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The Strange Death of Pagan Rome

Edited by
Rita LIZZI TESTA

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The end of paganism in antique Rome strongly involves the nature of the relations between pagans and Christians in the fourth century AD. The historical paradigm of conflict has been disseminated by scholars as the Hungarian András Alföldi, who in 1934 presented a Christian Constantine in irreconcilable conflict with a pagan Rome, and by Herbert Bloch. The latter, most notably in 1958, in a seminar conference at the Warburg Institute, consolidated the idea of a conflictual model in which the aristocracy of Rome, faced with a tightening of measures against traditional cults, realized a real 'pagan revival' and led against Theodosius I «the last pagan army of the ancient world». This model was subjected to a massive critique by Alan Cameron in his *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford 2011, but in the course of less than two years Cameron's publication has aroused a strong response, especially on the part of European scholars, and the debate has gained new, effervescent relevance.

This volume, edited by Rita Lizzi Testa, collects the reflections of some Italian scholars – Guido Clemente, Rita Lizzi Testa, Giorgio Bonamente, Silvia Orlandi, Giovanni Alberto Cecconi, Lellia Cracco Ruggini, Franca Ela Consolino, Isabella Gualandri, Gianfranco Agosti, Gianluca Grassigli, Alessandra Bravi – and of the illustrious professor François Paschoud from Geneva, on the theme of the last pagans of Rome. It is not only A. Alföldi's and H. Bloch's model that provides the dialectic reference for their discussions, but rather, the more insidious in its paradoxical nature, Alan Cameron's. For the English scholar the concept of conflict is a pure historiographical construction because no real pagans remained in Rome when Theodosius issued laws against paganism. They were not pagan but classical *élites*, people totally soaked in classical culture, who accepted Christianity when it became compatible with classical culture and the imperial institutions. In his monumental book (more than 800 pages), he argues his position through learned demonstrations and the review of a vast amount of literary, archaeological, epigraphic and even artistic documentation. Nevertheless, much of this evidence can be read again from very different perspectives, and this is what the contributors of the volume try to do.



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The Strange Death of Pagan Rome

Reflections on a Historiographical Controversy

Edited by
Rita LIZZI TESTA



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Idol from the Syriac sanctuary on the Janiculum (Rome), fourth century CE
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GIOVANNI ALBERTO CECCONI

ALAN CAMERON'S VIRIUS NICOMACHUS FLAVIANUS

Together with Alan Cameron's Nicomachus Flavianus, from this paper will emerge – *si parva licet componere magnis* – my own Nicomachus Flavianus. The combination, and to some extent competition, is inevitable, in view of the fact that to the historical profile of the same Flavianus I devoted a good part of my commentary on the second book of Symmachus' letters, which contains 91 letters addressed by the orator to his friend and *frater*¹.

In his acknowledgments, at the beginning of *The Last Pagans of Rome*, the author claims to have added just at the last moment chapters 17 and 18, those that focus on Nicomachus Flavianus². And he claims to be led to that choice because the historiographical work by Flavianus (*Annales*)³ has become a central topic in the recent debate, and dealing with it has become almost inevitable for specialists of cultural history and historiography of late antiquity. The interpretation of that work has some important consequences: for example, that Flavianus would have written his history of Rome with a strong ideological perspective, pagan and anti-Christian; «the most important and influential pagan history of the late fourth-century West», Cameron says, not without

¹ G. A. Cecconi, *Commento storico al libro II dell'epistolario di Q. Aurelio Simmaco*, Roma - Pisa 2002.

² C., p. vii.

³ Even the title of this historical work leads C. to some skepticism about how it should be understood by its author: «In Flavian's case *Annales* may not have been intended as a *title* at all, rather than (as often) a description, simply 'a history'» (C., p. 631).

criticism of this idea⁴. The existence of this history is to many scholars one of the more relevant elements that confirm the role of Flavianus as a charismatic leader of a pagan reaction finally buried in the aftermath of the battle of the Frigidus. According to Cameron, some scholars engaged in a kind of *Quellenforschung* affected by aprioristic tendencies would see in these *Annales* the basis for a significant part of the later pagan tradition. For example, some sections of attacks on Christianity present in Zosimus would have derived from the *Annales*. But the *Annales* are, for Cameron, neither a cornerstone of pagan tendencies nor an important intermediate piece for Byzantine historiography. They were a simple epitome of history, a summary like others commissioned by the emperors of the fourth century, a modest work that soon would be surpassed⁵.

In this regard, my position is not so far from that of Cameron or from that (even more *tranchante*) recently expressed by Burgess⁶. Or rather, I am unable to intervene in the debate on the influence of the *Annales*: the debate does not interest me and I presume that it can be of very little help for solving the political-religious or even historiographical issues, given the total lack of surviving fragments. If we admit that contaminations between Hieronymus' *Chronica* and Flavianus' work are probable or even certain, then complications multiply, and aspects of religious propaganda become especially confused⁷. If anything, it remains in my eyes somewhat curious that Cameron devotes most of his attention

⁴ C., p. 627.

⁵ C., p. vii; on *Annales* cfr. e.g. G. Zecchini, *Da Nicomaco Flaviano a Memmio Simmaco. La fine della storiografia classica in Occidente*, in Id., *Ricerche di storiografia latina tardoantica*, Roma 1993, pp. 51–63; B. Bleckmann, *Bemerkungen zu den "Annales" des Nicomachus Flavianus*, «Historia» 44, 1995, pp. 83–99; M. Festy, *Le début et la fin des "Annales" de Nicomaque Flavien*, «Historia» 46, 1997, pp. 465–478; A. Baldini, *Considerazioni in tema di Annales ed Historia Augusta*, in *HAC Barcinonense*, Bari 2005, pp. 15–46.

⁶ R. W. Burgess, *Chronicles, Consuls, and Coins. Historiography and History in the Later Roman Empire*, Aldershot 2011, pp. 168–169, with footnotes 11–12.

⁷ A discussion in St. Ratti, *Jérôme et Nicomaque Flavien: sur les sources de la "Chronique" pour les années 357–364*, «Historia» 46, 1997, pp. 479–508; more briefly, Cecconi, *Commento storico... cit.*, pp. 73–74, footnote 127. One of the problems on the relationships between the historical scripts of Flavian and Jerome is linked to the duration and layers of composition of both them, cfr. for chronology and sources of *Chronica* recently J. Benoît – B. Lançon, *Saint-Jérôme, Chronique: Continuation de la Chronique d'Eusèbe, années 326–378*, Rennes 2004,

to the debate about the *Annales* (pp. 627–658 and pp. 659–690), a non-existent work, instead of to Nicomachus Flavianus himself. In fact, he seems motivated by the desire not to shy away from an historiographical challenge (cfr. e.g. p. 629). Providing an historical profile of the personality reconsidered in this paper is not actually Cameron's main goal, but not doing so has a cost for it leaves the polychrome mosaic, which he himself studied and contributed to build, incomplete. Similar attitudes, albeit less striking and less important now, apply to the *Historia Augusta*. Cameron agrees with some reluctance to be led to discuss issues that he would like to avoid because he considers them scarcely significant. I shall briefly return to the *Annales* at the end of my paper, when I refer to the problem of the career of Nicomachus Flavianus and the relationships between him and Theodosius I.

By his own admission, paganism and pagans treated by Cameron are, firstly, those related to the learned circles of the Roman senatorial aristocracy, therefore *Last Pagans of Rome* treats pagans in Rome, where Rome is *Urbs*, much more than those in the entire late Roman world. Rural paganism, popular superstitions, indigenous 'provincial' religions, more or less traditional religious attitudes of the municipal *élites*: all that does not represent Cameron's 'dimension' (and, therefore, these issues are largely absent from his pages, except for some considerations in the epilogue). His 'dimension' and his main interests – as is known – are much closer to a social and cultural world characterised by a paganism, anything but radical, linked to a Christianity that is in turn 'lukewarm' and that together created a vast cultural «marais», to use the metaphor that Fontaine used a long time ago (in a famous *Entretien de la Fondation Hardt*)⁸: an educated, sophisticated (and indifferent) paganism, not combative from the view-point of worship and ritual, but which seems, rather, very close to, and even inclusive of, those Christians that appreciated cultural and artistic classicism.

pp. 19–63, to be consulted with caution, however: cfr. criticism of R. W. Burgess (<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2005/2005-09-47.html>).

⁸ J. Fontaine, *Unité et diversité du mélange des genres et des tons chez quelques écrivains latins de la fin du IV^e siècle: Ausone, Ambroise, Ammien*, in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'Antiquité tardive en Occident* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique, 23), Genève 1977, pp. 425–482, part. pp. 434–436.

In what follows I will not specify if I refer to Cameron's unique views or to those that he shares with others. Of course, he does not believe that in the decades after Julian the Apostate, a strong and effective religious opposition – with at the top an hypothetical 'triumvirate' formed by Praetextatus, Symmachus, Flavian, with their patronage and financial basis – 'coagulated' to fight the axis Church-Christian State (Ambrose-papacy-Gratian-Theodosius the Great). Nor does he believe that a 'circle' noted for a specific ideology existed around Symmachus, which would have coordinated pagan senatorial policy. Neither Symmachus nor Flavianus, even considering the few priesthoods they held, could represent a real and strong pagan leadership. And, I guess, if I correctly follow Cameron's thinking, the main perspective to evaluate is cultural. In fact, in this supposed traditional stronghold there was no political strategy to defend; there were no religious feelings; rather its members simply shared their classical *paideia* with each other and also with Christians. Consistent with this interpretation is the reading (one of the many cornerstones of the work of the professor of Columbia University) of the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, which Cameron began studying in the 1960s⁹. For him *Saturnalia* did not represent an eye-witness report that was evidence of pagan vitality at the end of the fourth century. Macrobius was not a convinced pagan. Macrobius, indeed, was a Christian, and wrote shortly after 430 AD (when all participants in the dialogue were long since dead, cfr. p. 274), several decades after the dramatic date in 384¹⁰; therefore, his work tells us more about the «'antiquarianism' of Christian senators in the 430s than the beliefs of pagans in the 380s» (p. 5). Not only. The topics attributed to the participants in the symposium interested Macrobius in the context of his time and were not an accurate reflection of the political and cultural identities of the characters that he put on the stage. In doing so, another

⁹ Al. Cameron, *The Date and Identity of Macrobius*, «JRS» 56, 1966, pp. 25-38; Al. Cameron, *Macrobius, Avienus and Avianus*, «CQ» 17, 1967, pp. 385-395.

¹⁰ On the religious affiliation of Macrobius, Cameron did not fully breach among scholars: cfr. for example, J. Flamant, *Macrobe et le Néoplatonisme latin à la fin du IV^{ème} siècle*, Leiden 1977, spec. pp. 652-680; E. Syska, *Studien zur Theologie des Macrobius*, Stuttgart 1993 (not cited in the bibliography by C.), and recently a brief notation in H. Sivan, *Galla Placidia: the Last Roman Empress*, Oxford 2011, p. 100.

piece of the religious picture of Nicomachus Flavianus senior as an «ardent pagan» will be removed from the mosaic: in particular the Flavianus who is competent in divination and *auguria*¹¹.

In direct connection with this, the description given by our sources of the religious wisdom of Flavianus and the impetus given the army by virtue of it, during the beginnings of the battle of September 5, 394, become insignificant and anecdotal¹². Furthermore, such a description is, according to Cameron, in proportion to the amount of prayers to the Christian God made by the other side in the war. If there is a vision that absolutely cannot be attributed to Cameron it is that paganism was ‘assassinated’¹³. Among the views he attacks with greater emphasis when referring to Nicomachus Flavianus as a political-religious leader are the traditional presentation of the battle of Frigidus as the culmination of a religious clash, and the return of public subsidies for traditional priesthoods by Eugenius’ government (p. 75). Beyond the standards and religious symbols, the statues of deities placed on the tops of mountains etc., what we have to understand more clearly is why a pagan and Christian tradition developed that interpreted the battle of Frigidus as religiously based. Was it a literary construction or journalism? Another aspect, which Hedrick has discussed, is an implicit tendency (in Cameron and others) to distinguish – sometimes building a hierarchy among the various components – culture, religion, politics, warfare, as if they were reciprocally separated («quarantined») and could not fully interact with each other, as clearly happened in the dynamics of war in the modern and contemporary world¹⁴.

¹¹ For this kind of competences: *PLRE* I, Flavianus 15, p. 348 (where the expression ‘ardent pagan’ recalled in the text).

¹² Ruf. *HE* XI 33: *At pagani, qui errores suos novis semper erroribus animant, innovare sacrificia et Romam funestis victimis cruentare, inspicere exta pecudum et ex fibrarum praesentia securam Eugenio victoriam nuntiare, superstitiosius haec agente et cum omni animositate Flaviano tunc praefecto, cuius adsertionibus – magna enim erat eius in sapientia praerogativa – Eugenium victorem fore pro certo praesumpserant.*

¹³ Of course I recall, paraphrasing them, the famous words of Pignaniol about the end of the Roman Empire, to insist that the struggle by the Frigidus and the stories that tell it are of limited significance and reliability to C.

¹⁴ Ch. W. Hedrick Jr., *History and Silence. Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity*, Austin 2000; on which cfr. G. A. Cecconi, *Un libro recente sulla riabilitazione di Virio Nicomaco Flaviano*, «Athenaeum» 91, 2003, pp. 603–608.

The years after 390 are crucial, not only because they are the best documented, but because they enable us to clarify who Nicomachus Flavianus was, the man and the politician.

Alan Cameron opportunely emphasizes the ties of friendship and cooperation between the pious Theodosius and the alleged pagan leader Flavianus. The notion of conflict between pagans and Christians should not be exclusively described (in order to prove easily that it has no reason to exist) as a clash between parties or ... gangs. It took place through a variety of different registers, among which we might well contemplate moments of dialogue, alternating with episodes of bitter controversy and violence. In any case, I do not deny the undisputed ties between Flavianus and Theodosius, all the more so given that there is clear evidence of the breaking of those ties in 392. This moment is key to understanding their relationship: it had probably deteriorated before the final break, for reasons that I will show. On the other hand, I will not dwell on less important (albeit not totally irrelevant) details such as the personal events and treachery of others, which seems to allude the 'rehabilitating' inscription of 431 (*CIL* VI 1783 = *ILS* 2948), exposed in the *Forum* of Trajan, with its discussed expression that many scholars think reveals a subtle point: *livor improborum*¹⁵. I repeat: I believe that the relationship between Flavianus and Theodosius got broken for very concrete reasons: the new lines of public policy by Constantinople; legislative steering; the attempt to remove room for maneuver in the West from Flavianus and his entourage, trying to replace him in the praetorian prefecture, in 392, with Apodemius. I emphasize sources that Cameron skates over quickly or that he in some measure neglects, including the second book of Symmachus' letters. In the same context, the psychological profile of Nicomachus Flavianus cannot be ignored (no need to go into a dangerous historical psychologism) as it emerges from the correspondence with Symmachus and which is in fact apparent from a series of exchanges in those letters. Here is not the place to restate the reasoning with which

¹⁵ On this inscription also *AE* 2009, 127; A. Baldini, *CIL* VI, 1783, 16-17: *plerique meministis (e considerazioni sparse sull'impiego di plerique)*, «AnTard» 17, 2009, pp. 365-374, considered again the document, with particular regard to ll. 16-17 of the text.

I have attempted elsewhere to illustrate serious neuroses of Flavianus when he had to live far from his close relatives and also when he had to deal with high political responsibilities¹⁶.

During the fourth century paganism weakened. It was a weakening not without jolts, in which there were some noticeable moments of vitality in the Julian and later in the post-Julian years: we are certain that there were tendencies to apostasy from christianity to the old religion¹⁷. A variety of crises – cultural tradition, pagan cults, the decline of religious buildings and of political and religious institutions etc. – in the presence of an increasingly threatening alliance between ecclesiastical and civil hierarchies involving military powers represented a dominating trend and was perceived as such in the society as a whole. I recall that the disturbance of the relationship between Nicomachus Flavianus and Theodosius goes almost hand in hand with the parallel and contemporary misfortune touching the pagan Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus (*consul* in 391 in college with Symmachus) in the Eastern court where Rufinus had much influence¹⁸. My deep belief is that in this context something traumatic happened in the consciousness of Flavianus: he envisioned an irreparable and rapid loss that led him to an existential choice of no return. The wealth of the urban *domus*, the snobbish elegance, intellectual interests could no longer hide or prevent his choice. Here I would like to ask a question, and not only to Alan Cameron: does it seem a decision of some historical importance – of some involvement and personal commissioning – to construct an alliance (with Eugenius, whose individual faith could be discussed, but also with the pagan Arbogast), then to go to war and fight a civil struggle clearly intended to be fatal for one or the other? A choice that a man like Flavianus, with his insight and complexity, could not take lightly. He did not enlist as an isolated ‘volunteer’; on the contrary, he used administrative structures, and political, ideological as well as military support. To be sure, Symmachus, in whose

¹⁶ See Cecconi, *Commento storico... cit.*, pp. 40–45.

¹⁷ See now G. A. Cecconi, *Pagani e cristiani nell'Occidente tardoantico. Quattro studi*, Roma 2012, pp. 53–84.

¹⁸ *PLRE I*, Tatianus 5; cfr. R. Scharf, *Die Familie des Fl. Eutolmius Tatianus*, «ZPE» 85, 1991, pp. 223–231.

correspondence it seems that almost nothing was happening, almost disappears at this stage. However, we do not know what was taken out of the correspondence, what was excised with the censure (or autocensure) that must have occurred and that will certainly also have affected political and religious matters. Incidentally, in my opinion this process limits the possibility to fully assess the ideological and devotional profile of Flavianus. It seems to me that the documentation we possess enables us to avoid the slippery slopes, sentimental and heroic, typical of an historical novel. Our character, who was a pagan not a fanatic, and one of great culture and of high human sensitivity (as we see clearly, once more, from the second book of Symmachus' correspondence), matured and then finally internalized the inevitable dissolution of his world. Finally he opted for giving his support to the armed conflict, when compromise and negotiations connected with the idea of tolerance and aimed at achieving a balance failed. Those efforts were advanced first by Symmachus' and then also by Eugenius' groups, in this last case in more institutional terms, I mean proposing a balance between East and West in holding the consulates.

Let us now return to September 5, 394, setting aside Cameron's observations on the issues connected with this historical event. However, let us reconsider the most significant points and sources.

For Cameron, what Rufinus of Aquileia says about the battle of Frigidus is largely invented, since the battle had no real religious connotation. This assertion would seem contradicted by the sources as a whole, both Latin and Greek. But according to Cameron the homogeneity of such a composite dossier is only apparent, since the literary and historiographical Christian papers seem to be copies of each other and derive from a unique '*mot d'ordre*' or from Rufinus himself, who if he did not invent everything, exaggerated greatly. In other words Cameron urges us not to be impressed by the different versions and the number of *testimonia* that we have. At the same time, the suicide of Flavianus was, according to him, an event that actually took place. He attributes it – perhaps with irony – to the fleeing of the pagan gods on whom Flavianus had faithfully counted and on whom he

founded all his favorable forecasts¹⁹. Strangely, though in the final bibliography appears the reference to the book by Françoise Thélamon, *Païens et chrétiens au IV^{ème} siècle: l'apport de l'Histoire Ecclesiastique de Rufin d'Aquilée* (1981), I could not find any mention of the book anywhere in Cameron's volume. Yet it would be an interesting comparison to make because Thélamon remarks how Rufinus attributed the voluntary death of Flavianus to his enlightening discovery of the inadequacy of his religion: he, an *eruditus admodum vir* (an expression that is difficult to understand), converted and committed suicide simultaneously, however paradoxical that may appear. Thélamon's position, basically, could have some points of contact with that of Cameron but it is impossible to know it for certain, reading the book. The key period here is (*HE XI 33*): *Flavianus plus pudoris quam sceleris reus, cum potuisset evadere, eruditus admodum vir, mereri se mortem pro errore iustius quam pro crimine iudicavit*. The reading of Thélamon is fully legitimate, but I do not think it is the only possible one, nor is it my favorite. I think, as I have argued elsewhere more extensively, that *error* may not consist in the 'subjective'²⁰ faith of Flavianus: rather, Rufinus in that sentence will have probably contrasted the death that Flavianus considered more worthy and more just (albeit defined by the Christian author as an *error*), with the unfortunate fate that he, defeated, would have suffered later as a punishment, as a result of a legal judgment, *pro crimine*.

After Flavianus the Elder's end and the definitive defeat of the enemies of the Roman order, there was a *damnatio* whose details are unknown but which incurred concrete consequences; it had an impact on the fortunes of the Nicomachean family for a relatively protracted period. In this regard, in year 2000 Charles Hedrick Jr., published *History and Silence. Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity*, which examines the memory of Flavianus. Condemned by Honorius and Stilicho, but tacitly preserved within the noble *gens*, in 431 his memory was officially relegitimized (restoring full prestige to Nicomachus Flavianus jr., who was still alive and active with high responsibilities in politics)

¹⁹ C., p. 101.

²⁰ Throughout the text, *error* is always to be understood as religious deviance, in the judgment of the author.

under the impulse of Valentinian III and his *entourage*. The book is interesting, *inter alia*, for the space given to the reasons for the silence on religious themes during the first three decades of the fifth century and again in the inscription on display in Trajan's Forum²¹. Cameron is quite critical of Hedrick's idea that the posthumous sentence was unjustly harsh and effective causing a long disappearance of Flavianus from the public official memory, which was finally and suddenly corrected by his reputation's unexpected rehabilitation in 430-431. According to Cameron, this *damnatio* was rather partial, and overall insignificant, as shown by data, including the fact that the statue in honor of Flavianus, when he was *vicarius Africae*, in Lepcis Magna was still standing. Even on this latter point, which has some importance in Cameron's argument, I have some doubts. It is well known that in the ancient world the deletion of the memory of a disgraced person convicted by the law rarely result in a systematic and eternal oblivion. Apart from the simple idea that inhabitants of Lepcis ignored the *damnatio* because of the vicar's great memory in the city, more in general, it is difficult to understand how the *damnatio* could be secured in written evidence (e.g. correspondence) with limited circulation. But for public monuments and statues the question is even more complicated because of the physical difficulty of reaching them and also in part due to the lack of political will. In the Italy of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many stones and inscriptions sculpted or pictured on monuments recall Mussolini, other people of his regime and fascist era, despite, after their fall, fascism and its leaders were subjected to a radical banning sanctioned by the Italian Republic and by the Constitutional Charter that punish the re-establishment of the fascist party. In addition, apologizing for fascism and creating associations that will foster its recovery are crimes specified by Scelba's law of 1952²². Similarly, traces of great dictators remain in many countries after the fall of

²¹ Interesting parallels are evoked by Hedrick, with the system of political segregations and condemnations in XXth century's dictatorships. Cfr. *supra* footnote 14.

²² The distinction between reconstitution of the dissolved mussolinian Fascist party, and the associations of fascist inspiration, which is not in itself an officially recognized criminal offense, is still in place.

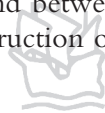
their regime. We also consider the ways in which, in antiquity, these obliterations were often realized on the material objects. For example, the texts were sometimes covered with chalk or plaster and these materials could fall off over time, bringing them again to light; or the enforcement procedure was simply to remove the statues from the *forum* or from the main streets and store them (relegating them to the fate often evoked in inscriptions, after they had been restored to a somehow public use, with phrases such as *de / ex sordentibus locis*, and similar)²³. All this considered, with respect to Cameron's opinion about aspects of Hedrick's book, even I, with Cameron, have some difficulty in imagining that there may have been a conviction, a memory obliteration 'religiously perceived' for more than thirty years.

I would like to go back briefly where I began to make a few comments on the *Annales* before I move to my conclusion. This will enable me to address the problem thus far only hinted at, namely the question of the *cursum honorum*. Cameron is convinced that in the short space of two years or so, after 388, Flavianus the Elder wrote his historical epitome, during the short time that his duties left him free. And that he did it in the West, since he would never have visited the East and Constantinople. In fact, references to Flavianus as a historian, or rather as a personality characterized by marked historical interests, are lacking in the Letters of Symmachus. Well, to Alan Cameron, Flavianus was undoubtedly *quaestor sacri palatii* in Italy in 388–389, then praetorian prefect in the West in one or two steps (I cannot address here the problems connected with other factors, like the issues related to the appointment codicils and to the two separate administrations, Western and Eastern). I think that Flavianus was already *quaestor* in 381 and then, immediately afterwards he withdrew from this charge (possibly even for a short time while preserving its power as *quaestor*), became praetorian prefect in 382–383; then there was the prefectural wide second phase in one or two steps in the years 390–394.



²³ For example, *CIL* VIII 20963; VIII 20965; *CIL* XIV 4721. I express my thanks to Ignazio Tantillo for discussion on this point.

The *Annales* were requested by, and dedicated to, Theodosius *a quaestore et praefecto suo* (once more a complicated expression, cfr. below), before something bad happened in the Court, as is alluded to by the famous inscription of 431, and of course before the already described ‘trust crisis’ between the two men during 392. In *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Cameron can be very selective in the choices that sometimes have an apodictic touch and authoritative tone. So, he devotes considerable space to refute nearly all recent interpretations of the *Annales* but he resolves with a few lines («Cannot be sustained ...», p. 676) a problem, partly associated with the composition of these same *Annales*, namely the high chronology of the quaestorship and the first praetorian prefecture. He accepts as an almost irrefutable truth the dating of these charges by John Matthews, in the period following the fall of Maximus, when Theodosius was in the West; undoubtedly this thesis is the most influential²⁴. I am honored to be quoted for my useful references in a footnote that acknowledges my contribution «with full bibliography» of different positions on the career of Flavianus (p. 631), but I am less proud of this statement: «To my mind Matthews has produced an all but unanswerable case for the later dates. Cecconi has recently tried to revive the earlier date, but without seriously undermining Matthews’ arguments or producing a new one of his own». This last phrase is not accurate, and I fear this originated from the fact that Cameron did not actually read my work, or if so, without enough care, perhaps given my inelegant Italian. I don’t mean that my argument is automatically right, but I gave an argument! Moreover, I was not interested at the time, in ‘reviving’ anything. That’s not the point: it was a topic whose evidence and historical critique I studied again. Rather, in debate particularly with Matthews, and making use of a structural analysis as close as possible of the Symmachian text, paying attention to an ‘infinite’ game of semantic correspondences inside a series of letters of the second book and between them and other sources, I simply came to a reconstruction of the career of Nicomachus



²⁴ J. F. Matthews, *Nicomachus Flavianus’ Quaestorship: The Historical Evidence*, in T. Honoré (ed.), *Virius Nicomachus Flavianus. Mit einem Beitrag von John F. Matthews*, Konstanz 1989, pp. 18-25.

Flavianus different from that of Matthews and other scholars. The only really new element is the chronology of Flavianus' quaestorship (for me held in Constantinople). I raise its chronology, placing it already in 381, in the first years of the settlement of Theodosius. So I stay marginally apart from the positions of Callu, Vera and Errington, whose works are dedicated above all to the problem of the first prefecture and who also establish a high chronology for the career of Flavianus when he first became a palatine functionary, charged with a highly prestigious office in a direct collaboration with the emperor²⁵.

This is not the place to return to a full analysis of Nicomachus Flavianus' career. Furthermore, it is hardly likely that I am able to demonstrate anything new or substantially different from what I wrote in 2002. Here I want only to argue that a succession quaestorship > prefecture from 381 to 383 does not alter the reliability of the critical phrase in the mentioned *CIL* VI 1783, namely that the *Annales* were dedicated (probably after 388 and when Flavianus was about to get the second prefecture, because this time best suits the contents of Trajan's *Forum* inscription) *a quaestore et praefecto suo*. And incidentally I would also add that this sequence would remove an inconsistency which, to my knowledge, has never been noticed: otherwise, for the years between 377 and 388, Nicomachus Flavianus junior would have 'outperformed' his father – of course still alive – with regard to the levels of their political career. I do not know if this is a unique circumstance but certainly it is a noteworthy anomaly: Nicomachus senior *consularis* of Sicily and vicar of Africa, Nicomachus junior, *consularis* of Campania and *proconsul* of Asia.

One last, empirical and perhaps very abstract, question which I offer as a provocation not having the ability to verify the possible significance without further study. Matthews identifies our character with the prefect of the *Carmen contra paganos*, unless he has made retractions of which I am unaware. This identifica-



²⁵ J.-P. Callu, *Les préfetures de Nicomache Flavianus*, in *Mélanges d'histoire offerts à W. Seston*, Paris 1974, pp. 72–80; D. Vera, *La carriera di Virius Nicomachus Flavianus e la prefettura dell'Illirico orientale nel IV sec. d.C.*, «Athenaeum» 71, 1983, I and II, pp. 24–64 e 390–426; R. M. Errington, *The Praetorian Prefectures of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus*, «Historia» 41, 1992, pp. 439–461.

tion is however strongly denied by Cameron²⁶. This divergence has obvious consequences for the overall image of Flavianus as a man deeply involved in religious activities and in pagan worship, a conviction which Cameron not without some good reason does not accept. But in the end my question is whether this identification may in some way affect the reconstruction of Cameron, who depends on Matthews' reconstruction for the succession quaestorship > prefectures in the career of Flavianus, or, if vice versa, is it irrelevant.



²⁶ In favor of the identification in Flavianus of the prefect of the *carmen*, cfr. recently B. Adamik, *Das sog. Carmen contra paganos*, «Acta Ant. Acad. Scientiarum Hungaricae» 36, 1995, pp. 185-223, and especially St. Ratti, *Polémiques entre païens et chrétiens. Histoire*, Paris 2012 (for Ratti, Flavianus was also the author of the *Historia Augusta*).