

SYMMACHUS AS AN ACTIVE POWER BROKER: WHAT DO HIS RECOMMENDATION LETTERS REVEAL ABOUT THE WRITER'S NETWORK?*

Abstract: This article aims to focus on the role that recommendation letters played in Symmachus' network. More specifically, by comparing recommendation letters written to different addressees within a given period for the same recommendee, it hopes to obtain a 'pure' vision of how a recommendation functioned in Symmachus' network. In this respect, 19 letter sets spanning the greatest part of Symmachus' public life (379–402) are discussed. A special attention is given to the recommendations for Nicomachus Flavianus. This comparison of individual letters allows to draw conclusions on the nature of Symmachus' recommendation letter, the letter writer's influence, the role of *amicitia* and the extent of his network. Moreover, the article wants to sketch the selected letters against the wider recommendation process. Several such moments in this process can be found in Symmachus' letters. The references to the different moments in the recommendation process suggest that Symmachus aspired, in an attempt at self-promotion, to represent himself as a successful power broker.

Keywords: Symmachus, ancient epistolography, recommendation letter, network, recommendation process, intervention, *amicitia*, Nicomachus Flavianus, Late Antiquity

Symmachus, who was born into one of the most influential families in Rome, was an avid epistolographer, as his monumental letter corpus attests. His letters were “primarily intended not to inform but to manipulate, to produce results”.¹ The purpose of Symmachus' letter writing was “the formation and preservation of ties of friendships in a world where distances made visits if not impossible, then certainly difficult”.² A large portion of his correspondence comprises letters of recommendation, which, thanks to

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1) Matthews 1974, 64. He also describes Symmachus' letters as “the more remarkable for their allusive sensitivity” (Matthews 1974, 82).

2) Sogno 2006, 88.

his extensive network, he could exchange with a broad range of correspondents. These recommendation letters were meant not only to advance the interests of his protégés but also to promote the self-image as a successful and well-connected patron.

Introduction

In this article I seek to study Symmachus' network from the perspective of his recommendation letters. In other words, I would like to highlight the role that recommendation letters played in the functioning of Symmachus' network. As such, it is important to firstly describe the methodology applied in exploring the recommendation letters to that purpose. Since Symmachus' recommendation letters cover a period which extended over roughly three decades, it is my understanding that these letters, taken as a whole, are not very suitable for studying the writer's network 'in action'. On the contrary, it seems to me that a discussion of the writer's network in action benefits more from a synchronical approach, when individual letters are compared to each other. Such a synchronical approach is often absent, when the recommendation letters are studied as a whole. Therefore, when the focus is put on recommendation letters that meet specific criteria, it is possible to obtain a 'pure' vision of how a recommendation functioned in the epistolographer's network.

Consequently, this article will discuss those cases in which Symmachus addressed a recommendation within a given period to more than one person on behalf of the same recommendee, excluding those letters that treat a different subject. There is indeed a risk that a comparison of letters that do not deal with the same topic might produce a distorted view of the writer's network, as the letter writer was involved in two separate cases at the same moment. To the best of my knowledge, Symmachus' recommendation letters have never been discussed from this perspective. Moreover, it seems to me that the understanding of Symmachus' network will largely benefit from embedding his recommendation letters within the larger recommendation process. Numerous examples indeed provide us with interesting indications that a recommendation letter was (an important) part of a broader recommendation process that often extended over several years.

It has, however, to be underlined that this approach is not the only way to study the recommendation letter in relation to Symmachus' network.³ Other features in the recommendation letters point to the duration and, hence, the density of the writer's network. Symmachus could address a recommendation to someone whom he himself had previously recommended. "In advancing and obtaining requests, he accrued honour and influence, since the recommendee was hereafter indebted to the letter writer."⁴ Successive recommendation letters on behalf of the same recommendee to the same addressee might point to the limitations of a writer's network, as a valuable alternative for the current addressee was not present, or, on the contrary, to the 'quality' of the network, as the addressee's position was such that for the same case he could grant a second request.⁵ These features fall outside the scope of this article.

*Recommendation letters of Symmachus*⁶

Before focusing on Symmachus' recommendation letters, I would like to briefly place the ancient recommendation letter within its larger framework. Recommendation letters were a common letter type in ancient epistolography.⁷ In very general terms, a rec-

3) Sogno 2006, 22 theorises that Symmachus from the beginning of his career "cultivated friendship at court and weaved a far-reaching web of connections that would support him throughout his life".

4) Salzman / Roberts 2012, XLV. I identified at least 10 such cases. These are the recommendation letters of Book 2, 6 and 46 other letters.

5) Examples are Epp. 3.81 and 86; 7.120 and 125; 8.16 and 9.7.

6) All the translations of Symmachus' letters, except those from Book 1, are my own.

7) (i) Within the letter corpus of different epistolographers between the fourth century BC and the beginning of the fifth century AD, I identified a number of recommendation letters: (a) Latin: Cicero, 105 recommendations (out of 865 letters); Pliny, 30 recommendations (out of 358 letters); Fronto, 18 recommendations (out of 287 [incomplete] letters); Augustine, 22 recommendations (out of 310 letters). (b) Greek: Isocrates, 3 recommendations (out of 9 letters); Basil, 46 recommendations (out of 366 letters); Gregory of Nazianzus, 61 recommendations (out of 249 letters); Synesius, 37 recommendations (out of 159 letters); Libanius, at least 510 (out of 1544 letters). (c) Pseudepigraphical and fictional letters: 14 recommendations. (d) Papyrus letters: 104 recommendations. Except for papyrus letters, the recommendation seems to have been practised more in Late Antiquity than in earlier periods. (ii) Other testimonies also point to the recommendation letter as a

ommendation letter is a request which is addressed to someone belonging to the writer's network⁸ on behalf of a third person (the recommendee),⁹ who is normally of lower status. Accordingly, such a letter can be considered a means of bridging a physical, hierarchical or mental distance between a recommendee and an addressee.¹⁰ The recommendation letter is an instrument that exhibits asymmetries of power and knowledge, and it permits communication in a mediated way with a person who was usually more powerful than the recommendee himself. "Recommendation letters by their nature would establish a complex social relationship involving three participants: the recommendee, the author and the

distinct epistolary category. The recommendation letter was treated by ancient epistolary theory. "The inclusion of the recommendation letter in the epistolary treatises of Pseudo-Demetrius' *Typoi epistolikoi* and Pseudo-Libanius' *Epistolimaioi Characteres* suggests that this letter type was a well-known form in antiquity" (Rees 2007, 167). Iul. Vict. *Ars Rhet.* 27.36–37 devoted – within the treatment of the familiar letter – a few lines to the recommendation letter. Cod. Theod. 2.31.2 also proves that a strong link existed between the familiar, personal letter (*familiaris epistola*) and the recommendation. Interesting remarks about the value of a recommendation letter are found in Lib. Ep. 62.7 and P. Mich. VIII 468.38–41. (iii) Moreover, Roman law made provisions about recommendation letters: Dig. 17.1.12.12; 32.11.2 and 47.2.67(66). (iv) Recent scholarly literature has touched upon certain aspects of the recommendation letter of one or more authors or focused on a specific function of this letter. There is insufficient room to list all of the publications that treat this vast subject. However, the following works can be cited as relevant for a specific author or aspect: Plantera 1977, 5–36; Stowers 1986, 153–165; Llewelyn 1989; Pavis d'Escurac 1992; Bérenger-Badel 2000; Verboven 2002, 287–323; Rees 2007; Deniaux 2011.

8) I assume that an ancient recommendation letter, contrary to what would happen nowadays, was normally only written when the letter writer and the recipient of the letter were in some way acquainted with each other.

9) An interesting exception is *Symm. Ep.* 1.19, in which Symmachus basically uses the recommendation letter to promote his own interests. In this way the recommendee becomes the recommending person and vice versa: *Nam fratri meo Potito hac condicione litteras dedi, ut eas ipse commendet. ... qui ubi te conpotem fecerit praesentiae suae, vereor ne excusatio mea ignoscenda non sit* – 'I have given a letter to my brother Potitus on the condition that he himself should recommend it. ... And when he has made you part of his presence, I fear that my excusing myself will not be forgivable' (transl. Salzman and Roberts). Sogno 2006, 7: "... under the present circumstances Symmachus needed the recommendation of his protégé in order to make Ausonius accept his apologies."

10) It could occur whenever the person who needed help, protection, etc. could not make a request orally or deemed it inappropriate to approach the addressee directly. Lib. Ep. 908.1 mentions that the recipient of the letter has assisted many people, although he knew barely anything about them.

recipient of the letter. The interaction involving these three determines the outcome of the recommendation.”¹¹

Recommendation letters constitute a broad category, as they can be used in a variety of circumstances and fit a wide spectrum of purposes, ranging from a mere introduction that requests the addressee to exercise patronage upon the recommendee, to an intervention, in which the element of support or aid is important, and finally to a letter that endorses the recommendee for a specific position or office. An oral message was often meant to supplement what was written in the letter.

In most cases, the recommendation was “chiefly a testimonial, since it testified to the recommendee’s good character and trustworthiness”.¹² The writer often makes it clear that the recommendation is part of the reciprocal nature of friendship. A recommendation letter then “aimed to bolster a long-term relationship between writer and recipient”.¹³

In some cases, the distance between a recommendee and the person to whom a request was eventually addressed was large and could not be bridged by only one recommendation letter. Such a situation resulted in an indirect intervention.¹⁴ This happened when a letter writer who intervened on behalf of his recommendee was himself unable to approach the person who might provide the aid, and instead had to turn to a third individual who could come into contact with the ‘appropriate person’.¹⁵ An indirect intervention might also occur when the letter writer, although he knew the ‘final addressee’, did not want, for some particular reason, to approach him directly, but preferred to turn to an intermediary.

After this brief description of the ancient recommendation letters, I would like to discuss some salient features of Symmachus’ recommendations. From a total correspondence of 902 letters, I

11) Mratschek 2015, 136.

12) Cotton 1981, 6.

13) White 2010, 28.

14) Verboven 2002, 318: “Patronal systems are generally more effective when patrons use not only their own resources, but also those of their friends, clients and higher patrons.”

15) Within the group of recommendation letters, examples of an indirect intervention in Late Antiquity are August. Epp. 113; 115 and 222.3; Bas. Epp. 32.1; 33; 86; 147 and 281; Greg. Naz. Epp. 15.6; 126.3–4; 127.2–3 and 151; Lib. Epp. 2; 308 and 966; Syn. Epp. 102.8–12; 117; 118.10–13 and 119.8–12.

identified 236 recommendation letters.¹⁶ The majority of the letters do not recommend a person for a specific position or activity, but can be regarded more as introduction letters. This suggests that the letter was ‘a supporting document’ for the recommendee, who was expected to explain orally the aim of his visit.¹⁷ However, a fairly considerable portion can be read as interventions in which Symmachus requests aid or support on behalf of his protégé. In the majority of the cases, the recommendation letters are rather short and unembellished documents whose length does not exceed three paragraphs.¹⁸

Symmachus underpins and justifies his recommendation by resorting to some broad categories, such as the character or psychological qualities (*mores*) of the recommendee,¹⁹ the qualities shown in a previous position²⁰ or his educational / rhetorical qualities.²¹ It has to be pointed out that, in some letters, the justification is not limited to a single category.²² The portrait of the recommendee is often rendered in a few strokes, without giving an ample description.²³ “The recommendation letters seldom say any-

16) The recommendation letters can be found in nine of the ten books: Book 1: 35 out of 107; Book 2: 34 out of 91; Book 3: 24 out of 91; Book 4: 18 out of 74; Book 5: 24 out of 98; Book 6: 7 out of 81; Book 7: 41 out of 131; Book 8: 2 out of 74 and Book 9: 51 out of 153. Stowers 1986, 165 did not identify any recommendation letter in Symmachus’ letter corpus. Matthews 1974, 61 and Salzman 1989, 352 limited themselves to stating that “recommendation letters constitute over a quarter of the total letter-corpus”. Other authors, when discussing a specific theme or book, identified some letters as recommendation letters. Examples are Bonney 1975 (letters belonging to Book 7 that lack superscript), O’Donnell 1978 (letters sent to Virius Nicomachus Flavianus), Bruggisser 1993, 275–280 (letters sent to Ausonius), Salzman 2006 (letters sent to Richomerus and Ambrosius), Ebbeler 2007 (recommendations on behalf of some inhabitants of Africa) and Desmulliez 2011 (letters sent to Ausonius).

17) See also Bruggisser 1993, 290.

18) Marcone 1988, 144–145.

19) Examples are Epp. 1.25; 1.60; 1.93; 2.15; 3.3; 3.72; 4.38; 4.66; 5.48; 5.55; 5.72; 5.84; 7.45; 7.51; 7.112; 7.128; 8.53; 9.3; 9.7 and 9.36.

20) Examples are Epp. 1.40; 1.60; 1.66; 1.73; 3.34; 3.67; 3.87; 4.37; 4.73; 7.103; 7.107; 7.123; 9.1 and 9.16.

21) Examples are Epp. 1.15; 1.43; 5.74; 7.96; 7.125 and 9.33.

22) This proves that Symmachus is part of a long-standing literary tradition. The recommendation letters of Cicero, Pliny the Younger and Fronto often describe the recommendee in terms of *mores* or education.

23) Callu 1972–2002, I 24: “Les portraits survivent dans les commendaticiae mais ramassés en quelques mots, il n’y a pas d’ecphrasis, les exempla sont allusifs.”

thing specific about the recommendee. It was enough that the letter identified him as a protégé of Symmachus. To this end a few lines were sufficient.”²⁴

Recurring epistolary themes in recommendation letters suggest that Symmachus saw the recommendation as a document that could be easily adapted to different circumstances.²⁵ When Symmachus points to the value and the merits of the recommendation itself, he intends to give his intervention more weight. Moreover, it can be assumed that a recommendee already belongs to the friends of the addressee when the letter writer expounds that a formal recommendation is no longer needed. Correspondingly, when Symmachus states that the (many) qualities of the recommendee do not require a recommendation, it could mean that the epistolographer esteems him higher than the many recommendees, and consequently expects that special attention would be devoted to his case. Furthermore, some letters seem to indicate that Symmachus identifies some criteria according to which recommendation letters can be differentiated. It emerges from Ep. 2.82 that he makes a distinction between recommendations based on the merits of the recommendee and those merely written upon request.²⁶ Ep. 7.87 demonstrates that Symmachus distinguishes a recommendation for friends from a letter written for unknown persons,²⁷ since a recommendation for a friend is based on the merits of the recom-

24) Cameron 2015, 68.

25) These themes will be discussed in detail later in this article.

26) Ep. 2.82.1: *Multi a me conciliationem litterariam poposcerunt, sed quorundam meritis, aliorum precibus parem gratiam dedi* – ‘There were many who asked me a recommendation letter, but the kindness I gave matched the merits of some or the entreaties of others.’ In paragraph two of the same letter, Symmachus explains that the letters written upon request came from ‘those who force my hand’. Also, Bas. Ep. 37.2–6 and particularly Lib. Ep. 97 contrast the letters asked by insistent petitioners with the recommendation written in a positive attitude. Although the epistolary theme can be seen as merely a cliché, it seems to me that such a difference indicates that in some cases letter writers saw the need to take a different approach according to their own intentions and/or the personality of the recommendee. See also Ebbeler 2007, 235 n. 31: “The sharp distinction between categories of *commendati* is invoked to give greater credit to the current recommendee, who did not have to force his request on Symmachus.”

27) Ep. 7.87: *Omnis commendatio amicis testimonium tribuit, suffragium praestat incognitis* – ‘Every recommendation grants a testimony to friends, and a support to strangers.’

mendee, and not on the favour that is done to him.²⁸ However, in Ep. 7.102 Symmachus seems to deal with this subject in a different way. He deems that for those who are known and esteemed,²⁹ there is no need to mention the merits of the recommendee.³⁰ Yet, in Ep. 1.73 Symmachus seems to link support to merits.³¹ It is thus not easy to distil a general picture from these citations. It seems safe to conclude that, for Symmachus, there is no one-size-fits-all recommendation. Some circumstances, such as the degree of friendship or merits of the recommendee, might have led the letter writer to adapt his recommendation letter.³²

It is the attention for and conformity to social obligations which, in Symmachus' view, brought about friendship.³³ He theorised that communication, such as letter exchange, had to comply with reciprocal obligations, which consequently would give rise to friendship. In this sense it can be seen as Symmachus' definition of friendship.³⁴ *Amicitia* is a notion that appears not only in the rec-

28) Ep. 7.87: ... *quem sine favore commendo. dignum est igitur, ut quantum apud me meriti conlocavit, tantum apud te benignitatis inveniat* – '... whom I recommend without bias. It is then fitting that he finds so much kindness with you as the merits he gave to me.'

29) Such persons should be equated with the friends of Ep. 7.87.

30) Ep. 7.102: *Pro cognitis et probatis pauca dicenda sunt; mei enim officii non sui meriti testimonium ferunt. quapropter laborare non debeo, ut praestantiae vestrae domini et filii mei Flaviani merita commendem* – 'There is no need to say much in favour of those whom one knows and esteems. My letters give an account of my support, not of their merits. For that reason I do not have to make an effort to recommend the merits of his lord, my son Flavianus, to your Eminency.'

31) Ep. 1.73: *Duabus enim commendationibus, ..., adiuvatur, mei testimonii praerogativa et sui meriti conscientia* – 'For he benefits from two recommendations ...; the special claim of my testimony and knowledge of his own merit' (transl. Salzman / Roberts).

32) A rather diverging conclusion is expressed by Matthews 1974, 62–63: "As for the letter of recommendations ... Symmachus expected his correspondents to distinguish those which were written from mere kindness and sense of duty, from those inspired by genuine warmth of feeling and respect for the abilities of their beneficiaries."

33) See Matthews 1974, 81.

34) See Ep. 7.129: *Liceat igitur mihi imitari erga te parsimoniam religionum quibus iure amicitia confertur* ... – 'that I might be allowed to imitate towards you the moderation in rites that rightly are compared to friendship.' A divergent opinion is found in Bruggisser 1993, 6: "Symmaque n'est guère explicite sur la définition nominale de l'amicitia. Il ne développe pas de corps de doctrine sur l'amitié, mais il parsème sa correspondance de réflexions sur l'amitié qui servent à la fois d'ornements et de justifications à ses démarches."

ommendation letters but in the entire correspondence. For the sake of clarity, the discussion about the idea of friendship will therefore not be limited to recommendation letters.

In Symmachus' understanding, friendship normally operates through letters.³⁵ Hence, friendship cannot be dissociated from a regular correspondence.³⁶ "The purpose of letter writing is not primarily the communication of information but the formation and the preservation of ties of friendship."³⁷ Friendship also contains an element of reciprocity³⁸ and obligation, since, in Symmachus' view, friendship is something that someone has to 'deserve' or 'merit'.³⁹ On other occasions, he stresses more the need to have a balanced and regular correspondence, in that the obligations or expectations of one party will be met by a similar reaction from the other party.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Symmachus underscores that *amicitia* cannot be estimated by the number of letters exchanged.⁴¹ Some-

35) Cameron 2015, 68: "The purpose of the letters lay not in their content but in the bare fact that they were written; not to have written might have been a social gaffe, costing Symmachus a favour he was hoping to ask."

36) Ep. 3.9: *Deinceps, si tibi cordi sum, frequenter operam scriptionis admitte vicissitudine remunerandus et sermonis et amoris* – 'Further, if I am dear to you, you should give attention to write me frequently, in exchange for a due payment with words and friendship.' A similar idea appears in Ep. 3.15.2.

37) Sogno 2006, 88.

38) See also Bruggisser 1993, 6: "Chez Symmaque, le concept qui éclaire l'amicitia est celui de la vicissitudo, de la réciprocité."

39) Ep. 3.18.1–2: *Sed continui silentii culpam tibi quoque purgare difficile est ... restat, quod minime volo, ut fatearis amicitiae neglegentiam ...* – 'But it is difficult also for you to shake off the blame of a continuous silence ... What remains – and that is what I want the least of all – is that you admit having neglected our friendship ...' And ... *de qua te interim suspensum tenebo tum demum tibi iudicii publici facturur indicium, cum exoraveris, cum merueris, et quia tanti litteras tuas duco, cum scripseris* – 'I will keep you for a while in suspense about this and will inform you about the public judgement, only when you will have beseeched and have merited it and you will have written me, because I hold your letters in such a high esteem.'

40) Ep. 3.22: *Faciet hoc crebritas epistularum tuarum, quae non solum tibi parabit gratiam, verum etiam me faciet promptiorem* – 'Your frequent correspondence will not only give you gratitude, but also render us more favourably disposed.' Other examples of reciprocal expectations can be found in Epp. 3.61; 3.64; 4.16; 4.25; 6.57 and 7.55. In Epp. 3.1 and 5.77, he urges the addressee to become a regular correspondent.

41) This theme specifically appears when Symmachus exchanged several letters with his correspondent. It should, therefore, not be seen as if Symmachus tried to make the best of the fact that his recipient is someone to whom he hardly ever

times Symmachus does not take correspondence into account, as he focuses exclusively on the reciprocal element of *amicitia*.⁴²

The idea of recommendation is closely linked to the notion of friendship and patronage.⁴³ It seems, in this respect, that the recommendation letter is an appropriate instrument for reinforcing an existing link of friendship.⁴⁴ The expectation voiced by Symmachus that his recommendation will be followed by a positive reply might point to the fact that – at least occasionally – his requests were not granted.⁴⁵ Salzman and Roberts hold the view that longer letters and requests for frequent communication were signs of more intimate ties.⁴⁶ However, it seems that this view is not (fully) supported by Symmachus' letters. On the one hand, he stresses the need to write at length when unknown persons are recommended, which shows that the length of the letter is not only conditioned by the relation between the writer and the addressee, but may also

writes. Ep. 3.28: *Desine igitur animum nostrum epistularum celeritate metiri, cum rebus potius quam verbis spectetur adfectio* – 'Therefore, you should cease judging my feelings against the promptness of my letters, because friendship is proved more by actions than by words.' Callu 1972–2002, II 39 prefers the reading *celeritate* ('promptness'), whereas Seeck 1883, 79 proposed *sedulitate* ('assiduity'), which is acceptable as well. In this letter, Symmachus blames external factors, such as a large workload or unreliable letter carriers, for his delay, but perhaps he used these as an easy excuse for his own negligence. In Epp. 3.12.1 and 5.28, he replies to reproaches for being a 'slow writer' who does not meet the addressee's expectations of a regular correspondence.

42) Ep. 4.39: *Nam si amicitia de mutuis constat officiis, facile erit, ut ex illius animo tuum metiar* – 'For, if friendship consists of the mutual exchange of favours, it will be easy for me to judge your feelings by his affections.'

43) Ep. 3.51: *Illos* (other persons that the addressee of the letter might recommend) *ego amicos beneficio tuo adquisitos putabo, quos nescio* ... – 'Those who are unacquainted with me, I shall consider them friends won by your kindness.'

44) For example: Ep. 1.81: *Nam cum ipsi ad promerendum tuum amorem nihil ultra possit accedere, id tantum videtur egisse, ut mihi ex hoc munere conciliatio tua uberius proveniret* – 'For, since he cannot have any further recommendation to merit your affection, he seems to have pressed his case, so that, as a result of this duty, your bond with me grows fuller' (transl. Salzman / Roberts). Salzman / Roberts 2012, XLV: "In advancing these requests and writing letters of recommendation for his 'friends', Symmachus accrued honour, favours, and influence, since the successful friend was hereafter in Symmachus' debt."

45) Ep. 9.8: *Vicissitudo testabitur, quod paginam meam libenter acceperis* – 'Your reply will testify that you gladly received my letter.' Another instance is Ep. 9.5.

46) Salzman and Roberts 2012, XLVI.

be influenced by the particular subject of the letter.⁴⁷ On the other hand, persons who already belong to the inner circle of the addressee do not need to be accompanied by a long recommendation letter.⁴⁸ Finally, another feature that often appears in Symmachus' recommendation letters is 'triangulation' or the integration of the three parties (letter writer, recommendee and addressee).⁴⁹ It can be seen as the expression of strong and reciprocal ties between the different parties in the recommendation letters. Triangulation meant that, owing to the writer's initiative, the bonds between the three parties were firmly set. "Triangulation aimed to configure inherent and mutual obligations. It was then more persuasive as an argument than the bald assertion of the relationship between the writer and the recommendee or between the writer and the addressee."⁵⁰

Comparison of letters that have the same recommendee

There are several examples of recommendations that Symmachus wrote to different addressees in a given period on behalf of the same recommendee. The most conspicuous case is that of Nicomachus Flavianus, Symmachus' son-in-law, for whom the epistolographer wrote at least two letters in 389–390,⁵¹ other two in 395⁵² and six letters in 398.⁵³ As explained above, my selection is limited to contemporaneous letters, insofar as the year or the period in which the letter was written can be established with certitude.⁵⁴ Also, contemporaneous letters that deal with a different

47) Ep. 6.27: *Vberius scribendum est, si commendentur incogniti* – 'You need to write more extensively, whenever unknown persons are recommended.'

48) Ep. 7.102: *Pro cognitīs et probatis pauca dicenda sunt; mei enim officii non sui meriti testimonium ferunt. quapropter laborare non debeo, ut praestantiae vestrae domini et filii mei Flaviani merita commendem ...* – For the translation, see n. 30. Another example is Ep. 7.46.2.

49) Triangulation is found in letters of most ancient epistolographers; it is also present in the example letter of the two epistolary manuals.

50) See Rees 2007, 156–159, who specifically discusses triangulation in letters by Cicero, Pliny and Fronto.

51) See the discussion of letter set (vi) on page 201 f.

52) See the discussion of letter set (x) on page 207 ff.

53) See the discussion of letter set (xv) on page 213 ff.

54) Since the contemporaneity of Epp. 9.60 and 7.123 or Epp. 9.10 and 5.24 could not be established, these letters were excluded from the selection. Another ex-

subject have not been taken into account.⁵⁵ Consequently, the selection amounts to 19 sets of letters, which will be discussed in chronological order.⁵⁶

The first letter set dates to around 379, when Symmachus had already taken some important steps in his career,⁵⁷ whereas the last letter set was written probably a few months before the letter writer's death. None of the letters were written when Symmachus held an official function.⁵⁸ Of course Symmachus' prominence in public life was not limited to public offices.⁵⁹ For all letters, except Epp. 3.89 and 4.2 (the sixth letter set), the dating proposed by Callu has been followed.

(i) In 379–380 Symmachus wrote two recommendations (Epp. 1.73 and 1.104) in which he asks the addressee⁶⁰ to accept Romanus⁶¹ in his patronage.⁶² Both letters are mainly built along the

ample is Epp. 3.66 and 81, which have been dated by Callu 1972–2002, II 65 and 73 to 382, whereas PLRE I dates Ep. 3.81 to 389–390 (PLRE I, 781) and Ep. 3.66 to 388–393 (PLRE I, 766). Similarly, PLRE and Callu hold a different opinion about the date of Epp. 3.69 and 86 (PLRE I, 766 and 781 versus Callu 1972–2002, 69 and 77).

55) Examples are Epp. 3.77 and 9.7 or Ep. 2.87 in relation to Epp. 2.85 and 5.53. It is most probable that Ep. 5.75 deals with a different case than that in Epp. 9.51 and 56. The same can be said of Epp. 9.3 and 9.152.

56) The discussed letters are Epp. 1.73; 1.104; 2.80; 2.85; 3.34; 3.72; 3.73; 3.89; 4.2; 4.19; 4.38; 4.39; 4.51; 4.53; 4.67; 4.73; 5.6; 5.41; 5.48; 5.53; 5.54; 5.66; 7.45; 7.46; 7.47; 7.54; 7.56; 7.94; 7.95; 7.102; 7.103; 7.108; 7.109; 7.113; 7.114; 9.1; 9.31; 9.41; 9.47; 9.51; 9.56; 9.103; 9.105 and 9.122 (44 letters).

57) Symmachus was *Pontifex* no later than 365 and *Corrector Lucaniae et Brittiorum* in 365, at the same time as he became *Comes tertii ordinis*, and he was *Proconsul Africae* in 373, *Praefectus urbi Romae* in 384–385 and *Consul ordinarius* in 391. With the consulship, Symmachus reached the summit of his career.

58) The only possible exception might have been the letters written in 395, when Symmachus was *princeps senatus*. This was an honour that allowed him to give his opinion first during deliberation in the Senate. However, this function was more honorary than embedded in effective power. Sogno 2006, 59: "The majority of Symmachus' letters were probably written in the last decade of Symmachus' life."

59) Sogno 2006, 88: "Symmachus' career was an active, long-lasting, and ultimately successful one. His restricted tenures should not deceive: they are typical of the *cursus honorum* of the late Roman senatorial aristocracy. ... Letter writing is also a fundamentally political activity. ... It is an important resource for a skilled politician to secure a prestigious career for himself and his family members."

60) Ep. 1.73: Celsinus Titianus, *Vicarius Africae* (PLRE I, 917–918); Ep. 1.103: Syagrius, *Magister Officiorum* (PLRE I, 862).

61) PLRE I, 769, Romanus 4.

62) Ep. 1.73: *in tuo praesidio* – 'under your protection'; Ep. 1.104: *invare praesidio* – 'to assist by someone's protection.'

same lines. Firstly, Symmachus refers to his long-standing friendship with the recommendee: ... *quocum mihi iam diu familiaritas est* (Ep. 1.73),⁶³ and *quae inter nos longa adolevit aetate* (Ep. 1.104).⁶⁴ Moreover, the recommendee is supported not only by Symmachus' recommendations but also by his own merits and qualities: *Duabus enim commendationibus, ..., adiuvatur, mei testimonii praerogativa et sui meriti conscientia* (Ep. 1.73),⁶⁵ and ... *pronuntiabis meis litteris defuisse, quae in illius meritis invenies redundare* (Ep. 1.104).⁶⁶ Finally, there are also other ideas that appear in both letters, but which are phrased differently, such as Symmachus' status as a recommending person⁶⁷ or the examination of Romanus' merits.⁶⁸ Both letters are 'pure' recommendation letters or introductions, in that they contain no element of intervention or aid.

(ii) Epistulae 4.53 and 9.1 are interventions written around 379 on behalf of Benedictus,⁶⁹ an official in the west who had lost his position in the state administration. According to both letters, the removal cannot be blamed on Benedictus, whose innocence is clearly stated: ... *quem nulli obnoxium crimini fortunae iniquitas loco depulit et honore privavit* (Ep. 4.53),⁷⁰ and ... *quem gradu atque honore militiae fortuna magis quam culpa privavit, ut innocenti fautor adrideas ...* (Ep. 9.1).⁷¹ Florentinus,⁷² the addressee of

63) '... with whom I have for a long time now been friendly' (transl. Salzman / Roberts).

64) '(because of the friendship) that has developed between us over many years' (transl. Salzman / Roberts).

65) For the translation, see n. 31.

66) '... you will declare that the qualities you find in abundance in his merits were absent from my letter' (transl. Salzman / Roberts).

67) Ep. 1.73: *si quid mihi tribuis, velim credas* – 'I would like you to believe ... , if you grant me any credence' (transl. Salzman / Roberts); Ep. 1.104: *si quid testimonio meo tribuis, nolo dubites ...* – 'If you consider my recommendation of any value, I do not want you to doubt ...' (transl. Salzman / Roberts).

68) Ep. 1.73: *si haeret animus, hortor examines* – 'If your mind is hesitant, I urge you to put him to test' (transl. Salzman / Roberts); Ep. 1.104: *certe si examen de eo habere digneris ...* – 'Certainly, if you think it proper to hold an examination of him' (transl. Salzman / Roberts).

69) PLRE 1, 160, Benedictus 1.

70) '... who, without being guilty of any crime, had been removed from his post by an injustice of fortune and lost his office.'

71) '... who rather by a misfortune than a mistake had been removed from his rank and official position, so that your aid smiles at an innocent ...'

72) PLRE 1.362, Florentinus 2. He also received recommendation letter Ep. 4.51, which is discussed later in this article.

Ep. 4.53, probably held the office of notary when he received the intervention, whereas the second letter was addressed to Palladius, who at that time was probably head of a *scrinium*⁷³ and, apparently, had easy access to the emperor: *Interest enim serenissimorum temporum gloriae, ut . . . ita clementiam maximi principis nostri sentiant vota et fata cunctorum* (Ep. 9.1).⁷⁴

In Ep. 4.53 Symmachus is seemingly convinced that his recommendation will have an effect: *Credo enim tanti apud te litteras meas esse momenti, ut effectum sperare fas fuerit . . .*⁷⁵ This could mean that Symmachus considered his addressee to be of a lower status than himself, which implied for the letter writer that he was able to exert direct influence over Florentinus. This is also suggested by the fact that Symmachus straightforwardly requests Florentinus' aid: *. . . ut Benedicti amici mei fortunam debeas adiuvare*.⁷⁶ Such an urgent appeal is clearly absent from Ep. 9.1, in which Symmachus does not deal with the addressee in such a direct manner, but in a more cautious way. He also mentions his long-standing friendship with Palladius⁷⁷ and links it to reciprocal favours: *Si amicitiae veteris memoria perseverat nec ulla oblivione tenuata est, credo quod litteras meas libenter accipias quas fiducia mutui amoris emisi . . .* (Ep. 9.1).⁷⁸ Moreover, the eulogistic words for the emperor (*serenissimorum temporum gloria – clementia maximi principis*) are specifically aimed to put some pressure – in a veiled way – on Palladius.⁷⁹ The mention of the 'imperial policy' at

73) Callu 1972–2002, IV 95–96 n. 2 to letter 9.1. PLRE I, 660, Palladius 12. Two recommendation letters addressed to him by Gregory of Nazianzus (one written in 382 and the other after 383) have also been preserved.

74) 'It is important for the glory of this very splendid time that . . . the wishes and fates of all people experience the leniency of our very noble prince.'

75) 'I think that my letter has such a weight with you that it will allow me to hope for fulfilment . . .'

76) ' . . . that you have to help the fortune of my friend Benedictus.'

77) In or before 379, Palladius was a teacher of rhetoric in Rome (PLRE I, 660, Palladius 12). According to Macr. Sat. 5.1, 7 and Prud. C. Symm. 1.632–634, Symmachus was known for his eloquence (see PLRE I, 868). This might point to a common interest between the letter writer and addressee that would explain their 'long-standing' friendship.

78) 'If the memory of an old friendship persists and no oblivion has weakened it, I think you will gladly receive my letter that I sent to you trusting in our mutual affection.'

79) Although the theme of a new period (*novum saeculum*), characterised by justice (*iustitia temporum*) or glory (*gloria temporum*) and clemency of the emperor

the end of this letter implies that Symmachus (indirectly) also expects Palladius to become involved. This imperial policy, combined with the long-standing friendship between Symmachus and the addressee, probably made him realise that, if the emperor would not grant the request, this would affect his friendship with Symmachus.

(iii) Around 382 Symmachus wrote two – rather elaborate – indirect interventions (Epp. 5.41 and 9.31) in favour of Epictetus,⁸⁰ a lawyer who – after complaints voiced by influential persons – had been barred from exercising his profession by the *Praefectus Praetorio*. Both letters aim to approach the author of the decision in order to have the resolution cancelled. Accordingly, Symmachus expects that both addressees will be able to wield the necessary influence upon the *Praefectus Praetorio*: *Scio inlustrem virum praefectum praetorio his quoque litteris tuis prompte esse cessurum* (Ep. 5.41.2),⁸¹ and *Faciet vir amplissimus communis frater, quidquid te velle cognoverit* (Ep. 9.31.2).⁸² In both letters, Symmachus describes Epictetus' problems at length and even admits that Epictetus' behaviour was wrong. In this way, he wants to underline the seriousness of the case and, hence, the urgent need for an intervention. Symmachus also accentuates the good character of the addressee: *Cum sciam, te animo esse placabili, recepi pro amico operam veniae postulandae* (Ep. 5.41.1)⁸³ – *Nunc ingenium tuum moresque considerans flecte ad veniam placabilem voluntatem* (Ep. 9.31.1).⁸⁴ By doing so, the letter writer aims to balance the merits of the addressee against the unfortunate situation of Epictetus.

(*clementia*), often appears not only in Symmachus but also in other literature of the late fourth century, I suggest that this theme is not used here merely as a rhetorical device but is Symmachus' way of declaring himself to be in agreement with the current imperial policy. It appears also in Epp. 3.73; 4.19 and 4.67.

80) PLRE I, 279, Epictetus 2.

81) 'I know that the illustrious Praetorian Prefect will promptly bow to this letter, if it comes also from you.'

82) 'The very distinguished man, our common brother, will do what he will know to be your wishes.'

83) 'Knowing that your character can be placated, I took it upon myself to ask a favour on behalf of a friend.' Another example in the same letter: *Quod ne diu maneat, tua praestabit humanitas* – 'Your humanity will make sure that it will not last too long' (Ep. 5.41.2).

84) 'Considering your character and attitude, you should bend your will to an indulgence that can be placated.' Another example in the same letter: ... *et qui togae amicus es, cuius laude supra alios splendisti*, ... – '(You) ... who are a friend of a toga whose honour made you shine above others ...' (Ep. 9.31.3).

The addressee of Epistula 5.41 is Flavius Neoterius,⁸⁵ who was *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis* in 380–381. It is probable that the author of the decision would have understood the importance of the intervention, since it was made by his former colleague. Also, Carterius, the addressee of Epistula 9.31, was “closely associated with Flavius Neoterius”.⁸⁶ Moreover, both letters have another significant element in common: in 380 their addressees resided in Antioch.⁸⁷

(iv) Epistulae 3.72⁸⁸ and 4.73⁸⁹ are both very short recommendation or introduction letters written around 386–387 on behalf of Felix, an official of undetermined rank. The very shortness of the documents might suggest that the recommendee was not a high-ranking figure, or was someone for whom Symmachus did not want to engage himself too much. It appears that Felix is described in terms that are mainly related to his position: *honestate vitae et exercitatione militiae* (Ep. 3.72),⁹⁰ and *honorabilis gradu atque exercitatione militiae* (Ep. 4.73).⁹¹ Moreover, Symmachus emphasises the tie between himself and the addressee by linking the latter’s kindness to the favour he himself confers upon Felix.⁹² These letters belong to the rare doublets⁹³ in the Symmachian corpus where wording is repeated. Also, it is not sure whether the

85) PLRE I, 623.

86) PLRE I, 182, Carterius 3.

87) Carterius was (possibly) governor of Syria in 379–380 and therefore resided in Antioch. Neoterius, as *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis*, had his office in the same city. “Since emperors in the fourth century frequently resided at Antioch, it became *de facto* the Praetorian Prefect’s headquarters, until this was transferred to Constantinople under Theodosius” (Bradbury 2004, 16–17).

88) The addressee is Flavius Timasius, *Magister equitum et peditum* (PLRE I, 914–915). He was a ‘barbarian general’ turned consul; see Salzman 2006, 359.

89) The addressee is Flavius Eusignius, *Praefectus Praetorio Italiae et Illyrici* (PLRE I, 309–310).

90) ‘His honourable life and service as official.’

91) ‘Honourable by his position and service as official.’

92) Ep. 3.72: ... *quantum favor meus posset optare* – ‘... as much as my sympathy could wish’; Ep. 4.73: ... *ad meum gratiam pertinebit* – ‘... will reach my friendship.’

93) Several lines of the recommendation letter Ep. 1.40 duplicate those in Ep. 9.59, albeit with some slight variation. Ep. 1.17 is repeated nearly verbatim in Ep. 7.113. The beginning of Ep. 1.40 is almost similar to Ep. 9.10.1. Epp. 2.67 and 7.53 also have similar wordings. See also Bruggisser 1993, 191–193.

recommendée cited in Epp. 9.51 and 56 (see page 218 ff.) is the same as in Epp. 3.72 and 4.73.⁹⁴

(v) The recommendation letters Epistulae 3.73 and 4.67, which date to 386–387, were written on behalf of the senator Stemmatus⁹⁵ to Timasius⁹⁶ and Eusignius.⁹⁷ In both letters, Symmachus seeks financial compensation for Stemmatus, who was a victim of *proscriptio*, confiscation of goods. In the first letter, the request is addressed directly to Timasius: *Haec in magno reipublicae gaudio tuis potissimum meritis repensanda committit* (Ep. 3.73).⁹⁸ Moreover, it seems that Timasius and Stemmatus are bound together by a long-standing tie that is more important than Symmachus' request: *Nam cum tanta sit tibi eius antiquitas, ut votum nostrum favore praecurras, laborem rogandi in lucro habere debemus* (Ep. 3.73).⁹⁹ The second letter exhibits some important differences when compared to the first letter. First of all, the aim of this document is not to directly approach the person who might be able to provide the requested support; rather, the letter is an indirect intervention, in which Eusignius is asked to intervene with Emperor Valentinian II: *Unde spes certa est, etiam principem nostrum lenitate venerabilem iusti parentis et pii fratris exemplo supplementa meliora fortunae eius daturum, si modo vestra insinuatio iuvet exhausti senatoris oratum* (Ep. 4.67.2).¹⁰⁰ Given the position of the addressee, Symmachus could, in this respect, easily afford to ask for his recommendée not only a financial compensation but also membership of the *curia*, by virtue of an imperial attestation (*reddi curiae testimonio sacro*, Ep. 4.67.2). It is, furthermore, interesting to note that Symmachus puts the confiscation and the subsequent request for financial compensation in general terms: *cui*

94) Roda 1980, 99–100. This Felix is not attested in PLRE I and II.

95) PLRE I, 852.

96) See n. 88.

97) See n. 89.

98) 'Amongst the great happiness of the nation, he especially trusts upon your merits to obtain a compensation for this.'

99) 'Since he is bound to you for such a long time that your favours are ahead of our wishes, we have to count our efforts of requesting as a gain.'

100) 'I have a very strong hope that the venerable gentleness of our Prince, following the example of his just father and pious brother, will add to Stemmatus' fortune, provided that the prayer of a ruined senator is supported by your intervention.'

dudum cuncta dempsit invidia fortunae (Ep. 4.67.1),¹⁰¹ and ... *recuperatione modici argenti ab inopia vindicari* (Ep. 4.67.2).¹⁰² The latter presumably points to certain sensibilities that Symmachus preferred not to offend. Symmachus also has eulogistic words for his addressee: *Haec ut favor tuus aliorumque optimatum te hortante promoveat, interest boni saeculi, cui laudem perennem pia facta conciliant* (Ep. 4.67.2).¹⁰³ The words *te hortante* ('with your encouragement') also point to an indirect intervention. The eulogistic words are clearly written with a view to putting some (additional) pressure on the addressee, as is the case in Ep. 9.1, another indirect intervention aimed at reaching the emperor.¹⁰⁴

The discussed features suggest that, in the first letter, Symmachus stressed the bond between the addressee and the recommendee, which prevails over a formal recommendation, whereas in Ep. 4.67 Symmachus, by praising the qualities of Eusignius, hoped to influence the addressee, since the latter was requested to refer the matter to the emperor.

(vi) In 389–390¹⁰⁵ Symmachus addressed two recommendation letters (Epp. 3.89¹⁰⁶ and 4.2¹⁰⁷) on behalf of Nicomachus Flavianus, his son-in-law.¹⁰⁸ Since neither letter contains a request, they can be considered mere introduction letters. In Ep. 3.89 Sym-

101) 'Envy of his fortune has lately taken all away from him.'

102) '... to be protected from poverty by the recuperation of a small amount of money.'

103) 'It belongs to a happy generation that your favour and – with your encouragements – the favour of other illustrious persons might advance this. Pious acts give it an everlasting praise.'

104) See letter set (ii) at page 196 ff.

105) Contrary to PLRE I, 345 (Nicomachus Flavianus 14) and Marcone 1987, 35, Callu assumes an earlier date (383) for both letters. This would, however, mean that the addressees received the letter at an early stage of their careers when, most probably, they would have been less capable of wielding influence than some years later, when they held higher posts.

106) Written to Flavius Rufinus, *Magister Officiorum* (PLRE I, 778–781). Sogno 2006, 72–73 calls him: "Flavius Rufinus, dangerously powerful *magister officiorum* of Theodosius", and "Symmachus was certainly eager to be on the good side of Rufinus, for the *magister officiorum* controlled access to the emperor ..."

107) The addressee is Flavius Stilicho, *Comes Domesticorum* (PLRE I, 853–858).

108) PLRE I, 345–347, Nicomachus Flavianus 14. He is the son of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus (see n. 115). The Nicomachi and Symmachi families were related to each other.

machus deems that a formal recommendation is no longer needed since the addressee had already exercised his patronage upon the requested person: *Commendam tibi Flavianum filium meum, nisi te volente esset accitus. nihil igitur tuo beneficio derogabo.*¹⁰⁹ In Ep. 4.2, however, Symmachus follows another strategy. In this letter, he emphasises that the recommendee has sufficient support from ‘important people’: *Abundat Flavianus filius meus ad promerendam conciliationem bonorum suis paternisque suffragiis . . .*¹¹⁰ His multiple merits render any recommendation superfluous: *. . . dum meritis illius nihil deesse contemplor, . . . facio igitur, quod redundet, et cumulum inpono perfectis.*¹¹¹ Finally, a triangulation is found in both letters: *Puto tamen convenire pietate, ut me quoque eius nomine tibi fatear obligatum* (Ep. 3.89),¹¹² and *. . . quia mihi pro beneficio intellegis inputandum, quod illi solo iudicio detulisses* (Ep. 4.2).¹¹³ In both letters he skilfully manipulates the theme of a recommendation to emphasise the importance of this case to which he wants to draw his addressee’s special attention. The triangulation also highlights the fact that strong ties exist between Symmachus and each of the addressees.

(vii) Epistulae 2.85 and 5.53 are both introduction letters on behalf of Helpidius and date to late 393.¹¹⁴ It emerges from Ep. 2.85 which is addressed to Virius Nicomachus Flavianus,¹¹⁵ that Helpidius was invited to attend the consular celebrations of the addressee:¹¹⁶ *Suscipe igitur amantissimum nostri eo animo, quo ro-*

109) ‘I would have recommended my son Flavianus to you, if your will had not convented him. Consequently, I will not remove anything from your kindness.’

110) ‘My son Flavianus can count on enough support, his own and that of his father, to attract the favour of people of good standing.’

111) ‘Since I observe that there is nothing in his merits that lacks . . ., I do something what is redundant and bring an addition to a perfect work.’

112) ‘However, I think it agrees with my respect towards him that I acknowledge in his name to be indebted to you.’

113) ‘. . . since you will understand that what your sole judgement would have decided to give him, I will have to count it as a kindness towards me.’

114) According to Callu 1972–2002, I 208 n. 2, the recommendee might be related to a namesake who was a friend of Emperor Theodosius I.

115) See PLRE I, 347–349, Virius Nicomachus Flavianus 15.

116) He was consul under the usurper Eugenius. The celebrations for his consulate would take place in January 394. Errington 1992, 441: ‘Virius Nicomachus Flavianus committed suicide after the battle of the Frigidus (September 394), when the defeat of Eugenius, whom he had served as PPO Italiae since 393 and

gasti.¹¹⁷ It seems that Symmachus and the recommendee were closely connected to one another: *Hunc ita spectatum mihi atque coniunctum iussis tuis negare non potui . . .*¹¹⁸ This letter can then be considered an introduction letter following a formal invitation sent out by Virius Nicomachus Flavianus.¹¹⁹ Ep. 5.53, which also hints at the consular invitation, aims to introduce the recommendee to Felix:¹²⁰ *Fratrem nostrum Helpidium non minus desiderium tui quam epistula consulis evocavit*.¹²¹ The letter writer points out that the recommendee and addressee have known each other for a long time (*prisca inter vos coniunctio*), so that only a small recommendation (*nonnihil commendationis*) is needed. A strong triangulation at the end of the letter emphasises the long-standing tie between Symmachus, Helpidium and the addressee: *Et hoc mihi munus adtribue, ut merita, quae suis apud te fundavit obsequiis, sentiat meo favore crevisse*.¹²²

consul for 394, became clear to all observers.” I do not endorse the viewpoint of O’Donnell 1978, 143, who describes Virius Nicomachus Flavianus as a “rather foolish figure prophesying victory over a usurper who never had a chance”.

117) ‘Receive our very dear friend with the same feelings as when you requested him.’

118) ‘This man, whom I esteem so much and who is allied to me, I cannot not refuse him to your commands.’

119) In the same year, Symmachus addressed another recommendation (Ep. 2.87) to Nicomachus Flavianus in favour of the same Helpidium. In this letter, the epistolographer requested the addressee to intervene in an ongoing sale of an estate. The outcome of the transaction threatened to be an important financial loss for Helpidium. It is, of course, impossible to determine which letter was written first, but it seems logical to suppose that the introduction letter preceded the intervention. In this respect, the aim of Ep. 2.85 was to create goodwill for Helpidium, upon which Symmachus could capitalise in the second letter, since the intervention would then request a bigger engagement of Nicomachus Flavianus. By doing so, Symmachus showed that he could skilfully ‘manipulate’ his network.

120) He held an unknown office at the Court of Eugenius. See PLRE II, 458–459, Felix 2.

121) ‘Our brother Helpidium has been invited no less by his own wish to meet with you than by the consul’s letter.’ Salzman / Roberts 2012, XLVI: “The language used to describe the recipient of the recommendation is also revealing of the values important to Symmachus. He describes this relationship as if it were part of a metaphorical family. By calling the recommended person his *frater* or *filius*, Symmachus wants to underline the close ties and, hence, the fidelity the recommendee owes to him.”

122) ‘Grant me also this favour, that he might understand that my sympathy increased the kindness for which he laid the foundation with his deference to you.’

It seems that both letters are also connected to each other in another way, since they are addressed to office holders who served under the usurper Eugenius. The question is whether writing recommendation letters to office holders who were on the usurper's side carried any risk for Symmachus. I suggest that, in 393, Symmachus, having attained the summit of his career, had become more or less 'untouchable', which would allow him sufficient 'manoeuvring room'. "Symmachus' influence was stronger than ever in the aftermath of Eugenius' usurpation, and his patronage was in high demand."¹²³ Matthews and Sogno consider that Symmachus did not actively support the usurper's regime and accordingly skilfully maintained his distance from Eugenius.¹²⁴ Cameron theorises that Symmachus was not compromised and despite his open paganism he could wield a lot of influence.¹²⁵ Other explanations, which are compatible with the preceding views, have also been forwarded. Errington points to the need for exceptional measures after the fall of the usurper's regime.¹²⁶ Grünewald supposes that the Roman nobility considered support for Eugenius as the best way to guarantee its own interests.¹²⁷

123) Sogno 2006, 83.

124) Matthews 1974, 85: "It seems that his contact with the usurping régime did not affect Symmachus' subsequent relations with the imperial court." The author makes a distinction between "active support for a usurping régime and the regular contact of due social courtesies with its members". Sogno 2006, 78: "The Roman senator had been appropriately deferential toward Eugenius but was not politically involved with his regime."

125) Cameron 2015, 103: "Symmachus cos. 391 was an active and loyal pagan who did his best for the old cults in 382 and 384. When it became obvious that his efforts were unsuccessful, he seems to have quietly withdrawn from the fray. He took no part in the rebellion of Eugenius. In consequence, when the rebellion failed, he was not compromised and was able, despite remaining an open and unrepentant pagan, to use his still considerable influence to restore the shattered career of his son-in-law."

126) Errington 1992, 447–448: "The situation in Italy in the weeks and months after the suppression of the usurper Magnus Maximus was such as to call for exceptional measures, which certainly included the attempt to bind the senatorial class in Italy to the new administration. The pardon and subsequent consulate for 391 which Symmachus himself received demonstrate this tendency well enough."

127) Grünewald 1992, 462: "Die Aristokratie des Reichswestens sah ihre äußere Sicherheit durch Arbogast und Eugenius besser gewährleistet als durch 'Kinderkaiser'. Sie unterstützte den Usurpator nicht allein wegen der Aussicht auf eine pagane Restauration, sondern vor allem auch im Interesse der Sicherheit des Reichswestens."

(viii) In 394–395 Symmachus wrote two interventions (Epp. 3.34¹²⁸ and 9.122¹²⁹) on behalf of Magnillus,¹³⁰ who held the office of *Vicarius Africae* from 391 to 393. After Magnillus had exited office, an official enquiry into his conduct was launched.¹³¹ He was put into detention, but afterwards acquitted. Both letters seem to have been written either during or after the official enquiry. Although in Ep. 3.34 Symmachus does not mention the official enquiry that was conducted into Magnillus, the addressee (Bishop Ambrosius) would have been acquainted with it by the oral explanation of the letter carrier: ... *cum a baiulo litterarum causas morarum eius acceperis*.¹³² The (early) return of Magnillus is requested by the epistolographer in insistent terms: *Quare inpendio peto, ..., religiosum pro eius reditu interventum digneris adhibere ...* (Ep. 3.34).¹³³ Symmachus, underscoring the excellent reputation of the recommendee,¹³⁴ grounds his request in the existing friend-

128) Addressed to Bishop Ambrosius (PLRE I, 52, Ambrosius 3). Barnes 1992, 7–10 conjectures that Symmachus and Ambrosius may have been first cousins.

129) The addressee is unknown. According to Callu 1972–2002, IV, IX–XIII, the letters without a named addressee (“des lettres acephales”) are those which were left (“un reliquat”) without identification at the time of Symmachus’ death. This would not necessarily mean that these letters were addressed to persons other than those preserved with a named addressee and written for the same recommendee. Cameron 2015, 72–73: “The explanation for the missing names in Bks viii–ix is surely that, with Symmachus gone, no one knew who they were addressed to.”

130) PLRE I, 533.

131) One aspect of the problem could be political. McLynn 1994, 268: “Magnillus’ position during Eugenius’ usurpation, as a subordinate of Flavianus who continued to traffic with Rome while claiming to uphold Theodosius’ interests, was not without ambiguity.” The inquiry could also be related to Magnillus’ fiscal / administrative duties. Wiewiorowski 2012, 76–80: “In January 392 Magnillus received an imperial constitution (*Codex Theodosianus*, 10.17, 3) in relation to the control of the public sale of property (property belonging to tax debtors) by an official auctioneer. The control of public auctions was part of the *vicarius*’ duties as the head of the administration of a *diocesis*. A *vicarius* could adjudge appeals in tax cases or hear complaints from taxpayers who were victims of the public auctions.”

132) ‘... when you will have learned from the letter carrier the reasons of Magnillus’ delay ...’ Symmachus also refers to ‘various obstacles that keep him in this province’ (*variis in ea provincia retardetur obstaculis*).

133) ‘Therefore I strongly request you to carefully intervene for his return ...’

134) Ep. 3.34: *testimonio omnium publice privatimque conspicuus* – ‘According to the judgement of all, he is as distinguished in the public sphere as in his private life.’

ship between the addressee and Magnillus, which dates to the latter's governorship of Liguria.¹³⁵ Yet, in Ep. 9.122, which was probably addressed to the *Praefectus Praetorio*,¹³⁶ Symmachus' strategy is different, since he directly approaches the person who conducted the enquiry. He emphasises the fact that the investigation had dismissed any wrongdoing and, consequently, concluded that Magnillus' behaviour was irreproachable.¹³⁷ Moreover, the request is phrased in rather vague terms: *brevi ceteras infortunii eius reliquias submovendas – (si eum) . . . tandem securitas plena respexerit* (Ep. 9.122).¹³⁸ Most probably, by doing so, Symmachus wanted to convey the impression that he did not want to directly intervene in the enquiry so as not to endanger Magnillus' chances of a positive outcome after the enquiry. "This letter reveals that the satisfactory outcome would eventually hinge upon a sympathetic judge and the favourable testimony of character witnesses."¹³⁹

(ix) Before 395 Symmachus addressed two short recommendations (Epp. 2.80¹⁴⁰ and 9.41¹⁴¹) in favour of Titianus, *agens in rebus* or *protector*.¹⁴² Both letters are introductions that urge the addressee to exercise patronage upon Titianus: . . . *ut eum sancto pectori tuo non*

135) Ep. 3.34: *Nosti optimi viri maturitatem ceterasque artes bonas, quibus etiam tuum amorem, cum Liguriam gubernaret, adtraxit* – 'You know the perfection of this excellent man and all the other qualities that drew him even to your friendship when he was governor of Liguria.' According to Wesch-Klein 2002, 75, Magnillus' governorship dates to between 385 and 391. It is not impossible that both men knew each other for a longer period, as Ambrosius was governor of Aemilia and Liguria in 374.

136) Callu 1972–2002, IV 129–130 n. 1 to Ep. 9.122. Callu underscores the 'serene tone' of the letter: "On reste surpris par le ton serein de l'épistolier en une période d'épuration." In my view, this may be an indication that Symmachus had become more or less untouchable, with the result that he could afford to stay aloof.

137) Ep. 9.122: *fide cognitionis audita – aequum iudicem fortuna praestitit – innocentissimam vitam sententiae testimonio conprobasti – eum quem constanter purgare dignatus es* – 'after the report of the enquiry was heard' – 'fortune gave him a fair judge' – 'by your judgment you confirmed the complete integrity of his life' – 'whom you consistently deigned to prove innocent.'

138) 'An early removal of what remains of his misfortune' – 'if a situation of complete safety would take him into account . . .' This would of course imply a return to his country.

139) McLynn 1994, 268–269.

140) See n. 115.

141) The addressee is unknown.

142) PLRE I, 917, Titianus 3.

aspernandus precator insinuem? (Ep. 2.80)¹⁴³ – *hortor ut ... promissae coniunctionis quamprimum conpotem praestes* (Ep. 9.41).¹⁴⁴ The first letter is also a clear illustration of the fact that a recommendation is part of the entire recommendation process.¹⁴⁵ Symmachus refers to an earlier recommendation written to him by Hilarius¹⁴⁶ and emphatically mentions it at the very beginning of his letter: *Commendatum mihi a fratre meo Hilario virum devotissimum Titianum quo alio possum beneficio munerari, quam ut eum sancto pectori tuo non aspernandus precator insinuem?* (Ep. 2.80).¹⁴⁷ This letter can be considered a reaction to an indirect intervention coming from someone who was himself unable to approach the ‘appropriate’ person that might provide the aid. In this case, the ‘appropriate’ (and more powerful) person is Nicomachus Flavianus, who is approached by Hilarius through Symmachus. The second letter begins with a triangulation, hinting at the strong links between the letter writer, Titianus and the addressee: *Silere non debui eo commeante, qui tuus est, siquidem necessitudo inter vos futura persuadet, ut utriusque vestrum similis a me diligentia deferatur* (Ep. 9.41).¹⁴⁸

(x) Epistulae 4.19 and 51 are two indirect interventions written in 395 for Nicomachus Flavianus¹⁴⁹ and addressed to the brothers Protadius¹⁵⁰ (Ep. 4.19) and Florentinus¹⁵¹ (Ep. 4.51). In both

143) ‘... except by introducing him to your pious heart as a favourable intercessor?’ This urging is repeated at the end of the letter: ... *ut instar gratiae habeas, si tibi probabilis amicus accedat* – ‘to hold the arrival of a commendable friend for a favour.’

144) ‘I encourage you that you ... help him attain forthwith the friendship that has been promised to him.’ However, according to Roda 1981, 167–168, the subject of this letter is a marriage pledge, addressed to the father of the future spouse of Titianus.

145) For a detailed discussion, see page 223 ff.

146) PLRE I, 435–436, Hilarius 11.

147) ‘This very devoted Titianus, whom my brother Hilarius recommended to me, how can I bestow on him a kindness except by introducing him to your pious heart as a favourable intercessor?’

148) ‘Upon the departure of a person who belongs to you, I did not need to be silent, if only future links between you convince me to give a similar affection to both of you.’

149) See n. 108.

150) PLRE I, 751–752. In 395, he was at the Court in Milan.

151) In 395, he held the office of *Quaestor sacri palatii* (PLRE I, 362, Florentinus 2). This office meant membership of the *consistorium*. Accordingly, he must have had easy access to the emperor.

letters, Symmachus asks the addressee to intervene with Emperor Honorius so that the emperor may cancel a large debt owed by Nicomachus Flavianus. Nicomachus, who had benefitted from rehabilitation measures ordered by Theodosius, was (nevertheless) ordered to pay back the wages his father, Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, received when he held the office of *Praefectus Praetorio* under Eugenius.¹⁵² The two letters clearly follow the same arguments. Both documents mention the rehabilitation¹⁵³ and, additionally, stress that the claim largely exceeds Nicomachus' financial abilities: *... taxatione pretiorum graviter aggerata, neque census exilis tanto oneri convenit* (Ep. 4.19.1),¹⁵⁴ and *uno adhuc, ... nodo infortunii strangulatur, quod homo tenuis et nunc labe patrimonii graviter exhaustus ...* (Ep. 4.51.1).¹⁵⁵ More specifically, the request emphasises the fact that Nicomachus might lose his property: *Fac igitur, si quid in te opis est, ut adflictae domui pia temporum parcat humanitas* (Ep. 4.19.2),¹⁵⁶ and *Ergo per te ac tui similes amoliri postulat imminentem ruinam* (Ep. 4.51.2).¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the letter writer hopes (or expects) that the new emperor will follow the example of his father, Theodosius: *Sequetur, ut spes est, paterna benefacta iuvenis Augustus, ...* (Ep. 4.19.2),¹⁵⁸ and *Nam quod plerisque sua invidia laborantibus imperialis remisit humanitas, id patris nomine*

152) Symmachus' request was met with a positive result. Sogno 2006, 81: "a letter [Ep. 5.47] indicates that Flavianus was exonerated from the burden of repaying the debt." Sogno 2006, 82: "Aristocratic families like the Nicomachi, which had been on the wrong side, were vulnerable to the attacks of their competitive peers, and the only way to survive such attacks was relying on the protection of strong and well-connected relatives and friends."

153) Ep. 4.19: *... sed divi principis beneficio in tranquillum reductus ...* – '... but brought back to an undisturbed situation by the kindness of our divine Prince ...'; Ep. 4.51: *Adeptus enim divi principis lenitate, quae magna sunt ...* – 'Having acquired by the kindness of our divine Prince things that are important ...'

154) 'The wages were valued particularly high, and his meagre properties do not meet such a heavy weight.'

155) 'He is still ... strangled by an unfortunate knot, since he has a meagre fortune and now he is highly exhausted by a shrinking patrimony ...'

156) 'If you have some influence, make sure that the rightness and humanity of the current times save a wretched house.'

157) 'Consequently he asks that the ruin which threatens him be removed by your help and that of your peers.'

158) 'We hope that the young Augustus may follow the benefactions of his father ...'

postulatum multo aequior venia relaxabit (Ep. 4.51.2).¹⁵⁹ Just as in Epp. 3.73 and 4.67, the imperial measures seeking to compensate for a loss of fortune are hailed favourably by Symmachus.¹⁶⁰ Contrary to the other indirect interventions that seek to approach the emperor, Symmachus does not praise the addressee in this letter, probably because he preferred, by focusing on Nicomachus Flavianus' unstable financial situation, to underline the seriousness of the case.

(xi) Around 397 Symmachus wrote two elaborate indirect interventions in favour of the heir of Ampelius.¹⁶¹ A dispute in relation to the right of possession of the moveable property of an estate purchased by Ampelius some 30 years previously had been brought before the Court in Milan. The first letter (Ep. 5.54) is addressed to Felix,¹⁶² and the second (Ep. 5.66) to Paternus.¹⁶³ Both letters follow the same arguments.

The larger part of both letters is devoted to a description of the legal and tax-related issues that are involved in this dispute. At the end of each letter, Symmachus asks his addressee to intervene with Sperchius, *Comes rei privatae*:¹⁶⁴ *Erit itaque optio amplitudinis tuae in aures eius perferre, quae scripsimus* (Ep. 5.54.6),¹⁶⁵ and *Cum fratre nostro Sperchio inlustri viro quaeso ista communicates* (Ep. 5.66.5).¹⁶⁶

In both letters, Symmachus explains why he could not directly approach the person who held the power to decide. An indirect intervention is clearly needed because Symmachus has not yet em-

159) 'What the humanity of the Emperor returned to the many who were afflicted by their own envy will be granted by a much fairer indulgence, when it is requested in the name of his father.'

160) Ep. 4.19.2: *Fac igitur, ... ut adflictae domui pia temporum parcat humanitas* – For the translation, see n. 156; Ep. 4.51.2: *Proficiet ista concessio etiam temporum gloriae* – 'This appeasement will also contribute to the glory of our times.'

161) PLRE I, 56–57, Publius Ampelius 3. The legal and technical details of this intricate case can be found in Callu 1972–2002, II 242–243 n. 1 to page 190.

162) The addressee of the letter is Felix 2 (PLRE II, 458–459), probably *Quaestor sacri palatii* (Callu 1972–2002, III 75 n. 1 to letter 7.56).

163) PLRE I, 671–672, Aemilius Florus Paternus 6.

164) PLRE II, 1025.

165) 'Your Greatness will have the liberty to convey to his ears what we have written to you.'

166) 'I ask you to communicate this to our brother, the illustrious Sperchius.'

barked on a letter exchange with Sperchius. Moreover, epistolary decency and decorum prevents a letter writer from beginning a letter exchange on such a sensitive issue:¹⁶⁷ *Ipse autem principium facere conserendis mutuo scriptis a tali genere non debui* (Ep. 5.54.6),¹⁶⁸ and *Si quaeret, cur ad eum super hoc nihil scripserim, respondeas, quaeso, nondum inter nos facta stili consuetudine veritum esse me, ne quid a principio viderer arguere* (Ep. 5.66.6).¹⁶⁹

However, both interventions exhibit important differences in how Symmachus wanted to approach the one intended as the ‘final addressee’ of the intervention. In Ep. 5.54 the direct tone seems to point to a hierarchical relationship between the addressee and Sperchius: *Erit itaque optio amplitudinis tuae in aures eius perferre, quae scripsimus*.¹⁷⁰ Accordingly, he expects Sperchius to begin the letter exchange: . . . *si umquam mihi per litteras obtulisset fiduciam sui*.¹⁷¹ A different picture emerges, however, from Ep. 5.66, in which Sperchius is praised by Symmachus for his professional attitude and loyalty towards the legal system: *Est aequi servantissimus, et qui libentius communi iuri cedat quam potestati suae faveat. scit enim leges honoribus esse potiores*.¹⁷² The praising words point to certain expectations nurtured by Symmachus, which, consequently, might result in some pressure on Paternus. The letter writer also calculates that the request will result in reciprocal favours: . . . *ad omne me officium iustitia eius hortabitur* (Ep. 5.66.6).¹⁷³ Finally, he does not consider it essential for the letter exchange to be inaugurated by Sperchius: *Si quaeret, cur ad eum super hoc nihil scripserim . . .*¹⁷⁴

167) This way of ‘skilfully approaching’ an addressee can (probably) be paralleled with Epp. 2.85 and 87, written to Nicomachus Flavianus for Helpidius. I suggest that the introduction letter Ep. 2.85 precedes the intervention (Ep. 2.87). See n. 119.

168) ‘I myself was not allowed to embark on a letter exchange, starting from such a subject.’

169) ‘If he asks why I did not write anything to him about this, you should answer him that, since there was no letter exchange between us, I feared that I may appear to have started it by blaming.’

170) For the translation, see n. 165.

171) ‘. . . if by means of letters he ever would have offered his confidence to me.’

172) ‘He strictly observes equity and he prefers complying with the law to promoting his power. Indeed, he knows that laws are stronger than titles.’

173) ‘His justice will prompt me to every kindness.’

174) For the translation, see n. 169.

In this respect, it can be concluded that the nature of the relationship between Symmachus and Sperchius, the ‘final addressee’, is primarily determined by the bond between the epistolographer and the addressee of the letter. Through Paternus, the addressee of Ep. 5.66, Symmachus entered into a ‘negotiable’ bond with Sperchius, whereas the hierarchical relationship between Felix and Sperchius gave rise to a direct and rather inflexible tie between the letter writer and the ‘final addressee’.

(xii) Gaudentius,¹⁷⁵ an *agens in rebus* who belongs to a senatorial family, is the recommendee of the short introduction letters Epistulae 4.38¹⁷⁶ and 7.45,¹⁷⁷ which date to 398–399. In both letters, Symmachus develops the same ideas: the recommendee’s senatorial family,¹⁷⁸ his utmost modesty¹⁷⁹ and the scrutiny (*inspectio*) of his character that will reveal the recommendee’s excellence.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, the letters refer to the patronage that the addressee is expected to exercise.¹⁸¹

175) PLRE I, 386 Gaudentius 5 and Roda 1980, 100. Marcone 1987, 80 assumes that this recommendee is a typical example of a poor senator.

176) The addressee of the letter is Minervius 2 (PLRE I, 603), who was *Comes sacrarum largitionum* in 399.

177) Bonney 1975, 370 – followed by Callu 1972–2002, III 69 n.1 to letter 46 and 179 n.1 to page 67 – proposed “to identify [Rufus Synesius] Hadrianus as the addressee of all eighteen ‘anonymous’ letters in Book 7. As a group they hang together surprisingly well. Such of the letters as are datable derive, like so much of his correspondence, from the last half dozen years of Symmachus’s life (397–401). No less than eleven are recommendations.” Hadrianus was at that moment *Magister Officiorum* (PLRE I, 406, Hadrianus 2).

178) Ep. 4.38: *Genus ei senatorium est* – ‘He belongs to a senatorial family’; Ep. 7.45: *viro generis senatorii* – ‘a man of senatorial family’.

179) Ep. 4.38: *Modestia origine sua ac stirpe nobilior* – ‘A modesty more noble than his origin and lineage’; Ep. 7.45: *modestiam ... reperies claris natalibus parem* – ‘You will find his modesty similar to his distinguished birth.’

180) Ep. 4.38: *Longa obsequiorum eius faciet inspectio, ut me iudices minora dixisse* – ‘When you will have examined his loyalty for a long period, you will esteem that I underestimated him’; Ep. 7.45: *... ante plenam tui fiduciam, quam mox illi morum praestabit inspectio* – ‘... before he had acquired your full confidence, that soon you will give him when examining his behaviour ...’

181) Ep. 4.38: *In gremium patrocini tui confugit*. – ‘He took refuge within your patronage’; Ep. 7.45: *Si ... in clientelam tuam ... inducam* – ‘If I bring him into your protection ...’

(xiii) In 398 Symmachus wrote the letters 7.54¹⁸², 7.113¹⁸³ and 114¹⁸⁴ for Attalus.¹⁸⁵ The three letters are closely connected to one another and refer to the same mission¹⁸⁶ *ad dominos et principes nostros* (Ep. 7.113),¹⁸⁷ instructed by the Roman Senate. Epp. 7.54 and 7.113 clearly request the addressee's support¹⁸⁸ and can, then, be considered interventions, whereas Ep. 7.114 seems to be an introduction letter which, apparently, the addressee Petronius received when he held no official position.¹⁸⁹ The letters written to Petronius and Patruinus "indicate that the brothers remained at court and enjoyed influence there".¹⁹⁰

(xiv) Probably in 398¹⁹¹ Symmachus addressed two rather short interventions (Epp. 5.48¹⁹² and 7.56¹⁹³) on behalf of Theodulus, a *colonus* of the letter writer, who faced some unspecified problems.¹⁹⁴ In both cases, Symmachus grounds his intervention in the duty he has towards his *colonus*: *Bene cognitis ac probatis commendatio prompta debetur ...* (Ep. 5.48),¹⁹⁵ and *... cum sit colonus agrorum meorum atque illi debita magis quam precaria cura praestetur*

182) See n. 177.

183) The addressee of the letter is Patruinus, an influential person at court (PLRE II, 843–844).

184) Probably written to Petronius (PLRE II, 862–863, Petronius 1). He is the brother of Patruinus. The letter was probably written after Petronius left the office of *Vicarius Hispaniarum* in 397 and before his presence at the Court in Milan, starting in 398, where he possibly held a public office.

185) PLRE II, 180–181, Priscus Attalus 2.

186) In Ep. 7.104, the mission is referred to only as '*laborem peregrinationis*' – 'the effort of his journey'.

187) 'To our Lords and Princes'.

188) Ep. 7.54: *Suscipe igitur partes benignitatis et meae petitioni debitas* – 'Accept then the role of benefactor which is due to my request'; Ep. 7.113: *fautor* – 'patron' or *suffragio* – 'by your support.'

189) *Beatum te qui honorum emeritus otiaris* – 'Happy are you, who, after your public duties, enjoy leisure.'

190) PLRE II, 862, Petronius 1.

191) Callu 1972–2002, III 75 n. 1 to letter 7.56.

192) See n. 162.

193) See n. 177.

194) Rivolta Tiberga 1992, 153 remarks that these letters belong to the few recommendations that Symmachus wrote for someone of a socially inferior status.

195) 'A prompt recommendation is owed to those who are well known and who have been tested ...'

(Ep. 7.56).¹⁹⁶ Neither letter specifies what aid is requested from the addressee: *Quaeso igitur, ut votis eius benignus adrideas ...* (Ep. 5.48),¹⁹⁷ and *ut quidquid culpa aut erroris incurrit, contra illius meritum meo digneris interventui relaxare* (Ep. 7.56).¹⁹⁸ In Ep. 5.48 Symmachus hints at the value and merits of a recommendation, probably because he wanted to confer more weight on his intervention.¹⁹⁹ It is also interesting to note that Symmachus begins Ep. 7.56 by appealing to the excellent character of the addressee. A similar expression is found at the opening of recommendation Ep. 7.46, which was (probably) also written to the same addressee.²⁰⁰

(xv) Epistulae 4.39;²⁰¹ 5.6;²⁰² 7.47;²⁰³ 7.95;²⁰⁴ 7.102;²⁰⁵ and 9.47 (without superscript) were written on behalf of Nicomachus Flavianus,²⁰⁶ and all date to 398. Letters written in 395 (Epp. 4.19 and 51)²⁰⁷ prove that Nicomachus' rehabilitation had already begun under Theodosius²⁰⁸ and was seemingly (almost) completed in 398,

196) '... because he is a *colonus* on my domains and taking care of him is more an obligation towards him than something that is obtained by entreaty.'

197) 'I entreat you to appear favourable to his requests.'

198) 'Whatever crime or fault he incurred, contrary to what he deserves, you will deign to alleviate his situation by my intervention.'

199) Ep. 5.48: ... *ne aut meum testimonium pro nihilo habitum iudicetur* – '... so that my testimony is not judged as worthless.'

200) Ep. 7.56: *Tua nos hortatur humanitas ...* – 'Your humanity urges us ...'; Ep. 7.46: *Singularis animi tui bonitas vocat* – 'The exceptional goodness of your character invites ...'

201) See n. 176.

202) The addressee of the letter is Flavius Mallius Theodorus 27 (PLRE I, 900–902), *Praefectus Praetorio Italiae*.

203) See n. 177.

204) The addressee of the letter is Flavius Macrobius Longinianus (PLRE II, 686–687): "Longinianus might have been the *Comes privatarum largitionum*. During this office, or earlier, he received Symm. Ep. 7.95."

205) See nn. 183 and 184.

206) See n. 108.

207) See letter set (x) on page 207 ff.

208) Sogno 2006, 80: "Symmachus' son-in-law had been one of the most prominent political figures under the usurper. ... while his father was in a position of extraordinary power at the court of Eugenius as praetorian prefect of Italy." The emperor was probably seeking Symmachus' support, see Cameron 2011, 57: "The solution is simply that, in the East and West alike, the emperor did his best to work with traditional elites as far as he could, even when, like Tatianus, Symmachus, and Flavian, they were pagans. When he returned to the East, he needed influential western supporters."

as Nicomachus was invited by the Emperor Honorius to attend the celebrations of the new consul. “Symmachus’ triumph was complete when a year later Flavianus was appointed to the *praefectura urbis* and his political career was restored. This was made possible by Stilicho, who had developed a close relationship with Symmachus and whom the Roman senator profusely thanked.”²⁰⁹

The letters, which are all short and quite similar, do not carry any request and can therefore be considered introductions. They reveal the existence of strong (reciprocal) ties between Nicomachus and the addressee. An interesting example is offered by: ... *cum et ipse te colere supra mensuram diligentiae meae coeperit* (Ep. 4.39).²¹⁰ This tie is almost based on the argument of friendship: *Talis igitur in eum esse dignare, qualem te vetus amicitia pollicetur* (Ep. 7.47).²¹¹ In another letter, this friendship is expressed by means of a triangulation: *Mei sermonis haec summa est, ut in patriam redux sibi perpetuum amorem vestrum, mihi mutuam reportet salutationem* (Ep. 7.102).²¹² *Amicitia* is also the source of reciprocal favours: *Nam si amicitia de mutuis constat officiis, facile erit, ut ex illius animo tuum metiar* (Ep. 4.39).²¹³ Symmachus expects his addressee to maintain an existing friendship: *Serva igitur, oro, depromptae in eum benignitatis tenorem* (Ep. 5.6).²¹⁴ Moreover, in most letters the personality of the recommendee does not constitute a major argument in the request: *Pro cognitis et probatis pauca dicenda sunt*

209) Sogno 2006, 83.

210) ‘... since he started to honour you more than measured by the size of my affection.’ An existing tie between recommendee and addressee is maybe less apparent in Ep. 9.52.

211) ‘Therefore you should have such an attitude towards him as the long-standing friendship would promise to you.’ The idea of long-standing friendship also appears in Ep. 7.102.

212) ‘My main point is that, once he is back in his home town, he will have brought for himself your continuous affection, and for me your mutual greetings in return.’ Another triangulation is found in Ep. 4.39.

213) ‘For, if friendship consists of the mutual exchange of favours, it will be easy for me to judge your feelings by his emotions.’

214) ‘I ask you, once you have shown your affection towards him, to make sure that it remains uninterrupted.’ A similar reasoning, but based on a pre-existing friendship, is found in Ep. 7.95: *Amplecti amicitias domini et filii mei Flaviani ante dignatus es. Sed nunc tempus datur, ut illi documenta verae familiaritatis exhibeas* – ‘Previously you thought it fitting to embrace the friendship of his lord, my son Flavianus. But now the occasion has come to give him the proof of a real commitment.’

(Ep. 7.102).²¹⁵ In Ep. 7.95 the letter writer stresses the value of this recommendation, as if he wants to confer more weight on his intervention: ... *nec in dubium venit, quid habeat ponderis pignorum commendatio apud eum, qui suos diligit*.²¹⁶ Finally, Symmachus also emphasises in some letters that a recommendation is not needed, which is a rhetorical way to specifically ask attention for this case: *Nescio, an eum commendare tibi debeam, cui summi gaudii auctor fuisti* (Ep. 5.6).²¹⁷

It is also interesting to compare the different offices that the addressees held in 398: *Comes sacrarum largitionum* (Minervius), *Praefectus Praetorio Italiae* (Theodorus), (probably) *Magister Officiorum* (Rufus Synesius Hadrianus), *Comes rerum privatarum* (probably Flavius Macrobius Longinianus), and Patruinus and Petronius also belonged to Court. It also seems that the unknown addressee of Ep. 9.47 had direct access to the emperor: *Unde aequum est, ut quem respicit imperiale suffragium, familiaritas vestra non deserat*.²¹⁸ It has to be highlighted that at least three addressees (or probably four or five) were high officials who sat on the *consistorium*.²¹⁹ “In the fourth century the *consistorium* was an effective council of state, which dealt with matters of administration and high policy and advised the emperor upon them.”²²⁰ I suggest then that the case of Nicomachus Flavianus’ rehabilitation was discussed by the *consistorium*. Moreover, since it is clear from Ep. 9.47 that the addressee belonged to the close circle around the emperor,

215) ‘There is not much to say on behalf of those whom one knows and esteems.’ Other examples are Ep. 9.47: *Reperies in eo mentem dignam amore tuo et meliore fortuna* – ‘You will find him a person that is worthy of your affection and a better fortune’; Ep. 7.95: *occasionem dabit, qua et ipsius meritum iudicio tuo pateat* – ‘It will give him an occasion to submit his merits to your judgement.’

216) ‘I do not doubt the weight of a recommendation of intimates, when it is addressed to someone who is attentive for his friends.’

217) ‘I do not know if I have to recommend him, for whom you were author of an utmost joy.’ Other examples are Epp. 7.47 and 7.102.

218) ‘For this reason, it is fair not to keep away from your business whom an imperial favour had considered.’

219) Jones 1964, II 333: “The chief civilian ministers of the *comitatus*, the *comes et quaestor*, *comes et magister officiorum*, *comes sacrarum largitionum* and *comes rei privatae* ... were certainly *ex officio* members. The praetorian prefect who was in *comitatu* must also have had a seat. ... In addition to this *ex officio* members there was a large number of non-official members.”

220) Jones 1964, II 334–336.

membership of the *consistorium* might also be supposed in his case.²²¹ It can also be assumed that Symmachus was informed about the ongoing discussions in the *consistorium*.²²²

Furthermore, the letters must be read in relation to Ep. 4.6, which was addressed in the same year to Stilicho, who was at that moment the main figure of the western court. This document is a letter of thanks for services rendered, most probably after Symmachus had written a recommendation letter for Nicomachus, which has not been preserved. Apparently, the letter of thanks had been carried by the latter: *Commendationem non desiderat, qui ad agendas gratias pergit* (Ep. 4.6.1).²²³ It emerges from Ep. 4.6 that Stilicho had been instrumental in rehabilitating Nicomachus: *Nihil esse ad integrandas fortunas hominum virtutibus tuis promptius* (Ep. 4.6.1).²²⁴ Moreover, it can be supposed that, previously, Symmachus addressed to him another intervention, asking that Nicomachus Flavianus be allowed to attend the consular celebrations of 399. Ep. 4.6 refers to a formal invitation for Nicomachus to be present at the consular ceremonial. Apparently, Stilicho's assistance also turned out to be decisive in this case: *Nunc adiecta est ei honorabilis evocatio, quam testimonii tui iuvit auctoritas* (Ep. 4.6.2).²²⁵ In addition, Symmachus expects – without saying it openly – Stilicho to be receptive to future requests: *Novos beneficiorum gradus invenis et inconstantem putas amorem, qui incrementa non accipit*.²²⁶ In conclusion, this letter, as it links previous favours to future ones, might be considered a veiled recommendation letter for Nicomachus Flavianus, all the more so since the letter emphatically begins with *commendationem*.

221) In this hypothesis, the addressee could hold, for example, the office of *Quaestor sacri palatii*.

222) That other persons (than those who sat on the *consistorium*) were in the know of the discussions in this council, can be inferred, for example, from the fact that in 390 Emperor Theodosius gave “strict orders that Ambrose was even not to be told what was being discussed in the consistory” (Cameron 2011, 64).

223) ‘Who proceeds to express his thanks, does not expect to be recommended.’

224) ‘No virtue other than yours is more prompt to rehabilitate individual fortunes.’

225) ‘And in addition comes an honourable invitation which is backed by your authoritative testimony.’

226) ‘You find new levels in your favours and consider friendship inconsistent when it does not increase.’

The main question is why Symmachus wrote introductions to six persons who presumably could wield a lot of influence.²²⁷ At least three letters appear to have been written even after the formal decision of rehabilitation had been made.²²⁸ One explanation might be that the decision process with regard to the complete rehabilitation did not run smoothly and / or the decision was not undisputed. During the discussions of the *consistorium*, one or more member(s) might have shown his opposition to the measure. It is probable that Symmachus had come to the conclusion that there was no full-hearted support in the *consistorium* for a complete rehabilitation of Nicomachus Flavianus. In order to combat or to neutralise any individual resistance, Symmachus considered it preferable to individually approach each of the involved persons (or at least the majority of them). In this respect, it is interesting to examine Ep. 4.6 against the background of the six introductions written in the same year. This letter demonstrates that Symmachus expects Stilicho, who had twice granted a favour, to be receptive to future requests. When the six letters are read together, they reveal a certain uneasiness on the part of Symmachus. It looks as if Symmachus struggled to make his point, and, accordingly, he used several means to convince his addressees.²²⁹

(xvi) Probably around 399 Symmachus wrote two interventions (Epp. 9.103 and 105) to unknown addressees²³⁰ on behalf of

227) This great influence is hinted at in Ep. 7.47: *Cui adiecit honoris tui gradus, ut quae pro eo velle debes, posse te non neges* – ‘Your rank in the hierarchy has added that you affirm to be capable of what his interest needs you to endeavour.’

228) Ep. 5.6: *Filium meum Flavianum consulatus tuus revocat in lucem* – ‘Your consulate brings my son Flavianus back to the fore’; Ep. 7.95: *Sacris enim Domini nostri Honori augustissimi principis litteris ad officium magnifici consulis evocatus...* – ‘Invited to the accession to office of the noble consul by the letters of His Majesty, our most venerable Lord Honorius...’; Ep. 9.47: *... licet sacri beneficii magnitudo casibus eius occurrerit et ad cumulum lenitatis adiecta sit evocatio.* – ‘... although his Majesty’s large generosity obviated the misfortunes and his invitation increased the kindness.’

229) Another matter discussed in the *consistorium*, in which Symmachus was involved, was his request for the restoration of the altar of Victory, see Jones 1964, 335: “When the senate petitioned Valentinian II for the restoration of the altar of Victory and of the endowments of the Roman priesthoods, the official dispatch of Symmachus, prefect of the City, and the two counter-petitions were read before the consistory, and after a debate ..., the senate’s request was rejected.”

230) Epp. 9.103 and 105 bear no superscript, but according to Bonney 1975, 361 they might have been addressed “to an urban prefect and a prefect of the *an-*

the *mancipes salinarum* (the farmers of salt pits) of Rome. Symmachus begins both short letters with an urgent appeal to help this corporation.²³¹ A vague request concludes the two documents.²³² In both letters, the letter writer underscores that the help will be useful for the city of Rome. Symmachus does not explain the nature of the problems which confronted this corporation. An explanation might be that, over the years, the *mancipes salinarum* had been losing economic power / influence, against which they tried to fight.²³³

(xvii) Epistulae 9.51²³⁴ and 9.56,²³⁵ which were probably written in 399–400, can both be seen as the result of an indirect intervention by friends for the *curialis* Felix.²³⁶ The letters indicate the stage after ‘a third person’ (in this case Symmachus) has been approached.

nona”. Jones 1964, II 690: “... the (city) prefect was by no means master in his own house. ... Two constitutions, dated 365 and 376, which regulate the spheres of the prefect of the city and the prefect of the *annona* and their respective *officia*, are masterpieces of ambiguity ...”. Roda 1981, 238 does not exclude the possibility that Ep. 9.105 is a second letter to the same addressee.

231) Ep. 9.103: *Totis viribus adiuvandi sunt communis patriae corporati, praecipue mancipes salinarum* – ‘With all our forces we have to assist the corporations of our common fatherland, especially the farmers of salt-works’; Ep. 9.105: *Iuvandi sunt mancipes salinarum, qui splendori atque usui patriae communis inserviunt* – ‘We need to assist the farmers of salt-works who serve the splendour and interests of our common fatherland.’

232) Ep. 9.103: ... *hanc quoque partem diligentiae tuae vindices* – ‘... claim this issue also to your commitment’; Ep. 9.105: *Dignaberis igitur auditis eorum querellis adeuntibus deferre iustitiam* – ‘After having heard the complaints of those who approach you, you will deign to provide justice to them ...’

233) In 384–385, Symmachus, in his role as *Praefectus urbi Romae*, wrote *relatio* 44 to the emperor, in which he came to the defence of the *mancipes salinarum*, who were facing a dwindling membership. Vasiliev 1943, 12: “In 398–399 the Emperors Arcadius and Honorius issued an edict to Lampadius, *Praefectus Praetorio*, which made this corporation the privileged salt dealer in Rome (Cod. Just. 4.61, 11).” Diosono 2015, 258–261 describes how “the collegia system was an essential network within the state organisation and represented a level of social organisation that, however, was on the verge of collapse”.

234) The addressee is PLRE II, 119, Apollodorus 2, *Proconsul Africae*.

235) The addressee is Erius Fanius Geminianus (PLRE I, 389).

236) This *curialis* is not attested in PLRE I or II. Roda 1980, 99–100 is not completely certain that the recommendee of both letters is one and the same person. Since both recommendations are the result of an indirect intervention and have an ‘African connection’, I do not see sufficient reason to suppose two different recommendees. Contrary to Callu, PLRE I, 389 dates the letter to 396–397.

In Ep. 9.51 Symmachus refers to an intervention he received from some high-ranking friends: *Quintus et Felix Hipponensium curiales has de me litteras summatibus viris intervenientibus impetrarunt*.²³⁷ Given the quality of those who intervened, Symmachus would have understood that it was important to give the matter his utmost attention. As a result, he apparently decided to approach external witnesses who could testify to the recommendee's probity: *Debui enim probitatem hominum de testibus aestimare*.²³⁸ Unless this is a rhetorical argument, he did so because he wanted to be entirely sure about the recommendee, so as not to run any risk of his recommendation being rejected.²³⁹ In addition, he explicitly links the friendship between himself and the addressee to the high expectations that the intervening persons hold of Symmachus: *Interest igitur amicitiae nostrae, ne spes eorum, qui me ad impetrationem validum crediderunt, decepta videatur*.²⁴⁰ As stated by the letter writer himself, a refusal of the recommendation by the addressee would have meant for Symmachus a loss of honour and credibility on the part of his 'high-ranking friends'. It appears that Symmachus took every measure to be sure of the recommendee's probity. It can therefore be supposed that this indirect intervention was probably written, not because the intervening persons were unable to come into direct contact with Apollodorus, *Proconsul Africae*, but rather because the high-ranking friends, despite the fact that they knew the addressee, did not want, for some particular reason, to approach him directly, but preferred to turn to Symmachus as an intermediary.²⁴¹

237) 'Quintus and Felix, *curiales* from Hippo, requested from me this letter, upon the intervention of high-ranking persons.'

238) 'I had to estimate the honesty of individual persons by having recourse to witnesses.'

239) Roda 1981, 181 points to the existence of (at least) distrust of the *curiales*. He underscores the very cautious tone of the letter, as if Symmachus wanted to avoid excessive involvement ("dimostra l'esistenza per lo meno di un certo senso di diffidenza; non solo ma tutta quanta la lettera è modulata su toni di estrema cautela, como se Simmaco volesse evitare un coinvolgimento e una sua compromissione eccessiva nella questione").

240) 'It is important for our friendship that the hope of those who deemed me capable for what they wanted to acquire does not seem to be frustrated.' This is a triangulation not between letter writer, recommendee and addressee, but between epistolographer, intervening persons and addressee.

241) According to Callu 1972–2002, IV 112 n.1 to letter 9.51, some reluctance or embarrassing situation might be supposed: "Symmachus déclare ne pas

Ep. 9.56 paints a rather different picture. The intervention was carried out by some unspecified friends: *Felix cum . . . humanitatem commendationis meae amicis intervenientibus postulare . . .*²⁴² It can be assumed that external witnesses did not provide any testimonial, since the letter writer remains silent on this point. Furthermore, Symmachus does not mention any friendship link and even assumes that the addressee might not know the recommendee: *Si nondum tibi cognitus est, praestet clientelae aditum, si iam notus, augmentum.*²⁴³ Generally speaking, in both letters Symmachus took into account not so much the quality of the recommendee as the status of the intervening persons. However, the intensity of Symmachus' tie with the intervening persons is different in both letters. It can then be concluded that in Ep. 9.51 Symmachus is fully engaged in the entire recommendation process, whereas the epistolographer is far less involved in Ep. 9.56.

(xviii) Epistulae 7.108 and 7.109 (both dating to between 398 and 401) were written on behalf of Caecilianus²⁴⁴ to the brothers Patruinus²⁴⁵ and Petronius,²⁴⁶ who were very influential figures in the palatial administration. In both letters, Symmachus clearly asks the brothers to intervene in the course of justice: *Hoc tantum de sancto animo tuo impetratum volo, ut iisdem viribus, quibus pro eo luctamina prima sedasti, repetitae medearis iniuriae . . .* (Ep. 7.108),²⁴⁷ and *Nam reducitur in longinqua iudicia, quibus facile, si suffragium tuleris, eruatur* (Ep. 7.109).²⁴⁸ Both letters follow the same line of reasoning and argumentation: Symmachus describes that Caecilianus

connaître directement les curiales d'Hippone et il ne nomme pas non plus ceux qui les patronnent: on soupçonne de la réticence ou de l'embarras."

242) 'Since Felix requested the gentleness of my recommendation upon the intervention of friends (. . .).'

243) 'If he is still unknown to you, may this request provide him access to your clients; if you already know him, may this petition increase it.'

244) PLRE II, 244–245, Caecilianus 1. A. Both letters were written after Caecilianus had left the office of *Praefectus annonae*.

245) See n. 183.

246) See n. 184.

247) 'I only want to obtain from your dedication that with the same efforts you eased the first disputes to his benefit, you will remedy an injustice that is repeated.'

248) 'He is indeed facing long disputes, from which he will be easily pulled out, if you should give him your support.'

probably faces a second trial,²⁴⁹ despite previously concluded agreements.²⁵⁰ It is not necessary to explain the facts, because they are largely known to the addressee.²⁵¹ Moreover, in Ep. 7.109 the letter writer explicitly mentions the addressee's brother, as if he wanted to put pressure on the recipient of the letter: *Est enim in te atque fratre portus omnium, quos fortuita sollicitant.*²⁵² Most probably these letters should be associated with a previous lawsuit referred to in Ep. 3.36.²⁵³

(xix) Epistulae 7.46, 7.94 and 7.103,²⁵⁴ which can be dated to between 401 and 402, are interventions on behalf of Desiderius,²⁵⁵ a *clarissimus* who is facing judicial problems in relation to his patrimony and for whom Symmachus is seeking support in Rome and at the Court in Milan.²⁵⁶ In all three letters, Desiderius is sketched as a 'most excellent person'.²⁵⁷ The reciprocal elements between let-

249) Ep. 7.108: ... *filius meus Caecilianus denuo ad incerta litis adtrahitur* – 'Again, my son is drawn into the uncertainties of a trial'; Ep. 7.109: (*eorum qui*) ... *finem iurgii secunda lite commutant* – '(Of those who) ... substitute the ending of a dispute for a second trial.'

250) Ep. 7.108: *Post consensum partium, post vinculum pactionis* ... – 'After the consent of the parties, after the bonds of the agreement ...'; Ep. 7.109: ... *qui reducunt in quaestionem pactionibus terminata* – 'those who raise doubt about what the agreements have established.'

251) Ep. 7.108: *Nota est tibi qualitas causae; merito omitto conperta stilo exequi* – 'You know the nature of this affair; I rightfully omit what is already known'; Ep. 7.109: *Prolixus in petendo esse non debeo, cum* ... – 'I do not need to dwell upon my request, since ...'

252) 'Since you and your brother are the haven of all those who are afflicted by misfortune.'

253) Callu 1972–2002, III 101 n. 1 theorises that this possible lawsuit referred to an older case that was already settled in 397. Barnes 1992, 10: In Ep. 3.36, "Symmachus virtually warns Ambrosius to avoid exercising his episcopal jurisdiction in a matter affecting one of the writer's clients". See also Bruggisser 1987 and Ebbeler 2007, 236 n. 37.

254) The addressees are: (i) Ep. 7.46: Rufus Synesius Hadrianus (see n. 177); (ii) Ep. 7.94: Flavius Macrobius Longinianus (see n. 204); (iii) Ep. 7.103: Patruinus (see n. 183).

255) PLRE II, 355, Desiderius 1.

256) Callu 1972–2002, III 69 n. 1 to letter 46. Apparently, Desiderius had been facing these problems for a few years, as they are referred to in Ep. 4.40, which dates to 398–399.

257) Ep. 7.46: *ornatissimum virum* – 'a most distinguished man'; Ep. 7.94: *virum praeter fortunam cunctis rebus ornatum* ... – 'a man who, besides Fortune, is adorned with everything ...'; Ep. 7.103: *optimum virum Desiderium, cui maximam*

ter writer and addressee, which are the expression of a strong tie between both persons, feature largely in Ep. 7.46 (... *cum ipse ad hoc meum studium voti benignitate sollicitus – Suscipe, oro, benefaciendi provinciam quae hominum merita deo adplicat, clarioresque fructus ex huius commodo cape*²⁵⁸) and even more prominently in Ep. 7.103 (*(tradetur) pagina relatúra ad me plurimum boni, si te plurimum in amicitiam tradentis adtraxerit*).²⁵⁹ This strong tie will make a recommendation all the more credible: *Non est igitur mihi commendationum familiarium verenda reprehensio...* (Ep. 7.46).²⁶⁰ In Ep. 7.94 Symmachus underscores the honour and the merits that arise from Longinianus' office and allow him to be very influential: *Honor militiae vestrae dandis beneficiis enitescit. Cum igitur te meritorum ratio summis proximum faciat*²⁶¹ ... – *pro loci ac meriti tui viribus...*²⁶² The three letters exhibit a clear level of engagement and commitment that suggests Symmachus considered the case to be important. The reason the letter writer attached such importance to this case is not easy to determine. Symmachus' commitment can hardly be explained by the fact that the recommendee was a *clarissimus*.²⁶³ In this respect, some similarities can be noted with Epp. 4.38 and 7.45, which were written in favour of Felix, who was also of senatorial rank.

laudem pura vita conciliat – 'The great Desiderius, whose spotless lifestyle procures him the highest tribute.'

258) '... when by your benevolent wish you yourself stir my zeal for it' – 'Take up, I ask you, the duty of benefactor who attributes the human merits to the Deity, and take a clearer profit from the advantages you give him.'

259) 'In return, this letter will bring me an extreme happiness, if by delivering it to you, it especially attracts you to his friendship.' A clear and elaborate triangulation at the end of the same letter also points to the existence of strong links between Symmachus, Desiderius and the addressee.

260) 'I do not have to fear that my intervention for close friends will be censured ...'

261) 'Your honourable position gets its brightness from the kindnesses it grants. Also, when your merits are taken into account, it brings you close to the top ...'

262) 'On account of your position and merits ...'

263) Although in the imperial period *vir clarissimus* had developed into a title of rank for members of the senatorial class, yet, as a consequence of the expansion of the senatorial class, this title was given to those of the lowest (third) class of rank.

The letter as part of the recommendation process

After a discussion of the selected letters, it is interesting to broaden the perspective and to link a recommendation letter to the wider recommendation process. A recommendation letter is not something that ‘stands on its own’; rather, it forms part of a more elaborate process. Therefore, the activity of recommending someone cannot be seen exclusively through the lens of a recommendation letter. It is important to understand that, in this process, there are several stages that play an important role in the recommendation activity. Some moments can be linked to the letter writer acting as the one who recommends, whilst for others the focus shifts to the addressee of the letter. Symmachus’ letter corpus gives some interesting examples of how this recommendation process operated.²⁶⁴ It seems to me that such an overview will provide us with an additional layer of understanding of how and in which circumstances a recommendation letter functioned.

The first important stage, of which no examples are found in Symmachus’ letters, was when the letter writer proposed recommending his protégé to a third person. Cicero’s letter corpus, in particular, offers examples of holding out the prospect of recommendation.²⁶⁵

Secondly, a recommendation could mention previous actions that had already been undertaken in favour of the recommendee. The writer might refer to an earlier recommendation that he wrote in favour of the same recommendee. The writer hoped, by writing a second letter, to give more weight to the recommendation, which, most likely, had not yet been crowned with success: *Licet arbitrer, superiores litteras meas, ... in manus tuas esse delatas* (Ep. 3.33).²⁶⁶ Accordingly, the epistolographer could also mention that previously he had sent several other letters to the addressee: *Urgeo te frequentibus scriptis et animi affectione non desero* (Ep. 3.72).²⁶⁷ The letter writer might refer to previous requests that his addressee

264) Similar examples are also found in other epistolographers, but they are referred to only in footnotes.

265) Cic. Fam. 6.8.3; 7.18.1 and 3; 14.7.2; Att. 5.20.10.

266) ‘Even if I think that my previous letter ... has been brought to you, ...’ Another example is Ep. 9.3. Both letters refer to recommendations that have been lost.

267) ‘My frequent writings press upon you and my personal affection does not leave you.’

had granted, thereby implying what he is now expected to do.²⁶⁸ Also, he might hint that the addressee had previously recommended the same person to him: ... *ut ames in eo spem, quam dedisti, addasque inchoato beneficio perfectionem* (Ep. 7.125).²⁶⁹

Moreover, the letter writer might refer to a recommendation letter that someone else wrote to him on behalf of the same recommendee. More specifically, such a letter must often be seen in relation to an indirect intervention. Symmachus refers to an earlier recommendation written to him by Hilarius²⁷⁰ and emphatically mentions it at the beginning of his letter: *Commendatum mihi a fratre meo Hilario virum devotissimum Titianum quo alio possum beneficio munerari, quam ut eum sancto pectori tuo non aspernandus precator insinuem?* (Ep. 2.80).²⁷¹ This letter can be considered the reaction to an indirect intervention coming from someone who was himself unable to approach the ‘appropriate’ person that might provide the aid.

Thirdly, the letter writer might allude not to previous actions, but to the future, and thus voice the expectation that the addressee will reply positively to the request: *Vicissitudo testabitur, quod paginam meam libenter acceperis* (Ep. 9.8).²⁷² By highlighting the value and the merits of a recommendation, Symmachus hints at the influence it will have over the addressee: *Quare desiderii sui me adscivit interpretem, sciens apud te tantum loci esse litteris meis, ut haec commendatio maximi testimonii instar habeatur* (Ep. 1.107).²⁷³

Another stage in the process was when the addressee of the request explained how he will proceed with the request that he received.²⁷⁴ The examples in Symmachus’ letter corpus shed an in-

268) Examples are Fronto, Ad Ant. Pium, 9 or Bas. Epp. 177.1–5; 178.1–5 and 274.15–19.

269) ‘Cherish the expectations you have aroused in him and complete the kindnesses you have begun.’ Callu 1972–2002, III 109 n.1: “Athanasie ... avait d’abord été introduit par le ‘sage’ Patruinus auprès de Symmaque qui, à son tour, le confie aux soins de son protecteur initial.” A similar idea appears in Ep. 7.96, 1.

270) See n. 146.

271) See n. 147.

272) See n. 45.

273) ‘For that reason, he has enlisted me as an interpreter of his wishes, knowing that my letters have such a status with you that this recommendation is considered the strongest endorsement.’

274) These instances are often present in Cicero’s letter corpus. Examples are Cic. Fam. 7.5.2; 7.17.2; 9.24.1 and 12.25b.1.

teresting light on his activities as a power broker. The letter writer explained that the favourable opinion conveyed in the recommendation letter proved to be correct once he came to know the recommended person more closely. Symmachus was then able to carry out the request that was put forward in the recommendation letter: *Quem ego in numerum bonorum esse referendum, priusquam morum ipsius periculum facerem, ex praerogativa tui testimonii iudicavi; sed ubi propiore congressu probitatis eius ornamenta patuerunt ... Pro his ergo muneribus optatum tibi solvo responsum* (Ep. 7.115).²⁷⁵ In another letter, Symmachus, having received a recommendation, hinted at the obligation which he was put under by the recommendation: *Tantum esse apud te loci Aurelio meo gaudeo, ut a me tibi traditus invicem sub commendatione reddatur. Vicisti nostram pro eo diligentiam, quam iubes crescere. Itaque sum dicto audiens* (Ep. 7.63).²⁷⁶

A further stage occurred after the recommendation was granted.²⁷⁷ A successful recommendation letter enhanced the status of the letter writer:²⁷⁸ *Relatum in cultores tuos Aurelium familiarem meum gaudeo non illius modo nomine, quem tuendum summatis viri cura suscepit, sed meo maxime, cuius testimonium iudicii instar*

275) 'Before putting his behaviour to test, I judged him – based on the previous choice that is your testimony – worthy of being counted among the honest men. But as soon as his distinctive honesty became manifest after a closer contact ... For all his kindness I pay you the answer that you desire.' Examples of other writers are Plin. Ep. 6.9.1 (this letter can be considered a 'contrastive reference' to Ep. 6.6, which comes a few letters earlier in the letter collection and deals with the same recommendee) and Greg. Naz. Ep. 83.1.

276) 'I am delighted that my Aurelius is so important for you that, after having given him to you, he has been returned back to me together with your recommendation. You prevailed over the care I have for him and that you order me to increase. Accordingly, I am attentive to your words.' In Epp. 9.80 and 9.90, Symmachus dwelled upon the expectations that the writer of the recommendation had for Symmachus.

277) Often these letters refer to a recommendation that has not been preserved.

278) See also Pavis d'Escurac 1992, 65: "Mais lorsqu'elle est couronnée de succès, la commendatio constitue pour l'homme influent une démonstration de son crédit, de son audience, une affirmation donc de sa place dans la hiérarchie sociale. Qui plus est, en apportant aux bénéficiaires de ses interventions avancement et promotion souhaités, le bienfaiteur voit son prestige personnel, sa propre dignitas, s'accroître à mesure que s'élargit le cercle de ses obligés reconnaissants."

habuisti (Ep. 5.50).²⁷⁹ It might confer honour upon the person making the request: *Nam mihi quoque plurimum honoris accedit, quotiens sententia nostra concordat* (Ep. 5.42)²⁸⁰ and even prompt others to emulate him.²⁸¹ Correspondingly, it might increase the power of the letter writer's persuasion, so that the addressee would find it more difficult not to grant the request. It also occurred that the favour granted to the recommended person resulted not only from the recommendation letter but also – and maybe even more so – from the interventions that the addressee of the letter had previously undertaken: *Nec tamen impetrationis gratiam mihi vindico: iustitia postulati et interventus tui desiderata promovit* (Ep. 5.68).²⁸²

Finally, the letter writer might thank his addressee for the aid that he provided in relation to the recommendation:²⁸³ *Agendis tibi gratis pro Flaviano filio meo usquequaque me inparem sentio, et cum sint verba rebus faciliora, beneficii tui magnitudinem dictis aequare non possum* (Ep. 4.4).²⁸⁴ The letters of Symmachus provide some interesting examples of the epistolographer aiming to achieve something more than simply expressing thanks for a recommendation. In Ep. 3.19 Symmachus not only thanked his addressee, Gregorius, for having granted a request in favour of Palladius,²⁸⁵ but he also referred to a previous and successful recommendation let-

279) 'I am pleased that my friend Aurelius has been ranged among your supporters, not only on behalf of himself, whom a most distinguished man received under his protection, but specially on my behalf, whose testimony you considered as a judgement.' A similar idea appears in Ep. 7.97.

280) 'For I also receive a lot of honour whenever our feelings correspond with each other.'

281) An example is Syn. Ep. 118, 13–17.

282) 'However, I do not claim to have obtained the request (only) by myself; the legitimate character of the demand and your interventions have advanced the request.'

283) Such letters of thanks are also found in other letter collections. Examples are Plin. Ep. 10.10; Lib. Ep. 651 and P. Mich. VIII 498. The existence of a model letter of thanks following a recommendation, which is found in letter-writing manuals preserved on papyrus, also implies that such a letter of thanks had specific importance within the entire recommendation process. Williams 2014, 352–353 refers to P. Bon. 5, 1.5–10 (TM 64278), dating to the third–fourth century AD, and BKT IX 94 (TM 64977), dating to the sixth century AD.

284) 'I feel in all respects unable to thank you for my son Flavianus, and although words are easier than deeds, I am not able to equal with my sayings the greatness of your favour.'

285) PLRE I, 660, Palladius 12.

ter²⁸⁶ that Symmachus himself had written to Syagrius on behalf of the same Palladius, as if he wanted to reinforce his argument: *Vestro quoque in eum favore delector, tamquam aliquid ipse praestiterit. Cum quo inlustrem virum Syagrium fides certa est operam bonae frugis adnissum.*²⁸⁷ In Ep. 4.6.2 Symmachus – besides offering his thanks for a previous and successful intervention – exhorted the addressee to continue granting favours on behalf of the same recommendee: *Novos beneficiorum gradus invenis et inconstantem putas amorem, qui incrementa non accipit.*²⁸⁸

Undoubtedly, these examples prove that recommendation was a large process, of which the letter itself was only a part, albeit an important one. Accordingly, this suggests that Symmachus, by referring to other stages in the recommendation process, wanted to emphasise the importance of the intervention for which he was asked, or that he was looking for ways to highlight his own role in the intervention process. It is thus clear that the letter writer, when speaking about recommendation in his capacity as either the initiator or as the addressee of the request, also intended to stress his own role in this process.²⁸⁹

Conclusions

Recommendation letters cannot be read in isolation from the functioning of Symmachus' network. They make up more than a quarter of Symmachus' letter corpus. There are some general features that emerge from these letters. They are not so much intended as intervention letters as mere introductions. The recommendee is often sketched in a few strokes, without giving an ample descrip-

286) This letter is Ep. 1.94.

287) 'I am delighted by the favour you also bestowed upon him, as if he had in a way vouched for it himself. What undoubtedly adds to this, is that the success was obtained by the great care of the distinguished Syagrius.'

288) 'You find new degrees of kindness and deem that a friendship is inconsistent when it does not receive increases.'

289) Bruggisser 1993, 8–9: the "devoir de recommandation" is one of the three *officia* that ground an epistolary friendship. The purpose of this obligation is to "faire fructifier la relation, accroître le réseau des amitiés en présentant à ses amis des personnes dignes d'être protégées ou en accueillant sous sa protection des personnes présentées par des amis". However, Bruggisser does not focus very much on the active – and not disinterested – role played by the letter writer.

tion. Recurring epistolary themes about the recommendation itself and specific circumstances, such as the degree of friendship or merits, indicate that the recommendation was considered by Symmachus a document that could easily be used in different situations.

For Symmachus, there is a strong, but not exclusive, link between friendship and letter exchange. It also appears that recommendation, friendship and patronage cannot (easily) be dissociated from one another. Frequently, the theme of friendship is accompanied by elements such as reciprocity and obligation. Longer letters and requests for a frequent letter exchange do not always point to intimate ties. Triangulation, as the expression of strong and reciprocal ties between the different parties, regularly appears in Symmachus' recommendations.

The comparison of recommendation letters written to different addressees within a given period for the same recommendee reveals important elements that shed an interesting light on the functioning of Symmachus' network. As I set out in the methodology, focusing on these specifically selected letters that meet certain criteria instead of recommendation letters taken as a whole, aims to give a 'pure vision' of the epistolographer's network. These elements are grouped together into seven main conclusions and undoubtedly point to the fact that Symmachus acted as a (successful) power broker in Late Antique society.²⁹⁰ It has to be pointed out that the conclusions cannot be seen as exclusively valid for the discussed letters, but one or more of these deductions might also apply to the other recommendation letters.

(i) First of all, the very fact that this article discusses 19 sets of letters proves that it was absolutely not unusual for Symmachus to write more than one letter for the same case. This is an important feature for which several, often overlapping, explanations can be forwarded. This 'multiple writing' refers to a situation in which competences and powers of the different office holders were not clearly defined.²⁹¹ The result was that a letter writer, in order to be

290) Salzman / Roberts 2012, XIII: "Symmachus' family, wealth, and connections, along with his political and rhetorical skills made him one of the most influential men in the fourth-century western empire."

291) Jones 1964, II 602: "The service was riven by departmental jealousies, mainly concerned with their jurisdictional privileges and with the allocation of works. We can find traces in the Codes and Novels of the struggles between different offices."

‘on the safe side’, might be inclined to address his recommendation to more than one person. In relation to this, it has to be remembered that, in Late Antiquity, ‘imperial positions’ grew more important at the expense of provincial posts. In some cases, it might also indicate that Symmachus’ influence over a given single addressee was not sufficient, and that the letter writer was also aware of this. On the other hand, writing more than one letter for the same case could highlight Symmachus’ commitment to this recommendee.

(ii) Secondly, this comparison gives us interesting indications about the nature of the recommendation letters. Symmachus frequently addressed introduction letters which carry no specific request or in which the epistolographer requested the addressee to admit the recommendee into his patronage (Epp. 1.73; 1.104; 2.85; 3.72; 3.89; 4.2; 4.38; 4.73; 5.53; 7.45; 7.114 and 9.41). Such letters contain no element of support or aid. These introductions do not give us more information about why the patronage is requested. Yet, the six letters written in favour of Nicomachus Flavianus (Epp. 4.39; 5.6; 7.47; 7.95; 7.102 and 9.47) might constitute an important exception to this. I suggest that these letters were meant to neutralise any individual resistance by members of the *consistorium* against the measure of the full rehabilitation of Nicomachus Flavianus. Moreover, when seen in relation to the six aforementioned letters, Ep. 4.6 can be considered a veiled recommendation letter.

Besides the introductions, Symmachus wrote several interventions in which he specifically went beyond a mere introduction of his recommendee by actively pleading in their favour (Epp. 3.34; 5.48; 7.46; 7.54; 7.56; 7.94; 7.103; 7.113; 9.1; 9.103; 9.105 and 9.122). The aim of such an intervention is to settle a case, to request aid for the recommendee who was facing problems, or more generally to lend support. A specific category is an indirect intervention in which the distance between a recommendee and the person to whom a request is eventually addressed is such that it could not be ‘bridged’ by one recommendation letter. The letter writer who intervened on behalf of his recommendee was himself unable to approach the person who might provide the aid and, consequently, turned to a third person. On the one hand, Symmachus himself addressed an indirect intervention (Epp. 4.19; 4.51; 4.67; 5.41; 5.54; 5.66 and 9.31),²⁹² asking his addressee for an intervention with a

292) Ep. 4.53 can be regarded as a veiled indirect intervention.

high-ranking official or the emperor. He expects the addressee to be able to wield the necessary influence.²⁹³ Such an intervention was needed when Symmachus had not yet begun a letter exchange with the 'final addressee'. It is the bond between Symmachus and the recipient of the letter that determines the nature of the relationship between the epistolographer and the 'final addressee'.²⁹⁴ On the other hand, when he was the recipient of such an intervention, the epistolographer himself wrote the recommendation to an addressee whom the initial requester could not / did not want to reach (Epp. 2.80; 9.51 and 9.56).

(iii) Thirdly, friendship (*amicitia*) is a broad feature that appears in different forms in several letters. The aim of this friendship is to underpin the letter writer's recommendation. In several letters, Symmachus underlines his long-standing friendship with the recommendee (Epp. 1.73; 1.104 and 4.53), or that of his recommendee with the addressee (Epp. 3.34; 3.73; 7.47; 7.95 and 7.102). *Amicitia* can also be seen as a source of reciprocal favours (Epp. 4.39 and 4.53). Such favours undoubtedly point to strong ties between the different parties of a recommendation (Epp. 3.72 and 4.73). Such a friendship can also be seen in relation to the high expectations that others hold of Symmachus (Ep. 9.51). Furthermore, related to friendship is 'triangulation' or the integration of the three parties. This is the expression of strong and reciprocal ties between the different parties in the recommendation letters (Epp. 3.89; 4.2; 4.39; 5.53; 7.103 and 9.41). Accordingly, these strong ties cannot be seen in isolation from engagement on the part of Symmachus. Letters such as Epp. 7.46; 7.94; 7.103 and 7.109 demonstrate a high degree of commitment, and therefore suggest that the epistolographer saw their cases as important. However, when Ep. 9.51 is contrasted with Ep. 9.56, it appears that Symmachus' full involvement in the recommendation process, such as it appears in Ep. 9.51, is far less apparent in Ep. 9.56. Finally, the six letters written in 398 in favour of Nicomachus Flavianus are salient examples of how Symmachus skilfully used *amicitia* in its different aspects to promote his son-in-law's case.

(iv) Moreover, within each set of letters, the letters are similar to a great extent and do not differ very much from one another

293) For example, Epp. 5.41 and 9.31.

294) Epp. 5.54 and 66.

with regard to length, structure, stylistic level or line of argument. Some letters, such as Epp. 1.73 and 1.104; 3.72 and 4.73; 4.38 and 7.45; 4.19 and 4.51; 5.48 and 7.56; 7.108 and 109; 9.103 and 9.105, clearly follow the same ideas. It would seem that, for each of the situations, Symmachus had some blueprint or structure in his mind that, in general terms, he wanted to follow.²⁹⁵ He did not go so far as to (significantly) adapt his message when writing another recommendation for the same recommendee. Epp. 3.73 and 4.67 might, however, be an exception to this. Yet, the variation can be seen on a higher level. Differences are more obvious when the different letter sets are compared to one another. The short introductions (for example, Epp. 2.80; 3.72; 4.73 and 9.41) do not have much in common with the larger interventions, in which the epistolographer describes – in a great amount of detail – the difficult situation of his recommendee and requests the addressee's aid (for example, Epp. 3.34; 4.19; 4.51; 7.46; 7.103 and 9.122).

(v) Fifthly, some epistolary themes specifically dealing with a recommendation (or the absence of it) appear in the discussed letters. In Ep. 4.53 Symmachus emphasises the fact that the recommendation will be successful. When stating this, the epistolographer is convinced that he will be able to exert direct influence upon the addressee, whom he considers of lower status than himself. Similarly, in other letters Symmachus points to the value and the merits of a recommendation, hinting to the influence it will have with the addressee. By doing so, he intends to give his intervention more weight (Epp. 1.73; 5.48; 7.46 and 7.95).²⁹⁶ The epistolary theme that a formal recommendation is no longer needed, appears in a context in which friendship and the ties between recommendee and addressee are put forward (Epp. 3.73; 3.89; 5.6; 5.53; 7.47 and 7.102).²⁹⁷ At face value, this would suggest that the recommendee already belongs to the friends of the addressee. Yet, the letter cor-

295) Recommendation letters for the same recommendee written by other epistolographers are often more varied. The letter writers frequently adapted their message to different circumstances. Examples are Bas. Epp. 32 and 33; 86 and 87; 147, 148 and 149; Greg. Naz. Epp. 14 and 15; 126 and 127; 147 and 148; Syn. Epp. 118 and 119, in comparison to 131.

296) This theme is found throughout the entire correspondence. Examples are Epp. 1.107; 2.72; 5.84; 7.112; 9.36; 9.49; 9.64 and 9.99.

297) This theme is also found in other letters than those discussed in this article. Examples are Epp. 1.93; 2.9 and 2.15.

pus does not provide any evidence of this particular recommendee already belonging to the recipient's network.²⁹⁸ Therefore, these passages have to be read in a more rhetorical way. By stressing the addressee's affection and friendship with the recommendee, Symmachus urges the recipient to have special attention for the case. Accordingly, when the letter writer expounds that 'the (many) qualities of the recommendee do not require a recommendation' (Ep. 4.2),²⁹⁹ he rhetorically emphasises that no need for recommendation constitutes in itself the best recommendation.

(vi) Sixthly, this comparison reveals some minor features that appear in only a few letters. The praise of the addressee in an indirect intervention (Epp. 4.67 and 9.1) is a way of skilfully voicing the expectation that eventually the request will be granted, as, otherwise, it would mean a loss of honour for the recipient. Accordingly, these eulogistic words are meant to exert some pressure on the addressee. Moreover, when Symmachus describes the recommendee's problems at length (Epp. 5.41 and 9.31), it can point to the fact that the letter writer intends to underline the seriousness of the case, and hence of the intervention that is requested.

(vii) Finally, with regard to the extension of Symmachus' network, it appears that in most cases Symmachus approached influential men from the western part of the empire. The majority of the addressees have a function at Court (*notarius*, *Comes sacrarum largitionum*, *Comes rerum privatarum*, *Magister officiorum* ...) or hold a high office in the territorial administration (*Vicarius*, *Praefectus Praetorio*). Through such connections, Symmachus could win favours for his protégés.

Finally, it is also important to widen the view and to sketch the selected letters against the wider recommendation process. The activity of recommending cannot be seen exclusively through the lens of a recommendation letter. The process contains several moments and each plays a role in the recommendation activity. A first important stage is when the letter writer proposes recommending his protégé to a third person. Secondly, a recommendation can allude to previous steps in favour of the recommendee. Thirdly, the epis-

298) No other letter written to the same addressee in favour of the same addressee has been preserved (except for Ep. 7.104 for Nicomachus Flavianus).

299) Other instances of this epistolary theme found elsewhere are Epp. 1.25; 1.28; 1.75; 1.90.1; 2.2; 2.15; 2.29; 2.67; 3.48; 3.77; 5.31; 5.80; 6.27; 6.31 and 7.51.

tolographer, by alluding to the future, might hint at a positive result for a request. Another stage in the process is when the addressee of the request explains how he will proceed with the request that he has received. Fifthly, another important moment occurs after the recommendation was granted. The status and the honour of the letter writer are increased by a successful recommendation letter. Accordingly, it might raise his power of persuasion, so that it would be more difficult for the addressee to refuse the request. A sixth and final stage is when the letter writer thanks his addressee for the aid that he provided. When expressing thanks for a recommendation, Symmachus also aims to achieve something in addition. The multiple references to the different moments in the recommendation process clearly suggest that Symmachus aspired to stress his own role in this process and, accordingly, in an attempt at self-promotion, to represent himself as a successful power broker.

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