

NUNC DEMUM REDIT ANIMUS (TACITUS, *AGRICOLA*, 3. 1):
HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS AFTER THE END
OF A TYRANNICAL GOVERNMENT*

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Abstract:

This essay explores the theme of hope in the literary production of second-century C.E. intellectuals, with reference to a selection of emblematic passages from Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Cassius Dio and Dio of Prusa. In the climate of positive renewal perceived after the death of Domitian, these authors express favorable judgments on Nerva and Trajan, which reflect an expectation towards a future grounded in good governance and open dialogue between the *princeps* and the intellectual élite. This analysis highlights how these texts convey the perception of a transition from an oppressive regime to a renewed sense of trust in the figure of the emperor.

Key-words: hope, intellectuals, Nerva, Trajan, Roman history

1. *The Return of Hope: Tacitus and the promise of Principate and Freedom*

Within the framework of the theme of the Conference “The Future of Hope”, the reflections of second-century C.E. intellectuals – especially Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Cassius Dio, and Dio of Prusa, on whom this brief essay focuses – are emblematic of how hope, in their writings, was closely linked to the expectations of good governance following the dramatic interlude of the tyrannical and culturally oppressive principate, imposed more recently by Domitian and, earlier, by the Julio-Claudians, especially Nero. In relation to the beginning of Nerva’s principate and

* Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are by the author.

the subsequent rise of Trajan, these authors express, in various ways, feelings of trust and expectations of political, cultural and moral renewal. The well-known sentence *Nunc demum redit animus* from Tacitus' *Agricola*, which serves as the starting point of this reflection, is particularly emblematic in this regard: it marks the beginning of a new phase of recovery not only for the empire in general, but also for the relationship between the *princeps* and the intellectual élite:

Now at last spirits are reviving. At the first dawning of this most fortunate age, Nerva Caesar at once combined principles formerly incompatible, principate and freedom. Day by day Nerva Trajan is enhancing the happiness of our times. Public security has not merely inspired our hopes and prayers but has gained the assurance of those prayers' fulfilment and, from this, strength. And yet, by the nature of human frailty, remedies take longer to act than diseases¹.

The word chosen by Tacitus, *animus*, moreover, means “vital breath”, “breathing”, “possibility to breathe”, which, in this passage, appears to be connected with the notion of hope². With these words, Tacitus compares the age of the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians – marked by a tyrannical regime and violent censorship of intellectuals³ – to the age of Nerva (96-98 C.E.) and Trajan (98-117 C.E.), characterized by the union of two elements that had until then been considered irreconcilable: principate and freedom⁴. Indeed, the contrast between a tyrannical past and a present marked

¹ TACITUS, *Agricola* 3. 1: *Nunc demum redit animus; et quamquam primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerua Caesar res olim dissociabiles miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem, augeatque cotidie felicitatem temporum Nerua Traianus, nec spem modo ac uotum securitas publica, sed ipsius uoti fiduciam ac robur adumpserit, natura tamen infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala*. Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *Tacitus. Agricola and Germania*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, p. 55, with an amendment on the translation of *principatum*.

² See, e.g., also the translation offered by E. ADLER, *Effectiveness and Empire in Tacitus' Agricola*, in «Ancient History Bulletin», XXX. 1-2, 2016, p. 2.

³ See, e.g., TACITUS, *Agri.* 2. 2: «No doubt they (*scil.* the previous emperors) thought that in that fire the voice of the Roman People, the liberty of the senate, and the conscience of mankind could be wiped out – over and above this, the teachers of philosophy were expelled and all noble accomplishments driven into exile, so that nothing honourable might anywhere confront them» (*Scilicet illo igne vocem populi Romani et libertatem senatus et conscientiam generis humani aboleri arbitrabantur, expulsis insuper sapientiae professoribus atque omni bona arte in exilium acta, ne quid usquam honestum occurreret*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁴ However, it cannot be excluded, as stated by E. ADLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-14, that Tacitus' praise was not entirely sincere: despite his initial commendations of Nerva and Trajan, the two would prove unable to quickly reverse the moral decline of Rome. In the passage cited

by a widespread sense of well-being is evident: «None the less, it will not be an unpleasant task to put together, even in a rough and uncouth style, a record of our former servitude and a testimony to our present blessings»⁵. The theme most prominently highlighted in these passages is, more specifically, that of hope in an unprecedented climate of renewed freedom of speech. To this end, in *Agricola* 2.1, Tacitus mentions intellectuals who lived under the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians and who suffered censorship or were condemned to death for expressing libertarian and anti-tyrannical ideas: Arulenus Rusticus, sentenced to death by Domitian for having praised Thræsea Paetus, an anti-Neronian intellectual who had himself been forced to commit suicide; Herennius Senecio, also condemned by Domitian for a panegyric written in honor of the politician Helvidius Priscus, who had been executed by Vespasian⁶. In this oppressive climate, Tacitus states,

and the following statements, one can indeed detect a trace of pessimism – typical of this author – regarding the slowness of human nature to adapt to change, even when that change is positive: «And yet, by the nature of human frailty, remedies take longer to act than diseases. Our bodies, which grow so slowly, perish in an instant. So too you can crush the mind and its pursuits more easily than you can recall them to life. Indolence indeed has a charm of its own, to which we gradually yield, and we end up by loving the inaction that we at first hated» (*natura tamen infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala; et ut corpora nostra lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur, sic ingenia studiaque oppresseris facilius quam revocaveris: subit quippe etiam ipsius inertiae dulcedo, et invisa primo desidia postremo amatur*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 55). Thus, the remedies for the ills caused by Domitian are slow, due to the nature of human weakness, unlike *Agricola*, who improved the condition of the province within his first year of governance, as stated in 20.1: «By clamping down on these abuses at once in his first year, he gave peace a good name: it had been feared no less than war through either the negligence or the arrogance of previous governors» (*Haec primo statim anno comprimendo egregiam famam paci circumdedit, quae vel incuria vel intolerantia priorum haud minus quam bellum timebatur*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

⁵ TACITUS, *Agr.* 3. 3 (*Non tamen pigebit vel incondita ac rudi voce memoriam prioris servitutis ac testimonium praesentium bonorum composuisse*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶ Among the wide range of contributions on the relationship between the *princeps* and the intellectuals during the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods, see, for example, R. SYME, *A political group*, in *Roman Papers*, vol. 7, ed. by A. R. Birley, Oxford Academic, Oxford 1991, pp. 568-587; V. RUDICH, *Political Dissidence under Nero*, Routledge, London-New York 1993; W. ECK, *Helvidius*, in *Der Neue Pauly*, vol. 5, Stoccarda, Metzler 1998, pp. 339-340; O. DEVILLERS, *Le rôle des passages relatifs à Thræsea Paetus dans les Annales de Tacite, Neronia VI*, in «Collection Latomus», CCLXVIII, 2002, pp. 296-311; W. TURPIN, *Tacitus, stoic exempla, and the praecipuum munus annalium*, in «Classical Antiquity», XXVII, 2, 2008, pp. 359-404; T. E. STRUNK, *Saving the life of a foolish poet: Tacitus on Marcus Lepidus, Thræsea Paetus, and political action under the principate*, in «Syllecta Classica», 2010, pp. 119-139; WOLFGANG-RAINER MANN, «You're playing you now»: *Helvidius Priscus as a stoic*

We have indeed provided a grand specimen of submissiveness. Just as the former age witnessed an extreme in freedom, so we have experienced the depths of servitude, deprived by espionage even of the intercourse of speaking and listening to one another. We should have lost our memories as well as our voices, were it as easy to forget as to be silent⁷.

2. *Voices of Hope: Pliny's Panegyricus and the Promise of Imperial Renewal*

Historians and intellectuals of second century C.E., in fact, generally agree in describing the principates of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian as a prosperous and peaceful era. In concluding his biography of Domitian, Suetonius recounts a meaningful and emblematic anecdote that foreshadows the promising change in direction that was about to unfold:

They say that even Domitian himself dreamt that a golden hump grew out of his back and he understood this as a certain indication that the condition of the state would be happier and more prosperous after his time, as indeed happened shortly afterwards through the self-control and integrity of the subsequent emperors⁸.

hero, in Roman reflections. Studies in Latin philosophy, ed. by G. D. Williams and K. Volk, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 213-237.

⁷ TACITUS, *Agr.* 2. 3-4 (*Dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut vetus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute, adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendique commercio. Memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 55. This passage has many similarities with the preface of the *Histories*. (1. 1): «For many historians have related events of the preceding 820 years dating from the foundation of Rome. So long as republican history was their theme, they wrote with equal eloquence and independence. Yet after the battle of Actium had been fought and the interests of peace demanded that power should be concentrated in one man's hands, this great line of historians came to an end. Truth, too, suffered in various ways, thanks first to an ignorance of politics, which now lay outside public control; later came a passion for flattery, or else a hatred of autocrats» (*nam post conditam urbem octingentos et viginti prioris aevi annos multi auctores rettulerunt, dum res populi Romani memorabantur pari eloquentia ac libertate: postquam bellatum apud Actium atque omnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit, magna illa ingenia cessere; simul veritas pluribus modis infracta, primum inscitia rei publicae ut alienae, mox libidine adsentandi aut rursus odio adversus dominantis*). Transl. by K. WELLESLEY, *Tacitus. The Histories*, Penguin Books Ltd, London 2009, p. 41.

⁸ SUETONIUS, *Life of Domitian*, 23 (*Ipsum etiam Domitianum ferunt somniasse gibbam sibi pone cervicem auream enatam, pro certoque habuisse beatiorem post se laetiolemque portendi rei publicae statum, sicut sane brevi evenit abstinentia et moderatione insequentium principum*). Transl. by C. EDWARDS, *Suetonius. Life of the Caesars*, ed. by C. Edwards, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2nd ed., 2008, p. 294.

Nerva, formerly governor of Mauretania and consul under Vespasian and Domitian⁹, is portrayed by Cassius Dio, for example, as playing a key role in restoring institutional balance¹⁰. Pliny the Younger, in addition to stating that «although a private citizen, he was not indifferent to the public good», also claims that Nerva's era was «an example similar to ancient times»¹¹.

The system of adoptive succession¹² must certainly have played a major role in establishing the atmosphere of hope and courage that Tacitus speaks of in the *Agricola*. Dio, consistently, states that the choice was made primarily «for the good fortune of the Senate and the Roman people»¹³. Trajan's position as Nerva's successor¹⁴, personally chosen by the emperor, of senatorial rank, and possessing a wide military experience¹⁵, generated enormous expectations in public opinion, clearly reflected in numerous passages of Pliny the Younger's *Panegyric*. Trajan is portrayed as an ideal ruler, «beyond human hope and condition»¹⁶, whose virtues promise prosperity and stability for the future:

⁹ On the career of M. Cocceius Nerva, who had moreover maintained close ties with the Flavians prior to his imperial appointment, see e.g. CIL XI 5743, TACITUS, *Annales* 15. 72. Regarding the succession to Domitian, see e.g. *Fasti Ostienses* (ed. L. VIDMAN, *Ceskoslovenská Akademie Ved.*, Praha 1982, 2nd ed.), p. 45; CASSIUS DIO 67. 15. 5; *Ep. de Caes.* 12. For a general overview, see C.L. MURISON, M. *Cocceius Nerva and the Flavians*, in «Transactions of the American Philological Association» CXXXIII, 2003, pp. 147-157; A.W. COLLINS, *The palace revolution: the assassination of Domitian and the accession of Nerva*, in «Phoenix», LXIII. 1/2, 2009, pp. 73-106.

¹⁰ CASSIUS DIO, 68. 1-4. See, in particular, par. 2, in which measures to suspend *maiestas* (treason) trials and to condemn informers are mentioned.

¹¹ *Ep.* 7. 33. 9: *nam privatus quoque attendebat his quae recte in publico fierent [...] exemplum [...] simile antiquis.*

¹² On which see e.g. CASSIUS DIO, 68. 4: «Thus Trajan became Caesar and later emperor, although Nerva had some descendants. In fact. He did not place family ties above the safeguarding of the state, and it was certainly not the fact that Trajan was a Spaniard rather than an Italic or Italiote that prevented him from adopting him, given that no foreigner had ever before assumed the empire of the Romans; indeed, Nerva believed that his choice should be made based on a man's virtue, not his nationality» (οὕτω μὲν ὁ Τραϊανὸς Καῖσαρ καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο αὐτοκράτωρ ἐγένετο, καίτοι συγγενῶν τοῦ Νέρουα ὄντων τινῶν. ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ τῆς τῶν κοινῶν σωτηρίας ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὴν συγγένειαν προετίμησεν, οὐδ' αὖ ὅτι Ἰβηρ ὁ Τραϊανὸς ἄλλ' οὐκ Ἰταλὸς οὐδ' Ἰταλιώτης ἦν, ἡττόν τι παρὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸν ἐποιήσατο, ἐπεὶ μὴδεις πρόσθεν ἄλλοεθνῆς τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων κράτος ἐσχίκει· τὴν γὰρ ἀρετὴν ἄλλ' οὐ τὴν πατρίδα τινὸς ἐξετάζειν δεῖν ᾔετο.). See O. SCHIPP, *Die Adoptivkaiser – Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marc Aurel, Lucius Verus und Commodus*, Herder Verlag GmbH, Darmstadt 2011.

¹³ 68. 3. 4: ἀγαθὴ τύχη τῆς τε βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δήμου τῶν Ῥωμαίων καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.

¹⁴ See e.g. PLINY, *Pan.* 6.

¹⁵ See e.g. J. BENNETT, *Trajan. Optimus princeps. A Life and Times*, Routledge, London 2005 (2nd ed.), pp. 28-86.

¹⁶ *Pan.* 27: *supra hominis spem conditionemque.*

Great is your glory now and forever, Caesar, whether or not other princes follow your example, for is it not beyond all praise that a man, now consul for the third time, conducts himself as if it were his first election; that a prince should appear no different from a private citizen, an emperor no different from those under his command?¹⁷

According to Pliny's account, moreover, on his very first day in office, Trajan publicly declared that, although he was *princeps*, he would remain subject to the laws and would not place himself above them¹⁸. One of the main hopes expressed in the *Panegyric*, in fact, is that of a just and benevolent government. Once again, *libertas* lies at the heart of the intellectual's reflection:

At last, therefore, the nobility is no longer relegated to obscurity, but is placed in full light by the *princeps*; at last those illustrious descendants of great men, those illustrious posterity of freedom no longer have any fear of the emperor and no longer make him [...] On the contrary, he (Trajan), if somewhere there survives some descendant of an ancient family, if there survives some glimmer of a splendor not yet extinguished, surrounds him with his manifestations of benevolence, revives him and places him in evidence so that he may make himself useful to the state¹⁹.

Elsewhere in the *Panegyric*, Pliny emphasizes a point that echoes the pairing – already present in Tacitus – of principate and freedom: «Imperial power and liberty are brought before the same tribunal»²⁰. In the text, the terms *spes* (“hope”) and *sperare* (“to hope”), in various forms and conjugations, appear on multiple occasions. Below is a list of the most significant examples:

¹⁷ *Pan.* 64. 3-4: *Ingens, Caesar, et par gloria tua, sive fecerint istud postea principes, sive non fecerint. Ullane satis praedicatio digna est, idem tertio consulem fecisse, quod primo? Idem principem, quod privatum? Idem imperatorem, quod sub imperatore?*

¹⁸ *Pan.* 65. While Trajan presented himself as humble and respectful of the law, J. BENNETT, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76, 244 suggests that his decision was part of a strategic political plan to consolidate his sovereignty through the ordinary consulship, ensuring the adoption of his reforms without opposition. His decision to accept a third consulship in 99, despite initial reluctance, would therefore have been part of a broader plan to secure the peaceful implementation of the reforms he wished to see enacted.

¹⁹ *PLIN.* *Pan.* 69: *Tandem ergo nobilitas non obscuratur, sed illustratur a principe: tandem illos ingentium virorum nepotes, illos posteros libertetus, nec terret Caesar, nec pavet [...] si quid usquam stirpis antiquae, si quid residuae claritatis; hoc amplexatur, et refovet, et in usum reipublicae promit.*

²⁰ 37. 4: *eodem foro utuntur principatus et libertas*. However, ADLER (*op. cit.*, p. 4) remains convinced that Pliny's highly laudatory perspective stems from the need to appear aligned with imperial propaganda.

You have shown great wisdom, Caesar, in taking upon yourself the task of preserving the hope of the Roman name. For there is no expenditure more worthy of a prince, and of one who wishes to live on in immortality, than that which is made for the benefit of posterity²¹.

- Indeed, the hope of receiving public support and gifts is a powerful incentive to become a father, but an even sharper incentive is the hope of giving birth to children in liberty and security²².
- That murderer and butcher of all the best men had filled us both with terror through the slaughter of our friends and the thunderbolts he hurled at us; for we had the same friends, we mourned the same losses, and just as now we share hope and joy, so then we shared sorrow and fear²³.

3. Hope after tyranny: intellectuals and the hope for an ethical kingship

I will now very briefly turn to mention an intellectual and author of discourses on good governance, whose thought aligns with the tradition of treatises on kingship (*Peri basileías*), a genre with precedents in Xenophon (with the *Cyropaedia*), Isocrates (*To Nicocles* and *Evagoras*), and the Pythagoreans, and which extends throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. These writings, whose stylistic register lies somewhere between laudatory and exhortative, were often addressed to specific individuals (as the titles themselves indicate), yet the ethical concepts they expressed were universally applicable and widely shared. Thematic and conceptual features typical of this literary genre – which displays numerous points of contact with various philosophical schools, particularly Stoicism – include the opposition between king and tyrant; the image of a ruler who, though not bound by the laws, acts as though he were and behaves toward his subjects like a good father; the parallel drawn between the relationship of ruler to subjects and that of soul to body; the emphasis on gentleness as an essential and appropriate virtue of the *basileus*; and the necessity for the ruler to exercise a salvific function. This vision is expressed, for example, in

²¹ Pan. 26: *Recte, Caesar, quod spem Romani nominis sumptibus tuis suscipis. Nullum est enim magno principe immortalemque merituro impendii genus dignius, quam quod erogatur in posteros.*

²² Pan. 27: *Magnum quidem est educandi incitamentum, tollere liberos in spem alimentorum, in spem congiariorum; maius tamen, in spem libertatis, in spem securitatis.*

²³ Pan. 90: *Utrumque nostrum ille optimi cuiusque spoliator et carnifex stragibus amicorum, et in proximum iacto fulmine afflaverat. Iisdem enim amicis gloriabamur, eosdem amissos lugebamus: ac sicut nunc spes gaudiumque, ita tunc communis nobis dolor et metus erat.*

several of Plutarch's minor works, all part of the broad collection known as *Moralia*: in *Ad principem ineruditum*, *Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum*, and *De unius in re publica dominatione*, Plutarch defines monarchy as the best form of government, advocating its efficacy in maintaining universal order. However, in order to fully carry out his duties, the *basileus* must seek the company of philosophers capable of guiding him toward ethical rule. *Praecepta rei publicae gerendae* and *An seni res publica gerenda sit*, on the other hand, offer examples of sound political conduct addressed primarily to members of the Greek city-state élites, encouraging them – despite the inescapable reality of Roman dominion – to govern in a way that preserves at least a minimal degree of internal autonomy²⁴.

In line with this type of treatise is Dio of Prusa (c. 40-120 C.E.), an orator active under the Flavians, Nerva, and Trajan, who places at the center of his reflection the ideal of *eunomia* (“good governance”), itself based on a balanced relationship between the emperor and his subjects. To this end, there is a strong emphasis on moral values and virtues, an emphasis that reflects the hopes and expectations placed in Nerva and, above all, in Trajan. This vision is expressed in particular in the four orations *Perì Basileías* (*On Kingship*). Among the most emblematic occurrences of the term *elpis* (hope) in these discourses is the following:

And so, the time granted to man is short and unpredictable; much of life is taken up with the memory of the past and the hope for the future. Which of the two men, then, do we think rejoices in remembering the past, and which is troubled by it? Which is encouraged by hopes, and which, on the contrary, is disheartened? Therefore, the life of the good king must also be the more pleasant one²⁵.

According to Dio, the good king is the one who, having ruled with righteousness, can look to the future with hope and confidence. The ideology underlying these discourses also seeks to redefine, in new terms, the relationship between the emperor and the elites (particularly those of the Eastern provinces), who acknowledge his divine origin and autocratic power, yet in turn hope for a degree of participation in the exercise of authority²⁶:

²⁴ G. ZECCHINI, *Il pensiero politico romano*, Roma, Carocci, 2018 (2nd ed.), pp. 120-121.

²⁵ DIO, *Or.* 3. 61: πότερον οὖν τοῖν ἀνδροῖν ἡγώμεθα εὐφραίνειν τὴν μνήμην καὶ πότερον ἀνιᾶν, καὶ πότερον θαρρύνειν τὰς ἐλπίδας καὶ πότερον ἐκπλήττειν; οὐκοῦν καὶ ἡδίωνα ἀνάγκη τὸν βίον εἶναι τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ βασιλέως.

²⁶ G. Zecchini, *op. cit.*, *Il pensiero politico romano*, Roma, Carocci, 2018 (2nd ed.), p. 122.

I have given no small and not short-lived demonstration of how much I cherish my freedom. And if I were to lie now that without any doubt everyone can tell the truth, I who was the only one who had the courage to proclaim it, at the risk of my life, when it seemed necessary to everyone to lie out of fear, it would really have to be said that I do not know how to recognize either the time for freedom of expression or the time for flattery²⁷

The same theme is addressed in Oration 56 (*Agamemnon, or On Kingship*): in response to an interlocutor who claims that kingship is a power not subject to accountability («this power you speak of – the power to command men with absolute authority and give orders without being answerable – is called kingship»²⁸), Dio counters by presenting a political ideal based on a mixed form of government. This government consists of a king (Agamemnon) who governs with the collaboration of a wise man (represented by the figure of Nestor) and a council of elders: «Then do you not call the rule of the Heraclidae in Sparta, which lasted for such a long time, kingship? Well, they did not act as they pleased, but were required to obey the ephors in many matters»²⁹. Here too, the hope is clearly expressed that the emperor will cooperate with men of culture. It is no coincidence that the content of all these works, aimed to present to the ideal reader, the *princeps*, a model of virtuous and just rule, as well as a relationship with subjects based on active commitment to the community and mutual loyalty, mirrors that of the *On Tyranny* discourses, which condemn the tyrannical rule of Domitian, who had sentenced Dio to exile³⁰.

²⁷ DIO, *Or.* 3. 12-13: οὐ γὰρ ὀλίγην οὐδὲ ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ δέδωκα βάσανον τῆς ἐλευθερίας. εἰ δὲ ἐγὼ πρότερον μὲν, ὅτε πᾶσιν ἀναγκαῖον ἐδόκει ψεῦδεσθαι διὰ φόβον, μόνος ἀληθεύειν ἐτόλμων, καὶ ταῦτα κινδυνεύων ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς, νῦν δέ, ὅτε πᾶσιν ἔξεστι τᾷληθῆ λέγειν, ψεύδομαι, μηδενὸς κινδύνου παρεστῶτος, οὐκ ἂν εἰδείην οὔτε παρρησίας οὔτε κολακείας καιρόν.

²⁸ DIO, *Or.* 56. 5: ἡ ἀρχὴ αὕτη, ἣν λέγεις, τὸ καθόλου ἀνθρώπων ἄρχειν καὶ ἐπιτάττειν ἀνθρώποις ἀνυπεύθυνον ὄντα βασιλεία καλεῖται.

²⁹ *ibid.* Σὺ ἄρα οὐχ ἡγῆ βασιλείαν τὴν τῶν Ἡρακλειδῶν ἐν Λακεδαιμόνι τοσοῦτον βασιλευσάντων χρόνον; ἐκεῖνοι γὰρ οὐ πάντα ἐπραττον ὡς αὐτοῖς ἐδόκει, ἀλλὰ περὶ πολλῶν ὑπήκουον τοῖς ἐφόροις.

³⁰ Although Domitian is not explicitly mentioned, he is allegorized through the figure of the Persian king (on the works from the period of exile, see P. DESIDERI, *Dione di Prusa. Un intellettuale greco nell'impero romano*, D'Anna, Messina-Firenze 1978, pp. 187-260).

Conclusions

The sources analyzed bear witness to how, in the transition from the tyranny established by Domitian to the adoptive principate inaugurated by Nerva and consolidated by Trajan, a new collective hope emerged – not only for a return to the values of justice and freedom, but also for a relationship between power and intellectuals founded on open dialogue. Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Cassius Dio, and Dio of Prusa all reflect in their writings a climate of trust in the future, in which the exercise of imperial power is no longer authoritarian, but authoritative, marked by balance, legality, and virtue. In the works of these authors, hope thus becomes a critical lens, a key to interpreting the past and envisioning the future. In this sense, the testimonies examined here resonate with the theme proposed by the Conference: they remind us that for events to have a fortunate outcome, hope must be conscious, rooted in history, and shaped by a collective vision of the common good.