8 *Humanitas* in the Thedosian Age: The Reproposition of the Trajanic Pattern?

While, despite the paucity of pagan sources in Latin for the age of Constantine, during the first part of the fourth century the argument *humanitas* seems to have been little exploited in socio-political context, things change when we move towards the second half of the fourth century and the Theodosian age in particular. At the beginning of the previous chapter I have already stressed that scholars usually agree that *humanitas* played an important role in fourth-century legislation. And yet the rhetoric of laws is one thing, the people's perception of the emperors is another, and the two do not necessarily run in parallel.[1] In other words, the presence of the term in numerous laws does not imply that the judges' and emperors' behaviours concretely followed the path of *humanitas*. Laws are projected into the future, but we need to turn to historiography for a backward perspective on, and evaluation of, people and events. Latin fourth-century pagan literature includes only one great historian, Ammianus Marcellinus. His *Res Gestae*, which end with the Roman defeat of Hadrianople in 378 CE, were completed after 395, in the Theodosian age. What has come down to us, which forms the narration of the events from 353 to 378, shows that Ammianus gave much importance to *humanitas* in all its facets. Yet he perceived that period as devoid of *humanitas*, a value which was mostly feigned, especially by emperors. His strategy is opposite to that of Tacitus (and rather reminds us of Suetonius): while Tacitus avoided using the term with reference to periods and emperors which neglected *humanitas*, Ammianus explicitly laments its absence and denounces its simulation. What unites Ammianus and Tacitus, however, are the socio-political contexts in which these two historians wrote, and which explain their special care towards the word *humanitas*. Both the Trajanic and the Theodosian age did not simply promulgate laws (apparently) inspired by *humanitas*, but exalted it as a complex cluster of values which can create a special bond between the emperor and his subjects, and across (and within) different levels of Roman society. The two historians thus exalted 'in negative' the *humanitas* of the ages in which they wrote by spotlighting the lack of *humanitas* in previous times. And even if we look at those who are usually considered the 'minor' historians of the fourth century, namely Eutropius, Aurelius Victor and the author of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, or also the author(s) of a series of imperial biographies which taken together fall

1 On the propagandistic use in late imperial legislation of concepts like *humanitas* cf. Girotti 2017, 17.

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under the name of *Historia Augusta*, the situation does not seem to differ so much.[2] Evidently, this trend is the reverse of that used by the writers who exalt *humanitas* in the positive: we saw in Chapter 3 that, in the case of Trajan's Rome, Pliny the Younger was the main supporter and disseminator of this ideal; his main counterpart in the Theodosian age was Symmachus, slightly anticipated by Ausonius.

We learn from various sources that Theodosius explicitly presented himself as a new Trajan, and allegedly went so far as to fabricate proof of his blood relationship with him.[3] And if Theodosius was the new Trajan, Symmachus was the new Pliny. Thus, the first half of this last chapter will be devoted to the *humanitas* of Ammianus and the other historians, and the second half to that of Ausonius and Symmachus. Whereas in the case of Ausonius' *Gratiarum actio* to Gratian we can simply appreciate a return to the praise of an emperor (also) through the concept of *humanitas*, which furthermore recovers its educational dimension, for Symmachus *humanitas* is really crucial. As with Pliny, *humanitas* emerges from his correspondence as a binding value within Roman society. Pliny aimed to foster the rebirth of Rome after Domitian's tyranny, but Symmachus' goal was just as difficult: he wanted to preserve intact the prestige and power of the traditional senatorial class, which was at that time seriously threatened by multiple factors. The fourth century had been characterised by social mobility, with a great deal of people of humble origins – even barbarians – reaching the highest military and administrative offices. In addition, the success of Christianity would undermine the traditional values on which Roman *nobilitas* had long relied.[4] In this context, the defeat of Hadrianople could have been perceived as the deathblow, marking the end of the Roman empire as well as of its traditional structure and society. Thus, also through the traditional, not to say patriotic, *humanitas*, Symmachus sought to maintain and reinforce the network of relationships which had once

2 Cf. Lizzi Testa 2022, xii: "In Rome, in the second half of the fourth century, a cultured senatorial nobility again dictated its own exegesis of recent events, both because many of its members were involved, and because Theodosius I did not want skeletons in his closet while he was in the process of founding a new dynasty", and 81.

3 Cf. Claud. 8.18–29; Them. *Or*. 16.202d–205a and 19.229b; Oros. *Hist.* 7.34.1–3. There is also an extensive comparison between Theodosius and Trajan – favourable to the former – in the *Epitome de Caesaribus* (48). Cf. also Paul. Diac. *Hist. Rom*. 12.5 and the *Scholia Vallicelliana* (Whatmough 1925, 140), with Stover/Woudhuysen 2023, 171–172. Although Theodosius is the most often compared to Trajan, "the notion of Trajan as predecessor for new emperors to surpass recurs in various locations", as B. Gibson/Rees 2013, 157 remark, mentioning for example the case of Tacitus in the *Historia Augusta* (*Tac*. 8.5).

4 Some bibliographical references to these issues can be found in the general Introduction, above pp. 5–6.

made up the backbone of Roman society, the *ordo senatorius*.[5] In this respect, it is telling that Symmachus employs *humanitas* so many times – to our knowledge, only Cicero among pagan authors had used the term more often – but only in letters which date after the battle of Hadrianople and Theodosius' appearance on the political stage early in 379 CE.[6] Indeed, the deeper we dive in the Theodosian age, the more frequently Symmachus uses the term *humanitas*, so much so that his letters seem to confirm Marcone's claim that *humanitas* is a sign of the new (i.e. Theodosian) times.[7]

One clarification needs to be made straight away. Given the common image of Theodosius as the promoter, or even the emblem, of Christianity, one might see a contradiction in presenting the pagan Symmachus' *humanitas*, the unifying value of the senatorial class, as a value which was shared by Theodosius himself. Yet Theodosius' religious policy was not always – and not everywhere – so strict, let alone in the city of Rome, and in any case all his interventions in the religious sphere were motivated by socio-political convenience rather than by theological principles.[8] In particular, he needed to preserve social stability, especially after Hadrianople. In the Eastern empire, his legislation aimed at smoothing disagreements and conflicts between different Christian sects, neglecting the traditional opposition between pagans and Christians. That in principle he had nothing against pagans is further proved by his appointing several pagan aristocrats to the highest public offices, as is the case, for instance, with Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus, who became praetorian prefect of the East. In the western part of the empire, where Symmachus lived, the importance of pagan aristocracy was even greater, especially in Rome, and Theodosius was well aware of this, so much so that Symmachus himself could reach the consulate (391 CE). As Errington puts it, "[t]here is no sign of any religious dimension to Theodosius's political activities there [i.e. in Rome]. His attitude was conciliatory, for he knew well enough that without the support of the Roman aristocrats [most of whom were still pagan] a new government in Italy would have a hard time achieving that traditional political consensus among the ruling classes without which no Italian government

5 Cf. Brown 1971, 121: "The most vocal patriots of the late fourth century were resolute pagans." On the political importance of Roman senators during the fourth century cf. Lizzi Testa 2022, xiii–xv, 263–264 and *passim*.

6 Yet "Symmachus' correspondence extends from 364 till 402", as Matthews 1975, 7 rightly remarks.

7 Marcone 1987, 26 – with reference to the Theodosian age: "Segno dei tempi è l'*humanitas* [. . .], il fondamentale valore dell'età celebrato in ogni tipo di documenti."

8 For a detailed description of Theodosius' (religious) policy cf. Errington 2006, 212–259.

could function satisfactorily."[9] By functioning as the glue holding Rome's senatorial class together, Symmachus' *humanitas* was therefore perfectly fitting to Theodosius' policy.

8.1 Absent and Feigned *Humanitas*: Ammianus' Perspective on the Decline of the Empire

Ammianus concludes his *Res Gestae* by resorting to the following statement: *Haec ut miles quondam et Graecus, a principatu Caesaris Neruae exorsus ad usque Valentis interitum, pro uirium explicaui mensura* (31.16.9: "These events, from the principate of the emperor Nerva to the death of Valens, I, a former soldier and a Greek, have set forth to the measure of my ability", trans. Rolfe 1986).[10] Regardless of the fact that these words are to be taken as a declaration of modesty or, on the contrary, of pride, there is no doubt that the self-referential phrase *ut miles quondam et Graecus* is key to our understanding of his personality and historiographical method.[11] In judging the content of his work, his viewpoint, style, vocabulary and so forth, we need therefore to bear in mind two points: first, that he was a Greek writing in Latin, and second, that he was (or had been) a career soldier. As a non-native Latin author, he must have looked for a model to imitate, and it comes as no surprise that he mainly found this model in Cicero.[12] As a soldier who was at times a direct protagonist of the events he narrates, it is to be expected that he paid much attention to the behaviour and moral values of rulers, high-ranking military officers and powerful men and women in general.[13] And, what is more, he had in-

9 Errington 2006, 242. Cf. also Brown 1971, 121; Lizzi Testa 2022, 94. A brief survey on the different positions of scholars concerning the relationship between pagans and Christians in the late fourth century can be found in Gassman 2020, 165–166.

10 Calboli 1974, 74 and Matthews 1989, 461 among others regard Ammianus' statement as an expression of modesty, and so seems to do Mazzoli 2012, 66–67, although he then (70–72) stresses Ammianus' criticism of Roman habits, to which the historian opposes his Greek, nobler origins. *Contra*, Barnes 1998, 65; Den Boeft *et al.* 2018, 298; Piatti 2019 rather think of a declaration of pride – cf. *e.g.* Piatti's translation: "Come un soldato d'altri tempi e in quanto greco . . ." (p. 35).

11 On the meaning(s) of *ut miles quondam et Graecus* cf. Camus 1967, 23; Sabbah 1978, 532–537; 597; Barnes 1998, 65 and nn. 1 and 2; 79–80; Kelly 2008, 103 and n. 203; Den Boeft *et al.* 2018, 297–299. Further bibliography in Rohrbacher 2002, 24.

12 Cf. Camus 1967, 60–68; Sabbah 1978, 72–75; 352; 596–597; Salemme 1989, 40; 63; Mazzoli 2012, 68.

13 On the moral character of Ammianus's work cf. Rosen 1982, 117–130; Seager 1986, *passim*; Brandt 1999, 13–14; *passim*; Wieber-Scariot 1999, 27; Drijvers/Hunt 1999, 4–5; Zugravu 2018, 344–345; 355–356.

sight into a reality that others would not have been able to see as closely. In addition to the cultural context in which he wrote, these two criteria also account for Ammianus' extensive use of *humanitas*, a word with Ciceronian connotations whose multifacetedness is very apt to portray different aspects of people's nature. In this respect, Ammianus distances himself from two major Roman historiographers in Sallust and Tacitus, who, as we have seen, usually avoided using the word.[14] After all, despite setting himself in the footsteps of Tacitus (*a principatu Caesaris Neruae*, where Tacitus' *Historiae* ended), in many respects Ammianus' work reminds us more of previous Greek than Roman historians, and the use of *humanitas* is no exception.[15] Philologists of Wilhelmine Germany already understood – as Barnes rightly brought back to light – the 'essential Greekness' of Ammianus' thought, and this is also mirrored in his use of *humanitas*-φιλανθρωπία as a sovereign virtue (or *Herrschertugend*, to borrow a German term).[16] Aside from Ammianus in fact, φιλανθρωπία *qua* sovereign virtue is accorded far more space in Greek historical thought than its equivalent *humanitas* is accorded in Roman, as also a survey of *humanitas* in fourth-century minor historians will confirm.[17] Although this perspective might seem to have the limitation of equating Ammianus' conception of *humanitas* with the Greek φιλανθρωπία, thereby oversimplifying the versatility of the Latin word (of which we are by now well aware), we will see in this chapter that Ammianus pays far more attention to this philanthropic aspect of *humanitas*, without however neglecting its educational and cultural components.[18]

I will first look into the instances in which Ammianus uses *humanitas* to characterise imperial virtue or links it to emperors. The analysis of these passages will bring into play both the role that Ammianus accorded to the education of emperors and statesmen, and the relationship between *humanitas* and foreigners

14 Cf. more generally Seager 1986, 36: "Of the moderate virtues prized by Ammianus, most are found much more rarely, if at all, in Tacitus."

15 The extent to which Ammianus was influenced by Tacitus is debated. Among the scholars who have brought to light the affinities between the two of them or at least Ammianus' willingness to continue Tacitus' work we can name Thompson 1947, 17; Camus 1967, 70–73; Momigliano 1974, 1398; Sabbah 1978, 565; 596–598, who at the same time also emphasises Ammianus' affinities with Greek authors and mentality (cf. note below); Fornara 1992; Brandt 1999, 19. More hesitant are Matthews 1989, 32; Barnes 1998, 192–193 – with a concise state of research, who yet spotlights some parallels between the two (193–195); Kelly 2008, 175–177.

16 Barnes 1998, viii; 67–68. On Ammianus' 'Greekness' cf. also Thompson 1947, 16; Sabbah 1978, 376; 536; 596. Further bibliography and an overview in Barnes 1998, 69–71.

17 Brandt 1999, 140–141. Cf. also Chapter 8.2 below.

18 *Pace* Girotti 2017, 21 and *passim*, according to whom for Ammianus the value *humanitas* "non ha nulla a che vedere con la *philantropia* [sic], ma è per lo più connesso alla *paideia*." More in detail on the structural weakness of Girotti 2017 cf. Mollea 2018a.

or barbarians. However, as we will see, several of these cases describe *humanitas* as feigned; hence, investigation of instances of *simulata humanitas* or *species humanitatis* will be in order. I will then consider the significant role that *humanitas* plays in Ammianus' two digressions on Rome, and how this value can be related to noble women or astrologers. Finally, I shall provide an overview of Ammianus' use of the adjective *humanus*.

8.1.1 *Humanitas* in the *Res Gestae*

Let me start with those instances where *humanitas* is associated with emperors. The relationship is quite complex. To begin with, Ammianus never uses the word *humanitas* in relation to Julian the Apostate, *pace* Selem and De Jonge.[19] This is striking, because Julian emerges as Ammianus' favourite ruler.[20] Of course his exclusion from the category of *humanitas*-gifted rulers is not to be overstated, for neither is he accused of lacking in this virtue, nor, on the other hand, does this mean that *humanitas* is not important to Ammianus. Yet, from a rhetorical point of view, it is significant that the term *humanitas* is only linked to the emperors whose overall portraits emerge as negative from Ammianus' narration.

The first case in point is Julian's (losing) opponent Constantius, whom Ammianus presents as claiming twice that he possesses *humanitas*. The passage (*Res Gestae* 14.10) is quite a long chapter recounting the drawing up of a peace deal between the Romans and the Alemanni. The Alemanni were devastating Gallic lands close to the Roman province, and Constantius therefore decided to move against them. *Res Gestae* recount that, as the Roman army arrived in their territories, the Alemanni begged for pardon and peace. The emperor was well aware of the possible benefits deriving from peace, but also knew it was difficult for him to justify his decision not to fight, especially after forcing the soldiers into exhausting marches. He thus resolved to pass the ball to them, at least apparently: in fact, he addressed them with a persuasive speech in which he clearly revealed his intentions (14.10.11–15). The oration, as it is given by Ammianus, ends thus:

> In summa tamquam arbitros uos, quid suadetis, opperior ut princeps tranquillus temperanter adhibere modum allapsa felicitate decernens. Non enim inertiae, sed modestiae humanitatique, mihi credite, hoc, quod recte consultum est assignabitur. (14.10.15)
>
> In short, I await your decision as arbiters, as it were, being myself convinced as a peace-loving prince, that it is best temperately to show moderation while prosperity is with us.

19 Selem 1964, 150; De Jonge 1980, 308.

20 On the relationship between *humanitas* and the emperor Julian cf. also below, pp. 239–240.

> For, believe me, such righteous conduct will be attributed, not to lack of spirit, but to discretion and *humanitas*. (trans. Rolfe 1935)

Opting for peace, says Constantius, would be seen as a sign of moderation, intellectual poise and humanity, not of inactivity or passiveness. This message seems to be inspired not only by Constantius' willingness to counter his reputation for cruelty but also by common sense, and yet in what follows (14.10.16) Ammianus does not miss the chance to throw some discredit on the emperor by stating that the army only voted for peace because they mistrusted Constantius' war skills.[21] After the Ciceronian model of the *Pro Archia*, which was followed by Lucius' speech in *Metamorphoses* 3 and Eumenius' panegyric, we face here another case where the *humanitas* argument appears within the *peroratio* of an oration. This time, however, *humanitas* is paired with *modestia* and opposed to *inertia*. This triangular relation *humanitas-modestia* vs. *inertia* is significant to understanding Ammianus' view of *humanitas*, for it invites us to nuance Brandt's claim that for Ammianus *humanitas* is subordinate to *temperantia*.[22] Brandt rightly concludes from the general meaning of this passage that *humanitas*, here used in reference to the Romans' mild use of force, can only be gained if the ruler subordinates his own feelings and interests to those of his army and people, and shows some *modestia*.[23] This ultimately explains the meaning of its pairing with *modestia*. However, this does not necessarily mean (*pace* Brandt) that *humanitas* must be subordinated to *temperantia*. In fact, a closer look at the passage, and more specifically at the association of *humanitas* with *modestia*, seems to contradict this claim.

In discussing 14.10.15, Brandt argues that this relationship between moderation (*Maß*) and humanity (*Menschlichkeit*) appears quite often in Cicero, and in support of his statement he refers to *Leg. Man.* 13; *Mur*. 66; *Phil.* 13.36 and *Sen.* 7.[24] However, in three of these Ciceronian passages (*Mur*. 66; *Phil.* 13.36; *Sen.* 7) it is the word *moderatio*, rather than *modestia*, that is associated with *humanitas*; in the fourth case (*Leg. Man*. 13) then, *humanitas* is linked to *mansuetudo* and *temperantia*, and *modestia* is once again absent. It is true that at *Tusc.* 3.16 *temperantia*, *moderatio* and *modestia* appear together in one sentence, but this does not

21 On Constantius' bad reputation during his life cf. Whitby 1999, who at 70 claims: "The evidence for Constantius' harshness was undoubtedly improved after his death, but it was still a reputation that had to be countered during his life since mildness and mercy were important imperial virtues."

22 Brandt 1999, 140. Apart from the quick survey by Seager 1986, 20–22 and the unconvincing Girotti 2017, Brandt's is to my knowledge the only study to allow significant space to Ammianus' use of *humanitas*.

23 Brandt 1999, 140.

24 Brandt 1999, 140 n. 124.

mean that they are interchangeable, let alone synonymous. Nor does this allow for the conclusion that one virtue is subordinated to the other. On the contrary, both syntax and content indicate that they are considered to be of equal importance. Accordingly, even if one accepted the equivalence between *moderatio* and *modestia*, there is no reason why *modestia*, and consequently *humanitas*, should be seen as hyponyms of *temperantia*. Compare Cicero's *Leg. Man*. 36, where *humanitas* and *temperantia* are clearly put on the same level, or even *Leg. Man.* 13 mentioned by Brandt himself.[25] If we do not restrict our scope to Ciceronian texts, the same holds true for a Ciceronian author like Pliny the Younger, whom we have seen claiming in the *Panegyricus*: *Diuinitatem principis nostri, an humanitatem temperantiam facilitatem, ut amor et gaudium tulit, celebrare uniuersi solemus?* (2.7: "What about us? Is it the divine nature of our prince or his *humanitas*, his moderation and his courtesy which joy and affection prompt us to celebrate in a single voice?", trans. Radice 1975).[26] If we then recall Seneca's *Letter* 88 discussed above, it will appear clear that he explicitly regarded *temperantia* and *humanitas* as two different values providing different benefits.[27] But it is also the very relationship put forward here at 14.10.15 which dissuades us from looking for rigid classifications of value concepts, especially in the case of *humanitas*. It is sufficient to compare the opposition between *inertia* and *humanitas* to yet another Plinian passage already discussed, *Pan.* 3.5, where *humanitas* is opposed to *superbia*, and *inertia* to *labor*. Closer to Ammianus is instead a passage of the

25 Cic. *Leg. Man.* 36: *Ac primum quanta innocentia debent esse imperatores, quanta deinde in omnibus rebus temperantia, quanta fide, quanta facilitate, quanto ingenio, quanta humanitate!* ("In the first place, what integrity commanders should have; then what moderation in everything they do, what good faith, what graciousness, what intelligence, what humanity!", trans. Berry 2006).

26 Cf. above, pp. 85–86.

27 On *humanitas* in Seneca cf. above, pp. 67–71. Sen. *Ep.* 88.29–30: *Temperantia uoluptatibus imperat, alias odit atque abigit, alias dispensat et ad sanum modum redigit nec umquam ad illas propter ipsas uenit; scit optimum esse modum cupitorum non quantum uelis, sed quantum debeas sumere. Humanitas uetat superbum esse aduersus socios, uetat amarum; uerbis, rebus, adfectibus comem se facilemque omnibus praestat; nullum alienum malum putat, bonum autem suum ideo maxime quod alicui bono futurum est amat* ("Take self-control, the quality which takes command of the pleasures; some she dismisses out of hand, unable to tolerate them; others she merely regulates, ensuring that they are brought within healthy limits; never approaching pleasures for their own sake, she realizes that the ideal limit with things you desire is not the amount you would like to but the amount you ought to take. *Humanitas* is the quality which stops one being arrogant towards one's fellows, or being acrimonious. In words, in actions, in emotions she reveals herself as kind and good-natured towards all. To her the troubles of anyone else are her own, and anything that benefits herself she welcomes primarily because it will be of benefit to someone else", trans. Campbell 1969)

Rhetorica ad Herennium, in which we find the same opposition between the negative *inertia* and the positive *modestia*: *quam ille modestiam dicet esse, eam nos inertiam et dissolutam neglegentiam esse dicemus* (3.6: "what he declares to be temperance we shall declare to be inaction and lax indifference", trans. Caplan 1954).[28] In sum, neither the context nor previous instances of the concepts of value involved in Amm. Marc. 14.10.15 justify Brandt's taxonomy and, specifically, the claim that Ammianus subordinates *humanitas* to *temperantia*. Rather, all these combinations of *humanitas* with other values, and its opposition to faults like *inertia*, confirm the need to investigate each and every occurrence of *humanitas* as an ever-evolving nexus of interrelated connotations that are also influenced by the presence of other words which are ethically connoted.

When we turn to the second passage where Constantius invokes *humanitas* within a speech, we immediately realise that Ammianus established an interesting dialectical relationship between the two occurrences. 21.13.10–15 features the *contio* that the emperor delivered in front of his army before the decisive battle against Julian (which did not take place eventually). To begin with, the external narrator Ammianus recounts that Constantius, caught between two fires, is hesitant as to what course of action to take: should he concentrate all his forces against the 'inner' enemy Julian, or would it be better to send part of the army to monitor the Persians' movements? In the end, he opts for the latter solution, but does so – Ammianus seems to rejoice in making this clear – "in order not to be blamed for his inactivity."[29] As in the preceding instance at 14.10.15, Ammianus once again alludes to Constantius' unwillingness to show *inertia* towards external enemies. However, while in that case the *inertia* was replaced by the nobler *humanitas*, which fortunately prevented war, at 21.13.10 that same *humanitas* is regarded by the emperor as the error which has too long put off an inevitable war:

> Sollicitus semper, ne quid re leui uel uerbo committam inculpatae parum congruens honestati, utque cautus nauigandi magister clauos pro fluctuum motibus erigens vel inclinans compellor nunc apud uos, amantissimi uiri, confiteri meos errores, quin potius, si dici liceat uerum, humanitatem, quam credidi negotiis communibus profuturam.
>
> Being always careful by no act or word, however slight, to allow myself to do anything inconsistent with faultless honour, and like a cautious steerman putting my helm up or down according to the movements of the waves, I am now constrained, dearly beloved soldiers, to confess to you my mistake, or rather (if I may be allowed to use the right word) my *humanitas*, which I believed would be profitable to the interests of all. (trans. Rolfe 1940)

28 On *humanitas* in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* cf. above, pp. 50–52.
29 Amm. Marc. 21.13.3.

Here Constantius realises that what had been his main merit at 14.10.15, that is, his tendency to subordinate his own good to that of others, has turned out to be a double-edged sword in this case. Symptomatic, in this sense, is the fact that *humanitas*, which had been the key element of his *peroratio* at 14.10.15 as well as the last and most important feeling he tried to instill in his soldiers so as to persuade them not to fight, has now become the first element of his *introductio*, the basis, so to speak, on which to build an oration aimed at encouraging the soldiers' minds. Constantius' premature death will prevent the slaughter in a field battle, but it is telling that the entire chapter 13 of Book 21 is full of negative presages for himself and his army. Accordingly, if on the one hand Kelly is right in giving credit to Constantius for recognising (albeit a little too late, we might add) the validity of the negative *exemplum* of Gallus (cf. 21.13.11 with 15.8.2) and therefore for admitting his previous errors of judgement, on the other hand, Constantius' biggest error turns out paradoxically to be his having considered *humanitas* as an error.[30] So in both these two passages *humanitas* carries the idea of 'restraint', but Ammianus' narration adds irony to these events: in the first case, Constantius' *humanitas* is presented as insincere, but leading to a positive outcome; in the second, it is presented as possibly genuine, but the emperor did not persist in his moderate behaviour, and this led to a negative outcome. Both passages underline the incompatibility between *humanitas* and Constantius.

From this standpoint however, the case of Constantius is not unique within the *Res Gestae*, for one more time Ammianus features a case where *humanitas* is regarded – again wrongly, judging by the historian's tone – as a value leading to a negative result or behaviour. Towards the beginning of book 29, the historian tells of the numerous plots against the emperor Valens' life. Despite all being unsuccessful, these plots made the emperor obsessive and indiscriminately cruel:

> Inexpiabile illud erat, quod regaliter turgidus, pari eodemque iure, nihil inter se distantibus meritis, nocentes innocentesque maligna insectatione uolucriter perurgebat, ut dum adhuc dubitaretur de crimine, imperatore non dubitante de poena, damnatos se quidam prius discerent quam suspectos. (29.1.18)

> But it was inexcusable that, with despotic anger, he was swift to assail with malicious persecution guilty under one and the same law, making no distinction in their deserts; so that while there was still doubt about the crime the emperor had made up his mind about the penalty, and some learned that they had been condemned to death before knowing that they were under suspicion. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

30 Kelly 2008, 287.

And as if that were not enough,

> Adolescebat autem obstinatum eius propositum admouente stimulos auaritia et sua et eorum, qui tunc in regia uersabantur, nouos hiatus aperientium et, si qua humanitatis fuisset mentio rara, hanc appellantium tarditatem. (29.1.19)
>
> This persistent purpose of his increased, spurred on as it was both by his own greed and that of persons who frequented the court at that time, and opened the way to fresh desires – and if any mention of *humanitas* was made – which rarely happened – called it slackness. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

In sum, the emperor's entourage even worsened Valens' own greed and vices in general,[31] so much that they went so far as to call *humanitas* 'slowness' – and it is worth noting that in Latin *tarditas* stands for both slowness of movement and slowness of intellect. Like *error* at 21.13.10, *tarditas* makes an unusual pairing when associated with *humanitas*, and, in broader terms, when seen as the dark side of a virtue. Cicero's *tenth Philippic* probably provides the closest parallel: *Itaque illi ipsi si qui sunt qui tarditatem Bruti reprehendant tamen idem moderationem patientiamque mirantur* (10.14: "Therefore the very persons – if any such there be – who censure the slowness of Brutus, yet at the same time admire his moderation and patience", trans. Ker 1957). The opposition between *tarditas* on the one hand and *moderatio* and *patientia* on the other hand seems to be posed in less explicit terms than that between *tarditas* and *humanitas.* Yet in the light of the close relationship between *humanitas* and *moderatio* already observed in Ammianus, and between *humanitas* and *patientia* already noticed several times in other authors, Valens ends up being implicitly compared to Caesar's assassin Brutus. From the standpoint of Ammianus' conception of *humanitas* then, the parallel of *Phil.* 10.14 clearly contributes to spotlighting the Ciceronian influence on Ammianus' language and worldview, and to illustrating the way he uses Ciceronian terminology to present Roman emperors as either bad or good rulers. But to return to 29.1.19: clearly on this occasion Valens did not (and evidently could not because of his courtiers!) display any *humanitas*, but earlier in the *Res Gestae* he had done so, as the next passage shows.

Section 12 of book 27 narrates the critical political situation in Armenia after Julian's death and a later peace agreement between the Persian king Shapur and

31 Cf. Den Boeft *et al.* 2013, 33 for other passages where Ammianus refers or alludes to Valens' greed, or to the vices of courtiers in general. According to Selem 1964, 149, 29.1.19 is one of those passages which reveal Ammianus' concern for (and probably dislike of) the rising category of wealthy courtiers who would threaten the privileges of the traditional aristocracy. More extensively on greed in Ammianus Brandt 1999, 402–412.

the young emperor Jovian. The passage explains that Shapur ignored the terms of the peace treaty, imprisoned the Armenian king Arsaces, then killed and replaced him with two Armenian defectors called Cylaces and Arrabannes. The two of them however broke their allegiance again and conspired with Arsaces' wife and son against Shapur. In doing so, they obviously looked for the Romans' help. In fact, Arsaces' young son Papa was even housed by Valens:

> Arsacis filium Papam suadente matre cum paucis e munimento digressum susceptumque imperator Valens apud Neocaesaream morari praecepit, urbem Polemoniaci Ponti notissimam, liberali uictu curandum et cultu. Qua humanitate Cylaces et Arrabannes illecti missis oratoribus ad Valentem auxilium eundemque Papam sibi regem tribui poposcerunt. (27.12.9)

> Papa, son of Arsaces, at the persuasion of his mother, had departed with a few followers from the fortified town and been received by the emperor Valens, who advised that he stay a while at Neocaesarea, a well-known city of Pontus Polemoniacus, where he was to receive liberal support and education. This act of *humanitas* encouraged Cylaces and Arrabannes to send envoys to Valens to ask that he aid them and give them the said Papa as their king. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

Evidently, unlike the case of 29.1.19, in this context Valens' *humanitas* could hardly fall under the definition of mercy, for Papa cannot be considered a spared enemy. In fact, Armenian royalty were not Roman enemies at that time, and at any rate Valens did not limit himself to sparing him. No doubt this instance of *humanitas* shares with the previous one the broad idea of φιλανθρωπία, but it is quite differently nuanced. The presence of the phrase *liberali uictu curandum et cultu* is highly significant. The twinning of *uictus* and *cultus* is very common in Latin literature, particularly in Cicero and Gellius.[32] The jurist Ulpian explicitly links them when defining *uictus*: *Verbo "uictus" continentur, quae esui potuique cultuique corporis quaeque ad uiuendum homini necessaria sunt. Vestem quoque uictus habere uicem Labeo ait* (*Dig.* 50.16.43: "Food, drink, the care of the body, and everything necessary to human life is embraced in the term 'maintenance'. Labeo says that maintenance also includes clothing", trans. Scott 1932). But while the emphasis of *uictus* is on the most material and individual aspects of human life (food, drink, and even clothes), *cultus* has a broader meaning, which often implies the notions of culture and education.[33] On one famous occasion in particular, the same notion is expressed through the association of *cultus* with *humanitas*: *horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae, propterea quod a cultu atque humanitate prouinciae longissime absunt*

32 Ammianus' good knowledge of Gellius' oeuvre has already been spotlighted in modern scholarship: cf. Sabbah 1978, 517–518; Kelly 2008, 192–203.

33 On *cultus* cf. the relevant entry in the *TLL*, especially 4.0.1324.70–80.

(Caes. *BGall.* 1.1.3: "Of all these, the Belgae are the bravest, for they are furthest away from the civilization and *humanitas* of the Province", trans. Hammond 1996, slightly adapted).[34] And the same holds true in Ammianus' passage, for Papa was most likely about fifteen years old by the time of his stay at Valens' court, and needed therefore not only room and board but also education. In providing him with both, Valens thus displayed more than mere benevolence or kindness, but also awareness of the importance of instruction for young nobles probably destined to rule one day. *Humanitas* is likely to epitomise all these feelings here. As we have seen, such an awareness is most likely to be expected from people who already possess a high level of education, but Ammianus shows us that that is not always the case. From Valens' final obituary, in fact, we learn that he was not well educated (31.14.5: *nec bellicis nec liberalibus studiis eruditus*, "was trained neither in the art of war nor in liberal studies", trans. Rolfe 1986). In other words, the *humanitas* he displays on this occasion probably originates from his regret for not having benefited from others' *humanitas*. At any rate, this episode, almost unique in Valens' life, seems to be the exception which proves the rule. As well as being rare (cf. *mentio rara* of 29.1.19), Valens' *humanitas* must have been short-lasting, for one paragraph later (27.12.10) Ammianus informs his readers that Papa was then brought back to Armenia by the Roman general Terentius. Nevertheless, someone else later appealed to Valens' *humanitas*.

Book 31, the last one of Ammianus' *Res Gestae*, recounts both the events which led to the epochal battle of Hadrianople and the battle itself, where Valens lost his life. The uninterrupted pressure that Goth tribes, often suffering from shortage of food, had long exerted on the north-eastern borders of the Empire was becoming unbearable, and the Romans, in order to avoid bloody conflicts, were often forced to let them in (more or less) peacefully. To this sort of 'welcoming' attitude of the emperor Ammianus refers at 31.4.12:

> Per hos dies interea etiam Videricus Greuthungorum rex cum Alatheo et Safrace, quorum arbitrio regebatur, itemque Farnobio propinquans Histri marginibus, ut simili susciperetur humanitate, obsecrauit imperatorem legatis propere missis.
>
> During these days also Videricus, king of the Greuthungi, accompanied by Alatheus and Saphrax, by whose will he was ruled, and also by Farnobius, coming near to the banks of the Danube, hastily sent envoys and besought the emperor that he might be received with like *humanitas*. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

Previous examples of Valens' *humanitas*, which we might understand here as humanitarian aid more than simple hospitality, had evidently persuaded the Greu-

34 On this Caesarian passage cf. above, p. 64, and also below, pp. 256–257.

thungi that they could take advantage of the same benefits already granted to other Goth tribes. Yet, as with Constantius, it looks as if there is always some incompatibility between Valens and *humanitas*: the phrase *simili* [. . .] *humanitate* makes it clear that right before this episode there had been other occasions on which Valens had displayed a similar attitude, but Ammianus had not employed the word *humanitas*. By contrast, every time Ammianus associates this concept with this emperor, he is quick to underline that Valens' displays of *humanitas* are short-lived and are generally followed by a change of attitude. Showing *humanitas* towards internal enemies is rare and seen as a flaw (29.1.19); when shown towards a young foreign prince it is short-lasting (27.12.9), and when it comes to the Greuthungi there is no room at all for *humanitas*: *Quibus, ut communi rei conducere uidebatur, repudiatis* (31.4.13: "These envoys were rejected, as the interests of the state seemed to demand", trans. Rolfe 1986).[35] In sum, the fact that Ammianus attributes the term *humanitas* to Valens no less than three times does not help mitigate the negative image that the historian gives of this emperor throughout the *Res Gestae*, and which culminates in his obituary (31.14.5–8).[36] On the contrary, Valens' incoherent and inconsistent use of *humanitas* ends up adding to his negative portrayal.

Yet in general terms, as Sabbah has observed, the figure of Valens emerges as more positive than Ammianus' treatment of his brother and colleague Valentinian.[37] This is particularly true in the context of *humanitas*, for Valentinian's fault is aggravated by the fact that he did not follow the path of *humanitas* despite having *exempla* of it – a reasoning that Ammianus could have applied to many other emperors.[38] The long passage is worth quoting in full:

> Atquin potuit exempla multa contueri maiorum et imitari peregrina atque interna humanitatis et pietatis, quas sapientes consanguineas uirtutum esse definiunt bonas. E quibus haec sufficiet poni: Artaxerxes, Persarum ille rex potentissimus, quem Macrochira membri unius longitudo commemorauit, suppliciorum uarietates, quas natio semper exercuit cruda, lenitate genuina castigans tiaras ad uicem capitum quibusdam noxiis amputabat et, ne secaret aures more regio pro delictis, ex galeris fila pendentia praecidebat. Quae temperantia

35 On Valens' utilitarian behaviour (*ut communi rei conducere uidebatur*) in this episode cf. also Brandt 1999, 137.

36 Some virtues are attributed to Valens in his obituary (31.14.1–4), and this explains why Brandt 1999, 55–60 maintains that in this case the emperor's *bona* almost compensate for his *uitia* (60). Yet, even admitting this, the same cannot be said of Valens' actions throughout the *Res Gestae*, which are rarely, if ever, praised by Ammianus.

37 Sabbah 1978, 445–449.

38 On the role of *exempla* and anecdotes in Ammianus' oeuvre cf. mainly Wittchow 2001, which mentions the case of 30.8.4 at 56; Kelly 2008, 256–295.

> morum ita tolerabilem eum fecit et uerecundum, ut adnitentibus cunctis multos et mirabiles actus impleret Graecis scriptoribus celebratos. (30.8.4)
>
> And yet he could have contemplated many examples of the men of old, and might have imitated native and foreign instances of *humanitas* and righteous mercy, which philosophers call the kind sisters of the virtues. Of these it will suffice to mention the following. Artaxerxes, that mighty king of the Persians, whom the length of one of his limbs made known as Macrochir, with inborn mildness corrected various punishments which that cruel nation had always practised, by sometimes cutting off the turbans of the guilty, in lieu of their heads; and instead of cutting of men's ears for various offences, as was the habit of the kings, he shared off threads hanging from their head-coverings. This moderation of character so won for him the contentment and respect of his subjects, that through their unanimous support he accomplished many noteworthy deeds, which are celebrated by the Greek writers. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

A close reading of this passage confirms that in Ammianus' taxonomy *humanitas* is not subordinated to *temperantia*.[39] Ammianus' argument is as follows: first, Valentinian must have known good examples of *humanitas* and *pietas*; secondly, the case of Artaxerxes stands out among these examples; thirdly, Artaxerxes' *temperantia* (*morum*) was even celebrated by Greek writers. Here Ammianus clearly equates *temperantia* with the pair *humanitas-pietas*, rather than subordinate *humanitas* to *temperantia*. In the light of what I said above about the relationship between *temperantia* and *humanitas* in other authors (above all, Cicero), Ammianus seems to use *temperantia* and *humanitas* as synonyms. More specifically, the twinning of *humanitas* with *pietas* helps these two polysemic words clarify each other, thereby allowing the reader to understand that *humanitas* carries a connotation of philanthropy. Briefly, there is neither need nor reason to assume that in Ammianus' view *humanitas* is subordinated to *temperantia*. By contrast, my interpretation perfectly fits Brandt's treatment of *pietas* in Ammianus. According to him, in fact, the historian mainly gives *pietas* philanthropic connotations, the same that can also be carried by *humanitas*.[40] In this respect, and in regard to the pairing of *pietas* with *humanitas* in particular, 30.8.4 makes all the more clear that Ammianus distances himself from previous authors like Cicero, who had instead connected *pietas* and *humanitas* to refer to two very distinct values.[41] To discuss *pietas* at length would require another book, so I limit myself to a couple of considerations. At *De inuentione* 2.66 Cicero broadly defines *pietas* as *quae erga patriam aut parentes aut alios sanguine coniunctos officium conseruare moneat* ("what warns us to keep our obli-

39 Cf. above, pp. 230–231. *Contra*, Brandt 1999, 140.

40 Brandt 1999, 147.

41 For the joint presence of *pietas* and *humanitas* within a sentence cf. *e.g.* Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.97; 2.4.12; *Planc.* 96; *Off.* 3.41; *Att.* 6.3.8; 11.17.1; Quint. *Inst.* 6 *praef.* 10; Sen. *Dial.* 4.28.2.

gations to our country or parents or other kin", trans. Hubbell 1949, slightly adapted) and Hellegouarc'h, quoting Cicero, *Phil.* 14.29, stresses how its meaning is close to *fides*, although the latter generally concerns the legal sphere, while *pietas* rather concerns the religious sphere.[42] When applied to politics then, *pietas* becomes linked to the idea of *patria* and, even more, of patriotism.[43] What is most remarkable, however, is the fact that, unlike Ammianus' use at 30.8.4 for instance, *pietas*, like often *clementia*, usually implies an upward relationship, from a person of lower rank towards an entity of higher rank, whether it is a person or a god. Conversely, Ammianus' understanding of *pietas* tends to resemble the Christian conception of piety, and it is possible that he was affected by Christian language more in this respect than in that of *humanitas*, where no significant variation in meaning and context is detectable in comparison with previous pagan authors, as we are seeing. After all, as Kelly puts it: "[Ammianus] is far more at home in the language of Christianity than he appears."[44]

The case of Valentinian at 30.8.4 as well as the last two instances of *humanitas* with regard to Valens open the door to further investigations. First, we have seen that Valens' concern for Papa's education can hardly originate from the emperor's own education. So to what extent is education important to rulers, and can it be called *humanitas* in Ammianus' oeuvre? Secondly, both 27.12.9 and 31.4.12 bring into play Roman *humanitas* towards barbarians, while 30.8.4 seems to imply that the Persian king Artaxerxes, unlike Valentinian, possessed *humanitas*. So what is this relationship like? And can barbarians also possess and show *humanitas* by Ammianus' time? Let me start with the first issue.

Camus probably stressed more than others the importance that Ammianus attaches to education and culture, and went so far as to claim that Ammianus' love for Julian mainly derives from this emperor's exceptional *Bildung*.[45] Along the same lines a few years earlier Selem had maintained that Ammianus admired Julian's *humanitas*.[46] Given that Ammianus never uses the word *humanitas* in relation to Julian, as I mentioned above, Selem's point is that Ammianus loved Julian because of his ability to reconcile culture and morality. The combination of these two aspects is of particular relevance, for Blockley rightly stated: "Education, though it is an aid to and perhaps a prerequisite for virtue, does not, in Am-

42 Hellegouarc'h 1963, 276.

43 Hellegouarc'h 1963, 278. More generally on *pietas* cf. Schröder 2012.

44 Kelly 2008, 157. Ammianus' attitude towards Christianity is an open and very debated question. For an overview cf. Neri 1985, 25–70; Wittchow 2001, 185. Cf. also Barnes 1998, 90–94.

45 Camus 1967, 55. On the importance of education for Ammianus in general cf. also Camus 1967, 108–109 and 129.

46 Selem 1964, 150. Along the same lines De Jonge 1980, 308: cf. above, p. 229.

mianus' eyes, automatically confer it."[47] The validity of such an assertion, which undoubtedly concerns rulers first, is corroborated by passages such as 27.6.9:

> Vt enim mihi uideri solet mores eius et appetitus licet nondum maturos saepe pensanti, ineunte adolescentia, quoniam humanitate et studiis disciplinarum sollertium expolitus, librabit suffragiis puris merita recte secusue factorum.
>
> For as I am wont to think, when I consider, as I often do, his character and his inclinations, although they are not yet fully developed: when he enters on the years of youth, since he has been instructed in the liberal arts and in the pursuit of skilful accomplishments, he will weigh with impartial justice the value of right and wrong actions. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

This excerpt is taken from the investiture speech which Valentinian delivered before his troops when he appointed his young son Gratian to the rank of Augustus.[48] That *humanitas* is educationally connoted is made all the more clear by its twinning with *studiis* (*disciplinarum sollertium*), a phrase which basically reproduces the formulaic expression *studia humanitatis*.[49] What is striking, however, is the fact that the emperor does not only emphasise his son's knowledge, the result of Ausonius' teachings, but also regards this knowledge as the precondition for Gratian's future ability to distinguish right from wrong.[50] To answer to the first question posed above: education, as long as it is not an end in itself, is important to rulers, and Ammianus also calls it *humanitas*. The case of the aspiring emperor Theodorus provides another example in this sense. The episode of which he is protagonist is the same we have already touched upon when highlighting Valens' and his courtiers' lack of clemency towards conspirators (or alleged conspirators) at the opening of book 29. As we know, Valens was always obsessed by the idea of suffering conspiracies, and tended to give credit to informers. In the case of Theodorus, a defendant named Fidustius declared that an oracle had outlined the profile of the future emperor, who would be an *optimus princeps*. And when it came to unveiling his name:

> Atque cunctantibus, quisnam ea tempestate omnibus uigore animi antistaret, uisus est aliis excellere Theodorus secundum inter notarios adeptus iam gradum. Et erat re uera ita ut opinati sunt. Namque antiquitus claro genere in Galliis natus et liberaliter educatus a primis pueritiae rudimentis modestia, prudentia, humanitate, gratia, litteris ornatissimus semper officio locoque, quem retinebat, superior uidebatur altis humilibusque iuxta acceptus. So-

47 Blockley 1975, 160.
48 On imperial speeches in Ammianus cf. De Bonfils 1986, 29–32 – 30–31 on Valentinian's speech.
49 On *studia humanitatis* cf. above, pp. 57–59; 61; 90; 166–167.
50 On Ausonius and Gratian cf. below, pp. 269–273.

> lusque paene omnium erat, cuius linguam non infrenem, sed dispicientem, quae loqueretur, nullius claudebat periculi metus. (29.1.8)
>
> And while they were in doubt who there was at that time that was superior to all in strength of character, it seemed to them that Theodorus surpassed all others; he had already gained second rank among the secretaries, and was in fact such a man as they thought him. For he was born of a clan famous in olden times in Gaul, liberally educated from earliest childhood, and so eminent for his modesty, good sense, refinement (*humanitate*), charm, and learning that he always seemed superior to every office and rank that he was holding, and was dear alike to high and low. He was also almost the only man whose mouth was closed by no fear of danger, since he bridled his tongue and reflected on what he was going to say. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

This passage is telling in several respects. To begin with, *humanitas* is placed in the middle of a list of values which includes *modestia* and *prudentia* on the one hand and *gratia* and *litteris* on the other. We have already seen that Ammianus associated *modestia* with *humanitas*, and that it basically stands for restraint.[51] The case of *prudentia* is a little more complex. More than once Cicero defines it as "that which allows us to distinguish good from evil."[52] And Hellegouarc'h rightly notices that while in the professional sphere *prudentia* refers to the ability, derived from experience and study, to do a job, in politics it evokes practical experience as opposed to theory.[53] He thus concludes, following Cicero, that *prudentia* is a fundamental virtue for any statesman.[54] *Gratia* is even more polysemic. In the Republican age, it can refer to the esteem, respect and influence of the statesman, but more broadly it is associated with the idea of friendship.[55] Since *litteris* is self-explanatory, Brandt's comment – albeit interpreted in a different way from his – seems particularly apt to describe the bridging role of *humanitas* in this context:

> Berücksichtigt man die Wortstellung – *humanitas* steht zwischen *prudentia* und *gratia*, verbindet also sozusagen den dianoethischen Bereich (*prudentia*) mit dem ethischen (*gratia* bei dem Mitmenschen als Resultat charakterlicher Liebenswürdigkeit) – dann wird klar, daß der Ausdruck hier etwas wie geistig-moralische Bildung bezeichnet.[56]

51 Cf. above, pp. 230–231.

52 Cf. *Inu. rhet*. 2.160; *Nat. D.* 3.38, and Hellegouarc'h 1963, 256 n. 10 for further references.

53 Hellegouarc'h 1963, 257. Cf. Hellegouarc'h 1963, 257 nn. 3 and 5 for references to ancient passages.

54 Cf. Hellegouarc'h 1963, 257 n. 8 for the Ciceronian passages corroborating this statement. More on *prudentia* in Ammianus in Brandt 1999, 108–119.

55 Cf. Hellegouarc'h 1963, 204–206.

56 Brandt 1999, 134 n. 75.

In other words, we face here one of those cases where the boundary between the παιδεία- and the φιλανθρωπία-meaning of *humanitas* is particularly fluid, so much so that it becomes hard to say which one prevails over the other. In fact, while the proximity of expressions such as *liberaliter educatus*, *prudentia* and *litteris ornatissimus* incline us toward the educational aspect,[57] the association of *humanitas* with *modestia* and *gratia ornatissimus* as well as the fact that people belonging to both the higher and the lower classes of Roman society liked Theodorus (*altis humilibusque iuxta acceptus*) rather stress its philanthropic connotation.[58] What is certain, however, is that, in Ammianus' view, a good emperor should possess both cultural and moral qualities, hence his admiration for Theodorus: *uisus est aliis excellere Theodorus . . . . Et erat re uera ita ut opinati sunt.* Hence, also, Ammianus' dislike of Valens, who not only lacked these qualities, but even killed someone who did possess them and could therefore have been a better ruler than himself, Theodorus.

So much for the role of *humanitas*-education with regard to rulers. Let me now turn to the second question posed by 27.12.9, 30.8.4 and 31.4.12, that is to say, the relationship between *humanitas* and foreigners in Ammianus' work. The passages just referred to show that Roman *humanitas* can be expected from and accorded to barbarians. The close of Book 18, however, portrays a different situation, for this time Ammianus presents the Persian king Shapur as displaying *humanitas* during the siege of Nisibis:

> Inuentas tamen alias quoque uirgines Christiano ritu cultui diuino sacratas custodiri intactas et religioni seruire solito more nullo uetante praecepit lenitudinem profecto in tempore simulans, ut omnes, quos antehac diritate crudelitateque terrebat, sponte sua metu remoto uenirent exemplis recentibus docti humanitate eum et moribus iam placidis magnitudinem temperasse fortunae. (18.10.4)
>
> Yet finding that there were others also who were maidens and consecrated to divine service according to the Christian custom, he ordered that they be kept uninjured and allowed to practise their religion in their wonted manner without any opposition; thus he made a pretence of mildness for the time, to the end that all whom he had heretofore terrified by his harshness and cruelty might lay aside their fear and come to him of their own volition, when they learned from recent instances that he now tempered the greatness of his fortune with *humanitas* and gracious deportment. (trans. Rolfe 1935)

57 On the other hand, it must be stressed that *prudentia* in Ammianus can also be independent of education: cf. 14.6.1 with Brandt 1999, 112.

58 In view of this, it is not clear why Brandt 1999, 134 and n. 75 endeavours to prove that at 29.1.8 the idea of *humanitas* as *Bildung* is almost exclusive. In speaking of a 'geistig-moralische Bildung' in fact, he inevitably links the idea of education expressed by *Bildung* to the moral aspects (*moralische*) well epitomised by the φιλανθρωπία component of *humanitas*.

From a linguistic perspective, *humanitas* is opposed here to *diritas* (frightfulness) and *crudelitas* (cruelty). *Diritas* appears eleven times in Ammianus, but is generally a rare occurrence in classical Latin literature. This explains why we have no instance of *humanitas* being paired with that term. In contrast, *crudelitas* is far more common, and also appears elsewhere in opposition to *humanitas*, as we have already seen.[59]

Yet the most interesting aspect of *humanitas* in this passage is that, alongside the instance of 30.8.4 discussed above, it brings into play the status of the Persians: worst of the barbarians or forefathers of the Graeco-Roman cultural tradition? Scholarship is divided on this question, and the analysis of these two passages cannot hope to solve the problem once and for all.[60] All it can do is suggest a new point of view from which to address this issue, the diachronic perspective. The two Persian kings to whom Ammianus attributes *humanitas* belong in fact to two different epochs: Shapur, a 'suitable' rival of Constantius in the recent and inglorious past, and Artaxerxes in a more remote and idealised age. This difference is reflected in their opposite level of *humanitas*: while at 18.10.4 Shapur's *humanitas* is only feigned, as is clear from the phrase *lenitudinem . . . simulans*, at 30.8.4 Artaxerxes is even regarded as an *exemplum* of *humanitas*. Regarding the latter, by saying that this Artaxerxes was surnamed 'long-handed' (*Macrochir*), Ammianus makes it clear that he is referring to Artaxerxes I, the fifth king of Persia, who reigned from 465 BCE to 424 BCE. Despite the doubts raised by De Romilly, Plutarch records at the very opening of the *Life* of Artaxerxes' grandson, Artaxerxes II 'Mindful', that he was famous in antiquity for his mildness of character and clemency: Ὁ μὲν πρῶτος Ἀρτοξέρξης, τῶν ἐν Πέρσαις βασιλέων πραότητι καὶ μεγαλοψυχίᾳ πρωτεύσας, Μακρόχειρ ἐπεκαλεῖτο, τὴν δεξιὰν μείζονα τῆς ἑτέρας ἔχων, Ξέρξου δ' ἦν υἱός (1.1: "The first Artaxerxes, preëminent among the kings of

59 Cf. above, pp. 195–196.

60 Cf. *e.g.* Drijvers 1999, 176: "For the Romans Parthia was an *alter orbis*. This other world represented eveything which was not Roman [. . .] This barbarian is portrayed as the negative embodiment of Graeco-Roman values and ideals, where social life fails to comply with the norms of Graeco-Roman society", and the opposite opinion of Matthews 1989, 140, who commented upon Julian's Persian campaign by saying that this "was a journey to the origins of civilisation itself, to a land of ancient culture fully equal in material resources and complexity of social organisation to the Classical Near East of Ammianus' birth and upbringing. [. . .] For Ammianus, Mesopotamia was in a sense the natural extension of the Classical world." It is perhaps worth specifying that Parthia and Persia are often (mis)used as synonyms, as made clear by Drijvers 1999, 177: "One aspect of Rome's ideology of Parthia is that no distinction is made between Medes, Persians, Parthians and other orientals." As a result, modern scholars often pick the name they prefer, without paying too much attention to the differences, which are particularly relevant in chronological terms.

Persia for gentleness and magnanimity, was surnamed Longimanus, because his right hand was longer than his left, and was the son of Xerxes", trans. Perrin 1926).[61] The term φιλανθρωπία does not appear in this passage, but, alongside it and ἐπιείκεια, πραότης is one of the aptest Greek words to denote the idea of mildness ('douceur'), as De Romilly has shown.[62] Moreover, in the case of Plutarch, πραότης often appears together with φιλανθρωπία.[63] Plutarch's attestation therefore confirms the paradigmatic character of Artaxerxes I's behaviour, and explains why Ammianus also attributed to a Persian king a value which is usually the prerogative of Romans or, at most, of Greeks. The same does not hold for the almost contemporary Shapur, although his simulated *humanitas* ultimately puts him on the same level as his Roman counterpart(s). In other words, when it comes to *humanitas* Ammianus fixes chronological rather than ethnic boundaries. Here as elsewhere in Ammianus, the so-called practice of the *laudatio temporis acti* shines through, and, aside from very few exceptions, statesmen and rulers, whether they are Roman or not, can hardly equal the (moral) values of their ancestors. In this respect, the two Roman digressions are particularly significant, as we will see shortly.

Both the cases of Shapur and Valens also spotlight Ammianus' treatment of the dangers in feigning *humanitas*. In this respect, a case in point is 29.6.5: some time during his reign, Valentinian decided to fortify the Danubian borders in the land of the Quadi, who quite expectedly did not appreciate this policy. Works proceeded slowly at first, but things changed when Marcellianus was put in command in that area. In particular, to crush any forms of opposition, Marcellianus traitorously killed the Quadi's king Gabinius, "the only savage who is credited with moderation" in Ammianus' work:[64]

> Denique Gabinium regem, ne quid nouaretur, modeste poscentem, ut assensurus humanitate simulata cum aliis ad conuiuium corrogauit, quem digredientem post epulas hospitalis officii sanctitate nefarie uiolata trucidari securum fecit.
>
> Finally, when king Gabinius mildly asked that no new step should be taken, he pretended that he would assent, and with feigned *humanitas* invited the king with others to a banquet. But as Gabinius was departing after the feast and suspected no treachery, Marcellianus, with abominable violation of the sacred duties of hospitality, had him murdered. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

61 De Romilly 2011[2], 286 n. 2.
62 De Romilly 2011[2], 37; *passim.* Cfr. also Della Calce 2023, 21–23.
63 Cf. De Romilly 2011[2], 278 and n. 2.
64 Seager 1986, 68.

Displaying all his contempt for Marcellianus' behaviour, Ammianus openly speaks of *simulata humanitate*, an expression which cannot be found elsewhere in previous Latin literature. Ammianus evidently represents deceit as a vice that is traditionally attributed to foreigners, but that Roman commanders should always avoid. The teaching of Livy's *Ab Vrbe condita* is echoed here. Yet the situation is even worse, for not only does Marcellianus resort to deceit, but he even violates a kind of sacred law of the ancient world, that of hospitality.[65] This latter ideal is clearly linked to *humanitas* in the passage under investigation, but, as usual, the polysemy of *humanitas* transcends the mere meaning of *hospitalitas*. In fact, if we look at the previous paragraph (29.6.4), we find that Marcellianus' nature is characterised by haughtiness through the expression *intempestiue turgens*, which evokes the same idea as *superbia*: as we have seen, *superbia* can be used, together with the rare *inhumanitas*, to denote the opposite of *humanitas*.[66] Accordingly, in simulating *humanitas* Marcellianus is not only displaying his faked sense of hospitality, but he is also endeavouring to hide his arrogant, haughty nature.

The same idea of feigned *humanitas* is expressed through the expression *species humanitatis*, which we have already encountered in Gellius' conceptualisation of *humanitas*.[67] I remarked on that occasion that this phrase is rare in Latin literature, but Ammianus is the exception to the rule, for two out of 17 occurrences of *humanitas* in his work are preceded by *species*. The first instance is at 25.8.1. About the first half of Book 25 tells of Julian's last days of life during the Persian campaign, but from 25.5 onwards the new emperor Jovian becomes the unfortunate protagonist of the events. As this war is turning into a nightmare for the Romans, Jovian, fearing that he might be deposed, accepts peace terms that Ammianus regards as dishonourable.[68] As well as saying *Quibus exitiale aliud accessit et impium* (25.7.12: "To these conditions there was added another which was destructive and impious", trans. Rolfe 1940), the historian begins section 25.8 by speaking of *pax specie humanitatis indulta* ("the peace granted under pretence of *humanitas*", trans. Rolfe 1940, slightly adapted), thereby echoing the content of the speech (indirectly referred by Ammianus) of the Persian ambassadors at 25.7.6: *Condiciones autem ferebant difficiles et perplexas fingentes humanorum respectu reliquias exercitus redire sinere clementissimum regem, si, quae iubet, impleuerit cum primatibus Caesar* ("Nevertheless, they offered conditions which were difficult and involved, for they pretended that, with respect of human prin-

65 On hospitality as a cornerstone of (Roman) civilization cf. above, pp. 16 and 126.

66 Cf. above, pp. 44–45.

67 Cf. above, pp. 162–163.

68 For the sake of clarity, this is the same peace agreement I have already mentioned when analysing Valens' *humanitas* towards barbarians at 27.12.9.

ciples, the most merciful of kings would allow the remnants of the army to return, if the emperor and his most distinguished generals would comply with his demands", trans. Rolfe 1940, adapted). The idea of simulation is expressed by *specie* at 25.8.1 and by *fingentes* at 25.7.6, whereas *humanitatis* recalls, etymologically at least, *humanorum respectu*. But 25.7.6 also makes a connection between *humanorum respectu* and the idea of clemency (*clementissimum regem*). In this context, the expression *specie humanitatis* is likely to express the same idea of simulated clemency.[69] After all, Ammianus speaks of *pax indulta*, where the participle of *indulgeo* ('to grant as a favour, concede', but also 'to be lenient') implies superiority on the part of those who concede peace, and we know that *clementia* is more apt a noun than *humanitas* to evoke a unilateral, downward relationship between people of higher and people of lower rank or condition. From a more rhetorical standpoint then, although Ammianus concedes that this further case of feigned *humanitas* is not literally associated with Jovian, we once again get the sense that in his view *humanitas*, especially when it is linked to emperors, has too many obscure sides for it to be ascribed to a model emperor like Julian.

The second instance of *species humanitatis* can be found towards the epilogue of the *Res Gestae*, at 31.5.7. We are on the threshold of the battle of Hadrianople, and the Thuringii, driven by hunger and lack of means, and mistreated by the Romans, rebel against Valens. The scenario is as follows: while the Goth kings Alavivus and Fritigernus are banqueting together with some Roman officials at Marcianopolis (Thracia), some barbarians try to enter the city in search of food, but are warded off. A bloody riot ensues, leading the Roman Lupicinus to slaughter the guards who are awaiting Alavivus and Fritigernus. As the news reaches the Goths who are by then besieging the city, the situation risks taking a turn for the worse, but Fritigernus comes up with a cunning idea:

> Vtque erat Fritigernus expediti consilii, ueritus, ne teneretur obsidis uice cum ceteris, exclamauit grauiore pugnandum exitio, ni ipse ad leniendum uulgus sineretur exire cum sociis, quod arbitratum humanitatis specie ductores suos occisos in tumultum exarsit. Hocque impetrato egressi omnes exceptique cum plausu et gaudiis ascensis equis volarunt moturi incitamenta diuersa bellorum.
>
> And since Fritigern was quickwitted and feared that he might be held with the rest as a hostage, he cried out that they would have to fight with heavy loss of life, unless he himself were allowed to go out with his companions to quiet the people, who, believing that their leaders had been slain under pretence of friendly entertainment (*humanitatis specie*), had blazed out into turbulence. And when this request was granted, they all departed. They

69 The phrase *clementiae specie* (ablative) is used by Cicero, for instance, with reference to Julius Caesar's despotic power at *Phil.* 2.116, on which cf. Angel 2008, 119–120.

> were received with applause and rejoicing, and mounting horses hastened away, to set in motion the various incitements that lead to wars. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

The connotations of this occurrence of *species humanitatis* are significantly different from the previous case: here the ideas of courtesy and hospitality seem to prevail over the notion of clemency. However, what is interesting about this passage is that it represents another Ammianean instance of feigned or missed *humanitas* in the relationship between Romans and barbarians. This is actually only a potential instance of simulation on the Romans' part: indeed, it rather reveals Fritigernus' than the Romans' predisposition to treachery. Ammianus' narration nowhere suggests that the Romans had invited the Goth kings to the banquet with the intent of ambushing them, nor do we know if an ambush would have actually taken place had Fritigernus not come up with his idea. In any case, there is no denying that, on the surface at least, this passage also highlights the extent to which Ammianus liked to allude to the infidelity of some Roman officials or emperors.

To recap, we have so far seen how Ammianus uses the word *humanitas*, both in its educational and above all philanthropic dimensions, in relation to emperors or other powerful men. We have also noticed that Ammianus often uses it when he describes the relationship between Romans and non-Romans, one of the clearest contexts in which it emerges that *humanitas* can be feigned.

Three no less interesting fields in which *humanitas* appears are yet to be investigated: *humanitas* in the two excursuses on Rome, *humanitas* with regard to women, and *humanitas* and astrologers. To some degree, in all these cases Ammianus continues to articulate the opposition between civilization and barbarism. Let me procede in order.

Towards the conclusion of his study, Seager claims:

> If any one element deserves to be singled out as fundamental to Ammianus's perception of men and events, it is perhaps the antithesis between civilization and barbarism. [. . .] Ammianus saw barbarism in all its manifestations, both external and internal, as the ultimate threat to the Roman way of life.[70]

We might add that Ammianus' use of *humanitas* helps him articulate the notion that the lack of civilization is key to understanding Roman society, for the numerous cases we have already observed ultimately show that, when they lack *humanitas*, the Romans are on the same – low – level as barbarians. In this respect, despite the completely different socio-cultural context, the parallel with Cicero's un-

70 Seager 1986, 131. Cf. also Seager 1986, 68. The numerous acts of violence disseminated across Ammianus' work also account for this opposition between civilization and barbarism: cf. Zugravu 2018, 349.

derstanding and political use of *humanitas* is striking.[71] Ammianus' two 'Roman digressions', and his use of *humanitas* therein, represent the litmus test: if even Rome is no longer the 'abode of all virtues' (*uirtutum omnium domicilium*) and her aristocracy no longer lives up to their duties, then it is unsurprising that the empire as a whole is degenerating. Compare 14.6.21:

> Illud autem non dubitatur, quod cum esset aliquando uirtutum omnium domicilium Roma ingenuos aduenas plerique nobilium ut Homerici bacarum suauitate Lotophagi humanitatis multiformibus officiis retentabant.
>
> Furthermore, there is no doubt that when once upon a time Rome was the abode of all the virtues, many of the nobles detained here foreigners of free birth by many kindly attentions (*humanitatis multiformibus officiis*), as the Lotus-eaters of Homer did by the sweetness of their fruits. (trans. Rolfe 1935)

When reading a passage like this, it is easy for scholars to claim that Ammianus betrays his rancour towards Rome here, for he would be among the foreigners who were expelled during the famine of 383 or 384 CE mentioned at 14.6.19. Yet this, together with the notion that Ammianus would be treated badly by the citizens of the *Vrbs* during his stay there, is pure speculation.[72] What is certain from this and other passages, however, is that Ammianus believes Rome to have been the guiding light for the entire ancient world as long as virtues were cultivated: *humanitas* must have played a key role among or in addition to these virtues. In this sense, it is hard to tell exactly what Ammianus means by the expression *humanitatis multiformibus officiis*. We saw in the Suetonius section that the twinning of *humanitas* and *officium* is rather common, and in that very passage *iura omnia offici humanitatisque* stands for 'all the laws of obligation and humanity'. Yet here, significantly, *humanitas* is not on the same level as *officia*, but depends on it. An analogous construction can be found in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*:

> Frequentabunt uero eius [*scil.* oratoris] domum optimi iuuenes more ueterum et uere dicendi uiam uelut ex oraculo petent. Hos ille formabit quasi eloquentiae parens, et ut uetus gubernator litora et portus et quae tempestatium signa, quid secundis flatibus quid aduersis

71 On Cicero's political use of *humanitas* cf. above, pp. 52–54.

72 On the extent of the autobiographical character of Ammianus' attitude towards Rome cf. the sceptical Kelly 2008, 132–135; 141, who denies that the historian was among those who had been expelled. Also Momigliano 1974, 1396, while remarking that the two Roman excursuses presume Ammianus' good knowledge of Rome, is hesitant to admit his expulsion from the city. Further support to this theory is brought by Rees 1999, who shows the affinities between Ammianus' Roman digressions and Juvenal's *Satires*. Cf. also Den Hengst 2007, 167–177; Matacotta 2010, 303–304. By contrast, Thompson 1947, 14; Matthews 1989, 13; Sogno 2006, 33 are more inclined to admit Ammianus' personal involvement in the events and his expulsion from the City.

> ratio poscat docebit, non humanitatis solum communi ductus officio, sed amore quodam operis: nemo enim minui uelit id in quo maximus fuit. Quid porro est honestius quam docere quod optime scias? (12.11.5–6)
>
> Promising young men will frequent his house, as in the old days, and learn the road to true oratory from him as from an oracle. The father of eloquence will educate them, and, like a veteran pilot, teach them the coasts and the harbours and the signs of the weather, what reason prescribes when the wind is fair and what when it is contrary. His motive will be not only the common duty of *humanitas*, but a love of the work, for no one likes to see the field diminished in which he was once supreme. And what occupation is more honourable than teaching what you know best? (trans. Russell 2001)

In Ammianus' passage *humanitas* is probably differently nuanced, because the hospitable aspect largely prevails over the educational one which shines through Quintilian's text. Yet in both these cases the philanthropic component is there, and I would suggest that *officium humanitatis* is comparable to *ius humanitatis*, in that they both evoke the idea that *humanitas* is an obligation towards fellow human beings. In Ammianus, moreover, the Homeric similitude seems to suggest that in Rome's early history *humanitas* used to result in something particularly pleasant and appealing (cf. *bacarum suauitate*), but also multifarious (*multiformibus officiis*). In other words, the versatility of the term *humanitas* would be reflected in the multiple ways it could be performed.

Moreover, as in other passages we have already encountered, within this context of hospitality *humanitas* serves to measure the level of civilization of a given people, namely the Romans, the only one for which this ideal should be taken for granted. In addition, given Rome's duty (*officium*) to impose 'civilization' on the world, it goes without saying that the most appropriate situation in which to display *humanitas* is towards non-Romans, as in this case. Yet Ammianus later laments that this noble Roman custom belongs to the past: *Nunc uero inanes flatus quorundam uile esse, quidquid extra urbis pomerium nascitur, aestimant praeter orbos et caelibes nec credi potest, qua obsequiorum diuersitate coluntur homines sine liberis Romae* (14.6.22: "But now the vain arrogance of some men regards everything born outside the pomerium of our city as worthless, except the childless and unwedded; and it is beyond belief with what various kinds of obsequiousness men without children are courted at Rome", trans. Rolfe 1935). The pessimistic message aside, it is also worth noting here that *flatus* recalls the idea of haughtiness traditionally opposed to *humanitas*.[73]

In the second Roman digression (Book 28), Ammianus uses the term *humanitas* to stigmatise the way in which the Roman notion of civilization is understood

73 Cf. also above in this section, p. 245.

by the inhabitants of Rome. Here Ammianus appears to argue – rather polemically – that their understanding of culture is determined by trivial matters such as the baths that they frequent, the kind of water they use or the house in which they live:

> Ex his quidam, cum salutari pectoribus oppositis coeperunt, osculanda capita in modum taurorum minacium obliquantes adulatoribus offerunt genua sauianda uel manus id illis sufficere ad beate uiuendum existimantes et abundare omni cultu humanitatis peregrinum putantes, cuius forte etiam gratia sunt obligati, interrogatum, quibus thermis utatur aut aquis aut ad quam successerit domum. (28.4.10)
>
> Some of these men, when one begins to salute them breast to breast, like menacing bulls turn to one side their heads, where they should be kissed, and offer their flatterers their knees to kiss or their hands, thinking that quite enough to ensure them a happy life; and they believe that a stranger is given an abundance of all the duties of *humanitas*, even though the great men may perhaps be under obligation to him, if he is asked what hot baths or waters he uses, or at what house he has been put up. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

In view of this passage, it appears clear that Ammianus' Rome is again (or still?) threatened by the risks of 'Roman civilization' under the slogan of *humanitas*, as denounced by Tacitus in *Agricola* 21.[74] In particular, the baths – as a breeding ground for corruption and vice – are the common denominator between the two texts.[75] But we have gone one step further here, because Ammianus implies that baths have now become a diagnostic factor in establishing who possesses or does not possess *humanitas*.[76] Or, to put it another way, baths represent an element of inclusion or exclusion within the city of Rome's community, and, by extension, of the very idea of Romanness. Whether you are a Roman or not, Ammianus seems to imply, what counts is that you can talk at length about baths and thermal waters, and Rome's nobility will welcome you into their elitist community. Given the general context of the passage and the expression *cultu humanitatis*, Ammianus is clearly thinking of *humanitas* in the broader terms of civilization rather than as mere kindness. We have already noticed the same connection between *cultus* and *humanitas* in the case of Valens' attitude towards the Armenian Papa.[77] While here the link is even closer because of the dependence of the genitive *humanitatis* on *cultus*, it is clear that in both cases *humanitas* takes on a strong educational and

74 On Tacitus' *Agr*. 21 cf. above, pp. 118–124.

75 Cf. Tac. *Agr*. 21: *paulatimque discessum ad delenimenta uitiorum, porticus et balinea et conuiuiorum elegantiam.* On this passage cf. above, pp. 122–123.

76 A similar idea can be found with reference to Neronian Rome in Seneca's *Epist.* 86, but without the term *humanitas* appearing there: cf. Rimell 2013.

77 Cf. above, pp. 235–236.

cultural component. The passage also hints again at the idea of feigned *humanitas*, implying that foreigners can simulate *humanitas* by simply showing off their knowledge of the refinements of baths. It also implies that the notion of *humanitas* is now founded upon trivial non-values, and reiterates the concept that when they lack or feign *humanitas*, Romans and non-Romans, whether they are barbarians or simple foreigners, are similarly uncultured. As Seager has emphasised, when it comes to possessing or not possessing virtues, there is one major difference between Romans and non-Romans: the Romans alone are reprimanded by Ammianus for lacking these values.[78] This is also the case in Ammianus' use of *humanitas*: the Romans should be culturally, historically, even naturally perhaps, bound up with this ideal. Valentinian's obituary, as we have seen, is a case in point.[79]

Judging from the two excursuses on Rome and from Ammianus' use of *humanitas* within them, Rome therefore emerges as the mirror of an empire in which fundamental values (education, culture, hospitality, clemency, all of which can also fall under the category of *humanitas*) are about to collapse, and this decline in turn explains the political troubles of the Empire. In other words, the decline of *humanitas* is used here to explain why the Roman empire is undergoing a decline which culminates in the defeat of Hadrianople. Some exceptions to this value crisis clearly existed, such as the case of the prefect of the city of Rome Olybrius, another protagonist of the second Roman digression. Thanks to this prefect, the opening of this section bodes well, although the digression soon turns into a list of the vices which affected Rome's nobility and plebs. Ammianus says of him:

> Diu multumque a negotiis discussus urbanis adigente cumulo foris gestorum ad ea strictim exsequenda regrediar exorsus ab Olybrii praefectura tranquilla nimis et leni, qui numquam ab humanitatis statu deiectus sollicitus erat et anxius, ne quid usquam factum eius asperum inueniretur aut dictum, calumniarum acerrimus insectator, fisci lucra, unde poterat, circumcidens, iustorum iniustorumque distinctor et arbiter plenus in subiectos admodum temperatus. (28.4.1)

> After long lasting and serious dispersion from affairs in Rome, constrained by the great mass of foreign events, I shall return to a brief account of these, beginning with the prefecture of Olybrius, which was exceedingly peaceful and mild; for he never allowed himself to be turned from humane conduct (*ab humanitatis statu*), but was careful and anxious that no word or act of his should ever be found harsh. He severely punished calumny, cut down the profits of the privy-purse wherever it was possible, fully and impartially distinguished justice from injustice, and showed himself most lenient towards those whom he governed. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

78 Seager 1986, 21; 68.
79 Cf. above, p. 236.

Olybrius' prefecture (369–370 CE) is regarded as extremely tranquil (*ab . . . praefectura tranquilla nimis et leni*) for the very reason that he never abandoned the path of *humanitas*. *Humanitas* is conceived here as human benevolence towards others, mainly subordinates. But it is also interesting that in this case *humanitas* is treated as a permanent condition (*statu*) of its possessor, a condition which quite exceptionally was neither affected by the climate of moral decadence nor by Olybrius' own vices. In particular, Olybrius had one major vice – he devoted all his private life to luxury – but this did not have any repercussions on public life (cf. 28.4.3).[80] Unfortunately for Rome, the same cannot be said of his successor Ampelius, whose behaviour and policy induce Ammianus to claim:

> Quae probra aliaque his maiora dissimulatione iugi neglecta ita effrenatius exarserunt, ut nec Epimenides ille Cretensis, si fabularum ritu ab inferis excitatus redisset ad nostra, solus purgare sufficeret Romam; tanta plerosque labes insanabilium flagitiorum oppressit. (28.4.5)
>
> These shameful acts, and others worse than these, had, by being constantly overlooked, blazed up to such unbridled heights that not even that celebrated Cretan Epimenides, if, after the manner of myth, he had been called up from the lower world and returned to our times, would have been able single-handed to purify Rome; such was the stain of incurable sins that had overwhelmed most people. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

With these biting comments on the moral condition of Roman society, we can conclude our brief survey on *humanitas* in Ammianus' digressions on Rome, and focus our attention on the extant opening of the *Res Gestae*, Book 14.1. More specifically, I would like to explore one of the episodes of what Wieber-Scariot aptly calls the 'Gallus-Constantina-Tragödie', referring to Ammianus' presentation of Constantina as an antiheroine in the narration of a story that recalls classical tragedies.[81] For Ammianus, the wife of the Caesar Constantius Gallus, Constantina, was the antimodel of the Roman *matrona*, as we see from the very beginning of Book 14, where Ammianus first tells of Gallus' cruelty, and then adds:[82]

> Cuius [*scil.* Galli] acerbitati uxor graue accesserat incentiuum germanitate Augusti turgida supra modum, quam Hanniballiano regi fratris filio antehac Constantinus iunxerat pater, Megaera quaedam mortalis, inflammatrix saeuientis assidua, humani cruoris auida nihil mitius quam maritus. (14.1.2)

80 More generally on the virtues and vices of the prefects of Rome cf. Drexler 1974, 13–18.

81 Wieber-Scariot 1999, 76 and *passim.*

82 For an in-depth study of Constantina's negative role in the *Res Gestae* cf. Wieber-Scariot 1999, 74–195. On her and his husband's negative portraits in Ammianus cf. also Barnes 1998, 120–121 and 129–132.

> To his cruelty his wife was besides a serious incentive, a woman beyond measure presumptuous because of her kinship to the emperor, and previously joined in marriage by her father Constantine with his brother's son, King Hannibalianus. She, a Megaera in mortal guise, constantly aroused the savagery of Gallus, being as insatiable as he in her thirst for human blood. (trans. Rolfe 1935)

Among the crimes they are accused of, the indiscriminate condemnation of citizens takes pride of place. Under their domination even whistleblowers were superfluous: the Caesar and his wife were not concerned with keeping up appearances, and many people were put to death in total non-compliance with human and divine laws (14.1.4–5). They wanted to be aware of everything happening and went so far as to send out malicious men to collect intelligence in every corner of Antioch (14.1.6). As Ammianus makes it clear, Constantina's role in all this was decisive:

> Adolescebat autem obstinatum propositum erga haec et similia multa scrutandi stimulos admouente regina, quae abrupte mariti fortunas trudebat in exitium praeceps, cum eum potius lenitate feminea ad ueritatis humanitatisque uiam reducere utilia suadendo deberet. (14.1.8)

> Moreover, his fixed purpose of ferreting out these and many similar things increased, spurred on by the queen, who pushed her husband's fortunes headlong to sheer ruin, when she ought rather, with womanly gentleness, to have recalled him by helpful counsel to the path of truth and *humanitas*. (trans. Rolfe 1935)

Instead of bringing her husband back to the path of truth and *humanitas* thanks to her presumed womanly mildness, Constantina even encouraged him in his faults. What is interesting about this passage is the unique triangular relationship between *lenitas*, *humanitas* and *ueritas*. Despite the potential connections of their meanings, *lenitas* ('mildness, gentleness, clemency') and *humanitas* rarely appear together, although they do in Ciceronian texts.[83] Their relation to *ueritas* is less clear, probably because the very meaning of *ueritas* in this context is ambiguous: we do not know whether Ammianus uses *ueritas* to allude to the fact that Gallus should respect the truthfulness of the events instead of inventing charges and condemning at will, or if he uses *ueritas* to evoke the 'adherence to standards of honesty, uprightness, sincerity' that should characterise a good ruler.[84] Since *ueritas* ought to be a consequence of *lenitas*, the second option is probably preferable, although the context also allows for the first possibility. The noun *ueritas* in fact, like *humanitas*, can have multiple meanings, a polysemy which opens up

83 Cf. *De or.* 2.212 (with regard to the tone of orations) and *Fam.* 13.1.4. But cf. above in this section the case of Artaxerses, where *lenitas* can be seen as a sort of halfway point between *humanitas* and *temperantia.*

84 Cf. *OLD* s.v. *ueritas*.

two possible interpretations. Conversely, *humanitas* appears to be less polysemic than in most other situations, and the deciding factor is again the presence of *lenitas*, which clearly involves ethics, that is, a philanthropic feeling, rather than education. Ammianus blames Constantina for her lack of *lenitas*, a virtue that women usually possess (*feminea*), in the same way as he blames those powerful, Roman men who do not possess *humanitas* and other virtues. Moreover, if later on in his oeuvre the laudatory portrait of the only other woman to be described at length, Constantius' second wife Eusebia, counterbalances the situation, Ammianus had already reminded the reader (while speaking of Constantina) that virtuous empresses had existed and had mitigated the crimes of their husbands: *cum eum potius lenitate feminea ad ueritatis humanitatisque uiam reducere utilia suadendo deberet, ut in Gordianorum actibus factitasse Maximini truculenti illius imperatoris rettulimus coniugem* (14.1.8: "when she ought rather, with womanly gentleness, to have recalled him by helpful counsel to the path of truth and *humanitas*, after the manner of the wife of that savage emperor Maximinus, as we have related in our account of the acts of the Gordians", trans. Rolfe 1935).[85]

Finally, let us look at *humanitas* in regard to astrologers (with, in the background, once again the emperor Valens). The protagonist is actually only one astrologer (*mathematicus*), a certain Heliodorus. What is striking about this figure is the fact that the royal court and Ammianus display opposite attitudes towards him: while Valens and his courtiers love him, Ammianus repeatedly expresses his contempt.[86] His main argument is that Heliodorus' official role at court was to predict the future, but in practice this turned into inventing accusations against whomever the emperor disliked. The question is, what benefits did he gain from such a behaviour? Ammianus is clear:

> Inter fragores tot ruinarum Heliodorus, tartareus ille malorum omnium cum Palladio fabricator, mathematicus, ut memorat uulgus, colloquiis ex aula regia praepigneratus abstrusis iam funebres aculeos exsertabat omni humanitatis inuitamento ad prodenda, quae sciret uel fingeret, lacessitus. Nam et sollicitius cibo mundissimo fouebatur et ad largiendum pelicibus merebat aes collaticium graue. (29.2.6–7)
>
> Amid the crash of so many ruins Heliodorus, that hellish contriver with Palladius of all evils, being a mathematician (in the parlance of the vulgar) and pledged by secret instructions from the imperial court, after he had been cajoled by every enticement of *humanitas* to induce him to reveal what he knew or could invent, how put forth his deadly stings. For he was most solicitously pampered with the choicest foods, and earned a great amount of contributed money for presents to his concubines. (trans. Rolfe 1986)

85 On the positive role of Eusebia in Ammianus' *Res Gestae* cf. Wieber-Scariot 1999, 197–284.
86 On Ammianus' bad attitude towards Heliodorus cf. *e.g.* 29.2.9.

Omni humanitatis inuitamento: all the seductions of *humanitas* which the emperor could offer him induced Heliodorus to play his dirty role. But what does *humanitas* mean in this context? Brandt is rather oblique in this respect, and generally alludes to *Gastfreundlichkeit*, hospitality.[87] This idea is clearly implied, but the explicit reference to refined food (*cibo mundissimo*) suggests that the interpretation can be pushed a little further. Although the association of *humanitas* and *inuitamentum* does not occur elsewhere in classical Latin, a passage in Petronius' *Satyrica* has something close to it:

> Non recessit tamen miles, sed eadem exhortatione temptauit dare mulierculae cibum, donec ancilla uini odore corrupta primum ipsa porrexit ad humanitatem inuitantis uictam manum, deinde refecta potione et cibo expugnare dominae pertinaciam coepit et "quid proderit" inquit "hoc tibi, si soluta inedia fueris, si te uiuam sepelieris, si antequam fata poscant, indemnatum spiritum effuderis? (*Sat.* 111.10–11)
>
> Still the soldier did not withdraw, but with the same encouragement tried to press some food on her servant, until the maid was seduced by the fragrance of the wine. She first extended her own hand, overcome by the *humanitas* of the invitation, and once she was refreshed by the drink and food, began to lay siege to her mistress' obstinacy, and said: "What will this benefit you, if you faint from hunger, if you bury yourself alive, if you breathe out your innocent life before the Fates summon it?" (trans. Schmeling 2020)

In the story of the widow of Ephesus,[88] the reaction of the widow's handmaid to the soldier's offer of wine and food is of particular interest for this study: as with the case of Heliodorus, here too there is a close relation between food, *humanitas* and the idea of seducing through food (*inuitantis*).[89] Commenting on this instance of *humanitas* at *Satyrica* 111, Høgel says: "This may be a rhetorical manner of expression,

87 Brandt 1999, 136 n. 88 and 137.

88 Here is the account of the story according to Colton 1975, 35: "An Ephesian matron, famous for her chastity, was stricken with such grief after the demise of her husband that she remained in his tomb, bent on starving herself to death. Her only attendant was a devoted maidservant. Some thieves were crucified near the tomb, and a soldier was posted to guard the crosses. At night, having heard groans and seen a light, the soldier entered the tomb and offered the mourning widow food and sympathy. The widow ignored his kindness, but the maidservant accepted the nourishment. Later she induced her mistress to partake of the food. The soldier, enamored of the beautiful widow, burned to win her hand. Implored by maidservant not to struggle against love, the widow finally yielded to the soldier. During his absence from his post, one of the bodies of the executed thieves disappeared from its cross. Fearing that he would be punished for neglecting his duty, the soldier was on the point of taking his own life when the widow saved him by having the body of her late husband removed from the coffin and fastened to the unoccupied cross."

89 On this and the other instances of *humanitas* in Petronius cf. specifically Ebersbach 1993.

the *humanitas* being a sort of metonymy for the meal, but it is a usage that caught on."[90] This passage of Ammianus provides an excellent example of this later usage.

8.1.2 *Humanus* in the *Res Gestae*

Brandt has rightly remarked that Ammianus never employs the noun *humanitas* simply to mean 'of man', or to point to human nature or mankind.[91] He also shows that when Ammianus wishes to express the notion 'human', he resorts to a noun followed by the adjective *humanus*, such as the usual *casus, corpus*, *cruor, hostia, manus, mens*, *modus, mos, necessitas, prospectus, ratio, res, sanguis, sensus, uis, uisio* and *uultus.* This indicates that, as in the case of other authors, there is no complete overlap between the noun *humanitas* and the adjective *humanus*. In addition, one may notice that the neuter is substantivised four times, and that there are no instances of superlatives. There are however two occurrences of the comparative, and in both cases it accompanies the noun *cultus*, which we have already seen to be at times linked to *humanitas* in Ammianus' oeuvre.[92] Of particular interest to our research into the concept of *humanitas* is the instance at 15.11.4, on which I have already lingered elsewhere:[93]

> Horum omnium [*scil.* Gallorum, Belgarum et Aquitanorum] apud ueteres Belgae dicebantur esse fortissimi ea propter, quod ab humaniore cultu longe discreti nec aduenticiis effeminati deliciis diu cum transrhenanis certauere Germanis.
>
> Of all these nations the Belgae had the reputation in the ancient writers of being the most valiant, for the reason that being far removed from civilised life (*ab humaniore cultu*) and not made effeminate by imported luxuries, they warred for a long time with the Germans across the Rhine. (trans. Rolfe 1935)

That this passage echoes Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* 1.1, analysed above, is beyond question:[94]

> Horum omnium [*scil.* Belgarum, Aquitanorum et Gallorum] fortissimi sunt Belgae, propterea quod a cultu atque humanitate prouinciae longissime absunt, minimeque ad eos mercatores saepe commeant atque ea quae ad effeminandos animos pertinent important,

90 Høgel 2015, 76.
91 Brandt 1999, 134 and n. 74.
92 On the relationship between *humanitas* and *cultus* in Ammianus cf. above, pp. 235 and 250.
93 Cf. Mollea 2023b, 13–15.
94 Cf. above, pp. 64 and 235.

> proximique sunt Germanis, qui trans Rhenum incolunt, quibuscum continenter bellum gerunt.
>
> Of all these, the Belgae are the bravest, for they are furthest away from the civilization and *humanitas* of the Province. Merchants very rarely travel to them or import such goods as make men's courage weak and womanish. They live, moreover, in close proximity to the Germans who inhabit the land across the Rhine, and they are continually at war with them. (trans. Hammond 1996, slightly adapted)

Whether Ammianus directly depends on Caesar or not is of little importance in this context, for an intermediate source would need to be very close to both texts from a terminological point of view.[95] What counts are the elements these two texts share: they both acknowledge that the Belgae are the most courageous people in Gaul, and they agree on the reasons for this – the Belgae are sufficiently removed from civilization and, therefore, from the risk of becoming effeminate. Moreover, they are (or used to be) in constant war with the bellicose Germans. Our focus is clearly on the relationship between the expressions *ab humaniore cultu* of Ammianus and *a cultu atque humanitate* of Caesar. First, given that Ammianus elsewhere employs the pair *humanitas-cultus*, his preference for the comparative of *humanus* followed by the noun *cultus* can hardly be regarded as a stylistic choice. Instead, it rather shows that all these expressions sounded almost synonymous to him. Secondly and crucially, Ammianus does not resort to the positive form of *humanus*, but to the comparative: as we have already seen in several authors, it looks as if the comparative (and the superlative) is far more suitable to convey the nuances of the noun *humanitas*, especially when its educational and cultural aspects are at stake.

The second instance of *humanior cultus* in the *Res Gestae* seems to confirm this. Book 24.1 describes Julian's entrance into Assyria and his burning of the city of Anathas. Despite this fact, the emperor showed his clemency towards its citizens, as Ammianus does not forget to remark:

> et statim munimento omni incenso Pusaeus eius praefectus, dux Aegypti postea, honore tribunatus affectus est. Reliqui uero cum caritatibus suis et supellectili humaniore cultu ad Syriacam ciuitatem Chalcida transmissi sunt. (24.1.9)
>
> At once the whole fortress was set on fire; Pusaeus, its commander, later a general in Egypt, was given the rank of tribune. As for the rest, they were treated kindly, and with their families and possessions were sent to Chalcis, a city of Syria. (trans. Rolfe 1940)

95 Barnes 1998, 98 for one stresses that Ammianus's dependence on Caesar is not necessarily direct. Cf. also Vergin 2013, 76.

Unfortunately, we do not have other Latin sources for establishing comparisons. Nevertheless, some observations are in order. To begin with, it is evident that there is no second term of comparison after the comparative. Technically speaking, *humaniore* is therefore an absolute comparative. But what would its meaning be? The Loeb translation by Rolfe, as we have just seen, reads: "they were treated kindly", thereby overcoming all problems. Nor, to pick another example, is Selem's Italian translation better: "ricevettero un trattamento corretto." In my view, the main problem of both these translations does not lie in the fact that they do not render the comparative, but that they neglect the idea of culture and civilization, and, as a consequence, of philanthropy carried by *humaniore*. In other words, what the text means is that the inhabitants of Anathas were treated in respect of the civic norms of their own and of the human community. Thus the main function of the comparative is to bring into play the ideal of *humanitas* rather than to express the intensity of a behaviour or feeling.

One more occurrence of the adjective *humanus* seems worth a look, that at 21.6.4. Speaking of Constantius' third marriage, Ammianus does not miss the opportunity to reiterate his admiration for the emperor's second wife, Eusebia:[96]

> Eodem tempore Faustinam nomine sortitus est coniugem amissa iam pridem Eusebia, cuius fratres erant Eusebius et Hypatius consulares, corporis morumque pulchritudine pluribus antistante et in culmine tam celso humana, cuius fauore iustissimo exemptum periculis declaratumque Caesarem rettulimus Iulianum.
>
> At that same time Constantius took to wife Faustina, having long since lost Eusebia, sister of the ex-consuls Eusebius and Hypatius, a lady distinguished before many others for beauty of person and of character, and kindly in spite of her lofty station, through whose well-deserved favour (as I have shown) Julian was saved from dangers and declared Caesar. (trans. Rolfe 1940)

She is described as *humana* despite her lofty condition (*in culmine tam celso*), a contrast that might remind us of Pliny the Younger's portrait of Trajan in the *Panegyricus*.[97] After all, like *superbia*, *culmen* is also etymologically linked to the idea of a superior position or condition – it is sufficient to remark that the English 'hill' has its same root.[98] Accordingly, like Trajan, Eusebia maintained her human and humane attitude even though, thanks to her royal, upper condition, she could have shown haughtiness on several occasions.

96 Cf. above, p. 254.
97 Cf. above, pp. 87–88.
98 Cf. Ernout/Meillet 2001[4] s.v. *collis.*

8.1.3 Conclusion

To recap. As far as *humanitas* is concerned, Ammianus represents both continuity and break with the tradition preceding him. There is continuity, because in terms of the nuances *humanitas* takes on within his oeuvre he does not ultimately differ from previous authors such as Eumenius, Gellius or Apuleius, and at times we find echoes of Ciceronian, Caesarian and even Petronian uses of the word. Ammianus appears to have assimilated the polysemy that *humanitas* had been enriching from the beginnings of its history in Republican Rome until his day: the Ciceronian educational component is there; the ethical idea of philanthropy, which also materialises in hospitality, is there; the nobler ideal of civilization resulting from the two previous aspects is there as well. At times then, Ammianus' *humanitas* is even associated with the earthly notion of food.

Yet Ammianus' *humanitas* also implies a break with the tradition, because he is the first historian writing in Latin to make relatively abundant use of this concept. This second aspect might be explained in different ways. To begin with, the socio-political context in which Ammianus wrote seems to have conferred great importance to the concept of *humanitas*, as the section on Symmachus will reveal in greater detail. Judging from Ammianus' narration, this can also be regarded as an hoped-for reaction to the violence which characterised immediately previous times at all levels and in all forms.[99]

Moreover, in the centuries from Tacitus to Ammianus Latin changed significantly in many respects, not least in style, so that by the fourth century CE historians would hardly feel the need to distance themselves from Cicero and from rhetorical style and vocabulary in general. On the contrary, as Sabbah puts it: "Ammien a voulu être le Polybe, le Tacite et le Suétone de son temps, sans renoncer à en être aussi un parfait orateur" – the fact that Cicero was the model *par excellence* of the perfect orator is implicit in this statement.[100] Moreover, as I emphasised in the introduction to this section, we must bear in mind that Latin was not Ammianus' mother tongue, and, if he had to look for a model to follow, no one more than Cicero better represented Latin prose.

Then come the questions of Ammianus' military profession and of his more or less direct role in the events he narrates. By this I mean to reiterate what scholarship has already shown, at least in broad terms: that is, his tendency to judge events from an ethical standpoint – and we have seen in the very many instances

99 Cf. Zugravu 2018, 378: "Ammiano [. . .] è stato [. . .] anche il testimone di un'epoca violenta, in cui dominava un'atmosfera di horror, di insicurezza e sospetto, di terrore onnipresente [. . .] e di sofferenza generalizzata."
100 Sabbah 1978, 598.

in which *humanitas* also implies philanthropic connotations that in his oeuvre this word almost always takes on ethical nuances. The main objects of his moral judgement are, as one would expect, powerful men and emperors in particular – which explains why *humanitas* is mostly linked to these figures. In Ammianus' work *humanitas* is regarded as a founding value of Roman society, and it must be for this very reason that the historian is very keen on denouncing every distortion or lack of it. Julian aside, almost all the other emperors mentioned by Ammianus distorted *humanitas*, and this fault becomes extremely serious when there is evidence that they were aware of the importance of this value and deliberately did not behave accordingly. This puts them on the same level as barbarians, and, to some degree, contributes to explaining Rome's gradual decadence, which, in Ammianus' narration, reached its nadir with the battle of Hadrianople.

8.2 *Humanitas* in the Minor Roman Historians of the Fourth Century

Aside from the great Ammianus Marcellinus, what has come down to us of fourth-century Latin historiography shuns long and detailed narrations in the tradition of the Greek Herodotus and Thucydides or the Latin Livy and Tacitus.[101] True, our perception is also influenced by the fact that the *Annales* of Virius Nichomacus Flavianus and, possibly, other works of a larger scope have perished.[102] Nevertheless, there is no denying that these were often replaced by brief historical accounts to which we usually refer today by the name of *Epitomes* or *Breuiaria*.[103] When they deal with the imperial age, epitomes also tend to show a biographical structure, which reflects the authors' understanding of the history of this time as marked by the succession of different emperors.[104] Taking at its most extreme this principle, we come across the *Historia Augusta*, a work which consists of 30 imperial biographies, from Hadrian to Carus, Carinus and Numerian, that is, from 117 to 285 CE. My analysis, inevitably quick because of the paucity of occurrences of *humanitas* and *humanus* in these works, will first deal with the breviaries and then with the *Historia Augusta*.

101 Cf. Brown 1971, 115: "It appeared that in the fourth century the mantle of Tacitus could fall only on the shoulders of a Greek such Ammianus."

102 Cf. Bonamente 2003, 85–86.

103 The differences between *Epitome* and *Breuiarium* as highlighted in modern scholarship are of little interest in this context: for a survey and some bibliographical references cf. Banchich 2008, 305–306; Stover/Woudhuysen 2023, 44–71.

104 Cf. Banchich 2008, 305.

8.2.1 The Breviaries: Eutropius, Aurelius Victor and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*

In spite of their own different characteristics, Eutropius' *Breuiarium*, Aurelius Victor's *Historiae abbreuiatae* and the *Epitome de Caesaribus* seem to share one general purpose, that is, "to propose the continuity of the history of Rome in its ethical values, political institutions and military prestige as a model for the state of the empire and its future security."[105] Yet because of their conciseness and general tendency to privilege facts and anecdotes over ideological and cultural considerations, it cannot be surprising that there is very little trace of a value concept like *humanitas* in the epitomators. This is not to deny that also works like Eutropius' or Aurelius Victor's reveal a moralising view of history as well as their authors' overall opinion regarding emperors, but simply they do not specifically linger on each and every emperor's virtues and flows.[106]

Eutropius' *Breuiarium ab Vrbe condita*, composed after 369 CE[107] and dedicated to emperor Valens, counts no occurrences of *humanitas* and only three of *humanus* (twice in accordance with *genus*, once with *memoria*). This happens despite the fact that the *Breuiarium* displays a rather biographical structure in its second part, the one devoted to the imperial age, where also vices and virtues of the emperors are listed.[108] To some extent, this might be seen as the most explicit way to say that there was not at all room for *humanitas* in the imperial age. But the noun does not appear in the narration of the republican age either and also the other concept which has often been mentioned for its dialectic relationship with *humanitas*, namely *clementia*, only appears twice in Eutropius, on both occasions in the section on emperor Hadrian – although what the epitomator says is that Hadrian was not renowned for his clemency (8.7.1: *Non magnam clementiae gloriam habuit*).[109] In the light of this, it is perhaps safer to presume that Eutropius eschews altogether the word *humanitas* because it does not belong in the noblest historiographical tradition.[110]

Things change very little when it comes to Aurelius Victor's *Historiae abbreuiatae*, written about 359–360 CE.[111] One sole occurrence of *humanitas* can be

105 Bonamente 2003, 85. More in detail on the aims of Eutropius' *Breuiarium* cf. Bird 1993, xix–xx.

106 Cf. Banchich 2008, 305.

107 Cf. Bird 1993, xiii.

108 Cf. Bird 1993, xx–xxiii.

109 More generally on Eutropius' sceptical, not to say negative, view of Hadrian's policy cf. Bird 1993, xxi–xxii.

110 Cf. above, p. 116.

111 Cf. Dufraigne 1975, xv–xvii; Stover/Woudhuysen 2023, 25–27.

found in one of the final chapters of this short epitome, on 39.26. Chapter 39 very concisely summarises the period from Diocletian's until Constantius' and Galerius' accession to the throne. Aurelius Victor mentions the noun *humanitas* when speaking of the Illyrian origins of the three of them as well as of Maximian. He says: *His sane omnibus Illyricum patria fuit: qui, quamquam humanitatis parum, ruris tamen ac militiae miseriis imbuti satis optimi reipublicae fuere* ("Illyricum was actually the native land of all of them: so although they were deficient in *humanitas*, they had nevertheless been sufficiently schooled by the hardships of the countryside and of military service to be the best men for the state", trans. Bird 1994). The context is clear: to possess *humanitas* would be best for those who are to govern and yet their experience on the field compensates for this lack. The contrast between *humanitas* and *rus* therefore reveals that Aurelius Victor conceives the former in educational terms, and this is little surprising in the light of the importance that this author generally acknowledges to education and culture.[112] On the other hand, we cannot but ascertain that, as is often the case with Ammianus, Aurelius Victor resorts to the noun *humanitas* to denounce its lack.

Humanus is rare too in the *Historiae abbreuiatae*, appearing with *genus* and *mens*, and standing alone as substantivised adjective with reference to the noun *memoria* to mean 'of mankind' (39.15: *post memoriam humani*). The fourth and last instance is instead a little more complex and has brought editors to make conjectures. The passage in question, taken from § 5, devoted to Nero, in Nickbakht/Scardino 2021 reads thus: *namque ubi mentem inuaserint uitia, nequaquam uerecundiae †externis societate humanius† datur, peccandi consuetudo noua et eo dulciora affectans ad extremum in suos agit. Humanius* is the *lectio* of P, while the other manuscript, O, reads *extenis societate humani*. Nickbakht/Scardino's apparatus criticus lists a considerable amount of conjectures, including the one which convinces me the most, *humana ius* proposed by Pierre Dufraigne in his 1975 edition. *Humana* would therefore go with *societas* and the meaning of the sentence would be: "For, in fact, when vices have entered the mind, in no way are strangers accorded that law of respect imposed by the human community, and habitual sinning, which leads to novel and therefore sweeter pleasures, finally turns them to their own family" (trans. Bird 1994, adapted).

In the light of the importance of *humanitas* in the Theodosian age, as testified to by Symmachus' oeuvre and Pacatus' panegyric, it is a little surprising that neither the noun *humanitas* nor the comparative or superlative of *humanus* appear

112 Cf. Dufraigne 1975, xviii; Bird 1984, 71–80. Bonamente 2003, 90 claims: "With regard to culture and rhetorical education, they are, in Aurelius Victor's opinion, an indispensable basis for the making of princes, even taking as an example Cyrus the Great." Further bibliography in Bird 1984, 149 n. 1.

in the *Epitome de Caesaribus*. This work, which has come down to us as an epitome of Aurelius Victor's *Historiae abbreuiatae* but that in fact shows its independence on several levels, for example extending the narration until Theodosius, presents the latter in quite a laudatory tone, but nowhere speaks of *humanitas*.[113] *Humanus* does appear, but in its simple relational meaning in accordance with *conuersatio*, *genus*, *ius* and *res.*

8.2.2 The *Historia Augusta*

A work of its own, the *Historia Augusta* is surrounded by so many problems that any discussions on the role of *humanitas* therein need to be very careful and provisional. While it is by now usually agreed that it was written by a single author who resorts to six different pseudonyms[114] – although who this author was is anything but certain – its dating still oscillates between 361 and 430 CE.[115] As is obvious, that of the dating in particular is a very relevant problem, as it affects the overall message and interpretation of the *Historia Augusta*.[116] Furthermore, numerous doubts have been expressed about its genre (history, biography, work of fiction or something else?) and, consequently, about its reliability.[117] What it is worth highlighting, however, is that on various occasions the *Historia Augusta*, in Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* footsteps,[118] stresses the importance of *mores* and *uirtutes*, to be preferred over *acta*.[119]

In the light of these premises, I limit myself to some first remarks, tacitly implying that the *Historia Augusta* can be dated to the late fourth century and there-

113 The date of composition of the *Epitome* is disputed and it has recently been suggested that it was written by Paul the Deacon in the eight century: cf. Stover/Woudhuysen 2023, *passim* on this issue.

114 Cf. Dessau 1889; Adams 1972; Marriott 1979; Birley 2006, 19; Fedeli 2014, 10–11; Stover/Kestemont 2016, 154; Gasti 2020, 94. *Contra* Tse *et al.* 1998*;* Den Hengst 2010^2.

115 Cf. Paschoud 2002 (after 389); Birley 2006, 19 (after 395); Cameron 2011, 772 (between 361 and 385); Fedeli 2014, 11.

116 Cf. Momigliano 1954, 27.

117 Cf. Momigliano 1954, 25–26; Birley 2006, 23–28; Pausch 2010; Fedeli 2014, 11–12; Stover/Kestemont 2016, 143; Gasti 2020, 94–95.

118 Cf. Chazal 2021, 17–19 on the structural similarities between Suetonius' *De uita Caesarum* and the *Historia Augusta*. Furthermore, as Momigliano 1954, 24, Fedeli 2014, 10 and Stover/Kestemont 2016, 144 remark, the *Historia Augusta* might have begun with the lives of Nerva and Trajan, that would be now lost, in order to continue Suetonius' oeuvre. Birley 2006, 21–22 (n. 13 for further bibliography) is sceptical on this point.

119 Cf. *Auid. Cass.* 3.1; *Max. et Balb*. 4.5; *Aurel.* 22.4, with discussion in Savino 2017, 239 and n. 12. Cf. also Fedeli 2014, 11; 13.

fore be of relevance to this study. The occurrences of *humanitas* are only four, and on two occasions the noun appears in the *Life of Hadrian*, which on the one hand is in tune with what we have seen about the general climate of his reign and legislation, but on the other hand might come into conflict with Eutropius' denying clemency to this emperor. To begin with, we need to show that the philanthropic side of *humanitas* prevails in its instances of the *Life of Hadrian*, and that its association with *clementia* is therefore pertinent. In *Hadr.* 10.8 we read: *De militum etiam aetatibus iudicabat, ne quis aut minor quam uirtus posceret, aut maior quam pateretur humanitas, in castris contra morem ueterem uersaretur, agebatque, ut sibi semper noti esse<nt>, et eorum numerus sciretur* ("Furthermore, with regard to length of military service he issued an order that no one should violate ancient usage by being in the service at an earlier age than his strength warranted, or at a more advanced one than *humanitas* permitted. He made it a point to be acquainted with the soldiers and to know their numbers", trans. Magie 1921). The two comparative structures (*minor . . . posceret*, *maior . . . humanitas*) clearly oppose *humanitas* to *uirtus*, but the meaning of *humanitas* is completely different from the Eumenian case in which we found the same juxtaposition. While on that occasion the term signalled the importance that both the emperor and the governor of the *prouincia Lugdunensis* conferred to culture as well as to military prowess, the cultural aspect of *humanitas* does not seem to shine through here.[120] By contrast, the text might open up to two possible interpretations – or, perhaps more probably in the light of the intrinsic polysemy of *humanitas*, has a double message to convey – depending on who the concrete referent of such *humanitas* is, whether the soldier or the emperor. There is in fact no doubt that *uirtus* refers to the soldier's value or strength, and, given the symmetrical structure of the sentence, the same might go for *humanitas*. If this were the case, *humanitas* then would mean 'human nature', and the overall message would be that Hadrian wanted soldiers to be mature enough to know the true meaning of virtue and military value, but not so old that their bodies were no longer in good shape. Yet, taken in broader terms and perhaps more intuitive at first glance, *humanitas* can refer to the emperor's respect towards old men, who would be spared and exempted from military service. In other words, the emperor's own *humanitas* would set the limit to the enlistment. In this latter sense, the noun would be connoted in philanthropic terms and therefore closer in meaning to *clementia*. But I reiterate that am not sure the text asks the reader to choose between the two options: after all, both would be good reasons for not having too

120 Cf. above, pp. 212–213.

old soldiers in the army, and the polysemy of *humanitas* encourages this twofold reading.

The context of the second occurrence of *humanitas* in the *Life of Hadrian* is utterly different, and is likely to remind us of passages of Pliny's panegyric in praise of Trajan where the emperor is said to be easy-going in social situations.[121] *Hadr.* 20.1 reads: *In conloquiis etiam humillimorum ciuilissimus fuit, detestans eos, qui sibi han<c> uoluptatem humanitatis quasi seruantes fastigium principis inuiderent* ("Most democratic in his conversations, even with the very humble, he denounced all who, in the belief that they were thereby maintaining the imperial dignity, begrudged him the pleasure of such *humanitas*", trans. Magie 1921). Like Pliny's Trajan, Hadrian is praised for his friendliness with humble people, which makes him *ciuilissimus*, indirectly associating two concepts like *ciuilitas* and *humanitas* that, as we have seen before, do not usually appear together.[122] And clearly this implies that *humanitas* can be understood as a form of benevolence towards people of lower rank.

Now that it has been made clear that the two instances of *humanitas* in relation to Hadrian have something to do with the idea of *clementia*, which is itself attributed to Hadrian at *Hadr.* 5.5, we can return to the issue of the possible discrepancy between the author of the *Historia Augusta*'s and Eutropius' representations of this emperor. This inconsistency has not escaped the attention of modern scholars, and, as far as the idea of clemency is concerned, Chazal has recently included it among the elements that would reveal the author of the *Historia Augusta*'s willingness to portray Hadrian as an ambiguous figure, neither utterly positive nor negative, despite 'officially' including him in the list of the *boni*.[123] In support of his claim, Chazal observes that Latin historians and biographers – Suetonius for one – are not new to attributing *clementia* to the first years of reign of emperors who then turn out to be fierce.[124] I am sceptical. While I have no difficulties admitting that Hadrian's portrait in the *Historia Augusta* can reveal dark sides of this emperor, this does not seem to be the case of *clementia* and analogous concepts. The two instances of *humanitas* are undoubtedly positive in this respect and the same goes for the occurrence of *clementia* at 5.5: none of these seem therefore to open up to the practice of doublespeak we have observed earlier on in Pliny's sec-

121 Cf. *e.g.* Plin. *Pan.* 49.5; 71.6: above, pp. 92–94.

122 Cf. above, p. 128.

123 Cf. Chazal 2021, 120. The opposition between *boni* and *mali principes* is regarded as the best evidence of Pliny's *Panegyricus*' influence on the *Historia Augusta* by Burgersdijk 2013. On the influence of Pliny's and the other panegyrics on the *Historia Augusta* cf. also Paschoud 2002.

124 Cf. Chazal 2021, 120–125.

tion.[125] The oxymoronic doublet *saeuus clemens* of *Hadr.* 14.11 might raise questions about Hadrian's clemency, but if one looks deeper at the context, one notices that the long list of contradictory adjectives has the aim of emphasising the final message that Hadrian was generally inconsistent and unpredictable in his behaviours than questioning all the virtues mentioned: *Idem seuerus laetus, comis grauis, lasciuus cunctator, tenax liberalis, <simplex> simulator, saeuus clemens et semper in omnibus uarius* ("He was, in the same person, austere and genial, dignified and playful, dilatory and quick to act, niggardly and generous, deceitful and straightforward, cruel and merciful, and always in all things changeable", trans. Magie 1921). Accordingly, with regard to Hadrian's idea of clemency and philanthropy, the author of the *Historia Augusta* seems to distance himself from Eutropius and put Hadrian's reign in the footsteps of his predecessor Trajan's, during which we know *humanitas* was important. And it would not be too far off to think that, in case the *Historia Augusta*, or the *Life of Hadrian* at least, was written during the Theodosian age, its author might have wanted to exalt in Hadrian, Trajan's successor, that same *humanitas* that acquired (or was acquiring) new importance under Theodosius (or his successors).[126]

Likewise, Hadrian's *humanitas* is consistent with the other emperors' lack of it. When the term crops up again in the *Historia Augusta*, in the *Life of Caracalla* 4.2, it is only to stress its absence even in front of cadavers: *Occisus est etiam eius* [scil. *Caracalli*] *iussu Patru<in>us ante templum diui Pii, tractaque sunt eorum per plateam cadauera sine aliqua humanitatis reuerentia* ("Patruinus, too, was slain by his order, and that in front of the Temple of the Deified Pius, and his body as well as Papinian's were dragged about through the streets without any regard for *humanitas*", trans. Magie 1921). The context recalls a declamatory one we have seen above, but, more generally, it is by now unsurprising that respect before the dead is a requisite of *humanitas*, whether it is understood more broadly as civilization or more specifically as benevolence towards the other.[127]

The last occurrence of *humanitas* in the *Historia Augusta* is to be found in the section on Trebellianus in the *Lives of the Thirty Pretenders*. Yet it does not refer to Trebellianus nor to any other emperor in particular, but to emperors in general, and, perhaps more important, the author explicitly says that such *humanitas* is offered but never accepted; in other words, it does not materialise. Read *Tyr. Trig.* 26.5: *Neque tamen postea Isauri timore, ne in eos Gallienus s<a>euire<t>, ad*

125 On the practice of doublespeak in imperial literature cf. above, pp. 86–87.

126 Also consider that Trajan and Nerva are among the very few first-century emperors to be considered *boni* in the *Historia Augusta*: *Per Neruam atque Traianum usque ad Marcum solito melior* (*Car.* 3.3); cf. Bonamente 2010, 77–82; Savino 2017, VIII; 129–130.

127 Cf. above, pp. 193–194.

aequalitatem perduci quauis principum humanitate potuerunt ("Never afterwards, however, was it possible to persuade the Isaurians, fearing that Gallienus might vent his anger upon them, to come down to the level ground, not even by any offer of *humanitas* on the part of the emperors", trans. Magie 1932). After proclaiming himself emperor among the Isaurians, Trebellianus "had betaken himself into the inmost and safest parts of Isauria, where he was protected by the natural difficulty of the ground and by the mountains" (26.3, trans. Magie 1932). However Gallienus sent his general Camsisoleus against Trebellianus, who went down to the plains, was defeated and killed. This is why the Isaurians did not want to leave their mountains again after that defeat, and it is logical that they rejected the offering of *humanitas*, because, as the *Historia Augusta* continues to narrate, "after the time of Trebellianus they have been considered barbarians" (26.6: *post Trebellianum pro barbaris habentur*; trans. Magie 1932, adapted). The incompatibility is therefore not between *humanitas* and emperors on this occasion, but between *humanitas* and barbarians, along the lines of another pattern with which we are familiar.

The author of the *Historia Augusta*'s conception of *humanitas* as closely bound to *clementia* is further proved by a passage in the *Life of Aurelian* where we find the sole occurrence of the comparative *humanior* in the entire work. *Aur.* 25.1 reads: *Recepta T[h]yana Antiochiam proposita omnibus inpunitate breui apud Daphnem certamine optinuit atque inde praeceptis, quantum probatur, uenerabilis uiri Apollonii parens humanior atque clementior fuit* ("After thus recovering Tyana, Aurelian, by means of a brief engagement near Daphne, gained possession of Antioch, having promised forgiveness to all; and thereupon, obeying, as far as is known, the injunctions of that venerated man, Apollonius, he acted with greater kindness and mercy", trans. Magie 1932). The fact that Aurelian became benevolent only upon Apollonius' exhortation does not plead in his favour, but what interests us the most is, on the one hand, that *humanior atque clementior* appears as a synonymous doublet and thus specifies at best the sense of *humanior* in this context; and on the other hand, that the author had no real necessity to resort to comparative forms since there is no second object of comparison. In my view, the comparative *humanior* is therefore used to stress its bond with *humanitas*, while *clementior*, which was not at all necessary since *clemens* is not a relational adjective, serves the stylistic purpose of balancing the doublet.

The superlative of *humanus* appears instead twice in the *Historia Augusta*. Pertinax, one who is considered a *bonus princeps*,[128] is said to be *mitissimus et humanissimus*, where the doublet with the superlative of *mitis* makes it clear

128 Cf. Savino 2017, 127–129.

once again that the philanthropic dimension largely prevails in the *Historia Augusta*'s understanding of *humanitas*.[129] And *mitissimus* as well as *humanissimus* also apply to Didius Julianus, whom Pertinax always considered a colleague and successor, as in fact he was.[130] Yet *mitissimus* appears at 4.8 and is highly significant as it refers to Didius' entire reign (*totoque imperii sui tempore mitissimus fuit*), while *humanissimus* is limited to banquets at 9.2 (*humanissimus ad conuiuia*).[131] Whereas at Pliny's *Panegyricus* 49.5 *humanitas* compensates for *frugalitas*, the former permitting to prolong the banquets that the latter would cut short, there is no doubt that *humanissimus ad conuiuia* said of Didius means that he was sober during banquets, for the author wants to counter what people often say of this emperor – wrongly – namely that he was gluttonous (9.1: *Obiecta sane sunt Iuliano haec: quod gulosus fuisset*). These two characteristics, as well as what the author of the *Historia Augusta* says of Didius at 3.8–10 and 9.1–2, seem to me to make a good emperor of him, and I do not understand why Savino lists him among bad emperors.[132]

As for the positive *humanus*, it appears – without particular relevance – alongside *fragilitas, genus, hostia, ius, mos, oratio, orbis, positio, res, sanguis, species, stercus*.

8.3 *Humanitas* Back Again: Ausonius' *Gratiarum actio*

The great renaissance of *humanitas* under Theodosius I – however rhetorical and a means to an end it might have been – was slightly anticipated by Ausonius' *Gratiarum actio*. The great poet delivered this formal oration in the imperial palace at Trier in the second half of 379 CE.[133] Like Pliny's *panegyric* to Trajan and Mamertinus' to Julian, Ausonius' speech too was composed to thank the emperor for appointing its author to consulship.[134] Having been accused of lack of original-

129 Curiously, Hadrian, Aurelian and Pertinax also share noble physical descriptions in the *Historia Augusta*, and Fedeli 2014, 14 maintains that these are among the very rare cases in which the physical aspect "riflette una maestosa solennità, consona alla somma carica."

130 Cf. *Did. Jul.* 2.3.

131 On frugality during banquets as a virtue, and its lack as a flaw, in the *Historia Augusta* cf. Fedeli 2014, 23–25; Chazal 2021, 82; 205–214, who on p. 206 remarks, "la sobriété des moeurs caractérise le bon prince."

132 Cf. Savino 2017, 127.

133 Cf. Green 1991, 537; Balbo 2018, 159 n.1.

134 Cf. Grilli, 1982, 140; Green 1991, 537; Castello 2010, 190; Gómez-Santamaría 2015, 660; Balbo 2018, 159 n.1. On the differences between panegyric and *gratiarum actio* cf. Balbo 2018, 160–163.

ity[135] – which is after all something to be expected from this kind of compositions –, Ausonius' *Gratiarum actio* has more recently attracted scholars' attention thanks to its rhetorical features and, above all, due to the light it may throw on Theodosius I's accession to the throne and the historical-political climate after the defeat of Hadrianople. At the same time, this text is revealing of Ausonius' self-esteem and of his own political ambitions, mainly deriving from his having been Gratian's mentor right from the future emperor's youth.[136] These being the premises, it should not be surprising that the first occurrence of *humanitas* we meet in this oration has (also) to do with the emperor's education and culture.[137] After all, if Ammianus deserves credit, Valentinian himself, when presenting his son Gratian to his army, had praised the young emperor's *humanitas* as prerequisite for his other virtues.[138]

Accordingly, when in chapter 5 of his *gratiarum actio* Ausonius tries to answer on what grounds Gratian has bestowed such a great honour on him, since the emperor's response seems to be that he was in debt to Ausonius,[139] the discourse quite inevitably shifts to education:

> Quid autem mihi debes, gratissime imperator? (Patitur enim humanitas tua, ut praeter regias uirtutes priuata appellatione lauderis)? Quid tu mihi debes? Et contra quid non ego tibi debeo? Anne quod docui? Hoc ego possum uerius retorquere, dignum me habitum, qui docerem; tot facundia doctrinaque praestantes inclinata in me dignatione praeteritos, ut esset quem tu matura iam aetate succinctum per omnes honorum gradus festinata bonitate proueheres; timere ut uidereris, ne in me uita deficeret, dum tibi adhuc aliquid, quod deberes praestare, superesset. (5.24)

> But what do you owe me, most gracious Emperor – for your *humanitas* permits me to set aside your kingly qualities and use this familiar form of complimentary address? What do you owe me? And on the other side, what do I not owe you? Is it because I was your tutor? I can turn this about and say more exactly that I was deemed worthy to teach you; that so many men superior to me in eloquence and learning were passed over; that the honourable choice fell upon me, in order that you might have a man equipped with ripe years whom your impetuous generosity might advance through all the stages of a distinguished career; and that you seemed to fear that my life might fail while there still remained unbestowed something which you ought to bestow. (trans. Evelyn-White 1921)

135 Green 1991, 537.

136 Cf. B. Gibson 2018, 282; 287.

137 On the importance of culture in the *gratiarum actio* cf. Balbo 2015; Balbo 2018, 175–177.

138 Cf. above, p. 240.

139 On the importance of Ausonius quoting Gratian's own words on this occasion cf. B. Gibson 2018, 283.

Lolli has rightly highlighted that the epithet *gratissime* is a play on word with Gratian, the emperor's name, and has emphasised that Ausonius' freedom of speech on this occasion is due to his familiarity with the emperor, a feeling which is subsumed in the word *humanitas*.[140] Without denying that this occurrence of the word *humanitas* might have this implication, it is my contention that Ausonius' mastery of language is even more sublime here and exploits the polysemy of *humanitas*. First, if we assume that here *humanitas* also takes on an educational component, it will become clear why the emperor cannot take offence and, on the contrary, inevitably understands the pun. For will not one who loves playing with language and poetry, as is evident from works like the *Technopaegnion* or the *Griphus ternarii numeri*, have tried to pass this habit down to his pupil? Will not the education he has always imparted to Gratian have also been based on irony? Secondly, by saying that it is thanks to his *humanitas* that Gratian also accepts being praised for private qualities, Ausonius is actually praising another of his private qualities, *humanitas* itself. Thirdly, in chapter 6.27 Ausonius reiterates the expression *priuata appellatio* by resorting to an epithet which far more than *gratitudo* is closer to *humanitas*: *Scis enim, imperator doctissime (rursum enim utar laude priuata)* ("You know, most learned Emperor (for once again I will use a personal mode of complimentary address)", trans. Evelyn-White 1921). And were all this not enough, at the very beginning of chapter 6 Ausonius mentions and quotes Cicero, the first to fully exploit the polyphony of *humanitas*.[141] Yet there is perhaps a closer parallel than Cicero: Eumenius, because the same simultaneous praise of official virtues and *humanitas* also characterises the *Oratio pro instaurandis scholis*, as we have seen.[142] As Green has noticed, however, it would be difficult for Ausonius to linger over military virtues just after the defeat of Hadrianople.[143]

Despite this first occurrence of *humanitas* and the relevance of its implications, the reader who continues reading this oration will not come across this noun again until the final chapters; nor will they find numerous or significant occurrences of the adjective *humanus*. Other value concepts, such as *fortitudo*,

140 Lolli 2006, 717. Cf. also Gómez-Santamaría 2015, 662; B. Gibson 2018, 281: "Ausonius turns the expression of public thanks which it is customary for a consul to offer into a means for exploring his individual association with the emperor."

141 On Cicero in the *Gratiarum actio* cf. Green 1991, 538; Balbo 2015, 17–18; Balbo 2018, 174 and, above all, Balbo 2013. On this passage in particular cf. Balbo 2018, 177–178.

142 On further parallels between Ausonius' *Gratiarum actio* and Eumenius' *Panegyricus dictus Augustoduni* cf. Sivan 2004^2, 17. On Eumenius cf. above, pp. 205–214.

143 Green 1991, 538. Cf. also Jussen 2019, 268–269.

prouidentia, *bonitas* and *clementia* are mentioned, and *pietas* and *liberalitas* take the lead.[144]

This is not to deny, however, the general importance of *humanitas*, as is evident from its two close occurrences in a rhetorically pivotal point like the end of the speech.[145] Furthermore, these two instances reveal different nuances when compared to the first one.

In chapter 16 Ausonius is still praising Gratian's generosity (*liberalitas*), and in the final section makes a comparison between the present emperor and the Antonines:

> Antoninorum [comitas] fuit etiam in Germanicorum cohorte amicorum et legionibus familiaris humanitas, sed ego nolo beneuolentiam tuam aliorum collatione praecellere; abundant in te ea bonitatis et uirtutis exempla, quae sequi cupiat uentura posteritas et si rerum natura pateretur, adscribi sibi uoluisset antiquitas. (16.75)
>
> The intimate *humanitas* of the Antonines was also exhibited towards the Germans, in their suite of friends and in their legions. But I do not care to extol your benevolences by comparing others. You furnish a host of such instances of goodness and virtue as generations to come will long to imitate, and as ages past would have wished, did the nature of things allow, to have attributed to themselves. (trans. Evelyn-White 1921, adapted)

I have accepted here Green's text, despite not being completely convinced by the deletion of *comitas*.[146] Fortunately, the sense of *humanitas* does not seem to be much affected by the text one decides to print. For *humanitas* is regarded as *familiaris* and immediately afterwards is substituted by *beneuolentia*, one of the very words by which Gellius identified his contemporaries' misuse of *humanitas*. That this word is employed in its philanthropic meaning is rarely as clear as it is here. What is interesting are the categories towards which the Antonines are explicitly said to have shown their *humanitas*, that is, barbarians and soldiers, or, better, barbarian soldiers. To back up Ausonius' statement, Green refers to Fronto's *Ad M. Caes*. 4.1, in which "Fronto instructs Marcus how to treat his *cohors amicorum*", but at the same time remarks: "It is unlikely, however, that even Pius, in whose reign the Germans were relatively quiet, had Germans among his amici."[147] Regardless,

144 Cf. Grilli 1982, 147; Lolli 2006, 721–722; Raimondi 2008, 162–163; Castello 2010, 199; 204; Balbo 2018, 168–170; 179.

145 It must also be borne in mind that "l'elogio [scil. di Graziano] diventa però il tema centrale a partire dal paragrafo 61, in cui esso tocca anche le caratteristiche più comuni, quelle che emergono nella vita quotidiana, senza occuparsi solo di quelle di particolare rilievo." (Balbo 2018, 170).

146 For a synthesis of the textual issues concerning this passage cf. Green 1991, 552.

147 Green 1991, 552.

what counts is that Gratian is portrayed as not inferior to them in this respect; on the contrary, he too will be an example for future generations of governors.

The message becomes even stronger a few lines later, when the comparison is drawn between Gratian and Trajan, the emperor to whom Theodosius looked as the model *par excellence*. The connection with the previous paragraph is explicit because, after saying that he does not want to praise Gratian through comparison with other emperors (*aliorum collatione*), Ausonius seems to reverse his decision:

> Necesse est tamen aliquid comparari, ut possit intellegi, bona nostra quo praestent. Aegrotantes amicos Traianus uisere solebat: hactenus in eo comitas praedicanda est. Tu et uisere solitus et mederi praebes ministros, instruis cibos, fomenta dispensas, sumptum adicis medellarum, consolaris adfectos, reualescentibus gratularis. In quot uias de una eius humanitate progrederis! (17.76)

> Nevertheless, some comparison must be made in order to make clear the superiority of our blessings. Trajan was in the habit of visiting his friends when they were sick: so far we may grant that he had a considerate nature. Your practice is both to visit and to heal them: you provide them with attendants, you order their diet, you prescribe medicines, you furnish the cost of remedies, you comfort them in their pain, and you congratulate them on their recovery. See in how many ways you show advance beyond Trajan's single form of *humanitas*! (trans. Evelyn-White 1921)

Green has highlighted that this Trajanic habit of visiting his friends and soldiers is first praised in Pliny's *Panegyricus* 13, a passage where neither *comitas* nor *humanitas* are mentioned, but on the centrality of the latter throughout the entire Plinian eulogy of Trajan I have lingered at length earlier.[148] In claiming that Gratian's *humanitas* even surpassed Trajan's, Ausonius speaks of the latter's *una humanitas* compared to the multifaceted of Gratian. In context, Ausonius alludes to the fact that, in addition to visiting them, Gratian also heals sick friends, behaving like a doctor.[149] This must have been an exaggeration in any case, but if we broaden the horizons and look at Pliny's multifaceted understanding and presentation of Trajan's *humanitas* – much more polyphonic than Gratian's in the *Gratiarum actio* – it will become all the more clear that rhetoric far prevails over reality, as always with panegyrics.[150]

148 Green 1991, 552. Cf. also B. Gibson 2018, 275; Jussen 2019, 268. On *humanitas* in Pliny's *Panegyricus* cf. above, pp. 84–95.

149 Cf. Lolli 2006, 718; Raimondi 2008, 163.

150 Cf. Aug. C*onf.* 6.6.9: to compose panegyrics meant *recitare imperatori laudes, quibus plura mentirer et mentienti faueretur ab scientibus* ("to recite the praises of the emperor, in which I was to tell many lies, by which lies favor was to be gained from those who knew [the truth]", trans. Bourke 1953 – the reference to this passage is in Grilli 1982, 141).

Whether Theodosius I's accession to the throne was promoted by Ausonius and his faction, or, on the contrary, was opposed by them, requires the analysis of so many points that would lead us too far from the scope of this research.[151] Yet a fact which concerns both the *Gratiarum actio* and this research on *humanitas* might be relevant in this respect: this official speech, in which Ausonius is inevitably (also?) "portavoce della propaganda ufficiale del potere",[152] ends by focusing on the presence of the pairing *humanitas* – Trajan, two elements which are key to Theodosius' policy of renewal, as we have seen.[153] But how to interpret this? Is this but a coincidence or is Ausonius resorting to one of his rhetorical strategies, when not play on words, to allude to Theodosius and the beginning of his political propaganda without naming him? And, if the latter were the case, what would his aim be? To claim that Gratian's *humanitas* is superior to Theodosius' as it is superior to Trajan's, his *alter ego*? Or is Ausonius trying to warn his pupil Gratian against Theodosius? I am not sure a satisfying answer can be found at the current state of research. What seems to me to be clear, however, is that after Hadrianople and the difficult – in many respects – central part of the fourth century, as it emerges from Ammianus' narration,[154] times were mature for the comeback of *humanitas*.

8.4 Defending Roman Nobility: *Humanitas* and Networking in the Work of Symmachus

In the following epigraph, Matacotta alludes to one of the main reasons why it would be fitting to conclude a study on *humanitas* in pagan Latin literature with Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, namely his watershed role during the transition years between paganism and Christianity:

> But Symmachus' last years must have been troubled by a suffering that he endured as a cross to bear silently, and that never shines through his correspondence. If it is true that his son-in-law Nicomachus Flavianus Jr. had to convert to the Christian faith in order to obtain his political rehabilitation after joining the regime of the usurper Eugenius, then Symmachus must have been tormented until the day of his death by the thought that his descend-

151 Cf. Raimondi 2008, 156–158 and Castello 2010, 193–205, both with a clear state of research and rich bibliography on this issue.

152 Castello 2010, 190.

153 Cf. above, pp. 224–227. Despite not mentioning *humanitas*, Balbo 2018, 169 stresses that Ausonius' list of virtues in the *gratiarum actio* sets Gratian in the wake of Trajan and Hadrian.

154 Cf. above, pp. 227–260.

> ants would be educated in the new religion, and that his fight proved as futile as his life was useless.[155]

To be sure, the Italian scholar probably overstated the case when presenting Symmachus as a fundamentalist pagan who opposed Christianity, since the tone of the very many letters which he wrote to pagans rather indicates the opposite.[156] Yet our focus should be on Matacotta's emphasis on the idea that future generations would receive a Christian education. Despite showing respect for Christianity and despite having several Christian friends, Symmachus defended Roman traditional education and its value system.[157] This clearly emerges from his struggle with Ambrose over the Altar of Victory (384 CE), which is perhaps the most famous of the last pagan attempts to resist the imposition of Christianity, and explains why he is one of the protagonists of Cameron's *The Last Pagans of Rome*.[158] Furthermore, Symmachus very often employed the traditional Roman concept of *humanitas* in his writings, and only Cicero, among pagans, makes more use of the term.

In view of these premises, it is no surprise that Cicero and Pliny the Younger are the classical authors to whom Symmachus is usually compared. Yet modern scholars have not sufficiently explored the links between their conceptions of *humanitas* and that of Symmachus, and have limited themselves to pointing out stylistic affinities, commonality of genres as well as vague similarities of thought.[159]

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155 Matacotta 2010, 377.

156 Cf. Cristo 1974, 43–51; Sogno 2006, 50. Further bibliography in Klein 1971, 161 n. 1.

157 Cf. Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 37: "Il fut une personnalité complexe, dont l'obstination pour la Romanité traditionelle [. . .] est souvent touchante."

158 Cameron 2011. But cf. Brown 2012, 101: "Symmachus was what we now call a 'pagan.' He has even been acclaimed by modern scholars as one of the 'last pagans' of Rome. It might be more accurate to call him the 'first pagan.' He was the first member of the Roman nobility whom we can see adjusting to an unprecedented situation."

159 Already his contemporaries compared Symmachus to Cicero and/or Pliny, especially on the grounds of his oratorical skills: cf. Macr. *Sat.* 5.1.7; Prud. *C. Symm.* 1.633–634 with Klein 1971, 68; Matthews 1974, 66; Cracco Ruggini 1986, 102; Matacotta 2010, 376; Kelly 2013, 261–262. Moreover, also some modern scholars regard Cicero and Pliny as the epistolographic models of Symmachus: cf. Matacotta 2010, 247 and the relevant bibliography in Kelly 2013, 263 n. 4. By contrast, Kelly 2013, 263–269 spotlights the significant differences between Symmachus' and Pliny's letters, while admitting that there are more analogies between Symmachus' oeuvre and Pliny's *Panegyricus* (269–274). Other scholars stress Cicero's, Pliny's and Symmachus' common view of poetry: cf. Cracco Ruggini 1986, 114 and n. 54. On the similarities, not only of thought, between Symmachus and Cicero cf. Klein 1971, 59–60; 68; 103; 106; Cameron 2011, 357. On analogies and differences between Symmachus and Pliny cf. Cameron 2011, 360–361; 415, who concludes: "Tempting as it might seem to suppose that Symmachus saw himself as the Pliny of his age, the truth is that Pliny was more to the taste of Jerome and Ambrose" (416). Yet it is my contention that the present

Two exceptions are the studies by Klein and Marcone.[160] Klein devotes a short section to Symmachus' *Humanität* (67–76), but his study does not provide an in-depth discussion of the concept, and is founded on a limited number of occurrences of the word. Similarly, Marcone recognises the importance of *humanitas* in the Theodosian age and its recurrent use in Symmachus' writings, but, given the nature of his work – a commentary on Book 4 of the *Letters* – he cannot investigate its nuances in detail.[161] Accordingly, a coherent picture of Symmachus' own conceptualisation of the word *humanitas* remains a *desideratum*.

8.4.1 Symmachus' *Humanitas*

Symmachus uses the word *humanitas* 45 times in his writings, three times in the *Orationes*, five times in the *Relationes* and 37 times in the *Epistulae*. What is more, he uses this noun in an unprecedented – with the obvious exception of Cicero – variety of contexts.[162] This is not only due to Cicero's influence over his style and thought, but also to Symmachus' habit of using words that could take on a vast range of meanings (and, conversely, to his love for concepts which could be indicated by a variety of quasi-synonymous words).[163] As we see, the common denominator of all the occurrences of *humanitas* to be found in his work is the cultural and social background that each of these instances presupposes. This is not new, for we have already seen many times that *humanitas* often implies adherence to a set of norms or customs which are shared by a more or less large collectivity as opposed to those who are excluded from it. Just to recall a couple of examples discussed at length in the course of this research, in Apuleius' *De magia*, *humanitas* is used in a judicial context to create an elitist bond between the judge, his predecessor and the accused Apuleius, which sets them apart from the uncultivated inhabitants of Sabratha;[164] by contrast, we saw instances where Tacitus and Ammianus used *humanitas* to establish a distinction between Romans and Non-Romans, to paraphrase Veyne's famous article.[165] What is new in Symmachus, however, is that *humanitas* seems to encapsulate the code of conduct of

study on Symmachus' *humanitas* will reveal the profundity of the ideological relationship between Symmachus and Pliny.

160 Klein 1971 and Marcone 1987.

161 Marcone 1987, 26–28.

162 On Cicero's *humanitas* cf. above, pp. 52–62.

163 Cf. Matacotta 2010, 359; 373–374.

164 Cf. above, pp. 138–147.

165 Veyne 1993.

the senatorial order, without necessarily implying any outward-directed opposition. *Humanitas* is one of the means through which Symmachus aimed to remind his fellow senators of their social habits and duties, in the hope of preserving (or restoring) the features of a social class whose very survival was threatened by the continual changes to the socio-political structure of the Roman empire.[166] But at the same time, such a concept, which we have seen to be socially transversal by definition, was of no obstacle to the maintenance of good relationships with Roman common people.[167] As well as having other secondary aspects, in his view *humanitas* becomes therefore an incitement to write letters, to introduce and/or recommend people – two major means to keep social and political relationships alive;[168] it is linked to other crucial values like *pietas*, *caritas*, *religio* and *hospitalitas*, and of course to the παιδεία which all noble men ought to possess;[169] it has peculiar traits of concreteness, and can obviously be an imperial characteristic too. Probably this social, and consequently political, use of *humanitas* links Symmachus to Pliny the Younger and Cicero more than any other aspect.

I shall start by looking at the role which *humanitas* plays as a stimulus to exchange letters between friends. As will soon become clear, the boundary between this kind of letter, the so-called *salutatoria*, and letters of recommendation (*commendaticiae*), practically the only two categories of Symmachian letters, is sometimes blurred by *humanitas* itself, because this very concept encourages the

166 On the perilous status of the senate in Symmachus' days cf. Poglio 2007, xiii–xxxii; *passim*; Brown 2012, 98.

167 Cf. Matthews 1974, 72–73. This interpretation of the role of Symmachian *humanitas* seems to be compatible with the recent suggestion by Cavuoto-Denis 2023 that Symmachus' socio-political programme addresses the entire nobility. Cf. in particular Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 48–49: "Symmaque [. . .] s'adresse autant aux vieilles familles de l'Empire qu'à cette nouvelle élite (bureaucratique, étrangère, militaire), pour qui il n'a pas la même admiration, notamment intellectuelle. L'omniprésence de la classe sénatoriale sous toutes ses formes, incluant d'anciens sénateurs et de jeunes gens nouvellement cooptés au sein de l'Ordre, des femmes et des militaires ou encore de hauts fonctionnaires de l'Empire, n'est pas anodine et constitue, à notre avis, la réelle idéologie symmachéenne."

168 Cf. Sogno 2006, 88: "Letter writing is also a fundamentally political activity", and Roda 1986, 184–188; 201–202 who rightly observes that letters of recommendation end up benefitting not only the recommendee, but also the recommender. Cf. also Cracco Ruggini 1986, 109; Brown 2012, 97; 100–101.

169 Cf. Lizzi Testa 2022, 44: "[I]t is clear that the cultural wealth – beyond movable and immovable property – of some members of the late fourth-century senatorial aristocracy was still significant. It was an important component of the central political role the senatorial aristocracy played."

extension of friendships, whereby friends are recommended to other friends.[170] I will therefore investigate this bridging role of *humanitas* as well as those *commendaticiae* in which Symmachus leverages the *humanitas* argument to persuade his interlocutors to support his recommendees.[171] I will then move on to those instances where *humanitas* is regarded as an imperial virtue and, by extension, as a value which characterises an entire age, as emerges from the expressions *humanitas saeculi* / *temporum*. These occurrences are to be found not only in the *Epistulae*, but also in the *Relationes* and *Orationes*. After focusing on these functional roles of *humanitas*, in the second and shorter part of this sub-chapter I will change tack and investigate some more isolated cases which help us to define better Symmachus' extremely multifaceted conception of *humanitas*.

From as many as five letters *humanitas* explicitly emerges as the main value by virtue of which letters should be written to maintain friendships.[172] The short *Ep*. 7.98 is symptomatic, for it is entirely devoted to this issue:[173]

> Iamdudum desiderabam litteras tuas: nunc inmodica animi gratulatione suscepi. Debita igitur reuerentia et amore respondens adicio postulatum, ut in reliquum frequentare digneris munus optabile quod sponte tribuisti. Sed in hac postulatione non opus est conmorari. Neque enim petitio mea debet elicere quod tua promittit humanitas. Vale.
>
> I have long been awaiting a letter from you: now I have received it with immense joy. Thus with due reverence and obeying my love for you, I reply and add the following request, that in the future you will send me more frequently those desirable gifts that you have spontaneously accorded to me on this occasion. But there is no need to linger on this request. Indeed, my request does not need to ask for what your *humanitas* guarantees. Farewell.

In expressing his delight at receiving a letter from Longinianus, who probably occupied the prestigious post of *comes priuatarum largitionum* at that time, Symmachus takes the opportunity to urge his friend to send him more frequent letters in

170 On the topics as well as for a classification of Symmachus' letters cf. Matthews 1974, 61–63; Callu 2003, 24–25; Sogno 2006, 63. Matacotta 2010, 358 is emblematic: "L'argomento più trattato nelle lettere è costituito, appunto, dalle lettere". Cf. also Matthews 1974, 64, reiterated in Matthews 1975, 7: "[I]n the great majority of cases, the letters are nothing but the mere performance of *amicitia*, its pure administration." Also *honestas* and *dignitas* play a crucial role in Symmachus' letters of recommendation: cf. Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 52–53; 59 and *passim*.

171 As Roda 1986, 177 observes, the *commendatio* is the most recurrent element in Symmachus' letters. Cf. also Brugisser 1993, 273–330.

172 On writing letters as an *officium* in Symmachus (and not only) cf. Brugisser 1993, 4–16; Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 113–114.

173 Cf. Matthews 1975, 7: "Symmachus only rarely admits spontaneity to his letters, and he often conveys no information at all."

future.[174] In an unmistakably adulatory tone, he then closes the letter by adding that his exhortation is superfluous, because Longinianus' *humanitas* will undoubtedly make this happen.

The same applies to *Ep.* 2.88, which is addressed, like all the letters in Book 2, to Symmachus' dear friend and daughter's father-in-law Flavianus the Elder.[175] Compared to *Ep.* 7.98, the slight difference is that this letter has some content beyond the mere request of sending along more letters, that is, Symmachus congratulates Flavianus on a new prestigious appointment:[176]

> Et honore tui, quo nunc auctus es, et continuo in me amore delector. Volo igitur ut communia pignora curae mihi esse non dubites, quae magis merita tua quam scripta commendant. Supererat, ut adsiduum stili tui munus exposcerem; sed redundantis est operae bona spontanea postulare, ne meus stilus extorquere uideatur quod tui animi spondet humanitas. Vale.
>
> I take pleasure both from the appointment that has now raised you and the love you keep showing towards myself. I therefore want you not to doubt that I take care of our protégé, whom your merits recommend more than your letters. But there was just one thing left to me to do, that is, to ask for frequent gifts from your stylus. Although it is superfluous to ask for goods that are voluntary and I do not want that my stylus seems to extort what your heart's *humanitas* promises. Farewell.

The logic of *Epp*. 7.98 and 2.88 is inverted in *Ep*. 3.65, which does not express a hope for the future, but already acknowledges the merits of Ricomeres, apparently a good friend of Symmachus' and one who held several prestigious military posts.[177] His *humanitas* has always prompted him to write to Symmachus, who in turns feels obliged to pay back *humanitas* in the same way:

> Scio praestantem animum tuum salutis meae et reuersionis indicia cupide, ut amicitia postulat, opperiri, et ideo expectationi tuae reuectus in patriam satisfeci, meque agere ex sententia atque esse memorem tuae circa nos humanitatis insinuo; simulque deprecor ut adfectionem quam mihi et praesenti dependere et absenti dignatus es polliceri, litterarum munere, quotiens usus tulerit, non graueris augere. Vale.
>
> I know that your outstanding feelings fervently desire news, as friendship requires, on my health as well as on my return. That's because, once back to my homeland, I decided to satisfy your impatience: I inform you that it is going satisfactorily and that I remember well

174 On Longinianus' career cf. *PLRE II* 686–687.
175 On Flavianus the Elder, his political role as well as on his relationship with Symmachus cf. Matacotta 2010, 226–240; Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 83–89. Cf. also below, pp. 285; 287; 292–293.
176 The date of this letter as well as the nature of the appointment it mentions are uncertain: for more details and bibliography cf. Cecconi 2002, 424–425.
177 Cf. *PLRE I* 765–766.

> your *humanitas* towards myself. And at the same time I beg that it will not be too much of a trouble for you to increase the number of the epistolary gifts whenever possible: these have revealed the affection you feel for me when I am present and promise to me when I am absent. Farewell.

Along the same lines Symmachus writes to a certain Eusebius (probably):[178]

> Conpertum habeo quolibet honorum culmine animum tuum non solere mutari — quidquid enim bene meritis honestatis accedit, id solutum magis uidetur esse quam praestitum —, et ideo mirari me ac stupere confiteor cur tanta uirtute atque humanitate praeditus iampridem circa me munere litterarum [causis occupationis] abstineas. Quod ego etsi occupatione magis quam uoluntate arbitrer accidisse, tamen orare non desino ut censuram tuam nostri memorem frequens sermo declaret. Vale. (*Ep.* 8.1)

> It is clear to me that your feelings do not usually depend on the rank of the public office you hold – indeed, any honourable action that has increased your merits seems to be a reward rather than a loan. Accordingly, I must admit that I am surprised and startled that, given such a great virtue and *humanitas* of yours, you have not been sending your epistolary gifts to me for long time. And although I think this is due to your being busy rather than to your willingness, I nonetheless keep begging that a frequent correspondence proves that your office is mindful of myself. Farewell.

Compared with the previous *Epp.* 7.98, 2.88 and 3.65, *Ep.* 8.1 looks like the other side of the same coin: despite possessing *humanitas* – and also *uirtus*! – Eusebius seems to ignore it, abstaining from sending letters to Symmachus, to the latter's surprise (*et ideo mirari me ac stupere confiteor*). Like Longinianus, Eusebius does not avoid Symmachus' exhortation to write more often, although he seems to be excused on account of his noble but time-consuming duties (*honorum culmine . . . occupatione magis quam uoluntate*).

The identity of Eusebius is unclear, although he was probably someone of a high social class. It is interesting to note, however, that in other instances the association of *uirtus* with *humanitas* is made to refer to cultural and military values respectively, *uirtus* preserving its original function of indicating the quality *par excellence* of the good soldier or general. This is certainly the case of Eumenius' *Oratio pro instaurandis scholis* we investigated earlier on,[179] and in Symmachus we find another passage where the pairing of *uirtus* and *humanitas* concerns a

178 The name of the addressee of this letter is not in the manuscripts. Seeck 1883, CXCI dates the letter to 396 and, following in his footsteps, Callu 2003, 113 n.1 integrates <*Eusebio?*>, identifying him with the *uir inlustris iudex praetorianus* of *Ep.* 6.12.2, possibly the same Eusebius who received *Ep.* 9.55 (cf. *PLRE I* 306–307 – Eusebius 32). Cf. also Ruta 2023, 29–30.

179 Cf. above, pp. 205–214.

famous general.[180] Accordingly, one might speculate that Eusebius too was renowned for his military prowess, even if we do not have sufficient evidence to prove this. After all, the same expression *uirtute et / atque humanitate* is also attested with a broader meaning since Caesar's and Cicero's day: it condenses the qualities of a well-educated, honest and noble man, who knows the social norms which regulate the world in which he lives.[181] Either way, there is little doubt that this occurrence of *humanitas* brings into play cultural aspects which transcend the mere sense of benevolence and rather evoke the idea of παιδεία-based *humanitas*. Further instances of *humanitas* with this meaning will be investigated in the second part of this chapter, but the next example might well fall into the same category.[182]

In another similar context, Symmachus uses *humanitas* to excuse his close friend and excellent poet Ausonius at *Ep.* 1.18, especially if Callu is right in linking this letter with Ausonius' role of Praetorian prefect, either of Gaul (377 CE) or of Gaul, Italy and Africa (378–379 CE):[183]

> Ego etsi continuis litteris honorem tuum celebrare possem, non satis mihi uiderer, proquam res postulat, fungi debitum meum: tantum abest ut operam tibi adsiduitatis exprobrem. Sed ut hoc meae uerecundiae conpetit, item tuae humanitatis est studium nostrum pari gratia sustinere. Animaduerte quo tendat summa uerborum meorum: iamdudum nihil tribuis quod legamus. Totum me, inquies, emancipauit sibi cura praetorii. Verum est: potiris merito summa iudicia, sed maximas ingenii tui uires fortuna magna non onerat. Proinde etiam his rebus adtende, quae ita occupatis nihil molestiae adferunt, ut ipsas molestias plerumque solentur. Vale.
>
> Even if I were able to celebrate the honor of your appointment by a succession of letters, I would not be satisfied that I was sufficiently fulfilling my obligation as the occasion demands; so far am I from reproaching you for your diligent efforts in your new office. But, as such a course befits my sense of propriety, so it is due to your *humanitas* to support my devotion with equal goodwill. Notice where the gist of my words is leading; for some time now you have given me nothing to read. You will say, "The concerns of the praetorian prefecture have claimed me entirely for themselves." It is true; you deservedly have the right to make judgments about most important matters. But great good fortune does not weigh heavily on the very great resources of your talent. Be attentive, then, to these matters, which are no trouble for busy people but often in fact provide solace from troubles. Farewell. (trans. Salzman/Roberts 2011)

180 On the second Symmachian occurrence of the expression *uirtute et humanitate* cf. below, pp. 307–308.

181 Cf. *e.g.* Caes. *BGall.* 1.47.4; Cic. *Planc.* 58; *Lig.* 12; *De or.* 3.1; *Fam.* 14.1.

182 Cf. below, pp. 306–308.

183 Callu 2003, 83 n. 1. On this letter and its dating cf. also Salzman 2011, 53–54.

Given the identity of the recipient, Symmachus might well be referring here not to letters, but to literary works: the practice of sending recently composed literary pieces to good friends for them to read and comment upon was well-established by that time.[184] This would explain why Symmachus is referring to Ausonius' *maximas ingenii tui uires*, an expression that would be strange if it only referred to letter writing. In this case, *humanitas* would no longer refer to a vague feeling of benevolence, but to the love of literature Symmachus and Ausonius shared. After all, in the wake of his models, which included Cicero and Pliny the Younger, at times Symmachus too seems to attribute educational, literary and cultural nuances to *humanitas*, as we will see in greater detail below, and the same is certainly true of Ausonius, as we have already noticed.[185]

If we return to *humanitas* as a stimulus to exchange letters, we must acknowledge that in this respect Symmachus cannot be accused of inconsistency. Judging from what he says in the short *Ep.* 7.84, he practises what he preaches: *Primam mihi scribendi causam religio fecit, ut amicitia nostra litteris excolatur; secundam suggessit humanitas, ut uiro optimo Thalasso familiari meo tua concilietur adfectio.* ("The first stimulus to writing came from a religious feeling, which induced me to cultivate our friendship by means of letters. *Humanitas* came second, to suggest that your affection for myself may be extended to the excellent Thalassus, a friend of mine"). The addressee is yet again an important statesman, Messalla Avienus, Praetorian prefect of Italy and Africa in 399–400 and one of the protagonists of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, to whom Symmachus sent a few letters (now in Book 7).[186] However, this time Symmachus regards *religio* as the first impulse (*primam . . . causam*) which induces him to exchange letters with Messalla; *humanitas* comes second (*secundam*). It is interesting that here Symmachus clearly distinguishes the different aims of *religio* and *humanitas*: thanks to the former, he is led to cultivate his friendship with Messalla, whereas the latter invites him to extend the friendship to a third person. This clearly suggests that *humanitas* has also to do with recommendation, but I shall look at this aspect in greater detail later. For the moment, let me dwell a little longer on the relationship between *religio* and *humanitas*, an association / opposition which we have not yet encountered.

As Roda rightly observes, *religio* is one of Symmachus' most employed words to indicate the mutual duties of friendship, especially with regard to the exchange of letters.[187] Yet its meaning probably merits closer inspection given the problematic and discussed etymology of *religio*, and that Symmachus himself also used

184 Cf. the example of Pliny's letters: above, pp. 101–105.
185 Cf. below, pp. 306–308 and above, pp. 269–273.
186 Cf. *PLRE II* 760–761 – Messalla Avienus 3 and Callu 2003, 164.
187 Roda 1981, 199.

this word with other meanings.[188] In *De natura deorum* 2.71–72, Cicero makes a clear distinction between *religio* and *superstitio*: *superstitiosi* are those who spend their days praying and making sacrifices in order for their sons to outlive them, while *religiosi* refer to those who diligently reconsider and re-read (Latin *re-lego*), as it were, everything related to the cult of the gods.[189] It follows that *superstitio* is negative while *religio* is positively connoted, and – more importantly for the purpose of the present study – that Cicero connects *religio* to the verb *relego*. This is quite different from what we see in Lactantius and Servius, who, in the tradition of Lucretius, make *religio* derive from *religo* (to bind fast), as though religion were literally that which binds people to god(s).[190] In the case of *Ep*. 7.84, both the idea of creating a bond and the notion of continuing to re-read or revise (a relationship) are present in Symmachus, although *religio* is probably used in a broader, less technical context. To be sure, what *religio* confers to friendship is an aura of sacredness, which Symmachus could already find in Cicero's *De inuentione* 2.168:

> Amicitiarum autem ratio, quoniam partim sunt religionibus iunctae, partim non sunt, et quia partim ueteres sunt, partim nouae, partim ab illorum, partim ab nostro beneficio profectae, partim utiliores, partim minus utiles, ex causarum dignitatibus, ex temporum opportunitatibus, ex officiis, ex religionibus, ex uetustatibus habebitur.
>
> In as much as some friendships are related to religious scruples, and some not, and some are old and some new, some arise from a kindness done to us by others, and some from our

188 Cf. Ernout/Meillet 2001[4], s.v. *religio*; Gothóni 1994, both with further bibliography. Gothóni endorses Cicero's etymology. On the meanings which *religio* takes on in Symmachus' oeuvre cf. Matacotta 2010, 374.

189 *Non enim philosophi solum uerum etiam maiores nostri superstitionem a religione separauerunt. Nam qui totos dies precabantur et immolabant, ut sibi sui liberi superstites essent, superstitiosi sunt appellati, quod nomen patuit postea latius; qui autem omnia quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent diligenter retractarent et tamquam relegerent, <hi> sunt dicti religiosi ex relegendo, elegantes ex eligendo, ex diligendo diligentes, ex intellegendo intellegentes; his enim in uerbis omnibus inest uis legendi eadem quae in religioso. Ita factum est in superstitioso et religioso alterum uitii nomen alterum laudis* ("For religion has been distinguished from superstition not only by philosophers but by our ancestors. Persons who spent whole days in prayer and sacrifice to ensure that their children should outlive them were termed 'superstitious' (from *superstes*, a survivor), and the word later acquired a wider application. Those on the other hand who carefully reviewed and so to speak retraced all the lore of ritual were called 'religious' from *relegere* (to retrace or re-read), like 'elegant' from *eligere* (to select), 'diligent' from *diligere* (to care for), 'intelligent' from *intellegere* (to understand); for all these words contain the same sense of 'picking out' (*legere*) that is present in 'religious'. Hence 'superstitious' and' 'religious' came to be terms of censure and approval respectively", trans. Rackham 1967).

190 Cf. Lact. *Diu. Inst.* 4.28.2; Serv. *Aen.* 8.349; Lucr. 1.931.

> own services to them, an examination of their nature will involve a consideration of the value of causes, the suitableness of times and occasion, moral obligation, religious duties, and length of time. (trans. Hubbell 1949)

Cicero does not expand on this topic – that is not the aim of a rhetorical treatise like *De inuentione* after all – but this passage is sufficient for us to verify that he considered that there was a tight connection between *amicitia* and *religio*. This idea is backed up by Quintilian, who, in stating that the perfect orator should not be afraid of other people and therefore needs to be accustomed to social life right from his birth, speaks of lifelong friendships in terms of *religiosa quadam necessitudine inbutae* ('imbued with a certain religious bond').[191]

But what about *humanitas*? In his commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* 1.8.7, the fifth-century author Macrobius writes: *de iustitia ueniunt innocentia, amicitia, concordia, pietas, religio, affectus, humanitas* ("From justice derive innocence, friendship, concord, *pietas*, *religio*, affection, *humanitas*"). He thus unites several concepts, including *religio*, *amicitia* and *humanitas*, and claims that they all derive from justice (*de iustitia ueniunt*), surely meaning to say that justice is a general precondition for all these value concepts to exist, and not that it is a sort of hyperonym, let alone a more important value within a ranking. Yet Macrobius was not the first to link *humanitas* and *religio*. If we recall the texts dealing with the 'Athenian' origin of *humanitas*, we will perhaps also remember that *humanitas* was seen as only one of a series of discoveries that the Romans imported from the Greeks. Another one was *religio*.[192]

Given the emphasis on *humanitas* as a stimulus to write letters in Symmachus' thought and in the light of the above reasoning on *religio*, let me now return to Symmachus' *Ep.* 7.84. The concomitant use of *religio* and *humanitas* has an adulatory purpose: because of its sacred implications which adorn Symmachus' friendship with Messalla, *religio* is superior to *humanitas*. While *religio* confers a sort of divine status to a human relationship, as is the case with *amicitia*, *humanitas* stops at the very human level of recommendations. But the opposition is clearly specious, for neither is there evidence of any ontological superiority of *religio* over *humanitas*, nor does Symmachus regard *humanitas* as an insufficient reason for cultivating friendships.

An analogous case within an analogous context is provided by the opposition between *humanitas* and *caritas*. The close of *Ep.* 9.90, one of the very many letters of Book 9 whose addressee is unknown, reads:

191 Quint. *Inst.* 1.2.20.

192 Cf. Cic. *Flac.* 62; Plin. *Ep.* 8.24.2 (above, pp. 35–37).

> Non inuideo poscentibus testimonia uel suffragia tua, sed ualidior est amicitiae causa quam gratiae. Precarias epistulas postpone legitimis. His frequentius caritas studeat, illas nonnumquam praestet humanitas. Vale.
>
> I do not envy those who ask for your testimony or approbation, but friendship is stronger a reason than favour. Letters obtained by prayer must come after the genuine ones. May affection encourage to write genuine letters more often! May *humanitas* guarantee letters obtained by prayer from time to time. Farewell.

Caritas should lead one to write letters to friends more often, whereas *humanitas* yet again lies at a lower level, that of letters of recommendation. It is worth noting the appropriateness of linking *caritas* to friendship in this situation. Compare Cicero, *Partitiones Oratoriae* 88:

> *Amicitiae autem caritate et amore cernuntur; nam cum deorum tum parentum patriaeque cultus eorumque hominum qui aut sapientia aut opibus excellunt ad caritatem referri solet, coniuges autem et liberi et fratres et alii quos usus familiaritasque coniunxit, quamquam etiam caritate ipsa, tamen amore maxime continentur.*
>
> Friendships are manifested by esteem and by affection. Respect for the gods and for parents and country and for those persons who are eminent for wisdom or for wealth is customarily classed under esteem, whereas wives and children and brothers and other persons attached to us by association and familiarity are bound to us partly it is true by actual esteem but chiefly by affection. (trans. Rackham 1960)

As Hellegouarc'h glosses: "Il semble donc que la juxtaposition de *amor* et *caritas* ait pour but de distinguer deux sortes d'affections: l'affection naturelle que l'on éprouve pour des parents ou des amis intimes pour laquelle *amor* constitue le terme adéquat et celle qui s'applique à des êtres qui sont plus éloignés de nous au point de vue des relations naturelles."[193] Accordingly, when one is only a friend and not a relative, as seems to be the case with the addressee of this Symmachian letter, *caritas* is more appropriate than *amor* to define the feeling upon which this relation of friendship is based.

Yet *Ep.* 4.48 and 2.43 testify both to the inadequacy of the opposition between *humanitas* and *religio* / *caritas* and to the flexibility of Symmachus' use of concepts of value. Symmachus wrote *Ep.* 4.48 to Minervius, the *comes sacrarum largitionum* for the West in 398/399, after 398 CE.[194] Its purpose is to support Bassus' petition in favour of his sister, who reclaims a fleeing slave. The opening reads: *Litteras nonnullis humanitate praestamus: has autem domino et fratri meo Basso qui sororis fortunas tuetur, iusto amore detulimus* ("To some people we grant a letter induced by

193 Hellegouarc'h 1963, 148.

194 On Minervius cf. *PLRE I* 603 (Minervius 2).

our *humanitas*, but legitimate love made me accord this letter to Bassus, my brother and a gentleman, who defends his sister's wealth"). On this occasion Symmachus opposes *iustus amor* instead of the 'expected' *caritas* to *humanitas*, but, despite according greater value to the former, regards the latter as a sufficient reason to write letters of recommendation. After all, this is utterly unsurprising in the light of what he says when recommending Flavius Sexio to Flavianus the Elder at *Ep.* 2.43:[195] *Est humanitatis et consuetudinis tuae aliis quoque placitos amore dignari* ("It is part of the *humanitas* habitual to your nature, to honour with your affection those whom others have found congenial", trans. Matthews 1974). Not only does the opposition between *humanitas* and *amor* vanish, but Flavianus' usual *humanitas* – *humanitatis et consuetudinis* is to be taken as an hendiadys – even becomes the premise for his *amor* towards Sexio. On the one hand, this is a symptom of the ductility of both *humanitas* and *amor*, but the presence of *amor* instead of a weaker concept like, for example, *caritas*, probably strengthens Symmachus' request by suggesting that a very close friendship should grow between the two. If, in the wake of Vera, Cecconi is right in supposing that Symmachus' aim is to support Sexio's admission to the senate and, consequently, to expand his control over the senatorial order, then he would have good reasons to resort to such loaded words in this letter.[196]

The 'bridging' role of *humanitas* we have noticed in the last four Symmachian occurrences of this term is summed up and formulated as a sort of moral law by Symmachus himself in *Ep.* 4.73, sent between 386–387 CE to the then Praetorian prefect of Italy and Illyricum Eusignius:[197]

> Facio quod suadet humanitas, ut amicitiae tuae uiros bonae frugis adiungam. Horum unus est Felix honorabilis gradu atque exercitatione militiae, cui si quid amoris inpenderis, ad meam gratiam pertinebit. Vale. (*Ep.* 4.73)
>
> I do what *humanitas* persuades me to do: I add honest men to your friends. One of them is Felix, honourable for his rank and his service in the army. I will be grateful if you devote some affection to him.

An important caveat needs to be made here: friendships must only be extended to other virtuous men (*bonae frugis*).

195 More on Sexio and on the political function of this letter in Cecconi 2002, 291–295. On Sexio cf. also *PLRE I* 838.

196 Vera 1979, 402–403; Cecconi 2002, 294–295.

197 On the date of this letter and on Eusignius cf. Marcone 1987, 105 and *PLRE I* 309–310 respectively.

In all the five last letters (7.84, 9.90, 4.48, 2.43 and 4.73), we should notice the indirect effect of *humanitas*: it persuades Symmachus to write to a friend, but on behalf or in favour of a third person who is dear to him. More broadly, in the light of what we have seen so far about Symmachus' *humanitas*, we can say that it operates at two levels: at a higher one, as a means to preserve friendship between two people (*Epp.* 1.18, 7.98, and 8.1); at a lower one, as an opportunity – with evident utilitarian purposes – to extend to a third party the existing friendship between sender and addressee (*Epp.* 7.84, 9.90, 4.48, 2.43 and 4.73).[198]

This last argument prompts us to turn our attention to the use of *humanitas* within Symmachus' many letters of recommendation. Before doing so, I want to discuss briefly one last case in which *humanitas* has to do with the exchange of letters between friends. This instance is of particular interest because it might seem to invert, perhaps even contradict, the trend I have sketched so far. The beginning of *Ep.* 5.13, which is addressed to Theodorus, reads:[199]

> Iampridem nihil scribis. Aequum esset huic culpae talionem reponi: sed ego arbitror imitanda non esse quae doleas, et animo persuadeo alias potius interuenisse causas officii differendi quam residem uoluntatem. Quamquam uereor ne factum tuum haec ipsa grauet humanitas. Nam qui mihi pro te satisfacio, ostendo nihil me tale meruisse.
>
> You have not written to me for a long time. Given such a fault, it would be right to resort to a retaliation, but I believe that hurtful actions are not to be imitated. Also, I convince myself that other reasons than your idle willingness intervened to cause the delay of your duty. Nevertheless I fear that this same *humanitas* might aggravate the situation. Indeed, in excusing yourself in your place, I reveal that I did not merit it.

Interestingly, the same value which Symmachus regards several times as a major stimulus to write letters to friends can now excuse those who do not do so. But far from being a contradiction or a sign of inconsistency, this is simply a further clue to understanding the versatility of *humanitas*. Indeed, *humanitas* is here conceived as the virtue which urges one to try to understand a friend's problems, without judging them negatively. In other words, from whatever point of view it is considered, *humanitas* remains for Symmachus fundamental within a relation of friendship.

Whereas so far *humanitas* has worked as an incitement to write letters, in the case of letters of recommendation it can also play a more central role. This mainly happens through the shift of the possessor of *humanitas*, from the sender to the addressee – notice that Symmachus speaks very often of *humanitas tua* on

198 On these two levels cf. also Roda 1986, 184.

199 On Theodorus cf. *PLRE I* 901–902 (Flauius Mallius Theodorus 27); Rivolta Tiberga 1992, 93–96.

these occasions. Instead of being the value which encourages the recommender to present his recommendee's case, it becomes the element that should persuade the recommender's friend to take the recommendee's case to heart and support it. Symmachus enunciates this principle in clear terms at the opening of *Ep.* 2.70, addressed to Flavianus the Elder (*Humanitatis interest commendationem deferre poscentibus*, "It is typical of *humanitas* to accord a recommendation to those who ask for it"), as well as at the beginning of *Ep.* 7.56, probably addressed to Hadrian (*Tua nos hortatur humanitas opem poscentibus non negare*, "Your *humanitas* urges us not to deny help to those who ask for it").[200] As one would expect, an immediate consequence is an implicit increase in the level of adulation. Two letters from Book 7 and four letters from Book 5 illustrate this.

Ep. 7.34 to Symmachus' relative Atticus Maximus plays a sort of 'bridging role' with the previous category of letters which extend friendships.[201] The logic is simply inverted, for friendship – if it can be defined as such – is extended only once a recommendee's request has been satisfied:

> Salutationis honorificentiam praelocutus Gaetulici agentis in rebus exequor postulatum, qui a te iustum fauorem per me optat adipisci. Humanitatis tuae est amplecti probabilem uoluntatem numerumque eorum qui te iure suspiciunt adiectione noui cultoris augere. Vale. (*Ep.* 7.34)
>
> After paying the homage of the salutation, I support the request of the *agens in rebus* Getulicus, who desires to get a deserved favour from you thanks to my intercession. It is typical of your *humanitas* to embrace commendable desires as well as to increase the number of those who rightly venerate you through the addition of a new worshipper.

The short *Ep.* 5.31 is addressed to Magnillus, who throughout his career held the prestigious posts of Governor of Liguria and *Vicarius Africae*.[202] Without providing much detail, it generally recommends an unnamed woman who was on good terms with the apparently esteemed philosopher Asclepiades:[203]

> Propinquam sancti Asclepiadis philosophi absque litteris meis abire par non fuit: nam illius merita poposcerunt ut ad curaturam praeclari uiri pertinens tuo patrocinio traderetur. Pro quo non arbitror ambitu longae orationis utendum, cum eam humanitati tuae contemplatio parentis sine cuiusquam petitione commendet. Vale
>
> It would have been unfit to let a relative of the venerable philosopher Asclepiades go away without a letter of mine. In fact, her merits required that you accord your protection to

200 On Flavianus the Elder cf. above, pp. 278 and 285; on Hadrian cf. below, p. 294.
201 On Atticus cf. *PLRE I* 586–587 (Nonius Atticus Maximus 34).
202 Cf. *PLRE I* 533.
203 On Asclepiades cf. *PLRE I* 114 (Asclepiades 4).

> someone who is object of care of such an illustrious man. To this end, I do not think that I need to resort to the circumlocutions of a long speech, since the contemplation of her relative recommends her to your *humanitas* without the need of anyone's request. Farewell.

In another letter, Symmachus pairs *humanitas* with *patrocinium*. Here he recommends the *agens in rebus* Julian to Patruinus, an influential figure of the Palatine administration in the last years of the fourth century thanks to his familiarity with Stilicho:[204] *Iuliani agentis in rebus modestiam noui, natales probo, doleo fortunam; fatalibus enim malis diu et grauiter exhaustus est. Sed credo cum eo omnia in gratiam esse reditura, si tuo patrocinio et humanitate foueatur.* (*Ep.* 7.107: "I know the *agens in rebus* Julian's temperateness, I approve of his origins, I am sorry about his condition: he has long been tormented by deadly misfortunes. But I believe everything will get better again if your protection and *humanitas* support him"). Although the lack of context does not allow us to understand fully the meaning of *patrocinium*, we can see here as in the previous *Ep.* 5.31 that the term means protection in general, without implying the technical references to legal defence that it often took on. Symmachus' other occurrences of this word confirm this.[205]

At a slightly higher level of detail, *Ep.* 5.60, probably written between 396 and 398 CE, informs us that Symmachus is recommending a certain Turasius, apparently victim of an unjust verdict, to the *humanitas* of Florus Paternus, the then *comes sacrarum largitionum* for the West.[206] The close of the letter reads: *Tuere igitur aequa poscentem et humanitatis tuae latius extende famam quae incrementis maximis cumulabitur, si Turasio per te secunda successerint. Vale* ("So defend one who asks for just things, and extend further the reputation of your *humanitas*. This will increase up to the maximum if thanks to you Turasius gets good results. Farewell"). It is worth highlighting here the close relationship Symmachus establishes between *humanitas* and *aequitas*: Paternus' fame for *humanitas* will increase because, by supporting someone who is making a fair request (*aequa poscentem*), he is on the right side of the controversy.[207] Interestingly, this is a variation upon the theme of the relationship between *humanitas* and *iustitia*

204 Cf. Callu 2003, 184.

205 Cf. *Ep.* 2.63; 2.70; 2.74; 2.76.1; 3.37; 4.38.1; 5.41; 7.42; 9.35; 9.57; *Rel.* 3.3; 28.4. By contrast, when Symmachus wants to specify that *patrocinium* concerns the judicial sphere, either the context is explicit (*Rel.* 19.7; 30.2) or he pairs *patrocinium* with terms like *iustitia* (*Ep.* 2.91.1; 4.28.1).

206 Cf. *PLRE I* 671–672 (Paternus 6).

207 Cf. Mantovani 2017, 22: "In tutte le sue applicazioni, dunque, *aequus* è accompagnato da un carico semantico legato dall'idea di uguaglianza, di corrispondenza, di proporzione, di equilibrio."

which we have already discussed when looking into Pliny's *humanitas*.[208] To recall it briefly: at *Ep.* 9.5.1 Pliny praises Calestrius Tiro for reconciling *humanitas* and *iustitia* during his administration of Baetica. Likewise, we noticed there that Cicero regarded *humanitas* and *iustitia* as two of the main virtues which best fit the head judge during a trial.[209] A similar case is illustrated by Ulpian, who claimed that *aequitatem* [. . .] *ante oculos habere debet iudex* ("The judge must have equity before his eyes").[210] Symmachus is once again setting himself in the tradition of his two greater 'models'. This is especially true of Cicero, one of the very few authors to link *humanitas* with *aequitas*, as does Symmachus, and not only with *iustitia*. Among the instances of this pairing, at *Verr*. 2.2.86 *humanitas* and *aequitas* characterise the personality of Scipio Aemilianus when dealing with the restoration of Himera's independence.[211] Or, if we look for a judicial context, at *Flac.* 78 Cicero uses a letter by his brother Quintus as evidence in the trial, and, in order to corroborate the content of this letter, he speaks of *litteras plenissimas humanitatis et aequitatis* ("a letter utterly full of *humanitas* and *aequitas*").[212]

The fifth instance is represented by *Ep.* 5.41, which is the longest of the three and is addressed to the higher-ranked figure, Flavius Neoterius, who was Praetorian prefect of the East in 380–381, Praetorian prefect of Italy in 385, and Praetorian prefect of Gaul in 390, before holding the consulship in 390 CE.[213] The letter, comparatively detailed and probably dated to 382,[214] recounts the vicissitudes of

208 On *aequitas* cf. the up-to-date, well-documented and clear overview by Mantovani 2017. Further bibliography, especially on its use in legal studies, in Mantovani 2017, 19 n. 7. On the relationship between *aequitas* and *iustitia* cf. Vogt-Spira 2014 and again Mantovani 2017, 51–53, whose caveat on pp. 38–39 deserves to be quoted: "Il nesso fra *iustitia* (come equivalente della greca δικαιοσύνη) e *aequitas* resta peraltro problematico, nel senso che a volte i due termini sembrano usati sinonimicamente o come un'endiadi, altre volte le nozioni vengono considerate affini, ma distinte."

209 Cf. above, pp. 97–98. More on the relation between *humanitas, iustitia*, judges and tribunals in Symmachus below, pp. 312–313.

210 *Dig.* 13.4.4.1.

211 According to Cicero's narration, Scipio Aemilianus thought that, in order to preserve Rome's glory, the then Carthaginian Himera should be given back to the Sicilians after Carthage's defeat.

212 On the pairing of *humanitas* and *aequitas* cf. also *Off.* 2.19; Caes. *BCiu.* 3.20.2, and, above all, Vitruvius' *De architectura* 9 *praef.* 2: *e quibus* [scil. *philosophis*] *qui a teneris aetatibus doctrinarum abundantia satiantur, optimos habent sapientiae sensus, instituunt ciuitatibus humanitatis mores, aequa iura, leges, quibus absentibus nulla potest esse ciuitas incolumis* ("And those who from an early age enjoy an abundance of learning develop the best judgment, and in their cities they have established civilized customs, equal justice, and those laws without which no community can exist safely", trans. Rowland 1999).

213 *PLRE I* 623.

214 Cf. Callu 2003, 180 n. 2.

the advocate Epictetus, who was disbarred by the then consularis of Syria Carterius for slandering his opponent Sabinus.[215] In order to obtain Epictetus' reinstatement, Symmachus resorted to a twofold strategy. As well as writing to Carterius directly (*Ep*. 9.31), he also wrote to the more influential Neoterius, asking him to uphold Epictetus' case. To make his case stronger, Symmachus invokes *humanitas* to not only excuse him on the grounds of his excessive passion and sympathy with the defendant, but also to show that Epictetus was dear to a great deal of clients, who now needed and missed him:

> Nunc illa clientium turba unius fortuito insultat errori; quod ne diu maneat, tua praestabit humanitas. Satis datum est correctioni, nunc ingenium tuum respice. Illud causa meruerit, hoc tribue lenitati. Scio inlustrem uirum praefectum praetorio his quoque litteris tuis prompte esse cessurum. (*Ep*. 5.41.2)

> A crowd of clients is insulting the fortuitous mistake of one man alone, but your *humanitas* will ensure that this will not last for long. Punishment has been given ample room; now consider your attitude: the occasion required the former, but now accord mildness to your disposition. I am sure that the Praetorian prefect, that illustrious man, will be ready to surrender to this letter if it also on your behalf.

Despite the obvious affinity between *humanitas* and *lenitas* ('mildness', 'clemency'), here we find the unusual pairing of these two values. *Lenitas* can be regarded as a value which is quite close to *clementia*, which we have seen to be in turn linked to *humanitas*.[216] Cicero also paired the two in a letter to Memmius, stating that *lenitas* can originate from *humanitas*:

> Quod si ita est et si iam tua plane nihil interest, uelim, si qua offensiuncula facta est animi tui peruersitate aliquorum (noui enim gentem illam), des te ad lenitatem uel propter summam <tuam> humanitatem uel etiam honoris mei causa. (*Fam*. 13.1.4)

> If that is so, and it is now of absolutely no importance to you, I should like you, if your feelings have been ever so slightly hurt by the wrong-headedness of certain persons (I know that coterie), to allow yourself to incline towards leniency, whether because of your own exceptional *humanitas*, or even as a compliment to myself. (trans. Glynn Williams 1965)

In Symmachus' *Ep*. 5.41.2 going from *humanitas* to *lenitas* is not as straightforward as in Cicero, but in the end the relationship between the two holds tight. The impression is that, as in the case of *clementia*, *lenitas* is more specific than

215 We are informed of the role of Carterius thanks to another letter on the same issue which Symmachus sent to Carterius himself (*Ep*. 9.31).

216 Hellegouarc'h 1963 does not devote an independent section to *lenitas*, but only mentions it twice (261 and 263 n. 10) when discussing *clementia*.

humanitas, for it is restricted to the category of the subordinates. To put it differently and state again one of the fundamental principles of *humanitas*: while *humanitas* transcends social class distinctions and thus induces, or should induce, all true human beings to respect the 'sacred' bond which ties them together by nature, *lenitas* rather appears as one of its offspring, that which leads a higher-ranked person to show mildness towards one who is junior to them – in this respect its meaning is close to *clementia*.

One last occurrence of this category of *humanitas* merits special attention, for it enlarges the category of the recommendees to include the entire senatorial order, to which Symmachus belonged and which he famously defined as 'the better part of mankind' (*pars melior humani generis*).[217] *Ep.* 5.65, like *Ep.* 5.60, was probably written to Paternus when he was *comes sacrarum largitionum*. It deals with the problem of the high custom duties imposed on some exotic animals (in this specific instance, bears) which recently appointed quaestors and praetors had to purchase when organising inaugural games. As this 'plague' had afflicted or would afflict all senators one day, Symmachus wrote: *Quaeso igitur ut humanitatem quae inter uirtutes tuas prima est, nostri ordinis editoribus dignanter inpertias et ursorum transuectionem cupiditati mancipum subtrahas* ("I therefore ask that you courteously bestow *humanitas*, which takes pride of place among your virtues, on those from our order who have organised the games, and that you save the transport of the bears from the greed of the contractors"). Two points must be stressed. First, in comparison with the use of *humanitas* in the previous Symmachian letters of recommendation, here the social rank of the recommendees cannot be lower than that of the person to whom they are recommended – the only difference being in the privileged but fixed-term post held by Paternus. Secondly, by making appeal to Paternus' *humanitas*, and by regarding it as Paternus' most important virtue, on this occasion Symmachus seems to display a conception of *uirtus* and *humanitas* that is different from that developed in *Ep*. 8.1 and *Ep.* 2.16.[218] Yet it must be borne in mind that the singular *uirtus* usually has its own meaning(s), while the plural *uirtutes*, especially in classical and later Latin, collectively indicates all possible virtues.[219]

To summarise, in all the cases we have seen so far the *humanitas* of the recommender and the *humanitas* of the person to whom one is recommended are two

217 *Ep.* 1.52. Cf. also *Or.* 6.1 and *Or.* 8.3. As Chastagnol 1986, 73 puts it: "Aussi bien dans ses Lettres et ses Relationes que dans ses Discours, Symmaque nous apparaît d'emblée comme le représentant-type du Sénat, le sénateur par excellence."

218 On *Ep.* 2.16 cf. below, pp. 307–308.

219 Cf. Hellegouarc'h 1963, 245 and, above all, McDonnell 2006, 128–134. On the meanings of virtue cf. also Balmaceda 2017, 14–47.

sides of the same coin. As well as pointing to the flattering character that *humanitas* can take on – an aspect we have encountered in numerous examples throughout this study – the latter side of this polarity also testifies to the transitivity and reciprocity of this concept of value, which is in turn linked with its potential universal nature. It is therefore unsurprising to find that *humanitas* can also refer to the recommendation itself, as happens in the short *Ep.* 9.56, in which Felix asks Symmachus to recommend him to a certain Geminianus:[220] *Felix cum et domus tuae cultor esse diceret et humanitatem commendationis meae amicis interuenientibus postularet, desiderio eius familiarem paginam non negaui* ("Since Felix claims to be a worshipper of your house and asks for the *humanitas* of my recommendation through the intercession of friends, I did not refuse the friendly page that he desired"). The clarification *amicis interuenientibus* ('through the mediation of some common friends') is telling not only because it illustrates once again the relationship between *humanitas* and friendship, but also because it gives us yet another indication of that late-fourth-century network of recommendations in which *humanitas* played a central role. This urges us to broaden the compass of *humanitas* to expressions like *humanitas saeculi* or *humanitas temporum*.

The *humanitas*-topic within Symmachus' letters of recommendation has not been completely covered yet. From three letters in particular (*Epp.* 4.19, 5.39 and 7.49) that of recommendation emerges as a practice which does not find its roots in the *humanitas* of the recommender or else of his addressee, but in the spirit of *humanitas* which characterised the time in which Symmachus and his contemporaries lived. This is something we have already touched upon briefly when introducing *humanitas* in the fourth century CE and the recurrent use of the term in the legislation of the time.[221] But while Ammianus' work induces us to question the veracity of most fourth-century emperors' *humanitas*, Symmachus appears to be sincere in maintaining several times that the late fourth century was indeed a time of *humanitas*.

Ep. 4.19, probably written early in 395 CE, is tightly connected with the destiny of Symmachus' own family. When the usurper Eugenius seized power after Valentinian II's death in 392 CE and tried to re-establish Rome's traditional religion, Flavianus the Elder, whom I have already mentioned a couple of times, was one of Eugenius' main supporters, becoming his Praetorian prefect and also consul *sine collega* (in 394 CE). After Eugenius' defeat in the decisive battle of the Frigidus (5–6 September 394 CE), Theodosius demanded that Flavianus' salary as Praetorian prefect of Eugenius be given back. As Flavianus had committed suicide a few

220 Probably Erius Fanius Geminianus, on whom cf. *PLRE I* 389.
221 Cf. above, p. 226.

days after the Frigidus, the demand passed on to his son, Flavianus the Younger.[222] However, as Symmachus says when upholding Flavianus the Younger's case in the letter to Protadius, brother of the then *quaestor sacri palatii* Florentinus, Flavianus the Younger did not have the amount of money requested and thus begged for Theodosius' mercy.[223] In this context, Symmachus addresses Protadius as follows: *Fac igitur, si quid in te opis est, ut adflictae domui pia temporum parcat humanitas* (*Ep.* 4.19.2: "Make sure, if you have any power, that the righteous *humanitas* of this period spares this shattered household"). To avoid the tragic possibility that Flavianus the Younger may turn to a usurer in his desperate search for money, Symmachus invokes the *pia temporum humanitas*, that is to say, he asks for Protadius' help in the same spirit of *humanitas* which Theodosius has restored. It is therefore clear that *humanitas* has increasingly become an abstracted and transcendent concept, and is no longer an exclusively human characteristic. The role of the emperor(s) and of their entourage in disseminating this ideal has caused *humanitas* to become a value that people could perceive in the air. As we learn from *Ep.* 5.47, Symmachus succeeded in his intention and obtained for his son-in-law a reduction of the sanctions.[224]

An analogous situation is found in *Ep.* 5.39, which probably dates to 390 CE, when, as we saw earlier, the addressee Neoterius was both Praetorian prefect of Gaul and consul.[225] On this occasion Symmachus recommended a certain Alexander, who had fallen from grace presumably after joining the usurper Maximus' cause.[226] Relying on Neoterius' and, consequently, on Theodosius' forgiveness, Alexander hoped to have his rank of tribune and notary reinstated after Maximus' defeat (388 CE). Symmachus' letter closes thus: *Facile est enim ut sub tam pio gubernatore rei p. infortunia hominum saeculi uincat humanitas. Vale* ("It is in fact easy under such a pious ruler of the State that the *humanitas* of the age gets the better of men's misfortunes"). Instead of *humanitas temporum* we find here *humanitas saeculi*, but the meaning is pretty much the same. Indeed, the tie between *humanitas* and the ruling emperor becomes even stronger, for in such contexts the term *saeculum* is used to indicate the reign of a given emperor.[227] The *saecu-*

222 On Flavianus the Younger cf. Matacotta 2010, 240–243; Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 84–89.

223 On Protadius cf. *PLRE I* 751–752 (Protadius 1).

224 On the historical context of *Ep.* 4.19 as well as on Flavianus the Younger's difficult economic situation after the battle of the Frigidus cf. Marcone 1987, 59–60. On this specific issue of Flavianus the Younger cf. also below, pp. 295–296.

225 On the dating cf. Rivolta Tiberga 1992, 146. On Neoterius cf. above, pp. 289–290.

226 On this Alexander cf. Rivolta Tiberga 1992, 144.

227 For more details on Symmachus' and previous authors' (Pliny above all!) use of *saeculum* to indicate the reign of an emperor cf. Kelly 2013, 284–285.

lum alluded to is clearly the age of Theodosius, and even if the expression 'pious / faithful pilot' (*pio gubernatore*) refers to Neoterius, a broader adulation towards Theodosius, as in *Ep.* 4.19, is not missing, and is again conveyed through the use of *humanitas*.

As well as speaking one more time of *humanitas saeculi* with reference to the age of Theodosius in one of his *Relationes*, as we shall see in detail shortly, Symmachus once employs this expression in regard to the reign of Theodosius' son and successor Honorius. This occurs in *Ep.* 7.49, the dating of which is uncertain (perhaps 401–402?), but whose addressee is likely to be the Hadrian mentioned in *Ep*. 6.34, who held more than once the prefecture of Italy and Africa under Honorius.[228] Symmachus writes in support of his nephew, probably victim of an injustice that would affect his wealth, and once again he invokes the *humanitas saeculi* as the ideal which should lead Hadrian to approve his request: *Negotii autem genus de humanitate saeculi exspectat auxilium, cuius qualitas uirtutibus tuis precum lectione pandetur* ("This kind of business waits for the aid from the *humanitas* of this age. And the quality of this aid will be revealed by your virtues when reading the requests"). The relation between *humanitas* and *uirtus* which we have already observed many times is here mediated by *auxilium*.[229] Symmachus' argument goes as follows: the climate of *humanitas* typical of the age morally obliges one to grant help in that situation; the (high) quality of the help given will be the consequence of the (excellent) virtues of Hadrian. To put it more directly, an abstract, conceptual, quasi-transcendent *humanitas* fosters the exercise of virtues.

The *humanitas* which Symmachus praises in, and requests from, his interlocutors, and which he himself sometimes displays when recommending people is thus a general characteristic of one of the imperial periods during which he lived, the Theodosian age.[230] As I remarked above, this also emerges from the dating of Symmachus' uses of the word *humanitas*. I did not dwell too long on the meaning of the word *humanitas* itself in all these instances, but it should have emerged quite clearly from the contexts that it mainly evokes philanthropic attitudes, usually towards people of lower status who are experiencing hard times. The cases of *humanitas temporum* and *humanitas saeculi* then imply that the climate of an age reflects the personality of the ruler. In other words, if the late fourth century is said to be characterised by benevolence and humanity, this is probably because

228 Cf. *PLRE I* 406 (Hadrianus 2). On the dating and addresse of this and other letters from Book 7 (42–59) cf. the state of research in Callu 2003, 179–180. The suggestion that this block of letters is addressed to this Hadrian was first put forward by Bonney 1975.

229 On *humanitas* and *uirtus* cf. above, pp. 212–213; 279–280.

230 By the label 'Thedosian age' I also include here the reigns of Theodosius' sons Arcadius and Honorius.

the policy of those who ruled at that time was shaped around those values. In the case of Symmachus we have explicit evidence for this, for also emperors and imperial rescripts are linked to the word *humanitas*.

On one occasion in particular Symmachus reveals that he perceives a very close connection between the *humanitas* of the *saeculum* and that of the emperor. Or, more precisely, that he regards the two as equivalent. Symmachus deals with the problem of Flavianus the Younger's restitution of his father's 'illegitimate' salary as Praetorian prefect of Eugenius not only in the already investigated *Ep.* 4.19, but also in *Ep.* 4.51. The addressee of this letter, which dates to 395 CE like *Ep.* 4.19, is the *quaestor sacri palatii* Florentinus. In the first half of the letter Symmachus simply explains the issue in detail – and it is not worth dwelling again upon it – but the second part merits attention:

> Ergo per te ac tui similes amoliri postulat inminentem ruinam. Nec res inpetratione difficilis est. Nam quod plerisque sua inuidia laborantibus imperialis remisit humanitas, id patris nomine postulatum multo aequior uenia relaxabit. Proficiet ista concessio etiam temporum gloriae, si quod beneficiis principis deerat, pius successor adiecerit. Vale.
>
> Accordingly, he asks that the catastrophe which threatens him be avoided thanks to your and your fellow noblemen's intercession. Nor is this difficult to obtain. Indeed, if you ask for it in the name of a father, the emperor's indulgence will concede far more fairly what the *humanitas* of the emperor has remitted to the very many who were victims of their own envy. This concession will also add to the glory of the age, if a pious successor makes up for those merits which the previous emperor lacked. Farewell.

We need to focus on three intertwined aspects: the replacement of *humanitas temporum* of *Ep.* 4.19 with *imperialis humanitas*, the relation between the latter expression and *temporum gloria*, and Honorius' and Stilicho's continuation of Theodosius' clement policy.

Compared to *humanitas temporum* or *humanitas saeculi*, *imperialis humanitas* sounds more direct. The emperor's merits and his personal role as purveyor of this ideal are explicitly acknowledged. And even though the pairing of *humanitas* with the adjective *imperialis* is almost unique, it is perhaps unsurprising that, especially in the case of living rulers, *humanitas* is mainly linked with the term *imperator* or its cognates in panegyrics. With regard to the same Theodosius, of particular relevance is what Drepanius says at *Pan. Lat.* 2.20: *humanitas inquam, quae tam clara in imperatore quam rara est* ("a kindliness, I might say, that is as remarkable in an Emperor as it is rare", trans. Nixon 1994).[231] But, as we know, *humanitas* had also been attributed to other fourth-century emperors like Con-

231 On the occurrences of *humanitas* in Drepanius' panegyric cf. Rees 2023, 295–296.

stantine, Gratian and, much earlier, to Trajan in Pliny's *Panegyricus*, the model for all panegyrics which would follow.[232]

On the other hand the larger notion of period or age remains, and the fact that the acts deriving from the emperor's *humanitas* contribute to the glory of the age (*temporum gloria*) has the result of making explicit the obvious: the ruler determines the political and social climate of his reign, as well as its rhetoric. But the reference to Honorius as continuer of his father's policy adds a deeper message: in the case of very good rulers, like Theodosius, their policies may even determine their successors'. In other words, a *saeculum* does not necessarily end with an emperor's death. Theodosius dies without *humanitas* being his exclusive prerogative. His philanthropic attitude has affected his contemporaries and also his successors, so much so that what had been his former *imperialis humanitas* has now become the *humanitas* of an entire generation, and, more precisely, the *humanitas* which glorifies an entire age (*temporum gloria*).

At this point, although the *Epistulae* have much else to say about Symmachus' *humanitas*, I want to turn to his *Relationes*. As with Pliny the Younger, we are fortunate enough to possess both private and official writings by Symmachus. And as with Pliny the Younger, the key (and true) social and political role played by the idea of *humanitas* best emerges from its being used consistently in both kinds of writings.

The 49 *Relationes* are reports which Symmachus sent as *praefectus Vrbis* to some or all the members of the imperial college between 384 and 385 CE. They deal with different matters related to the city of Rome, and their aim is either to inform the emperors of current affairs or to ask them for advice on particular issues (or both). According to Callu, the *Relationes* cover four areas: the most important one concerns the administration of the City and Symmachus' role of *praefectus Vrbis* therein (17); then follow reports on judicial (12) and social (11) matters, while 9 are about politico-religious affairs.[233]

Within some of these *relationes* we encounter instances of both *humanitas* with reference to the emperor and *humanitas* in regard to the *saeculum*. Let me first focus on the latter. *Rel.* 9, a 'social' report in Callu's classification,[234] is addressed to both Theodosius and Arcadius, and tells of the equestrian statues that the Senate dedicated to the emperor's father, Flavius Theodosius, (officially) to thank Theodosius for some imperial gifts (chariot races and theatrical plays)

232 Cf. *Pan. Lat.* 12.14.1; 3.28.2; Aus. *Grat. act.* 24, and Plin. *Pan.* 24.2, on which cf. also above, pp. 269–270; 90.

233 Callu 2009, li–lii. For an introduction to the *Relationes* cf. also Barrow 1973, 15–19; Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 277–327.

234 Callu 2009, lii n. 5.

which he had recently bestowed on Rome, thereby making Rome's inhabitants enthusiastic and bringing the City back to its past splendour.[235] After this long *captatio beneuolentiae*, towards the end of the letter Symmachus does not miss the chance to ask the emperors to have more food sent to Rome – we must bear in mind that in 384 CE Rome was hit by famine.[236]

> Fecistis ut Vrbs cana luxuriet in primam reducta laetitiam et uer illud quondam uigentis aetatis. Audeo iam sperare potiora: mittetis etiam regiam classem quae annonariis copiis augeat deuotae plebis alimoniam. Hanc uero in Tiberinis ostiis mixtus Populo Senatus excipiet; uenerabimur tamquam sacras puppes quae felicia onera Aegyptiae frugis inuexerint. Non sunt auara uota quae saeculi excitauit humanitas: de exemplis uenit ista fiducia; magna sumendo maiora praesumimus. (*Rel.* 9.7)

> Your efforts have made a city grey with age flourish again, have restored it to its original luxuriance and to the springtime of its earlier years of vigour. I hopefully await still better things; you are going to send a royal fleet to augment with plentiful supplies of corn the free maintenance of a devoted people. This fleet senate and people together will welcome in the entrances to the Tiber: we shall revere as almost sacred the ships which will have brought in their bountiful cargoes of the crops of Egypt. It is not greed that inspires the desires which the *humanitas* of the age has aroused; rather, the precedents you have set are the source of our confident expectations; because we have received so much we anticipate even more. (trans. Barrow 1973)

The *humanitas saeculi* appears therefore as a sufficient reason for being certain that the people's hopes will be fulfilled. Despite Vera's remarks, there is no denying that the level of flattery is high, but at the same time it is evident that *humanitas* is given a central role.[237] Furthermore, the clarification that such a trust relies on previous examples of the emperor's *humanitas* accounts for the presence of an expression like *humanitas saeculi*, for it is taken for granted that this value has long been characterising the policy of Theodosius by this time.

And not only of Theodosius. We have just seen that his son and successor Honorius too was affected by this philanthropic attitude, and the same holds true for Valentinian II, the then Augustus of the West. And if the case of Honorius tes-

235 According to Vera 1979, esp. 394–395, the dedication of statues to Theodosius' father was part of a broader political project aimed at strenghtening the relationship between Theodosius and the Senate of Rome, i.e. the Western part of the empire.

236 On this famine cf. the section on Ammianus (above, p. 248), and below, p. 310.

237 Vera 1979, 383: "Certamente, i due motivi, quello dell'onore concesso a Flavio Teodosio e quello della richiesta di aiuti annonari, si saldano senza tracce visibili di sutura sotto l'abile penna di Simmaco. Tuttavia, non è da presumersi una rozza proposizione utilitaristica, in chiave di do ut des, nel conferimento delle statue e nella richiesta di approvvigionamenti. Diciamo semplicemente che il clima instauratosi avrebbe facilitato l'accoglimento dei voti del senato."

tifies to the chronological duration of *humanitas*, its being related to Valentinian II is all the more important in that it shows that *humanitas* was one of the political and cultural values, and thus attitudes, that bound together eastern and western policies of the time. But the case can be put in more detailed terms: if we accept the well-documented and convincing thesis that it was Theodosius' aim to try to manage to have great influence on western emperors, and on Valentinian II in particular,[238] then the spread of *humanitas* in the West is to be seen as one of the aspects in which Theodosius' policy materialised all over the empire.

One example of Valentinian II's *humanitas* occurs at *Rel*. 41.1, where this value, being the value of an emperor, is even called *sacra*. This 'judicial' report dealing with a case of succession is actually addressed to the entire imperial college, but the context makes it undoubtedly clear that *humanitas* only refers to Valentinian:

> Certum atque dilucidum est nihil esse tam familiare legibus quam Vestra decreta, Domini Imperatores Valentiniane, Theodosi et Arcadi inclyti, uictores ac triumphatores semper Augusti, sed executorum praua interpretatio, dum supplicantibus fauet, plerumque iussa corrumpit. Statuerat receptus in caelum germanus Numinis Vestri, cum Marcianus dudum protector Aggareae bona tamquam uacantia postulasset, ut, si ea hereditas scriptum successorem uel legitimum non haberet, in ius fisci tamquam domino nuda concederet; tunc insinuato per rationalem patrimonii modo opperiretur petitor, quid ei sacra deferret humanitas.
>
> It is certain and transparently clear that nothing is so akin to the laws as your decrees, my Lords Emperors, but a wrong-headed interpretation of them by those who carry them out often perverts your commands by showing favour to litigants. Your Divinities' brother now received into heaven had given his decision when Marcianus, in former time a *protector*, asked for the property of Aggarea as being property without an owner; he had ordered that, if the inheritance had no heir nominated in the will and no legitimate successor, it should pass, as lacking an owner, into the jurisdiction of the fisc; then, when the *rationalis* had provided information about the extent of the estate, the suppliant should wait to see what the Emperor in his *humanitas* would grant him. (trans. Barrow 1973)

In this passage, Symmachus' reference to Gratian's brother (*germanus Numinis Vestri*) links *humanitas* to Valentinian II. Less idealistic than usual, here the emperor's *humanitas* is measured in money and nothing else. If we bear in mind the (para)etymological relation of *humanitas* with man (*homo*), its rare pairing with the adjective *sacra* ('sacred', 'holy') might seem striking, and even oxymoronic – compare also the opposition between *humanitas* and *diuinitas* we saw in Pliny

238 Cf. Vera 1979.

the Younger's *Panegyricus*.[239] Yet in ancient Latin the pairing of *homo* with *sacer* indicated a man "which might be violated without any *nefas*: a man whom anyone might slay with impunity."[240] The expression *sacer esto* was in fact a curse, "and the *homo sacer* on whom this curse falls is an outcast, a banned man, tabooed, dangerous."[241] By Theodosius' time, however, *sacer* was already commonly used to designate members of the imperial house: if on the one hand the term was no longer given particular emphasis, on the other hand its association with emperors testified to their implicit divine nature.[242]

Indeed, on one other occasion Symmachus even speaks of the *humanitas* of a sacred rescript (*rescripti sacri humanitate*).[243] The emperor is likely to be once again the addressee of the message, and the context is once again a 'judicial' *relatio*, the short 39. This instance of *humanitas* further testifies to the pervasiveness of this word in the socio-political climate of the age, so much so that even a document is said to possess *humanitas* – granted, because the rescript embodies the emperor's will as well as his benevolent attitude.

One more time Symmachus attributes *humanitas* to Valentinian II, and this occurs again in an official report, *Relatio* 14. This text is of particular interest because it brings into play a very important social category of Symmachus' day, the guilds. Due to compelling military needs, the emperor had ordered all Roman guilds to hand over to the Treasury an unspecified number of horses. But at the guilds' insistent request and probably even lockout threat, Symmachus refused to obey the emperor's order.[244] The aim of his report to Valentinian is therefore to ask the emperor to withdraw or change his order. To persuade him, Symmachus also resorts to an example featuring Valentinian I, Valentinian II's father, as protagonist. According to his account, Valentinian I found himself in an analogous situation, but withdrew an order at the people's protest. *Humanitas* is once again located at a strategic point, at the close of the letter:

> Quod si adiciantur insolita, forsitan consueta cessabunt. Quare paternum Clementiae Tuae ingerimus exemplum. Praetuli oraculum quod pius successor imiteris. Oro atque obsecro ne Populum quem triumphantes saepe ueneramini ceteris urbibus conferatis. Dabit fortuna

239 Cf. above, p. 85. On the original meaning of *sacer* and its connection with gods cf. Warde Fowler 1911.

240 Warde Fowler 1911, 58, with reference to Macrobius, *Sat.* 3.7.3.

241 Warde Fowler 1911, 58. The bibliography on *homo sacer* is vast: cf. above all Agamben 1995.

242 Cf. *OLD* s.v. *sacer*, 7 and, above all, Hiltbrunner 1968.

243 *Rel.* 39.3.

244 More details on this episode in Matacotta 2010, 310–312, according to whom Symmachus' decision reveals that he feared the Roman people more than the emperor. Cf. also Sogno 2006, 39–40 on this *relatio* as well as on the guilds and their role in Symmachus' Rome.

> melior quidquid castrensis usus efflagitat; humanitatis merito necessitas Vestra sedabitur. (*Rel.* 14.4)
>
> Now, if services to which they are unaccustomed are added, there is a risk that those to which they are already accustomed will languish. That is why we impress on you his pronouncement which it is for you to imitate as his dutiful successor. I beg and beseech you not to equate with all other cities the people whom in your triumphs you have often regarded with respect. Fortune will improve and will give you what the requirements of the imperial administration demand; if you show *humanitas*, it will win your alleviation of your present needs. (trans. Barrow 1973)

On this occasion we encounter another new pairing, or better, a new opposition: *humanitas* vs. *necessitas*.[245] As usual, *humanitas* appears as the winning force, but in this very case this value ought to be as strong as to prevail even over imperial military obligations and needs. If it indeed prevailed, we do not know, for the outcome of this matter is uncertain. What is certain however is that Symmachus must have regarded *humanitas* as a very powerful and reliable value, and one which could also be effective on Valentinian II.

Aside from one other occurrence at which I shall look later, in the *Relationes* *humanitas* has therefore first and foremost to do with the emperors' behaviours and with the political climate of the time. As Symmachus was prefect of Rome, it is obvious that he primarily addressed his official reports to the Augustus of the West, Valentinian II. But what really matters is that, as in the case of Pliny, in both the *Relationes* and the *Epistulae* there is evidence that *humanitas* was used with political purposes at both official and private level.

One further, yet speculative argument, given the paucity of material to investigate, may be made in favour of the official return of *humanitas* only after Theodosius'accession. This is provided by Symmachus' other official writings which have come down to us, the *Orationes*. Symmachus' fame among his contemporaries, and more generally in late antiquity, was mainly due to his oratorical skills.[246] Unfortunately, very little of his oratorical production is extant, and in all likelihood all the eight preserved orations can be dated before 377 CE.[247] Of these eight speeches, only three are panegyrics that Symmachus delivered on emperors, and, what is more, they are lacunose. He delivered *Or.* 1 and 2 on Valentinian I, and *Or.* 3 on Gratian. They all date about 369–370 CE. Contrary to the cases of Pliny's *Panegyricus* on Trajan and, albeit on a smaller scale, of Drepanius' on Theodosius,

245 But cf. *necessaria humanitas* of *Decl. mai.* 9.15.6: above, pp. 195–196.

246 Cf. above, pp. 274–275.

247 On the dating of Symmachus' *Orationes* cf. Seeck 1883, ix–x; Cristo 1974, 38–39. More generally on the *Orationes* cf. Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 329–381.

none of them include the noun *humanitas*.[248] But on the other hand, this is consistent with Ammianus' treatment of *humanitas* with regard to the emperors whom we encounter in his historical work, especially in the case of Valentinian I, who despite knowing good examples of *humanitas* never possessed it.[249] Of course other somewhat similar virtues can be praised in panegyrics, like for example *clementia*, but the impression is that *humanitas* preserved a less standardised meaning – while *clementia* had by that time also become part of the emperor's official titulature.[250] Moreover, Sogno's investigation of the virtues of Valentinian I that Symmachus praises in his two surviving orations is revealing, for no moral virtue seems to be applied to this emperor.[251]

To return to *humanitas*, judging from Symmachus' writings, it looks as if before Theodosius *humanitas* was rather the prerogative of the Senate, while only after Theodosius the emperors shared this senatorial value; or better, vice versa. *Or*. 4, which probably dates to 376 CE, is symptomatic: *humanitas* is used twice to refer to the Senate, while *clementia* is attributed to the emperors. Let us look at the relevant passage more closely. This oration is known as *Pro patre*, for Symmachus delivered it to thank both emperors and Senate for appointing his father Avianus Symmachus to the ordinary consulship for 377 CE.[252] In the first extant paragraph the opposition between the Senate's *humanitas* and the emperors' *clementia* is explicit. The one led the Senate to ask for this appointment, the other persuaded the emperors to grant it:

> <Si quis miratus cur post patris mei grauissimam orationem ego quoque susceperim> dicendi munus et gratulationis uerba protulerim, secum reputet quantos huius beneficii habeamus auctores – humanitatem uestram qui postulastis, clementiam principum qui dederunt – desinet profecto mirari non unum pro consulatu gratias agere, quem tam multos uideat detulisse. (*Or*. 4.1)
>
> If anyone wonders that after my father's impressive oration I too have decided to give a speech and express words of gratitude, they just need to reflect on the importance of the sources of this gift – the *humanitas* of you who have asked for it, the *clementia* of the Emperors who have accorded it – and no doubt they will stop wondering that one sole person

248 On Pliny's *humanitas* cf. above, pp. 83–115. In Drepanius' panegyric there are overall three occurrences of *humanitas*, two at 20.2 and one at 20.5: cf. Rees 2023, 295–296.

249 Cf. above, p. 237.

250 On *clementia* in late antiquity cf. also above, pp. 264–265. On its presence in imperial titulature cf. Dowling 2006, 234–235. Cf. also below, pp. 302–304.

251 Cf. Sogno 2006, 15–17. The praised virtues are *patientia* (to be taken as endurance of extreme weather or geographical conditions), *industria*, warfare skills, *prouidentia*.

252 More on this oration in Pabst 1989, 159–163; Sogno 2006, 25; Matacotta 2010, 203; Cavuoto-Denis 2023, 352–371.

> cannot express adequate thanks for a consulate which has been conferred by so many people.

The problem is the extent to which we can speak of a true opposition between *humanitas* and *clementia* in this passage.[253] As we have already seen, it is quite common to find these two values together.[254] But on most occasions they are clearly used to strengthen one and the same idea of benevolence. At other times instead they are on two different levels, *humanitas* representing a universal value that each and every man can show towards a fellow human being, and *clementia* being the prerogative of a higher-ranked person towards an inferior.[255] This Symmachian occurrence may well belong to this second category: the senators are on the same hierarchical level as Avianus Symmachus, and thus *humanitas* is the right way to call the attitude which they display; by contrast, the emperors are senior to him, and *clementia* sounds more appropriate to emphasise this distance. It looks as though, in contrast to the tendency of the age, *clementia* as used here maintains its weighty connotations as well as its original characteristics of one-sided value, which are further emphasised by its comparison with *humanitas*.[256] But even more importantly, once again Symmachus' *Weltanschauung* reveals striking analogies with Pliny the Younger's. As we saw towards the beginning of this study, to stress Trajan's distance from his predecessors, and above all Domitian, Pliny preferred to praise his *humanitas* rather than his *clementia*, with the very aim of spotlighting his being a man among men rather than a tyrant.[257] The same is true of Symmachus: before the accession of Theodosius, *humanitas* could hardly be attributed to emperors, who at best possessed *clementia*. More generally, Symmachus employs the noun *clementia* very rarely (six times in the *Epistulae* and three in the *Orationes*) if we exclude from this calculation the 45 occurrences of *Clementia Vestra* / *Tua* with which he addresses the imperial college in the *Relationes*, and which, I stress, testify again to the weakening of its meaning. In the end we can say that two equivalences hold: Symmachus corresponds to Pliny, Theodosius corresponds to Trajan. Theoretically, despite the fact that the meanings of *humanitas*

253 Indeed Kelly 2013, 282 maintains that there is unanimity between senate and emperor at the beginning of this oration.

254 Cf. especially above, pp. 157–158.

255 Cf. above, pp. 39–40.

256 On the general evolution of *clementia* in the imperial period cf. Dowling 2006, 234: "There is compelling evidence that in the imperial period clemency transcends boundaries of class and patronage and is found at all levels of Roman society, even among equals."

257 Cf. above, p. 85.

and *clementia* can overlap, at least partly, in Pliny's footsteps Symmachus seems to show that word choice matters, and matters greatly.

Only one exception might seem to stand out, *Ep.* 4.4, which merits attention because of its role in modern Symmachian scholarship. It was addressed in 399 CE to Stilicho, who at that time was probably the most powerful man in the Roman empire, to thank him for Flavianus the Younger's appointment to the urban prefecture. Unlike most Symmachian letters, *Ep.* 4.4 is unfortunately too long to be quoted in full, so I limit myself to reproducing part of § 2:

> Maius quiddam est honorem restituere quam dedisse; illud enim fieri fortuna consentit, hoc contra ipsam praestat humanitas. Praemiserat alia exempla clementiae receptus caelo principum parens et Flaviano meo multa casibus detracta reddiderat: reseruatus est unus et potissimus bonitatis titulus heredi, quem magnitudinis tuae monitu paternis beneficiis d. n. Honorius adiecit interpretatus scilicet diuo principi tempus non animum defuisse. Nunc perfecta sunt a successore consimili interrupta fato clementiae. (*Ep*. 4.4.2)

> Reestablishing an honour is more important than bestowing it, for while one thing happens in agreement with fate, in the other case *humanitas* prevails over fate. The father of our Emperors, who is now embraced in Heaven, gave other examples of his *clementia* and gave back to my dear Flavianus a lot of things of which he had been deprived by fate. A unique as well as most powerful sign of goodness has been reserved for his heir: on your Greatness' advice, our Lord Honorius has added it to the benefits granted by his father, rightly judging that the divine Emperor had lacked time rather than willingness. Now his very similar successor has accomplished the *clementia* which had been interrupted by fate.

Its commentator Marcone, in regarding this letter as crucial to understanding the policy of continuity between Theodosius and his successors, claims: "La ep. 4 è il documento più significativo di questa prospettiva ideologica: a Onorio riconosce il merito di aver seguito gli *exempla clementiae* paterni e di aver sentito il dovere di recare a compimento quanto era stato interrotto dal destino."[258] Yet here and in previous passages Marcone seems to overestimate the importance of *clementia* as it emerges from Symmachus' oeuvre, probably because he goes too far in establishing a complete overlap between *humanitas* and *clementia*. Indeed, on page 26 he had (more correctly) emphasised the role of *humanitas* as mirror of the Theodosian age. But it is not only the low rate of occurrences of *clementia* that contradicts his thesis, but the very context in which *clementia* appears twice at *Ep.* 4.4.2.[259] We must bear in mind that Honorius gave back to Flavianus an office which he had already held under the 'reign' of the usurper Eugenius in 394 CE.[260]

258 Marcone 1987, 28.

259 This, as it seems to me, emerges well from the reading of this letter provided by Matacotta 2010, 242–243.

260 Cf. Marcone 1987, 39.

But siding with a usurper was a grave fault which usually implied the death penalty. Yet the new appointment clearly proves that Flavianus had been forgiven by Honorius by 399 CE. Hence the need to praise the emperor's *clementia*, because this is the most proper way to describe the behaviour of a higher-ranking person who would have the right to condemn someone but prefers to spare him. Indeed, as a way of introducing his praise, Symmachus first underscores the importance of *humanitas* in restoring Flavianus to his role, but then the context requires more technicality, and also more flattery. Accordingly, I find it risky to confer general validity to a principle which Symmachus applies to a particular case, and which does not allow for placing *clementia* on the same level as *humanitas* in his value system.

But to return to *Or*. 4, Symmachus mentions the Senate's *humanitas* once more, this time echoing Cicero rather than Pliny: *Noua sunt quae adgredimur, sed uestra humanitas auctor est inusitata faciendi* (*Or.* 4.2:"What I am going to do is something novel, but your *humanitas* encourages to do something unusual"). The unusual (*inusitata*) practice Symmachus refers to is his delivery of this very oration to thank Senate and emperors for bestowing an honour not on the person speaking themselves, but on someone else, his father. In regarding the Senate's *humanitas* as the mainspring of his action, he calls to mind Cicero's *Pro Archia* – § 3 in particular – as a token of its influence on future uses of the *humanitas* argument in oratorical contexts.[261] But while on previous occasions our interest mainly lay on the expression *studia humanitatis*, now *uestra* (i.e. the judges') *humanitas* is crucial, for this is one of the main reasons why the judges should allow Cicero to resort to an oratorical genre which probably had no precedents (*hoc uti genere dicendi quod non modo a consuetudine iudiciorum uerum etiam a forensi sermone abhorreat*, "I should be using a manner of speaking which is out of keeping not only with the tradition of the courts but also with the customary style of forensic pleading", trans. Berry 2000). So we are dealing with two oratorical contexts out of character and both facilitated by *humanitas*. Symmachus' instance, however, looks like a variation upon a theme, for it also shows differences from the Ciceronian case. One in particular: while Cicero hopes that the judges will display their *humanitas* – and his tone strategically takes this as a given – Symmachus delivers his oration because the senators have already given proof of theirs towards his father. On a linguistic level then, there is little evidence that this Symmachian occurrence of *humanitas* is as educationally nuanced as the Ciceronian ones in the *Pro Archia*.

261 On Cicero's *Pro Archia* cf. above, pp. 54–60.

One last occurrence of *humanitas* in the *Orationes* is to be found in *Or.* 7 *Pro Synesio*, which, like the *Pro patre*, was presumably delivered before the senate.[262] According to Sogno, this is one "of the most revealing documents concerning the process of *adlectio*, by which new members of non-senatorial birth gained access to the senate."[263] Moreover, this speech summarises "the ideal prerequisites of a candidate to be admitted into the *amplissimus ordo*."[264] In the light of this and of what emerged from the *Pro patre*, it will probably come as no surprise that *humanitas* is one of the virtues at which Synesius, the new senator in question, aims:

> Pendet circa illum sollicitae domus pietas, sed ipse de se exigit quidquid omnium sibi humanitas relaxauit. Iam uideo, Iuliane, causas consultissimae placiditatis tuae: tali filio magis securus es quam remissus. (*Or*. 7.5)
>
> The affection of an anxious family floats over him, but he requires from himself the *humanitas* that people usually acknowledge to him. I can see, Julian, the reason of your very careful placidity: with a son like this you are more untroubled than relaxed.

The first and major part of the chapter primarily focused on the political and utilitarian role played by *humanitas* in Symmachus' oeuvre and in Roman society during the reigns from Valentinian I to Arcadius and Honorius, with great emphasis being placed on the watershed policy of Theodosius I. In this context, I looked at how *humanitas* contributes to explaining Symmachus' action and the Theodosian age. With this aim in mind I also took pains to specify the political and administrative posts held by Symmachus' interlocutors, in order to underscore further the existence of a network of high-ranked people which determined the public life of the age and which was based on certain common values.[265] I now turn my attention to how Symmachus' work can help us further understand the myriad nuances that *humanitas* can take on as well as the countless contexts in which we can encounter it. Needless to say, this differentiation has practical purposes, but there is obviously a high level of overlap. The first part itself also testifies to the persistence of the philanthropic connotations of *humanitas* and, to a lesser degree, of its educational and cultural meaning. By the same token, this second half will deal with occurrences of *humanitas* which are set in identical or similar social contexts to the previous ones.

262 Sogno 2006, 26.

263 Sogno 2006, 26.

264 Sogno 2006, 28.

265 Cf. Sogno 2006, 88: "The purpose of letter writing is not primarily the communication of information but the formation and preservation of ties of friendships in a world where distances made visits if not impossible then certainly difficult."

Let me start with those instances which provide further confirmation that Symmachus' conception of *humanitas* is comparable to that of Cicero and Pliny the Younger. As we noticed in passing earlier on, Symmachus, like his two models, believes that *humanitas* potentially has educational components, that is to say, that it is, or can be, related to the Greek concept of παιδεία. In Symmachus however this does not emerge as clearly as in other authors where we encountered expressions like *studia humanitatis*. At times he seems to have reached a level of assimilation in which the Greek concepts of παιδεία and φιλανθρωπία are simultaneously present but hardly distinguishable from one another. This might be the case in *Ep.* 1.18 to Ausonius, as we saw earlier, and best emerges in more personal letters addressed to his close friend Flavianus the Elder, another person of letters.[266] On two occasions Symmachus sends him letters of recommendation in favour of literati using *humanitas* as leverage. At first sight, *humanitas* is used in the same way and with the same meaning as in the other letters of recommendation investigated above.[267] Yet we must bear in mind two points. First, Symmachus was often cryptic in his letters and took much for granted. Secondly, it is not always sufficient to focus our attention on the sender: the identity of the recipient also affects the content of a letter. Before pushing this reasoning further, let us look at the texts:

> Pro optimis uiris quisquis interuenit, non magis illorum uidetur iuuare commodum quam suum commendare iudicium. Quare in eo quod fratris mei Maximi desideria litteris prosequor, non tam illi usui <sum>, quam mihi laudi est. Est enim uita atque eruditione liberalium disciplinarum pariter insignis neque ulli praestantium philosophorum secundus ac propterea tua familiaritate dignissimus. Cuius tibi negotia cum in rem missus absoluerit, quaeso ut humanitate, qua clarus es, iustas petitiones ingrauato auxilio prosequaris. Vale. (*Ep*. 2.29)

> Whoever intervenes in favour of excellent men seems to support their interests no less than recommend his own judgement. This is why whenever I accompany with a letter my brother Maximus' requests I am of use to him no less than of praise to myself. He is in fact distinguished for his life as well as for his erudition in the liberal disciplines; he is not inferior to the most outstanding philosophers and, for these reasons, he is absolutely worthy of your friendship. Once his envoy for this business has made you clear the situation, I beg, in the name of that *humanitas* for which you are famous, that you offer to him your increased help to satisfy his legitimate requests. Farewell.

> Vt habitus et crinis indicio est, Serapammon litterarum peritiam pollicetur, cuius si se meminisset exortem, nunquam philosophis congruentem sumpsisset ornatum. Sed de hoc uestra aestimatio sit, qui talium rerum profitemini notionem. Mihi religio fuit non negare uerba

266 On Flavianus' literary works cf. Matacotta 2010, 239–240.
267 Cf. above, pp. 286–294 in particular.

> poscenti. Facies rem morum tuorum, si ope atque humanitate fortunam peregrinantis adiueueris. Vale. (*Ep.* 2.61)
>
> Judging from his outfit and hairstyle, Serapammon must be a seasoned literatus. For if he had thought of lacking in knowledge, he would have never put on clothes similar to those of the philosophers. But I leave it to you to appreciate it or not, since you claim to be an expert on this kind of things. My respect towards him has obliged me not to deny these words for which he asked. You will do something in keeping with your habits if you help a man coming from far away with your support and *humanitas*. Farewell.

Both these letters emphasise the erudition and the literary skills that the recommendees possess (*eruditione liberalium disciplinarum . . . insignis* and *litterarum peritiam pollicetur*), thereby implying that this is the common denominator between Flavianus and themselves.[268] Thus, when a man of letters of a certain standing like Flavianus was asked to support their causes on these grounds and was reminded of the *humanitas* for which he was famous (*humanitate, qua clarus es*), it is easy to imagine that he will have taken it as a more or less flattering appeal to his culture rather than to his mere benevolence. Nor is it sensible to think that a man like Symmachus, who knew Cicero and his oratorical strategies almost by heart, resorted by accident to a multifaceted value like *humanitas* on these two occasions.

One further occurrence where *humanitas* seems to be educationally and culturally connoted can be found in Symmachus' *Epistulae*, and yet again within a letter addressed to Flavianus the Elder. The beginning of *Ep.* 2.16 reads: *Si necdum filii mei Nicasii laudabiles mores et honestum institutum didicisti, accipe pro eo locupletissimum uadimonium, meum Promotum uirtute et humanitate conspicuum* ("If you have not yet learnt of the laudable behaviour and noble customs of my son Nicasius, take this very rich deposit in place of him: this is my dear Promotus, famous for his virtue and *humanitas*"). We have already found the twinning of *uirtus* and *humanitas* at *Ep*. 8.1, and already on that occasion I suggested that *humanitas* is likely to be related to education. Here three further elements can be added to the argumentation I put forward then. First and foremost, as Cecconi shows well, Promotus must have been a great general:[269] this fact allows us to link *uirtus* to his military skills, and, consequently, *humanitas* to his respect for culture, along the same and more proper lines observed in Eumenius' panegyric.[270] Secondly, the addressee is still Flavianus the Elder, which means that it

268 On these letters' attention for liberal arts, philosophy and those who pursue them, as well as for the relationship between *Ep.* 2.29 and *Ep.* 2.61 cf. Cecconi 2002, 235–239; 349–351.
269 Cecconi 2002, 192–193 (with further bibliography).
270 Cf. above, pp. 212–213.

might be an effective strategy to recommend a person for his uncommon culture, this time leaving it implicit that love for culture is what unites the two of them. Thirdly and conversely, it would make little sense in this general context if the stress were on the philanthropic aspect of *humanitas*, for how could this have significant consequences for Flavianus' opinion of him?

Ep. 8.1 and *Ep.* 2.16 thus portray two valiant men, who were probably military leaders and whose skills and values are synthesized in the formula *uirtute et humanitate*. But on other occasions Symmachus connects *humanitas* with more specific virtues or abstract concepts. We have seen for instance that it can be opposed to *caritas* and *religio* when it comes to differentiating between letters of recommendation and intimate letters among friends, or else it can be paired with *aequitas* or *lenitas* when its meaning needs to be clarified further.[271] At *Ep.* 7.116 instead *humanitas* is what enables one to understand who merits *benignitas* and *misericordia*, and on which occasions. The letter's opening reads: *Scis pro insita tibi humanitate quid paruulis et parentum suffragio destitutis benignitatis ac misericordiae debeatur* ("Thanks to your innate *humanitas* you know what kind of benevolence and compassion is due to the young people who have been deprived of their parents' aid"). The context is well known, that of inheritance after the death of one's parents. Once again Symmachus asks for the help of an influential person, Patruinus, *comes sacrarum largitionum* for the West from 401 to 408 CE.[272] Those in need of help are the sons of a certain Severus, probably to identify with Valerius Severus (*PLRE I* 837 – Valerius Severus 29). As for the relation between *humanitas*, *misericordia* and *benignitas*, a distinction is required. We have seen, especially while looking into Apuleius' use of *humanitas*, that the meanings of *humanitas* and *misericordia* can even overlap sometimes. More interesting is the unusual pairing with *benignitas*, which sounds very appropriate in the case in question. As Hellegouarc'h illustrates well, *benignitas* is that virtue which induces people to bestow gifts.[273] In this respect, it is similar to *beneficentia*, the value by which benefits (*beneficia*) are bestowed. By presenting *humanitas* as the origin of *misericordia* and *benignitas*, Symmachus thus implies that at times it is not enough to have a benevolent and clement attitude (*misericordia*), but concrete acts (*benignitas*) are necessary. This example clearly contributes to make explicit an aspect of concreteness which is often only implicit in the notion of *humanitas*, but that in Symmachus' oeuvre is not unique, as the following examples show.

271 Cf. above, pp. 281–285; 288–291.
272 Cf. *PLRE II* 843–844.
273 Hellegouarc'h 1963, 217–218.

An analogous situation of inheritance is portrayed in *Rel.* 41, which deals with the problem of the *delatores*, those who denounced (ostensible) vacant goods to the public administration in the hope of seeing these goods bestowed on themselves. Without looking in detail into this *relatio*, I only notice that *humanitas* refers to the *testator*'s generosity (41.3: *nihil de testatore humanitatis exigeret*), although the amount of money in question is very low. Its meaning is therefore very close to the previous occurrence of *humanitas* at *Ep.* 7.116.

Along the same lines is to be set the short *Ep.* 9.65 to Alevius, in all likelihood an addresse of unusual low rank:[274]

> Vehiculi rotae cuius debeant esse mensurae linea missa testabitur. Superest ut omne carpentum adfabre et firmis compaginibus explicetur. Si parte pretii ad hoc opus est, quod dandum scripseris iubebo numerari. Humanitas xeniorum tuorum debet esse moderatior: religio enim animis potius quam muneribus aestimatur. Vale.
>
> The sketch I am sending to you will make it clear of what size the wheel of the carriage needs to be. Now we have to put together the whole wagon skilfully and with a firm structure. If you need an advance payment for this, write to me how much it amounts to and I will have it paid. The *humanitas* of your gifts must be more sober: affection is shown by one's attitude rather than one's gifts. Farewell.

While I note in passing that we face here another instance of *religio* with reference to the maintenance of friendship,[275] our focus goes on *humanitas xeniorum tuorum*. If in *Ep.* 7.116 the relationship between *humanitas* and gifts is indirect, in *Ep*. 9.65 it is clearly direct, and it looks as if the gifts themselves become vehicles of this ideal.

The same direct relationship between *humanitas* and gifts is found in *Ep.* 9.82, in which Symmachus thanks the unknown addressee of this letter for sending him fruits from his Marsican orchards. The short message closes with an Homeric echo: *Faciet frequens humanitas tua ut saepe alias in Marsos bona Phaeacum translata celebremus* ("Your frequent *humanitas* will make sure that we often celebrate the fruits of the Faiakes transplanted among the Marsi").[276]

To remain in the domain of concreteness, we learn from Symmachus that *humanitas* can even accelerate an oil delivery. Judging from *Ep.* 9.58, there had long been an office responsible for the supply of African oil in Formia.[277] But at the time when Symmachus sent this letter to the *praefectus annonae* Caecilianus to

274 Cf. Roda 1981, 197.

275 Cf. above, pp. 281–283.

276 Cf. Hom. *Od.* 7.114–126. For a list of the Homeric echoes in Symmachus cf. Roda 1981, 213 – with further bibliography.

277 More details and relevant bibliography in Roda 1981, 191–192.

ask for his intervention, probably between 396 and 397 CE, there must have been some delay in the delivery which might harm Formia's inhabitants.

A much more serious situation is portrayed in *Ep*. 4.74, written in 383 CE and addressed to Eusignius, the then proconsul of Africa.[278] This letter testifies to the poor harvest and to the ensuing harsh conditions suffered by the African provinces. Further, it envisages a real famine for the following year, the famous famine recounted by Ammianus, which would cause the expulsion of foreigners from Rome.[279] Under the circumstances, Symmachus urges Eusignius to help the provincial peoples by showing all his *humanitas*:

> Iure igitur ad aeternorum principum prouidentiam prouincialium sollicitudo confugit. Interea dum maior ab illis salubritas petitur, humanitas tua foueat exhaustos et tamquam particeps doloris alieni persuadeat laborantibus sibi accidisse, quidquid prouinciae pertulerunt. (*Ep*. 4.74.2)

> With good reason therefore the anxiety of the residents of the provinces has induced them to make appeal to the foresight of the eternal emperors. In the meantime, while better health is required to them, may your *humanitas* soothe the exhausted and, by seeming to take part in their suffering, convince them that you too have experienced what the provinces have suffered.

Rather than referring to material, concrete help, which is instead expected from the imperial college (*dum maior ab illis salubritas petitur*), here *humanitas* implies and requires emotional involvement on Eusignius' part. Crucial is the innovative relationship between *humanitas* and *dolor* (*alienus*), never to be found in pagan Latin authors before Symmachus. The idea is that the people should feel that their governors share their pains and sorrows. Ever since Tertullian there existed in Latin a more technical term to name this feeling: *compassio* (*cum* + *patior*), a calque from the Greek συμπάθεια. But a search for *compassio* in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* reveals that this word remained the prerogative of Christian authors.[280] Accordingly, it looks as if this occurrence of *humanitas* was to some extent influenced by Christian thought, but at the same time Symmachus endeavoured to keep this hidden. He did so by avoiding a Christian term and by reinvesting a traditional pagan one like *humanitas* with new nuances.

Once more in Symmachus' writings *humanitas* is explicitly connected with *dolor*. *Ep*. 3.88 is addressed to Rufinus, one of Symmachus' most influential friends. A committed Christian, he was *magister officiorum* of Theodosius from

278 On Eusignius cf. also above, p. 285.
279 Cf. above, pp. 248 and 297.
280 *TLL* 3.2022.84–2023.69.

388 to 392 CE, consul in 392 and Praetorian prefect of the East from 392 to 395.[281] The letter in question concerns the death of a common acquaintance of theirs whose identity remains obscure, a man with whom Symmachus was clearly on bad terms, so much so that he had first thought of not speaking of his death at all – hence Rufinus' reproach.[282] In Symmachus' view, another sort of 'law of *humanitas*' recommended such a behaviour:[283] *Scis humanitatis hanc esse rationem, ut parum probatis et ante discordibus ad uicem doloris quem mors incutere solet, reuerentiam saltem silentii deferamus* (*Ep*. 3.88.1: "You know that this is the principle of *humanitas*: instead of the sorrow which death usually causes, we need at least to concede the deference of silence to those whom we did not approve of and who were not dear to us"). While I note in passing that the expression *humanitatis ratio* echoes Cicero,[284] the content merits more attention: contrary to the African provincials in the previous case, this dead man does not deserve his *dolor* to be shared by Symmachus; at most, *humanitas* grants him the deference of silence (*reuerentiam . . . silentii*). In other words, the comparison between *Ep*. 4.74 and *Ep*. 3.88 shows that *humanitas* calls for sympathy only when the victim is worthy of it, and not always indiscriminately.

The ideas of culture, concreteness and relation with other concepts of value which we have observed in the previous instances of *humanitas* in some ways come together at *Ep.* 6.21, which is addressed to both Symmachus' daughter and her husband Flavianus the Younger. The young couple was used to spending most of the year in Campania, either at Baiae or in the Phlegraean Fields. When the sons of Symmachus' friend Entrechius had to prolong their stay in Campania due to bad weather conditions, Symmachus thus asked his son-in-law to take care of them: *Quapropter dum nauigatio intractabilis est, in oris Campaniae paulisper haerebunt; sed ne peregrinationis amara sustineant, humanitas uestra praestabit* ("Accordingly, as long as navigation is impossible, they will spend some time on the shores of Campania. But your *humanitas* will make sure that they will not suffer the bitterness of the travel").[285] The impression is that the broad concept of benevolent attitude becomes more specific, evoking the idea of hospitality that we have already seen to be at times associated with, if not conveyed by, *humani-*

281 Cf. *PLRE I* 778–781 – Rufinus 18.

282 Cf. Pellizzari 1998, 241–242 for more details and bibliography on this letter. On Symmachus' attitude in this letter as well as towards other people with whom he was on bad terms cf. Matthews 1986, 174–175.

283 On a previous Symmachian instance of *humanitas* treated as a kind of law cf. above, p. 285.

284 Cf. Cic. *Quinct.* 97; *Verr.* 2.2.97; 2.4.120; *Rab. perd.* 2; *Mur.* 66.

285 On this letter cf. Marcone 1983, 93–94.

tas.[286] The major difference between this and the previous instances observed in Petronius, in Tacitus' *Germania* or in Gellius 15.21 is that educational and cultural implications remain more in the background here.[287]

In the last few pages I have gathered some Symmachian occurrences of *humanitas* which are barely related to one another, not to say unrelated, and which do not seem to fit well in the categories I drew up in the main part of this chapter. They nonetheless contribute to our understanding of Symmachus' extremely multifaceted view of *humanitas*, for example by underscoring its concreteness, its cultural components, its malleability (on its own and in relation with other concepts of value).

Before turning to Symmachus' use of the adjective *humanus*, I should now like to conclude my overview of *humanitas* by spotlighting a final aspect which further suggests that Symmachus' *humanitas* engages consciously with a long-lasting tradition which seemingly began with Cicero: the use of *humanitas* in judicial contexts. Curiously, in Symmachus this occurs in letters, not in orations. Three letters from Book 7 (*Epp.* 7.81, 7.83 and 7.89), all addressed about 399 CE to the then Praetorian prefect of Italy Messalla, deal with one and the same trial, the protagonist of which is Symmachus' friend Jucundus.[288] *Ep.* 7.81 provides the introduction to the story: Jucundus has been summoned to Milan to face a trial on unspecified charges concerning private matters. Yet he is ill, and therefore Symmachus asks Messalla to relocate the trial to Rome. His first request must not have been very effective, for Symmachus reiterates it with a more incisive tone in *Ep.* 7.89, which I quote in full:

> Iamdudum litteras meas in manus tuas credo perlatas, quibus allegaui, quod iudiciis adprobatum est, amicum meum Iucundum quamquam tui examinis cupidum per ualetudinem non posse proficisci. Huius in dies morbus augescit et ideo repeto postulatum ne incidat inuidiam contumaciae qui miserationem meretur. Et sane ciuili causae nihil decerpet humanitas, si ad uicarium uestrum transferatis examen. Nam pariter et laboranti detrahetur iniuria et negotio finis eueniet. Vale.
>
> I believe that my letter has been in your hands for a while now. I appended to it the notification, approved by the court, according to which my friend Jucundus, despite looking forward to being examined by you, was not able to leave because of his indisposition. His disease worsens day after day and I therefore beg you again that one who deserves pity will not fall victim of a judgement by default. To be sure, your *humanitas* will not diminish the effectiveness of the civil trial, if you delegate the examination to your substitute. Indeed, at

286 Cf. above, pp. 126; 162; 245; 251.
287 Cf. above, pp. 255; 125–126; 161–162.
288 On Messalla cf. above, p. 281.

> the same time a suffering man will be saved from an injustice and we will put an end to this affair. Farewell.

As far as *humanitas* is concerned, the message may be summed up as follows: *humanitas* does not obstruct justice. This same principle was probably implicit in Pliny the Younger's *Ep*. 9.5.1, where the proconsul of Baetica Calestrius Tiro was praised for administering justice with *humanitas* (*iustitiam tuam prouincialibus multa humanitate commendas*).[289] Here the impression is that *humanitas* is used to avoid the repetition of *miseratio* in the previous sentence, and we have already noticed the same rhetorical technique with the same equivalence between the two words in *Decl. mai.* 15.3 (*postquam nihil miseratio, nihil proficiebat humanitas, temptauit asperitate discutere*.)[290]

Unlike *Ep*. 7.81, Symmachus' second letter to Messalla probably achieved some results and persuaded the Praetorian prefect to accept Symmachus' request. Yet bureaucratic difficulties must have cropped up, and Symmachus decided to send yet another letter to Messalla, *Ep*. 7.83, in which he revealed his upset over the event. The letter ends thus: *Inpensius igitur quaeso ut uicarii foro saepe in his iudiciis agitata causa reddatur, quando hoc et sacrae litterae imperant et iudiciorum non refutat humanitas. Vale.* ("I therefore beg you with more ardour that this case, which has until now taken place in the local court, be transferred to your substitute: the sacred letter prescribes this and the *humanitas* of the tribunals does not deny it. Farewell"). Regardless of the outcome of the Jucundus affair, which is unknown and at any rate would be of scarce interest to this study, Symmachus' rhetorical strategy merits some attention. Being placed at the end of the letter, *humanitas* assumes great emphasis, especially because it is here said to be possessed by the courts themselves (*iudiciorum*). Compared to the more common instances in which *humanitas* is praised in, or expected from, some judges, as exemplified by Cicero's *Pro Archia*, the shift is significant. Symmachus' statement appears to have objective and universal validity, for *humanitas* is regarded as the value which all tribunals possess. Whether this happened by accident or not, it certainly symbolises, and goes hand in hand with, the policy of *humanitas* applied to laws, which we have seen characterising a major part of the legislation of the fourth century CE.

289 Cf. above, pp. 97–98.
290 Cf. above, pp. 199–200.

8.4.2 *Humanus* in Symmachus

Symmachus' use of *humanus* confirms that there is a substantial difference between the multifacetedness of the noun and the relative flatness of the adjective. Exceptionally, he employs the adjective less often (29 times) than the noun (37 times), and in most cases *humanus* is paired with the usual nouns we have already encountered in the previous authors simply to mean 'of man'. Thus, as many as 9 times it goes with *genus*, three times with *ingenium*, twice with *sensus*, and only once with *caput*, *casus*, *consilium*, *cunctatio*, *fortuna*, *gaudium*, *natura*, *ops*, *oratio*, *sanguis*, *uerbum* and *uox*. Moreover, we find two instances of the substantivised neuter plural *humana* to indicate the 'human things'. There are no occurrences of comparatives and there is only one superlative: *humanissimum* at *Ep*. 5.8.1. The addressee is the same Theodorus we have encountered as the recipient of Symmachus' *Ep.* 5.13, and the superlative, which is closer to the meaning of the noun *humanitas* as usual, refers to the good practice of writing letters to friends. In particular, it goes with *inceptum* ('undertaking') in the sentence: *Gaudeo mihi sermonis tui primitias contigisse et inpendio postulo ut humanissimum inceptum religiosa cura non deserat* ("I am glad that I have received the first fruits of this dialogue and very much beg that your scrupulous care will not abandon this very kind undertaking"). The topic is by now well known, and one in which the role of *humanitas* is crucial, at least to Symmachus.[291]

8.4.3 Conclusion

As with the cases of Cicero and Pliny the Younger, two main aspects characterise Symmachus' *humanitas*: its pervasiveness across all his written works and its polysemy (although, as far as the latter is concerned, Symmachus comes slightly second). Nor should this come as surprising, for Symmachus' intent, despite the long time which separates him from his two models, was pretty much the same: he needed a unifying factor to defend (his conception of) Roman society during a period which threatened its stability and even its survival, and *humanitas* was perfectly fitting to this end. In the name of *humanitas*, in fact, Symmachus writes letters to maintain and extend relations of friendship, thereby reinforcing the internal bond among the members of the senate. And yet the often exalted transversal nature of *humanitas* also allows him to extend this bond upwards, to the emperor(s), and downwards, to members of the other social classes whom he regards as possibly useful to his – and

291 Cf. above, pp. 277–285.

Theodosius' – political project. The variety of addressees of Symmachus' letters, *relationes* and orations as well as of the other people involved in his discourses is good evidence of this strategy.

8.5 *Humanitas* in the Theodosian Age: Final Remarks

In the context of Theodosius I's effort to save and restore the Roman Empire after Hadrianople, and of his related willingness to appear as a new Trajan, the use of *humanitas* by Ausonius and Symmachus on the one hand, and of Ammianus and the 'minor' historians on the other hand revived the Trajanic pattern embodied by Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and Suetonius. Like Pliny, Symmachus fostered the spread of *humanitas* as a unifying value within the upper echelons of Roman society; like Tacitus and Suetonius, Ammianus and the other historians spotlighted the lack of this value during the reigns of previous emperors. After all, it is unsurprising that historians do not deal with ruling sovereigns, for as Lizzi Testa 2022 has remarked in commenting Ammianus' closure of the *Res Gestae*, "the final sentence alludes to the tradition that historians should leave the ruling emperor to panegyrists."[292]

Through his correspondence in particular, Symmachus' willingness to preserve and extend the network of senators emerges clearly. A senator of the noblest birth himself, Symmachus was thereby trying to defend Rome's as well as his own interests. Christians, barbarians as well as the increasing social mobility might represent serious threats to the senatorial class and, by extension, to the traditional structures of the Empire. In this socio-political climate, the concept of *humanitas* becomes much more than an incitement to write letters: as a well-established Roman value, it served to forge, foster and preserve links with other members of the *ordo senatorius* without at the same time compromising the relationships with the other social classes. Invoking a Ciceronian value takes on a strong cultural and political meaning: let us, through our profoundly Roman *humanitas*, remain Romans! Despite his Christian orientation, Theodosius must have understood the importance of this message and of having Rome's pagan ar-

292 Lizzi Testa 2022, 128. Ammianus' *Res Gestae* end thus: *Scribant reliqua potiores, aetate et doctrinis florentes. Quod id (si libuerit) aggressuros, procudere linguas ad maiores moneo stilos* ("The rest may be written by abler men, who are in the prime of life and learning. But if they chose to undertake such a task, I advise them to forge their tongues to the loftier style", trans. Rolfe 1986). Cf. also Lizzi Testa 2022, 130: "Ammianus was [. . .] following a well-known literary tradition, being conscious that the denigration of the previous emperor helped to exalt the one currently in power."

istocracy on his side. In this, as in many other respects, he also influenced the policy of his two sons and successors, Arcadius and Honorius. This explains why it is legitimate to refer to his, and his sons', reign as an age of *humanitas*, as Symmachus himself does more than once.

The importance of *humanitas* not only to Symmachus', but to the Theodosian age's socio-political thinking is confirmed by Ammianus' extraordinary interest in this value concept; or, more precisely, by his stressing that most previous fourth-century emperors, with the sole exception of Julian, had neglected this fundamental value.[293] Moreover, Ammianus explicitly attacks the aristocracy of the city of Rome for ignoring the true, traditional aspects of *humanitas* as civilization. Their frivolity – it is implied – was contributing heavily to the decadence of Rome. Also from this point of view, it comes therefore as unsurprising that Symmachus relied on *humanitas* to try to bring back the senatorial class to the splendour of its glorious past.

293 It goes without saying that this conclusion is based upon Ammianus' extant books and might be differently nuanced if the first thirteen books of his *Historiae* had come down to us.