

## THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL STATUS AND PRESTIGE IN PLINY, JUVENAL AND MARTIAL

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In Roman society, the quest for prestige and honour constituted a significant driving force in the formation of social, cultural, and political identities and relations.<sup>1</sup> A claim to prestige implied a claim to status,<sup>2</sup> the social position of a person which could manifest itself in membership in the Roman *ordines* (i.e. his formal rank) and the tenure of senatorial and equestrian offices.<sup>3</sup> Among the expressions that circumscribe the semantic field of prestige – such as *dignitas*, *honor*, *fama*, *auctoritas*, *maiestas*, *gloria*, *existimatio* – the first two terms, *dignitas* and *honor*, reflect particularly well this close link between status, prestige, rank and office,<sup>4</sup> as it is evident, for instance, from the designation of the sequence of senatorial offices as *cursus honorum*, or the *notitia dignitatum*, the late-antique ranking list of offices/dignitaries.<sup>5</sup> In his *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, Valerius Maximus encapsulates the two conceptions wittily in a paronomasia by defining the prestige (*maiestas*) of great men as “a long-term and enviable unofficial office” (*longum et beatum honorem esse sine honore*).<sup>6</sup> In brief, status and prestige

- 1 For an analysis of the concept of honour in the Roman Empire see above all Lendon 1997; cf. also Pöschl 1989; Barton 2001; Hellerman 2005. For important sociological studies on prestige and honour see Leopold 1916; Kluth 1957; Korff 1966. For a concise overview of the theories see Schroeter 2006, 28–36; Hildebrandt 2009.
- 2 On this interrelation see Pitt-Rivers 1965, 22. Garnsey – Saller 2014, 140 define status as “the social estimation of [a Roman’s] honour, the perception of those around him as to his prestige”.
- 3 On the further differentiation between status and rank see Judge 1982, 9, who defines rank as the “fossilised status of the past”. Cf. also Garnsey – Saller 2014, 136–144; Alföldy 1980/81 [1986], 365–367. Wolkenhauer 2014, 301–309 distinguishes between “hard status”, i.e. the rank and the social honour derived from *ordo* membership, magistracies and legal affiliations, and “soft status”, i.e. prestige derived from precedence through descent, wealth, influence, lifestyle etc. Cf. also Max Weber’s definition of the status class (“Stand”), which emerges from the non-economic components of honour and prestige (“soziale Ehre”): Weber 1922 [1972], 531–540.
- 4 For Latin and Greek terms describing “prestige” and their nuances see Hellegouarc’h 1963, 388–415; Pöschl 1989; Lendon 1997, 272–279 (Appendix). On *dignitas* see Drexler 1944 [1980]; Rilinger 1991 [2007].
- 5 See also the notion of a *gradus dignitatis*: Liv. 1.42.4; Cic. *Rep.* 1.43.6. Pöschl 1989, 237–238 observes a more technical use of *dignitas* in the sense of different degrees of rank in the imperial period. Cf. in this context the characterization of the Roman social structure as a “pecking order” defined by different grades of honour; see, for example, Lendon 1997, 34.
- 6 Val. Max. 2.10.pr.

and the related notions of rank, office, authority, dignity, fame etc. were distinct, but closely connected concepts.<sup>7</sup> Just as prestige could establish status, so status could bestow prestige on a person.<sup>8</sup> The reciprocal effect well reflects the dynamic nature of each of them as well as their dynamic relation.

Given the marked status-consciousness and the centrality of honour in Roman society, there are plenty of references to the interweaving of status and prestige in Roman literature. As will be shown in the following, the works of three contemporary authors, Pliny the Younger, Juvenal and Martial,<sup>9</sup> yield, from different perspectives, invaluable insights into the Roman mindset on the issue in the period of the High Empire.

### 1. PLINY'S REFLECTIONS ON STATUS AND PRESTIGE

The quest for distinction and glory, an excellent reputation and social esteem, powerful influence, highly regarded offices, or other prestige-related values and aspirations are central topics that run throughout Pliny's letters. Pliny, the esteemed senator, lawyer and renowned epistolographer, touches on diverse dimensions of the nexus of status and honour, in particular with reference to the social prestige associated with membership of an *ordo*, the prestige derived from holding a certain office, or a person's individual dignity which is mainly based on his moral superiority. *Ep.* 1.23, for instance, deals with the maintenance of the *dignitas* inherent in public office. Pliny's friend Pompeius Falco had asked his advice as to whether he should continue to practise his profession as a lawyer after assuming the tribuneship. In Pliny's view, the answer depends on Falco's attitude towards this office – whether he regards it as no more than an “empty shadow” (*inanem umbram*), a mere “title without dignity” (*sine honore nomen*), or a sacrosanct institution of high *auctoritas* and recognition, which must not be slighted by anyone, not even the holder.<sup>10</sup> As he admits, Pliny was once faced with the same dilemma and now explains his own reservations on the matter:<sup>11</sup>

7 On status and prestige as distinct categories see Kluth 1957, 6. They are, however, sometimes equated in modern sociology: see, for example, Marshall 1996, 416.

8 See Pitt-Rivers 1965, 23.

9 In the following, texts and translations of the ancient authors are based on the Loeb edition.

10 Plin. *Ep.* 1.23.1: *Plurimum refert, quid esse tribunatum putes, inanem umbram et sine honore nomen an potestatem sacrosanctam, et quam in ordinem cogi ut a nullo ita ne a se quidem deceat.*

11 Plin. *Ep.* 1.23.2–3: *Ipse cum tribunus essem, erraverim fortasse qui me esse aliquid putavi, sed tamquam essem abstinui causis agendis: primum quod deforme arbitrabar, cui adsurgere cui loco cedere omnes oporteret, hunc omnibus sedentibus stare, et qui iubere posset tacere quemcumque, huic silentium clepsydra indici, et quem interfari nefas esset, hunc etiam convicia audire et si inulta pateretur inertem, si ulcisceretur insolentem videri. Erat hic quoque aestus ante oculos, si forte me adpellasset vel ille cui adessem, vel ille quem contra, intercederem et auxilium ferrem an quiescerem sileremque, et quasi eiurato magistratu privatum ipse me facerem.*

When I was tribune myself, I acted on the assumption (which may have been a wrong one) that my office really meant something. I therefore gave up all my court work, for I thought it unsuitable for a tribune to stand while others were seated, when it was really every man's duty to rise and give place to him; to be cut short by the water-clock though he had the power to command anyone's silence; and, although it was sacrilege to interrupt him, to be exposed to insults which he could not pass over without an appearance of weakness, nor counter without seeming to abuse his power. I had also to face the anxiety of how to react if my client or my opponent were to appeal to me as tribune, whether to lend my aid by interposing my veto, or to keep silent as if I had laid down my office and resumed my status of private citizen.

As Pliny sees it, a lawyer's subordination to the rules of procedure in the courtroom requires deferential conduct that is hardly commensurate with the *auctoritas* of a tribune. The simultaneous activity as an advocate may, therefore, be detrimental to the dignity of the office and the office-holder. Pliny insists on the essential interlocking between office (*honor*) and prestige: the office as such imparts honour and pre-eminent authority to the incumbent, which elicits an appropriate, respectful attitude towards him, but the office-holder in turn has the great responsibility to imbue the office with integrity and maintain its inherent dignity and honorific nature by his personal bearing.<sup>12</sup> Given this conflict, Pliny for his own part decided that he had better be a tribune for all rather than a lawyer for a few.<sup>13</sup>

In another instance, Pliny refers to a trial against the senator Hostilius Firminus, who, as the legate of the *proconsul Africae*, was involved in a charge of provincial maladministration.<sup>14</sup> Two sentences were discussed in the Senate: Firminus should either be expelled from the Senate, or he should be excluded from drawing lots, i.e. from promotion to higher senatorial offices. The latter proposal, which the majority of senators viewed as the more lenient sentence, was adopted. Although Firminus thereby retained his senatorial rank and was merely debarred from the *cursus honorum*, Pliny regards this verdict as the harsher one:<sup>15</sup>

Nothing could be worse than to be stripped of all the privileges of senatorial rank but not to be rid of its toils and troubles, and nothing more humiliating for anyone so disgraced than to remain in his conspicuous position exposed as a marked man to the public gaze instead of hiding himself in retirement. And besides, nothing could be more unsuitable or less conducive to the public interest than for a senator to retain his seat after he has been censured by the Senate, to remain equal in status to those who censured him, and though debarred from a

12 On the distinction between personal dignity and office-holding see also Plin. *Ep.* 1.10.

13 On the dignity of office see also Plin. *Ep.* 4.17.3: Pliny's respect for Corellius Rufus is based on the latter's personal *dignitas* as well as the honour of the consulship for which Rufus is designated, all the more so because Pliny is keen to show regard for an office he himself has already held.

14 Plin. *Ep.* 2.12. Cf. also *Ep.* 2.11.23. See Sherwin-White 1966, 172.

15 Plin. *Ep.* 2.12: *Quid enim miserius quam exsectum et exemptum honoribus senatoriis, labore et molestia non carere? quid gravius quam tanta ignominia adfectum non in solitudine latere, sed in hac altissima specula conspiciendum se monstrandumque praebere? Praeterea quid publice minus aut congruens aut decorum? notatum a senatu in senatu sedere, ipsisque illis a quibus sit notatus aequari; summotum a proconsulatu quia se in legatione turpiter gesserat, de proconsulibus iudicare, damnatumque sordium vel damnare alios vel absolvere!*

governorship for his disgraceful conduct as governor's deputy, to retain his power of passing judgement on other governors, to condemn or acquit them of crimes which he has himself been found guilty.

According to Pliny, the maintenance of rank and its duties without the prospect of enhancing one's prestige by further distinctions deprives Firminus of the very essence of senatorial rank: it has become an empty shell without content (*sine honore nomen*, see above).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Pliny considers it an intolerable moral dilemma that Firminus will pass judgement on other senators accused of the same offences for which he himself has been stigmatized by his peers. In this regard, even the complete loss of his senatorial dignity would have been less disgraceful for Firminus than this form of *ignominia* and loss of credibility: it would have allowed him to withdraw from the public eye.<sup>17</sup>

Pliny's allusion to the "public gaze" (*altissima specula*) touches on a crucial feature of the "construction" of social prestige: honour is *accorded* by common recognition, by the judgement of others on someone's standing and qualities. It cannot be generated or maintained *ipso facto*, but constitutes a "public commodity".<sup>18</sup> Pliny is well aware of the cardinal role of public opinion for the conferral of prestige and is, therefore, undecided whether he should spread the word of his benefactions at his hometown Comum: it might give the impression that he made the donation (of a library) only for the sake of fame, and particularly now that he is seeking a wider audience by the publication of his speech.<sup>19</sup> In this context, Pliny notes that any self-glorification of a laudable benefaction, however justified it may be, will diminish its honorific value, as long as it is not recognized and approved by group opinion: "So what would win a glowing tribute from an independent opinion soon loses it if accompanied by self-praise."<sup>20</sup> The value of honour may depend on the size and status of the group that accords prestige, but the quality and scope of public recognition are not necessarily conflicting aspects. It may be granted by the opinion of one's peers, i.e. the internal honour community, but also by those outside the status group who do not possess high rank themselves. It may be granted by a few men of great repute and carry weight, or by a crowd of men of no particular political and social importance – and still carry

16 On prestige as vital to life see also Plin. *Ep.* 1.12: According to Pliny, the most important factors that make life worth living are "a good conscience, an excellent reputation, great influence" (*optimam conscientiam, optimam famam, maximam auctoritatem*). See also *Ep.* 9.3.

17 See in this context the case of Silius Italicus in Plin. *Ep.* 3.7: Silius Italicus had suffered *infamia* under Nero for his services as an informer, but under Vitellius he was able to clear his name and win fame again through a proconsulship of Asia and his "honourable retreat" (*laudabili otio*). On the social decline of senators and equestrians see Heil 2005; Klingenberg 2011.

18 Thus Hellerman 2005, 40–45. See also Lendon 1997, 37.

19 Plin. *Ep.* 1.8; see also *Ep.* 1.22. On this letter see Ludolph 1997, 67–71; Hardie 2012, 315–321. On the role of public opinion in Pliny see Méthy 2007, 87–99. On Pliny's patronage of communities see Nicols 1980; Nicols 2014, 125–146.

20 Plin. *Ep.* 1.8.15: *Sic quod magnificentum referente alio fuisset, ipso qui gesserat recensente vanescit*. See also *Ep.* 9.23. On Pliny's self-fashioning see Riggsby 1998; Gibson 2003.

weight.<sup>21</sup> As Pliny succinctly observes, “all who are anxious for honour and reputation are wonderfully pleased with the praise even of lesser men. (...) It somehow happens that men prefer a widespread to a great reputation.”<sup>22</sup>

The reciprocal link between those who grant honours and those who receive them characterizes the bonds between patron and protégé, or rather the quasi-patronal connections and *amicitia*-relations that were essential for social advancement in Roman society.<sup>23</sup> Pliny as a public figure who enjoyed considerable prestige was able to extend it to another person and contribute to his career and his social standing – by letters of recommendation, laudatory remarks or generous financial support.<sup>24</sup> In brief, the “currency of honour” (J.E. Lendon) could be converted into status, rank and office. The principle of reciprocity underlying this type of patronage is reflected in *Ep.* 1.19, where Pliny reports on his support of the career ambitions of his friend Romatius Firmus by offering him the amount of money that was needed to meet the equestrian census qualification. But he also asks Firmus not to forget that his new rank and *dignitas* are owed to him and entail a certain sense of obligation and gratitude towards him: “An honourable position has to be maintained with special care if it is to keep alive the memory of a friend’s generous gift.”<sup>25</sup>

From these manifold exchange relationships a dynamic elite network based on relations of friendship, family and kinship developed, which was held together by the powerful asset of prestige. For instance, Pliny’s support for his protégé Iulius Naso, who was seeking election to a quaestorship, was motivated by the latter’s friendship and high regard of Pliny, which prompted Pliny to ask a third party, his friend Fundanus, to back Naso since he deemed Fundanus’ *auctoritas* more potent than his own.<sup>26</sup> When Tacitus, who was ignorant of Pliny’s already existing patronage of Naso, also commended the young man, Pliny in turn requested Tacitus to mobilize the support of further “network members”.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, when Pliny offered a tribuneship to his friend and colleague Suetonius, which he had obtained for him through his connection to an influential senator, Suetonius declined the office and asked Pliny to confer it on his relative Caesennius Silvanus instead.<sup>28</sup> Pliny is most willing to make this “prestige transfer” and admit Silvanus into the

21 On this aspect cf. also Sen. *Epist.* 102.8; Cic. *Tusc.* 3.3–4: Cicero distinguishes between *popularis gloria* (the praise of the crowd) and *gloria solida* (the praise by the *boni*).

22 Plin. *Ep.* 4.12: *Omnem enim, qui gloria famaue ducuntur, mirum in modum adsensio et laus a minoribus etiam profecta delectat. (...) Etenim nescio quo pacto vel magis homines iuvat gloria lata quam magna.*

23 On this aspect see Saller 1982; Leunissen 1993; Saller 2000; Garnsey – Saller 2014, 177–179; see also Wallace-Hadrill (ed.) 1989; on *amicitia* as formalized bonds see Peachin (ed.) 2001.

24 See, for instance, Plin. *Ep.* 1.19; 2.9; 2.13; 3.2; 3.8; 4.4; 4.17; 6.6; 6.9; 7.22; 7.28; 7.31. On Pliny’s letters of recommendation see Saller 1982, 119–144; Rees 2007.

25 Plin. *Ep.* 1.19: *Nam sollicitius custodiendus est honor, in quo etiam beneficium amici tuendum est.*

26 Plin. *Ep.* 6.6. On Iulius Naso cf. Jones 1968.

27 Plin. *Ep.* 6.9. Pliny feigns indignation that Tacitus does not recommend Pliny himself. On Pliny’s claim that he matches Tacitus in fame see *Ep.* 7.20; 9.14; 9.23. Cf. also *Ep.* 7.33.

28 Plin. *Ep.* 3.8.

network, not only because Pliny takes Suetonius' recommendation, whom he himself had deemed worthy of this post, as sufficient credential, but also because Pliny realizes that "some credit will be reflected on me, too, if as a result of his [Suetonius'] action it is known that my friends are free either to hold the office of tribune themselves or to give it away."<sup>29</sup> In this regard, the patronal exchange was also an opportunity for the patron to test the degree of his influence, his *auctoritas* based on his social esteem.<sup>30</sup> A successful promotion of a protégé was a credit to the supporter and confirmed or augmented his honour. At the same time, however, it represented a risk for him, since the rejection of a recommendation could damage his prestige and standing if his backing of a friend was not accepted by peer opinion. Pliny was once worried about the consequences for his reputation if his friend Sextus Erucius was not appointed to the tribuneship for which Pliny had recommended him to the emperor. He is rather outspoken in weighing up the imponderables of his nomination of Sextus.<sup>31</sup>

My own honour, my reputation, and my position are all at stake, for it was I who persuaded the Emperor to raise Sextus to senatorial rank and grant him a quaestorship, and it is on my nomination that he is now standing for the office of tribune. If he is not elected by the Senate, I am afraid it will look as though I have deceived the Emperor; and so it is essential for me to see that everyone shares the high opinion which I led the Emperor to form.

Likewise, Pliny considers his public support for Naso's candidature (see above) as a *de facto* application of his own, which could be a risk for his *dignitas*: if Naso is elected, the honour will be Naso's; if not, his failure will be a blow to Pliny's prestige.<sup>32</sup>

Pliny not only ponders the question of status and prestige during a person's lifetime, but also the issue of the immortalization and commemoration of fame. Those people, Pliny reckons, must be considered truly fortunate who enjoy "the anticipation of a good and lasting reputation, and, confident in the verdict of posterity, live in the knowledge of the fame that is to come."<sup>33</sup> Pliny himself admits his desire for lasting fame (*gloria*) by means of his writings, which he

29 Plin. *Ep.* 3.9.3: *Praeterea intellego mihi quoque gloriae fore, si ex hoc tuo facto non fuerit ignotum amicos meos non gerere tantum tribunatus posse verum etiam dare.* See also *Ep.* 5.11.2: Pliny believes that the glory of his grandfather-in-law will reflect on him.

30 See Plin. *Ep.* 1.17. On the significance of *auctoritas* in Pliny see Büttler 1970, 85–93 and 103–104.

31 Plin. *Ep.* 2.9.1–3: *et alioqui meus pudor, mea existimatio, mea dignitas in discrimen adducitur. Ego Sexto latum clavum a Caesare nostro, ego quaesturam impetravi; meo suffragio pervenit ad ius tribunatus petendi, quem nisi obtinet in senatu, vereor ne decepisse Caesarem videar. Proinde adnitendum est mihi, ut talem eum iudicent omnes, qualem esse princeps mihi credidit.*

32 Plin. *Ep.* 6.6.8.

33 Plin. *Ep.* 9.3: *Alius aliud: ego beatissimum existimo, qui bonae mansuraeque famae praesumptione perfruitur, certusque posteritatis cum futura gloria vivit.* Consequently, Pliny wonders how to know the right moment when a retirement from senatorial business is considered to be an honourable and justified withdrawal to *tranquillitas* rather than laziness (*Ep.* 4.23). On the difference between *otium* and the quest for *dignitas* see Plin. *Ep.* 7.3.

believes will also contribute to the spread of the glory of other excellent men.<sup>34</sup> He is deeply upset to see that the tomb of a distinguished person like the former consul and commander of upper Germany, Verginius Rufus, whose “glory had spread all over the world,”<sup>35</sup> was still unfinished a decade after his death, due to the negligence of the person in charge of the construction.<sup>36</sup> When Pliny’s friend Cremutius Ruso criticizes the boastful inscription which Verginius Rufus had reportedly ordered for his tomb, Pliny fervently defends the ambition of any accomplished citizen to perpetuate “the undying glory of his name” (*victurique nominis famam*).<sup>37</sup> His advocacy for immortal prestige is also motivated by the example of Iulius Secundus, the father of Iulius Naso. As Pliny complains, Secundus’ considerable fame as an orator has apparently fallen into oblivion among most senators, and those senators who still remember him are inclined to revere only the living instead of memorizing the past achievements of a distinguished Roman.<sup>38</sup> Given this disregard of commemorating the accomplishments of the dead, Pliny welcomes the posthumous erection of a statue for a certain Cottius, since in his view the merits of this excellent and esteemed young man deserve some permanent form of glory.<sup>39</sup> A statue set up in a public place may in particular help to recall the honour and distinction of a person.<sup>40</sup>

It will be a pleasure for me to contemplate his statue from time to time, turn back to look at it, stand at its foot, and walk past it. We seek consolation in sorrow in the busts of our dead we set up in our homes; still more than should we find it in the statues standing in public places, for these can recall men’s fame and distinction as well as their forms and faces.

With the reference to statues as visual expressions and “reminders” of honour, Pliny addresses an essential aspect of status and prestige: their public display. The abstract notion of status and prestige could be represented visually and assume

34 Plin. *Ep.* 5.8.1–2. On Pliny’s quest for posthumous fame see Guillemin 1929, 13–22; Büttler 1970, 21–27; Trisoglio 1972, 176–180; Ludolph 1997, 60–88; Riggsby 1998; Mayer 2003; Méthy 2007, 59–87. On literary activities as a source of prestige see, for example, Plin. *Ep.* 4.3; 5.5; 5.17; 6.8; 9.23.

35 Plin. *Ep.* 6.10.3: (...) *cuius memoria orbem terrarum gloria pervagetur*. On Verginius Rufus cf. also *Ep.* 2.1; 3.18; 4.28; 9.19; see Levick 1985; Marchesi 2008, 157–160 and 189–198; Gibson – Morello 2012, 126–135.

36 Plin. *Ep.* 6.10.

37 Plin. *Ep.* 9.19. Ruso compared Verginius Rufus’ commissioning of a funerary inscription with Frontinus’ modest renunciation of any monument. Asked for his opinion, Pliny explains that Frontinus’ explicit prohibition of an inscription is merely a disguised form of the same wish for immortality. In this regard, Verginius Rufus and Frontinus pursued the same goal, eternal glory, but different pathways.

38 Plin. *Ep.* 6.6.4.

39 Plin. *Ep.* 2.7. See also *Ep.* 3.10: Pliny seeks to spread Cottius’ eternal fame through several writings. Cf. also *Ep.* 1.17.4.

40 Plin. *Ep.* 2.7.6–7: *Erit ergo pergratum mihi hanc effigiem eius subinde intueri subinde respicere, sub hac consistere praeter hanc commeare. Etenim si defunctorum imagines domi positae dolorem nostrum levant, quanto magis hae quibus in celeberrimo loco non modo species et vultus illorum, sed honor etiam et gloria refertur*. On the erection of statues in public places see also Plin. *Ep.* 3.6; 1.17.4.

concrete forms. In Roman society, a variety of status symbols (*ornamenta/insignia dignitatis*) were used as external signifiers to indicate a person's social status, his rank, attendant rights and privileges, his belonging to a particular social grouping as well as their shared values and "habitus".<sup>41</sup> They comprised formalized symbols of prestige such as the emblems of senatorial and equestrian rank (e.g. *latus clavus*, *angustus clavus*, *calceus patricius*, *anulus aureus*, privileged seating), the magisterial badges (e.g. *fasces*, *sella curulis*), military decorations (*ornamenta triumphalia*, *dona militaria*) as well as less official forms of the public display of status and prestige (e.g. the number of clients, prestige goods like luxury clothing, jewellery, feasting, housing). In this regard, status symbols could both divide and unite: create distinction and hierarchies between groups as well as enforce cohesion and solidarity within a group. In *Ep.* 6.23, Pliny points to the high social station of a certain Nonius Celer, which obliges his wife to show a certain splendour (*nitore*) in keeping with his position, a dignified appearance reflected by her dress and entourage. In Pliny's view, the function of such signifiers is only representative in nature: it does not augment her *dignitas*, but adorn and underline it.<sup>42</sup>

However, status symbolism, the "language" of status and prestige, not only served as a static manifestation and adornment of rank that closely mirrored Rome's social and political structure. On the contrary, it also implied dynamic relations between the basic constituents involved in this communicative process: between the sign (status symbol), the signified (status, *dignitas*), the sender (the status holder entitled to the symbols) and receiver (the community and their judgement).<sup>43</sup> The dynamics of status symbolism comes to light as soon as the established balance between these elements is altered and one factor becomes more dominant and outweighs the others. An instructive example of the dissolution of the matching link between status and signifiers is given by Pliny when he reports on the conferment of the *ornamenta praetoria* on Claudius' freedman Pallas.<sup>44</sup> The official honorific practice of bestowing the insignia of a senator on persons who were legally excluded from senatorial rank arouses Pliny's great indignation, not least because it subverts the distinctions of order and rank (*discrimina ordinum dignitatumque*), which he advocates and is committed to as a matter of principle: "Once these are thrown into confusion and destroyed, nothing is more unequal than the resultant 'equality'."<sup>45</sup>

41 On status symbolism in Rome see Reinhold 1969; Reinhold 1970; Reinhold 1971; Kolb 1977; Schäfer 1989; Scholz 2005; Edmondson – Keith (eds.) 2008. On the concept of "habitus" see Bourdieu 1979; on objects as social signifiers see Goffman 1951; Appadurai (ed.) 1986; Habermas 1999, 241–256.

42 Cf. Plin. *Ep.* 6.32.1: *non quidem augetur dignitas, ornatur tamen et instruitur*. Cf. also Plin. *Ep.* 2.4.3 on his notion of *dignitas sumptuosa*.

43 For a semiotic approach to status symbols see Burmeister 2009 (with a discussion of Peirce's theory of signs); on ancient semiotics see Manetti 2010.

44 Plin. *Ep.* 7.29; 8.6. For a detailed discussion of this episode see my article on Claudius' "politics of prestige" in this volume.

45 Plin. *Ep.* 9.5: *quae si confusa turbata permixta sunt, nihil est ipsa aequalitate inaequalius*.



## 2. THE CRITICISM OF STATUS DISPLAY IN JUVENAL AND MARTIAL

With trenchant wit, two voices from imperial Rome are in particular preoccupied with the dynamic aspect of status symbolism. In their satirical writings, Juvenal and Martial, who are known for their scathing criticism of the social changes of their time,<sup>46</sup> prove sharp observers of the interrelationship between status, prestige and their symbolization, giving a primary focus on the adverse effects of this link: an increasingly widespread culture of pretence and presumption. Both authors vividly describe the regime of outward status display that, in their view, prevails in contemporary Roman society. Status emblems are cherished more than anything else, carefully guarded, showily paraded, and, as indicators of status and wealth, they are indiscriminately considered as a hallmark of a person's excellence and power. In his seventh satire, Juvenal complains that advocates are no longer employed for their skills or eloquence; it is primarily the nature and scope of the status markers about which they can boast that earns them confidence and payment. Juvenal is full of reproach for this development.<sup>47</sup>

His purple and violet clothes are an advocate's advertisement. It pays him to live with a bustle and show beyond his real income. Do we put our faith in eloquence? There's no one these days who will give Cicero two hundred, unless there's a huge ring flashing on his hand. The first thing a litigant looks for is whether you have a household of eight slaves and an escort of ten clients, a litter to follow you, and citizens to walk in front. That's the reason why Paulus conducted cases with a sardonyx ring he'd hired, and that's the reason why he earned a higher fee than Gallus or Basilus.

A purple cloak, a ring, a litter, the number of slaves and clients – such externals are blindly taken as a proof of an advocate's quality. The status markers are not viewed as a reflection of his repute, but become its very source; they alone inspire trust and confidence in the professional abilities of an advocate.<sup>48</sup> No one bothers whether the advocate can actually afford this display of splendour or whether he simply pretends to possess it. What ultimately counts is that the display works: "Eloquence in thin rags is a rare phenomenon," Juvenal remarks with bitter sarcasm.<sup>49</sup>

46 With all caveats as regards their satirical exaggeration, the writings of Juvenal and Martial have been credited as a valuable source for Roman social history. See, for example, Garrido-Hory 1981; Gérard 1985; Marache 1989; Hellegouarc'h 1995. See, however, Braund (ed.) 1989 on the limitations of the use of satires as a historical source.

47 Juv. 7.135–145: *Purpura vendit causidicum, vendunt amethystina; convenit illi et strepitu et facie maioris vivere census. Fidimus eloquio? Ciceroni nemo ducentos nunc dederit nummos, nisi fulserit anulus ingens. respicit haec primum qui litigat, an tibi servi octo, decem comites, an post te sella, togati ante pedes. ideo conducta Paulus agebat sardonyche, atque ideo pluris quam Gallus agebat, quam Basilus.* Cf. also Juvenal's example of the lawyer Aemilius, who will gain more payment than his colleagues only because of his impressive equestrian statue in his atrium: see Juv. 7.124–128.

48 The same is true for witnesses in court: see Juv. 3.143–144.

49 Juv. 7.145: *rara in tenui facundia panno.*