

RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THREE BRIDGES  
IN THE 4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ROME. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE\*

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**Keywords:** pons Valentinianus, pons Gratianus, pons Theodosius, topography, utilitarian architecture, Late Antiquity.

**Abstract.** *This study aims to present an historical perspective on utilitarian architecture in late antique Rome and focuses in particular on the reconstructions of three bridges in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Rome, namely the pons Aurelius/Valentinianus, pons Cestius/Gratianus, and pons Probi/Theodosius pons. I examine the narrative and epigraphic sources to assess the social aspects and communicative potential of bridges. The study considers the literary allusions to the three ancient bridges in order to achieve an historical evaluation of the bridges as social objects and as a suitable medium for messages of power in the period of Late antiquity.*

**Rezumat.** *Acest studiu urmărește prezentarea unei perspective istorice asupra arhitecturii utilitare în Roma din Antichitatea târzie, analiza fiind concentrată pe reconstrucția a trei poduri din capitala Imperiului în secolul al IV-lea, și anume pons Aurelius/Valentinianus, pons Cestius/Gratianus și pons Probi/Theodosius pons. Voi examina izvoarele literare și epigrafice pentru a evalua aspectele sociale și potențialul de comunicare al podurilor. În cadrul acestei evaluări istorice, mențiunile literare privind cele trei poduri sunt considerate în prezentul studiu obiecte sociale și un mediu al mesajelor puterii în Antichitatea târzie.*

Ancient bridges in imperial Rome were well visible and elaborate objects on which and in whose close proximity every-day and lively social life took place. I suggest that it is possible to identify their political significance and communicative aspects within the whole history of the

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ancient Roman state<sup>2</sup>. The bridges served as practical and strategic continuations of major trade roads and joined densely inhabited river banks, at least from the period of the late Republic when the *Pagus Ianiculensis* on the right bank of the Tiber was attractive enough as a residential district<sup>3</sup>. The Tiber river was one of the most important commercial arteries linking the capital of a large empire with Ostia, so a lot of pleasure boats and commercial ships passengers could see monumental bridges and their inscriptions from the river perspective<sup>4</sup>. Material and historical resources prove that the number, quality and appearance of the bridges reflected crucial changes in politics and the economy, and at the same time were active subjects as a medium of political self-presentation performed by the emperor and the senatorial aristocracy.

The city of 4<sup>th</sup> century Rome is very suitable place, if somebody wants to make a historical picture of bridges<sup>5</sup>. During the reigns of the

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<sup>2</sup> From the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century up to now some articles have been published which focus on historical context of ancient bridges in Rome, but no one has comprehensively treated their communicative, nor social aspect. See: MAYERHÖFER 1883; CLARK 1908, 144–147; KLEINER 1991, 182–192; GRIFFITH 2009, 296–321. However, none of these works have systematically considered the issue of bridges as social objects and suitable media for self-presentation of the imperial executives, or senatorial aristocracy. For the general communicative aspects of the public urban space see: WHYTE 2006, 153–177.

<sup>3</sup> The first bridge in Rome was wooden Pons Sublicius, according to Livy (1.33.6) built by Ancus Marcius, in late 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC. See: GRIFFITH 2009: 301–310.

<sup>4</sup> There are literary indications that in the imperial period Tiber was full of commercial or specialist ships with plenty of passengers and harbour workers. E.g. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.18.3) mentions two hundreds of ships destroyed by fire in the very harbour and one hundred more, which had sailed up the Tiber. Pleasure boats: Ov. *Fast.* 6.773–84; Juv. 9.130–2; Suet. *Ner.* 27.3. The principal work on Tiber in antiquity remains LE GALL 1953. The river as presented in ancient law, literature, religion, and art is also considered in the latest publication: CAMPBELL 2012.

<sup>5</sup> In no other ancient city were there so many bridges. Late antique and medieval lists (*Curiosum*, *Notitia*, *Polemii Silvii*, *Mirabilia*, *Graphia aurea urbis*) mention between eight and ten ancient bridges in Rome, with various names, according to their original builder, reconstructions and appearance in late antiquity and medieval times. In the geographical order, from north to south: pons Mulvius, Aelius/Hadriani, Neronianus/Triumphalis, Agrippae, Aurelius/Antoninus, Fabricius/Iudaeorum,

emperors Valens, Valentinian, Gratian and Theodosius were invested considerable resources to the constructions and reconstructions of the river crossings in eternal city. Although Rome was not the residential place of the emperors, they signed their names to the costly repairs of three bridges in the city — pons Aurelius/Valentinianus (271–275, rebuilt in 365–367), pons Cestius/Gratianus (62 to 27 BC, rebuilt in 369), and pons Probi/Theodosius pons (276 to 282, restored in 384–7)<sup>6</sup>. For the next two centuries nothing is known on repairs of the stone bridges elsewhere in the Roman world<sup>7</sup>. From the perspective of historical assessment, all three bridges are the best utilitarian objects, recognizable correspondingly by literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence.

#### **Pons Cestius/Gratianus.**

No other bridge at late antique Rome is better glorified in a literary context than Pons Gratianus, the modern Ponte S. Bartolomeo. The bridge that connects the Tiber island with the Transtiberim, was probably built by *curator viarum* (between 62 and 27 BC) C. Cestius Epulo, who is recognized also as the builder of his own pyramid tomb outside the Porta S. Paolo and moreover as the friend of the influential M. Vipsanius

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Cestius/Gratiani, Aemilius/S. Mariae, Sublicius, Probi/Theodosii. Today it is possible to see ancient remains in six bridges — Mulvius, Aelius, Fabricius, Cestius, Aemilius, and Neronianus. The amount, quality and character of the literary references to the particular bridges in Rome are very divergent.

<sup>6</sup> In the specific historical circumstances of the later Roman Empire, relatively large resources were invested to the reconstructions of the bridges. In the provinces, immense bridges were built on the main strategic rivers, the Rhine and Danube. Constantine I. built a large bridge over the Rhine, in Colonia (Pan. Lat. 7.11; 13–14), and the famous bridge in Sucidava (today Celei in Romania), probably the longest ancient Roman bridge ever, at 2437m. Constans and Constantius II reconstructed the bridge-viaduct over the river Aniene in Tivoli (CIL XIV 35837). Constantius got involved with the bridge over the river Sava in Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica). In the 6<sup>th</sup> century two exceptional bridges were known, one in Gallia – the bridge of boats at Arles (Auson. Ordo nob. urb. 16.10.4–8), and the second in Anatolia – Justinian’s bridge over the river Sangarius (Procop. *Aed.* 5.3.8–11). See GALLIAZO 1994, 1: 78–81.

<sup>7</sup> In the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century the governor of Italy, Narses, rebuilt the Pons Salaris. The inscription says about the bridge, that it was destroyed down to water-level by the most infamous tyrant Totila CIL VI 1199 = ILS 832.

Agrippa. Nothing certain is known about its maintenance and repairs until the emperor Antoninus Pius reconstructed it in 152 AD<sup>8</sup>. The whole following century after the event we have no other information about this bridge. In 369, it was completely redesigned by the emperors Valentinian I, Valens and Gratian and dedicated in 370 as the public construction entitled *pons Gratiani*<sup>9</sup>.

What is crucial for the historical evaluation is that *pons Gratiani* is the only bridge in Rome, which was praised in a literary context. The praise occurs in Q. Aurelius Symmachus' (345–402) panegyrics to the emperor Gratian, delivered supposedly at Trier in 369. Symmachus came to the court of Valentinian in Trier as the official representative of the Roman Senate, to express (in person) the loyalty and devotion of the senatorial aristocracy to the Emperor<sup>10</sup>. He did it in two ways. Immediately after his arrival, on the 25<sup>th</sup> February, he delivered two panegyrics, the first in honor of Valentinian (*Oratio 1*), the second devoted to the young Valentinian's son Gratian, who had just been appointed *Augustus* (*Oratio 3*). The third speech (*Oratio 2*) was recited 10 months later, in January 370, to commemorate Valentinian's third consulship. Moreover, he offered the emperor a specific gift, *aurum oblativum*, a voluntary tax on the occasion of the emperor's *quinquennalia*<sup>11</sup>.

In the panegyric on Gratian, Symmachus contrasts two rivers – the Rhine and the Tiber, and as part of this, interpreted the bridges, which crossed them<sup>12</sup>. The Rhine was pictured as a defeated prisoner, which was

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<sup>8</sup> InscrIt 13.1, 207, 238.

<sup>9</sup> In its reconstruction, the *spolia* were used, among them the travertine blocks from the Theatre of Marcellus. The bridge was 48 m long and 5.8 m wide. In 1885/9 the bridge was taken down. In 1892, a new bridge was built, the centre arch of which was rebuilt to its original measurements.

<sup>10</sup> For the chronology of the orations, see: PABST 1989, 152–54.

<sup>11</sup> On the relationship between Roman aristocrat and absent emperor Valentinian, see: HUMPHRIES 2003, 27–46. For a discussion of the orations delivered in Trier, see: SOGNO 2006, 8–21.

<sup>12</sup> Symm. *Oratio 3.9*. *Laudatio in Gratianum Augustum: En noster bicornis, caue aequalem te arbitrere Tiberino, quod ambo principium monumenta gestatis: ille redimitus est, tu subactus. Non uno merito pons uterque censetur: victus accepit necessarium, victor aeternum; pretiosior honori datus est, uilior servituti.* Symmachus 2009: 26 – 27. “Look here, you two-pronged river now

pressed in handcuffs of the bridges: *ille libera hucusque cervical repagulis pontium captivus urgetur*<sup>13</sup>. The Tiber is, however, a great winner crowned by the monuments of Roman emperors, to whom the Rhine is not equal: *en noster bicornis (Rhenus) te cave aequalem arbitrere Tiberina, quod ambo Principum Monumenta gestatis: redimitus ille est, tu subactus*. The most remarkable moment comes in the following sentence, where the author compares a bridge across the Tiber with a bridge across the Rhine<sup>14</sup>. In Symmachus' opinion it is not just to juxtapose bridges on two unrivalled rivers. While the bridge of the Rhine was in this section associated with attributes such as *necessarium, vilior*, the one that crossed the Tiber, (pons Cestius) was celebrated by the adjectives *aeternum, pretiosior*: *Victus accepit necessarium, victor aeternum; pretiosior honori datus est, vilior servituti*. These were apparently courageous words, since Symmachus expressed the indirect opinion that Rome and its monuments were more praiseworthy than extra-Roman buildings. In the context that Symmachus came to express loyalty to the Rome-absent emperor, it seems to be anachronistic. In fact, the bridge did play here a major figurative role; it served as a medium to memorialize the prominence and glory of the eternal city. The prominent Roman senator exercised the symbolic power of bridges not only in Rome, but also on the Rhine to remind the executives in Trier that the city of Rome remains a persuasive icon of political and military power, although the real political map appeared to be unlike that.

At the time when Symmachus was staying at Valentinian's court in Trier, the reconstruction works on the bridge in Rome were finished<sup>15</sup>. After completing the bridge, the Senate dedicated it to Gratian, at the

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ours — be careful not to think yourself the equal of the Tiber, just because you both carry structures built by our emperors: that river has been crowned, you have been conquered. The two rivers are not celebrated for the same quality. The conquered river has received a necessary bridge, the conquering an eternal one; the finer bridge was bestowed as an honor, the cheaper one as a mark of slavery."

<sup>13</sup> Symm. *Oratio* 3.9.

<sup>14</sup> While the bridge in Rome is recognized as the Pons Cestius/Gratianus, the bridge on Rhine is not exactly identified. It is likely that it was a pontoon bridge. Symm. *Oratio* 2. 26.

<sup>15</sup> The second bridge in Rome to be repaired in a short space of time — between 365 and 367 Valentinian's bridge was reconstructed, see below.

time, the eleven year old *augustus*. This project, which took place in a very short period of one year, has been immortalized by two inscriptions on marble tablets fixed in the parapet of the monument itself<sup>16</sup>. The inscriptions are still discernible at the present day, survived *in situ* (CIL VI 1175–76, 31250–51).

*Domini nostri imperatores Caesares / Fl(avius) Valentinianus pius felix maximus victor ac triumph(ator) semper Aug(ustus) pontif(ex) maximus / Germanic(us) max(imus) Alamann(icus) max(imus) Franc(icus) max(imus) Gothic(us) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estas) VII imp(erator) VI cons(ul) II p(ater) p(atriciae) p(roconsul) et / Fl(avius) Valens pius felix maximus victor ac triumph(ator) semper Aug(ustus) pontif(ex) maximus / Germanic(us) max(imus) Alamann(icus) max(imus) Franc(icus) max(imus) Gothic(us) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estas) VII imp(erator) VI cons(ul) II p(ater) p(atriciae) p(roconsul) et / Fl(avius) Gratianus pius felix maximus victor ac triumph(ator) semper Aug(ustus) pontif(ex) maximus / Germanic(us) max(imus) Alamann(icus) max(imus) Franc(icus) max(imus) Gothic(us) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estas) III imp(erator) II cons(ul) primum p(ater) p(atriciae) p(roconsul) / pontem felicis nominis Gratiani in usum senatus ac populi Rom(ani) constitui dedicarique iusserunt<sup>17</sup>.*

From the historical point of view, this inscription is interesting for several reasons<sup>18</sup>. The first is that it allows us, using the titles of the emperors, accurately date the dedication of the bridge to the end of 369 or the beginning of the 370. Second, the contents of the inscription can be put into context with Symmachus' panegyrics, which he delivered at that time in Trier. Just as Symmachus in his panegyrics praised the victories of Roman emperors over the Germans on the Rhine, so this bridge inscription points up the Roman triumphs on the Rhine and Danube frontier. The most interesting connotations are, however, in regard to the

<sup>16</sup> CIL VI 1175, 1176 = ILS 771, 772.

<sup>17</sup> CIL VI 1175 = 31250 = ILS 771. On the interior of the north parapet. Translation of last two lines: *ordered the bridge consecrated to the eternity of the august name of Gratian, triumphant emperor, to be begun, completed, and dedicated for the use of the Senate and People of Rome.*

<sup>18</sup> It is the last public monumental inscription in Rome, on which appeared the pagan priest titlature *pontifex maximus* by the emperor's name.

person of the Emperor Gratian. The inscription by its contents corresponds to Symmachus' orations, in which he glorified the bridge over the Tiber. There is an implicit common message both in the bridge inscriptions and the panegyrics sent by Symmachus and Roman senate towards the imperial power. That is, in my opinion, the expression of senatorial approval with unexpected appointment of young Gratian straight to *Augustus*<sup>19</sup>. This unforeseen action had been criticized by Ammianus Marcellinus, who referred that Valentinian violated old habits, when he generously named his brother and son not for *caesars* at first, but directly for *augusti*<sup>20</sup>.

In contrast to the retired military officer writing Roman history, this was evidently not the attitude of the ambitious and active fourth-century Roman aristocrats fully engaged in power struggles. Pons Cestius/Gratiani at the time of its reconstruction was the epitome of the obedience of the Roman senators to the wilfulness of distant emperors. At the same time it was a personification of the specific dialogue between remote emperor, generously investing to the buildings of the city of Rome, and the conservative aristocrats grateful for these investments and willing to see their princeps in the eternal city<sup>21</sup>. The communicative aspect of the bridge could not be better articulated than in this case.

### **Pons Theodosii/Probi**

The next Roman bridge, from which literary testimony survives from the period of late antiquity, is the Pons Probi<sup>22</sup>. This bridge construction cannot be dated nor identified precisely, because neither material trace,

<sup>19</sup> Gratian has got the same titulature as Valentinian and Valens in the inscription.

<sup>20</sup> Amm. Marc. 27.6.16. *In hoc tamen negotio Valentinianus morem institutum antiquitus supergressus non Caesares sed Augustos germanum nuncupavit et filium benivole satis.*

<sup>21</sup> HUMPHRIES 2003, 13.

<sup>22</sup> The name Pons Probi is identified in Constantinian Regionary Catalogue, which says nothing about its location. Medieval sources like *Mirabilia* and *Graphia aureae urbis*, which catalogue the Roman bridges in geographical order from north to south, name the last Roman bridge at Aventine as Pons Marmoreus Theodosii or Pons Theodosii in Riparanea. The bridge was demolished in 11th cent. and razed to its foundations in 1484 by Sixtus IV. NASH 1962, 196.

nor inscription has been preserved<sup>23</sup>. It is likely that the bridge was completely built by Probus (276–282), south of Porta Trigemina, not far from the middle of Aventine Hill<sup>24</sup>. It was fully rebuilt in 381–387 when the emperor Theodosius was in power.

The literary evidence is preserved by the same author, who has celebrated the Pons Cestius. Fourteen years after his embassy in Trier, Symmachus became prefect of the city of Rome, for the period of 384–385. In this office he was responsible, *inter alia*, for the construction of new public buildings and repairing old ones<sup>25</sup>. Although the urban prefect was highest executive official in Rome directly subordinated to the emperor, he did not possess a sufficient amount of his own resources for costly building projects, and had to rely on loans from the senatorial treasury (*arca quaestoria*), or from bankers, or in the case of bridges and sewers, from aqueduct funds. The deficiency of the urban prefect's resources often caused technical and economic problems in major construction projects<sup>26</sup>. One such problematic project was the construction, or rather restoration of the Pons Theodosii, which was officially sponsored by the emperor, but was in reality realized with the support of urban resources. In two *relationes* (*Relat.* 25 and 26, June 384), and two letters (*Ep.* 4.70 and 5.76, 387) there is some chronological data, some information on technological procedures, and control mechanisms, and also details of the interpersonal relationships of the main architects responsible for construction of a bridge in late antique Rome. The main unanswered question is whether the Senate or emperor initiated the restoration.

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<sup>23</sup> The last remnants of its piers indicating that the arches and piers were faced with travertine, were raised from river bed in 1878. JORDAN 1878, 421–22; NASH 1962 vol.2., 196–197; RICHARDSON 1992, 299; COARELLI 1999d, 111–112.

<sup>24</sup> TAYLOR (2002, 14–16) suggests that the bridge was erected to meet the need of effective distribution of flour required by the bakeries in the Transtiberim region. He also advocates that emperor Probus despoiled the pons Neronianus for his new bridge.

<sup>25</sup> Among other responsibilities he was in charge of the security of the river banks. In the major projects, such as reconstructions or constructions of bridges, was involved the emperor himself, who made money available in a designated city-fund. See: ECK 1983, 49–102.

<sup>26</sup> Symm. *Relat.* 34 (Orfitus affair). See: CHASTAGNOL 1950, 166–183.



In the summer of 384, Symmachus as urban prefect wrote to emperor Valentinian II about the problems in the construction of the basilica and the bridge (*super basilicae atque pontis*)<sup>27</sup>. In fact, the main theme was the bridge and two senators and architects (*comes et mechanicus*), Cyriades and Auxentius, who were project managers for the construction of the bridge<sup>28</sup>. They accused each other of negligence and errors leading to the collapse of the bridge before completion in winter of 382<sup>29</sup>. Following this, the works were stopped and the emperor initiated an investigation, which he delegated to Auchenius Bassus<sup>30</sup>, later prefect of the Rome (382–83). The situation became very complicated because of a growing animosity between the architects, so the emperor then assigned the inquiry to Sallustius, who was prefect in 387<sup>31</sup>. Subsequently Auxentius disappeared and afterwards was succeeded by another architect Aphrodisius<sup>32</sup>.

The details of the building of the bridge appear gradually in Symmachus' report. Firstly in connection with the basilica, when Symmachus records that Auxentius personally accused Cyriades about the excessive cost of the basilica and the bridge (*super basilicae atque pontis inmodico sumptu*)<sup>33</sup>. It is a rare express reference in Latin literature about large investments for the construction of the bridge. Further he writes about "experts of construction", who had to appraise the work, for which Cyriades and Auxentius were responsible (*decrevi fabriliis artis magistros ... aestimationi operis admovendos*). Taylor deduces from these words, that Symmachus completely relied on the experts and he did not convince himself on the real state of the bridge in situ<sup>34</sup>, since at this moment he did

<sup>27</sup> This basilica is not San Lorenzo fuori le mura as it was supposed to be: MARTINEZ-FAZI 1972: 209–215.

<sup>28</sup> On the architects: JONES et al. 1971: voce Cyriades, 237, voce Auxentius 5, 142.

<sup>29</sup> Symm. *Relat.* 26. 4.5. On the affair see: Vera 1978: 45–94.

<sup>30</sup> JONES et al. 1971: voce Anicius Auchenius Bassus 11: 152.

<sup>31</sup> JONES et al. 1971: voce Sallustius 4: 797.

<sup>32</sup> JONES et al. 1971: voce Aphrodisius: 81.

<sup>33</sup> Symm. *Relat.* 25.2. With translation and introduction see: BARROW 1973.

<sup>34</sup> TAYLOR 2000, 221.

not report about the collapse of the construction<sup>35</sup>. The following passage is worth to be quoted in full:

*“It was established that a length of the bridge, short and standing by itself, had been begun at the beginning of the winter and had collapsed under the impact of the river. Craftsmen estimated the cost of repair at twenty gold coins, at the outside. But the collapse of this part, which was as yet separated from the rest of the structure, did not seem to have damaged in any way the more distant sites. Cyriades, of the distinguished order of senators, assured us that it would not be a difficult building operation to repair it. A second site was examined, and a block of stonework was discovered with gaps in it. Cyriades, comes and civil engineer, giving us the advice of his specialist knowledge, told us that the stones had been set in this way so the material could be run in later and the parts separated by gaps would thus be bound together. His successor in the work ought to have taken great care to do this, but he was said, instead of doing it, to have contrived that open places should be filled with bales of hay and esparto so as to bring the originator of the works into discredit. He supported this by quoting from the record of work done and skilled diver did not deny that was what had been done, but he said that it was in accordance with normal building practice, and not with a view to dishonoring Cyriades, of the distinguished order of senators, that this kind of measure had been adopted.”*<sup>36</sup>

It is the longest passage about the processes of construction of the bridge, which has been preserved from the pen of late antique author, although it is in fact only necessary information explaining to emperor the cause of the antagonism of two influential architects. It also demonstrates

<sup>35</sup> He wrote (*Relat.* 26.4) it in the following year (385).

<sup>36</sup> Symm. *Relat.* 26.5. Transl. Barrow. “*Atque ita constitit, partem brevem atque discretam sub exordio hiemis inchoatam vi fluminis corruisse, cuius inpendium viginti solidorum definitione artifices aestimarunt. Sed casus partis istius utpote adhuc a cetero corpore segregatae nihil videtur iniuriae locis distantibus adtulisse; ipsam facili aedificatione reparandam Cyriades v. c. pollicetur. Post haec alterius loci exploratio hiulcam conpagem lapidum deprehendit, quam Cyriades comes et mechanicus consilio suo et ratione artis ita positam sugerebat, ut infuso postea inpensarum liquore hiantia stringeretur. Quod cum facere debuisset succedentis industria, adfectasse potius dicitur, ut in auctoris invidiam patula quaeque faeni et sparti manipulis clauderentur. Quod cum adstrueret recitatione gestorum, factum quidem urinandi artifex non negavit, sed ex usu operis, non in dehonestandum Cyriadis c. v. adserebat remedium huiusmodi esse provisum.*”

the cautious approach of the author to technical matters of construction, which he did not understand well and fully relied on statements of architects and even *urinandi artifex*<sup>37</sup>.

The important point in evaluating the passage is not to underestimate the communicative or representative meaning of public works in the construction of the bridge. Although very little is known about specific investments — except unclear information about twenty gold coins of repair, the very nature of the edifice required a considerable number of workers, whether in engineering or logistic works, which inevitably would have been noticed by the general Roman public<sup>38</sup>.

Symmachus apparently responded to the intrigues of the Roman magistrature, perhaps also to the public defamation of the chief architects, of which the inhabitants of the city, or at least the senators and their families knew, that they were responsible for the effectual erection of the bridge. The unexpected and nervous reactions of both architects testified about the seriousness of the situation — Auxentius surprisingly disappeared in 382, immediately after the initiation of the investigation: *after a long search he could not be apprehended anywhere; when he was ordered to present himself to your Divinities' comitatus he fled*<sup>39</sup>, and Cyriades became very anxious lest his opponent should intrigue behind his back<sup>40</sup>. The emperor responded in this matter very quickly, but not emphatically enough, which can be interpreted in many ways. It may demonstrate the importance and extraordinary difficulty of the cause, or simply the inability of central power to solve the problem effectively<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> The third-century inscriptions from Rome testify about an alliance of divers: *corpus et urinatorum totius alvei Tiberis*. CIL VI 1080, 1872, 29700, 29702. For philological and historical discussion on ancient divers, see OLESON 1976, 22–29.

<sup>38</sup> For involving skilled labour, free builders, and slaves in bridge construction, see O'CONNOR 1993, 42–43.

<sup>39</sup> Symm. *Relat.* 25.3. Transl. Barrow.

<sup>40</sup> Symm. *Relat.* 25.3.

<sup>41</sup> Symm. *Relat.* 26.3.

The bridge was not completed in the next five years<sup>42</sup>. It is known from the letter of 387, in which Symmachus complained to Eusignius, who at that time held the position of *comes sacrarum largitionum*, that affairs are complicating even the emperor's good decision to entrust the matter to the trustworthy Bonosus. Symmachus expressed his concern: *sed vereor ne ludificationibus res iniuncta frigescat obluctante eo (=Cyriade) quem socium discussionis accepit, atque ideo clam te esse non patior eo rem deduci, ut labes magna sumptum publicorum studio occulatur. (Ep. 4.70).*

The communicative aspect of the bridge is rather vague here, since it is not known who initiated the reconstruction of the bridge and for what reasons<sup>43</sup>. The reconstruction of the bridge was a problematic building project from the very beginning, which triggered a lot of emotions in aristocratic circles, and probably also in the general public. Technical problems, lack of funds and perhaps also a lack of interest of the imperial executives caused, that its completion was variously delayed over the course of eight years. For a fuller assessment of the historical feature of this bridge there is a need for other literary sources, whether narrative or epigraphic.

### **Pons Aurelius/Valentiniani**

No other bridge in Rome than pons Aurelii/Valentiniani was a better symbol of ability of the Roman aristocracy to find a suitable way to present their own building merits while not offending the majesty and honour belonging only to the emperor<sup>44</sup>. This bridge was called by various

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<sup>42</sup> Christina Sogno argues that "Once again, in the exercise of his judicial power, the urban prefect was unable to find a solution to a judicial case that he had inherited from his predecessors and was forced to forward the case to the attention of the emperor". SOGNO 2006, 39.

<sup>43</sup> It is possible that the bridge was destroyed by a flood in 374, to which Ammianus (29.6.17) refers.

<sup>44</sup> There are some questions on its identity, and origins. Medieval sources are confusing - Pons Aurelius, represented by modern Ponte Sisto, was sometimes identified with Pons Antoninus, or Antonini in Arenula, and consequently with Pons Agrippae. The foundations of this bridge (pons Aurelius/Valentiniani) has been ascribed to emperor Caracalla by Richardson, and to M. Aurelius Probus by Taylor who asserts that the bridge

names according to its historical modifications throughout antiquity and the Middle ages, mostly as Aurelius, but also as Valentinianus, Antoninus, Antonini in Arenula, Ianicularis, Tremulus, and after its rupture in 791–2 Ruptus or Fractus<sup>45</sup>. It was probably first built in the period of high empire (possibly from Caracalla to Probus), just 140–160 m south of the former Pons Agrippae<sup>46</sup>, and enabled pedestrians and travellers on the via Aurelia to carry on their trip by the ends of Aurelian wall, from Transtiberim to the populated spaces of the Campus Martius. Only modest physical remains of the ancient bridge survived until present<sup>47</sup>, but what is key moment from the point of historical evaluation, is the existence of archaeological findings from 1878, when arrangements for the new canalization in the Tiber riverbed revealed the vestiges of the bridgehead arch with inscribed letters, which were positioned in

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was made from the spoils of Pons Agrippae. DEY (2011, 314) suggests that Pons Agrippae was simply “demolished and replaced by a new bridge ex novo 140 m downstream, at the point where the walls on both sides of the river were made to end”. The Aurelian bridge was destroyed in 791–792 and its foundations were afterwards used again by Sisto IV, who gave it a new name — the Ponte Sisto. The relics of the piers of the original Pons Aurelius were visible in 1878, when the left bank of the Tiber was drained. See: RICHARDSON 1992, 297; COARELLI 1999b, 107–108. For further discussion on topographical identification see: TAYLOR 2000, 157–161, and DEY 2011, 310–314.

<sup>45</sup> The name Pons Aurelius occurs solely in in lists of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> cent. — Notitia (Appendix), and Polemius Silvius 545. Medieval literary evidence refers to *Pons Antonini in arenula*, *pons Ianicularis id est pons ruptus vulgariter nominatus et tremulus et Antoninus* (Anon. Magl. 158, Urlichs). The name pons Valentiniani appears only in *Mirabilia (Mirabilia urbis Romae, 9.11)*.

<sup>46</sup> The existence of this bridge with uncertain purpose is proved by inscribed *cippus* (CIL VI 31545) set up by *curatores riparum* of Claudius, found in 1887, and at the same year were discovered foundations of the bridge, that attest it crossed the Tiber 160 m upstream of the Ponte Sisto. In 147 was the Pons Agrippae restored by Antoninus Pius, as proved by Fasti Ostienses discovered in 1939: *K. Febr. imp. Antoninus Aug(ustus) pontem Agrippae dedic(avit)*. (VIDMAN 1982, 51). There is also a confusing passage in Procopius (*Goth. 1.19.10*), where it can be read, that when the Aurelian walls on the eastern bank of Tiber were built, they were linked with the rest of walls on the other side of the river with a new bridge. COZZA (1986, 104) deduced, that the pons Agrippae was built along with the Wall.

<sup>47</sup> The relics of the first right arch and original foundations show that Pons Valentiniani was probably wider than the modern Ponte Sisto. For a picture of the ancient bridge foundation of the piers, see NASH 1961, vol. 2, 185.

multiples both on the bridge itself and on a bridgehead arch at the eastern end<sup>48</sup>. The inscriptions recorded the reconstruction of the bridge by the emperors Valens and Valentinian in 365–366. They provided explanation for up-to-date indistinct reference in Ammianus about a bridge, which was built by Lucius Aurelius Avianus Symmachus (†376), father of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus.

It is compelling to see these inscriptions together with Ammianus' reference to this bridge. It enables us to appreciate the communicative power of this bridge in the historical context of the aristocratic level of self-presentation. The section is worth quoting in full:

*“However, long before this happened, Apronianus was succeeded by Symmachus, a man worthy to be classed among the conspicuous examples of learning and moderation, through whose efforts the sacred city enjoyed an unusual period of quiet and prosperity, and prides itself on a handsome bridge, which Symmachus himself, by the decision of our mighty emperors, dedicated, and to the great joy of the citizens, who proved ungrateful, as the result most clearly showed. For after some years had passed, they set fire to Symmachus' beautiful house in the Transtiberine district, spurred on by the fact that a common fellow among the plebeians had alleged, without any informant or witness, that the prefect had said that he would rather use his own wine for quenching lime-kilns than sell it at the price which the people hoped for”<sup>49</sup>.*

These words together with the text of the inscription present an eloquent picture of the bridge as a suitable object for self-presentation of a

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<sup>48</sup> LANCIANI 1878, 243–44; HÜLSEN 1892, 329. The vestiges of decorative sculpture from the period of Severan dynasty (except the bronze head of Valentinian I.) were found in the same location. It cannot be excluded that this statue decoration was installed on the Pons Agrippae. See: DEHN 1911, 238–259; TAYLOR 2000, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Amm. Marc. 27.3.3–4: *Multo tamen antequam hoc contingeret, Symmachus Aproniano successit, inter praecipua nominandus exempla doctrinarum atque modestiae. Quo instante urbs sacratissima otio copiisque abundantius solito fruebatur, et ambitioso ponte exultat atque firmissimo, quem condidit ipse, iudicio principum maximorum, et magna civium laetitia dedicavit ingratorum, ut res docuit apertissima. Qui consumptis aliquot annis, domum eius in Transtiberino tractu pulcherrimam incenderunt, ea re perciti, quod vilis quidam plebeius finxerat, illum dixisse sine indice ullo vel teste, libenter se vino proprio calcarias extincturum, quam id venditurum pretiis quibus sperabant.* Translated by Rolfe.

Roman aristocrat in the period of increased building activity in the eternal City, where, despite personal absence, only sovereign emperors could be officially celebrated. There are a number of unspoken messages to readers inherent in this text, which says specific information about merits linked with building or repairing public monuments, particularly of bridges. Ammianus mentioned bridges several times in his historical treatise, but mostly in the context of military operations, and with two exceptions – Pons Mulvius and Pons Valentiniani, they all were provisional military constructions<sup>50</sup>. It is also interesting that the “civilian” bridges in Rome linked their construction not with emperors, but with aristocrats, the Valentinian bridge with Symmachus, the Milvian bridge with the elder Marcus Scaurus.

The key sentence in relation to Valentinian’s bridge is: “*et ambitioso ponte exsultat atque firmissimo, quem condidit ipse*”, which raises a number of philological and historical questions<sup>51</sup>. Above all, it is the curious formulation *condere pontem*, that is generally unusual in Latin texts<sup>52</sup>. Ammianus himself used this phrase only once, in other instances he expressed the constructing of the bridges by verbs *pontes iungere* (24.2.7), *digere* (24.6.2), *contexere* (18.8.1), *pontem contabulare* (24.7.8 and 30.5.13), *transmittere* (23.2.7), *compaginare* (21.12.9) or *struxisse* (27.3.9 – *Mulvium pontem*). This formulation gives a promising connotation when compared with the use of the verb in the inscription, where is written: “*instituti ex utilitate urbis aeternae Valentiniani pontis atq. perfecti*” (ILS 769 = CIL VI 31402–4). There is no reason to disagree with Boeft, who suggest that “it is possible that Ammianus chose the unusual *condidit* to emphasize that Symmachus did not simply repair the existing bridge, but built a new one to replace it, thus anticipating the opposition *instaurator – conditor* in §7”<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> In Ammianus’ work the word *pons* appears 48 times. See: CHIABÒ 1983, 587–8.

<sup>51</sup> See: BOEFT et al. 2009, 45.

<sup>52</sup> Thesaurus Linguae Latinae lists these verbs: *pontem facere, inicere, frangere, transducere* (TLL, 2670).

<sup>53</sup> BOEFT et al. 2009, 45. Ammianus (27.3.7) criticised prefect Lampadius for displaying his name on many places at Rome not as restorer, but as builder of edifices, although he in fact did not erect any new buildings. Lampadius, however, had to follow a law of emperor Valentinian issued in May 365 allowing just restoration of old buildings, prohibiting the

The attributes that Ammianus gave to the bridge also deserve close attention. Given the very small amount of literary praise given to bridges, the words *ambitoso* and *firmissimo* sound extraordinarily laudatory in association with the object of a bridge. Perhaps it is possible to include this literary section among the modest amount of literary references glorifying bridges, along with the references in the writings of Cassius Dio and Symmachus<sup>54</sup>. In addition, Ammianus uses the verb *exsultat* in this sentence, which in relation to non-human objects appeared only twice in his work<sup>55</sup>.

The text and quality of building inscriptions indicate further historical circumstances, which complete the picture of the bridge as an object bearing the formulated message of power. The following dedication to the emperor Valens was placed on the well visible base that carried a column of a triumphal/memorial arch. This arch was probably erected at the eastern entrance to the bridge leading to the Campus Martius:

*Imp(eratori) . Caesari . d(omino) . n(ostro) / Fl(avio) . Valenti  
max(imo). p(io). f(elici). victori ac / triumphatori semper Aug(usto). / . s . p . q .  
r . / ob providentiam quae illi semper / cum inclyto fratre communis est / instituti  
ex utilitate urbis aeternae / Valentiniani pontis atq(ue). perfecti. / dedicandi  
operis honore delato iudicio princip. maximor / L(ucio). Aur(elio). Aviano  
Symmacho . v(iro). c(larissimo). ex praefectis . urbi<sup>56</sup>*

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erection of new — Cod. Theod. 15.1.1. (25 May 365). MATTHEWS (1975, 22) believes that the prefect just exploited the opportunities to express his building efforts in face of the emperor's attempt to limit investments on public structures.

<sup>54</sup> Cassius Dio's praise of Trajan's bridge (Cass. Dio 68.13) and Symmachus's celebration of Cestius bridge (Symm. *Oratio* 3.9).

<sup>55</sup> Amm. Marc. 14.8.3: *Ciliciam vero, quae Cydno amni exultat*; and 15.11.15: *Viennensis civitatum exsultat decore multarum*.

<sup>56</sup> CIL VI 31402 = ILS 769. *To the Emperor, our Lord Flavius Valens, maximus, pius, felix, victor and conqueror, ever Augustus, the Senate and the People of Rome, because of his foresight (which he has in common with his illustrious brother) in planning and completing the Valentinian bridge to serve the needs of the eternal city, the honor of dedicating the work being conferred, by decision of the emperors, upon L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus, of senatorial rank, former Prefect of the city (Rome)*. Translated by Gordon.

CIL VI 31403 – 31404: *victoriae Augustae / comiti dominorum / principumq. nostror / s. p. q. r. / curante et dedicante / L. Avr. Aviano Symmacho. v. c. / ex praefectis urbi*



The inscription is noteworthy for several reasons: The titlature of the inscription dates the repair of the bridge to the period before 367, since there is no mention of Gratianus, who was declared emperor in the summer of that year<sup>57</sup>. Symmachus was the urban prefect from 364 to 365, and in the inscription appears the word construction *ex praefectis urbi*, which means that bridge was dedicated after Symmachus' office. It is likely that the works on the bridge and triumphal arch standing at the eastern side leading to the Campus Martius lasted from 365–366<sup>58</sup>. The most noteworthy fact in the context of the aristocratic self-presentation was the “detail”, that the former urban prefect, who was probably fully in charge for the organizational tasks, did not manage to complete the work at the time of his office, and despite (or because of it?) got the privilege to place his name together with the names of emperors, on this large and highly visible inscription<sup>59</sup>. In this case, the clear message was sent to the inhabitants of Rome, that the merits of the reconstruction of the public monument are principally in the hands of the emperors, but there is also space and possibility for the presentation of Roman aristocrat as a person, not official<sup>60</sup>. Considering that the names of emperors in inscriptions were naturally expected, and therefore did not attract exceptional attention, or did not cause a great stimulus for reflection in the mind of ordinary Roman citizen, the Aurelian bridge served as a very suitable object for

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<sup>57</sup> Without doubt before Valentinian's death in 375. A further inscription found in proximity, that mentions *decennalia* of Valentinianus indicates another *ante quem* date, which is 373.

<sup>58</sup> TAYLOR (2000, 162) insist that: “The job must have been done in haste, and the need for a thorough refurbishment in the late fourth century may have been acute. At this time the bridge was strengthened with an elaborate set of iron clamps similar to those in Gratian's rebuilding of the Pons Cestius”.

<sup>59</sup> Praescriptae sunt in basibus marmoribus n. 31402 – alta 1,45m, lata 1,30m, crassa 1,62 m.

<sup>60</sup> The grades of hierarchy are upheld in the inscription – a private aristocrat may gain honor by the connection of his person with a public building. The emperor is clearly shown to remain the ultimate source of honours. After Symmachus followed ambitious C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius (Amm. Marc. 27.3.5), who built or restored a castellum of the Aqua Claudia (CIL VI 3866). In 367–8 was the prefect of Rome the famous V. Agorius Praetextatus, who restored Porticum deorum consentium (ILS 40003), the last great investment to the pagan monument.

emphasizing the family prestige of a particular noble man. I suggest that the commemorative element of the bridge is clearly readable from the remaining historical traces, although it was explicitly stated that the honor of dedicating the bridge was conferred upon Symmachus by the emperors, as a personal favour.

### **Conclusion**

The Pons Cestius became a symbol of loyalty of senatorial aristocracy to the emperor, but also it represented the subtle desire to restore the status of Rome as a residential city of the emperors. The Pons Theodosius was an instructive example of the general resentfulness in investing in such a difficult and costly bridge construction at a time of dwindling public funds. In this particular case it is not possible to speak about the clearly-expressed communicative aspect, just the implicit consequences that can be deduced from the surviving letters of a fully engaged roman aristocrat. With regard to the ability of the Roman aristocracy to make use of the self-presenting potential of public monuments for celebrating their own names and the names of own families, no bridge served for this purpose better than Pons Valentinianus. At the historical period when the merits in restoring and erecting public monuments were attributed almost exclusively to the Christian emperors, one of the most influential pagan aristocrats found a way for self-promotion that did not offend the imperial majesty. On that occasion, the communicative potential of the bridge was utilized for sending the subtle message to all readers of the inscription, that the glory of the reconstruction of the public monument should first be assigned to the emperors, but in the second place to the particular city inhabitant involved, who at time did not hold the highest office of urban prefect.

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