

## Citation style

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Q. Aurelius Symmachus: Amtliche Schreiben. Relationes. Lateinisch-deutsch. Herausgegeben und übersetzt von Alexandra Forst. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter 2020 (Sammlung Tusculum). 308 p. € 29.95. ISBN: 978-3-11-060904-2.

This volume which appeared in de Gruyter's series *Sammlung Tusculum* has the merit of making accessible for the first time to a German speaking public Symmachus' *Relationes*, allowing scholars and students to approach this work through a clear translation and commentary notes.

The collection of official reports, written by Symmachus in 384–385 AD as *praefectus urbi*, gives an insight into the administrative life of the Western part of the Empire at the end of the fourth century, providing information about a complex period, characterized by a serious shortage of wheat, by the increasing problem of the pillage of public places and by the redefinition of roles and privileges in the relationship between the pagan aristocrats and the Christian political establishment. The editor's brief introduction and the commentary guide the reader into the context framing the work, clarifying aspects of the legal and administrative system of the time with the concise and direct notes, as well as with the glossary of titles and functions pertaining to the late antique imperial administration (307–308).

The introduction (7–17) provides a concise overview on Symmachus' life and on the events which happened in the year of his office as urban prefect. The long-standing question concerning the editing of the collection and its controversial identification with the tenth book of Symmachus' Letters is nearly overlooked. In the section (16) dealing with the "Publikation und Überlieferung der *relationes*", the editor adheres to the reconstruction proposed by Domenico Vera,<sup>1</sup> who ascribes the arrangement of the *corpus* to an anonymous editor living in late fifth or sixth century. In support of this assumption, Alexandra Forst points out that, with the exception of rel. 3, it is not possible to outline the reception of the collection of the official reports before the sixth century, and that there is no evidence that Sidonius Apollinaris, who mentioned Symmachus among his epistolary *fontes*, had read the

1 D. Vera: Sulle edizioni antiche delle *Relationes* di Simmaco. In: *Latomus* 36, 1977, 1003–1036; D. Vera: *Commento storico alle Relationes di Quinto Aurelio Simmaco. Introduzione, commento, testo, traduzione, appendice sul libro X, 1–2, indici.* Pisa 1981 (Biblioteca di studi antichi 29), XC–XCV; 440–441.

*Relationes*. However, Sidonius cites in a catalogue of ‘famous wives’ (letter 2,10) the name of Symmachus’ wife, Rusticiana, who is only mentioned in rel. 34. For this section, Sidonius might have used a list of persons, a sort of *laterculus*; nonetheless, the possibility that he had the *Relationes* in his library cannot be excluded.

The Latin text follows the MGH edition;<sup>2</sup> the few readings diverging from the text established by Otto Seeck have been listed at pp. 231–232. Furthermore, like Seeck, the editor accepts in the text the *inscriptiones* as transmitted in the manuscripts, informing the reader about potential inconsistencies in the introductory note to the individual reports. The translation is accurate, although it occasionally fails to render the nuances and metaphoric images of Symmachus’ lexical choices. One may consider, as example, rel. 21, where Symmachus defends himself from the shameful accusation, qualified as a lie (rel. 21,1: *crudo mendacio*), of having illegally imprisoned Christian priests who had damaged some abandoned public places, including pagan temples. The expression *crudum mendacium* has been translated in German (105) “dreiste Lüge”, where the attribute “dreist” (‘insolent’) indicates the obvious falsity of the accusation of Symmachus’ detractors. The translation by Reginald Barrow<sup>3</sup> (“a sheer lie”) and Vera<sup>4</sup> (“una menzogna evidentissima”) point to the same direction. However, *crudus* almost never occurs with the sense of ‘evident, obvious’ or ‘impertinent’. The term literally means ‘raw, half cooked’, and then, in its figurative use, ‘immature’, ‘rough’, ‘unrefined’ or ‘savage’;<sup>5</sup> in this case, the attribute characterizes the roughness of the blatant

2 O. Seeck: Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt. Berolini 1883 (MGH Auct. ant. 6,1).

3 R.H. Barrow: Prefect and Emperor. The *Relationes* of Symmachus A.D. 384. With translation, introduction and notes. Oxford 1976, 115.

4 See Vera: Commento storico (note 1), 409.

5 In the other occurrences in Symmachus’ oeuvre, the term is used to define the pain cause by an open wound (rel. 11: *excessum viri inlustris crudo adhuc dolore non sileo*; epist. 1,101: *me sinito interim tempore aut ratione decoquere crudum dolorem*; 9,78: *credo miraris quod adhuc crudo fortunae meae vulnere silentium ruperim*) or the youthful energy of one of his addressees (epist. 8,69: *Rusticari te adseris et ducendis vitibus aut arboribus inserendis crudam senectutem fovere*; cf. Verg. Aen. 6,304: *cruda [...] viridisque senectus*). Moreover, a further nuance in the meaning of *crudus* is in Prud. c. Symm. 1,73, where the expression *crudus stupor* refers to the naive primitiveness of the ancients, who invented and believed in the stories about Juppiter’s transformations.

lie. Its evocative power is preserved in Jean-Pierre Callu's<sup>6</sup> translation ("mensonges saignants"); although the French editor uses an expression which is not idiomatic, his rendering is closer to Symmachus' stylistic choice. Furthermore, in rel. 21,2, Symmachus' anonymous slanderer is defined *scenae* [...] *fabricator*, equating the accusation against the urban prefect to a stage play (Forst translates "der Erfinder dieses Dramas"); in the following section (rel. 21,3) the expression *tragicas quaestiones*, referring to the supposed irregular questioning which the priests had gone through, recalls and strengthens the idea of dramatic fiction, as remarked by Callu<sup>7</sup>, who translates "dramatiques interrogatoires". Also here, Forst's translation ("grausame Untersuchungen"), which is surely correct, sacrifices, like already Vera<sup>8</sup> and Barrow<sup>9</sup> did, the suggestion evoked by the Latin term *tragicus*.

The commentary (233–302) provides for each report information concerning the dating and the *inscriptio* formula, when present, followed by the notes; these are crucial to understand the *Relationes*, which are the result of the complex late fourth-century imperial administrative system. This section much helps to make sense of the translation, fully enlightening the cultural and historical context of the work; nonetheless, it mainly deals with the historical and legal background of the texts, while the literary and stylistic aspects of Symmachus' learned prose and references to the Latin text have not been considered.

In conclusion, the volume appears particularly appropriate for students and scholars of late antique history, as it is based on the common idea of the *Relationes* as documentary source. When comparing them with the letter collection, the author remarks that the importance of Symmachus' reports lies in the quantity of information provided therein, which contrasts with the disengagement of contents in his private correspondence (12); in this respect, the reviewed book lacks attention to the literary aspects of the text, which had been welcomed as an encouraging and refreshing novelty at the

6 J.P. Callu (ed.): Symmaque. Discours – Rapports. Texte établi, traduit et commenté. Paris 2009 (Collection des universités de France. Série latine 394), 104.

7 See Callu (note 6), 104.

8 See Vera: Commento storico (note 1), 409: "interrogatori violenti".

9 See Barrow (note 3), 115: "hearth-rending inquisition".

time of publication of Callu's Budé edition.<sup>10</sup> In any event, Forst's 'Amtliche Schreiben' is an indispensable work for those who want to approach the *Relationes* and the world framing the *querelle* on the Altar of Victory through an elegant translation and accurate and easy to read commentary notes in German.

10 See C. Sogno's review about Callu's edition (note 6): BMCRev 2010.11.42, URL: <https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2010/2010.11.42/>.

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