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**Gratian as *optimus princeps* – the Literary Image of
“an Ideal Emperor” in *Gratiarum actio ad Gratianum
Imperatorem* by D.M. Ausonius and the *Laudatio in
Gratianum Augustum* of Q.A. Symmachus**

ABSTRACT: Ausonius and Symmachus addressed their speeches to the emperor Gratian, the son of Valentinian I. Ausonius included in his *gratiarum actio* two praises of the young emperor in order to express his gratitude for the consulate he received; Symmachus delivered his *laudatio* in honour of the ruler at a meeting of the Roman senate. In their speeches both authors showed not so much a real image of Gratian as an individual but rather a literary creation of *optimus princeps*. Gratian is presented as an ideal that is artificial in its perfection: he loses his individual and true characteristics and appears to be pasted into a panegyric-propaganda scheme based on literary convention as well as the slogans of imperial state ideology. In this article we aim to present the literary image of Gratian as “an ideal emperor”, which emerges from both laudatory speeches, as well as to point out the literary devices, motifs, panegyric techniques and ideological *topoi* used in its creation.

KEYWORDS: Decimus Magnus Ausonius, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, Flavius Gratianus Augustus, Roman laudatory prose of the 4th century AD, *orationes*

Gratian¹ became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire in 378 AD following the death of Valens (his uncle), the emperor in the East, at Adrianople. One of the first decisions of the new emperor was to appoint Ausonius, his former teacher (Olszaniec 2007: 340), to the post of consul.² Ausonius expressed his gratitude to the emperor for the consulship in his speech *Gratiarum actio ad Gratianum imperatorem* (delivered in the second half of 379 AD), in which, apart from personal threads related to the author's life and career (cf. Olszaniec 2007: 339–349), were included two praises of Gratian (*Act.* II 6–9 and *Act.* VIII 37–XVII 78). But these were not the only praises of the young emperor. Ten years earlier, on February 25, 369 AD, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus³ gave his laudatory speech in the Roman senate to honour the emperor Gratian (*Laudatio in Gratianum Augustum: Oratio* III).⁴ The addressee of this *laudatio* was then Augustus in the Western Empire, together with his father, Valentinian I. It is noteworthy, however, that Ausonius and Symmachus show in their speeches, first and foremost, the image of an ideal and infallible ruler with impeccable morals and perfect in each

¹ Flavius Gratianus Augustus was born on April 18, 359 AD in Sirmium (now Sremska Mitrovica) and was murdered by the usurper Magnus Maximus on August 25, 383 AD in Lugdunum (now Lyon) – Gratian cf. also PLRE I, Flavius Gratianus 2, p. 401; Kienast 1996: 328–330. Notwithstanding his young age, Gratian was nominated for the consulship in 366 AD (with his colleague Dagalaifus; seven-year-old Gratian was *consul prior*) and had been Augustus in the Western Empire from August 24, 367 AD to November 17, 375 AD (together with his father, Valentinian I). Then, from November 17, 375 AD to August 25, 383 AD Gratian was the sole ruler in the West (following the death of Valentinian I – Gratian's stepbrother, Valentinian II, whom he appointed the second Augustus on November 22, 375 AD, was then a small boy – cf. PLRE I, Flavius Valentinianus 8, pp. 934–935 and Kienast 1996: 330–332).

² Cf. Aus., *Act.* II, 10–11; *Praef.* I 35–38; *Protrepiticus ad nepotem* 86–93; *Epicedion in Patrem* 41–42. Cf. also PLRE I, Decimus Magnus Ausonius 7, pp. 140–141; Olszaniec 2007: 346; Rogowski 2009: 251.

³ Cf. PLRE I, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus 4, pp. 865–870.

⁴ Symmachus' speech has not been preserved in its entirety; at the very beginning a few pages are missing which contained most of the first chapter (only the passage from its last sentence has been preserved), and in chapter 6 five pages are missing (the beginning of this chapter and the passage from its last sentence have been preserved). Chapters 2–5 and 7–12 have been preserved in their entirety.

area of his activity. In consequence, both *orationes* become panegyrics⁵ in honour of Gratian, in which the idealized ruler loses his individual features and appears to be a schematic figure who is artificial in his perfection. In this article we aim to present the literary image of Gratian as the “ideal emperor” (*optimus princeps*) that emerges from both of these laudatory speeches, as well as to point out the literary devices, motifs, ideological *topoi* and panegyric techniques used in its creation.

1. *Auspicia*

Symmachus begins the preserved part of his *laudatio* with a solemn apostrophe in which Gratian is directly addressed in an emotional and elevated tone as *spes sperata* (“hoped for hope of the new age” – Sogno 2006: 18); the orator also defines the role Gratian plays and will continue to play in the lives of both present and future generations (*Or.* III 2): *Salve novi saeculi spes sperata et in gremio rei publicae nutricis adolesce, laetitia praesentium, securitas posterorum*. The ruler, whose coming to the throne is expected to install the new age (*saeculum novum*), brings joy (*laetitia*) and is the source and personification of hope

⁵ Kelly (2013: 261) pays attention to the influence of Pliny the Younger’s *Panegyricus in Traianum Augustum* in Symmachus’ *Laudatio in Gratianum Augustum* (*Or.* III) as well as in *Or.* I and *Or.* II (these two are *laudationes* of the emperor Valentinian I). As regards Ausonius’ speech, some scholars (Rees 1998: 97, Lolli 2006: 726; Rogowski 2009: 276) pay attention to the fact that *Gratiarum actio ad Gratianum imperatorem* seems also to be *gratiarum actio ad Ausonium praeceptorem*. This is due to the fact, as they argue, that in Ausonius’ speech not only the person of the emperor, but also the person of the orator (sc. Ausonius) is very prominent, which is not found in any late-antique panegyric; thus, Burdigalian’s speech may seem to be aimed at praising both the emperor and his teacher (sc. Ausonius). But, as these scholars indicate, questions about the motivations that prompted Ausonius to compose his speech in such a manner are still open. Nevertheless, as Rogowski (2009: 278) explains, due to the rhetorical convention and the official status of both figures, the emperor’s position definitely prevails over the orator’s, as Ausonius constantly accentuates that the teaching of the young emperor was an honour and that he owed his nomination only to the emperor: in this way (and according to the literary and rhetorical convention of imperial panegyric) the orator emphasized, praised and exaggerated Gratian’s *pietas*, so the emperor became its perfect personification and, in consequence, the whole speech came to be a panegyric addressed exclusively to him.

(*spes*) and security (*securitas*). As Sogno (2006: 17) points out, here Symmachus clearly expressed not only his but also the senate's hopes (*spes sperata*) for a great future for the empire that would be led by Gratian, a descendant of the glorious family of Valentinian I, as well as envisaged a return of the golden age (*saeculum novum: novi saeculi spes sperata*) under his magnificent rule. Let us note that Symmachus, in indicating the values such as *spes*, *laetitia* and *securitas*, unequivocally suggests that the new emperor, notwithstanding his young age, is and will be the ideal ruler (*optimus princeps*) for his subjects. Gratian's tender age⁶ is aptly indicated by means of the imperative *adolesce* and the metaphorical picture developed in the accompanying phrase *in gremio rei publicae nutricis*: a caring nursing mother (*nutrix*) cradles her infant son in her arms (*in gremio*). Here Symmachus suggests that Gratian, the only child of the nursing state-mother, grows up in the embrace and love she bestows upon him, and therefore their bond is indissoluble.

It should be explained that the definition of the state as a mother (here “nursing mother”, sc. *nutrix* due to Gratian's tender age) and the emperor as her son (*gremium rei publicae nutricis = filius rei publicae nutricis*) is not Symmachus' conception, but – to some extent – a *topos* that appears also in the then historiography. In the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus this *topos* referred to the relationship between the state as an imperious mother (*res publica imperiosa parens* – XXV, 3, 18) and the emperor Julian the Apostate as her honest son (*alumnus rei publicae frugi* – XXV, 3, 20).⁷ Nevertheless, as Sogno (2006: 18; 101, n. 109) argues, by means of this *topos* Symmachus (let us add: despite the panegyric tone of his remark) seems to imply that the tender age of the future emperor was actually a topic of conversation in Roman aristocratic circles as well as a source of criticism of the new regime (cf. Sym., *Or.* III 3: *tu nempe es, quem paene intempestive putabamus*

⁶ When Symmachus delivered his speech Gratian was a nine-year-old (almost a ten-year-old) boy.

⁷ Cf. Mleczek 2018: 100. In the *Res Gestae* the function of the emperor as an honest son of the state-imperious mother was fundamental to Ammianus' concept of a good ruler (*princeps legitimus = alumnus rei publicae frugi*), which was built on the basis of Julian the Apostate's conduct and virtues as well as his attitude towards the state – cf. Mleczek 2018: 97–106. Symmachus seemed to follow the same way of thinking.

electum), and for two reasons: firstly, the elevation to the consulship of Gratian, a seven-year-old boy, and Dagalaifus, a barbarian general and Gratian’s colleague in 366 AD, would certainly be regarded as inopportune by the Roman senators (*nempe es*), and secondly, the elevation of the eight-year-old Gratian to the dignity of Augustus would seem controversial due to the tender age of the candidate (*intempestive electum*), who in fact became the coruler with his father and the second Augustus in the West (*intempestive electum*).

As for Gratian’s elevation,⁸ it is too overwhelming an event to be described in words. It was, as Symmachus says (*Or.* III 5), a miracle which could hardly be believed (*vix credenda miracula*), so only a great painter⁹ could lend it credibility: *Si quis mihi Zeuxis discoloribus ceris haec comitia spectanda digereret, si quis Apelleus imitator illud caeleste iudicium verisimili adflatu artis animaret,*¹⁰ *viserent posterit vix credenda miracula. [...] digna tabula saeculis, digna pictura temporibus, quibus magis utiles videmus eligi quam volentes!* The way of presenting Gratian’s elevation¹¹ is noteworthy. Symmachus presents it by means of a combination of descriptive metaphor and hyperbole:

⁸ Ware (2019: 293 [3]) pays attention to the fact that imperial panegyrics (despite their apparent uniformity) acquired an important political role in the later Roman Empire, and that is why they often concerned the key moments of an emperor’s reign, such as, for example, his elevation to Augustus. Symmachus follows this practice in his panegyric speech. Cf. also Sabbah 1984: 363–388.

⁹ As Sogno (2006: 102, n. 115) points out, Symmachus applied here the old principle that the eyes are more reliable than ears to the realm of the arts: he argued that the painting of a great artist, such as Zeuxis or Apelleus, would persuade the audience of the truth of the event in a way that words could not.

¹⁰ This technique, to which Symmachus refers, seems to be reminiscent of an encaustic painting described by Pliny the Elder. Cf. also Plin., *Nat. Hist.* XXXV, 153 (*ceris pingere ac pictura inurere quis primus excogitaverit, non constat*); Stat., *Silvae* I, 1, 100 (*Apellae te cuperent scribere cerae*) – the same technique was considered the most appropriate to capture the likeness of Domitian.

¹¹ This took place on August 24, 367 AD in Ambianum (sc. Samarobriua Ambianorum; now Amiens). At the time of his elevation to Augustus in the West, Gratian was eight years old (cf. also Zosimos, *NH* IV, 12, 2). In fact, Gratian (although formally Augustus) did not play any role in the management of the state during the lifetime of his father: Gratian’s elevation to the dignity of Augustus had ideological significance and served dynastic purposes (cf. Rogowski 2009: 263). For more, cf. McEvoy 2013: part 1, ch. 2: ‘Gratian and Valentinian II: Setting the Precedent’).

Gratian's election is a heavenly idea (*caeleste iudicium*: election = *caeleste iudicium* – hyperbole/metaphor) shown on colourful wax tablets in the form of a splendid painting (metaphor: *Zeuxis discoloribus ceris digereret*) inspired and enlivened by the art of the most perfect painters of antiquity (metaphor: *Apelleus [...] verisimili adflatu artis animaret*). Therefore the ceremony, as the orator accentuates, is a brilliant and animated scene viewed on the stage of history from the perspective of present (*digna pictura temporibus, quibus magis utiles videmus eligi*) and future generations (*viserent posteris*); such a presentation was aimed to make the magnificence of Gratian's elevation more credible than a written testimony usually does. As Ware (2019: 293 [3]) points out, this practice was common in epideictic (sc. laudatory) speeches, because *laudationes* were aimed (like Symmachus' speech) to direct the gaze of all to the emperor and to the impact of his presence.

However, this exaggerated and metaphorical picture is clearly contrasted with its contents, as the whole scene is rooted in Roman military realities and is built – as Sogno (2006: 19) aptly indicates – around the ideal of the refusal of imperial power (*recusatio imperii*; *Or.* III 5 – cf. also Miozga 2008: 71). This ideal actually constitutes a *topos* consistent with the ideological conservatism of the Roman senatorial aristocracy, which seems to come to the fore in Symmachus' conception (cf. Miozga 2008: 73): *hinc Augustum, inde legiones et inter hos medium regni inpuberem candidatum; anceps diu utrimque certamen et cunctis alacri favore plaudentibus patrem sero cedentem. turmas supplices, cuneos ambientes*¹² (*Or.* III 5). So in the foreground of this animated painting Symmachus presents the emperor Valentinian I (Augustus) and his son Gratian, the young (eight-year-old) candidate for the dignity of Augustus, standing in the midst of the legions (*legiones et inter hos medium regni inpuberem candidatum*). The ceremony is accompanied by the applause of the gathered crowd (*cunctis alacri favore plaudentibus*). Gratian's elevation was accepted by Valentinian with the same reluctance (*patrem sero cedentem*) that he had shown at the time of his proclamation as emperor (cf. also Sym., *Or.* I, 10; Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XXVI, 2, 6). As Sogno (2006: 19) implies, Symmachus,

¹² Gratian's elevation to Augustus in accordance with Roman military ritual was presented by Ammianus Marcellinus in the *Res Gestae* XXVII, 6, 5–13.

using the *topos* of *recusatio imperii* (*patrem sero cedentem*), aims to paint a scene that is likely and consistent with Valentinian’s character and particularly with his *verecundia* (restraint sc. modesty shown in the public forum – cf. Mleczek 2022: 89, n. 54; Miozga 2008: 75), because Valentinian’s gesture of (apparent) refusal to elevate his eight-year-old son to the dignity of Augustus (or rather a gesture of accepting this elevation after a struggle and much begging on the part of the soldiers, that is, under the influence of external circumstances and after prolonged resistance: *topos*) actually is a confirmation of the fact that Gratian is indeed *novi saeculi spes sperata* (“the hoped for hope of the new age”). In the second plan, Symmachus shows humble crowds (*turmas supplices*) and units of the Roman cavalry lined up in battle formation (*cuneos ambientes*). Notwithstanding such a pictorial and metaphorical presentation of the elevation, Symmachus (*Or.* III 4) testifies to its credibility, showing the soldiers’ attitude towards the young Augustus: *O militum sincera suffragia! scit iudicare devotio! [...] quis umquam de indole pueri cum parente contenderet? et tamen fiducia non peccat exercitus: spe electus es, re probatus*. The sincere love of the soldiers¹³ (*devotio*), as the author argues, makes them the best judges for choosing the new Augustus; in addition, the confident expectations of the soldiers did not prove to be excessive (*fiducia non peccat exercitus*), because their hope that led to Gratian’s election (*spe electus es*) had been confirmed by events (*re probatus*).

However, while presenting this enthusiastic reaction of the soldiers to Gratian’s elevation, Symmachus – in order to intensify the panegyric tone of the whole scene – fails to mention that the boy’s father significantly contributed to this joyful acclamation. In fact, Valentinian I, who after recovering from an illness that (as even his supporters thought and, perhaps, hoped) would prove fatal, started thinking seriously about Gratian as his successor, won the favour of the soldiers before his son’s election. In consequence, during the ceremony

¹³ However, at the end of Gratian’s reign this love of the soldiers turned into their hatred, because – as Zosimos (*NH* IV, 35, 2–3) pointed out – the emperor was too eager to surround himself with barbarians and let them join the Roman army, although his soldiers were against such a move. Afterwards this growing hatred for the emperor resulted in many rebellions.

the soldiers were in “heartfelt support” of Gratian (*militum sincera suffragia*) and thus willingly and unanimously (that is, in accordance with Valentinian’s will and expectations) accepted his elevation to Augustus (cf. Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XXVII, 6, 5; cf. also Sogno 2006: 18–19).

In Symmachus’ and Ausonius’ speeches we do not find the ancestry of such a perfect candidate. Symmachus (*Or.* III 4), instead of referring to it, briefly mentions Gratian’s talent (*indoles pueri*),¹⁴ which indicates that he is a suitable candidate for being Augustus and exercising imperial power (*utilis: utiles eligi* – *Or.* III 4); according to the author, the talent of the ruler is an essential auspicious sign of a good reign. As for Ausonius, he replaces Gratian’s ancestry with the etymology of his name, which is derived from the noun *gratia*;¹⁵ the orator also emphasizes (not without some exaggeration) that Gratian fully deserved it because of his excellent deeds (*Act.* VIII, 38–39): *tu, Gratiane, qui hoc nomen sic per fortunam adeptus es, ut nemo verius ambitione quaesierit: neque enim iustius Metellus cognomento Pius patre revocato, qui esset impius exulante; aut verius Sulla Felix, qui felicior ante, quam vocaretur; quam tu, Gratianus: cui et hoc nomen est, et illa Metelli Sullaeque cognomina. tu, inquam, Gratiane, qui hoc non singulis factis, sed perpetua grate agendi benignitate meruisti; cui, nisi ab avo deductum esset, ab omnibus adderetur.* The Roman republican *exempla* are noteworthy here because of their use of the past in presenting the great significance of the emperor (let us add that historical and mythical *exempla* were indicated among the standard techniques of the panegyrist – cf. Maranesi 2016: section II); by means of them Ausonius, using this standard panegyric technique, accentuates how much Gratian – in comparison with former illustrious men (Metellus, Sulla) – deserved his great name, which by a twist of fate (*hoc nomen sic per fortunam adeptus es*) he inherited from his grandfather¹⁶ (*ab avo deductum*

¹⁴ Gratian’s talent was also mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus: *Res Gestae* XXXI, 10, 18 (*praeclare indolis adulescens*).

¹⁵ Here Ausonius seemed to refer to the noun *gratia*, understood as kindness, friendship, grace and gratitude. These meanings are consistent with the qualities of the emperor given in the text; other meanings seem rather inadequate.

¹⁶ Gratianus Maior Funarius: Valentinian I’s father and Gratian’s grandfather – por. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXX, 7, 2–3; PLRE I, Gratianus 1 (pp. 400–401).

esset). The quality and essence of the achievements are the criteria of evaluation here, and with regard to this aspect Gratian surpassed the great men of the past (*neque iustius Metellus, aut verius Sulla*), who performed only singular and not so remarkable deeds; moreover, these deeds were not consistent with the nicknames these men were given to commemorate them. Metellus received the nickname Pius¹⁷ (“loving his father”) because he brought his father out of exile (*patre revocato*), which actually was his filial duty (*qui esset impius exulante*); Sulla was given the nickname Felix¹⁸ (“lucky, fortunate”), although in fact he enjoyed greater success before he received this cognomen (*felicior ante, quam vocaretur*). Gratian, unlike Metellus and Sulla, earned his great name due to his continual and gracious doing of good (*perpetua grate agendi benignitate*), which is thanks to the continuous implementation of the *gratia* announced in his name (*grate agendi*). Here Ausonius seems to imply (*Act. VIII 38–39*) that Gratian’s name is a fortunate *auspicium* which foretells him being “the ideal emperor”.

Other auspices are presented by Symmachus in *Or. III 2* by means of references to traditional Roman symbols: *vidimus in sellis curulibus novum lumen, clementiae auspices incruentas secures, virtutis omina in fascibus laureatis, maiestatis augurium in aquilis scipionum*. As we can read in the metaphor *in sellis curulibus novum lumen*, Gratian is considered “the new light” (*novum lumen*) that shone on the curula chair (*in sellis curulibus*). Symmachus underlines through this metaphor that Gratian is the ideal ruler who received the highest state dignity (it is indicated here by the metonymic phrase *in sellis curulibus*). Therefore, Gratian’s presence (*optimus princeps*) at the highest position in the state constitutes an auspicious sign and is tantamount to the beginning of the rule of law and, consequently, of a new age (*saeculum novum*). Thus, Gratian, as the perfect ruler, is himself the auspices of imperial power not stained by blood (*incruentae secures*), that is, free from cruelty, full of clemency (*clementiae auspices*; cf. also Sym., *Ep. IV, 67: temporum clementia*) and based on justice¹⁹ (due to his lack of

¹⁷ Cf. Valerius Maximus, *Memorabilia* V 27; Cic., *Orator* II 40, 167; Plin., *Paneg.* 88.

¹⁸ Cf. Sall., *Iug.* 95; Suet., *Tib.* 59, 2; Plin. *Nat. Hist.* VII, 137.

¹⁹ Cf. Arist., *EN* 1134b.

cruelty: *iustitia et clementia = incruentae seures sc. civile iustumque imperium*; cf. also Sym., *Ep.* III 45: *aequitas temporum*; *Ep.* IV 66: *iustitia temporum*), which is closely connected with clemency (cf. Mleczek 2018: 67–69) and constitutes the foundation of lawful imperial power (cf. Mleczek 2018: 98–99). Therefore *clementia*, as Ausonius accentuates (*Act.* XVII 40), is regarded as a precious gift on the part of Gratian for the whole human race, and (due to the close relationship of clemency with justice) its manifestation towards his subjects does not disturb the perfect order (sc. justice) in the state (*intellegis posse te esse lenissimum sine dispendio disciplinae* – *Act.* XVI 72).

It is noteworthy, however, that justice and clemency are not only individual qualities of Gratian because they were also considered features of the imperial period (in accordance with the state ideology²⁰ of the day – cf. Demandt 1965: 129; Mleczek 2018: 45–46), and (in addition to other imperial *virtutes*) belonged to the conventional scheme of virtues (*topos*) that appeared in the imperial panegyrics (e.g. Plin., *Paneg.* 3; 78 – cf. part 2) as well as in other contemporary (e.g. Pacat., *Or.* 31, 3; 36, 3–4; 43, 4; 44, 2; 45, 4–6) and later authors (e.g. Claud., *4. Hon.* 276–278). Both of these virtues can also be found in the then historiography of Ammianus Marcellinus,²¹ who pointed out *iustitia* and *clementia* in the character and conduct of the emperor Julian the Apostate, and regarded the former as the foundation of the emperor's lawful power and the latter as the most laudable virtue of his nature (cf. Mleczek 2018: 67–69; Demandt 1965: 61). However, it should be explained that *clementia*, indicated by Symmachus in *Or.* III 2, constitutes not only the virtue of Gratian himself but also has a wider scope and reference. According to the principles of the imperial state ideology, which seems to come to the fore in Symmachus' statement discussed above (*Or.* III 2), *clementia* was considered a means of extending Roman rule over the barbarians (cf. Brodka 1998: 49; Asche 1983: 107 sqq). Thus *clementia* also defines the conventional guideline of the Roman policy, which officially assumed the application of clement methods

²⁰ Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XIV, 6, 5–6.

²¹ Cf. *Res Gestae* XVI, 5, 12–13; XXI, 12, 20; XXII, 9, 9, XXV, 4, 1; 8–9. In Ammianus' opinion, *iustitia* and *clementia* (that is closely related to justice) belonged to the innate virtues of the emperor (e.g. XXV, 4, 1).

towards the barbarians (cf. Brodka 1998: 52). These methods, as Symmachus says in *Or.* III 2, will be adopted by the Roman state during the reign of Gratian²² (let us add: actually in accordance with this so called “principle of *clementia*” in the Roman policy towards barbarians in the imperial period). In the next metonymic phrases (in the passage quoted above – *Or.* III 2), Symmachus presents the auspices of other imperial virtues: the bunches of rods crowned with laurel (*in fascibus laureatis*) predict Gratian’s bravery (*omina virtutis: fasces laureatae = virtus*) and the eagles adorning the staffs (*in aquilis scipionum*) foretell his imperial majesty (*maiestatis augurium: aquilae scipionum = maiestas*). Roman auspices, as Symmachus accentuates, unanimously indicate Gratian as the ideal ruler even before his formal elevation to Augustus (*his ad imperium lectus auspiciis* – *Or.* III 3); by means of them Symmachus not only presents virtues of the new emperor consistent with panegyric *topos* (*iustitia, clementia, virtus, maiestas*) but also indicates the guidelines of Roman state policy (*clementia*) under his rule. Gratian’s appearance on the stage of history was announced not only by the Roman auspices. In *Or.* III 12 Symmachus says that the advent of this perfect ruler in the course of history is the fulfilment of the prophecies proclaimed for a long time by barbarian soothsayers and oracles: *audio iampridem fatidicos obmurmurare gentium vates, hactenus nomen stetisse barbaricum, iam genitum esse, iam crescere, cui necesse sit cum toto orbe servire. incusant alii senectutem servatamque in tempora captiva canitiem; alios tenerae taedet aetatis, qui postquam sensum libertatis hauserunt, metu servitutis agitantur. merito undique certatim supplices misere legatos: captivo similis est, qui primus currit ad pacem.* Let us notice that in the barbarian *responsa* and *praesagia* Symmachus presents quite a different image of Gratian. So the same emperor who, according to Roman auspices, is the personification of clemency (*Or.* III 2), according to the *responsa hostium*, is at the same time the ruler who arouses the fear of slavery (*metu servitutis*

²² Such a method was the continuation of Valentinian I’s policy, so Gratian entered and followed the political path marked out by his father. However, the question of *clementia* in Symmachus’ panegyric (laudatory) speeches should be approached quite cautiously, because – as Brodka (1998: 52) points out – the orator advocated the policy of Roman conquest while praising imperial clemency.

agitantur – *Or.* III 12). It should be explained that according to the Roman imperial state ideology, this *metus* (fear) was the appropriate reaction of barbarians to the emperor's activity (cf. Brodka 1998: 49). Therefore making the barbarians feel this fear did not constitute a negative feature in Gratian's behaviour, but – on the contrary – indicated his correct conduct that was consistent with the Roman *raison d'état*. Moreover, as Symmachus (*Or.* III 12) says, this fear of the emperor's majesty as well as the power of the Roman Empire compelled the barbarians to submit themselves voluntarily (sc. without force or any external pressure: without being compelled) to the rule of the Romans (*undique certatim supplices misere legatos*). In light of the principles of Roman foreign policy this conduct was right and proper (*merito*) on the part of the barbarians. Therefore, *metus* allowed the Romans to extend their rule over the barbarians without the use of force and by peaceful means causing the barbarians to enter into a voluntary alliance (*foedus*) with the Romans. Such a measure gave the Romans and the emperor, as their superior, the opportunity to act in accordance with the requirements of clemency (*clementia*: *Or.* III 2 – cf. above).

Let us explain that according to the *topos* that occurred within Roman state ideology, this voluntary alliance (*foedus*), to which Symmachus refers (*Or.* III 12), was shown and regarded as *pax precativa*.²³ Symmachus (*Or.* III 12) presented this *pax precativa* as an act of voluntary submission of the barbarians to Roman rule: the barbarians, despite the lack of previous military conflict, were the first to seek to make peace (*pax precativa*) without being forced, which was *de facto* tantamount to entering into a voluntary alliance (*foedus*)²⁴ with the Romans (*captivo similis est, qui primus currit ad pacem*). Therefore *pax precativa* and *metus* (on the part of the barbarians) indicate that Gratian's policy was implemented by means of *clementia*, which was proper and consistent with the Roman *raison d'état*.

However, it should be added that here Symmachus (*Or.* III 12) also pointed to a certain intransigence and hardness of Roman policy

²³ Cf. Brodka 1998: 49; Asche 1983: 104 sqq. Rhetoric and political communication – cf. Sabbah 1984: 363–388.

²⁴ A different version of this event can be found in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus (XXXI, 10, 12–17) – cf. also Brodka 1998: 49.

(despite the officially declared clemency) towards the barbarians, who actually had no other choice and in fact were made to submit (*necesse sit*) to Roman rule (*cui necesse sit cum toto orbe servire*). So *pax precativa* was actually the result of the tough policy of the Roman Empire towards the barbarians, although officially it was a voluntary act that the barbarians undertook without any external coercion. Symmachus (*Or.* III 12) emphasized that future fame and favour on the part of the barbarian nations that submitted to Roman rule resulted from Gratian’s conduct consistent with the principles of the Roman policy towards the barbarians (*clementia, pax precativa, metus*): *credo hostium responsis, credo praesagiis: quantum gloriae consequeris olim patre incolumi ducturus exercitum, qui quacumque duceris, iam rogaris!* The repetition *credo ... credo* adds an emotional and personal tinge to Symmachus’ statement, as it is not only the praise of Gratian’s courage, the conduct and policy adopted by him, but also appears to reveal the unspoken declaration of the orator, who, although he praises imperial *clementia*, at the same time advocates the policy of Roman conquest and external expansion (*ducturus exercitum, qui quacumque duceris, iam rogaris*).²⁵ However, all these political and ideological references are understandable and in fact constitute one of the panegyric techniques, considering the important political and cultural role that panegyrics (to which also Symmachus’ *laudatio* belongs – cf. Kelly 2013: 261) acquired in the later Roman Empire (cf. Ware 2019: 293 [3]; Sabah 1984: 363–388).

2. *Virtutes*

Symmachus and Ausonius emphasize that Gratian, as the ideal emperor, is the source and personification of imperial virtues. Ausonius presented them in *Act.* VIII 39–40: *tu tuaeque virtutes: bonitas, qua in omnes prolixus es, perpetuus in me; pietas, qua orbem tuum temperas, quam in ulciscendo patruo probas, tuendo in fratre cumulas, ornando in praeceptore multiplicas. agat gratias clementia, quam humano*

²⁵ Cf. Symmachus’ similar attitude towards this question in *Or.* II 24; also cf. Brodka 1998: 52.

generi impertis; liberalitas, qua ditas omnes; fortitudo, qua vincis, et mens ista aurea, quam de communi deo plus quam unus hausisti. It is noteworthy that these *virtutes* were not particularly characteristic of Gratianus but constituted the conventional scheme of imperial virtues (*topos*). As Ware (2019: 293 [3]) explains, this canon appeared in the rhetorical handbooks where the abstract ideal of a ruler was created,²⁶ but the individual orator was free to choose those virtues that were required to build the ideal of the emperor whom he praised in his speech. So these canonical virtues appeared, first and foremost, in imperial panegyrics²⁷ that were highly conventional forms (Cameron 2011: 228) in which orators presented their erudition with references to other panegyrists, repeating also the same schemes, exempla and tropes (Ware 2019: 293 [3]; Ware 2017: 11–16). Moreover, as Ware (2014: 88) explains, the selection of virtues “created for the emperor a symbolically and ideologically coherent persona and demonstrated the practical benefit of the imperial reign”; in addition, the extensive lexicon of imperial virtues, through selection, emphasis and omission, enabled one to create a very nuanced portrayal of the emperor (Ware 2014: 89).

Therefore Gratian, in accordance with this panegyric (and carefully selected) canon of *virtutes*, was the source of the goodness (*bonitas*) and love (*pietas*) that he generously bestowed on his subjects. Let us notice that the author indicated the scope and various tints of imperial *pietas* by means of *gradatio* (a mental figure of speech), enumerating them from greater to smaller (*a maiore ad minus*). So Gratian showed his *pietas* by exercising power over a world subjected to his

²⁶ Cf. Plin., *Paneg.* 2 (*pietas*), 3 (*liberalitas, clementia, fortitudo*) – Traianus; Pacatus., *Or.* 40, 3–4; 6, 2; 7, 1 (*prudentia, fortitudo*) – Theodosius; Claudianus, 4. *Hon.* 220 (*virtus*); 4. *Hon.* 276–278 (*clementia*); 4. *Hon.* 276 (*pietas*) – Honorius; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXV, 3, 18 (*clementia*); 4, 1 (*prudentia, fortitudo, liberalitas*); 7 (*prudentia*); 10 (*fortitudo*); 15 (*liberalitas*) – Julian the Apostate. According to Ammianus, *prudentia* and *fortitudo* belonged to the innate virtues of an emperor (*virtutes praecipuae*), whereas *liberalitas* was considered one of his external virtues (*virtutes extrinsecus aliae*). Imperial virtues – cf. Brodka 1998: 17, 29, 43–46; 97–102; Lippold 1969: 228–250; Mause 1994; Mleczek 2018: 64. *Bonitas, liberalitas* and *indulgentia* appear in the praise addressed to Constantine the Great (*Pan. Lat.* 5[8] 311 AD; cf. also Ware 2014: 89) – Ausonius chooses similar virtues from the panegyric canon and praises them in *Act.* VIII 39–40.

²⁷ Cf. Nixon, Saylor Rodgers 1994: 33 (also n. 85)–34 (introduction).

rule: here *pietas* has a wide geopolitical scope, as it embraces the entire *imperium Romanum* (*orbis*) subjected to the absolute power of Gratian (*tuus: orbis tuus*; cf. Brodka 1998: 29). The young emperor testified to his *pietas* by avenging the death of his uncle Valens²⁸ (*in ulciscendo patruo probas*): here *pietas* has a narrower scope, namely intrastate and partly family; he also proved his *pietas* by taking care of his younger stepbrother, Valentinian II (*tuendo in fratre impertis*): here *pietas* has only a family tint and its scope is clearly narrowed (as in *Act. II 7: piissimus* – because of love and devotion towards his family). Gratian also manifested his *pietas*²⁹ by bestowing the dignity of consul on Ausonius, his former tutor (*ornando in praeceptore*): here *pietas* has a personal tint, and its very narrow scope concerns only the private life of the emperor, since the reference to the dignity of the consul is an act of his personal gratitude to his former teacher³⁰ (cf. also Aus., *Mos.* 450–452:

²⁸ In fact, Gratian’s actions were – as Brodka points out (1998: 29) – only “striving for revenge” for the death of his uncle Valens at Adrianople: the young emperor actually failed to fulfil an act of definitive revenge on the Goths. Therefore Ausonius, relying here on the device of rhetorical probability (*verisimile*) and using his rhetorical invention (*inventio*), presents as true these facts that were actually only similar to the true ones – *verisimile* and *inventio*, cf. Hermann 2021: 67–68.

²⁹ As Rogowski (2009: 254–255) points out, in Ausonius’ speech *pietas* was not only Gratian’s virtue but also a category which served the orator to interpret his own political career (including the appointment as consul; for more on Ausonius’ political career, cf. Olszaniec 2007: 340–346). This was proven by the fact that, as the scholar (2009: 255) argues, Ausonius, while addressing Gratian, used the adjective *piissimus* only when he referred to his appointment to the post of consul (cf. Aus., *Act.* II, 7; IV, 16; V, 22; VI, 29; VIII, 39; IX, 43).

³⁰ Ausonius (*Act.* II, 7) seems to refer here to one of the aspects of *pietas*, which was limited to the duty of children towards their parents (*pietas erga parentes*) because the appointment as consul was the fulfilment of the pupil’s duty towards his tutor (based on his gratitude: *ad consulatum praeceptor electus*). Rogowski (2009: 256) explains that the mere understanding of the relationship between teacher and pupil in terms of *pietas* is not unusual, because – according to the Roman concept – their mutual relationship was to be modelled on the bond existing between father and son (cf. Quint., *Inst. orat.* II, 2, 4; 9, 1). Ausonius, as the scholar (2009: 257) points out, using this *topos* and transferring the father-son relationship to his relation with the emperor (which was astonishing, as Gratian was the ruler of the Roman Empire) presented himself not only as his tutor but also as an individual to whom the emperor might feel obliged to repay the debt of gratitude (cf. *Act.* V, 23: *debere te dicis*). In fact, this conflict of contradictory roles (tutor-subject and pupil-ruler) was not a source of discomfort for Ausonius

Augustus, pater et nati, mea maxima cura, / fascibus Ausoniis decoratum et honore curuli / mittent).

Gratian as *optimus princeps* was also distinguished by his generosity (*liberalitas*), which – like *pietas* – belonged to the canonical imperial virtues (cf. above). Ausonius presented the essence of imperial *liberalitas* in a conventional way in the phrase *qua ditas omnes*, saying that the emperor, thanks to his generosity, enriched everyone, that is not himself but all his subjects (cf. a similar opinion to Julian the Apostate's *liberalitas* in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus: XXV, 4, 15). However, as for stylistic means, this conventional virtue was presented here in an interesting way, that is with the help of the rhetorical figure³¹ *gradatio* (*a minore ad maius*) as well as the skilful use of the verb *multiplicare* (*Act. XVI 72–73*): *neque vero unum aliquod bonum uno die praestas: sed indulgentias singulares per singula horarum momenta multiplicas. [...] quod tu quam cumulata bonitate fecisti!* Thanks to the discussed stylistic means (*gradatio a minore ad maius* and *multiplicare*), the author descriptively presents the operation of multiplying (*indulgentias singulares per singula horarum momenta multiplicas*), where multiplication illustrates the continuous increase in the number of boons (the number of boons × the number of minutes in hours × the number of hours during the day). The great and perfect goodness (*bonitas cumulata*) of the ruler is the result of this multiplication: this *bonitas cumulata* is manifested in the benevolent and approachable attitude (*facilitas*)³² of the emperor towards his subjects and in his openness to their needs and complaints (*Aus., Act. XV 71*): *laudabile est imperatorem faciles interpellantibus praebere aditus nec*

but a source of pride because he was deemed worthy to be appointed tutor to the future emperor Gratian (*Act. V, 24: hoc ego possum verius retorquere, dignum me habitum, qui docerem*). For more on this aspect of *pietas* in Ausonius' speech, cf. Rogowski 2009: 258–262. Gratian's *pietas* was also testified to in St. Ambr., *De ob. Val.* 79–80: *Plurima dedisti tuae pietatis insignia. Tu me inter tua pericula requirebas, tu in tuis extremis me appellabas, meum de te plus dolebas dolorem; De ob. Val.* 74: *pius atque mansuetus.*

³¹ For more on rhetorical figures and tropes in Ausonius' speech, cf. Dräger 2011: 509–580.

³² Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXV, 4, 7 (Julian the Apostate); Plin., *Paneg.* 2 (Traianus) – cf. Mleczek 2018: 67.

de occupatione causari: tu confirmas adire cunctantes; et iam quærimoniis explicatis, ne quid adhuc sileatur, interrogas. Gratian’s *bonitas* was further emphasized by the *exemplum* of the emperor Titus (Aus., *Act.* XVI 72), who was known for regarding every day without granting a boon as one lost (*amici, diem perdidit* – Suet., *Tit.* 8). But Gratian, due to constantly multiplying his boons by the number of minutes and hours during the day, surpassed this former emperor in goodness, generosity and graciousness (*indulgentias singulares multiplicas*). On the other hand, Gratian, who surpassed in goodness the excellent *exempla antiquitatis*, while rendering his boons was only an imitator of God (*dei munus imitatoris* – Aus., *Act.* V 22), who was always above him (cf. Brodka 1998: 29). According to Ausonius, remitting debtors’ payments of overdue debts and taxes was a representative act of Gratian’s perfect generosity and benevolence (*Act.* XVI 73): *vel illud unum cuius modi est de condonatis residuis tributorum? quod tu quam cumulata bonitate fecisti! quis umquam imperatorum hoc provinciis suis aut uberiore indulgentia dedit, aut certiore securitate prospexit, aut prudentia consultiore munivit?* By means of rhetorical questions the author emphasized the great goodness of the young emperor (and at the same time his own unquestionable conviction of it), although – worth noting – some earlier rulers³³ also manifested their generosity by excusing payment of overdue debts (so such a move on the part of Gratian was quite a usual practice to win the favour of the subjects). Ausonius, however, was quite sceptical over any similar acts of generosity and clemency on the part of Gratian’s predecessors (*Act.* XVI 73–74): *fecerat et Traianus olim, sed partibus retentis non habebat tantam oblectationem concessi debiti portio, quanta suberat amaritudo servati. et Antoninus indulserat, sed imperii, non beneficii successor invidit, qui ex documentis tabulisque populi condonata repetivit. tu argumenta omnia flagitandi publicitus ardere iussisti. [...] quid te, imperator Auguste, indulgentius, quid potest esse consultius? quæ bona præstas, efficis, ne caduca sint: quæ mala adimis, prospicis ne possint esse recidiva.* Thus, the *exempla* of Traianus and Marcus Aurelius (the former good emperors)

³³ Cf. Traianus (Plin., *Paneg.* 37–40); Marcus Aurelius (Cass. Dio, *RH* 72, 32, 2; *Historia Augusta, Marcus Antoninus* 23, 3); Julian the Apostate (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestæ* XXV, 4, 15).

were to emphasize the immensity of Gratian's goodness, generosity and benevolence. Let us note that the author, aiming to illustrate the emperor's perfect *bonitas* and *liberalitas*, by means of these *exempla*, added to this standard panegyric technique the Tacitean motif of *aemulatio virtutum*³⁴ (competition in virtues with predecessors – Tac., *Ann.* III 55, 5). Traianus, who (as the author says) did not completely remit the payment of debts, and Marcus Aurelius, whose generosity was destroyed by his greedy successor Commodus, showed their goodness to their subjects. Gratian, however, whose *bonitas*, combined with clemency, generosity and prudence, was much more magnificent, far surpassed his predecessors, that is, he made their goodness more perfect. Let us add that Ausonius, who, as Green (1991: 538) points out, was generally not imaginative in his speech, unexpectedly sketches (*Act.* XVI 74) an evocative picture, which emphasizes (and exaggerates) Gratian's generosity and goodness: *ardebant stirpes fraudium veterum: ardebant semina futurarum. iam se cum pulvere favilla miscuerat, iam nubibus fumus se involuerat: et adhuc obnoxii in paginis concrematis ductus apicum et sestertiorum notas cum substantiolarum ratione cernebant, quod meminere lectum, legi posse metuentes*. Here Ausonius argues that thanks to the *bonitas cumulata* of the emperor, who ordered the burning of the debt registers, “the roots of past and future wrongs were set on fire” (*ardebant stirpes fraudium veterum: ardebant semina futurarum*). This descriptive metaphor corresponds with the colouring and atmosphere of the whole picture: soot and ash (*cum pulvere favilla*: black and grey colour) as the only reminiscence of all injuries, smoke from bonfires rising under the sky (*nubibus fumus se involuerat*: the red-gold colour of the flame; the grey colour and smell of smoke), charred pages (*paginae concrematae*: black colour) and

³⁴ This motif consists in the development, through posterity, of attitudes and virtues more perfect than those of their predecessors. It is worth adding that this Tacitean motif was also known to Ausonius' contemporaries; hence its use by the Burdigalian testifies not so much to his brilliant invention but to his erudition. Symmachus used this motif in *Rel.* 12, 2, where he presented posthumous praise of Praetextatus (cf. Mleczek 2022: 83); Ammianus Marcellinus in the *Res Gestae* XXI, 16, 8–10 travestied this Tacitean motif, aiming to illustrate the cruelty of the emperor Constantius II and other bad rulers, whereas in the *Res Gestae* XVI, 1, 4, by means of this motif, Ammianus emphasized the good moral conduct of the emperor Julian the Apostate.

the deep-rooted fear of the debtors (*quod meminereant ... metuentes*), observers of this event. It is worth noting that this gloomy and exaggerated picture reveals the essence of the motif of *aemulatio virtutum*: by means of this picture the author clearly indicates that Gratian surpassed his predecessors in generosity and goodness, because – unlike them – he effectively removed all the wrongs of his subjects (*mala ne recidiva = ardebant stirpes fraudium veterum et semina futurarum*) and offered them everlasting boons (*bona ne caduca = cum pulvere favilla, paginae concrematae*).

Ausonius continues this thought in *Act. XVI 75*: *haec provincialibus indulgentiae bona. quid illa nostro ordini? quid illa militibus? Antoninorum cognita fuit et iam ante Germanicorum in cohorte amicorum et legionibus familiaris humanitas. sed ego nolo benevolentiam tuam aliorum collatione praecellere. abundant in te ea bonitatis et virtutis exempla, quae sequi cupiat ventura posteritas et, si rerum natura pateretur, adscribi sibi voluisset antiquitas*. Let us notice that this time the author emphasized Gratian’s benevolence by means of omission (*praeteritio*), which was used twice (the accumulation of these rhetorical figures helped to strengthen the meaning) in two successive rhetorical questions (*quid illa nostro ordini? quid illa militibus?*), which deliberately did not have predicates to intensify their emotional charge. By means of them Ausonius also accentuated the boons that Gratian granted to members of *ordo senatorius* and soldiers, but he did not develop these generalizations, failing to enumerate these acts of the emperor’s benevolence in detail. Therefore, here *praeteritio* underlined the immensity of Gratian’s benevolence, since the author (as he seemed to suggest) did not even attempt to list all the boons offered by the emperor because of their abundance. The analogous effect was achieved by means of *praeteritio* in the sentence *sed ego nolo benevolentiam tuam aliorum collatione praecellere*. Here refusal (*nolo praecellere = malo praeterire/silere*) was an interesting approach to omission: the author did not want (sc. he refused) to praise Gratian’s *benevolentia* because it was so perfect that it required no comparison with the benevolence of his predecessors.

An essential aspect of Gratian’s benevolence was manifested in his attitude towards the soldiers. Ausonius illustrated it by means of the

exemplum of the emperor Traianus as well as the Tacitean motif of *aemulatio virtutum* (Act. XVII 76): *Aegrotantes amicos Traianus visere solebat: hactenus in eo comitas praedicanda est. tu et visere solitus et mederi praebes ministros, instruis cibos, fomenta dispensas, sump-tum adicis medellarum, consolaris adfectos, revallescentibus gratularis*. Gratian, as the author says, developed a more perfect goodness than Traianus: the latter only visited his sick comrades-in-arms while the former visited them, healed and nursed (*visere et mederi: humanitas*) – thus, Gratian’s *humanitas* was far more perfect than that of the former emperor Traianus. Ausonius did not refer to Gratian’s *humanitas* directly but presented it descriptively by means of *enumeratio*: he indicated twelve activities by which the emperor’s virtue was shown and realized. It is worth adding that the verbs indicating visual and auditory perception (*vidi ... vidi, audivi*) used in this *enumeratio* enlivened the picture as well as put the author in the role of an eyewitness of the emperor’s deeds (cf. Krynicka 2010: 934–935), and thus emphasized the credibility of this scene (Act. XVII 77): *vidi te circumire tentoria, ‘satin salvae?’ quaerere, tractare vulnera sauciorum et, ut salutiferae adponerentur medellae atque ut non cessaretur, instare. vidi quosdam fastidientes cibum te commendante sumpsisse. audivi confirmantia ad salutem verba praefari, occurrere desideriis singulorum: huius sarcinas mulis aulicis vehere, his specialia iumenta praebere, illis ministeria perditorum instaurare lixarum, aliorum egestatem tolerare sumptu, horum nuditatem velare vestitu, omnia agere indefesse et benigne, pietate maxima, ostentatione nulla, omnia praebere aegris, nihil exprobrare sanatis*. It is worth noting that Gratian’s actions indicated in this *enumeratio* also revealed the Christian³⁵ tint of his *humanitas*, which was his *misericordia* (pity and compassion) towards the sick. Ausonius

³⁵ Gratian was a Christian (cf. Kay 2001: 24; St. Ambr., *De ob. Val. 74: Gratianus [...] fuit enim et ipse fidelis in Domino*), which might have influenced the emperor’s attitude and Ausonius’ presentation of his conduct. As regards Ausonius, his views are difficult to define: some scholars claim (e.g. A. Di Berardino) that he was a Christian by faith but a pagan by attitude towards life; others say (e.g. Manzanares 2001) that he was a pagan who recognized the Christian God but regarded him as one of many gods; according to Krynicka (2014: 273–275, 278), Ausonius was a “half-Christian” who “was a pious, but without ostentation and within the limits of a good tone, follower of Christ”. In Kay’s opinion (2001: 24) “all evidence points to Ausonius’ being at neither

sketched the image of a modest and merciful ruler who “tirelessly, kindly, with the greatest devotion and without seeking vain glory” (that is, as one may conclude, with Christian modesty and *miser cordia: indefesse et benigne, pietate maxima, ostentatione nulla*), cared about the weak and the sick: the emperor visited them personally (*circumire tentoria*) and comforted them in their misfortune (*confirmantia ad salutem verba praefari*), touched and healed wounds (*tractare vulnera sauciorum et, ut salutiferae adponerentur medellae atque ut non cessaretur, instare*), made them eat in his presence (*cibum te commendante sumpsisse*), fulfilled their wishes (*occurrere desideriis singulorum, nihil exprobrare sanatis*), satisfied their needs at his own expense (*egestatem tolerare sumptu*) and supplied clothes for the poorest (*nuditatem velare vestitu*). Therefore *miser cordia* completed the image of Gratian’s generosity and goodness (*liberalissimus: ostentat hoc dives exercitus – Act. II 7*), making him more perfect than his predecessor, Traianus.

Gratian’s bravery (*virtus, fortitudo*) was foretold by the auspices (bunches of rods crowned with laurel: Sym., *Or.* III 2 – cf. above) at the moment of his elevation. Ausonius (*Act. II 8–9*) emphasized that the emperor’s bravery was a gift from fate (*fortuna concessit*) and proof of the benevolence of heaven (*indulgentia divina: possum ire per omnes appellationes tuas, quas olim virtus dedit, quas proxime fortuna concessit, quas adhuc indulgentia divina meditatur*). The emperor’s bravery (*merita virtutis – Act. II 9; imperator fortissimus – Act. II 7*) and prosperity (*felicitas*:³⁶ *cognomina felicitatis – Act. II 9*) are testified to, as Ausonius says, by his sound plans and military measures, which include the establishment of peace³⁷ on the borders along the Danube and

extreme of the fourth century debate between paganism and Christianity, and probably to his not being particularly interested in it”.

³⁶ The mutual relationship of bravery (*fortitudo/virtus*) and prosperity (*felicitas*) in the undertakings of the emperors was also emphasized in historiography: Ammianus Marcellinus mentioned it in his *Res Gestae* XXI, 16, 13 (while discussing the prosperity of the emperor Constantius II) and XXV, 4, 14 (in references to the deeds of the emperor Julian the Apostate) – cf. Mleczek 2018: 71–72. *Felicitas imperatoria* – cf. Neri 1984: 12–14; Wistrand 1987: 67 sqq; Brandt 1999: 358–366; also Zieske 1972.

³⁷ The peace mentioned by Ausonius was a consequence of Gratian’s victory over the Alamannic tribe of Lentiens (*Lentienses*), whom he defeated in May 378 AD in the battle at Argentovaria (now Horbouurg) – cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXXI, 10, 1–20; Pastorino 1971: 328, n. 7; cf. also Aus., *Mos.* 418–424 (*iunctos na-*

the Rhine (*uno pacatus in anno et Danuvii limes et Rheni – Act. II 7*) as well as the establishment of order in the eastern provinces (sc. in Thrace: *oriens ordinatus – Act. II 7*).

It is noteworthy, however, that Ausonius, while presenting in *Act. II 7* with a clearly panegyric tendency Gratian's merits and the effectiveness of his military movements, showed the political realities of the day in a rather superficial way and, in fact, covered up the really difficult situation of the Roman state in 379 AD. As regards the peace on the Danube and the Rhine (made after Gratian's victory over the Alamanni), it should be explained that in 379 AD Gallia was again exposed to invasion by the Germans (although the author obscures this fact, mentioning the earlier victory of the emperor).

As for the reference to the establishment of order in the East (*oriens ordinatus*: after the defeat of the Romans at Adrianople and the death of the emperor Valens on August 9, 378 AD), the situation there was far from stabilized: the Goths, emboldened by their victory, still prowled the territories of the Eastern Empire with impunity (cf. Lenski 1997: 129–168). Regarding Gratian's participation in the establishment of the discussed order in the eastern provinces, this was actually limited to the nomination of Theodosius as emperor³⁸ in the East, so it was not tantamount to the subjugation of the Goths by Gratian himself. Thus

tique patrisque triumphos). However, Ausonius omitted the fact that Valentinian I, who fortified the entire bank of the Rhine on the Gallic side with military camps, castles and towers (cf. Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XXVIII, 2, 1–6) and after his victory over the Allamnic king Macrianus (November/December 374 AD), made peace with the Alamanni (cf. Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XXX, 3, 1–7), significantly contributed to stabilizing the situation on the borders of the Rhine. Moreover, Valentinian I's victorious military campaign against the barbarian Quads (April – November 375 AD), which ended in making peace (November 375 AD), helped to stabilize the situation on the borders of the Danube (cf. Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XXX, 5, 1–2; 11–15; 6, 1): Ausonius refers to Valentinian I's successes in *Epigr.* 3 and 4.

³⁸ Gratian, being aware of the hopeless situation of the state after the Roman defeat at Adrianople (August 9, 378 AD; cf. also Zosimos, *NH* IV, 25, 1–2; Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XXXI, 16, 1–5), withdrew from Thrace and appointed Theodosius (cf. PLRE I, Flavius Theodosius 4, pp. 904–905) as emperor (Augustus) in the East (January 19, 379 AD – cf. also PLRE I, Flavius Theodosius 4, p. 905; Kienast 1996: 332–336; Zosimos, *NH* IV, 24, 4). Afterwards Gratian sent military reinforcements to Theodosius and entrusted him with ending the war with the Goths (cf. Ziolkowski 2009: 884–885).

Ausonius, skilfully using his rhetorical invention³⁹ and referring to Gratian’s political wisdom (*imperator consultissimus: probat hoc tali principe oriens ordinatus* – Act. II 7), tried to convince (or rather create the impression) that the problem of the Goths had already been solved (cf. Brodka 1998: 29), although at the time of formulating these statements and delivering this speech (sc. in 379 AD) it was actually not yet a real (but only probable) fact.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, by means of the phrases *pacatus Danuvii limes et Rheni* and *oriens ordinatus* Ausonius clearly emphasized peace (*pax*), which – according to the state ideology in the days of Gratian – was one of the features of the imperial period. Other Gratian’s victories were shown in the same way, as they testified to his exceptional military bravery (*fortitudo, qua vincis* – Act. VIII 40). Ausonius presented them by enumerating (*enumeratio*) the emperor’s honourable nicknames derived from the names of the peoples he defeated (Act. II 8): *voca Germanicum deditione gentilium, Alamannicum traductione captorum, vincendo et ignoscendo Sarmaticum*. Gratian was therefore given the nicknames *Germanicus* and *Alamannicus*⁴¹ (because of his victory over the German tribe of the Alamanni) and *Sarmaticus*⁴² (due to his victory over the Sarmatians).

³⁹ Cf. Hermann 2021: 68 (*verisimile* and *inventio*); Korenjak 2000: 12; Lausberg 1960: 146.

⁴⁰ In fact, in about four years the emperor Theodosius I (and not Gratian, as Ausonius said), in taking advantage of the division among the Gothic tribes, managed to subjugate the Goths and strengthen the alliance with them (in 382 AD peace was made and the Goths became allies [*foederati*] of the Roman Empire: the Goths were permitted to settle on the lower Danube and were granted relatively wide autonomy, but – in exchange – they were obliged to supply the empire with soldiers for the auxiliary troops that fought under independent Gothic command) – cf. Ziółkowski 2009: 884–885.

⁴¹ Gratian was given the nicknames of *Germanicus* and *Alamannicus* after Roman victory over the Alamanni at Solicinium (summer, 368 AD; Solicinium now: Sulz am Neckar): these nicknames are attested in epigraphy (370 AD) – cf. Krynicka 2010: 923, n. 18; Green 1991: 541, n. 7. Roman victory at Solicinium was also described by Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae* XXVII, 10, 1–16); Ausonius mentioned it in his poem *Mosella* (422–424).

⁴² Ausonius referred here to Gratian’s victories over the Sarmatians (he mentioned these also in *Precatio consulis designati* 31); this nickname is attested in epigraphy too (370 AD). However, present-day scholars have two contrary standpoints on this problem: Pastorino (1971: 329, n. 13) takes the view that Ausonius attributed victories over the Sarmatians to Gratian although they were actually won by Theodosius (378–379

However, the very merits of the young emperor seem exaggerated. Ausonius mentioned the acceptance of the barbarian capitulation by Gratian (*deditio gentilium: Germanicus*) as well as his taking of barbarian prisoners (*traductio captorum: Alamannicus*), whereas, in fact, during the battle with Alamanni at Solicinium (to which the author refers in *Act. II 8*), the Roman army was commanded by the emperor Valentinian I (Gratian's father) and not by Gratian himself, who as a nine-year-old coruler only accompanied his father in this military expedition and did not join the fight, remaining outside the main line of clashes under the cover of the best imperial guard (cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XXVII, 10, 1; 6; 10).⁴³ Moreover, in contemporary historiography we find no mention of either the capture of Alamanni prisoners or the acceptance the barbarians' capitulation by Valentinian I (and his child coruler Gratian). In fact, the barbarians were mostly murdered by the Romans, and those who remained alive did not allow themselves to be taken prisoner, but escaped and sheltered in the nearby forests (cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXVII, 10, 15–16). So in *Act. II 8* we are dealing not so much with the deliberate distortion of historical facts, but rather with the obscuring of the historical truth and introducing propaganda fiction⁴⁴ (cf. Brodka 1998: 29), which consists in deliberately exaggerating the role of Gratian in the events presented.

Let us explain that Ausonius introduced this propaganda fiction to his speech to present Gratian as the ideal emperor (Brodka 1998: 29; cf. also Bruggisser 1989: 189–205) and to create a literary figure consistent with imperial ideology rather than the real image of the boy

AD – por. Krynicka 2010: 923, n. 18; PLRE I, Flavius Theodosius 4 [pp. 904–905]), whereas Green (1991: 535) argues that Ausonius used this nickname in reference to the victories of Gratian himself.

⁴³ In enumerating the nicknames *Germanicus* and *Alamannicus*, Ausonius clearly points to Gratian as the commander-in-chief, hero and victor in the battle at Solicinium. However, he omits an important fact that was mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae* XXVII, 10, 1; 6; 8; 10): nine-year-old Gratian took part in the expedition against the Alamanni, but, in fact, it was Valentinian I who commanded the Roman army at Solicinium and directed the entire war plan. As Ammianus said (XXVII, 10, 10), Gratian, due to his age, was not prepared to endure the hardships of battle and remained at the rear of the army with the imperial guard.

⁴⁴ This was often used in panegyrics and *laudationes* addressed to emperors. Cf. also Rees 2010: 105–121.

(e.g.: cf. Doignon 1966: 1693–1709), as well as to show the nine-year-old ruler as the invincible emperor who, due to his military bravery, became the conqueror of barbarians (*Alamannicus, Germanicus, Sarmaticus*). In addition, Ausonius, as one may infer from the conception of *deditio* introduced here (*Act.* II 8), seemed to imply that all barbarian nations recognize and accept Roman authority⁴⁵ (let us add that this standpoint was consistent with the characteristics of Roman state ideology, which assumed that all enemies of the Roman state were regarded as subjugated – cf. Brodka 1998: 29). Therefore Ausonius, in aiming to create in his speech the ideal image of Gratian (consistent with imperial propaganda), who actually was a mediocre emperor and military commander, clearly (and in accordance with the panegyric convention – cf. Lolli 1999: 620–625; Lolli 2006: 707–726) interpreted the historical facts in his favour (Krynicka 2010: 936; cf. also Sabbah 1984: 363–388). As Ware (2019: 294 [4]) indicates, this medium of praise was also aimed at facilitating and strengthening the bond between the emperor and the Gallic provinces (threatened by the Alamannic invasion in the day of Gratian) and creating a vision of the future that would balance the great deeds he had already achieved (cf. also Chenault 2020: part III, ch. 9; Sabbah 1984: 363–388). It is worth adding that the introduction to *gratiarum actio* of this propaganda fiction and its presentation as truth (that is, showing the nine-year-old Gratian as the invincible ruler and conqueror of barbarians, although in fact this was not true) is based on the theory of probability (*verisimile*), which – as Hermann points out (2021: 68) – was a popular rhetorical device⁴⁶ in late antiquity that enabled orators to show in their speeches probable facts as real and true (that is, those that could have been occurred but, in fact, had not occurred to date).

The literary convention can also be found in the presentation of Gratian’s physical fitness, which Ausonius considered an important aspect of his bravery (*Act.* XIV 64): *in exercendo corpore quis cursum*

⁴⁵ Omissi (2020: 214) pays attention to the fact that epideictic rhetoric tells history from the victor’s perspective (here: from the perspective of the Romans and their emperor Gratian). Nevertheless, the scholar stresses the importance of laudatory rhetoric as a historical source contemporary to the given facts.

⁴⁶ Cf. Hermann 2021: 67–83 (*verisimile* in Roman rhetorical theory); also Quintilianus, *Inst. Orat.* 4, 2, 35 – cf. Carey 1994: 29; Cic., *De inv.* 1, 29 – cf. Riu 2013: 50.

tam pernicious incitavit? quis palaestram tam lubricus expedivit? quis saltum in tam sublime collegit? nemo adductius iacula contorsit, nemo spicula crebrius iecit aut certius destinata percussit. The author, aiming to accentuate this important virtue, skilfully uses three rhetorical questions that emphasize Gratian's excellence in running, wrestling and jumping (*quis incitavit?*, *quis expedivit?*, *quis collegit?*) and are followed by two repetitions (*repetitio: nemo ... , nemo ...*) that underline the emperor's excellence in throwing a javelin and spear. Such a sequence of rhetorical figures results in an increase of both the strength of the praises addressed to the emperor and the emotions of the author. This *gradatio* leads to the climax (*Act. XIV 65*), where Ausonius argues that Gratian surpassed the skills of his teachers and allowed him to understand the Numidians' excellent fitness, which was frequently praised by poets: *mirabamur poetam, qui infrenos dixerat Numidas [...] obscurum hoc nobis legentibus erat: intelleximus te videntes, cum idem arcum intenderes et habenas remitteres aut equum segnius euntem verbere concitares vel eodem verbere intemperantiam coherceres.* It is worth noting that the author embellishes his statement with references to Nemesianus' poem as well as the Aeneid of Vergilius⁴⁷ (*qui infrenos dixerat Numidas*), whom he does not indicate by name, but – in accordance with the requirements of the imperial panegyric genre (Green 1991: 550, n. 65) – only generally refers to as “a poet” (*mirabamur poetam*). As Krynicka (2010: 931) points out, such references were a literary convention in the poems or speeches of educated Gallic panegyric authors who were familiar with the works of many poets and often quoted or paraphrased their poems to adorn their own speeches as well as to exaggerate the qualities of their addressees (cf. also Chenault 2020: part III, ch. 9; Dräger 2011: 509–580).

⁴⁷ Cf. Vergilius, *Aeneis* IV, 14: *Numidae infreni*; Nemesianus, *Cynegetica* 268: *verbera sunt praecepta fugae, sunt verbera freni*. Cf. also Roman historiography – Sall., *Iug.* 6, 1: *uti mos gentis illius [sc. Numidian – A.M.] est, equitare, iaculari; cursu cum aequalibus certare* (Jugurta); Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXI, 16, 7: *equitandi et iaculandi maximeque perite dirigendi sagittas [...] scientissimus* (the emperor Constantius II).

Regarding the three comparisons by means of which Ausonius illustrated Gratian’s moral purity (*castitas*)⁴⁸, they also seem quite conventional (*Act. XIV 66*): *aperto conclavis tui non sanctorum ara Vestalis, non pontificis cubile castius nec pulvinar flaminis tam pudicum*. The comparison of the chastity that prevails in the privacy of Gratian’s chamber to the chastity of the altar of the goddess Vesta, and thus the reference to the chastity of the Vestal virgins, also appears (even in a similar verbal approach) in other imperial panegyrics.⁴⁹ As regards the next two comparisons, in which Ausonius juxtaposed Gratian’s *castitas*⁵⁰ with the chastity prevailing in the high priest’s bedroom, as well as with the immaculate manners proper to the priest of Jupiter, they seem to have been created by the Burdigalian himself (cf. Green 1991: 550, n. 66; Krynicka 2010: 932). As we can conclude, these three references to the old pagan *cultus deorum* in the comparisons discussed may serve to accentuate that Gratian is distinguished by the same austere decency and modesty (*castitas: ara Vestalis, pontifex, flamen*) that were characteristic of the ancient Romans. Thus Ausonius (who himself was very attached to the old pagan tradition) underlined that Gratian was not only distinguished by his imperial virtues but also by the old Roman *virtutes* (cf. Mleczek 2018: 16, n. 25, 26), which, as Symmachus argued (*Or. III 7*), were clearly imprinted on him (*agnosco in te non adumbrata vestigiis sed expressa veterum signa virtutum*). As can be concluded from the statements of both authors, the old Roman virtues (aptly indicated by means of the references discussed above) constituted the norm (cf. Mleczek 2018: 53–54; Beck 2007: 265) that enabled them to define and emphasize the chastity of the young emperor, whose conduct constituted a continuation of the old moral attitudes (*pudor, pudicitia, modestia, austeritas* = Gratian’s *castitas*). Let us add that regarding the past as a moral norm was characteristic of the Roman mentality (Lindt 1979: 51), and the cult of old Roman virtues was, as Fears (1981: 827–948) points out, a very important aspect of Roman impe-

⁴⁸ Gratian’s *castitas* is also accentuated by St. Ambrosius in *De ob. Val. 74: Gratianus [...] fuit [...] puro corde. Fuit etiam castus corpore, qui praeter coniugium nescierit feminae alterius consuetudinem*.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Panegyrici Latini 3 (11), 13, 3: sit lectulus [...] Vestalium toris purior*.

⁵⁰ *Castitas* as imperial virtue in Roman historiography – cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae XXV, 4, 2–3* (Julian the Apostate); *XXX, 9, 2* (Valentinian I).

rial ideology (it was clearly followed by both authors in *Act.* XIV 66 and *Or.* III 7).

The paraphrase of the Tacitean motif of *aemulatio virtutum* served Ausonius to present Gratian's abstinence (*abstinentia*⁵¹ – *Act.* XIV 66) and approachability (*facilitas* – *Act.* XIV 67). As for abstinence in food, this was illustrated by comparison with the severe abstinence of the Christian priests (*in cibis autem cuius sacerdotis abstinentior caerimonia?* – *Act.* XIV 66), who used to eat only poor food (cf. also Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXVII, 3, 15) and observe strict fasts. However, as the author pointed out (*Act.* III 66), Gratian's abstinence was more perfect than that of the then priests (*abstinentior sacerdotis caerimonia*), so, in consequence, he also surpassed the modern *exempla virtutum*. The discussed paraphrase of the Tacitean motif also appeared in the descriptive comparison, by means of which Ausonius illustrated the approachability (*facilitas*)⁵² of the young ruler (*Act.* XIV 67): *in officiis amicorum non dico paria reddis: antevenis et, quotiens in obsequendo praecedimus, erubescis pudore tam obnoxio, quam in nobis esse deberet ab imperatore praeventis*. In this scene we can see how Gratian, who always outdid his friends in showing his kindness (*antevenis*: the paraphrase of *aemulatio virtutum*), feels guilty and blushes with shame when he is outdone by them in such conduct, because competition in virtues with contemporaries (sc. showing a more perfect attitude than they have) is characteristic of the ideal emperor, who always strives to be a moral model⁵³ (*quam in nobis esse deberet ab imperatore praeventis*).

⁵¹ Ammianus Marcellinus pointed out the same attitude in the conduct of the emperor Julian the Apostate (so *abstinentia* is not a virtue characteristic only of Gratian) – the historian regarded Julian's abstinence in eating and drinking as an important aspect of his moderation (*temperantia*): *Res Gestae* XXV, 4, 4; also XXV, 2, 2 – cf. Mleczek 2018: 64–65.

⁵² According to Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae* XXV, 4, 7 – Julian the Apostate), *facilitas* was an aspect of the emperor's prudence (*prudencia*) – cf. Mleczek 2018: 66–67.

⁵³ Such an attitude was consistent with the conviction of the moral function of the emperor in the state, which was common in the imperial period; this moral function concerned the conduct of the ruler not only in the public forum but also in private life (cf. Mleczek 2018: 89). Therefore Ausonius did not depart here from this convention while presenting Gratian's conduct.

Gratian’s prudence (*prudencia*) also fitted into a similar scheme of presentation. Ausonius called this virtue “the golden mind” (*mens aurea*) and exaggerated it, saying that Gratian was endowed with it by God more generously than any of his contemporaries (*Act. VIII* 40): *mens ista aurea, quam de communi deo*⁵⁴ *plus quam unus hausisti*. Thus Gratian, unlike his contemporaries, has a special relationship with God (*plus quam unus*) that results in his participation in divine reason (since prudence sc. *mens aurea* is indicated as the most generous gift offered to him by God). Considering that *prudencia* determined the emperor’s attitude towards the state, himself and his subjects, and manifested itself in a thorough knowledge of civil and military matters (Mieczek 2018: 65 also n. 236 and 237), such a perception of Gratian’s prudence (*mens aurea* sc. the most generous gift from God) enabled Ausonius to emphasize (and exaggerate) the emperor’s excellence in every area of public activity. Therefore Gratian, endowed with such unique prudence (*mens aurea*), proved to be the wisest and the most experienced (*consultissimus*) in both military (*Act. II* 7) and civil activities (*Act. XIV* 67): *in illa vero sede, ut ex more loquimur, consistorii, ut ego sentio, sacrarii tui, nullus umquam superiorum aut dicenda pensius cogitavit aut consultius cogitata disposuit aut disposita maturius expedit*. By means of the Tacitean motif of *aemulatio virtutum*, here Ausonius presented the essential aspects of Gratian’s prudence, that is his unheard-of thoughtfulness and carefulness (*deliberatio*:⁵⁵ *pensius cogitavit, consultius cogitata disposuit*), as well as his excellent eloquence, in which he surpassed famous former orators, such as Sulpicius, Tiberius Gracchus and his father, Valentinian I (*non enim Sulpicius acrior [...] nec maioris Gracchi commendabilior modestia [...] nec patris tui gravior auctoritas* – *Act. XV* 68).

Another important aspect of Gratian’s “golden mind” (sc. prudence) was presented by Symmachus in *Or. III* 7: *tropaeis et litteris occupatus*

⁵⁴ Here the image of God is Neoplatonic rather than Christian – cf. Brodka 1998: 28. Burgersdijk (2020: part 3, ch. 8) indicates the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy in imperial panegyrics (also Tetrarchic and Constantinian ones).

⁵⁵ Here *deliberatio* is referred to only in the area of eloquence: Ausonius neglected to mention the importance of deliberation in the political forum, where it played an important role in rulers’ decisions regarding the nomination of candidates for state positions – this important function of *deliberatio* is discussed by Miozga (2008: 56).

*otiosa cum bellicis negotia miscuisti. [...] nempe Fulvium nobilem tam laude quam nomine inter aquilas cantusque lituorum praeceptor Accius frequentavit; Africanum illum terra marique victorem lectionis particeps et laboris Panaetius non reliquit; cum magno Alexandro mundanam paene militiam philosophorum comitatus exegit. iam credimus vetustati, cum in iisdem tentoriis tuis volumina et arma tractentur. nec deest, quod pro condicione rerum temporumque percenseas: historia oblectaris in proeliis, in adhortatione suasoriis, actionibus in colloquiis, carminibus in triumphis.*⁵⁶ Gratian, as Symmachus says, was engaged in both victories and literary studies (*tropaeis et litteris occupatus*), combining his intellectual pursuits with military tasks (*otiosa cum bellicis negotia miscuisti; in iisdem tentoriis tuis volumina et arma tractentur*). Moreover, the young emperor was able to skilfully use his knowledge in practice because he used it in accordance with the nature of actions and circumstances (*pro condicione rerum temporumque*). During military operations he was helped by his excellent knowledge of history (*historia in proeliis*) as well as the art of eloquence (*suasoriae, actiones*), whereas during triumphs he prided himself on his brilliant knowledge of poetry (*carminibus in triumphis*). It is worth noting that the relationship between the intellectual (*litterae, otiosa negotia, volumina*) and practical areas (*bellica negotia, arma*) of the ruler's activity, that is, his use of acquired knowledge in both military and civil tasks, constituted an important aspect of his prudence, which was manifested in the excellent deeds (*tropaea, triumphis*) he performed during war and peace (Mleczek 2018: 65 also n. 236, 237). Both Ausonius (*Act. XV 68*) and Symmachus (*Or. III 7*) unanimously emphasized that Gratian perfectly combined these two aspects in his activities, surpassing all outstanding *exempla antiquitatis* (Fulvius, Scipio Africanus, Alexander

⁵⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae XVI, 5, 4–6; 9; XXV, 4, 5*) accentuates a similar aspect of Julian the Apostate's prudence: Julian, as a thoroughly educated emperor, skilfully combined his intellectual pursuits (including arranging and delivering speeches) with state duties and military tasks. So other educated rulers also possessed the skills indicated by Symmachus (among former emperors, for example, Marcus Aurelius, who was even called "a philosopher on the throne"). Therefore Gratian's education, intellectual activities and the practical application of his knowledge were not something particularly unique (contrary to what Symmachus suggests).

Magnus); thus he became the best *exemplum* of *mens aurea*, and his deeds constituted the most perfect acts of his golden mind.

3. *Aureum saeculum* – *saeculum novum*

Gratian’s coming to the throne opened a new age in the history of the Roman Empire. *Saeculum novum*, as Symmachus said, was the golden age (*aureum saeculum*) that had been spun on the spindles of the Parcae (*fusa Parcarum*)⁵⁷ for a long time and came into being under the emperor Gratian (*Or.* III 9): *si fas est praesagio futura conicere, iamdudum aureum saeculum currunt fusa Parcarum*. Symmachus, in language consciously reminiscent of Vergil’s *Ecl.* IV⁵⁸ and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (the golden age: *Ov., Met.* I, 89–112),⁵⁹ by means of a descriptive metaphor, painted the picture of the golden age under Gratian’s rule (*Or.* III 9): *Si mihi nunc altius evagari poetico liceret eloquio, totum de novo saeculo Maronis excursum vati similis in tuum nomen excriberem; dicerem caelo redisse Iustitiam et ultro uberes fetus iam gravidam spondere naturam; nunc mihi in patentibus campis sponte seges matura flavesceret, in sentibus uva turgeret, de quernis frondibus rorantia mella sudarent*. In this passage, clearly evoking Vergil’s fourth Eclogue and modelled on Ovid’s first Metamorphosis, Symmachus argues that in the golden age (*aureum saeculum*), which began under Gratian’s rule,

⁵⁷ A similar motif of *fusa Parcarum* (spindles of the Parcae) was used by Vergilius (*Ecl.* IV, 46–49). By means of this motif the poet foretold the new era expected to begin with the birth of an infant prodigy: *Talia saecla, [...], currite, fuis concordis stabili factorum numine Parcae./Adgredero o magnos – aderit iam tempus – honores,/cara deum suboles, magnum Iovis incrementum!* – cf. also Moroni 2006: 86–87.

⁵⁸ Cf. Verg., *Ecl.* IV, 28–30; 39–40: *molli paulatim flavescet campus arista,/incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva,/et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella/[...]omnis feret omnia tellus:/non rastros patietur humus, non vinea falcem;/[...]*.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ov., Met.* I, 89–112: *Aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo,/sponse sua, sine lege fidem rectumque colebat./[...]ipsa quoque [...]per se dabat omnia tellus/[...]arbuteos fetus montanaque fraga legebant/cornaque et in duris haerentia mora rubetis/[...]Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,/nec renovatus ager gravidis caneabat aristis;/[...]/flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella.*

Justice⁶⁰ returned from heaven (*caelo redisse Iustitiam*), nature voluntarily produces abundant crops (*ultra uberes fetus iam gravidam spondere naturam*), grains turn golden spontaneously in vast fields (*in patentibus campis sponte seges matura flavesceret*), juicy grapes grow and swell on the vines (*in sentibus uva⁶¹ turgeret*) and honey drips from oak leaves (*de quernis frondibus rorantia mella sudarent*).

It should be explained that in this descriptive metaphor Symmachus revealed and underlined features of the imperial period that was considered (*Or.* III 9) the golden age (*aureum saeculum*), which featured qualities such as justice (*iustitia: caelo redisse Iustitiam*) and prosperity (*prosperitas: uberes fetus, seges matura, uva, rorantia mella*), which were actually consistent with the imperial state ideology of Gratian's days (cf. Mleczek 2018: 46; Demandt 1965: 129). Roman victories over barbarians are also tangible proof of the golden age (cf. Sogno 2006: 20). Symmachus referred to them by enumerating particular facts, such as the extent of Roman conquest by Valentinian I, which resulted in building the Roman fortifications along the Rhine (*Rhenus intersecat castella Romana*; cf. also Sym., *Or.* II 1; 23–28; Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XXVIII, 2, 1–5), as well as Roman successes and the introduction of peace on the Rhine during Gratian's rule (*Or.* III 9): *nec poeticis utar indicibus: ecce iam Rhenus non despicit imperia sed intersecat castella Romana; a nostris Alpibus in nostrum exit oceanum*. Therefore, as Brodka (1998: 36) points out, Symmachus does not limit himself in *Or.* III 9 only to a decorative scheme, because the idealized image of the golden age (*caelo redisse Iustitiam, uberes fetus, seges*

⁶⁰ Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* XXII, 10, 6 (*Iustitia [...] imperante eo reversa ad terras*: in reference to the reign of Julian the Apostate). Symmachus clearly idealized this aspect of Gratian's reign (as well as the other aspects), for even Ammianus Marcellinus, who regarded the emperor Julian the Apostate as the model of a good and just ruler, said that Justice would return to earth under his rule if he dealt with certain matters according to the letter of the law and not according to his own will, and if he did not sometimes make irreversible mistakes in this area (*Res Gestae* XXII, 10, 6).

⁶¹ In Symmachus' description of *aureum saeculum* the bunches of grapes (*uva*) are the detail that accentuates the Italian scenery and gives the whole picture a Roman character. Symmachus departed here from the image sketched by Ovidius in the *Metamorphoses* (Ov., *Met.* I, 89–112), where the poet mentions echinacea fruit, wild strawberries, berries and blackberries without any references to the Italian landscape. Symmachus clearly located his ideal image of the golden age in Roman scenery.

matura, uva, rorantia mella) bears (as we indicated above) clear panegyric and propaganda features (justice, prosperity, peace, Roman victories; cf. also Mause 1994: 202; Doignon 1966: 1693–1709).

It should be underlined that the motif of the *aureum saeculum* was a *topos* in Symmachus (it also appeared in imperial panegyrics), which was an important aspect of the official state ideology and imperial propaganda (cf. also Sym., *Or.* IV 15; Brodka 1998: 36)⁶² and was closely connected with the motif of *reiuvenatio* (sc. the rejuvenation of the Roman state and its vital forces). In Symmachus’ metaphorical and panegyric image of the golden age (*Or.* III 9), the motif of *reiuvenatio* is indicated by verbs that generally describe the dawn and beginning of the *saeculum novum*, as they indicate return (*redisse*), birth (*fetus spondere*) as well as development, growth and progress (*flavesceret, turgeret, sudarent*), and thus describe life processes proper for a young (and not the senile) age.

Let us add that the motif of *reiuvenatio* (like the one of *aureum saeculum*) was a literary *topos*: therefore it was not an innovation of Symmachus but had already appeared in earlier Roman historiography as well as in contemporary and later authors.⁶³ Symmachus emphasized that the *reiuvenatio* of a senile Rome (*incusant alii senectutem servatamque in tempora captiva canitiem* – *Or.* III 12)⁶⁴ came into being through (and thanks to) the person of Gratian, and was tantamount

⁶² Cf. Sym., *Or.* IV 15 (a similar *topos* of the golden age): *Haec est illa Latii veteris aetas aureo celebrata cognomine, qua fertur incola fuisse terrarum necdum moribus offensa Iustitia. Topos of the aureum saeculum and reiuvenatio in Symmachus* – cf. Brodka 1998: 36; Mleczek 2018: 86. Similar phrases that are synonymous with the phrase of *aureum saeculum* appeared also in Symmachus’ *Letters*: *saeculum bonum* (*Ep.* IV, 67), *publica felicitas* (*Ep.* IX, 1), *serenissima tempora* (*Ep.* IX, 1) – cf. Miozga 2008: 76.

⁶³ The motif of *reiuvenatio* also appeared in the historiosophic theory of Ammianus Marcellinus (cf. Mleczek 2018: 87–89), who was a contemporary of Symmachus, as well as in the later author, Claudianus (cf. Brodka 1998: 116; Mleczek 2018: 86) and in earlier historians (Tacitus, Florus – cf. Mleczek 2018: 44–47).

⁶⁴ The metaphor of senile Rome (*senectus Romae*) is a constant motif in Symmachus’ works (it is based on tradition): cf. also Sym., *Rel.* 3, 19; 9, 7; *Ep.* X, 2, 3. The motif of *senectus Romae* (sc. *senium*) appears also in the historiosophic theory of Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae* XIV, 6, 3–6), according to which *senium* never ends and continues in eternity (cf. Brodka 1998: 56–63; Mleczek 2018: 44–47).

to the regeneration of the political and moral forces of the state in the golden century under his rule (*Or.* III 9): *quis haec sub te negaret esse credenda, cuius indoles multa iam praestitit et adhuc spes plura promittit! et vere, si fas est praesagio futura conicere, iamdudum aureum saeculum currunt fusa Parcarum* (this moral and political revival is also alluded to in *Or.* III 2: *clementiae auspices, incruentae secures, virtutis omina, maiestatis augurium, ad honesta officia facundiam posse remeare* – cf. part. 1; also Brodka 1998: 36; Mleczek 2018: 86). Moreover, the motif of *reiuvenatio* conceals here (*Or.* III 9) an implication of a statement that Rome, despite its senility, does not terminate its existence but may live forever.⁶⁵ Therefore, due to the introduction of this combined *topos* of *aureum saeculum* and *reiuvenatio*, Symmachus' speech became not so much a praise of Gratian's personal merits but rather a panegyric idealization of his reign based on the conventional aspects of imperial state ideology. Nevertheless, as Brodka points out (1998: 36), this *topos* cannot be regarded as a purely rhetorical phrase because (besides the obvious propaganda and panegyric aspects) it also reflects Symmachus' personal considerations regarding his conception of Roman history. The image of a rejuvenated and renewed Rome (*reiuvenatio*) in the golden century under Gratian's rule (*aureum saeculum*) can also be found in Ausonius' speech (*Act.* I, 3–4): *nullus [...], quin admirandam speciem tuae venerationis incutiatur: non palatium, quod tu, cum terribile acceperis, amabile praestitisti; non forum et basilicae, olim negotiis plena, nunc votis pro tua salute susceptis: nam de sua cui non te imperante securitas? non curia honorificis modo laeta decretis, olim sollicitis maesta querimoniis; non publicum, in quo occursus gaudentium plurimorum neminem patitur solum gratulari; non domus commune secretum. lectus ipse, ad quietem datus, beneficiorum tuorum reputatione tranquillior. somnus, abolitor omnium, imagines tuas offert. ista autem sedes honoris, sella curulis, gloriosa pompis imperialis officii.* It is noteworthy that, unlike in Symmachus'

⁶⁵ *Roma Aeterna* is the traditional idea of Rome – cf. also Sym., *Or.* II 18; III 9; *Rel.* 3, 14 (cf. Brodka 1998: 34–37). Cf. a similar standpoint in Ammianus Marcellinus (the idea of *Roma Aeterna* is the leading idea and “historical dogma” in his historiographic theory): *Res Gestae* XIV, 6, 3; XIX, 10, 4; XXII, 16, 12; XXVI, 1, 14; XXVII, 6, 6 – cf. Mleczek 2018: 46–52.

metaphorical image (*Or.* III 9), the entry of the Roman state into the new golden century was presented here by means of a vivid picture of the spectacular metamorphosis in the public and private life of Rome under Gratian’s rule. Ausonius did not directly indicate but alluded (like Symmachus), in descriptive phrases, to the features of *aureum saeculum* that began with Gratian’s coming to the throne. So, as the author implies, public life in the golden age is based on harmony (*concordia*) and peace (*pax*). Firstly, these features are referred to in the image of the peaceful imperial palace (*palatium amabile praestitisti*) from which Gratian, thanks to his presence in it, has removed all crimes and vices (*palatium terribile acceperis*). Secondly, *concordia* and *pax* are also testified to in the image of public life in the forum and basilicas, where – instead of former feuds (*olim negotiis plena*) – unanimous prayers for the prosperity of the young emperor (*vota pro tua salute*) can be heard. Thirdly, harmony and peace are also accentuated in a metamorphosed image of the Roman senate that formerly mired itself in sorrow and disagreement (*curia olim sollicitis maesta querimoniis*), yet unanimously adopts new resolutions under Gratian’s rule (*honorificis modo laeta decretis*). Finally, *concordia* is also shown in the behaviour of Roman citizens who joyfully crowd the streets (*in publico occursus gaudentium plurimorum*) and whose home life is filled with serenity (*tranquillitas: lectus ipse, ad quietem datus, beneficiorum tuorum reputatione tranquillior*).

It should be noted that the features of the golden century indicated above (*concordia, pax, tranquillitas*) were consistent (just like in Symmachus’ *Or.* III 9) with imperial propaganda and state ideology, so their introduction to the discussed picture resulted in the idealization of Gratian’s reign. As regards stylistic means, Ausonius (*Act.* I, 3–4) sketched this exaggerated picture aptly using two combined rhetorical figures, such as antithesis (*oppositio*) and *gradatio* (gradation) *a maiore ad minus*. So the seven descriptive phrases were juxtaposed antithetically: antithesis (*oppositio*) referred to both places (*palatium – forum et basilicae; curia – publicum; palatium, forum et basilicae, curia*, sc. public life – *domus et lectus*, sc. private life) as well as their image in the past (bad) and under the reign of Gratian (good; *palatium: terribile* in the past – *amabile* under Gratian’s rule; *forum et basilicae: negotia* in the

past – *vota pro salute* under Gratian's rule; *curia: maesta* in the past – *laeta* under Gratian's rule). At the same time, by means of *gradatio a maiore ad minus*, the scope and meaning of these antithetically juxtaposed phrases was decreased and narrowed (*gradatio a maiore ad minus: palatium – forum/basilicae/curia – publicum – domus – lectus*).⁶⁶

Let us add that this spectacular metamorphosis in public life resulted from the lawful nature of imperial power in the golden age. Both authors presented this idealized image of Gratian's power in accordance with the convention and imperial ideology of the day. Ausonius accentuated the splendour of the emperor's office and dignity (*Act. I, 4*): *ista autem sedes honoris, sella curulis, gloriosa pompis imperialis officii*. Symmachus, as we pointed out above (cf. part 1), in accordance with imperial propaganda and convention, underlined (*Or. III 2*) features of Gratian's lawful imperial power, such as justice, clemency and liberty (this was alluded to in the description of the spectacular metamorphosis into *statum meliorem* at the judicial forum: *tunc primum forensis industria, lege quondam silentiis subiugata, liberos oculos ad tuum tribunal erexit. cum in amplissimo magistratu inlustre quiddam et dulce resonantia decreta sancires, statim intelleximus, ad honesta officia facundiam posse remeare – Or. III 2*).⁶⁷

4. *Optimus princeps*

Gratian, the ideal author of *aureum saeculum*, occupies an important place in the course of history (cf. also Bruggisser 1989: 189–205). In *Or. III 11* Symmachus accentuated Gratian's role played in the golden age: *te placido sinu cunctus orbis*⁶⁸ *amplectitur, cumque sit res publica*

⁶⁶ In *Act. I, 3–4* (*gradatio a maiore ad minus*) Ausonius seemed to follow Cicero (*Cic., Cat. IV 1, 2: non forum [...], non campus [...], non curia [...], non domus [...], commune perfugium, non lectus ad quietem datus [...]*). For more on literary reminiscences and rhetorical figures in Ausonius' speech, cf. Dräger 2011: 509–580.

⁶⁷ Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae XXX, 4, 8–19* (metamorphosis into *statum peiorem* at the judicial forum illustrated the moral decline of bad emperors and the deterioration of the state under their rule) – cf. Mleczek 2018: 156–174, 254–263.

⁶⁸ Using the noun *orbis*, Symmachus defined here the area subject to Roman rule, that is *orbis Romanus*, which was identical with the civilized world – cf. Brodka 1998:

patri et patruo tuo quadam specie distributa, tibi uni tamen cum utroque communis est. a cubilibus surgentis aurorae ad metas solis occidui nihil cernis alienum. inter cognatos siderum globos quantum adhuc alterutro minor es, tantum singulis ex utroque cumulator. Firstly, according to the *topos* of the emperor’s identity, which can be found in Latin imperial panegyrics (L’Huillier 1986: 529–582), Gratian is the master of a world (*dominus orbis*) that is subject to Roman authority (*te placido sinu cunctus orbis amplectitur; a cubilibus surgentis aurorae ad metas solis occidui nihil cernis alienum*; cf. also Aus., *Praef.* I 34: *at meus [discipulus, sc. Gratianus – A.M.] hic toto regnat in orbe suo*). As *dominus orbis* (cf. also Sym., *Or.* III 12 – part 1), Gratian rises not only above all geopolitical boundaries (*te cunctus orbis amplectitur*), but also above the formal division⁶⁹ of power within the state (*res publica patri et patruo tuo quadam specie distributa*): in this way he ensures the unity of both the Roman state (*tibi uni tamen cum utroque communis est*) and the whole Roman world (*a cubilibus surgentis aurorae ad metas solis occidui nihil cernis alienum*). Therefore, Gratian’s imperial power is universal (in fact, it also is the *topos* that can be found in imperial panegyrics – cf. Brodka 1998: 47; Mause 1994: 198). This character of Gratian’s power results from his schematic and conventional imperial identity as *dominus orbis* (cf. also Aus., *Praef.* I, 35: *At meus [discipulus, sc. Gratianus – A.M.] hic toto regnat in orbe suo*).

Moreover, Gratian, as Symmachus says (*Or.* III 11), is also the brightest constellation in the sky. However, the comparison of Gratian to a star (in *Or.* III 11: constellation of stars) is a conventional literary device, one of the models of imperial identity (cf. L’Huillier 1986: 529–582), and constitutes the *topos* found in imperial panegyrics. It also appeared (in accordance with the standard panegyric technique) in the descriptive metaphor in Symmachus’ *Or.* III 11: *inter cognatos siderum globos quantum adhuc alterutro minor es, tantum singulis ex utroque cumulator.* Symmachus, presenting Gratian by means of this *topos* as

46. The scope of the term *orbis* in Symmachus – cf. also Mause 1994: 198; Asche 1983: 35 sqq.

⁶⁹ Symmachus referred here to the political realities in 369 AD regarding the division of imperial power in the Roman Empire: Valentinian I and Gratian were emperors in the West, while the eastern part of the empire was ruled by Valens, brother of Valentinian I and uncle of Gratian.

the most perfect of the three star constellations (the others being Valentinian I and Valens: *inter cognatos siderum globos ex utroque cumulatior*), accentuated his superiority over his corulers as well as his highest degree of perfection. So, thanks to his remarkable perfection, Gratian deserved to be called a god (*Or.* III 3; 6): *errat, quisquis in deo recenset aetatem: pro senibus puer dimicas, pro liberis nostris aequaevus insudas [...] virtus, cum cito inchoat, diutius perseverat*. However, as Brodka explains (1998: 45), the noun *deus* used in *Or.* III 3 in reference to Gratian did not express the religious cult of the emperor (he still was *puer* and *aequaevus*), but emphasized his superhuman and supernatural qualities resulting from his purely human achievements (*pro senibus puer dimicas, pro liberis nostris aequaevus insudas*), which were magnificent (*virtus, cum cito inchoat, diutius perseverat*) because of his highest degree of perfection (*errat, quisquis recenset*; cf. Pabst 1989: 187). So, as it can be concluded from Symmachus' statement, Gratian as the ideal ruler (*optimus princeps*), who played a unique and special role in the state (*dominus orbis, siderum globus, deus*), was an earthly executor and mediator of God's will favourable to the Roman Empire (such an attitude is often found in imperial panegyrics – cf. Mause 1994: 221; Brodka 1998: 45–46; Pabst 1989: 130 sqq). Therefore, as Ausonius emphasized, Gratian was “a participant in the realization of God's intentions” (*deo participatus* – *Act.* IX, 42). Moreover, as he added (*Act.* I, 5), the young emperor was also “the essence and the contents of *aureum saeculum*”: *ades enim locis omnibus, nec iam miramur licentiam poetarum, qui omnia deo plena*⁷⁰ *dixerunt*. Let us notice that the author, in defining the unique role played and the special place occupied by Gratian in the golden century, introduced the conventional motif of the universal presence of the emperor (*ades locis omnibus* – cf. Brodka 1998: 28). According to this convention, Gratian was the ubiquitous being⁷¹ (*ades locis omnibus*) who filled even the thoughts of his subjects (*somnus imagines tuas offert* – *Act.* I 4). Thus Auso-

⁷⁰ Cf. Green 1991: 147. *Omnia deo plena* – cf. also Vergilius, *Ecl.* III 60: *Iovis omnia plena*; Vergilius, *Georg.* IV 221–222: *deum namque ire per omnia/terrasque, tractusque maris, caelumque profundum*; Aratos, *Phainomena* 2–4; Theocritus, *Id.* XVII; Sym., *Rel.* 3, 5: *omnia quidem deo plena sunt*.

⁷¹ Saylor Rodgers (1986: 69–104) points to some kind of divine insinuation in Latin imperial panegyrics. Ausonius seemed to apply this panegyric device in his speech.

nus, skilfully juxtaposing (in the first sentence in *Act. I 5*) the equivalent phrases *ades locis omnibus* and *omnia deo plena*, and by means of them emphasizing Gratian’s ubiquity in the golden age, unequivocally presented him as a being endowed with supernatural qualities, that is, as the ubiquitous author of *aureum saeculum* (*aurei saeculi auctor*).

This thought is continued in *Act. I, 5*: *spem superas, cupienda praevenis, nota praecurris: quaeque animi nostri celeritas divinum instar adfectat, beneficium praevenitibus anteceditur. praestare tibi est, quam nobis optare, velocius*. In this descriptive hyperbole, aptly chosen verbs, which generally refer to “excess” because they mean “overtaking” (*praevenire*, *praecurrere*, *praeire*) and “rising above” (*superare*, *praestare*) ordinary human capabilities (and thus underline the super-human qualities of the ruler, just like the above-mentioned ubiquity, which is not a human but a divine quality), consistently present Gratian as the emperor whose role in *aureum saeculum* constituted the earthly equivalent of the role of God (cf. Brodka 1998: 28; Rogowski 2009: 254). As Valensi (1957: 77) points out (in reference to the “divinity” of rulers in the fourth century AD), it might have seemed that the emperor, because of his superiority and power, possessed certain divine qualities (cf. also Levene 1997: 66–103). So Gratian surpassed the hopes of his subjects (*spem superas*), preceded their desires (*cupienda praevenis*), knew their unspoken wishes (*nota praecurris*), benefited his subjects faster than human thought runs (*beneficium praevenitibus*) and bestowed boons upon them faster than the desire for them arose (*praestare tibi quam nobis optare velocius*; cf. also Rogowski 2009: 254). In this way Gratian became the earthly giver of boons (in fact, this is a *topos* found in the Hellenistic tradition and a model of imperial identity in Latin imperial panegyrics: *beneficiorum auctor*⁷²) and imitated God, the divine author, benefactor and giver of all boons (*dei munus imitatoris* – *Act. V 22*). Therefore in the golden age Gratian, who was God’s earthly imitator, also became a caring father to his subjects (*subditorum pater: indulgentia pater* – *Act. VII 35*: this function of a ruler actually constituted a conventional model of an emperor’s identity often found in

⁷² As Blockley (1975: 86) points out, this was an important (though not the only) function that a good emperor was expected to perform towards his subjects, according to the Hellenistic conception of a ruler.

imperial panegyrics). In this way Gratian as a generous benefactor⁷³ and father to his subjects provided them with tranquillity (*tranquillitas: lectus beneficiorum tuorum reputatione tranquillior* – Act. I 4), security (*securitas: nam de sua cui non te imperante securitas?* – Act. I 3) and welfare (*prosperitas: beneficiorum magnitudo, beneficia praeuentia* – Act. I 4–5). Thus, Gratian’s activity in the golden age as a benefactor and father to his own subjects reflected the features of the imperial period consistent with state ideology. Gratian’s reign in the *aureum saeculum* and his paternal care of his subjects were the earthly equivalents of divine care of the world, because it was in the nature of an emperor to have a particularly close relationship with God (cf. Brodka 1998: 30; Rogowski 2009: 254; Beranger 1970: 242–254; Saylor Rodgers 1986: 69–104) and be the being closest to Him (*qui deo proximus* – Aus., Act. V 21).

Furthermore, Gratian also constituted a timeless and monumental model⁷⁴ of all virtues that had been waiting for centuries in the sphere of desires and wishes to be born, and actually appear only in his person (Aus., Act. XV 69): *vellem, si rerum natura pateretur, Xenophon Attice, in aevum nostrum venires, tu, qui ad Cyri virtutes exequendas votum potius, quam historiam commodasti: cum diceres, non qualis esset, sed qualis esse deberet. si nunc in tempora ista procederes, in nostro Gratiano cerneres, quod in Cyro tuo non videras, sed optabas*. An interesting solution on the part of Ausonius in Act. XV 69 is that he presents Gratian as a timeless statue of virtues (Gratian = *monumentum virtutum omnium*) by demythologizing the ideal of Cyrus, created centuries ago

⁷³ Gratian’s function as a benefactor (*beneficiorum auctor*), clearly indicated here by Ausonius, was close to the Hellenistic concept of a ruler as a benefactor of his own subjects (*euergetes* – cf. Themistios, *Or.* VIII 107 D; also Plin., *Paneg.* 28, 3; 29, 3; 68, 1). This function resulted from the *liberalitas* of the emperor because bestowing favours upon subjects was an essential aspect of his generosity towards them. Ammianus Marcellinus pointed out a similar attitude in Julian the Apostate’s conduct, emphasizing that the aim of a good emperor’s activity was the welfare of all his subjects, and that an emperor, as their ruler, was an author of this welfare – cf. Mleczek 2018: 73 (also n. 291).

⁷⁴ Cf. L’Huillier 1986: 529–582; Doignon 1966: 1693–1709; Bruggisser 1989: 189–205. Cf. also St. Ambr., *De ob. Val.* 74: *Gratianus [...] fructus diversarum esse virtutum*.

by Xenophon.⁷⁵ The Persian king, as Ausonius says, was the ideal of a perfect ruler existing only in this Greek historian’s imagination and in the sphere of his wishes (*non videras, sed optabas*), so, in fact, he presented only his conception of what the perfect ruler should have been and not the real image of Cyrus showing what ruler he actually was (*non qualis esset, sed qualis esse deberet*). Xenophon, as Ausonius adds, presented the imperial virtues that Cyrus should have had and not the virtues he actually possessed (*ad Cyri virtutes exequendas votum potius, quam historiam commodasti*). Gratian, unlike Cyrus (the unreal model of the ruler and his virtues), is the personification of an ideal emperor who is distinguished by his real *virtutes* (*in nostro Gratiano cerneres, quod in Cyro tuo non videras, sed optabas*). Therefore Gratian constitutes – in accordance with the convention adopted during the imperial period, which emphasized the moral function of the ruler in the state (Mleczek 2018: 89) – the magnificent unattainable moral model for posterity and past generations (Aus., *Act. XVI 75*): *abundant in te ea bonitatis et virtutis exempla, quae sequi cupiat ventura posteritas et, si rerum natura pateretur, adscribi sibi voluisset antiquitas*.⁷⁶ In this way Gratian became the timeless moral model for all humanity as well as the moral link between the past and the future, because everyone, regardless of the period of history in which he or she lives, can properly direct life by imitating this ideal emperor (cf. Brodka 1998: 30): *unus in ore omnium*⁷⁷ *Gratianus, potestate impera-*

⁷⁵ Ausonius refers here to the *Κύρου παιδεία* of Xenophon (432–353 BC), in which he described the life of Cyrus the Great, presenting him as an ideal ruler.

⁷⁶ Ausonius’ idealization of Gratian is particularly exaggerated here. Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res Gestae XXXI, 10, 18*) says that Gratian had a character prone to wanton deeds, and that at a slightly more mature age he turned to the idle passions of the emperor Commodus (cf. also SHA, *Commodus 12, 12*), neglecting many serious matters in the very difficult situation of the state following the Roman defeat at Adrianople. Ammianus, however, admits that Gratian also possessed virtues among which he enumerates (in addition to his talent and eloquence) moderation, bravery and clemency, regarding his tendency to imitate the best emperors as a good feature in his conduct (XXXI, 10, 18). Unlike in Ausonius, the emperor’s virtues are not so numerous and exaggerated in Ammianus.

⁷⁷ A similar phrase appears in Symmachus’ *Rel. 12, 3*, where it is referred to Vetius Agorius Praetextatus (the noble member of the then senatorial aristocracy): *qui in pectoribus omnium manet, sit in ore populorum*; this could indicate that also in the

*tor, virtute victor, Augustus sanctitate, pontifex religione*⁷⁸, *indulgentia pater, aetate filius, pietate utrumque* (Aus., Act. VII 35). As L’Huillier (1986: 529–582) rightly points out, in the case of Gratian (as in the case of other emperors), we are dealing with a literary and panegyric creation of his ideal personality (Gratian = *monumentum virtutis: virtutes principum* and *expressa veterum signa virtutum*) as well as his moral identity as a ruler (Gratian = *imperator victor, Augustus, pontifex, pater*). The image of this perfect imperial personality and identity arose in consequence of orators skilfully using not the real qualities of the emperor but conventional moral symbols (L’Huillier 1986: 529–582), as well as classically formal language and repetitive imagery and tropes (Ware 2019: 304 [13]), by means of which they actually created the artificial and conventional idea of a perfect emperor rather than the individual and real image of his personality and identity.⁷⁹ This was a very common practice in Latin imperial panegyrics and an allowable means in epideictic rhetoric, resulting from its other-worldly quality based on viewing the emperor from the aspect of what is praiseworthy (Pernot 2015: 99) and aiming at the creation of the best possible imperial image (Ware 2019: 292 [2]); Ausonius⁸⁰ and Symmachus followed this practice in their laudatory speeches.

phraseological sphere in the literary image of the perfect emperor, certain conventional phrases were used which referred to other eminent personalities who were considered moral models – cf. also Mleczek 2022: 84.

⁷⁸ We interpret this phrase: a priest for piety. Ausonius did not seem to refer to the function of *pontifex maximus* (in the noun *pontifex*) and to the worship of gods (in the noun *religio*). Gratian was the first Christian emperor who refused to accept the dignity of *pontifex maximus* – this dignity of Roman emperors pointed to the protective function of the ruler towards all religions in the empire (and not just to the one of his choice) – cf. Mleczek 2020: 93, n. 36.

⁷⁹ The concept of *laudatio* as a *speculum principis* – cf. Pernot 2015: 98.

⁸⁰ The ideas that constituted Ausonius’ concept of the emperor were closer to the ideology of the panegyrics than to the traditional idea of Rome – cf. Brodka 1998: 30; Näf 1995: 70.

Conclusions

As we have pointed out, from the laudatory speeches of Ausonius and Symmachus emerges the image of Gratian as the ideal emperor (*optimus princeps*) of his day as well as the timeless and perfect moral link between the past and the future. These exaggerated praises addressed to the emperor are clearly influenced by literary panegyric convention (imperial panegyrics) as well as by motifs and *topoi* included in and consistent with the state ideology of the imperial period. In consequence, this exaggerated and idealized image of Gratian, which emerges from both speeches, becomes, first and foremost, the literary creation of an ideal ruler that overwhelms and obscures the real image. As a matter of fact, the real and true (sc. non-literary) Gratian as an individual seems to be pasted into the conventional scheme and panegyric model of an ideal emperor, as seen in the speeches in question.

Ausonius and Symmachus created an ideal image of Gratian by skilfully using conventional literary motifs as well as panegyric-propaganda *topoi*, which were combined, emphasized or paraphrased according to the authors' conception and with the help of standard panegyric techniques, stylistic means and rhetorical devices.

As for literary motifs, we pointed out the Tacitean motif of *aemulatio virtutum* (competition in virtues: Aus., *Act.* III 66; VIII 40; XIV 66; 67; XV 68; XVI 72; 73; 75; XVII 76; Sym., *Or.* III 7), which was used in the presentation of all *exempla antiquitatis*, and the literary *topos* of an emperor as a star (Sym., *Or.* III 11).

As regards the panegyric-propaganda *topoi*, we indicated the *topos* of *aureum saeculum* (the golden age) and the *topos* of *reiuventio* (rejuvenation of senile Rome) – Sym., *Or.* III 9; Aus., *Act.* I 3–4; the concept of the emperor as a ubiquitous being closest to God (Sym., *Or.* III 3; Aus., *Act.* I 4–; V 21; VIII 40), the son of the state-mother (*rei publicae nutricis filius*: Sym., *Or.* III 2), the ruler of the whole Roman (civilized) world (*dominus orbis*: Sym., *Or.* III 11; 12; Aus., *Act.* XVIII 80), the author of the golden age (*aurei saeculi auctor*: Aus., *Act.* I 5; Sym., *Or.* III 9), a benefactor of his subjects (*beneficiorum auctor*: Aus., *Act.* I 5; Sym., *Or.* III 9) and the father of his subjects (*subditorum pater*: Aus., *Act.* I 5); the panegyric canon of imperial virtues (*bonitas, pietas,*

iusstitia and *clementia*, *liberalitas*, *fortitudo/virtus*, *mens aurea/prudentia*, *felicitas*, *castitas* and *abstinentia*, *sanctitas*); features of the imperial period consistent with Roman state ideology (*securitas*, *tranquillitas*, *pax* and *concordia*, *iusstitia*, *prosperitas*, *libertas*); the *topos* of *pax precativa* (a covenant voluntarily made by the barbarians with the Roman state: Sym., *Or.* III 12) and *clementia* (the leading feature of Roman policy towards the barbarians, consistent with official state ideology).

As for stylistic means, we pointed out common tropes and rhetorical figures (including detraction figures of thought and verbal detraction figures, sometimes combined) often found in panegyrics and epideictic speeches, such as apostrophe (Sym., *Or.* III 2), descriptive metaphor and hyperbole (Sym., *Or.* III 5), metaphor and metonymy (Sym., *Or.* III 2; 3), metaphor (Sym., *Or.* III 9; 11; Aus., *Act.* XVI 74), hyperbole (Aus., *Act.* I 5), anaphora (Sym., *Or.* III 12), *gradatio* (*a maiore ad minus*: Aus., *Act.* I 3–4; VIII 39–40; *a minore ad maius*: XVI, 73), *praeteritio* (omission: Aus., *Act.* XVI 75) and *enumeratio* (enumeration: Aus., *Act.* XVII 77).

Regarding rhetorical devices, we indicated the technique of rhetorical probability (*verisimile*) through which Ausonius introduced panegyric-propaganda fiction into his speech (Aus., *Act.* II 7; 8). Both authors also added other solutions that were considered standard panegyric techniques, such as motifs of auspices (Sym., *Or.* III 2; 12), historical *exempla antiquitatis*, mythological *exempla* (*Parcae*: Sym., *Or.* III 9), references to Numidian customs (Aus., *Act.* XIV 64) as well as to the works of ancient poets, mainly Vergil (*Aeneis*, the fourth *Eclogue*) and Ovid (the first book of *Metamorphoses*: the golden age). In consequence, the “literary” Gratian, whose image in both discussed speeches consists of all these *topoi* and motifs (as pointed out above) and is presented by means of panegyric techniques and rhetorical devices (indicated above), has a conventional personality and schematic identity consistent with a panegyric model. Therefore Gratian is presented as the being closest to God and his perfect earthly imitator (literary convention), the most perfect star (literary convention), the ideal ruler of the Roman world (*topos*), the ubiquitous author of the golden age (*topos*) who brings *reiuvenatio* (*topos*), the son of the state-mother (*topos*) as well as the benefactor and father of his subjects (*topos*). The “literary” Gratian is

also the ideal personification of both imperial virtues and old Roman *virtutes* (panegyric convention + *virtutes maiorum*) and thus constitutes the timeless moral link between the past and the future. As a result, the “non-literary” and real Gratian, who actually was a mediocre emperor not free from flaws in his character, lost his true individual features and metamorphosed into the ideal of an emperor (*optimus princeps*) created by Ausonius and Symmachus, in accordance with literary convention and panegyric *topos* based on “telling people what they should see and telling the emperor what he should portray” (Ware 2019: 303 [13]). However, this common panegyric practice is understandable, considering that both Ausonius and Symmachus were not only bound by the requirements of the literary genre of panegyric speech (*laudatio, gratiarum actio*), aimed at mirroring an imperial persona as a monumental ideal, but were also influenced by the political realities in which they delivered their speeches, as well as the strong pressure resulting from their status (Chenault 2020: part 3, ch. 9) to retain their prestigious positions and develop their own careers (Olszaniec 2007: 339–349; PLRE I pp. 865–870), which were successful thanks to the kindness and support of the emperor. Nevertheless, the credibility of this literary image of Gratian as well as his reign and achievements they presented in their speeches, seems debatable and should be approached with a pinch of scepticism.

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