουλότερος ἐτέρου ῥητορικώτερος.

<sup>292</sup> *Or.* 1.74. This was an official appointment with an imperial salary, as is indicated by the "royal letter" (βασίλεια γράμματα) that summoned him and the mention of an increase in his income (πρόσοδος) at §80. Flavius Philippus (*PLRE* 696 (7)), the son of a sausage-maker, rose, according to Libanius, through his skill in shorthand and the support of Constantius' court eunuchs to the praetorian prefecture of the east (c. 344 – 351) and the consulship of 348; see *Or.* 42.24 – 25, and 62.11.

drinking (τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν), but from the progress of eloquence amongst the Bithynians and the ensuing outcry from Athens, he knew that his productivity would be curbed by the inescapable extravagances of the capital.<sup>293</sup>

Central to this portrait of intellectual sterility and corruption is the senate of Constantinople, which, although established in 330 along with the new capital, quickly rose in status and influence in eastern Roman society under the patronage of Constantius.<sup>294</sup> Drawn more from “the camps” than the schools (ἐξ ὀπλων ἢ μουσείων τὸ πλέον), these parvenu senators failed to recognize either the time and effort that went into cultivating eloquence, or the proper principles of rhetorical delivery. Thus, at the risk of being judged an enemy and treated as such (ἐχθρόν τε κεκρίσθαι καὶ πολεμῆσθαι) by these δυνατοί, Libanius felt compelled to waste (διατρίβειν) the greater part of his days and nights drinking and dining in their company (συμπίνειν τοῖς δυνατοῖς καὶ περὶ τραπέζας). Indeed, he very explicitly condemns the drunkenness of these uncultured symposia as “completely contrary to the good qualities of the mind” (ὡς ἐναντιώτατα τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀγαθοῖς). As proof, the sophist offers their, for the most part, superficial appreciation of his oratory: “[T]hey gathered, some to listen to my words, but the majority to view my gestures” (καὶ συνήεσαν οἱ μὲν ἀκουσόμενοι

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<sup>293</sup> *Or.* 1.53 and 75.

<sup>294</sup> On the senate of Constantinople, see most recently Skinner 2008 and 2000, and Heather 1994. However, Dagron 1974, ch. 4 – 6, and Petit 1957 remain significant.

λόγων, οἱ πλείους δὲ θεασόμενοι κινούμενον).<sup>295</sup> Yet the influx of civilian functionaries into this new senatorial aristocracy must also have played a role here, for in an oration of 390 Libanius enumerates a series of senators who had achieved their status during the reigns of Constantine and Constantius through “nothing other than their skill in shorthand.”<sup>296</sup> Unlike his cultivated assistant Thalassius, whose senatorial candidacy this oration aims to defend, such individuals were incapable of discerning “the better and worse forms of eloquence.” As a result, in spite of Libanius’ success in garnering audiences during this period, even amid such infertile conditions, those students who had dutifully accompanied him from Bithynia very quickly dispersed.<sup>297</sup> While some were “bewitched” by the city’s delights (τῶν ἡδοναῖς γοητευθέντων), those of better intellect (αἱ γυνῶμαι βελτίους) feared “that the place by its very nature corrupted students’ minds” (ὡς δὴ πεφυκότα νέων ψυχὰς διαφθείρειν τὸν τόπον), and departed for either Athens or the law school at Berytus.

Furthermore, as the architect of eastern senatorial expansion, the figure of Constantius lurks in the background of this Constantinopolitan narrative of idleness and

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<sup>295</sup> The verb θεᾶσθαι, of course, is often used to denote the spectator’s gaze at a theatrical performance, and thus possibly emphasizes still more the lack of education among Libanius’ audience.

<sup>296</sup> *Or.* 42.25: Καὶ τούτοις ἅπασιν οὐς κατέλεξα τὸ συνέδριον ἀνέωξεν οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ τούτων δὴ τῶν σημείων ἢ τέχνη. τῷ δὲ τοῦτό τε ὑπάρχει καὶ τὸ διὰ τῆς πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὀμιλίας καὶ παιδείας τρόπον τινὰ γεγεῦσθαι. τῶν γοῦν ἐπιδεικνυμένων πολλοὶ πολλοὺς ἤσθοντο βουλομένους τὸν ἄνδρα ἐν ἐπαινέταις λαβεῖν, ὡς ἂν ἐπιστάμενον μορφᾶς λόγων ἀμείνους τε καὶ χείρους ὄραν. Included in this list is Flavius Philippus, the very prefect who summoned Libanius to Constantinople.

<sup>297</sup> *Or.* 1.76.

luxury.<sup>298</sup> The most explicit reference to the emperor occurs in Libanius' portrayal of the city's official sophist, Bemarchius, and is surely meant to influence his audience's impression of the general social and cultural milieu of the capital under this corrupt and uncultured regime.<sup>299</sup> Bemarchius, though described as "offering sacrifices to the gods" (θύων θεοῖς), was nevertheless a fervent partisan of Constantius and "the uninitiated" (οἱ ἀμύητοι) who surrounded him. The use here of the pejorative term ἀμύητος, rightly identified as referring to the emperor's Christian courtiers, also serves to highlight the educational deficiency of the imperial court, since Libanius on several occasions describes the study of rhetoric as a religious "initiation" (τελετή), specifically into the rites of Hermes and the Muses.<sup>300</sup> It is no surprise, then, that his chief academic rival achieved among such profane individuals a reputation (δόξα) for strength in oratory "through the clamor and din of his lawless words" (ψόφῳ τε καὶ κτύπῳ παρανόμων ῥημάτων). Moreover, Bemarchius fortified his position with the "strong friendships" (φιλίας ἰσχυραί) he had forged at court by participating in dice games and drinking to excess at parties (οἱ κύβοι καὶ τὰ μέχρι μέθης συμπόσια), an ironic subversion of the classical virtue of φιλία described in the aforementioned Nicomedia episode. Exalted by the applause of such "friends" and the money (χρήματα) earned in

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<sup>298</sup> While Libanius was no longer resident in Constantinople during the massive and officially sanctioned recruiting campaign of 358 – 359 undertaken by the philosopher-senator Themistius, Skinner 2008 argues that the development of the eastern senate began earlier at the outset of Constantius' reign.

<sup>299</sup> *Or.* 1.39.

<sup>300</sup> See Norman 1965: 158f. and Petit 1955: 204. For rhetorical education as an "initiation," see *Or.* 11.186, 58.4, and 62.9.

prostituting his oratory, this pagan sell-out had even embarked on a nine-month propaganda tour of the east to speak in praise of Christ, or “him who has arrayed himself against the gods” (τὸν ἐναντία τοῖς θεοῖς τεταγμένον), and to celebrate Constantius’ dedication of the Great Church in Antioch.<sup>301</sup> Libanius embellishes this act of character assassination still further with a Homeric quotation, describing the sophist as “bearing himself proudly and holding his head high” (κυδιόων τε καὶ ὑψοῦ κάρη ἔχων) as he set out across the Bosphorus with only this single traveling oration. As A. F. Norman has observed, the juxtaposition of a line from such a fundamentally classical work as the *Iliad* with the impious subject matter of Bemarchius’ oration is deliberate.<sup>302</sup> So too, I argue, is Libanius’ choice of quotation; for this line derives from a simile that likens Paris’ entry into battle to the eager gallop of an escaped domesticated horse to his accustomed bath in a “fair-flowing” river, and therefore draws upon the Trojan prince’s unfounded confidence and penchant for self-indulgence.<sup>303</sup> Thus, through this portrait of a sophist seduced by the luxury and impiety of the court, Libanius draws an overt connection between the character of this particular regime, its patronage of Christians, and the debased state of education in Constantinople.

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<sup>301</sup> Construction of the Great Church in Antioch started in 327 under Constantine and was finished during the reign of Constantius, who oversaw its dedication on January 6, 341; see Downey 1961: 342 – 349, and 358f.

<sup>302</sup> Norman 1965: 158.

<sup>303</sup> Hom. *Il.* 6.506 – 514: ὡς δ’ ὅτε τις στατὸς ἵππος ἀκοστήσας ἐπὶ φάτνῃ / δεσμὸν ἀπορρήξας θείῃ πεδίῳ κροαίνων / εἰωθὼς λούεσθαι ἐϋρρεῖος ποταμοῖο / κυδιόων· ὑψοῦ δὲ κάρη ἔχει, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαῖται / ὦμοις αἴσσονται· ὁ δ’ ἀγλαΐῃφι πεποithῶς / ρίμφα ἔγοῦνα φέρει μετὰ τ’ ἦθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων· / ὡς υἱὸς Πριάμοιο Πάρις κατὰ Περγάμου ἄκρης / τεύχεσι παμφαίνων ὡς τ’ ἠλέκτωρ ἐβεβήκει / καγχαλόων, ταχέες δὲ πόδες φέρον.

However, as noted above, the influence of the imperial administration under Constantius on traditional Greek education and civic life extended beyond the new eastern capital and nearby Bithynia to Syrian Antioch, which hosted the imperial court from 338 to 350 and again in 360/361, and served as the principal residence of the Caesar Gallus from 351 to 354.<sup>304</sup> In *Oration* 62, Libanius makes much of the imperial presence, contrasting the scholastic experience in the prominent educational centers of Egypt (specifically Alexandria), Palestine (that is, the law school of Berytus), and, of course, Athens with the three cities in which he had taught, Constantinople, Nicomedia, and Antioch:

ποῦ γὰρ ἴσον ἀκούειν τὴν τῶν ὑπογραφέων εὐτυχίαν καὶ παρόντας ὄρᾶν; καὶ διηγουμένων ἀκροᾶσθαι τὰς λαμπρὰς εἰσόδους καὶ ἐξόδους τὰς μὲν ἔωθεν, τὰς δὲ δείλης καὶ αὐτοὺς εἶναι τῶν διηγεῖσθαι δυναμένων;

For where is it equally likely to hear of the good fortune of the secretaries and to see them personally? To listen to descriptions of the magnificent entrances and departures that occur at dawn, as well as throughout the afternoon, and to be able themselves to describe them?<sup>305</sup>

Within the hostile environment of these imperial centers, he claims, students of rhetoric not only witnessed directly the emperor's patronage of mere shorthand writers, but also received no rewards for their considerably more substantial labors (τῶν πόνων ἄθλα) and therefore lost their zeal (ὄρμαί) to bear the hardship (ταλαιπωρία) of rhetorical

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<sup>304</sup> On the movements and residences of this emperor and his Caesars from 337 to 361, see Barnes 1993: 219 – 224 and 226 – 228.

<sup>305</sup> *Or.* 62.15.

studies.<sup>306</sup> In an earlier passage, one such student is depicted contemplating this pernicious state of affairs:

τί δέ μοι κέρδος τῶν μυρίων τουτωνὶ πόνων, μεθ' ὧν ἀνάγκη διὰ πολλῶν μὲν ποιητῶν ἀφικέσθαι, πολλῶν δὲ ῥητόρων καὶ παντοδαπῶν ἑτέρων συγγραμμάτων, εἰ <δὲ> τέλος ἔσται τῶν ιδρώτων, αὐτὸν μὲν ἄτιμον περιφοιτᾶν, ἕτερον δὲ εὐδαιμονεῖν;

What profit will I gain from these countless labors, by which I must pore through many poets, many orators, and every other kind of written work, if the end result of my sweat and toil is that I myself wander about in dishonor, while another achieves prosperity?<sup>307</sup>

Thus, Libanius once again contrasts the character of the imperial court under Constantius with the diligence and self-discipline of the recipients of παιδεία. Such individuals were more prudent (οἱ σοφώτεροι) and skilled in speaking (οἱ λέγοντες), but were no friend to that emperor (οὐδεὶς ἐκείνῳ φίλος), who, in their stead, granted the greatest rewards to those who were simply “quick in recording the words of another” (οἱ λέγοντος ἑτέρου γράφειν ὀξεῖς).<sup>308</sup> Indeed, in this manner, the lengthy reign of Constantius afflicted the students of those cities occupied by the court with a certain numbness toward the study of rhetoric (νάρκη τις πρὸς τοὺς λόγους), and, in the mind of Antioch’s leading sophist, effectively waged war on Greek letters (ὁ ἐν μακρᾷ βασιλείᾳ τοῖς λόγοις πεπολεμηκῶς).<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> *Or.* 62.15: τοῦτο δὴ μέγιστον ἠναντίωταί μοι καὶ τὰς ὁρμάς τῶν νέων ἀπήμβλυσε, τὸ μὴ κεῖσθαι τῶν πόνων ἄθλα πείθοντα φέρειν τὴν ταλαιπωρίαν.

<sup>307</sup> *Or.* 62.12.

<sup>308</sup> *Or.* 62.16.

<sup>309</sup> *Or.* 62.16 and 19.

Moreover, here too, Libanius maintains the distinction between shorthand writers and the students of rhetoric through the language of self-indulgence, fashioning a parallel dichotomy between Constantius and his ideal philosopher-emperor, Julian, in terms of idle luxury and tireless labor. Accordingly, while Constantius was accompanied on campaign by large quantities of wine, perfume, and soft mattresses, Julian brought with him only weapons and books. Inspired by his example, students found hard work (πόνος) sweeter than laziness (ράθυμία), “just as for the Achaeans war was sweeter than setting sail after they had received the impulse (ὄρμη) from Athena.”<sup>310</sup> As in the description of the sophist Bemarchius, this Homeric reference contributes to the rhetorical strategy of this passage, operating in this case on two levels of signification. Contextually, the simile recalls Athena’s role in the *Iliad* as a divine source of martial strength and endurance for the Greeks, and thereby enhances the connection implicit in the figure of Julian between military and scholastic discipline.<sup>311</sup> But this goddess traditionally served as the embodiment of wisdom and prudence (φρόνησις) as well, a fact mentioned explicitly in *Oration 24*, where Libanius includes her among Julian’s patron deities because of his possession of this very quality.<sup>312</sup> Thus, it is likely that the

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<sup>310</sup> *Or.* 62.17: καὶ ἦν ὁ πόνος τοῖς νέοις τῆς ράθυμίας ἡδίων, ὥσπερ τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς ὁ πόλεμος τοῦ πλοῦ μετὰ τὴν ὄρμη ἦν ἐδέξαντο παρὰ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς.

<sup>311</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2.445 – 454: οἱ δ’ ἄμφ’ Ἀτρεΐωνα διοτρεφέες βασιλῆες / θῦνον κρίνοντες, μετὰ δὲ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη / αἰγίδ’ ἔχουσα ἑρίτιμον ἀγήρων ἀθανάτην τε, / τῆς ἑκατὸν θύσανοι παγχρόσαιοι ἠερέθονται, / πάντες εὐπλεκέες, ἑκατόμβοιοι δὲ ἕκαστος / σὺν τῇ παιφάσσουσα διέσσυτο λαὸν Ἀχαιῶν / ὀτρύνουσα ἰέναι· ἐν δὲ σθένος ὤρσεν ἑκάστῳ / καρδίη ἄλληκτον πολεμίζειν ἠδὲ μάχεσθαι. / τοῖσι δ’ ἄφαρ πόλεμος γλυκίων γένητ’ ἢ νέεσθαι / ἐν νηυσὶ γλαφυρῆσι φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαίαν.

<sup>312</sup> *Or.* 24.37.

sophist's reference to Athena in this passage also functions as an allusion to that virtue of practical wisdom imparted by παιδεία and necessary for good governance, but which the secretaries who dominated Constantius' government lacked.

Ultimately, then, the spread of idleness and luxury both within the administration of Constantius and to those cities with an imperial presence operated in conjunction with the intellectual poverty characteristic of individuals educated solely in shorthand to create an atmosphere of disorder and corruption throughout the empire. In *Oration 15*, an attempt to reconcile Julian to Antioch's city council after his departure for Persia, the sophist attributes the unruly behavior of his fellow citizens to a lengthy period under a poor teacher:

οὐ πάντα ἦν ταραχῆς καὶ ῥαθυμίας καὶ ἀμελείας μεστά; οὐχ οἱ μὲν νόμοι γράμματα ἄλλως, ἀρχαὶ δ' ἐπωλοῦντο, τοῖς δὲ ἀρχομένοις κρείττοσιν εἶναι τῶν ἀρχόντων ὑπῆρχε δειλῆς μὲν δῶρα πέμπουσιν, ἔωθεν δὲ μονοноῦ ῥαπίζουσιν; οὐ τὸ μὲν δικαίως ἄρχειν κατεγελάτο, τὸ δὲ μισθοφορεῖν ἐπηνεῖτο; οὐ τὸ μὲν καλὸν ἀσθενὲς ἐγεγόνει, τὸ δὲ ἡδὺ τὴν ἰσχὺν εἶχεν; οὐχ ὁ πονηρευόμενος κύριος ἦν τοῦ μὴ δοῦναι δίκην; τί οὖν θαυμαστόν, εἰ τοσαύτης ἐξουσίας εἰς κακίαν δεδομένης ἐγένετό τις τοῖς τῶν πόλεων τρόποις ὑπὸ τοῦ καιροῦ λύμη;

Was everything not filled with confusion, laziness, and negligence? Were laws not merely letters and offices not bought and sold? Was it not possible for the governed to be more powerful than the governors, sending them gifts in the afternoon, yet all but flogging them early the next day? Was governing with justice not ridiculed and making a profit not applauded? Did virtue not grow feeble and pleasure not gain strength? Did the wicked master not escape justice? So is it any wonder after so much authority had been granted to wickedness, if some corruption had arisen in the character of the cities under the circumstances?<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> *Or.* 15.67 – 68.

Indeed, if a bad sophist (φαῦλος σοφιστής) is unable to produce good men skilled in eloquence (τεχνίται ἀγαθοὶ λόγων) and by his ignorance (ἀμαθία) a shepherd ruins (διαφθείρειν) his flock, an indolent (ὑπνηλός) ruler such as Constantius cannot impart to his subjects the self-control (σωφρονεῖν) necessary for virtuous conduct.<sup>314</sup> Instead, the cities learned from the laziness (ῥαθυμία) of this emperor, and according to Antioch's sophist, the primary instrument of this instruction in vice was the imperial secretariat.

### **The Race to Berytus and Rome**

Notwithstanding the deep anxiety Libanius exudes throughout his literary corpus over the social and political elevation of secretaries and shorthand writing, it is in fact the study of Roman law and Latin, he claims, that acted as the greatest hindrance to the influence of traditional Greek παιδεία (κώλυμα μέγιστον τῇ τῶν λόγων ἰσχύϊ).<sup>315</sup> Although the attraction of the famous law school at Berytus first manifests itself early in the sophist's career, during his official tenure in Constantinople from 349 to 353, the bulk of his critique of legal studies is found in the orations written after the accession of Theodosius I in 379.<sup>316</sup> The epistolary collection reinforces this chronological dichotomy, containing letters of recommendation from the 350s and 60s written to

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<sup>314</sup> *Or.* 15.68: ἢ τοὺς μὲν τῶν φαύλων μαθητὰς σοφιστῶν οὐκ ἔνι γενέσθαι τεχνίτας ἀγαθοὺς λόγων, ὑπνηλοῦ δὲ ἀνδρὸς βασιλεύοντος σωφρονεῖν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἔστι; καὶ τῇ μὲν τῶν ποιμένων ἀμαθία τὰ ποιμνία διαφθείρεται, ταῖς δὲ τῶν βασιλέων ῥαθυμίαις αἱ πόλεις παιδεύονται;

<sup>315</sup> *Or.* 62.21.

<sup>316</sup> *Or.* 1.76. On professors and students of law in Berytus from the fourth through the sixth centuries, see Jones Hall 2004: 195 – 220, with a list of lawyers, professors, and students at 280 – 285.

Domnio, a professor of law in Berytus, and even documenting several attempts to entice teachers of Latin to Antioch itself between 355 and 357.<sup>317</sup> Modern scholarship has generally interpreted this discrepancy between the earlier and later writings as both a reflection of the growing and very real antipathy of an elderly Libanius toward these rival disciplines, and a reaction to the evasion of civic duties by the eastern curial elite and the intrusion of Roman power and culture into the customary Greek way of life.<sup>318</sup> While this distinction between an initial tolerance and the uncompromising hostility of old age may be exaggerated by the nature of the sources, the expansion of the imperial bureaucracy over the course of the fourth century undoubtedly rendered knowledge of the law and the language in which it was written an important channel for upward mobility that conveyed honor (τιμὴ), power, and wealth (δυνάμεις τε καὶ πλούτους) to its possessors.<sup>319</sup> In Libanius' opinion, this came at the expense of not only the study of Greek literature and rhetoric, but also the civic and imperial administrations of the late Roman state.

Even so, the sophist tempers his condemnation of the study of law in the first half of *Oration 62*, characterizing this impediment to the λόγοι as “pernicious” (ὄλεθρος),

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<sup>317</sup> *Ep.* 117 (C156), 1131 (B165), and 1171 (B166) are recommendations for his own students, 533 (B163) a letter of introduction for the student of a rival sophist, and 653 (B164) introduces an individual who had not studied rhetoric at all. In *Ep.* 534 (C151) and 539 (C152), Libanius encourages a former student, Olympius, to return from Rome to teach Latin. He makes a similar attempt with Silanus, a law professor in Constantinople, in *Ep.* 433 (B162).

<sup>318</sup> See Liebeschuetz 1972: 243 – 255, and Festugière 1959: 411.

<sup>319</sup> See *Or.* 1.214 and 234, and Jones 1964: 511f. Crihiore 2007: 210 – 212 recognizes a greater attraction to Roman law and Latin in the 380s and after, but cautions against adhering to too strict a dichotomy, suggesting that the difference in tone between the orations and correspondence may have more to do with genre than chronology, and highlighting the disparity in preservation between the earlier and later letters.

yet nonetheless noble and an object of praise, at least among some circles (καὶ ἔστω καλὸν καὶ ἐπαινείσθω τοῦτο τὸ ἐμπόδιμα, εἰ δοκεῖ).<sup>320</sup> Unlike shorthand writing, an education in Roman jurisprudence involved much more than simply acquiring a technical skill. Although Cribiore has recently argued that an ability to write and speak polished Latin prose was not necessary to gain admittance to a school of law, such a course of study still required a good reading knowledge of the language and possibly some capacity for translation.<sup>321</sup> Once admitted, students embarked on a two- to four-year program that involved not only acquiring expertise in the extensive writings of the classical jurists and a growing body of imperial constitutions and rescripts, but also comparing specific juristic texts to other relevant works of jurisprudence in order to derive legal solutions to contemporary problems.<sup>322</sup>

Yet while an education in Roman law involved a certain level of rigor that training in shorthand lacked, it nevertheless was missing the literary and oratorical components that were fundamental to traditional elite παιδεία. Thus, for Libanius, the study of rhetoric was indisputably superior (τὰ πρότερα), and legal studies, secondary (τὰ δεύτερα).<sup>323</sup> During the course of his invective against the *consularis Syriae* Eutropius, the sophist brands law a subject for “those of slower intellect” (ὁ τῶν τήν

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<sup>320</sup> *Or.* 62.21.

<sup>321</sup> Cribiore 2007: 207 – 210, and 2009: 237f.

<sup>322</sup> See Humfress 2007: 81 – 86, and 1999.

<sup>323</sup> This qualitative distinction comes more to the fore over the course of the 380s and early 390s, especially after the institution of an official chair of Latin at Antioch in 388; see *Or.* 36.8, 58.22, and 3.24.

διάνοιαν βραδυτέρων ἐστίν).<sup>324</sup> This particular governor had undertaken legal training only after failing in his pursuit of rhetoric, and had proved to be a “blockhead” (λίθος) even among the law students. Young men who successfully applied themselves to the λόγοι, on the other hand, knew how to speak and were able to move an audience (καὶ νεανίσκοι λέγειν εἰδότες καὶ κινεῖν ἀκροατήν).<sup>325</sup> It is for this reason that legal experts (*iurisperiti* or *iurisconsulti*) had customarily assumed an inferior position in the hierarchy of the Roman judicial system, acting as private consultants when necessary to litigants and their rhetorically-trained advocates (*advocati*, *causidici*, or in Greek, συνήγοροι).<sup>326</sup> In *Oration 2*, Libanius laments a perceived reversal of this hierarchy, emphasizing the once deferential reliance of the *iurisperiti* on the professional orator: “In the past, those versed in the law had to bring their books and stand with their eyes upon the orator (ὁ ῥήτωρ), waiting for him to say, ‘Hey, read those please.’”<sup>327</sup> He elaborates on this state of affairs in *Oration 62*, identifying the heightened importance of tax collection under the administration of Theodosius as the primary factor undermining the status of oratory in the courtroom during this period.<sup>328</sup> Accordingly, the governors appointed by this emperor spent less time in adjudication, rejecting long and beautiful speeches (μῆκη τε

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<sup>324</sup> *Or.* 4.18.

<sup>325</sup> *Or.* 62.21.

<sup>326</sup> For the most recent treatment of *iurisperiti* and advocates in the late Roman empire, see Humfress 2007: 32 – 132.

<sup>327</sup> *Or.* 2.44.

<sup>328</sup> *Or.* 62.43 – 44.

καὶ κάλλη λόγων) and making it known that the real task of the orator is to cause trouble (τὸ τοῦ ῥήτορα ὡς ἀληθῶς ἔργον ὄχλον):

κἂν διηγήσῃται τις κἂν ἐσκεμμένον τι κομίση, ληρεῖν ἔδοξε καὶ τρίβειν χρόνον, τοὺς δὲ ἀμαθεῖς τουτουσί καὶ πολλοὺς καὶ τῶν ἀγοραίων οὐδὲν βελτίους καὶ νεύμασι μᾶλλον ἢ εὐφωνίᾳ περὶ ὧν εἰσέρχονται διδάσκοντας τούτους ἰσχυροὺς ἐποίησεν.

And if anyone offers detailed description and introduces a carefully considered argument, he seems to speak foolishly and waste time. This has given influence to a great many ignoramuses, who are no better than the vulgar masses, instructing the court about their concerns with a nod rather than by mellifluous delivery.

The old ways (τὰ ἀρχαῖα ἔθη) had passed, according to Libanius, superseded by a topsyturvy era that valorized ignorance and boorishness (ἀμαθία), in which it is advantageous not to know how to speak (πλεονέκτημα τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι λέγειν) and practicing rhetoric was a matter of reproach (ἔγκλημα τὸ ῥητορεύειν ἱκανῶς).

Moreover, in comparing law students with “those who frequent the marketplace” (οἱ ἀγοραῖοι), Libanius once again betrays his upbringing as a member of the city’s curial elite. He makes this connection between law school and the lower classes of urban society explicit earlier in this oration:

τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἄλλον ἅπαντα χρόνον τοὺς μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐργαστηρίων νέους, οἷς ἢ φροντὶς ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀναγκαίας τροφῆς, ἦν ἰδεῖν εἰς Φοινίκην ἐπὶ τῷ τοὺς νόμους λαβεῖν ἰόντας, οἱ δὲ ἐξ εὐδαιμόνων οἰκιῶν οἷς γένος ἐπιφανὲς καὶ χρήματα καὶ πατέρες λειψουργηκότες, ἔμενον ἐν τοῖς ἡμετέροις.

During every other period of time, young men from the workshops, who were concerned primarily with putting food on the table, used to be seen going to Phoenicia to study the law, while those from prosperous

households, with distinguished families, property, and fathers who had performed their civic duties, remained in our classrooms.<sup>329</sup>

The sophist fondly recalls that a legal education was once considered a sign of lesser social status (τῆς χείρονος τύχης σημεῖον) among the landed gentry who comprised Antioch's city council. But now, the sons of even these well-established families participate in "the crowded race" to Berytus (πολὺς πολλῶν ὁ δρόμος ἐπ' ἐκεῖνο). Rome, too, frequently enticed Libanius' students from their rhetorical studies with great expectations (ἐπὶ ταῖς μελλούσαις ἐλπίσιν) for office, power, marriage, a life at the imperial court, and access to the emperor.<sup>330</sup> Thus, the study of Roman law not only failed to uplift the humbler members of imperial polis society from their natural state of ignorance and vulgarity, but also undermined the cultural and educational advantages of the Hellenic elite by offering them the hope of honor and influence beyond the bounds of their native cities. In other words, this shift in educational priorities threatened to collapse the traditional social hierarchy of the eastern Roman empire to the level of its lowest common denominator.

As part of his rhetorical strategy to restore the authority of the λόγοι and thereby reconstitute the proper socio-political structure of the Greek east, Libanius depicts the study of law as a corrupting influence on vital civic institutions, the mental faculties of Antioch's youth, and, perhaps most importantly, the very nature of rhetoric itself. In a

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<sup>329</sup> *Or.* 62.21.

<sup>330</sup> *Or.* 43.5: ἐντεῦθεν ἀγωγαὶ συχναὶ νέων καὶ πλοῖα πλοῦν ἕνα τὸν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης φερόμενα κρότος τε τῶν κομιζομένων παιδαρίων ἐπὶ ταῖς μελλούσαις ἐλπίσιν. αἱ δὲ εἰσιν ἀρχή, δυναστεία, γάμος, ἐν βασιλείοις διατριβαί, τὸ διαλέγεσθαι βασιλεῖ.

pair of speeches from 388, the sophist castigates the ambitious and self-aggrandizing *principales* (Greek, πρῶτοι) of the city council for encouraging their fellow councilors to send their sons to Berytus or Rome.<sup>331</sup> Those among the curial elite who studied abroad did so not for the sake of justice (ὑπὲρ δικαιοσύνης), or to prevent an accidental transgression of the laws, or to facilitate communication between the council and imperial administration through their knowledge of Latin, but rather to escape membership on the council and the civic obligations attendant on their status.<sup>332</sup> As the most distinguished of Antioch's citizenry (οἱ σφόδρα εὐδοκίμησαντες) had demonstrated, such an education was useless (μάταιον) or, at best, of little importance (σμίκρον) to the duties of a councilor, and wholly unnecessary in making a name for oneself. Unlike students of rhetoric, then, law students were not passionate about the subject itself but what it produced (οὐκ αὐτῶν ἐκείνων ἔρᾶν, τῶν δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν φουμένων), that is, curial immunity. Thus, it should be no surprise that young men of curial origin came out of law school as pompous snobs (οἱ σεμνοί) who felt it beneath them to recognize their native cities (οὐκ ἀξιοῦντες εἰδέναι τὰς ἑαυτῶν).

However, according to Libanius, a legal education not only undermined the traditional and essential Hellenic value of civic patriotism (φιλοπατρία), but corrupted the mental faculties of its recipients as well. *Oration 62* discusses the impact of such an

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<sup>331</sup> *Or.* 48.22 – 24 and 49.26 – 30. These orations are considered “doublets” by most of Libanius’ commentators and therefore both dated to the autumn of 388 based on the internal evidence of *Or.* 49; see Norman 1977: 417f.

<sup>332</sup> *Or.* 48.22 and 23.

education upon the minds of those who had already received training in rhetoric, disputing the common misconception among the contemporary civic elite that knowledge of Latin and law was simply added to the fruits of their previous scholarly labors:

λελήθασι δὲ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ἀντὶ τοῦ προσλαβεῖν ἀντιλαμβάνοντες. οὐ γὰρ τὸ μὲν σώζεται τοῖς ἔχουσι, τὸ δὲ ἐπεισέρχεται, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἴσως εἰσέρχεται, <τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἐξέρχεται>, οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε τὴν διάνοιαν ἀρκεῖν ὁμοῦ πρὸς τε τὴν τούτων κτῆσιν πρὸς τε τὴν ἐκείνων φυλακὴν, ἀλλ' ὁ τούτῳ προσέχων ἐκεῖνο διαφῆκεν, ὥστ' ἀμείνους ἂν ἦσαν πάντα τοῖς νόμοις διδόντες τὸν χρόνον ἢ τούτου τὸ πλεόν ἀναλίσκοντες μάτην.

But they have failed to notice that they are receiving a substitution instead of an addition. For the earlier knowledge is not preserved for those who have it when something new is introduced, but the latter enters the mind, perhaps, and the former must depart. The intellect is not sufficient to acquire new knowledge and preserve the old both at the same time; whoever devotes himself to the former dismisses the latter, so that they would be better off giving all of their time to the law than squandering the greater part of it in vain.<sup>333</sup>

Furthermore, in a passage laced with legal terminology, the sophist concedes that there is no case to be made (οὐ διαδικασίαν ἔστι λαχεῖν) against the greater utility of an expertise in Roman law: students did well to consider pursuing the νόμοι a “more useful activity” (χρησιμώτερον πρᾶγμα) than instilling the λόγοι.<sup>334</sup> Yet this oration was written as an apology for his effectiveness as a teacher, not as a contribution to the long-standing philosophical debate over the relationship between the good and the useful. For

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<sup>333</sup> *Or.* 62.22. In spite of his assertion that these two disciplines are incompatible, Libanius does in fact praise individuals for their proficiency in both on several occasions in his letters; cf., e.g., *Ep.* 339 (B62), 668 (B79), 871, and 1296 (C118). Cribiore 2007: 212 notes that Libanius continued this type of epistolary praise into the 390s; see *Ep.* 974 (of 390) and 1032 (of 393).

<sup>334</sup> *Or.* 62.23.

this reason, he is content to demonstrate that while these secondary studies (οἱ δεύτεροι) gained strength, the eloquence garnered from an earlier education in rhetoric (οἱ πρότεροι) was erased, either wholly or in large part.

It was not long, however, before Libanius did take issue with the supposed utility of an education in law. Speaking before an audience of his fellow teachers in the winter of 385/6, he disputes the current notion that legal studies are the provider of all good things (οἱ χορηγοὶ ἀπάντων ἀγαθῶν), and rhetoric mere nonsense, a source only of toil and poverty (οὐδεν ἄλλο πλὴν ὕθλον καὶ πόνων καὶ πενίας ἀφορμήν).<sup>335</sup> In fact, the trip to Rome profits only a few, he maintains, while the majority returns empty-handed and somewhat deprived of understanding (παρείλοντές τι τοῦ φρονεῖν). Libanius makes his case most vividly with the story of a certain Alexander in the closely contemporary *Oration* 40.<sup>336</sup> This fugitive peasant, who had amassed a fortune as a ruthless and unscrupulous moneylender, went to war with the authority of Plato (ὁ τῆ τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἀρχῆ πεπολεμηκῶς) and spat upon the rhetorical studies offered at Antioch (καταπτύσας τῶν ἡμετέρων διατριβῶν), sending his sons to Rome instead with high hopes (μεγάλαι ἐλπίδες) and at great personal expense. Although initially incredulous of rumors of their ignorance (ἀμαθία), Alexander had to endure the rejoicing of his enemies and the lamentations of his friends after one son returned:

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<sup>335</sup> *Or.* 43.4 – 5. External evidence from *Or.* 36.13 (of 386) and 1.241f. provides the date; cf. Norman 2000: 111 – 114.

<sup>336</sup> *Or.* 40.6 – 7 and 10.

οὕτως οὐδὲν εἰδώς ὦν εἰδέναι χρῆν ὁ ῥήτωρ περιήρχετο, μικρὸν εἰπεῖν, οὐδὲν ὦν ἀνδραπόδου βελτίων, οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰδώλου γε ἐκεῖνος, οὔτε λέγων οὐδὲν οὔτε λέγοντι προσέχων, τοσοῦτον ἀπέχων <τοῦ> χρήσασθαι τῷ στόματι, ὥστε καὶ τὸ νεῦσαι κάματον ἔχειν αὐτῷ.

He came back knowing nothing that an orator must know, with little to say, and no better than a slave; for he was no more than a phantom, able neither to speak nor attend to a speech, and so far from using his mouth that he has even a decline in toil.<sup>337</sup>

The arrival of this “gift of Hermes” (ἔρμαιοι), Libanius notes with great irony and satisfaction, served to staunch the flow of young men to Rome and profited the Greek λόγοι. This was not to last, however, for in spite of the obvious educational deficiencies of this “speechless” (ἄφωνος) student, the object of this invective, Eumolpius, nevertheless procured for him the position of assessor (πάρεδρος) to his brother Dometius.<sup>338</sup> As a consequence, the study of law was shown to be an effective vehicle for political advancement and the Antiochene youth resumed once more their annual exodus to Italy: “again the harbors and again the ships, the Adriatic and the Tiber” (καὶ πάλιν λιμένες καὶ πάλιν νῆες καὶ Ἀδρίας καὶ Θύμβρις).<sup>339</sup>

According to *Oration* 62, this shift in educational priorities corrupted both the administration of justice in the Greek east, and the way rhetoric itself was practiced, fostering a breed of advocates who were not simply ignorant and unable to speak, but

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<sup>337</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 951 (N167), where Libanius claims that students return from Rome “not much different than sheep” (οἱ οὐ πολλῶ τῶν βοσκημάτων διαφέροντες).

<sup>338</sup> Eumolpius (*PLRE* 295) was a younger relation and old friend of Libanius, and served as the *consularis Syriae* of 384/5; cf. *Or.* 40.1 and 1.189, and *Ep.* 75 (B119).

<sup>339</sup> *Or.* 40.7.

also shameless and unscrupulous. Instead of waiting to be approached, these individuals hired agents (μισθοῦνται προσαγωγέας), snatched litigants, flattered hucksters (κολακεύουσι καπήλους), and sent submissive letters (ταπεινὰς ἐπιστολάς) to neighboring towns.<sup>340</sup> Worse still, they spread their corruption throughout the judicial administration of the eastern empire, enslaving themselves to the governors' assistants (δουλεύουσι τοῖς τῶν ἀρχόντων ὑπηρέταις), colluding with the court criers to split future profits (ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐσομένων κερδῶν), and purchasing the right of entrance from the magistrates who brought cases into court (ῶνοῦνται τὰς εἰσόδους παρὰ τῶν εἰσαγωγέων). As a result, the nature of court oratory changed, in Libanius' opinion, for the worse: "These are the strengths of contemporary rhetoric, shouting, lying, and swearing falsely, causing an uproar and spreading chaos, making promises and offering bribes" (ταυτὶ γὰρ ἐστὶ τῆς νῦν ῥητορικῆς τὸ κράτος, βοῆσαι, ψεύσασθαι, ἐπιορκῆσαι, ταραξαι, θόρυβον ἐμβαλεῖν, ὑποσχέσθαι, δοῦναι). Naturally, in such a depraved environment, Libanius' students were at a disadvantage, for under his instruction they learned not only the art of public speaking but a sense of decency as well (μετὰ τοῦ λέγειν αἰσχύνεσθαι). Thus, while advocates who had received a traditional education had few clients and made little profit, this new class of legal experts (δικῶν τεχνῖται), whose minds had become "thoroughly barbarous" (αἰ ψυχὰι αἰ

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<sup>340</sup> *Or.* 62.41.

ἐκβεβαρβάρωνται), left court each day “with their hands full of gold” (ἐμπλήσαντες χρυσοῦ τὰς χεῖρας).<sup>341</sup>

### **The Business of Government**

Toward the end of his apology for traditional Greek παιδεία, Libanius turns at last to the relationship between rhetorical training and governance. In addressing the criticism that only a small number of his students have become provincial governors, he argues that governorships are “gifts of Fortune” (δῶρα τῆς Τύχης), and so not the inevitable outcome of such training (οὐκ ἐν τῇ φύσει τῆς τέχνης).<sup>342</sup> For this reason, while the sophist agrees with his critics that an education in rhetoric is necessary “for those who intend to govern well” (ἐγὼ δὲ δεῖν μὲν ῥητορικῆς τοῖς μέλλουσι καλῶς ἄρξειν ὁμολογῶ), it is, in his view, not a prerequisite for actually receiving such a position. Yet, although Libanius confidently assumes agreement (ὁμολογία) that students of rhetoric are ideal candidates for the imperial administration, what follows is less an apology for his success rate than an impassioned defense of the benefits of rhetorical training in the government of the empire. To this end, he cites three former students who had served as provincial governors, defining their qualities in office in terms of the corruption they fought.

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<sup>341</sup> *Or.* 62.45.

<sup>342</sup> *Or.* 62.50.

The first of these rhetorically trained statesmen is Themistius of Heraclea, who had studied under Libanius from 355 to 357 and been named *praeses* of Lycia in 361 at the very early age of twenty-four.<sup>343</sup> Although he had attended school at Antioch for only two years and apparently questioned the usefulness of his studies at the time, in *Oration* 62, Themistius is refashioned as an ideal “sophistic” governor who enables the province to recover from the corruption of previous officials.<sup>344</sup> Upon his arrival, the young governor found the inhabitants “ruined by the depredations of his predecessors” (ταῖς τῶν ἔμπροσθεν κλοπαῖς διεφθαρμένον).<sup>345</sup> Unlike the thieving officials before him, Themistius judged that his salary from the emperor sufficed and therefore led the Lycians “to abundance” (εἰς εὐπορίαν). “He achieved great wealth by leaving his subjects wealthy” (μέγαν πλοῦτον ἤνεγκε τὸ πλουτοῦντας ὧν ἤρξε καταλιπεῖν), Libanius remarks. Moreover, while he worked to improve the material circumstances (τὰ πράγματα) of his province, Themistius added “the work of sophists” (τὰ τῶν σοφιστῶν ἔργα) to the functions of his office by delivering orations at the festivals of every city under his jurisdiction. Consequently, under his administration, the teachers of Lycia also profited (λυσιτελεῖν), but more from listening than from speaking.

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<sup>343</sup> *BLZG* 307 (iii), *PLRE* 894 (2).

<sup>344</sup> *Ep.* 309.1: “You were distressed during the course of your education, supposing that you were wasting your effort on something useless” (σὺ δὲ ἤσχαλλες παιδευόμενος τότε οἰόμενος περὶ πρᾶγμα ἄχρηστον ἀναλίσκειν τὸν πόνον). In *Ep.* 579 (C182), however, Libanius reports to Themistius’ father, Heortius, on his son’s marked improvement.

<sup>345</sup> *Or.* 62.55.

Libanius' next example, the "noble" (γενναῖος) Andronicus, required a good deal more rhetorical finesse, for this former student and friend had accepted two offices under the usurper Procopius and been subsequently executed by Valens in 366.<sup>346</sup> Prior to the usurpation, however, he had served as the governor of Phoenicia in 360 – 361, a province "daring in its bribery" (ἡ δοῦναι δυναμένη).<sup>347</sup> When the Phoenicians came bearing their customary offerings, which they called "gifts" (δῶρα) and concealed under the pretext of the New Year's festival, Andronicus initially threatened to arrest their slaves, but instead granted them leniency and ordered that they learn the distinction between a governor and a hired servant (μισθωτής). In this way, Libanius writes, Andronicus became "a more consummate guardian of each man's property than even the owners themselves" (φύλαξ δὲ ἐγένετο τῶν ἐκάστοις ὄντων ἀκριβέστερος δεσποτῶν). What is perhaps more impressive, though, was his capacity to resist the influence of previous holders of high office, the *honorati*, who were accustomed to giving orders (ἐπιτάττειν) to the governor of Phoenicia, and intimidating him into considering "their own desires before the laws" (πρὸ τῶν νόμων ποιεῖσθαι τὸν δικαστὴν τὰς ἐκείνων ἐπιθυμίας).<sup>348</sup> Andronicus brought an end to such "tyranny" (τυραννίς) not through violence or shouting (οὐχ ὕβρεσιν οὐδὲ κραυγαῖς), but by demonstrating that "he respected no man more than

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<sup>346</sup> *BLZG* 71 (ii), *PLRE* 64 (3). In *Or.* 1.171, Libanius blames Andronicus' execution on the deception of Hierius of Damascus, a philosopher and former governor whom the sophist had introduced to his former student in 360, *Ep.* 195 (N67). For Hierius, see *PLRE* 430 (4).

<sup>347</sup> *Or.* 62.56; cf. *Ep.* 1296.2 (C118), where Libanius describes the Phoenicians as "knowledgeable in acquiring riches" (οἱ πλουτίζειν ἐπιστάμενοι).

<sup>348</sup> *Or.* 62.57.

justice (τὰ δίκαια).” Thus, the *honorati* “were educated” (ἐπαιδεύθησαν) to request only what was not unjust (οὐκ ἄδικον) to receive, both inside the courtroom and out.

Unfortunately, Andronicus’ reputation for administrative excellence (ἀρχικός) drew the attention of the usurper Procopius, who summoned him from retirement in Tyre to serve first as governor of Bithynia and then *vicarius* of Thrace. Yet even under these circumstances, Libanius is able to defend the sound judgment (γνώμη) of his former student.<sup>349</sup> Although the sophist maintains that Andronicus was coerced into accepting office, he nevertheless performed his duties both faithfully (πιστός) and with the diligence (φιλόπρονος) he had cultivated in his studies.<sup>350</sup> The choice he faced, then, is portrayed as one between continuing his support for a militarily inferior usurper and the disgrace (ὄνειδος) of turning traitor in order to become rich (πλουτεῖν). Naturally, as a former student of Libanius and a recipient of traditional Greek παιδεία, he chose the latter, and in doing so, maintained his honor (δόξα). Indeed, even his execution provides proof of his virtue, for when Valens confiscated his property and witnessed “the meagerness of his possessions” (ἡ τῶν ὄντων βραχύτης), he was amazed at Andronicus’ character (ἐθαύμασε τὸν τρόπον).

Lastly, and briefly, Libanius discusses the administration of the learned Celsus, a student of his in Nicomedia who had himself taught rhetoric before serving as the

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<sup>349</sup> *Or.* 62.60.

<sup>350</sup> *Or.* 62.58 – 59.

*consularis* of Syria in 363 – 364.<sup>351</sup> This native of Antioch was able to govern his fellow citizens, his relatives, and his friends justly (ὀρθῶς), without overstepping the laws to show them favor (οὔτε νόμους παραβὰς τῆ πρὸς ἐκείνους χάριτι).<sup>352</sup> What is more, he did so and yet preserved both his friendships and justice (μετὰ τῶν δικαίων τὰς φιλίας φυλάξας). This, Libanius maintains, is “the rarest thing of all” (τὸ πάντων σπανιώτατον).

Together, these three former students of Libanius represent different facets of the concept of φιλανθρωπία, a term that gained wide currency in the Greek east during the fourth century and was applied as a supreme virtue to both emperors and individuals. While Glanville Downey argued in his now classic study that pagan authors such as Themistius, Julian, and Libanius offered this classical principle as a counterpart to Christian ἀγάπη, in the context of *Oration* 62, this concept instead serves to distinguish the recipients of traditional Greek παιδεία in the administration of the empire.<sup>353</sup> Accordingly, Themistius of Heraclea restored the inhabitants of Lycia to prosperity through his temperance and selflessly exceeded his official duties in order to adorn their cities with eloquence; Andronicus corrects the venal habits of the Phoenicians by his clemency and educates the local *honorati* in the proper exercise of personal influence; and Celsus offers a lesson to his fellow Antiochenes on the distinction between friendship

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<sup>351</sup> *BLZG* 104 (i), *PLRE* 193 (3). Celsus studied under Libanius at Nicomedia c. 350, *Ep.* 742. For his status as a rhetor, see *Ep.* 783, *Or.* 18.159.

<sup>352</sup> *Or.* 62.61. Celsus was a wealthy and influential member of Antioch’s curial elite, *Ep.* 86 (N44).

<sup>353</sup> Downey 1955.

and favoritism in the administration of justice. In short, their φιλανθρωπία is expressed in terms of their opposition to various forms of administrative corruption.

In stark contrast to these exemplary officials, Libanius depicts his chief critic as a model of inhumanity (ἀπανθρωπία) and an impostor of an orator. This unnamed *honoratus*, “who knew nothing except how to praise himself and slander others,” had filled Antioch with talk of his fabulous riches, his singular speaking ability, and his unique administrative skills.<sup>354</sup> Libanius does not dispute his wealth, but asserts that it derives “from the cruelty of his usury” (ἐκ τῆς ὠμότητος τῆς περὶ τοὺς τόκους).<sup>355</sup> Without pity for widows or orphans and “unbending before a flood of tears, shouting, and screaming,” he ruined many households and made beggars of their women and children; and “based upon these profits more dreadful than all forms of beggary” (ἐπὶ κέρδεσι πάσης δεινοτέροις πτωχείας), he called himself fortunate (εὐδαίμων). For the sake of continuing this practice, he gave up his governorship to accept a lesser position as assessor to a prefect. During the five months he spent in this post, he behaved “as a robber instead of a reasonable money-lender” (ληστής ὢν ἀντὶ δανειστοῦ μετρίου), and in collecting his dues, he was “more savage than the Cyclops, all but tearing the flesh from the poor” (ἀγριώτερός ἐστι τοῦ Κύκλωπος μονοноῦ τὰς σάρκας τῶν πενομένων ἀποσπῶν). Libanius concludes:

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<sup>354</sup> *Or.* 62.63.

<sup>355</sup> *Or.* 62.64 – 65.

τοιοῦτος ἡμῖν ὁ Κροῖσος ἀντὶ τοῦ Πακτωλοῦ τὴν ἀπανθρωπίαν  
αὐτὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ καρπούμενος, ὕπαρ ὄναρ λογιζόμενος τόκους, ὑπὸ  
πάντων μισούμενος, ἐν μὲν τοῖς τῶν ἄλλων κακοῖς φαιδρός, ἐν δὲ τοῖς  
καλοῖς περίλυπος, εὖ μὲν πάσχειν ἀξιῶν, τοῖς δ' εὖ ποιοῦσι πολεμῶν  
ὡς ἂν ἡδικημένος, δεδιὼς μὴ χάριν ὁμολογήσας εἰς ἀμοιβῆς ἀνάγκην  
κατακλεισθῆ. πῶς δ' οὐκ ἔμελλες πλουτεῖν τὰ τῶν φίλων  
ἀφαιρούμενος καὶ τὰς ἀκαιρίας ἐκείνων καιρὸν σαυτῷ τῶν κλοπῶν  
ποιούμενος;

This is our Croesus; instead of the Pactolus, he personally turns his  
inhumanity into profit; waking or sleeping he counts up his interest, hated  
by everyone, happy at the troubles of the rest and aggrieved at their  
success, demanding preferential treatment and quarrelling with those who  
treat him well, as if he had been ill done by, afraid that, if he condescends  
to accept a favor, he will inevitably be bound to repay it. Of course you  
would make a fortune if you rob your friends and regard their ill-fortunes  
as a chance for you to thief.<sup>356</sup>

Thus, through his ἀπανθρωπία, this anonymous *honoratus* turned the imperial  
bureaucracy into a source of profit for himself, instead of those he governed. Indeed, so  
great was his inhumanity that not even his friends benefited under his administration.

Yet this critic, it seems, had some reputation as an orator and had even married the  
daughter of a “lover of eloquence” (λόγων ἐραστής).<sup>357</sup> Thus, as in the case of the  
governor Eustathius, with whom this study began, Libanius was once again compelled to  
reconcile his subject’s literary pretensions with his very unliterary behavior in office. In  
this instance, the sophist claims that his detractor bought his speeches “like anything else  
for sale in the market” (ὡσπερ ἄλλο τι τῶν ὠνίων ἀγοράζειν), making him a mere  
actor (ὑποκριτής) who knows nothing except delivery (πλὴν εὐφωνίας). For a student,

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<sup>356</sup> *Or.* 62.66, trans. by Norman 2000: 107. The River Pactolus was in Lydia and carried gold dust down  
from Mount Tmolus, Hdt. 5.101.

<sup>357</sup> *Or.* 62.67 – 68.

such behavior was disgraceful (αἰσχρόν), Libanius observes, but for an individual “engaged in palace affairs, who for a long time provided his tongue for the emperor’s letters” (τὸ δ’ ἐν βασιλείοις στρεφόμενον καὶ παρέχοντα βασιλεῖ τὴν αὐτοῦ γλῶτταν εἰς ἐπιστολὰς πάλαι), it is certainly “worthy of the deepest dishonor” (ἐσχάτης ἀτιμίας ἄξιον).

### **Conclusion: A Hellenic Aristocracy of Virtue**

Within the body of his writings, Libanius constructs a narrative of political corruption that is inextricably linked to the declining popularity of traditional Greek παιδεία, especially among the families of the curial elite. This narrative begins under Constantius II, who placed lowly secretaries into powerful positions within the imperial administration and thereby enhanced the status of shorthand writing, a mere technical skill in the mind of Antioch’s leading sophist. Under the reign of this emperor in particular, the toils of a rhetorical education were abandoned for the easy success afforded to training in shorthand, and self-discipline gave way to idleness and luxury. Worse still, such men lacked the practical wisdom attained in the study of rhetoric, and as a result, confusion and disorder rippled across the empire.

Although the influence of the imperial secretariat declined after the death of Constantius, the threat posed by shorthand was replaced by the growing prestige of Latin and Roman law. While legal studies involved considerably more rigor shorthand, it still lacked the literary and rhetorical elements of Greek παιδεία, and was therefore portrayed

by Libanius as second rate. Nevertheless, the expanding imperial bureaucracy favored those with legal expertise and young men from all levels of Antiochene society departed for the law schools at Berytus and Rome. Those among the curial elite who had some prior rhetorical training returned to Antioch unable to speak. In the courtroom, as legal experts gained prominence over trained orators, violence and abuse replaced civility and eloquence, and success was measured in terms of monetary gain. This mentality infected the ranks of the administration as well, where humanity (φιλανθρωπία) of the rhetorically educated yielded to the inhumanity (ἀπανθρωπία) of bribery and extortion.

Although it would be dangerous to accept this narrative as a direct reflection of fourth century reality, Libanius' rhetorical construction of corruption did, in many ways, address the anxieties of his age. The development and expansion of an imperial administrative apparatus that charged fees for its services produced a growing number of individuals with wealth and power who originated from across the complex social hierarchy of the late Roman empire. Confronted with the potential for material gain and personal influence offered by a career in the bureaucracy, Libanius was compelled to justify the benefits of a traditional aristocratic education in literature and rhetoric not only to a new class of elites from various social backgrounds, but also to the more established families of the city councils of the Greek east who faced the threat of displacement. As a means to this end, Antioch's official sophist fashions a rhetoric of corruption that emphasizes the effectiveness of traditional Greek παιδεία in bestowing status and

legitimacy upon its recipients. Thus, in a letter to a former student, Julius, who was the son of a renowned governor but had himself grown lax in his education, Libanius writes:

Παρόντα μὲν σε τὰ μὲν ἔπειθον, τὰ δὲ ἠνάγκαζον τοὺς ὑπὲρ λόγων ὑπομένειν πόνους· νῦν δὲ τὸ δεύτερον μὲν οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην πρὸς ἀπόντα ποιεῖν, παραινῶ δέ σοι μέγιστον νομίζειν τῶν ἀγαθῶν παιδείαν καὶ μηδὲν βαρὺ τῶν ἐπὶ ταύτην ἀγόντων. Τοῦτο δ' ἂν ποιοῖς, εἰ περιφέροις ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τὴν αἰτίαν, ἀφ' ἧς ὁ πατήρ σοι καὶ ἄρχει καὶ μετὰ θαύματος. Ταυτὶ μὲν γὰρ οὐ πολλὴν περιουσίαν, οὐχ ὥραν σώματος, οὐκ εὐγένειαν εὐρήσεις αὐτῷ δεδωκυῖαν, ἀλλ' ὄντα ἀμφοτέρα δῶρα τῶν λόγων.

When you here, I both persuaded you and forced you to withstand the labors of rhetoric. I would not be able to do the latter now, since you are away, but I urge you to consider that education is the greatest of goods, and that none of the things that lead to it is heavy to bear. You would do this if you bore in mind the reason why your father governs and elicits admiration. You will find that those things do not derive from great wealth, physical beauty, and noble birth, but are both the gifts of rhetoric.<sup>358</sup>

Thus, like Symmachus, Libanius too was engaged in the task of fashioning an aristocracy of virtue for the rapidly changing social environment of the fourth-century Roman empire.

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<sup>358</sup> *Ep.* 1335 (C123), trans. by Cribiore 2007: 288.

## Chapter Four

### Gold, God, and Envy: Gregory of Nazianzus and the Corruption of the True Philosophical Life

Following his brief and tempestuous tenure as bishop of Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianzus devoted his remaining years to rewriting his life in the leisure of his family estate at Arianzus.<sup>359</sup> Among the works produced during this period is *Oration 42*, ostensibly a farewell address (λόγος συντακτήριος) to his fellow bishops assembled at the capital for the ecumenical council of 381 that also functions as a defense (ἀπολογία) of his conduct in ecclesiastical office.<sup>360</sup> Their criticisms, he argues, stem largely from their failure to comprehend the significance of his uncompromising independence:

Οὐ τὰ πολλὰ συμφέρομαι τοῖς πολλοῖς, οὐδὲ τὴν αὐτὴν βαδίζω  
ἀνέχομαι· θρασέως μὲν ἴσως καὶ ἀμαθῶς, πάσχω δ' οὖν ὅμως. Ἄνιᾶ  
με τὰ τῶν ἄλλων τερπνὰ, καὶ τέρπομαι τοῖς ἐτέρων ἀνιαροῖς. Ὅστε  
οὐκ ἂν θαυμάσαιμι οὐδὲ τοῦτο, εἰ καὶ δεθείην, ὡς δύσχρηστος, καὶ  
ἀνοηταίνειν δόξαιμι τοῖς πολλοῖς.

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<sup>359</sup> Gregory was ordained bishop of Constantinople on November 27, 380, shortly after the arrival of the new, strongly pro-Nicene emperor, Theodosius I, and was pressured into resigning in late June or early July of 381. Prior to his ordination, he had served as the *de facto* leader of the capital's embattled Nicene community, arriving sometime in 378 or 379; cf. Pouchet 1992: 23 – 26 (early 378), Barnes 1997: 13 (autumn 378), Bernardi 1995: 153, 175 – 177 (early 379), and McGuckin 2001b: 236 – 240 (autumn 379). Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 2.1.12.101 (*De se ipso et episcopis*), PG 37.1173 describes the total term of his residence as three years. For some general surveys of Gregory's tenure in Constantinople, see Mossay 1977, McGuckin 2001b: 229 – 369, and Van Dam 2002: 136 – 156.

<sup>360</sup> Although Bernardi 1992: 7 – 17 maintains that *Oration 42* was a fictive composition, written entirely after Gregory's retirement, McGuckin 2001b: 361 – 367 argues that it was likely based on a real address delivered during a formal farewell celebration at the capital. The immediate audience of the written oration was probably his circle of friends and supporters in Constantinople and at the imperial court, McLynn 1997: 299 – 302 and 1998: 478 – 479. For the most recent detailed analysis of the oration as a whole, see Elm 1999, and the most recent English translation, Daley 2006: 138 – 154, with notes on 236 – 244.

In many respects, I do not agree with the multitude, nor do I suffer to walk the same path; perhaps I am impudent and uneducated, yet this is nevertheless how I feel. Things that others find pleasurable trouble me, and I find pleasure in what is troublesome to others. Consequently, I would not be surprised if I were put in chains as a deviant and seemed devoid of intelligence to many.<sup>361</sup>

In particular, as leader of the council, Gregory had refused to participate in what he describes as the worldly ambitions and personal rivalries of the bishops in attendance. To valorize his own behavior over that of his critics, he likens such ecclesiastical politicking and its associated theological affectations not only to the “pastimes of children” (παίδων ἀθύρματα), but more importantly, to the popular entertainments of the hippodrome and theater, two sources of corruption in the writings of his non-Christian contemporary, Libanius. “I cannot bear your horse races and theatrical performances,” he exclaims, “nor this equivalent madness in spending money and zealously pursuing victory” (Οὐ φέρω τοὺς ἵππικούς ὑμῶν, καὶ τὰ θεάτρα, καὶ τὴν ἀντίρροπον ταύτην μανίαν ἔν τε δαπανήμασι καὶ σπουδάσμασι). For this reason, Gregory suffered (παθεῖν) much like a certain Greek philosopher, whose moderation (σωφροσύνη) was mistaken as madness (μανία), “because he laughed at all things, perceiving what is zealously pursued by many as worthy of laughter” (ὅτι διεγέλα τὰ πάντα, γέλωτος ὄρων ἄξια τὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς

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<sup>361</sup> *Or.* 42.22. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

σπουδαζόμενα).<sup>362</sup> Worse still, his fellow bishops had failed to recognize that his actions were compelled by the power of the Spirit (Πνεύματος δύναμις), not a drunken loss of wits (φρενῶν ἔκστασις). In this respect, he compares himself to “the students of Christ” (οἱ Χριστοῦ μαθηταί), who, when granted the ability to speak in tongues by the Holy Spirit, were also mocked by some in the crowd as full of new wine (γλεύκους μεστός).<sup>363</sup>

Yet this oration operates as much more than an exercise in self-fashioning; it is one of four works composed within the first year of Gregory’s retirement that together constituted a literary campaign to influence “the formation of a new Christian elite” and establish “the components of true Christian leadership.”<sup>364</sup> Consequently, many of the criticisms addressed within also serve to define the ideal bishop. To those who had reproached him for “the ambitious display of his dinner table, his awe-inspiring garb, his processions, and his pompous manner of address” (τὸ δὲ τῆς τραπέζης φιλότιμον, τὸ δὲ

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<sup>362</sup> This laughing philosopher is almost certainly Democritus of Abdera (born c. 460 BCE), an early propounder of atomism who first appears laughing in Cic. *De or.* 2.235 and Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.194 – 200. During the imperial period, he was coupled with “the weeping philosopher,” Heraclitus, and the pair came to represent the Cynic and Stoic reactions, respectively, to the vanity of human affairs; see Sen. *Ira* 2.10.5 and *Tranq.* 15.2, Juv. 10.28 – 53, and Lucian *De mort. Peregr.* 7, *Sacrif.* 15, and *Vit. auct.* 13 – 14. The fullest account of Democritus’ laughter, and the most relevant here, is found in the apocryphal *Letters of Hippocrates* (10 – 17), where the physician is summoned by the Abderites to cure Democritus of his madness, but determines that the philosopher is, in fact, saner than other men. Cf. Lutz 1954: 309 – 314 and Stewart 1958: 179 – 191. Daley 2006: 242 n. 704 correctly proposes Democritus of Abdera as “the laughing philosopher,” but wrongly identifies Diog. Laert. 9.36 as the source of this appellation.

<sup>363</sup> These “students” (μαθηταί), of course, are the twelve apostles; cf. Acts 2.1 – 13.

<sup>364</sup> Elm 2000b, quotes on 412 and 417. Included in this campaign are *Oration* 43, a λόγος ἐπιτάφιος delivered on behalf of Basil of Caesarea on January 1, 382, and the two autobiographical poems, *De se ipso et episcopis* (*Carm.* 2.1.12, PG 37.1166 – 1227) and *De vita sua* (*Carm.* 2.1.11, PG 37.1029 – 1166); cf. McLynn 1997 and Elm 1999.

τῆς ἐσθῆτος αἰδέσιμον, αἱ δὲ πρόοδοι, τὸ δὲ σοβαρὸν πρὸς τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας), Gregory responds with a feigned and ironic naiveté, confessing that he was unaware his position entailed competition with consuls, prefects, and the most distinguished of generals.<sup>365</sup> As one “who delights in the fare of beggars” (κατατρυφῶν τῶν πτωχικῶν), he failed to realize that he must fill his belly, enjoy life’s necessities to excess, and “belch upon” (κατερεύγεσθαι) the altars. Nor, finally, was he aware that a bishop should be borne along by luxurious horses and raised high upon resplendent litters to be paraded around and whistled at, parting the crowd as if he were a wild beast (ὥσπερ θηρίον) and visible from afar. Such misconceptions concerning the character and role of the Christian bishop, according to Gregory, were especially prevalent among the turbulent and fickle Constantinopolitan laity, who “seek not priests, but rhetors; not stewards of souls, but guardians of the coffers; not pure officials to offer sacrifice, but mighty champions” (οὐ γὰρ ζητοῦσιν ἱερεῖς, ἀλλὰ ῥήτορας· οὐδὲ ψυχῶν οἰκονόμους, ἀλλὰ χρημάτων φύλακας· οὐδὲ θύπας καθαρούς, ἀλλὰ προστάτας ἰσχυρούς).

As his earlier comparisons suggest, Gregory’s ideal bishop was a philosopher, disdainful of the petty ambitions of this world like his ancient Greek counterparts, yet filled with the Holy Spirit like the original disciples of Christ. Accordingly, when he requests that his audience grant him solitude (ἐρημία) and the countryside (ἀγροικία), as he does in this passage, intending to please God through his frugality (διὰ τῆς εὐτελείας), it is the secluded contemplation and study of Scripture at his family estate

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<sup>365</sup> *Or.* 42.24.

that he seeks, not the desert withdrawal of the hermits of Syria.<sup>366</sup> This “home-based” monasticism, which was heavily influenced by the classical elite ideal of leisure (*otium*) and centered around the labors of the mind, was also to be distinguished from the egalitarian lifestyle and physical labors of the cenobitic monasticism practiced by his friend, Basil of Caesarea.<sup>367</sup> Contemplation (θεωρία), however, constituted only part of Gregory’s vision of the philosophical life, serving as essential preparation for a carefully measured involvement in the affairs (πράξεις) of the Christian community.<sup>368</sup> As Brian Daley astutely points out, “Like the classical philosophers before him, Gregory realized that philosophy was not simply theoretical speculation but commitment to virtue, detachment from cares and passionate fixations, and longing for union with God.”<sup>369</sup> Thus, in the words of Susanna Elm, Gregory demanded from his ideal Christian bishop “a philosophical life of action.”<sup>370</sup>

In this last chapter, I shall examine the language and rhetoric of corruption in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus as it pertains to both his construction of the

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<sup>366</sup> On the similarities between Gregory and the hermits of Syria, see McLynn 1998.

<sup>367</sup> McGuckin 2001b: 87 – 99; Gregory’s monasticism is referred to as “home-based” on 88 n. 17. On Gregory’s contribution to the development of the monk-bishop ideal, see Sterk 2004: 119 – 140.

<sup>368</sup> Elm 2003: 497f. notes that the tension between the βίος θεωρητικός and the βίος πρακτικός is a central theme in Gregory’s corpus, as well as the basis of his historiographical persona as an “ecclesiastical failure;” cf. Elm 2000a and b. On Gregory’s “middle way” between these two spheres of activity, see Špidlík 1976, esp. 360.

<sup>369</sup> Daley 2006: 41.

<sup>370</sup> Elm 2003: 268f. Drawing her conclusions largely from *Oration 2*, Elm interprets Gregory’s construction of a “philosophy of action” as a response both to the continuing debate within the Christian community over the nature of the Trinity, and to the emperor Julian’s claim “that the (neo) Platonic philosophical life of theory was the sole path toward the universal God.” This latter aspect he shared with the influential philosopher-senator, Themistius.

philosopher-bishop ideal and his fashioning of himself as the perfect candidate for this idealized office. Whereas Elm has focused largely on the roles of the emperor Julian and Gregory's theologically ignorant successor, Nectarius, in the development of this ideal, I shall begin my investigation with Maximus the Cynic, a rival claimant not just to the episcopal throne of Constantinople, but more importantly, to the image and authority of the Christian philosopher.<sup>371</sup> Although Gregory had initially lauded Maximus as a staunch ally and true Cynic, his sudden betrayal and persistent efforts to obtain legitimacy for his surreptitious ordination compelled Gregory to refashion this former supporter from ascetic philosopher to superficial opportunist. Vital to this process is the language of luxury and self-indulgence, venal ambition and corrosive envy, which constitutes a rhetoric of corruption that is in many ways similar to that of Symmachus and Libanius but interwoven with Christian imagery and biblical references. Furthermore, through such language and imagery, Gregory not only undermines the qualifications of his episcopal and philosophical rival, but also usurps the mantle of the philosopher for himself in order to validate his own candidacy. In so doing, he establishes the parameters for an *otium cum dignitate* that is at once classical and Christian, and envisions an ecclesiastical hierarchy that is resistant to the pervasive venality so commonly associated with the imperial court and administration during this period.

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<sup>371</sup> On Julian, see Elm 2001, 2003, and 2006: 182 – 185, and Nectarius, see Elm 2000b. McGuckin 2001a makes the most comprehensive case for an attack on Nectarius in Gregory's later apologetic writings.

## The Maximus Affair

The figure of Maximus the Cynic in the corpus of Gregory of Nazianzus was a source of some confusion, it seems, even to late antique contemporaries. Jerome, Gregory's self-proclaimed student in the Scriptures, felt compelled to explain away the fact that his eloquent mentor had composed both a panegyric and an invective against this Christian philosopher and staunch opponent of Arianism. The pseudonym Hero, he notes, has been given to Maximus in the title of one oration "because there is another work that denounces this same Maximus, as if one may not praise and criticize the same individual according to circumstances."<sup>372</sup> And circumstances had indeed required that Gregory refashion the image of his former ally in the Nicene cause, for Maximus, in collusion with Peter, bishop of Alexandria, had attempted to seize Gregory's own church of Anastasia and have himself consecrated there as bishop of Constantinople.<sup>373</sup>

In his earlier encomium, *Oration 25*, Gregory depicts Maximus as the ideal Christian martyr and philosopher, an exemplum of that true nobility (εὐγένεια) that is characterized by piety (εὐσέβεια), strength of character (τρόπος), and "the ascent to the first good, from whence we came" (ἡ πρὸς τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθὸν ἀνοδος, ὅθεν

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<sup>372</sup> Jer. *De vir. ill.* 117.

<sup>373</sup> For details on the Maximus affair, see Sajdak 1909: 18 – 48, Bernardi 1968: 168 – 181 and 1995: 191 – 194, Mossay 1982: 229 – 236, McGucken 2001: 311 – 325, and Van Dam 2002: 139 – 142. Peter's support must have been particularly troubling, since the bishop of Alexandria not only had been named an arbiter of orthodox Christianity (together with Damasus of Rome) in an edict of February 27, 380 issued to the people of Constantinople, but had also previously supported Gregory's own bid for the episcopal throne; see *CTh* 16.1.2 (= *CJ* 1.1.1), and Greg. Naz. *De vita sua* (*Carm.* 2.1.11), vv. 858 – 864.

γεγόνναμεν).<sup>374</sup> This nobleman (ὁ γεννάδας) not only is a champion (ἀθλητής) of the Trinity, having willingly undergone persecution during the reign of the Arian emperor Valens, but also comes from a family of martyrs (ἐκ μαρτύρων), from whom he received his education in a virtue (ἀρετή) that is at once manly and Christian.<sup>375</sup> With such an upbringing, Maximus naturally chose a life of greatness, vigor, and transcendence:

Τρυφήν μὲν ἀτιμάζει καὶ περιουσίαν, καὶ δυνάσκειαν πλέον, ἢ τοὺς ἄλλους οἱ ταῦτα προέχοντες· καὶ τὴν μὲν ὡς πρώτην κακοπάθειαν, τὴν δὲ ὡς ἐσχάτην πενίαν, τὴν δὲ ὡς ἀσθένειαν τὴν ἀνωτάτω, διαπτύει καὶ ἀποπέμπεται. Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀγαθὸν εἶναι, ὃ μῆτε βελτίους ποιεῖ τοὺς κεκτημένους, ἀλλὰ καὶ χείρους ὡς τὰ πολλὰ· μῆτε διὰ τέλους παραμένει τοῖς ἔχουσι.

He shows more disdain for luxury and wealth and power than those who possess these things in greater abundance show towards everyone else. Luxury he rejects out of hand as the prime hardship, wealth as the ultimate poverty, power as the supreme impotence, on the grounds that there is nothing good about a thing that does not make its possessors better, and in most cases actually makes them worse, or fails to remain in their possession to the end.<sup>376</sup>

Philosophy is the mistress of his passions (ἡ δέσποινα τῶν παθῶν), and through it he advances eagerly toward moral beauty (τὸ καλόν), severing himself from the material world (ἡ ὕλη) even before he is parted from it. Thus, to the specifically Christian ideal of a masculinity based on martyrdom and persecution, Gregory adds the more contested image of the philosopher. However, it is through his Christianity that Maximus became a true Cynic, maintaining his virtuous character not isolated from but amidst the mass of

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<sup>374</sup> *Or.* 25.3.

<sup>375</sup> On the Roman manliness of second- and third-century Christian martyrs, see Cobb 2008.

<sup>376</sup> *Or.* 25.4, trans. by Vinson 2003.

humanity, engaged in acts of Christian φιλανθρωπία. He therefore scorns the supposed vanity (τυφος) and false pretension (ἀλαζονεία) of traditional Hellenic philosophers, but nevertheless adopts their characteristic robe (τρίβων) and beard (υπήνη), and embraces the Cynic habit of frugal simplicity (τὸ ἀπέριττον).<sup>377</sup> Yet in appropriating the imagery of this traditional non-Christian brand of asceticism, Gregory simultaneously renders his subject susceptible to traditional accusations of self-indulgence, ambition, and envy, a rhetorical strategy that he took full advantage of after Maximus' betrayal.

The most virulent and overt attack on Maximus occurs in the *De vita sua*, where Gregory depicts a philosopher whose wisdom is corrupted by luxury and greed. Whereas in *Oration 25* the foreign garb (τὸ σχῆμα) of the Egyptian Cynic is described as “angelic” (ἀγγελικόν) and radiantly white to symbolize an innate purity (ἡ κατὰ τὴν φύσιν καθαρότης), in this autobiographical poem Maximus becomes an effeminate slave to external appearance.<sup>378</sup> This womanly being (θηλυδρίας), a mere phantom (φάντασμα), had recently curled his lengthy philosopher's hair and dyed it a golden blond (χρυσοῦν), “mostly the work of women, and so now of men” (πλεῖστον γυναικῶν ἔργον, εἴτ' οὔν ἀρρένων). On his face, he wore women's cosmetics (τὰ τῶν γυναικῶν φάρμακα), an unseemly and wicked habit that acted as a silent proclamation

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<sup>377</sup> *Or.* 25.5 – 6. On Diogenes of Sinope and the tradition of Cynicism in the Christian writers of the fourth century, see Krueger 1993.

<sup>378</sup> *Or.* 25.2: ὁ τὰ ἡμέτερα φιλοσοφῶν ἐν ἀλλοτρίῳ τῷ σχήματι· τάχα δὲ οὐδὲ ἀλλοτρίῳ, εἶπερ ἀγγελικόν, ἢ λαμπροφορία, καὶ ἡ φαιδρότης, ὅταν τυπῶνται σωματικῶς· σύμβολον, οἶμαι, τοῦτο τῆς κατὰ τὴν φύσιν αὐτῶν καθαρότητος; *De vita sua*, vv. 750 – 772.

of his duplicitous character.<sup>379</sup> Moreover, this treacherous “doubleness” (διπλοῦν) in both nature and appearance (τὴν φύσιν τὸ σχῆμά τε) was amplified through his combination of male and female elements of fashion, that is, his staff (βακτηρία) and hair (κόμη) respectively. More seriously, however, Maximus’ pride in his appearance and his “beloved curls” (βόστρυχα φίλοι) corrupted his ability to reason and his philosophical achievements as a practitioner of Cynicism. He boasted and thought himself an individual of repute in Constantinople, “launching arguments from his hair as if from a sling, and carrying his entire education in his body” (ἐξ ὧν ἐκόμπαζ’ ὥς τι τῆ πόλει δοκῶν, ὧμους σκιάζων βοστρύχοις ἀεὶ φίλοις, πέμπων λογισμοὺς σφενδονωμέναις κόμαις, πᾶσαν φέρων παιδείουσιν ἐν τῷ σώματι).<sup>380</sup> In this way, then, the *De vita sua* unmakes the man that *Oration 25* had earlier fashioned as an exemplum of what Susanna Elm calls “the new masculinity of late antique Christianity.”<sup>381</sup>

Nevertheless, Gregory bitterly concedes that Maximus demonstrated a certain sort of wisdom (σοφόν) in his attempt to seize control of Constantinople’s Nicene community. This “Egyptian Proteus” became one of his most ardent followers, sharing his roof and table, his doctrines and plans; as a Cynic “dog,” he barked at Gregory’s enemies (κύων ὑλακτῶν δῆθεν τοὺς κακόφρονας), and was a zealous admirer of his

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<sup>379</sup> For Gregory’s hostility to this practice even amongst women, see *Carm. mor.* 29, PG 37.884 – 908.

<sup>380</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 769 – 772.

<sup>381</sup> Elm 2006: 172.

sermons.<sup>382</sup> Thus, after Maximus became afflicted with an “insatiable jealousy” (ἄπαστος ζῆλος), that “disease” (νόσημα) associated with the pulpit and a “remnant of the first sickness” (λειμμα τῆς πρώτης νόσου), he was able to involve a deacon and a priest from Gregory’s own flock in his designs, a feat that showed him to be “rather shrewd” (σοφώτερον).<sup>383</sup>

Gregory draws a distinction, however, between the perverse wisdom of Maximus, a “novel category amongst evils” (καινός ἐν κακοῖς λόγος), and the cleverness (δεινότης) that he himself holds in esteem.<sup>384</sup> Accordingly, while Maximus was a sophist (σοφιστής), his wisdom lay in base things (τὰ κακά) and he specialized in contriving plots (συνθέτης).<sup>385</sup> Gregory, on the other hand, was a complete stranger to intrigue (πλοκῆς πάντη ξένος), honoring instead the ability to make a wise statement, to admire a speaker who does so, and to derive the core meaning from Holy Scripture (εἰπεῖν σοφόν τι καὶ λέγοντα θαυμάσαι βίβλων τε θείων ἐκλέγειν τὴν καρδίαν). In this way, Gregory establishes a correlation between Maximus’ effeminate obsession with luxury and appearance, his duplicitous character, and a corruption of his mental faculties that rendered him unable to comprehend the true wisdom of Christian doctrine. As in the Libanian corpus, then, public authority for Gregory is underpinned by training and skill

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<sup>382</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 808 – 814; cf. Hom. *Od.* 4.384 – 386 and 450 – 459.

<sup>383</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 815 – 817 and 784f.; cf. Wis. 2.24.

<sup>384</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 786 – 791. The term δεινότης refers especially to the natural ability of an orator.

<sup>385</sup> Gregory also refers to the emperor Julian as “the sophist of evil” (ἡ σοφιστῆς τῆς κακίας) in *Or.* 4.27.

in rhetorical argumentation and analysis. Within the writings of this Christian rhetorician, however, the λόγοι serve the Λόγος, the Word of God, and it is the proper exegesis of Scripture that ultimately forms the basis of authority within the Church.<sup>386</sup>

But Gregory could only go so far in questioning his rival's exegetical competence; Maximus, after all, was known both to his contemporary, Jerome, and to the later ecclesiastical historian, Sozomen, as a zealous defender of Nicene doctrine.<sup>387</sup> Indeed, the personal rivalry between these two Christian celebrities was, in essence, part of a wider struggle for episcopal dominance within the Nicene community as a whole. Thus, in spite of Gregory's earlier assertion, Maximus did in fact receive outside help in his play for the episcopal throne of Constantinople, in particular from Peter, the aged and influential Patriarch of Alexandria. This "leader of pastors" (ὁ βραβεὺς τῶν ποιμένων), who had initially supported Gregory as a candidate for the Constantinopolitan see, exerted his influence in the capital through letters and, more significantly, a gang of Egyptian sailors who had arrived on the Alexandrian grain ships during the spring of 380.<sup>388</sup> As with Maximus, Gregory once again found himself inveighing against his erstwhile allies, whom he had welcomed into the Anastasia congregation with a laudatory

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<sup>386</sup> *De vita sua*, v. 481; cf. *De rebus suis*, vv. 97 – 102, PG 37.977, as well as Camelot 1966, Elm 2000b, McGuckin 2006, and McLynn 2006.

<sup>387</sup> Jer. *De vir. ill.* 127 and Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 7.9. However, Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.8 claims that Maximus was a follower of Apollinarism, an extreme form of homoousianism that completely suppressed Jesus' humanity; cf. McGuckin 2001b: 388 – 394. See also Mossay 1982.

<sup>388</sup> On the link between the Alexandrian bishops and the grain trade, see Hollerich 1982.

speech.<sup>389</sup> These sailors, whom Gregory characterizes in *Oration* 34 as “nurslings and defenders” of the great Egyptian champions of Nicene orthodoxy, who supplied almost the whole world with nourishment for both body and soul, he charges with religious hypocrisy and venality in the *De vita sua*:

Κατάσκοποι μὲν πρῶτον, οὓς τῆς ἐκκρίτου  
γῆς Ἰσραήλ ποτ' ἐξέπεμψ' ὁ γεννάδας·  
πλήν οὐκ Ἰησοῦς οὐδὲ Χάλεβ οἱ σοφοί,  
ἀλλ' εἴ τις ὕβρις ἐν νέοις καὶ πρεσβύταις,  
Ἄμμων, Ἀπάμμων, Ἄρποκρᾶς, Στίππας, Ῥόδων,  
Ἄνουβις, Ἑρμάνουβις, Αἰγύπτου θεοί,  
πιθηκόμορφοι καὶ κυνώδεις δαίμονες,  
δύστηνα ναυταρίδια καὶ παράφθορα,  
εὔωνα, μικροῦ κέρματος πολλοὺς θεοὺς  
ῥᾶστ' ἂν προθέντα, εἶπερ ἦσαν πλείονες.

The spies were the first to arrive, whom the generous patriarch of the chosen land, Israel, sent forth. Only these were not wise men like Joshua and Caleb, but the embodiment of whatever insolence was in young and old alike: Ammon, Apammon, Harpocras, Stippas, Rhodon, Anubis, Hermanubis, the gods of Egypt, ape-shaped and doglike evil spirits, wretched and corrupt sailors, cheaply bought, who would readily offer to sell many gods for mere pennies, if there were more than one to sell.<sup>390</sup>

Whereas Gregory had earlier used Egypt's long historical association with a “shameful and bestial” polytheism to demonstrate the magnitude of Christ's victory there and the distinction of the Egyptian church fathers, in his autobiographical poem, the sailors

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<sup>389</sup> McGuckin 2001b: 269f. argues convincingly that *Or.* 34 was delivered in May, rather than as an attempt at reconciliation after the Maximus affair.

<sup>390</sup> *Or.* 34.4 and 2, and *De vita sua*, vv. 834 – 843; cf. Nm. 13 – 14.

become the mythical δαίμονες of this ancient land, willing to sell themselves and their gods for a κέρμα, a small copper coin.<sup>391</sup>

In spite of Gregory’s seething resentment and manifest confusion over the “theatrical” actions of Peter and his representatives in the capital (ὥφθη τι τούτων σκηνικώτερον ποτε), it was the role of gold in this affair that he found even more “comedic” (παιγνικώτερον).<sup>392</sup> Here, the focus of the poem’s narrative shifts back to Maximus:

πρεσβύτερον ἐκ Θάσου τιν’ ἦκοντ’ ἐνθάδε  
χρυσὸν φέροντα τῆς ἐκεῖσ’ ἐκκλησίας,  
ἐφ’ ᾧ πρίασθαι Προικονησίας πλάκας,  
τοῦτον περισήνας καὶ λαβῶν συμπράκτορα  
πολλαῖς τε δήσας ἐλπίσιν τὸν ἄθλιον—  
οἱ γὰρ κακοὶ τάχιστα μίγνυνται κακοῖς—  
τὸν χρυσὸν εἶχεν εἰς ἅπανθ’ ὑπηρέτην,  
πιστὸν συνεργόν, γνήσιον συνέμπορον.  
τεκμήριον δέ· καὶ γὰρ οἱ πρώην ἐμέ  
σέβοντες, ὡς ἄχρηστον, ἄχρυσον φίλον  
περιφρονοῦσι φίλτατοι καὶ ῥαδίως  
κλίνουσι πρὸς τὸ χειρὸν ὡς ῥοπή ζυγοῦ.

A priest had arrived in the capital from Thasos bearing gold from the church there to buy slabs of Proconnesian marble. Maximus fawned over (literally, “wagged his tail around”) this man and made him an accomplice, binding the wretch with many expectations, for evil men very quickly make each other’s acquaintance. He got the gold, a faithful partner and true companion to every underling. The proof of it is this that even my dearest companions, who until then had respected me, now

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<sup>391</sup> *Or.* 34.5.

<sup>392</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 865 – 866. McGuckin 2001b: 319 suggests that this episode may have become the subject of a mime (παίγνιον) performed in the capital at Gregory’s expense.

despised me as a useless, penniless friend, and readily inclined toward the inferior man, like the turning of a scale.<sup>393</sup>

The image of the scale that completes this well-crafted passage is key, operating in conjunction with the mercantile task of the Thasian priest and the repeated references to gold to evoke the atmosphere of a marketplace. In effect, Maximus had corrupted the very social fabric of the Nicene community in Constantinople through bribery, debasing the hallowed friendship shared by Gregory and his supporters to a crass commercial transaction based on material wealth and personal advantage. Of course, the element of this story that makes it so laughable is that Maximus based his claim to episcopal authority largely on his devotion to the Cynic way of life, a way of life that famously embraced poverty. As Gregory asks jokingly, “How can it be that a dog has gold?” (πρόθεν δ’ ὁ χρυσὸς τῷ κυνί).<sup>394</sup>

Although this “stage-play” (σκηνή) ended with the expulsion of the pseudo-Cynic and his Alexandrian backers from the Anastasia in mid-consecration and their flight from the capital in the wake of increasing popular resentment, modern scholarship has tended to focus primarily on the damage done to Gregory’s political reputation by this incident.<sup>395</sup> After all, Gregory himself concludes this narrative with an apology for the poor judgment (εὐχέρεια) he exercised in the Maximus affair: “I failed to recognize an

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<sup>393</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 875 – 886.

<sup>394</sup> *De vita sua*, v. 874.

<sup>395</sup> *De vita sua*, v. 908. McGuckin 2001b: 310, for example, deems Gregory’s praise of Maximus in *Oration 25* as “his single biggest political mistake,” citing *Carm.* 2.1.34, vv. 160 – 178 as proof of his deep and sincere regret over this incident.

ignorance worthy of hatred” (ἄγνοιαν ἠγνόησα μίσους ἀξίαν).<sup>396</sup> Several scholars, however, have recently recognized that Gregory is not quite so ignorant of the superficial and faithless world of ecclesiastical and court politics as his poetic persona claims.<sup>397</sup> Gregory, after all, was born into Cappadocia’s curial elite, a class whose members lived in the popular gaze and were experienced in perceiving and managing their public personae. So it should come as no surprise that this still *de facto* leader of the Constantinopolitan Nicene community began his efforts in image management in the near aftermath of the ejection of the Egyptian contingent. The result was *Oration 26*, a masterful defense not only of his actions during and after the Maximus affair, but also of the role of philosophy in the formation of a Christian bishop.

### **The Philosophy of Leisure**

In the turmoil that followed his failed *coup d’état*, Maximus traveled west to continue his ecclesiastical politicking. This poetically fashioned slave of luxury had, in fact, fittingly completed his consecration in the “wretched dwelling of a flute player” (χοραύλου λυπρὸν οἰκητήριον) and now sought recognition, fruitlessly at first from the emperor Theodosius in Thessalonica, but with greater success later from the bishops Damasus of Rome and Ambrose of Milan.<sup>398</sup> Gregory, on the other hand,

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<sup>396</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 957 – 959.

<sup>397</sup> Gómez Villegas 1997, McLynn 1997, and Elm 1999 and 2000b.

<sup>398</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 905 – 912 and 1001 – 1004; cf. McGuckin 2001b: 318 – 325.

retreated to the countryside for a period of solitary contemplation in accordance not only with his prior habit of flight in the face of adversity, but also with his upbringing as a member of Cappadocia's curial elite. For this reason, *Oration 26*, delivered upon his return to the capital in the autumn of 380, begins in a manner that would be familiar to any member of the traditional upper classes of the Roman empire, curial or senatorial, eastern or western, Christian or non-Christian:

Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐπέστην, δῶμεν λόγον ἀλλήλοις, ὧν μετὰ κατωρθώσαμεν.  
Ἐπειδὴ καλὸν μὴ ῥήματος μόνον καὶ πράξεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ καιροῦ  
παντὸς, καὶ ὥρας αὐτῆς τοῦ ἀκαριαίου καὶ λεπτοτάτου οἶσθαι  
λόγον ἀπαιτεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς.

And now that I am here, let us give each other an account of what we have accomplished in the meantime. For it is a good thing to suppose that an account is required of us not only for what we say and do but also for every moment, down to the very last and briefest part of each hour.<sup>399</sup>

Although Gregory never quotes Latin sources directly, this passage strongly echoes the oft-cited Catonian maxim that introduces the epistolary collection of Symmachus and signals that author's intent to demonstrate an *otium cum dignitate*.<sup>400</sup> Thus, what Gregory offers his congregation, his "children" (τέκνα), in *Oration 26* is a lesson in the proper exercise of aristocratic leisure, a lesson that would have been well-received by an audience composed, at least in part, of the very party of Nicene aristocrats who had

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<sup>399</sup> *Or. 26.4*, trans. by Vinson 2003.

<sup>400</sup> Symm. *Ep. 1.1.2*: *libet enim non minus otii quam negotii praestare rationem*. The Greek λόγος in this sense is the equivalent of the Latin *ratio*.

contrived to lure him to the capital in the first place.<sup>401</sup> Yet, although Gregory’s words are strongly evocative of Symmachus, it quickly becomes clear that the quality of his leisure was more in line with Rome’s philosopher-senator, Praetextatus: “You report your labor to me, and I shall reveal my philosophical reflections while at leisure with only myself as company” (Ὑμεῖς μὲν ἀπαγγείλατέ μοι τὴν ἐργασίαν τὴν ὑμετέραν· ἐγὼ δὲ εἰς μέσον θήσω, ἃ καθ’ ἡσυχίαν ἐμαυτῷ συγγενόμενος ἐφιλοσόφησα). The Christian philosopher, however, devoted his solitude to the study and contemplation of Scripture and justified his leisure on the basis of biblical exempla.

After enumerating the “praiseworthy activities” (ἡ πράξεις τῶν ἐπαινουμένων) he expected of his congregation, Gregory turns to his own affairs and the fruits he reaped from the desert on their behalf (ἃ παρὰ τῆς ἐρημίας ὑμῖν κομίζομεν):

Ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἡλίας ἠδέως ἐνεφιλοσόφει τῷ Καρμῆλῳ, καὶ Ἰωάννης τῇ ἐρήμῳ, καὶ Ἰησοῦς αὐτὸς, τὰς μὲν πράξεις τοῖς ὄχλοις, τὰς εὐχὰς δὲ τῇ σχολῇ καὶ ταῖς ἐρημίαις, ὡς τὰ πολλὰ, προσένεμεν.

For Elijah, too, used to live with pleasure in philosophy at Mount Carmel, and John the Baptist, in the desert; even Jesus himself, for the most part, allotted his actions to the crowds and his prayers to leisure and periods of desert solitude.<sup>402</sup>

Jesus, of course, did not require such a retreat (ἀναχώρησις), “being God” (Θεὸς ὢν), but instead was offering himself as the ultimate pattern for human behavior, “so that we

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<sup>401</sup> *Or.* 26.1. Gregory’s maternal cousin, Theodosia, had married the senator Ablabius, a grandson of Constantine’s praetorian prefect and member of one of Constantinople’s most influential families. It was she who had provided him an urban villa for his residence, upon which he dedicated the church of Anastasia; see McGuckin 2001b: 236 – 243 and Bernardi 1984.

<sup>402</sup> *Or.* 26.5 – 7.

might learn that there is a proper time for action and a proper time for a higher occupation” (ἵν’ ἡμεῖς μάθωμεν καὶ πράξεως καιρὸν, καὶ ἀσχολίας ὑψηλοτέρας). This custom (νόμος) ordained by Jesus and exemplified by his two prophetic predecessors is one with deep aristocratic roots; it is a Greek reflection of the Roman *otium negotiosum*, or, in this case, the σχολὴ ἄσκολος. In Gregory’s opinion, however, the purpose of Christian leisure is not simply “to withdraw the mind for a little while from the vicissitudes of life” (μικρὸν ἐπανάγειν τὸν νοῦν ἀπὸ τῶν πλανωμένων), but more importantly “to converse with God untroubled” (ἀθολώτως προσομιλεῖν τῷ Θεῷ).

The divine conversation undertaken by Gregory following his encounter with the counterfeit philosopher, Maximus, not surprisingly revolved around the virtues of living the true philosophical life. His lesson came from a spectacle of nature (καὶ μοι τὸ θέαμα παίδευμα γίνεται) filtered through the lens of Scripture.<sup>403</sup> During one of his customary sunset walks along the seashore, which he no doubt very deliberately terms a περίπατος, Gregory watched as waves driven by a storm crashed upon some nearby rocks. Among these rocks, he observed that pebbles, seaweed, shells, and the lightest of oysters were displaced, some washing ashore while others were drawn back out to sea. The rocks, however, remained, undisturbed by the force of the waves. Inspired by the water imagery of Psalm 69, ostensibly written by David as a prayer for deliverance from persecution, Gregory equates the bitter brine and instability (τὸ ἀλμυρὸν καὶ ἄστατον) of the ocean

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<sup>403</sup> *Or.* 26.8 – 9.

with his own life and human affairs in general.<sup>404</sup> The winds, then, are the sudden temptations and unexpected circumstances (οἱ προσπίπτοντες πειρασμοὶ καὶ ὅσα τῶν ἀδοκίμων) that befall humanity. In this schema, philosophy acts as a “ballast of sober reason” (βάρος λογισμοῦ σώφρονος), and philosophers as a rock, “worthy of that rock upon which we stand and which we serve” (οἱ δὲ εἶναι πέτρα, τῆς πέτρας ἐκείνης ἄξιοι, ἐφ’ ἧς βεβήκαμεν, καὶ ἣ λατρεύομεν) and able to endure all things, unshaken and immovable (ἀσειστῶς καὶ ἀτινάκτως). Thus, once again, the figure of the philosopher is deeply embedded within a Christian context; he is the rock upon which the wise man builds his house by listening to and acting on the words of Jesus, as well as the rock upon which the Messiah built his church and bestowed the keys to the kingdom of heaven.<sup>405</sup> Yet, at the same time, he remained a possession of the elite, for “all those who live in accordance with philosophic reason” (ὅσοι φιλοσόφῳ χρώμενοι λόγῳ) also “have risen above the degradation of the masses” (ὑπερναβεβηκότες τὴν τῶν πολλῶν ταπεινότητα).

According to Gregory, however, this elite status was based not on birth or appointment, but good character (εὐτροπία) and excellence of mind (νοουμένη εὐγένεια). There are three types of nobility, he explains:

τὸ μὲν ἄνωθεν ἠργμένον, ὃ πάντες ἐσμὲν εὐγενεῖς ἐπ’ ἴσης, ἐπεὶ κατ’ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ γεγόναμεν· τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ σαρκὸς ἐρχόμενον, οὐκ οἶδ’ εἴ τις εὐγενῆς, τοῦτο φθορᾷ συνιστάμενον· τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ κακίας ἢ ἀρετῆς

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<sup>404</sup> Ps. 69.2 – 3 and 15.

<sup>405</sup> Mt. 7.24 – 25 and 16.18 – 19; cf. 1 Cor. 10.4.

γνωριζόμενον, οὐ μᾶλλον καὶ ἥττον μεταλαμβάνομεν, ὅσον ἂν, οἶμαι, ἢ τηρήσωμεν τὴν εἰκόνα, ἢ διαφθείρωμεν. Ταύτην ἀγαπήσει τὴν εὐγένειαν ὅγε ἀληθῶς σοφὸς καὶ φιλόσοφος.

The first originated from above and through it we are all equally noble, since we have come into being according to the image of God; the second comes from flesh, but I do not know whether it is something noble, given that it is associated with corruption; the third is recognized on the basis of vice or virtue, and we partake of it to a greater or lesser degree, I believe, depending on how much we either take care of or corrupt the image. This is the nobility that he who is truly wise and a philosopher will desire.<sup>406</sup>

Here, the second-generation curial churchman betrays the deep ambivalence he felt toward his own obligations to family and class. For among the ways in which he very publicly resisted the “tyranny” of his father was his steadfast devotion to virginity, a condition that permitted him to avoid the “corruption” (φθορά) of sexual desire and procreation that undermines this second type of nobility.

Gregory had challenged conceptions of nobility based on kinship or imperial decree in *Oration 25* as well, contemptuously dubbing them “popular” (εὐγένειαν δὲ λέγω, οὐχ ἦν οἱ πολλοὶ νομίζουσιν):

Οὐ πρὸς ἡμῶν οὕτω θαυμάζειν, οὐδὲ φιλόσοφον, τὴν ἐκ μύθων καὶ τάφων ἐρχομένην καὶ πάλαι σεσηπυίας ὄφρυος· οὐδὲ τὴν ἐξ αἱμάτων καὶ γραμμάτων προσγινομένην, ἣν νύκτες χαρίζονται, καὶ βασιλέων ἴσως οὐδὲ εὐγενῶν χεῖρες, προστασσόντων, ὥσπερ ἄλλο τι, τὴν εὐγένειαν.

It is neither appropriate for us nor characteristic of a philosopher to admire so a nobility that comes from legends, tombs, and a pride long since rotten, nor that which accrues from blood lines and decrees, which nights

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<sup>406</sup> *Or.* 26.10.

oblige as well as the hands of emperors, who assign it like anything else, although perhaps not even of noble birth themselves.<sup>407</sup>

Hence, like Libanius, Gregory too envisioned an aristocracy of virtue and used the image of the philosopher as its ideal. But unlike his Antiochene contemporary, he explicitly opens enrollment to both the man of breeding (εὐπατρίδης) and the man of low-birth (δυσγενής), doubtful that “one kind of clay differs greatly from another” (εἴπερ τι μέγα πηλὸς πηλοῦ διαφέρει).<sup>408</sup> Although Libanius had also defied his family’s expectations to pursue what he viewed as a higher calling (in his case, a career as a sophist), he never questioned the privileged position of the curial class within the social hierarchy of the empire; quite the opposite, in fact. Gregory, on the other hand, was engaged less in defending the status of the traditional municipal elite than in shaping the composition and comportment of a new elite stratum of imperial society, the hierarchy of the Christian church.

Nevertheless, despite his repeatedly professed disdain toward more conventional definitions of nobility, Gregory drew an even sharper division between his ecclesiastical aristocracy, whose members were suspiciously curial in their culture and education, and the increasingly numerous and influential aristocracy of service that was tied to the court. So to his three types of nobility, he dismissively adds a fourth:

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<sup>407</sup> *Or.* 25.3; cf. *Carm.* 1.2.8.41 – 45, *PG* 37.652 and McGuckin 2006: 204f.

<sup>408</sup> *Or.* 26.10.

Τὸ γὰρ τέταρτον γένος, τότε ἀξιῶσω λόγου, τὸ ἐν γράμμασι καὶ  
προστάγμασιν, ὅταν καὶ κάλλος ἀποδέξωμαι τὸ ἐν χρώμασι, καὶ  
πίθηκον αἰδεσθῶ λέοντα εἶναι κεκελευσμένον.

The fourth type, that which lies in decrees and ordinances, I shall deem  
worthy of discussion when I acknowledge that beauty lies in colors and  
respect a monkey who has been decreed a lion.

In *Oration 26*, then, Gregory is able simultaneously to preserve the increasingly hazy  
distinction between the traditional civic elite of the Greek east and a new and growing  
aristocracy derived from the imperial bureaucracy, and to privilege the Christian  
hierarchy by promoting the figure of the philosopher-priest.

Yet in these efforts to redefine the concept of nobility along both Christian and  
philosophical lines, Maximus, as we have seen, played a prominent role. Reflecting upon  
the incident in the *De vita sua*, Gregory concludes:

Τοιαῦτα φιλοσοφοῦσιν οἱ νυνὶ κύνες—  
κύνες ὑλάκται, τοῦτο καὶ μόνον κύνες.  
τί Διογένης τοιοῦτον ἢ Ἀντισθένης;  
τί δαὶ πρὸς ὑμᾶς ὁ Κράτης; διάπτυσθε  
τοὺς περιπάτους Πλάτωνος· οὐδὲν ἢ Στοά.  
ὦ Σώκρατες, τὰ πρῶτα μέχρι νῦν φέρεις.  
φθέγγωμ' ἐγὼ τι πιστότερον τῆς Πυθίας;  
ἀνδρῶν ἀπάντων Μάξιμος σοφώτατος.

Such are the philosophical pursuits of today's Cynics – barking dogs, but  
dogs only in this. Where is the likeness to Diogenes or Antisthenes?  
What has Crates to do with you? Spit upon the wandering philosophical  
discussions of Plato; the Stoa is nothing. O Socrates, you carried first  
prize until now. Let me say something more trustworthy than the Pythia:  
'Maximus is the wisest of all men.'<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1030 – 1037; cf. Krueger 1993: 41f.

Still, despite his disenchantment with contemporary philosophers, he remained confident in the efficacy of philosophy as a means of ennobling and distinguishing the nascent ecclesiastical aristocracy. In fact, he assumes the philosophical mantle himself in order to reassert his authority over the Nicene community of Constantinople. Thus, whereas in *Oration 25* Gregory is restricted to pursuing philosophy by praising an individual whom he had mistaken for a philosopher, in the latter half of *Oration 26* he uses a rhetoric of corruption to establish his own philosophical nobility, systematically usurping the persona he had previously bestowed upon Maximus.

Central to Gregory's construction of the philosopher, and what makes the rhetoric of corruption so effective in his hands, is the ideal of immateriality. Like God and the angels, the philosopher is "ungovernable" (δυσκράτητος).<sup>410</sup> But while the lover of wisdom exists "free of matter," he nevertheless remains in it (ἄυλος ἐν ὕλη):

ἐν σώματι ἀπερίγραπτος, ἐπὶ γῆς οὐράνιος, ἐν πάθεσιν ἀπαθής,  
πάντα ἡττώμενος πλὴν φρονήματος, νικῶν τῶ νικᾶσθαι τοὺς κρατεῖν  
νομίζοντας.

He is not bounded by his body, though in it, heavenly while on earth,  
passionless in his passions, yielding in all things except his will, victorious  
over the high and mighty by being vanquished.

For this reason, all things give way before the philosopher, and nothing is more impregnable and less assailable than a life devoted to philosophy.

Against this definition of the ideal philosopher, Gregory contemplates his own character and conduct in the face of wickedness (κακία) and injustice (ἀδικία), further

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<sup>410</sup> *Or.* 26.13.

sharing the fruits of his leisured θεωρία with his congregation.<sup>411</sup> This speculation takes the form of a list of potential attacks on his reputation and standing in Constantinople. With the first four charges, Gregory inverts some of the standard *topoi* found in the classical encomium – education, wealth, place of origin, health, and physical appearance – and thereby accentuates the transformation of his hereditary nobility into the nobility of a Christian philosopher.<sup>412</sup> To the charge of ignorance (ἀπαίδευτον), he responds not with his protracted study of the classics at Alexandria and Athens, or even with his time at the “Christian university town” of Caesarea Maritima, but with the words of Solomon, “the wisest of men” (ὁ σοφώτατος): “For the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; and, the end of the matter, hear all of it, fear God” (Ἀρχή τε γὰρ σοφίας, φόβος Κυρίου καὶ τέλος λόγου, τὸ πᾶν ἄκουε, τὸν Θεὸν φοβοῦ).<sup>413</sup> Thus, he immediately substitutes true Christian piety for Cynic godlessness (τὸ ἄθεον) and the mere refinement of words prized by Hellenes (ἡ τῶν λόγων κομψεία).<sup>414</sup>

Poverty, he maintains, is his wealth (πενίαν ἐγκαλέσουσι, τὴν ἐμὴν περιουσίαν), and in this he surpasses his earlier laudatory portrait of Maximus. Although he had offered the Christian Cynic of *Oration 25* as a lesson that piety and philosophy do not lie in external appearances, he nevertheless depicted him in the traditional threadbare cloak

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<sup>411</sup> *Or.* 26.13: Ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸν φιλόσοφον ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ἔγραψεν, ὅθεν εἶπον, ἀρξάμενος, φέρε, παρὰ τοῦτον τὰ ἡμέτερα θεωρήσωμεν.

<sup>412</sup> Daley 2006: 223 n. 309.

<sup>413</sup> *Or.* 26.14; cf. *Prv.* 1.7 and *Eccl.* 12.13. On Caesarea Maritima, see McGuckin 2001b: 36f.

<sup>414</sup> *Or.* 25.6 and 3.

(τρίβων) and beard (ὑπήνη) of the philosopher; the characteristic staff (βακτηρία) makes an appearance in the *De vita sua*.<sup>415</sup> Gregory, on the other hand, appears in *Oration 26* in rags (ράκια) and a tunic (χιτών), and longs to strip off even these, so that he may run “naked through the thorns of life” (ἵνα γυμνὸς διαδράμω τὰς ἀκάνθας τοῦ βίου).<sup>416</sup> In this way, he joins the willing poverty of the followers of Diogenes to the voluntary suffering of Jesus on behalf of humanity.<sup>417</sup>

In response to those truly violent xenophobes (ὄντως ὑβρισταὶ καὶ μισόξενοι) who stigmatized him as a fugitive (φυγόπατρις), he adapts to a Christian context the Cynic cosmopolitanism that he had attributed to Maximus:

Ἔστι γάρ μοι πατρις, ὧ οὔτοι, περιγραπτὸς, ὧ πᾶσα πατρις, καὶ οὐδεμία; ... ἂν οὕτως ἔχῃς, μὴ τῆς ἀληθινῆς πατρίδος ἐκπέσης, εἰς ἣν ἀποτίθεσθαι χρὴ τὸ πολίτευμα.

Do you really think that my homeland has boundaries? It is everywhere and nowhere... if such is your understanding, do not allow yourself to be driven out of the true homeland, to which our citizenship must be deferred.<sup>418</sup>

Lastly, he addresses his age and physical condition, turning his opponent’s criticisms back upon him:

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<sup>415</sup> *Or.* 25.5 and *De vita sua*, v. 768. The τρίβων and βακτηρία also appear together in a description of Diogenes of Sinope in *Ep.* 98.1.

<sup>416</sup> *Or.* 26.14.

<sup>417</sup> Cf. *Or.* 26.12.

<sup>418</sup> Cf. *Or.* 25.3: Πολίτης δὲ, σοφία μὲν, τῆς οἰκουμένης ἀπάσης (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀνέχεται μικροῖς ὅροις Κυνική περιγράφεσθαι).

Οὐδὲ σὺ σφριγῶν μοι καὶ σαρκοτροφῶν, ἡδὺ θέαμα. Εἴθε τι καὶ πολιᾶς ἐπήνθει σοι καὶ ὠχρότητος, ἵνα πιστευθῆς γούν εἶναι συνετὸς καὶ φιλόσοφος.

Your plump and well-nourished flesh is not a pleasant sight to me. Would that you showed a touch of gray and were incredibly pale so that you would at least be believed likely to be intelligent and philosophic.

Gregory's intellectual and philosophical endeavors, then, are writ upon his very body, a thing more difficult to feign than simply the manner of one's dress.

By rhetorically appropriating the mantle of philosophy from Maximus, Gregory renders himself unassailable in what he describes as “a senseless kind of war with no name” (πόλεμος κωφός τις καὶ οὐδὲ ὄνομα ἔχων) that bred suspicion (ὑποψία) throughout the inhabited world and sullied the name of Christianity.<sup>419</sup> At the heart of this conflict lay the privilege of position (προεδρία), both within the various local Christian communities and between the bishops of different sees (τις τόπου προτίμησις), a privilege that he deems befitting a tyrant (τυραννικὴ προνομία). Thus, such concerns occupied not only the laity but the pastors as well, “who are ignorant of their position as teachers of Israel” (οὐ τῶν κάτω μόνον, ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ τῶν ποιμένων, οἱ διδάσκαλοι τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ὄντες, ταῦτα ἡγνόησαν).

Gregory, however, who, as a member of the curial elite, was fully aware of his status as teacher to the Anastasia congregation, offered himself as an exemplum of an alternate and idealized Christian hierarchy based solely on virtue (ἴν' ἐξ ἀρετῆς μόνης ἐγινωσκόμεθα). Naturally, this virtue resulted from his rigorous devotion to the

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<sup>419</sup> *Or.* 26.15.

philosophical life. Indeed, his preference for the βίος θεωρητικός lent credibility to his resistance to ordination, both past and present, and proved the sincerity of his curses and tears. As recent events had shown, such a position of leadership brought only commotion to his affairs, rocking them their very foundation. Still, his enemies would never truly be able to bar him from the altars, for he knew only the archetypal altar that was wholly the work of the mind (ὄλον τοῦ νοῦ τὸ ἔργον) and reached through contemplation (διὰ θεωρίας).<sup>420</sup> Nor could they drive him from the city, since his was the city that lay in heaven above (ἡ ἄνω κείμενη). His possessions (χρήματα) were secure because he had none; luxurious living he denies completely: “If we pursue luxury, may those who hate us make sport of us; for I can call down no greater curse upon myself” (Τρυφήν δὲ εἰ διώκομεν, τρυφήσαιεν καθ’ ἡμῶν οἱ μισοῦντες ἡμᾶς· οὐ γὰρ ἄλλο τι μείζον ἐμαυτῷ καταράσομαι).<sup>421</sup>

Ultimately, Gregory’s philosophical demeanor not only shields him from anxiety over the present circumstances, but even allows him to lament those who have caused him pain, “once limbs of Christ, limbs dear to me, even if now corrupted” (μέλη Χριστοῦ ποτε, μέλη τίμια ἐμοῖ, εἰ καὶ νῦν διεφθαρμένα). Thus, it is in philosophy that he finds the strength for Christ-like forgiveness in the face of corruption and betrayal within his own congregation.

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<sup>420</sup> *Or.* 26.16. Although this passage very clearly evokes Plato’s theory of forms, Gregory attributes the philosophical conception of this ideal altar to David; cf. Ps. 43.4.

<sup>421</sup> *Or.* 26.17.

## The Kiss of Judas

Embedded within *Oration 26*, immediately following his claim to lack possessions, Gregory makes a rather startling revelation. The underlying motivation behind his enemies' attacks, the reason for "the entire war" (τοῦτό ἐστιν ὑπὲρ οὗ πᾶς ὁ πόλεμος), is to gain control of ecclesiastical finances:

δι' ἃ ζηλοτυπεῖ τὸ γλωσσόκομον ὁ κλέπτης, καὶ τὸν Θεὸν προδίδωσι τριάκοντα ἀργυρίων, τὸ δεινότατον. Τοσοῦτου γὰρ, οὐχ ὁ προδιδόμενος, ἀλλ' ὁ προδιδούς ἄξιος.

Because of these the thief vies for the money box and betrays God for thirty pieces of silver, that most terrible act. For so much was the betrayer worth, not the betrayed.<sup>422</sup>

The allusion here, of course, is to the infamous Judas Iscariot, who sold Jesus to the high priests of the Temple for thirty *denarii*. But Gregory combines two scriptural citations in this passage, the account in Matthew of Judas' betrayal and the anointing of Jesus at Bethany in the gospel of John.<sup>423</sup> This latter reference is of particular importance, since it is only John that explicitly casts Judas as the disciple who objects to the use of expensive nard for the anointment: "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred *denarii* and the money not given to the poor?" (Διὰ τί τοῦτο τὸ μύρον οὐκ ἐπράθη τριακοσίων δηναρίων καὶ ἐδόθη πτωχοῖς).<sup>424</sup> Furthermore, although in Matthew and Mark some

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<sup>422</sup> *Or.* 26.16.

<sup>423</sup> Jn. 12.6 and Mt. 26.15.

<sup>424</sup> Jn. 12.5, *New Revised Standard Version*.

among Jesus' disciples indignantly raise this same objection, John's account completely divests it of its sincerity and philanthropy:

εἶπεν δὲ τοῦτο οὐχ ὅτι περὶ τῶν πτωχῶν ἔμελεν αὐτῷ, ἀλλ' ὅτι κλέπτῃς ἦν καὶ τὸ γλωσσόκομον ἔχων τὰ βαλλόμενα ἐβάσταζεν.

He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.<sup>425</sup>

Thus, Gregory very deliberately draws upon an image of Judas in this speech that emphasizes his greed and venality, in addition to his treachery, in order to vilify his own betrayer, Maximus, and cast doubt on this pseudo-Cynic's motives in seeking the well-endowed episcopal office of Constantinople.

As I have shown above, such imagery also haunts the narrative of the *De vita sua*.

Early on in the poem, Gregory uses it to justify fleeing his ordination as bishop of Sasima, a source of great discord between himself and his “worst of friends,” Basil of Caesarea.<sup>426</sup> During the reign of Valens, early in 372, Cappadocia was partitioned into two provinces. While Cappadocia Prima retained Caesarea as its capital, now the lone city of this new territory, the emperor placed the more urbanized landscape of Cappadocia Secunda under the jurisdiction of ancient Tyana.<sup>427</sup> The bishop there,

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<sup>425</sup> Cf. Mt. 26.6 – 13; Mk. 14.3 – 9.

<sup>426</sup> As McGuckin 2001a points out, this section of the *De vita sua* also operates in conjunction with other portions of Gregory's later autobiographical writings to defend the legality of his tenure as bishop of Constantinople. Canon 15 of the Council of Nicaea expressly prohibited the translation of bishoprics, and had been used by the Egyptian contingent to force his resignation during the ecumenical council of 381. My argument, however, focuses on Gregory's attempt to establish the moral legitimacy of his position. On the complicated yet historically idealized friendship of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, see White 1992: 61 – 70, Rousseau 1994: 234 – 239, McLynn 2001, and Van Dam 1986 and 2003: 155 – 184.

<sup>427</sup> See Van Dam 2002: 28 – 38 and McGuckin 2001b: 187 – 204.

Anthimus, quickly took advantage of his newly acquired metropolitan status to assert his authority over the other bishops of the new province. In response, Basil ordained his younger brother Gregory as bishop of Nyssa and Amphilocius, a cousin of Gregory of Nazianzus, as bishop of Iconium, and conspired with the elder Gregory to install his son in the disputed town of Sasima. The younger Gregory’s ensuing flight from episcopal responsibility for this “utterly abominable, measly little village” (δεινῶς ἀπευκτὸν καὶ στενὸν κωμύδριον) resulted in the loss of the region to Tyana and earned him Basil’s ire.<sup>428</sup> In recounting this “dreadful battle” (δεινὸς τις μῦθος) between opposing bishops nearly a decade later, Gregory makes no distinction in motivation between Anthimus and his ambitious and calculating friend:

ψυχὰὶ πρόφασις, τὸ δ’ ἔστιν ἡ φιλαρχία·  
ὀκνῶ γὰρ εἰπεῖν, οἱ πόροι τε καὶ φόροι,  
ἐξ ὧν δονεῖται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος ἀθλίως.

Souls are the pretext, but it is actually the lust for power; indeed, I hesitate to say it, power over revenues and tithes, on account of which the entire world is in a wretched commotion.<sup>429</sup>

In contrast to this account of worldly ambition and greed, Gregory recalls the time he and Basil spent at Athens, their mutual labors in pursuit of letters (πόννοι κοινοὶ λόγων), and the single mind they once shared (νοῦς εἷς ἐν ἀμφοῖν) through their

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<sup>428</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 441 – 442. Anthimus installed his own candidate as bishop in the neighboring village of Limnai, which lay to the northeast of Sasima on the road to Caesarea; see Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 50, *PG* 37.104, as well as McGuckin 2001b: 198, and Galloway 1943: 116 and 1964: 64 – 66.

<sup>429</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 460 – 462. Naturally, Gregory’s account of this incident is much more favorable toward Basil in his funeral oration for his once dear friend, accusing only Anthimus of masking his insatiable greed (ἀπληστία) with the pretense of defending the faith from heretics; *Or.* 43.58 – 59.

traditional Greek education.<sup>430</sup> He laments that his friend had broken the pledges (δεξιά) they both had made, to cast off the world (κόσμον μὲν ὡς πόρρω βαλεῖν), to live life in common for God (αὐτοὺς δὲ κοινὸν τῷ θεῷ ζῆσαι βίον), and to dedicate their learning to the one wise Word (λόγους τε δοῦναι τῷ μόνῳ σοφῷ λόγῳ), Jesus Christ. In so doing, Basil had let slip the self-discipline developed during the course of his studies and through his ascetic retreat in Pontus, and abandoned the moral *exempla* encompassed by both the classical λόγοι and the growing body of Christian literature.<sup>431</sup> In short, he had upset the vital balance between the βίος θεωρητικός and the βίος πρακτικός, which, in Gregory’s view, naturally resulted in the corruption of his πράξεις as bishop of Caesarea. Worse still, he had attempted to corrupt Gregory as well by involving him in his machinations. To such a profound betrayal of the bonds of friendship, Gregory’s response could only be withdrawal:

τί φῶ; πόθεν δὲ τὴν ἐμὴν ὠδῖνά σοι  
 πᾶσαν παραστήσαιμι; κέντρα μοι πάλιν,  
 πάλιν φυγᾶς τις καὶ δρομαῖος εἰς ὄρος  
 κλέπτων φίλην δίαιταν, ἐντρύφημ’ ἐμόν.

What can I say? How can I make clear to you the whole of my anguish?  
 Once again the goad spurred me, and once again I became a fugitive,  
 running headlong to the mountain to steal into that beloved mode of life,  
 my luxury.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 476 – 481.

<sup>431</sup> Van Dam 2002: 185 maintains that for Basil, “the discipline of classical rhetoric was a preview of the discipline of an ascetic life;” cf. Bas. Caes. *Hom. 22 (De adulescentes)*.

<sup>432</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 488 – 491.

Moreover, this section of Gregory’s apologetic poem is meant to do more than simply justify his actions during the Sasima affair; it also serves to fashion the author as an ideal candidate for the very office that he rejected. This is most apparent in *Epistle 49*, where he defends himself against Basil’s accusations of laziness and indolence (ἀργία καὶ ῥαθυμία).<sup>433</sup> He was not stirred like a bishop (ἐπισκοπικῶς κινεῖσθαι), according to his indignant friend, when he failed to seize (καταλαμβάνειν) the town and take up arms (ὀπλιζειν) on his behalf. Gregory disputes this martial definition of a bishop’s duties, which he felt reduced the members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to dogs fighting over a piece of meat. For him, “the greatest action is inaction” (μεγίστη πρᾶξις ἐστὶν ἡ ἀπραξία), and, what is more, his ambition to live a quiet life (τοσοῦτον τῆ ἀπραγμοσύνη φιλοτιμοῦμαι), he believed, made him a norm of magnanimous conduct in this regard for all individuals (ὥστ’ οἶεσθαι καὶ νόμος εἶναι πᾶσι τῆς περὶ τοῦτο μεγαλοψυχίας). He concludes:

Καὶ ὡς εἰ πάντες ἡμᾶς ἐμιμοῦντο, οὐδὲν ἂν ἦν πρᾶγμα ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις οὐδ’ ἂν ἡ πίστις παρεσύρετο, τῶν ἰδίων ἐκάστω φιλονεικίων ὄπλον τυγχάνουσα.

If only all men emulated us, the churches would not be troubled, nor would faith be swept away as a weapon for each individual in their own private rivalries.

Thus, Gregory very explicitly offers here his preference for ἀπραξία, that is, his devotion to a Christianized classical ideal of ascetic philosophical retreat, as a solution to the internal divisions within the Christian community and the resulting fragmentation of

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<sup>433</sup> *Ep.* 49, Galloway 1964: 63f.

theological consensus. His rejection of Sasima and preference for leisure before all else (ἡμῖν δ' ἀντὶ πάντων δοῦναι τὴν ἡσυχίαν), however, did not preclude him from taking up the throne and engaging in ecclesiastical warfare when matters of real importance were at stake.<sup>434</sup> “Why must I fight for suckling animals and chickens and that which belongs to others,” he asks Basil, “as I would for souls and canons (περὶ ψυχῶν καὶ κανόνων)?”

During the Second Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople in 381, souls and canons were precisely what was at issue, as the newly ascendant Nicene bishops sought to refine Trinitarian doctrine and clarify the framework of church discipline established at Nicaea. It should be no surprise then, that Gregory’s language of excessive ambition and material greed is especially prevalent in the *De vita sua* throughout its account of his brief tenure as bishop of the eastern capital. There, it assumes a central role in distinguishing Gregory from his rivals and opponents by portraying him as the ideal philosopher-bishop in action.

When Gregory assumed office on November 27, 380, shortly after the arrival of the emperor Theodosius, he became the first Nicene bishop of Constantinople in forty years. Anticipating the loss of their see, Demophilus and his Arian clergy had absconded with the account books, which, according to popular gossip (τὸ θρυλούμενον), recorded treasures and revenues (κειμήλια τε καὶ πόροι) accumulated from the greatest churches

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<sup>434</sup> *Ep.* 48.7 – 8, Gallay 1964: 63.

throughout the inhabited world.<sup>435</sup> Although Gregory was pressured by some to conduct an investigation through an external auditor, he instead resigned himself to the situation, unwilling to violate the sanctity of the Christian mystery (εις ὑβριν μυστηρίου).<sup>436</sup> Claiming responsibility only for his own administration (ὑπεύθυνος), he casts anyone who would criticize him as “a slave to possessions” (ἡττων χρημάτων):

πᾶσιν γὰρ οὔσης τῆς ἀπληστίας κακῆς  
ἄπληστον εἶναι χειρὸν ἐν τοῖς πνεύματος.  
εἰ πάντες οὕτως ἐφρόνουσιν εἰς χρήματα,  
οὐκ ἂν ποτ' οὐδὲν τοῖον ἦν ἐκκλησίαις  
πλήρωμα' ἀνευρεῖν (οὐ φρενὸς γὰρ τῆς ἐμῆς),  
λέγω δ' ὅσον λειτουργόν, ἐγγίζον θεῷ.

For, although insatiable greed is an evil that afflicts us all, it is worse in matters of the spirit. If everyone were to think this way about possessions, there would never be such abundance found in churches (a state of affairs not to my liking), and I speak primarily of the minister, who is close to God.<sup>437</sup>

Moreover, in response to what he derisively refers to as the “chatter” of his opponents (θρύλλημα τῶν ἐναντίων), Gregory portrays himself as an eager and capable ecclesiastical administrator, not only filling the churches of a religiously divided capital, but also directing church funds toward various philanthropic enterprises. Accordingly, he ministered to the poor, monks, virgins, sick refugees, travelers, and prisoners; he sang psalms, shed tears, and held all-night vigils. In other words, upon entering office,

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<sup>435</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1475 – 1494.

<sup>436</sup> *Or.* 39, delivered on the vigil of the Epiphany, January 5, 381, casts Christian baptism as a mystery initiation similar but superior to the ancient Greek mysteries; see McGuckin 2001b: 340 – 344.

<sup>437</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1489 – 1494.

Gregory devoted himself wholeheartedly to the ideal Christian βίος πράκτικος for which his previous philosophical retreat had prepared him.<sup>438</sup>

In maintaining this dichotomy between his own Christianized philosophical virtue and so pervasive a vice as greed over the course of his narrative, Gregory relied on gold imagery as well, a particularly useful rhetorical tool within a community increasingly accustomed to the use of precious stones and metals in church mosaics and ornaments. Yet, unlike most of the authors discussed by Dominic Janes, who used scriptural exegesis to establish a symbolic link between the earthly magnificence of churches and the eternal splendors of heaven, this ascetic bishop frowned on ecclesiastical opulence and rejected the growing association of gold with the morally good.<sup>439</sup> Thus, while inveighing against the bribery of his Alexandrian rival, Maximus, Gregory pauses to reflect on the most potent influence on human behavior:

οἶνόν τις εἶπε συμπότης πάντων κρατεῖν,  
ἄλλος γυναῖκα, τὴν δ' ἀλήθειαν σοφός·  
ἐγὼ δ' ἂν εἶπον χρυσόν, ὡς ἔχει κράτος.  
τούτῳ τὰ πάντα ῥαδίως πεσσεύεται.  
οὕπῳ τὸ δεινόν, εἰ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου μόνα  
πλέον παρ' ἡμῖν ἰσχύει τοῦ πνεύματος.

Some symposiast said that wine prevails over all things, another said woman, and this wise man spoke the truth; but I would have said that gold holds the greatest sway. All things easily become pieces in its game. It is

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<sup>438</sup> The topics of poverty in the late Roman empire and the role of almsgiving and poor relief in the construction of clerical authority have seen growing interest of late; see Holman 2001, Brown 2002, and Finn 2006.

<sup>439</sup> See Janes 1998.

not at all strange, then, that material things exert more of an influence on us than the affairs of the spirit.<sup>440</sup>

Outside the context of this poetically imagined philosophical symposium, Gregory speaks of this seductive metal in a similar manner. Ironically, before an audience that included the very Egyptian sailors whom he would shortly accuse of the worst sort of venality, he had lauded the ability of the Christian fathers of Egypt to resist, among other things, gold, “that unnoticed tyrant, which now upsets many things and renders them mere game pieces” (χρυσὸς, ὁ ἀφανὴς τύραννος, ᾧ νῦν τὰ πολλὰ μεταρρίπτεται καὶ πεττεύεται).<sup>441</sup> To Gregory, then, as to Libanius, gold represented a potent source of social and personal corruption, and, as such, it could also serve this Christian curial as an effective means of both undermining the legitimacy of his opponents’ actions and establishing his own.

The account of the council of Constantinople in the *De vita sua* is dominated not by theological concerns, as might be expected from an author who would later be known as “the Theologian,” but instead by “destructive envy” (ὁ φθορεὺς φθόνος) and “strife over episcopal thrones” (ἡ ὑπὲρ θρόνων ἔρις).<sup>442</sup> Yet, as in the earlier description of the Maximus affair, gold too becomes a motivating factor behind the actions of Gregory’s opponents, and thus serves as an important contributor to the ecclesiastical discord so

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<sup>440</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 868 – 873.

<sup>441</sup> *Or.* 34.4.

<sup>442</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1506 and 1565. Gregory shares the title of “Theologian” only with John, the eponymous writer of the Fourth Gospel; cf. Daley 2006: 41.

prominent in this poetic narrative. When the council opened in May of 381, it allegedly included all the bishops of the east, with the exception of Egypt.<sup>443</sup> They met under the auspices of Theodosius, the first eastern emperor to endorse the Nicene Creed since Constantine, and immediately set about implementing his edict of January 10th, which had restored the churches of the empire to bishops of the Nicene faith.<sup>444</sup> The presidency of this assembly fell to Meletius, bishop of Antioch, “a man most pious, simple, guileless in character, full of God, and serene of gaze” (ἄνῆρ εὐσεβέστατος, ἀπλοῦς, ἄτεχνος τὸν τρόπον, θεοῦ γέμων, βλέπων γαλήνην), who guided the opening sessions with a mixture of boldness and modesty (θάρσος αἰδοῖ σύγκρατον).<sup>445</sup> Yet even this “product of the spirit” (πνεύματος γεώργιον), who had earned not only Gregory’s admiration but the support of the emperor as well, failed to produce harmony in this “martial frenzy” provoked by the lust for power and episcopal sovereignty (λύσσα φιλαρχίας τε καὶ μοναρχίας).<sup>446</sup>

After the sudden death of Meletius early in the proceedings, the presidency of the council devolved upon Gregory as the newly confirmed bishop of Constantinople.

Although Gregory sought to continue his predecessor’s policy of promoting unity within

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<sup>443</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1509 – 1513. On the opening month of the Council of Constantinople, see Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.

<sup>444</sup> *CTh* 16.5.6 (= *CJ* 1.1.2).

<sup>445</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1514 – 1517.

<sup>446</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1539 – 1577. According to Theodoret, Theodosius had experienced a vision prior to his nomination as emperor in which Meletius had offered him the imperial robe and crown. This prompted the emperor to greet the bishop of Antioch “like a child who loves his father” before the entire assembly of bishops in Constantinople; *Hist. eccl.* 5.6 – 7.

the Nicene party, the issue of Meletius' successor at Antioch proved to be a major source of contention between the Syrian bishops and the interests of Egypt and the west. During the Antiochene synod of 379, Meletius had arranged to share the episcopacy of this important see with Paulinus, his long-standing rival within the Nicene community who had been consecrated in his absence in 362 and, although not as popular locally, continued to have the support of Alexandria and Rome.<sup>447</sup> Under this compromise settlement, upon the death of either one, the other was to become the sole bishop of the city. This solution pleased neither party, however, and in response to the passing of their leader, the Meletian faction quickly proposed the election of the priest Flavian, a friend of the influential theologian and bishop of Tarsus, Diodore, and thereby reignited the schism within the Nicene community at Antioch and exacerbated tensions abroad with the Egyptian and western bishops.<sup>448</sup>

Although Gregory regarded this proposal as unworthy even of discussion, endorsed as it was by “the factious and wicked” (οἱ στασιώδεις καὶ κακοί), he nevertheless opted to speak against it before the assembly, supporting Meletius' original

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<sup>447</sup> According to the church historians of the fifth century, Meletius had been put forward and consecrated by the Arian community of Antioch in 360, but promoted Nicene theology after he had become bishop. Constantius exiled him in the following year and installed Euzoius in his stead, a devoted follower of Arius himself, but some among the Nicene faithful remained suspicious of Meletius' Arian past and chose to support Paulinus, a priest who had served under the previous Nicene bishop, Eustathius; cf. Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 2.44, 3.6 and 9, 4.2, and 5.5; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 4.28, 5.12 – 13, and 7.3; and Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 2.31, 3.2, and 5.3. On the suspicions of Athanasius of Alexandria, his successor Peter, and Damasus of Rome, see Bas. Caes. *Epp.* 89 and 266.

<sup>448</sup> Cf. Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 5.9 and 15; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 7.11; and Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 5.23.

settlement in an effort to achieve *détente* with the west.<sup>449</sup> In this speech, poetically refashioned in the *De vita sua*, the new president of the council specifically addresses the older generation of bishops, portraying his opponents as “an unruly mob of young men” and a “newfangled gang” (τύρβη νέων τις, καινὸν ἐργαστήριον).<sup>450</sup> “We old men will not persuade this seething mass,” he concedes, “for it is always a slave to empty glory” (οἱ γὰρ γέροντες τὸ ζέον γ’ οὐ πείσομεν· κενῆς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἥττον εὐκλείας ἀεί).<sup>451</sup> Impervious to his foresight and the greater wisdom of his age (λόγος προμηθῆς, τῶν νέων σοφώτερος), Gregory viewed this younger generation of Christian leaders as myopically seeking to achieve victory in only a single city, paying no heed to the turmoil of the wider world (κοσμικὸς σάλος) and therefore permitting Nicene doctrine to waste away through discord (στάσις).<sup>452</sup> In order to establish the sincerity and righteousness of his counsel (εἶρηθ’ ἀπλῶς τε καὶ δικαίως), however, Gregory abruptly shifts by way of conclusion from this rhetorically crafted dichotomy between generations to a more familiar strategy:

εἰ δ’ οἶεταί τις τῶν κακῶν ἢ πρὸς χάριν  
λέγειν τὰδ’ ἡμᾶς αὐτὸς ἠγορασμένος  
(εἰσὶν γὰρ, εἰσὶν ἔμποροι τῶν ἐκκρίτων  
χρυσοῦ γέμοντες καὶ προθυμίας ἴσης)  
ἢ τι σκοπεῖν οἰκεῖον, ὡς πολλοῖς νόμος,

<sup>449</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1583 – 1590. McGuckin 2001b: 351f. suggests that Gregory also may have been acting on the advice of Theodosius, “who was very anxious to secure better lines of communication with the Western churches.”

<sup>450</sup> *De vita sua*, v. 1682.

<sup>451</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1620 – 1623.

<sup>452</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1635 – 1660.

αὐτὸς τεχνάζων λανθάνειν ἐν τοῖς κακοῖς  
ἢ τὸ κρατεῖν ἐντεῦθεν αὐτῷ μνώμενος,  
δότω τὸ κρίνειν τῷ τελευταίῳ πυρί.  
ἡμῖν δὲ συγχωρήσατ' ἄθρονον βίου,  
τὸν ἀκλεῖ μὲν, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἀκίνδυνον.  
καθήσομ' ἐλθὼν, οἱ κακῶν ἐρημία.  
κρεῖσσον γὰρ ἢ τοῖς πλείοσιν μεμιγμένον  
μήτ' ἄλλους ἔλκειν πρὸς τὸ βούλημ' ἰσχύειν  
μήτ' αὐτὸν ἄλλοις συμφέρεσθ', οὐ μὴ λόγος.  
δεῦρ', ὅστις οἶδε τὸν θρόνον, προσβαινέτω·  
πολλοὺς ἀμείψει, ἀξίους τε καὶ κακοὺς.  
πρὸς ταῦτα βουλευέσθε. εἴρηται λόγος.

If anyone among the wicked thinks that we say these things to curry favor, because he is himself a bought man (for there are most certainly traffickers among this select body who are full of gold and equal zeal), or thinks that we are looking out for our own self-interest (as is the custom for many), because he contrives to escape notice in his own wicked deeds, or thinks that we gain influence from our position, because he courts it for himself, let him entrust judgment to the final fire. And to us, grant a throneless life, one without glory, but likewise free from danger. I shall go and sit where I am free from evil. For it is better than mingling with this crowd, where I am able neither to draw one group to my purpose, nor to join the other because they lack reason. Whosoever knows the throne, let him mount it; he will receive in exchange many people, both goodly and wicked. Deliberate upon these matters. I have finished speaking.<sup>453</sup>

In a note on this passage, McGuckin suggests that Gregory is responding to a specific allegation leveled by Diodore of Tarsus, who felt that the newly ordained bishop of Constantinople had betrayed his former patrons in Antioch in return for Theodosius' support in his bid for the throne.<sup>454</sup> “It is a charge which makes Gregory indignant,” he maintains, and “the counter charge that (Diodore) has been bought is more from passion

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<sup>453</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1663 – 1672. The verb μνάσθαι of line 1669 is equivalent in this context to the Latin *ambire*.

<sup>454</sup> McGuckin 2001b: 353 n. 222.

than evidence.” While it may well be the case that the bishop of Tarsus made such an allegation, neither passion nor evidence had much to do with Gregory’s response. Instead, it forms part of a broader rhetorical strategy that uses the language of gold, venality, and ambition to cast his opponents as a collective foil to the ascetic virtue he achieved in his pursuit of the philosophical life.

Still, faced with the stigma of collusion with the emperor, Gregory employs such language to differentiate himself from the imperial court even more so than from “the large rabble of traffickers in Christ” (τὸν συρφετὸν δὲ τὸν πολὺν χριστεμπόρων), whom he claims had hijacked the council of Constantinople.<sup>455</sup> Among the praiseworthy deeds that comprise the narrative of Gregory’s first months as bishop of the eastern capital is his conscious avoidance of the imperial palace. In this, he portrays himself as exceptional:

πάντων σεβόντων τὴν ὄφρυν τῶν ἐν τέλει—  
τούτων μάλιστα τοὺς ἔσω παραστάτας,  
οἱ πάντ’ ἀνανδροὶ τᾶλλα, πλὴν εἰς χρήματα—  
τί δ’ ἂν τις εἴποι, πῶς τε καὶ τέχναις ὅσαι  
αὐτοῖς πυλῶσι βασιλικοῖς προσκειμένων,  
κατηγορούντων, λαμβανόντων ἐκτόπως,  
τῆς εὐσεβείας ἐμπορουμένων κακῶς,  
ἀσχημονούντων, ὡς γε συντόμως φράσαι.

Since all men pay homage to the egos of those in office – especially to the inner circle of the court, those who are unmanly in every respect, except in matters of money – what can anyone say about the manner and number of schemes employed by those who keep close to the very gates of the

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<sup>455</sup> *De vita sua*, v. 1756.

palace, making accusations, profiting extraordinarily, wickedly taking their fill of religion, and, to put it concisely, disgracing themselves?<sup>456</sup>

These effeminate and venal imperial confidants are, of course, the court eunuchs, whom Gregory had openly criticized during this period for prostituting themselves in regard to the nature of divinity (μη πορνεύσητε περὶ θεότητα), a reference to their continued support of the doctrines of Arius and Sabellius even under the explicitly pro-Nicene regime of Theodosius.<sup>457</sup> *Oration 43*, written after his retirement from Constantinople, condemned these “men from the harem” (οἱ ἐκ τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος) in similar terms; “manly only in their impiety and unable to prostitute themselves naturally, they do so in the only way they can, with their tongues” (τοὺς τοῦτο μόνον ἀνδρικούς τὴν ἀσέβειαν, οἱ τὸ φυσικῶς ἀσελγαίνειν οὐκ ἔχοντες, ὥ δύνανται μόνον, τῇ γλώσσει πορνεύουσι).<sup>458</sup> In the *De vita sua*, however, Gregory chooses to focus instead on the venality traditionally associated with eunuchs as part of his wider effort to fashion himself as a philosopher-bishop, a figure presented here as uniquely able to resist worldly corruption through the rational contemplation of the divine. Accordingly, he was content to rely on reason (λόγος) as his “most trustworthy adviser” (σύμβουλος ἀσφαλέστατος):

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<sup>456</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1424 – 1431.

<sup>457</sup> *Or.* 37.16 – 22; quote from §17. McGuckin 2001b: 332 dates this oration on Christian marriage law to December of 380, and suggests that it was delivered in the Church of the Holy Apostles “before the emperor as part of a chancery meeting for legislative consultation.” Cf. Van Dam 2002: 145f.

<sup>458</sup> *Or.* 43.47. In his farewell address to the council of Constantinople, Gregory questions the loyalty of the court (ἴσον τε περὶ τὸν βασιλέα θεραπευτικὸν καὶ οἰκίδιον) to Theodosius, for “the greater part is unfaithful to God” (εἰ μὲν καὶ βασιλεῖ πιστὸν, οὐκ οἶδα· Θεῷ δὲ τὸ πλεῖον ἄπιστον); *Or.* 42.26.

μόνος ποθεῖσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ μισεῖσθ' ἔγνων  
καὶ τῷ σπανίῳ τὸ σεμνὸν ἠμπολησάμην  
θεῶ τὰ πολλὰ καὶ καθάρσει προσνέμων,  
τῶν δὲ κρατούντων τὰς θύρας ἄλλοις διδούς.

I alone understood that being missed is preferable to being hated and earned great respect by making myself scarce, dedicating much of my time to God and purification, while ceding the doors of the powerful to others.<sup>459</sup>

In late June or early July of 381, however, Gregory was compelled by the deteriorating circumstances of the council to set aside his studied aversion to the palace and seek an audience with the emperor. His endorsement of Paulinus, the western-backed claimant to the see of Antioch, had lost him the support of the Meletian faction in the east and unleashed a storm of political and theological partisanship that not even Theodosius himself could stem.<sup>460</sup> In the hope of restoring peace to the assembly, as well as advancing his own western-influenced religious policies, the emperor summoned episcopal delegations from Egypt and Macedonia.<sup>461</sup> Upon their arrival in mid-June, the Egyptian contingent, “practitioners of the laws and mysteries of God” (ἐργάται τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ νόμων τε καὶ μυστηρίων) as Gregory sarcastically terms them, soon resolved to depose the already beleaguered bishop of Constantinople on the basis of canon 15 of the council of Nicaea, which forbade the transfer of bishops from one see to another.<sup>462</sup> In

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<sup>459</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1423 and 1432 – 1435.

<sup>460</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1680 – 1718.

<sup>461</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1797 – 1817; cf. McGuckin 2001b: 358 – 360.

<sup>462</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1800 – 1801. Amm. Marc. 22.6.1 refers to Egyptians as an “argumentative race of men, who are by custom always exceedingly happy to engage in rather intricate litigation” (*genus hominum controversum et assuetudine perplexius litigandi semper laetissimum*).

response to these “wicked intrigues” (πλεκτὰ κακά), Gregory abruptly resigned, a striking demonstration of the “simplicity of heart” that he claimed to practice (τὴν ἀπλότητα καρδίας ἀσκούμενος) and regard as the means of his salvation (ἐξ ἧς τὸ σῶζεσθ’).<sup>463</sup> Such an act, however, required the consent of the emperor, exposing him to the corrupt and corrupting atmosphere of the imperial palace that he had described earlier in the *De vita sua*. Yet here, too, this Christian Demosthenes turns the image of the court as a nexus of worldly corruption to his rhetorical advantage.

He begins his poetic encounter with Theodosius by reiterating his simplicity, this time within the milieu of the sycophantic culture and crooked politics of the imperial court. To this end, Gregory asks a crescendo of rhetorical questions, each posing a greater threat to his ascetic persona than the last:

ἔκυψ’; ἐκλίνθην; ἠψάμην τῆς δεξιᾶς;  
ἰκετηρίους προσήγαγόν τινας λόγους;  
ἄλλους δὲ πρέσβεις ἐκ φίλων προυστησάμην,  
τῶν ἐν τέλει μάλιστα τοὺς μοι φιλτέρους,  
χρυσὸν δ’ ἔρευσσα, τὸν δυνάστην τὸν μέγαν,  
χρηίζων τοσοῦτου μὴ πεσεῖν ἔξω θρόνου;

Did I bow or fall prostrate? Did I grasp his right hand beseechingly or speak as a suppliant? Did I put others forward as my representatives from among my friends, in particular those in high office who are rather close to me? Did I lavish gold, that mighty lord, out of a desire not to fall from so great a throne?<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1865 – 1867.

<sup>464</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1872 – 1877. Of course, in denying that he received any support from his friends during this audience, Gregory also calls attention to the fact that he actually did have influential connections at the imperial court.

Rather, leaving such tactics to “the exceedingly devious” (οἱ λίαν πολύστροφοι), the guileless bishop ran from the council, just as he was (ὡς εἶχον), directly to the emperor himself (literally, ἀλουργίς, “the purple robe”), implicitly bypassing the venal eunuchs who controlled access to the palace.<sup>465</sup> Furthermore, what he said to Theodosius, he said openly, noting that there were many present to witness his words (πολλῶν παρόντων καὶ τὰδε σκοπουμένων):

κάγώ τιν', εἶπον, ὦ βασιλεῦ, αἰτῶ χάριν  
τὴν σὴν μεγαλόδωρον τὰ πάντ' ἐξουσίαν.  
οὐ χρυσὸν αἰτῶ σ', οὐ πλάκας πολυχρόους  
οὐδὲ τραπέζης μυστικῆς σκεπάσματα,  
οὐ πρὸς γένους τιν' ὕψος ἀρχικὸν λαβεῖν  
ἢ σοί γ', ἄριστε, πλησίον παραστατεῖν.  
ταῦτ' ἐστὶν ἄλλων, οἷς μικρὰ σπουδάζεταιται.  
ἐγὼ δ' ἑμαυτὸν ἀξιῶ καὶ μειζόνων.  
ἐν μοι δοθήτω· μικρὸν εἶξαι τῷ φθόνῳ.  
θρόνους ποθῶ μέν, ἀλλὰ πόρρωθεν σέβειν.  
κέκμηκα πᾶσι, καὶ φίλοις, μισούμενος  
τῷ μὴ δύνασθαι πρὸς τι πλὴν θεοῦ βλέπειν.

My emperor, I said, I too ask a favor of you, all-powerful in your munificence. I do not ask you for gold, or multicolored slabs of marble, or coverings for the altar. Nor do I ask to receive some high office for a family member, Excellency, or to stand close by your side. Such things are for others, who zealously pursue trivialities. But I think myself worthy of greater things. Grant me this one request: permit me to yield only slightly to envy. I am anxious to pay homage to thrones, but from afar. Hated by everyone, even my friends, I am tired of not being able to look to anything except God for help.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1878 – 1880.

<sup>466</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1881 – 1892.

On behalf of his fellow bishops, Gregory urges Theodosius to restore “loving harmony” (ἡ φίλη συμφωνία) to the council: “Let them throw away their arms, for your sake at least, if not through fear of God and punishment” (τὰ ὄπλα ῥιψάτωσαν, ἀλλὰ σὴν χάριν, εἰ μὴ φόβῳ θεοῦ τε καὶ τιμωρίας).<sup>467</sup> In return, he offers to continue his sweat and toil on behalf of God (τοὺς ἰδρῶτας, οὓς ἐρεύσαμεν θεῷ) and to persevere in suffering for the sake of the world (τὸ καρτερεῖν πάσχουσιν εἰς κόσμου χάριν), only not within institutional hierarchy of the church. Thus, he concludes, “You know that they placed me on the throne, even though I was unwilling” (οἶσθ’, ὡς ἄκοντα καὶ θρόνῳ μὲν ἐνίδρυσαν).

### **Conclusion: Bishop, Sophist, and Senator**

As Neil McLynn has noted, this “bold display of *parrhesia*” is part of Gregory’s broader textual strategy to lay claim to the image and authority of the late antique holy man.<sup>468</sup> Within the more specific context of the *De vita sua*, it serves to accentuate his suffering and isolation even among the bustle of an ecumenical council and his connections at the imperial court. The status conveyed here, then, is one based more on Gregory’s “personally achieved sanctity” than his social or ecclesiastical rank. For McLynn, the ascetic traits emphasized by this “self-made holy man” evoke the anchorite hermits of the Egyptian and Syrian deserts and are to be contrasted with the manual labor

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<sup>467</sup> *De vita sua*, vv. 1893 – 1901.

<sup>468</sup> McLynn 1998, quotes on 463 and 464.

and communal discipline of his friend Basil's monastery in Pontus. Yet, when viewed outside an exclusively Christian framework, this passage can also be seen as drawing upon the image of the philosopher, that other late antique holy man, especially when placed in dialogue with representations of the philosophical life in the works of Libanius.

As I established in the previous chapter, Libanius too demonstrated anxiety over the corrupting effect of material wealth. In a letter to the praetorian prefect Thalassius, he maintained that gold exerted the greatest influence on men (μέγιστον ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἰσχύων), and to look upon it with contempt constituted a virtue (καλόν) “akin to philosophy” (φιλοσοφίας ἐγγύς ἦκει).<sup>469</sup> The closest parallel, however, to Gregory's “philosophical” interaction with Theodosius lies in the *Autobiography*, where the image of the philosopher plays an integral role in validating the relationship between Libanius and his own imperial patron, Julian. Thus, like Gregory, the sophist initially held aloof from the emperor; he considered it a mark of shamelessness (ἀναίδεια) to approach him uninvited, and although he loved the man, he felt it unbecoming to flatter him because of his position (τὸν μὲν ἄνδρα ἐφίλουν, τὴν ἀρχὴν δὲ οὐκ ἐκολάκευον).<sup>470</sup> But once invited, he visited often:

αἱ δὲ συνουσίαι λόγους τε ἡμῖν τοὺς ὑπὲρ λόγων εἶχον καὶ ἐπαίνους τῶν εὖ πραττομένων ἐκείνῳ καὶ μέμψεις τῶν ὀλιγωρημένων, ἦτουν δὲ οὐδὲν οὐ τῶν ἐν θησαυροῖς, οὐκ οἰκίαν, οὐ γῆν, οὐκ ἀρχάς, καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἀριστοφάνους λόγος ἦν οὐκ ἔῶν κακὸν τὸν οὐ τοιοῦτον δοκεῖν,

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<sup>469</sup> Lib. *Ep.* 16.1 (N2). On Thalassius, who served under Gallus, see *BLZG* 289 (i), *PLRE* 886 (1), and *Amm. Marc.* 14.1.10.

<sup>470</sup> Lib. *Or.* 1.121.

καὶ τοῦτο ἐδίδου τὴν ἀρχὴν, ἐγὼ δὲ οὐδ' ἀπολαβεῖν ἠξίουν ὄντων μοι παππῶν οὐ μικρῶν ἐν τοῖς ἐκείνου κτήμασιν.

Our conversations consisted of literary discussions, words of praise for his achievements, and reproof for those matters he had neglected. I asked for nothing from the treasury, no house, no land, no offices. That business concerning Aristophanes was an oration I delivered to prevent a man who was not wicked from seeming so; and while Julian granted him an office, I did not think it right to receive one myself, even though no small amount of my grandfather's property was among his possessions.<sup>471</sup>

It was his scorn for personal profit (κέρδος), Libanius maintains, that proved to the emperor his affection was genuine and thereby constituted the basis of the παρρησία he exercised on behalf of Antioch and its council. Moreover, such conduct earned the sophist a divinely inspired gift (δῶρον) from his philosopher-emperor, which took the form of a simple, yet by no means insignificant compliment: “You seem to me,” Julian said, “to be classed among the rhetors because of your eloquence, but your actions have enrolled you among the philosophers” (εἰς μὲν ῥήτορας κατὰ τοὺς λόγους τελεῖν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἔργων ἐν φιλοσόφοις γεγράφθαι).<sup>472</sup> Both Libanius and Gregory, then, draw upon a broader late antique matrix of philosophical πράξις in order to assert some measure of personal independence from the figure of the emperor, and, more importantly, to distinguish themselves from the flattery, bribery, and influence peddling rhetorically associated with the imperial court and administration during this period.

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<sup>471</sup> Lib. *Or.* 1.125.

<sup>472</sup> Lib. *Or.* 1.131. Libanius compares this statement with an oracle from the Pythia at Delphi, since Julian “dwells under the influence of the gods” (ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ συνοικῶν); cf. Hdt. 1.65.

Gregory's philosophical ἔργα, however, were adapted to a Christian context, specifically the lengthy and contentious process of establishing a “new model of episcopal authority, the imperial bishop.”<sup>473</sup> To this self-fashioned philosopher-bishop, the episcopal throne was an object of reverence and its occupant should therefore act with dignity, remaining free of the compromising ties of court patronage and the worldly benefactions derived from them. In particular, a true Christian leader not only eschewed personal influence and material wealth, but also impeded the flow of riches into churches, the gold, brilliantly colored marble, and richly decorated altar cloths that increasingly adorned their interiors and came to symbolize to many late antique Christians the treasures that awaited them in heaven.<sup>474</sup> Thus, Gregory contested the growing tendency to envision a resplendent Christ presiding over the bejeweled grandeur of a heavenly court. His Jesus was not an emperor but a philosopher who retreated into the desert for solitary contemplation; and as one whose task it had been to impart knowledge of the divine to a Christian community surrounded by the luxuries and entertainments of an imperial capital, it was especially important for him to emulate this particular conception of humanity's savior.

Furthermore, by investing his model bishop with the traditional elite preference for retirement, Gregory offered a solution to “the bloodless battle” (ἡ ἀναίματος μάχη) over thrones that he claimed was motivated primarily by territorial envy and the control

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<sup>473</sup> Elm 2000b: 411.

<sup>474</sup> Janes 1998: 84 – 93.

of church revenues. This Christianized *otium cum dignitate*, however, was to be devoted to the rigorous examination of Scripture and a philosophical contemplation of God, thereby enhancing the self-discipline already achieved through a classical Greek παιδεία. Thus, Gregory invested his perfect episcopal candidate with an even greater *dignitas* than that imparted by the senatorial *otium* of Symmachus and attempted to shape a Christian hierarchy that surpassed the idealized imperial officials produced by Libanius' solely rhetorical education. Yet, as in the writings of his non-Christian contemporaries, a wider late antique language and rhetoric of corruption was vital to justifying his own position in late Roman society and privileging his particular conception of nobility.

## Conclusion

### The Rhetorics of Corruption

Among the published official dispatches sent by Q. Aurelius Symmachus to the emperors during his tenure as Rome's *praefectus urbi* is one written on behalf of an Athenian philosopher, Celsus.<sup>475</sup> This otherwise unknown individual, whom Symmachus extravagantly claims was “nearly equal to Aristotle” (*Aristoteli subpar*), was one in a long line of philosophy teachers who had been customarily invited from Attica by public decree (*auctoritas publica*) for the purpose of educating the youth of the Roman nobility (*erudiendis nobiles*). According to this *relatio*, addressed specifically to the eastern emperor Theodosius, Celsus had not only promised “an instruction in virtue” (*magisterium bonarum artium*), but had also agreed to undertake this position without compensation (*nullum quaestum professionis adfectans*).<sup>476</sup> “For that reason,” Symmachus writes, “he is worthy of admission to the senatorial order, so that we might reward a mind free from the failings of avarice with the privilege of an honorable rank” (*ut animum vitii avaritiae liberum dignitatis praemio muneremur*). Moreover, in addition to adlection to the Roman senate, the urban prefect asks the emperor to grant

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<sup>475</sup> Symm. *Rel.* 5.

<sup>476</sup> Within the classical literary tradition, the term *ars* sometimes referred to an individual's moral character, either good or bad, as indicated by his or her external actions. Of particular relevance here is a passage from Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*: “For avarice destroyed faithfulness, integrity, and the remaining virtues; in their place, it taught men arrogance, cruelty, to neglect the gods, and to consider everything for sale” (*Namque avaritia fidem probitatem ceterasque artis bonas subvertit; pro his superbiam crudelitatem, deos neglegere, omnia venalia habere edocuit*; 10.4).

Celsus the rank of consul specifically (*praerogativa consularis*), thereby exempting him from the costly obligations of providing public services and popular entertainment for the city (*munia publica*). Through such an exemption, Symmachus concludes, the senate would avoid the appearance of being more concerned with his expenditure (*sumptus*) than his educational services (*magisterium*), and itself remain free of “the disgraceful mark of avarice” (*avaritiae nota*).

I have chosen this particular *relatio* to conclude my study because it draws attention to two important distinctions between Symmachus’ rhetoric of corruption and those of his eastern contemporaries. First, whereas greed and the corrupting potential of material wealth play a significant role in the writings of Libanius and Gregory of Nazianzus, the vice of *avaritia* appears infrequently in the Symmachean corpus. While this first distinction is no doubt in part due to the nature of the sources examined here, economic factors must also be taken into consideration. Writing in the early fifth century, Olympiodorus of Thebes comments on the vast fortunes of Rome’s senatorial elite, noting that Symmachus himself spent two thousand pounds of gold on his son’s praetorian games in 401.<sup>477</sup> Although the historian classifies him as “a senator of moderate wealth” (συγκλητικὸς ὢν τῶν μετρίων), Alan Cameron has convincingly argued that Olympiodorus wrote ironically, and that Symmachus was in fact “one of the super-rich.”<sup>478</sup> Thus, it was not the newly acquired wealth of the aristocracy of service

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<sup>477</sup> Olympiodorus fr. 44; cf. Amm. Marc. 14.6.10.

<sup>478</sup> Alan Cameron 1999: 499.

that threatened this traditionalist senator, but the increasing diversity of senatorial backgrounds.

As the order rapidly grew to incorporate a large number of senators from a wide variety of social and geographical origins, the atmosphere and image of *unanimitas* within the Roman senate became increasingly difficult to maintain. In response, Symmachus refashions the republican crime of corrupt solicitation (*ambitus*) in order to educate the members of senatorial families, both old and new, in the boundaries of aristocratic conduct and the proper exercise of personal influence. Tied to the vice of *ambitio* both linguistically and conceptually, *ambitus* is described in the Symmachean corpus in terms of its opposition to *verecundia* and *pudor*, the primary motivating factors behind the self-restraint that had long been essential to Roman conceptions of elite identity. Thus, those who employed *ambitus* are portrayed as defying the conventions of friendship (*amicitia*) and the bonds of patronage, and competing for honor and glory to such a degree that they undermined the ideal of *concordia* that was central to the reputation (*fama*) of the senate both in Rome and abroad. These, however, are uniquely senatorial concerns and therefore result in a uniquely senatorial rhetoric of corruption.

Among the cities of the Greek east, the newfound wealth and influence of former office holders posed a much greater threat to the established families of the local aristocracies. Of particular relevance here is the work of the economic historian Jairus Banaji, who attributes to the conversion to a gold standard under Constantine and the resulting monetary expansion the development of a new classes of landowning elites

between the mid-fourth and mid-fifth centuries.<sup>479</sup> This new imperial aristocracy gradually supplanted traditional curial elite and was significantly more motivated by considerations of profitability. Although doubts have been raised about the applicability of Banaji's conclusions to the diverse conditions of the eastern countryside, the issue of profit-making is central to Libanius' rhetoric of corruption, which emphasizes the negative impact of those who sought to profit from their positions within the imperial administration.<sup>480</sup> Accordingly, the sophist contrasts the philanthropic conduct in office of his former students, who were content with their salaries and left their posts impoverished, with the "inhumanity" (ἀπανθρωπία) of bribery, extortion, and usury.

However, as Antioch's official sophist, Libanius attributes such corruption to the growing popularity of shorthand writing and Roman law, studies that rivaled the literary education offered in his classroom. These studies lacked the intellectual rigor of traditional Greek παιδεία, which required that students "pore through many poets, many orators, and every other kind of written work" (ἀνάγκη διὰ πολλῶν μὲν ποιητῶν ἀφικέσθαι, πολλῶν δὲ ῥητόρων καὶ παντοδαπῶν ἐτέρων συγγραμμάτων).<sup>481</sup> Without such labors (πόννοι), the practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and self-discipline (σωφροσύνη) that were essential prerequisites for good governance could not be developed. Thus, under the rule of Constantius' secretaries, the empire fell into turmoil

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<sup>479</sup> Banaji 2001: 101 – 170.

<sup>480</sup> Whitby 2003: 443 specifically questions the applicability of Banaji's thesis to the villages of North Syria, "where there do not appear to be dominant land-holders."

<sup>481</sup> Lib. *Or.* 62.12.

and succumbed to idleness; offices were bought and sold, governing justly was scorned and making a profit applauded, virtue yielded to pleasure. Students of law are also portrayed as ignorant, “unable either to speak or to follow a speaker” (οὔτε λέγων οὐδὲν οὔτε λέγοντι προσέχων).<sup>482</sup> Lacking too that sense of decency imparted by rhetorical training, these legal experts shout, break oaths, incite violence, and distribute bribes in order to win their court cases. For uncultivated souls such as these, success is measured solely by material gain. In the context of Libanius’ narrative of corruption, these behaviors and attitudes naturally carried over from the courtroom into the imperial administration, as an education in Roman law increasingly became an avenue for political advancement.

Conversely, within the rhetorical narrative of Gregory of Nazianzus, the imperial administration and the *honorati* play a very small role. Although the letters of this curial bishop manifest a range of contacts both at Constantinople and in Cappadocian high society, his orations and poetry depict a court dominated by venal and heretical eunuchs, even under the staunchly pro-Nicene Theodosius, and dismiss the former office-holders as possessed of a nobility that is more appearance than substance.<sup>483</sup> Instead, he crafted his rhetoric of corruption with a view to shaping the hierarchy of the Christian church. Accordingly, he contrasts the bishop’s duty to the souls of his congregation with the

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<sup>482</sup> Lib. *Or.* 40.6.

<sup>483</sup> For Gregory’s contacts at court, see *Ep.* 93 – 97, 128 – 130, 132 – 134, 136 – 137, and 168 – 170. He also wrote numerous letters to various governors of Cappadocia to procure favors for friends, see *Ep.* 10, 104 – 106, 125 – 126, 131, 140 – 141, 147, 154 – 156, 195, 198, and 207.

desire to gain control of church finances. To this base motivation, and the related vices of ambition and envy, Gregory attributes much of the conflict within the Nicene community that eventually derailed what was in his opinion the correct formulation of Trinitarian doctrine. His solution to such corruption is to fashion the ideal bishop as a philosopher.

This brings me to the second important distinction raised by *Relatio 5*, that is, the role of the philosopher in the rhetorical narratives of Symmachus, Libanius, and Gregory of Nazianzus. The adoption of a philosophical persona was a self-fashioning strategy available to members of both the senatorial and curial elites during the late Roman empire. In Symmachus' *Epistulae*, however, as in *Relatio 5*, the philosopher, for the most part, appears as a recipient of senatorial patronage, rather than a source of senatorial identity.<sup>484</sup> Indeed, this particular senator consciously rejects such a persona in his letters to Praetextatus, locating himself within the sphere of aristocratic leisure between the two extremes of philosophical study and the corrupting pleasures of Campania.<sup>485</sup> In this middle ground, he uses the language of idleness and luxury to construct an *otium* that is dignified both in its subordination to the affairs of state (*negotium*) and its dedication to the personal concerns and duties of the senatorial order. Although literary pursuits and theoretical contemplation were among these *negotia privata*, for Symmachus, they were not as central to his epistolary persona as his obligations to family and friends. After all, the senators of fourth-century Rome once again had the opportunity to participate in the

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<sup>484</sup> Symmachus writes on behalf of philosophers in *Ep.* 1.29, 41, and 79; 2.29, 39, and 61; and 9.39; and for a female relative of the Cynic philosopher, Asclepiades, in *Ep.* 5.31.

<sup>485</sup> Symm. *Ep.* 1.47 and 48.

business of empire. To adopt the persona of a figure renowned for mastering his passions “in a self-created solitude” and operating outside the ties of family, friendship, and patronage would be incongruous with the political and social revival of the Roman senate that characterized this period.<sup>486</sup>

In the Greek east, the concept of the philosophical life had much deeper roots and was more heavily contested. Indeed, fourth-century debates over the nature of the “true” philosophical life ultimately derive from Plato and Aristotle, and form the intellectual backdrop to the role of philosophy in the rhetorical construction of corruption within the writings of both Libanius and Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>487</sup> In Libanius, the image of the philosopher manifests itself almost exclusively in the βίος πρακτικός, specifically as a model of conduct for possessors of public authority. Accordingly, in the aforementioned letter to the praetorian prefect Thalassius, the sophist praises as virtues “akin to philosophy” (φιλοσοφίας ἔγγυς ἦκει) not only a contempt for gold (χρυσὸς καταφρονούμενος), but also a free tongue, a character that despises evil, a love of things good, and the courage he displays in benefiting some but rejecting others (γλῶττα ἐλευθέρα καὶ τρόπος μισοπόνηρος καὶ τῶν σπουδαίων ἔρωσ καὶ τὸ μετ’ ἀνδρείας τοὺς μὲν εὖ ποιεῖν, τοὺς δὲ ἐλάυνειν).<sup>488</sup> More significantly, in his capacity as Antioch’s

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<sup>486</sup> On the paradoxical image of the philosopher as “a man free from society,” yet who intervened in it on the basis of this freedom, see Brown 1992: 62 – 64; cf. Fowden 1982. The numerous recommendations cited above that Symmachus wrote on behalf of these supposedly reclusive figures further complicate this picture.

<sup>487</sup> Elm 2003: 498.

<sup>488</sup> Lib. *Ep.* 16.1 (N2).

official sophist, Libanius at times competed with the local Christian bishop to assume the traditional role of the philosopher as the ideal mediator between city and emperor.<sup>489</sup> Although this is most apparent in his autobiographical account of the emperor Julian, who enrolled him among the philosophers because of his disdain for personal profit, Libanius continued to lend his eloquence to the council and people of Antioch during the reign of the Christian emperor Theodosius, especially in the aftermath of the Riot of the Statues in 387.<sup>490</sup> Yet in the wider context of this event, it is also possible to discern the eventual victor in this competition over the symbolic capital of the philosopher. For in the contemporary homilies of Libanius' former student, John Chrysostom, it is the bishop Flavianus who successfully appeals to the emperor on behalf of the city, and monks who provide solace to its citizens.<sup>491</sup>

Like his future successor to the episcopal throne of Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianzus, too, played an integral part in the Christian appropriation of the role and authority of the classical philosopher. However, in contrast to the bishops and monks of Peter Brown (including Gregory's school friend, Basil of Caesarea), this second-generation curial churchman based his philosophical persona not only on his care for the poor and the needy, but also on the self-control and intellectual ability developed in the

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<sup>489</sup> Brown 1992: 65 – 67.

<sup>490</sup> Lib. *Or.* 1.125 – 127, and 131. Libanius describes his efforts on behalf of the people of Antioch during the famine and ensuing riot over taxation in *Or.* 1.205 – 211; in the aftermath, he composed *Or.* 19 – 23.

<sup>491</sup> Joh. Chrys. *Hom. ad pop. Ant.*, PG 49.15 – 240; cf. Averil Cameron 1991: 136 – 138, and Van de Paeverd 1991.

traditional παιδεία of his class.<sup>492</sup> Gregory shared Libanius' devotion to the λόγοι, but placed the fruits of the mental and physical ἄσκησις that he undertook at Athens in the service of the one true Λόγος. This Christian βίος θεωρητικός, then, was dedicated to the study and contemplation of Scripture, and transpired in the leisured retreat of the aristocratic estate. Moreover, as in the case of the dignified *otium* of Rome's senatorial order, the philosophical leisure of Gregory's ideal bishop served as essential preparation for a political life of action. Only those who had been thoroughly trained in language, rhetoric, and philosophy were able to comprehend the word of God and therefore impart knowledge of the divine to the Christian community.<sup>493</sup> Only those who had cultivated the philosopher's strength of character could resist the growing riches of the church and the material rewards of imperial patronage. Finally, only those who maintained the proper balance between the βίος θεωρητικός and the βίος πρακτικός failed to succumb to the worldly ambition and pernicious envy that so frequently accompanied episcopal office and jeopardized the correct formulation of Trinitarian doctrine. Thus, Gregory's fashioning of the philosopher-bishop was not simply a response to the corrupting potential of ecclesiastical power and wealth, but to the corruption of the Trinity and the threat this posed to the souls of ordinary Christians.

Yet, in spite of all their differences, in language and cultural heritage, status and religious belief, underlying the rhetorical construction of corruption in the writings of all

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<sup>492</sup> Brown 1992: 71 – 158.

<sup>493</sup> Elm 2003: 503f.

three authors is a deep anxiety about the nature of elite identity during this period. The development and rapid expansion of an imperial bureaucracy that conferred senatorial status on its members threatened the homogeneity of the senate at Rome and destabilized the traditional social hierarchy of the cities of the Greek east. At the same time, the increasing wealth and status of the Christian church offered still another opportunity for social advancement, as local bishops gradually displaced the established civic aristocracy as the principal benefactors of the urban populace. In response to this unprecedented era of social mobility, many among the traditional elite strata of the Roman empire drew upon and adapted classical notions of corruption in order to advance their own particular conception of nobility and maintain a position at the apex of late antique society. Such a rhetorical strategy, however, simultaneously provided an avenue of assimilation for the members of these new elites by defining noble status primarily in terms of virtue rather than wealth or even birth.

Thus, the picture of late antiquity that emerges from the rhetorical narratives of Symmachus, Libanius, and Gregory of Nazianzus differs from the accounts of both Ramsay MacMullen and Christopher Kelly. For, in spite of their widely divergent views on the effectiveness of the later Roman bureaucracy, these two scholars share the notion that there was “a profound change in the way the Roman Empire was ruled.”<sup>494</sup>

MacMullen describes this shift in terms of class: “Both public and private power came to be treated as a source of profit, in the spirit of slaves, freedmen, supply sergeants, and

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<sup>494</sup> Kelly 2004: 108.

petty accountants.”<sup>495</sup> This new ethos of venality spread across the empire through the expanding apparatus of the state, and gradually replaced the aristocratic networks of patronage that had proved so effective in maintaining social order and transmitting imperial power. Kelly, on the other hand, offers a more favorable assessment of the late antique imperial administration, but nevertheless largely upholds this dichotomy between traditional networks of influence based on friendship and the exchange of favors and new networks established through the payment of goods and services.<sup>496</sup> However, within the writings of the three authors who form the subject of this study, the profound changes that took place during this period are portrayed not as systemic but rather as a result of the personal failings of emperors and individuals. Even so, this does not mean that their accounts should be dismissed as merely a distorted reflection of real historical processes. Indeed, it is through the language and rhetoric of corruption that these traditional aristocrats promoted a type of nobility that emphasized the self-discipline and virtuous conduct developed in the course of a literary and rhetorical education over what they felt were the more superficial and arbitrary criteria of wealth and ancestry. In other words, they used the potential of traditional παιδεία to bridge social barriers and accommodate the development of new elites, while at the same time imparting the values and assumptions of the more established elite strata of the late Roman empire.

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<sup>495</sup> MacMullen 1988: x.

<sup>496</sup> Kelly 2004: 158 – 185.

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