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The Adaptation of Literary Culture and Paradigms of Roman Statehood in the Transition Period of the 5th Century AD: An Analysis of Dracontius' *Satisfactio*

*This article seeks to emphasise the considerable degree of cultural continuity between Graeco-Roman Antiquity and the early Christian world order that emerged in the 5th century. The arrival of Christianity is often associated with Rome's socio-political decline and the eventual downfall of the Western Roman Empire, marking the beginning of the so-called 'Dark Ages' of the early Middle Ages. A corresponding assumption is that pagan culture vanished along with the (pagan) Roman state. However, the surviving literary sources suggest the reverse is the case. By reevaluating familiar narratives of a rapid cultural decline, this paper intends to refute the widespread stance in academic discourse that portrays the period as a time when Roman tradition and identity were abandoned wholesale. Instead, this paper argues that Rome's thousand-year classical heritage was adapted to the mores of Christendom, as evinced by the literature of the 5th century. The poem *Satisfactio* of late 5th century poet Blossius Aemilius Dracontius – a poet whose works were written in Vandal North Africa – is an exemplar of this cultural adaptation. It is the primary source used throughout this paper.*

Keywords: Christianity, paganism, cultural continuity, adaptation, Vandals, Gunthamund, Dracontius, clemency

A Cultural and Historical Overview of the Late 5th Century

Blossius Aemilius Dracontius was a Christian poet and attorney active in Vandal-ruled Carthage during the second half of the 5th century AD.

Owing to the lack of contemporary biographical sources about him, information on his life and the context of his work must be gleaned from his accounts and his literary milieu. His works directly reveal key details about his origin and ancestry: his family is from the Roman Iberian Peninsula but migrated to Carthage, presumably to escape the Germanic tribes that were then advancing towards the southern territories of the Empire. In Carthage, Dracontius witnessed fundamental shifts in power, culture, and faith: the adoption of Christianity effected fundamental changes in the region's sociocultural structure. Pagan temples were closed, demolished, or transformed into churches. Sacral practices with a thousand years of history were banished by imperial decree. Emperor Theodosius' series of decrees targeting the old faith in 391 AD marks the beginning of the Roman state's persecution of pagans. The most noteworthy of these imperial commands was the abolition of the Vestal Virgins, a symbolic date and event indeed due to the common Roman belief that the Empire would survive only so long as the fire of the Temple of Vesta remained intact. Due to the oppression, tensions between pagans and Christians erupted into riots and violent conflict. The clashes in the West were generally more severe than in the East simply because paganism and traditional values were more deeply embedded in Western Roman society than they were elsewhere. Therefore, the pace of conversion to Christianity was correspondingly slower in the West, due to its population's firm adherence to pagan Roman tradition.¹ The Emperors in the subsequent 5th century did not even attempt to tackle the problems stemming from this divided society – they attested rigor in legislation in terms of religion. Each measure accelerated the decay of the empire. Emperor Honorius continued his father's legacy and declared all judges and officials punishable by law for not enforcing anti-pagan laws. Following the sack of Rome in 410 AD, many returned

¹ TIZZONI (2012: 20–21).

to the old faith based on their belief that the series of calamities Rome was then experiencing was the old gods' punishment for the Empire's abandonment of them. The state responded to these obstinate pagans with draconian measures; pagans were forbidden to serve in state administration or to participate in any public affairs. Theodosius II went further still, decreeing that any involvement in pagan practice was a capital offence. The old world order slowly vanished, and a new order took its place. The principles of the old state – *inter alia*, religious and cultural tolerance – ceased to exist, and this radical discontinuity in faith and tradition led to the eventual collapse of the Western Roman Empire.

The Cultural context of Dracontius' poetry

Dracontius was a Roman poet in this time of change. He was born in 455 AD in Carthage, just as this new world was coming into being: he was 21 years old when Emperor Romulus Augustulus was dethroned. The Vandals set foot in North Africa in 429 AD and declared their state in 439 AD, and were ultimately conquered by the Byzantine Empire in 534 AD, during the Vandalic War. On the former imperial territory of *Africa Proconsularis*.² Vandal rule was consolidated before Dracontius' birth. Hence, Dracontius – a man with strong ties to the conservative Roman elite – lived his entire life under this alien regime. Fortunately, his identity is well substantiated by his own account: *Vir clarissimus et togatus fori proconsulis almae Karthaginis*.³ The term 'clarissimus' was widely used for members of the senatorial rank in the late Imperial era. At the same time, the word 'togatus' refers to his intellect as an erudite Roman nobleman.⁴ Carthage's centuries-long history as a flourishing

² FIELDING (2017: 90).

³ *Drac. Rom.* 5.

⁴ FILOSINI (2018: 338).

Roman cultural centre makes this self-identification rather unsurprising. His poetic style follows the paradigms of classical poetry, including those of metrical scansion, rhetoric, and aesthetics. Dracontius presumably converted to Christianity in the early stages of his life, given that his works are predominantly Christian-themed. Such works include *De Laudibus Dei*, a collection of tales from the Bible written in hexameters in which he supplicates to the Christian God for mankind's deliverance from their sins and begs for redemption. The poem *Satisfactio* is a plea for forgiveness addressed to King Gunthamund of the Vandals, written in elegiac couplets; the poem invokes a series of moral examples from the Bible, but interestingly for our purposes, from the pagan past, too.⁵ Prayers for mercy to a sovereign were a tradition in ancient poetry. It is therefore not particularly surprising that references to his pre-Christian forebearers were incorporated into a poem of this genre. From these two superficial examples, it is already clear that correspondence between Christian culture and pagan tradition was indeed possible in certain aspects of morality displayed in literature. By zooming-in on this clear-cut example of pagan-Christian continuity, this paper aims to refute the wrongly-conceived tendency of academic discourse to portray this transition period as an age of unmitigated cultural decline that led to the beginning of the so-called Dark Ages, as well as to reevaluate it as an age during which the merits of classical antiquity were preserved, and indeed, continued to exist well into the Christian era.⁶

Dracontius' proficiency in ancient poetry problematizes assumptions about the status of classical literacy in the Vandal successor state, because it demonstrates that Carthage remained a thriving centre of Roman culture even after Roman authority in North Africa collapsed. In other words, Roman classical thought and intellect – collectively termed

⁵ NIKOLSKY (2017: 42).

⁶ TIZZONI (2012: 23–26).

romanitas – outlived Roman statehood in the region. Dracontius, as a member of the former senatorial elite, carried forth the heritage of his pagan predecessors. Classical Education must have survived intact under Vandal rule despite the Vandals' ruthless religious persecution of the former Roman elite. The persecution exclusively targeted the Orthodox aristocracy because they would have refused to recognize the Arian Vandals as their ruler.⁷ Thus, their persecution was an indispensable prerequisite to the successful conquest of the region. Consequently, Dracontius and his family were stripped of their fortune and later imprisoned under the reign of King Gunthamund.⁸⁹ However, the Vandals had no interest in erasing ancient culture along with the patrician class. Contrarywise, the Vandals were utterly captivated by the achievements of the imperial era. Dracontius' account in his series of poems and rhetorical exercises provides insight into this cultural continuity: *Sancte pater, o magister, taliter canendus es, qui fugatas Africanae reddis urbi litteras, barbaris qui Romulidas iungis auditorio, cuius ordines semper obstupescimus, quos capit dulcedo vestri, doctor, oris maxima (...)* (Drac. Rom. 1,12-1,16). This entry is the beginning of a poem which Dracontius wrote to his master, Felicianus Grammaticus, and it is written per the classical *captatio benevolentiae* rhe-

⁷ Germanic tribes, including the Vandals were Arians, while the Roman elite was predominantly Catholic. The tension between the two branches of Christianity was caused by a theological dispute, namely their views on the trinity. Arians believed that the trinity was created of three separate entities, while Catholics took the view it was created by God himself. Arians also argued the Catholic position of Jesus Christ in Christian theology: Christ was not truly divine, but a created being and that God solely is self-existent. Due to this major theological dissent, the Catholics declared the Arians heretics in 325 AD at the council of Nicene, deepening the conflict between the parties.

⁸ Gunthamund (450–496) was the third king of the Vandal Kingdom. He succeeded his unpopular uncle, king Huneric on the throne. During his successful reign, he brought about the consolidation after the tempestuous reign marked by the persecution of the Orthodox elite in Carthage. Thus, the state enjoyed a period of peace under his rule. During these relatively serene decades, Carthage has experienced a revival of classical literacy, due to his fondness for ancient culture.

⁹ FIELDING (2017: 90–91); NIKOLSKY (2017: 26).

torical paradigm. The phrase *littera fugata* stands out; though Dracontius does not clarify its meaning, the paradigms of classical literature suggest that it is a reference to the ill-treatment of Romans who had suffered under the Vandal occupation. The influence of classical education was decreased to some extent, for the elite suffering from Vandal persecution was the bearer of classical knowledge. These lines are also an expression of the cultural identity of Dracontius and his contemporaries; he refers to the Romans as '*Romulidae*', that is, the 'grandsons of Romulus'. This peculiar expression signifies the strong sense of Roman cultural belonging that lived on well after the decline of the Roman West. The fact that the barbarians are in 'the same auditorium' as the descendants of Romulus is clearly a matter of pride for the poet and even suggests a hint of cultural supremism, suggesting that the Romans remain the Vandals' superiors in terms of knowledge, even if they were then their inferiors politically. This idea that the cultural excellence of Graeco-Roman culture was unparalleled elsewhere was a consistent and fundamental part of Graeco-Roman identity, and literary excellence was in turn an essential aspect of Graeco-Roman conceptions of high culture.¹⁰

Apart from the embeddedness of old traditions, the ideology of the Vandal court itself also helped ensure the survival of Greek and Latin literacy. As foreign usurpers of Roman territories, the Vandals had a great interest in portraying themselves as the true heirs of the Roman Empire, and adopting the ancient culture of the elite they had persecuted made such portrayals far more convincing. Consequently, the Vandals were generally open to anything that was related to Graeco-Roman antiquity.¹¹ The following parts of this paper will discuss the interpretation of select passages of Dracontius' *Satisfactio*.

¹⁰ BOSHOFF (2017: 19–22).

¹¹ BOSHOFF (2017: 19–22).

Satisfactio

Satisfactio ad Guntharium Regem Vandalorum Dum Esset In Vinculis is Dracontius' plea for forgiveness to his sovereign, King Gunthamund. It is simultaneously a prayer to the Christian God for deliverance from his sins. Written in elegiac couplets that meticulously and seamlessly interweave motifs from Christianity with those of classical antiquity, the poem expresses regret for a past mistake that had Dracontius imprisoned by King Gunthamund; Dracontius' sin was a panegyric written to his sovereign's enemy. This mysterious enemy is not identified in the poem, and there is yet to be a decisive answer to who this enemy is,¹² because the poem merely describes him as an 'unknown lord': *culpa mihi fuerat dominos reticere modestos / ignotumque mihi scribere vel dominum (...)* (Drac. Sat. 93–94).

Following the root position of the praise written to a hostile king and aside from Dracontius' situation, the broader ideological background must be addressed as well. The dominant ideologies of late antiquity – and notably, the revival of paganism in the 3rd century AD – significantly contributed to the emergence of this peculiar form of literature. After the mischievous reign of Emperor Commodus, the Roman Empire was plunged into a cultural and economic crisis. At the same time, pagan literature was vanishing due to the ascendance of Christianity. By the middle of the 3rd century, the Christian population was numerous enough to organise a distinctly Christian literary culture that existed independent of and parallel to paganism's. Amidst this cultural low point of the 3rd

¹² However, NIKOLSKY (2017: 38–41), takes the opinion that the unidentified addressee of his lost panegyric was Hunerich, the previous Vandal king. Their conflict was rooted in religion and inheritance of power. Hunerich relentlessly persecuted Orthodox Christians and closed their churches down, which were only reopened after Gunthamund's surge to power. He also intended to appoint his son as the heir of the throne, but he was not able to finalize his endeavour due to his premature death, thus Gunthamund took power.

century, the Imperial Court considered measures aimed at decelerating the exponential growth of Christianity; these efforts came into fruition during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, who promoted classical literacy under his reign, and who is still remembered as a man of letters. However, the ideology of Roman traditionalism emerged through the reforms of Emperor Diocletian, which successfully delayed the fall of the Empire for another two centuries. The revival emerging in the century also involved the most severe persecutions against Christians, including a total ban on conversion to Christianity. It also placed literature and statesmen from the late republican and early Imperial eras on a pedestal, enshrining them as ideals to emulate and surpass.¹³ For instance, when the Senate inaugurated a new emperor, the Senators wished him thus: *'Felicior Augusto, melior Traiano'*. This new ideological direction permeated the arts, literature, and state governance, and remained the official ideology up until the fall of the Western Roman Empire.¹⁴ Additionally, *Satisfactio* also reflects the ideology of the Vandal Court. Similarly to the Romans, the Vandals intended to revive the imperial cult of earlier centuries. They viewed the ancient state structure as essential for their legitimisation across the Mediterranean and peaceful diplomacy with their neighbours; it was a common practice for Vandal kings to depict themselves wearing traditional *toga picta* – i.e., Roman imperial clothing – as evinced by numerous surviving coins found throughout North Africa. The kingdom is therefore labelled as an *'imitatio imperii'* in modern scholarship due to its adoption of Roman imperial principles in its organisation of political, economic, and social structures.¹⁵ Moreover, Vandal kings married their children to the successors of Eastern Roman emperors to further shore up their legitimacy

¹³ Virgil, Ovid, Horace, or Cicero in literature, the exemplary statesmen were Julius Caesar, emperors Augustus and Trajan.

¹⁴ ADAMIK (2009: 662–663).

¹⁵ STEINACHER (2008: 269).

as the successors of Rome. The first component of Vandal self-representation was therefore that of Roman cultural heritage. Religious portrayal was no less important; the Vandal Kingdom was surrounded by the Christian successor states of the former Western Roman Empire, and so their convincing adoption of Christian tradition was equally vital. On that account, their diplomatic communications were framed to demonstrate their status as the truly *Christian* heirs of the Roman emperors.¹⁶ Their political, literary, and artistic discourses were imbued with the traditionalism of the late imperial era, reflecting the Vandals' general openness to Graeco-Roman culture. The Vandals, therefore, utilized ancient literature as a means of propaganda, patronising poets who were willing to spread their ideology and utilise their poetic talents in the service of the 'imperial' state, as was common practice during the imperial era proper. Dracontius and his *Satisfactio* are no exception; the poem is a panegyric – a poet singing the praises of his (secular) lord – and serves as an example of state intervention in and control over cultural life. In the poem, Dracontius expressly states that should the king grant him mercy, his poetic ability would serve as an asset to the king: (...) '*Ipse meo domino Deus imperat atque iubebit ut me restituat respiciatque pius, servet, avi ut laudes dicam patriasque suasque perque suas proles regia vota canam.*' (Drac. *Sat.* 49–53). These lines also demonstrate Dracontius' submission to a regime that he is compelled to comply with for his survival.

Dracontius' Strategies of Argumentation

The following section of this paper intends to examine how Dracontius aligns his poetry with the aims of Vandal propaganda. To appeal to the king and to gain his sympathy, his rhetorical approach accords with the

¹⁶ NIKOLSKY (2017: 37–38).

Vandals' self-depiction.¹⁷ The erudite poet takes on the role of the king's educator, lining up a series of moral *exempla* from the pagan past and the Bible to convince Gunthamund of the importance of mercy and forgiveness to any true Christian monarch. The first element of his strategy is the invocation of the imperial heritage of the former Roman Empire. Idealised portrayals of merciful leaders are a motif that originates from the ancient tradition; the thought was conceived during the civil wars and later became a principle of rule in Imperial Rome.¹⁸ The core figures of the Empire's glorious past are Julius Caesar and his nephew, Emperor Augustus. Caesar's example exemplifies the correct conduct of a statesman towards his defeated foes; he introduces his poem with the values of Caesar's political propaganda, *venia* and *clementia*:¹⁹

Caesar ubique potens hosti post bella pepercit,
 (et quod erat peius, cuius et civis erat)
 sponte facultatem redhibens reparuit honores,
 inde vocatus abit dignus honore Dei,
 Cuius ab imperio surgens et origine Caesar
 Augustus meruit tempus habere pium,
 tempore namque eodem est natus de Virgine Christus,
 cuius emicuit stella per astra poli. (Drac. *Sat.* 175–182).²⁰

That Caesar's forgiving character is here portrayed as pious by a Christian author indicates that clemency was a core value in both the pre-Christian and Christian eras, an indication which in itself bears witness to a considerable degree of correspondence between Christian and pagan principles; put, the fundamental truths and values held by

¹⁷ FILOSINI (2018: 335).

¹⁸ KONSTAN (2005: 65).

¹⁹ FILOSINI (2018: 332–336).

²⁰ The edition of *Satisfactio* is *Patrologia Latina*: MIGNE, ed. (1841–1855: vol. 060).

ancient authors and statesmen continued to be upheld, and they constituted valuable segments of emergent Christian values.²¹ Dracontius invokes Caesar's good deeds as well as his benevolent nature; after granting forgiveness to his enemies, Caesar restored them to their former positions, even when some of these former enemies were fellow Roman citizens who had turned against him. As a result, Caesar left Earth with a godlike glory; he was summoned to ascend into heaven. With Caesar's propaganda considered, the dynamic of adaptation here is simple but requires proficiency in both cultures, because it involves the integration of motifs common to both. This aspect of interpretation suggests the conclusion that the transition period of the 5th century was not so much a cultural revival as it was a direct continuation of ancient culture; in other words, contrary to widespread narratives, Roman culture did not vanish in the Christian era.²² Dracontius restates this idea in the lines concerning Emperor Augustus. On the shoulders of his uncle's imperium, Augustus achieved a blessed era of Peace and prosperity now known as the Pax Romana; the poet even goes so far as to attribute the birth of Jesus Christ to Augustus' imperial consolidation after decades of civil war. Augustus is also praised as the founder of the Roman Imperial cult and the Principate, under which the Roman Empire reached its economic and cultural peak. Dracontius encodes an essential message in this passage: that good deeds never go unrewarded. Just as Caesar's clemency precipitated Rome's golden age, King Gunthamund's pardon of Dracontius may lead to similar rewards. The cited lines hold up Caesar as the (pagan) archetype of morality, while Augustus' reign represents the ideal state structure.

The moral teaching of mercy is further emphasised through specifically Christian ethical teaching. Dracontius acquaints his king with the

²¹ TIZZONI (2012: 141).

²² FIELDING (2017: 117).

correct manner of punishing sinners, urging Gunthamund to treat his prisoners humanely and to practice empathy towards them:

(...) *Tempore tam longo non decet ira pium. Nam qui inimicorum culpis veniale minaris, captivosque tuos deliciis epulas, puniat ut sit quod Christus, tu parcis iniquis, vindice quo regnas, quo vigilante viges.* (Drac. *Sat.* 120–124).

Dracontius highlights the importance of repentance by invoking the well-known Biblical story of David's affair with Bathsheba. According to the moral narrative in the *Book of 2 Samuel* in the Hebrew Bible (2, 11–12:25), one is always pardoned if they confess their sins and show repentance. God punished David with the deaths of four of his newborn babies due to the misdeeds he committed in the lead-up to his misbegotten marriage with Bathsheba, but once David confessed and showed remorse for his sins, he was pardoned. His fifth child, Solomon, was spared. Dracontius writes that '*Rex inimicorum iugulis mucrone pepercit, David et hic sceleris certus adulter inest, confessus facinus veniam pro clade meretur*' (...) (Drac. *Sat.* 157–159), emphasising the importance of repentance; Dracontius does not argue that his punishment was unjust – contrarywise, he concedes that Gunthamund's retaliation was an expression of God's wrath – yet he also emphasises that Christian teaching commands forgiveness and mercy once sinners show penance for their misdeeds. The king ought to absolve Dracontius from his sin by releasing him, according to Biblical teaching. Dracontius finishes his poem by adding that punishments ought always to be proportionate and humane: '*Sessorem, dum carpit iter, si cornea palpans / ungula concutiat quadropedantis equi, / Verbere corrigitur culpa, plectente flagello, / Non simul abscisi crura, pedesque iacent*' (Drac. *Sat.* 312–315). The ending of *Satisfactio* conveys another important message from the Holy Writ about forgiveness: when there is crime and repen-

tance, there ought to be forgiveness, and not once, but again. To this end, Dracontius writes '*Non semel dixit ignosci lex sancta reatum, / sed quotiens culpa est, sit quotiens venia*' (Drac. Sat. 307–308), intentionally applying moral pressure on the king; the authority of the Bible and the unappealable truth of religion is, after all, binding upon all.

The usage of examples from classical antiquity in *Satisfactio* is telling of the high level of literary proficiency and vibrant cultural life of Vandal North Africa. In his dual role as a Christian poet and a carrier of Roman tradition, Dracontius is well-read in and familiar with the traditions of both Christianity and Graeco-Roman antiquity. With this extraordinary knowledge at his disposal, he was able to compose a compelling plea to his sovereign, which later led to his forgiveness and eventual rehabilitation.

Literary Models

Given the conclusions of the preceding section on the role of Christian tradition in the work, this section seeks to emphasise that the role of the classical literary tradition is of no less importance. The previously discussed penitential tone is indeed purely Christian, but the poem's compositional paradigms and rhetorical strategies are rooted in the classical canon. *Satisfactio* is deeply influenced by both the poetic and prosaic works of numerous authors of previous centuries, and fully appreciating this sheds a great deal of light upon the dynamics of the cultural continuity of late antiquity. It is essential to highlight that Dracontius draws upon a variety of works in this plea alone – listing them comprehensively would require further research – but the following paragraphs highlight some of his most obvious inspirations.

The plea closely resembles Ovid's poetry of exile. Motifs from his *Tristia* are conveyed in the way *Satisfactio* lays out its moral teachings. Al-

lusion is a significant technique in Latin literature, employed as a means of preserving ancient customs and expressing reverence towards one's predecessors, and this is also the case in Dracontius's work.²³ The way of the ancestors (*mos maiorum*) was an irrefutable authority for Romans to live by. The passages of the poem that instruct the morals of ancient figures are thus a manifestation of this core value. As stated previously, piety was a principal element of moral thought in ancient Rome. For that reason, Dracontius invokes pagan exemplars of this value in his discourse: '*Sic leo terribile fremit horridus ore cruento, / unguibus excussis, dente minante neces/acrius iratus crispato lumine ferri / et mora si fuerit, acrius inde furit. / At si venator trepidans venabula ponat, / territus et iaceat, mox perit ira cadens*' (Drac. *Sat.* 137–142). These lines recall the Ovidian motif of Augustus as a forgiving lion: *Quo quisque est maior, magis est placabilis irae / et faciles motus gens generosa capit. / Corpora magnanimo satis est prostrasse leoni, / pugna suum finem, cum iacet hostis, habet* (Ov. *Tr.* 3,5, 31–34). Dracontius' argument is strengthened by the fact that pagan and Christian poets alike hold that the ability to overcome the urge of vengeance and to practice forgiveness instead are basic virtues that any good leader must possess.²⁴ Since the poem consists of a series of moral teachings, it is also essential to address the influence of ancient didactic poetry. The relevance of didactic poetry as a literary source is justified by the fact that it was Virgil who developed this genre in Latin literature.²⁵ On the other hand, Virgil's works laid the foundation for subsequent Roman poetry; thus, the model he set cannot be omitted. There are echoes of the *Georgics* in *Satisfactio*, both in the poem's moral teaching and in a particular word connection that is typical of Virgil's epic vocabulary: '*Littera doctiloquax apibus cognata refertur, / quis datur ut habeant cerea castra favos*'

²³ BOSHOFF (2017: 51).

²⁴ FILOSINI (2018: 344–345).

²⁵ TIZZONI (2012: 18).

(*Drac. Sat.* 61–62). The reference to beeswax alludes to the fourth book of the *Georgics*, in which didactic Virgil describes the organization of the beehive as a model for humans to follow. The main parallels between Dracontius and Virgil are found in the didactic program of their works, as both expound moral doctrines cast in the form of idealistic models for human behaviour that ought to be emulated. On the other hand, the use of the term ‘*castra*’ for beehive shows undeniable Virgilian Influence from the *Aeneid*: ‘*vestigavit apes fumoque implevit amaro, illae intus trepidae rerum per cerea castra*’ (Verg. *Aen.* 588–589).²⁶ After locating the appropriate set of values and a suitable didactic program in the classical canon, Dracontius also required good rhetoric to ensure that his message was readily decodable; in this regard, *Satisfactio* follows the standards of classical rhetorical practice, that is, it is organised into three units by Cicero’s discussion on orations. In the *exordium*²⁷ or introductory section, Dracontius opens the poem with a hymn to the Christian God, describes God’s authority over human actions, and concludes that the royal punishment that was inflicted upon him reflected the Divine Will: *Sic mea corda Deus, nostro peccante reatu / temporis immodici, pellit ad illicita* (*Drac. Sat.* 19–20). The central section or *confirmatio*²⁸ begins by the author recognising his sin, followed by the core teaching of the poem, i.e., the discussion of misdeeds and the correct manner of punishing and forgiving them. The section begins by laying out the doctrines that are discussed throughout the central section: *culpa quidem gravis est, venia sed digna reatus, / quod sine peccati crimine nemo fuit*. In this section, Dracontius confesses, albeit indirectly, that the panegyric he wrote to the aforementioned ‘unknown

²⁶ TIZZONI (2012: 50–51).

²⁷ Cic. *Inv.* 1, 15, 20. *Exordium est oratio animum auditoris idonee comparans ad reliquam dictionem: quod eveniet, si eum benivolum, attentum, docilem confecerit.*

²⁸ Cic. *Inv.* 1, 24, 34. *confirmatio est, per quam argumentando nostrae causae fidem et auctoritatem et firmamentum adiungit oratio.*

lord' was an act of sin. In the closing section or *peroration*,²⁹ Dracontius summarises his message to the king and attempts to alleviate his anger by invoking several social and naturalistic phenomena to advance the notion that everything has its proper time; thus, his punishment shall come to an end: *Tempora gaudendi, sunt tempora certa dolendi. / Tempora dant lucrum, tempora damna ferunt.* (Drac. Sat. 258–259). In the final lines, he reveals the reason for composing his plea: *'Inclitus armipotens, vestrae pietatis origo, / et docto genio pronior ad veniam, / "non homini ignosco" dixit, "lingua meretur", hic reus et doctus Vincolamos fuerat'* (Drac. Sat. 299–302). He recognises that education is a source of benevolence: King Genseric, Gunthamund's predecessor, had similarly spared the life of the rhetorician Vincomalus because he was impressed by his eloquence. Here, Dracontius is clearly expressing the hope that like cases be treated alike.³⁰

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²⁹ Cic. *Inv.* 1,52, 98. *Conclusio est exitus et determinatio totius orationis*

³⁰ FILOSINI (2018: 330–337).

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