### Chapter 13: Family heroines: female vulnerability in the writings of Ambrose of Milan

David Natal, Royal Holloway, University of London

Little is known of the family of Aurelius Ambrosius (d. 397), who was the provincial governor of the north Italian province of Aemilia-Liguria before becoming the bishop of Milan in 374. He never referred to his parents, who were briefly mentioned in Paulinus’ *Vita Ambrosii*, a hagiographical account written in 412, and only alluded to three relatives: his brother Satyrus, his sister Marcellina, and their common ancestor Sotheris.[[1]](#footnote-1) Ambrose described Satyrus in detail in two funeral speeches delivered after his brother’s death in 379.[[2]](#footnote-2) Much sketchier is the portrait of Marcellina; we only know that she was consecrated a virgin by Pope Liberius and lived as an ascetic in Rome.[[3]](#footnote-3) The information about Sotheris is more limited still: Ambrose mentions that she had been martyred without providing any further details or information about the exact nature of their relationship.

Despite their incomplete profile, however, Sotheris and Marcellina play an important role in Ambrose’s writings. Sotheris was mentioned in two treatises composed in different moments at which Ambrose was particularly vulnerable. She makes an appearance in the last paragraph of *On the virgins*, one of Ambrose’s earliest treatises, published in 377, when he was trying to build his power as bishop over the divided Christian community of Milan.[[4]](#footnote-4) Sotheris was again set as an example of faith and endurance in Ambrose’s *Exhortation to virginity*, a sermon preached in 394 in Florence, where he had fled from Milan in order to avoid contact with the usurper Eugenius (d. 394).[[5]](#footnote-5) Marcellina was the dedicatee of *On the virgins* and was the addressee of three letters that recount what are usually considered as some of Ambrose’s most spectacular successes in conflicts with the emperors Valentinian II (d. 392) and Theodosius I (d. 395).[[6]](#footnote-6)

The role of women in late antique Christian writings has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the last twenty years. Elizabeth Clark has explored how female characters became a polysemic discursive trope in Christian literature. [[7]](#footnote-7) Kate Cooper has shown how insinuations of undue influence by women were used to delegitimise the political or religious authority of men, and how exposing female relatives to public scrutiny was crucial to the construction of political authority of late Roman aristocrats.[[8]](#footnote-8) Recent historiography on Ambrose has also provided interesting insights into his treatises on virginity and widowhood. Neil McLynn has unpicked the political implications underlying Ambrose’s moral rhetoric.[[9]](#footnote-9) Similarly, Virginia Burrus and David Hunter have demonstrated how Ambrose’s discourse on female virginity should be read in the light of struggles for power between men.[[10]](#footnote-10)

This paper explores a less-studied aspect of the literary use to which Ambrose put his female relatives. I will argue that Ambrose displayed Sotheris and Marcellina symbolically at delicate moments during his episcopate, seeking to strengthen his legitimacy as bishop and to depoliticise his interventions in imperial politics. Ambrose presented Sotheris in order to construct a Christian family past that correlated with his current position as bishop of Milan, and to dignify the authority of former secular officials who, like him, had subsequently become religious leaders. In a similar fashion, Ambrose’s letters to Marcellina provided him with an occasion for rewriting his episodes of conflict with emperors, downplaying the political and legal repercussions of events and instead presenting them as struggles for the moral wellbeing of the community.

**Ambrose in Milan**

The fact that Ambrose’s writings are our main source of information about his life and episcopacy has deeply skewed our understanding of the true extent of his authority and intellectual reputation. Older scholarship tended to view Ambrose as a strong and influential bishop, who confronted aristocrats and emperors and was faithfully supported by his fellow bishops and the Milanese community. In the last three decades, however, revisionist energy has been directed against such a view. In their seminal monographs, Neil McLynn and Daniel Williams have convincingly argued that Ambrose’s authority was much weaker than was previously thought and have fundamentally questioned the extent of the bishop’s intellectual and spiritual prestige.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Ambrose’s weakness was especially evident in his first years as bishop. At that time, Milan was still much affected by doctrinal quarrels between Homoians and Nicenes, two Christian groups separated by their different theological conception of the Trinity. The controversy had started in 355, when the emperor Constantius II (d. 361) had summoned the Council of Milan in an attempt to put an end to the division between Arians, who contended that the Son of God was inferior to the Father, and Nicenes, who defended that both shared the same substance. Pressed by the emperor, the majority of the bishops at the council adopted an intermediate theological position, the so-called Homoian creed, which sustained that the Son was ‘similar’ to the Father. Far from putting an end to the debate, however, Constantius’ measures spurred a new wave of religious conflict in the aftermath of the council.

Three recalcitrant Nicene bishops, Dionysius of Milan, Eusebius of Vercelli, and Lucifer of Cagliari refused to subscribe the Council of Milan’s new Homoian formula in relation to the Trinity and were consequently condemned to exile. The banished bishops, however, continued to exert some influence over the north Italian Nicene communities that they represented, preserving a strong sense of Nicene communal belonging and a combative attitude to their opponents. During the following decades, local homiletic collections commemorated Eusebius as a martyr and a saint in Vercelli and the nearby parishes.[[12]](#footnote-12) Similarly, the Nicene community of Milan celebrated the cult of the ‘Innocent’, remembering the execution of four Milanese Christians under Constantius, which later became an opportunity for manifesting disagreement with imperial policy.[[13]](#footnote-13) These developments had traditionally been interpreted as a proof of Constantius II and those bishops who allied with him to impose the Homoian creed on the population of northern Italy. However, more recent research has suggested that the Homoian party was much stronger than the majority of Nicene sources are willing to admit.[[14]](#footnote-14) In fact, many Homoian communities seem to have thrived between the 350s and the 370s, and did so not only in Milan, where imperial patronage was strongest, but also in other north Italian towns.

The presence of two partisan groups generated instability in the region and clearly affected the election of Ambrose as bishop in 374, when he was still the governor of the province Aemilia-Liguria. Our only source of information for this episode is the *Vita Ambrosii*. According to this text, after the death in 374 of Auxentius, the Homoian bishop of Milan, Ambrose went to the main basilica in order to prevent the outbreak of riots between Nicene and Homoians. Ambrose was then acclaimed bishop *laetitia cunctorum*, ‘with the utmost grace and rejoicing among everyone’.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Largely following this narrative, older historiography understood that Ambrose’s special charisma and sanctity had persuaded the Homoians to accept his election, despite his clear Nicene affinities.[[16]](#footnote-16) More recent scholarship, however, has suggested that Ambrose was equally far from meeting the expectations of both groups.[[17]](#footnote-17) Although his connections with well-known Nicenes, such as Probus and the Pope Liberius, made obvious his position in relation to the Trinitarian controversy, Ambrose had very little in common with the banished bishops.[[18]](#footnote-18) Unlike Eusebius and Dionysius, he lacked the charismatic halo of those who had suffered exile for his creed. Quite the opposite, in his years as a barrister in Illyricum and as governor of the province Aemilia-Liguria in northern Italy, Ambrose had been in charge of implementing the emperor’s religious policy. It is clear that in Milan he coexisted with the Homoian bishop Auxentius. Neither Ambrose nor his hagiographer mention any conflict with Auxentius, suggesting that they had an unproblematic relationship. In addition, Ambrose did not hide his aversion to diehard Nicenes; in his funeral oration for Satyrus, he explicitly attacked the followers of the exiled bishop Lucifer of Cagliari.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Although Ambrose’s theological neutrality can hardly have satisfied any of the contending Christian groups in Milan, he could rely on the support of powerful secular officials. The *Vita Ambrosii* relates how the prefect Probus had encouraged his election as bishop and the emperor Valentinian had gladly allowed it.[[20]](#footnote-20) The involvement of important imperial agents may help to explain the irregularities in the process by which he was elected and confirmed in office: Ambrose was baptised by a priest on the same day that he was chosen as bishop, and was not then ordained in the presence of the required number of peers (three).[[21]](#footnote-21) The episode did not pass unnoticed by Ambrose’s enemies. In 381, Palladius, the Homoain bishop of Ratiaria in Illyricum, remarked that Ambrose owed more to his political connections than to his Christian credentials.[[22]](#footnote-22) Palladius’ bitterness is understandable because he had been expelled from his see at the Council of Aquileia (381), over which Ambrose had presided. It is likely that this kind of criticism was probably more frequent than our sources reflect and, as I shall explain later in this paper, Ambrose’s anxiety about his past roles in the imperial administration and his lack of qualifications for holding high office within the church left a mark across his literary output. Throughout his episcopacy, Ambrose made great efforts to present himself as an ascetic devoted to the promotion of the Nicene faith and to defending his community. The anxiety that derived from the shakiness of Ambrose’s original position was, however, especially evident during his first years in the episcopate.

**Building legitimacy: Female relatives in Ambrose’s early episcopate**

Conscious about his weak position, Ambrose played it safe after his episcopal election in 374; his first theological composition was only made at the request of the emperor in 378.[[23]](#footnote-23) Around a year earlier, Ambrose had published his first three treatises, *On* *the Virgins*, *On* *the Widows* and *On* *Virginity,* all of which focus on female asceticism. The longest and most elaborated of these writings is *On the Virgins*, a collection of sermons reworked as a treatise in three books, which contains a passionate exhortation to sexual renunciation as well as Ambrose’s first allusion to Sotheris and Marcellina.

Ambrose’s interest in female asceticism was not coincidental. The topic did not require deep theological knowledge and meant that he could avoid mentioning the Trinitarian controversy, as both Nicenes and Arians promoted the ideal of renunciation.[[24]](#footnote-24) However by writing about asceticism Ambrose was able to present himself as a moral and intellectual authority within his community. Ambrose did not reveal that he had borrowed much of the argument and content of the treatise from the earlier works of authoritative figures such as Cyprian and Athanasius. Jerome praised this act of ‘plagiarism’ with tongue firmly in cheek.[[25]](#footnote-25) Despite his dependence on earlier Christian authors, *On* *the Virgins* contains a number of original interventions in which Ambrose sought to justify his past as an imperial bureaucrat, and to define the two pillars of his legitimacy during the first few years of his episcopacy: his family’s ascetic tradition and the Christian nature of his clerical authority, independent of his previous role as an imperial bureaucrat.

In *On* *the Virgins*, Ambrose dignified the imperial service by offering an alternative reading of martyrdom. He consistently minimised the proactive role of imperial authorities in Christian persecutions and emphasised the involvement of male Roman citizens instead. This is especially perceptible in the first two books of the treatise, in which Ambrose focused on the cases of Thecla, Agnes and an unnamed virgin from Antioch, young girls who preferred to suffer a painful death rather than to lose their virginity. Ambrose presented martyrdom and virginity as two similar paths to Christian excellence and as the only ways of preserving female liberty and integrity: ‘You have thus in one victim a double martyrdom, of modesty and of religion. She both remained a virgin and obtained martyrdom’.[[26]](#footnote-26) Marriage, conversely, was despised and described as human trade: ‘This is to buy a son-in-law, not to gain one who would sell a glance of their daughter to her parents’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Ambrose’s radicalism in relation to marriage, questioning one of the cornerstones of Roman family and society, has puzzled historians.[[28]](#footnote-28) The extreme views of *On the Virgins*, however, contrasted with the more moderate interpretation contained in a slightly later treatise, *De Paradiso*, in which male authority was considered essential to the instruction and correction of women.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Nonetheless, undermining patriarchal authority fulfilled a purpose in *On* *the Virgins,* allowing Ambrose to reinterpret martyrdom as the result of the actions of male authority figures within the community, but not the Roman government. Accordingly, the narration of Agnes’ death does not contain any reference to imperial courtiers apart from the executioners. Ambrose described how the virgin had refused to marry, but omitted mentioning that a *iudex* had condemned her to be dragged to a brothel, an episode that was included in Prudentius’ later account.[[30]](#footnote-30) The downplaying of official involvement is also evident in Ambrose’s description of the martyrdom of Thecla, who was ‘condemned by her husband’s rage’.[[31]](#footnote-31) Forced to serve in a brothel, Thecla’s refusal would ultimately led to her execution, but Ambrose did not mention the judge or any other imperial officers. A similar interpretation is placed on the story of the unnamed virgin of Antioch, for which Ambrose is the only source. He described how some ‘wicked men’ denounced the maiden, who was more concerned about ‘those who plotted against her chastity’ than the imperial authorities.[[32]](#footnote-32)

In *On the virgins*, martyrdom was thus not presented as a conflict between the Christians and the empire, but between the ascetic and the family way of life. Ambrose’s text describes two gendered forms of authority. The Church embodies a Christian authority and is presented as a nurturing mother who instructs her children in correct behaviour: ‘In this way the holy Church, unspotted with intercourse, but fertile in bearing, is a virgin in chastity and a mother in offspring. She gave birth to us as a virgin, not filled by a man, but by the Spirit. [...] She feeds us as a virgin, not with the milk of the body, but with that of the Apostle, with which he fed the weak age of the arising people.’[[33]](#footnote-33) In contrast, patriarchal authority is depicted as restrictive and oppressive: ‘Parents speak against her […] they threaten to disinherit her […]. You practice, virgin, by being urged. And the anxious pleas of your parents are your first battles.’[[34]](#footnote-34) Earlier Christian literature had opposed the persuasiveness of clerics’ unblemished behaviour to the hierarchical violence of imperial institutions.[[35]](#footnote-35) Ambrose, however, went here a step further and implicitly blamed patriarchal society for persecuting and oppressing Christian ascetics.

Ambrose’s idiosyncratic depiction of gender roles underpinned his argument about the nature of the relationship between patriarchy and asceticism. Many martyr writings depict a strident tension between the extreme vulnerability of delicate young girls, and the repressive machinery of the Empire, represented through the fierce actions of male bureaucrats.[[36]](#footnote-36) In *On* *the Virgins*, however, this divergence is alleviated as officers turned into defenders of the unarmed maidens. An example is Ambrose’s description of an Antiochene virgin who was saved by a soldier who at first had ‘the aspect of a terrible warrior’, but later dressed up as a virgin.[[37]](#footnote-37) Ambrose followed a similar model for the description of Thecla’s frustrated martyrdom. In the oldest version of this story, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, probably composed at different stages during the second century, the virgin was condemned to death and thrown to the beasts. Once in the arena, a fierce lioness defended the virgin and was torn apart by a male bear.[[38]](#footnote-38) Conversely, Ambrose emphasised the masculinity of the lion that defended the virgin: ‘the beast reverenced his prey and, having forgotten his own nature, assumed the nature that men had rejected. By such a transfusion of nature, one could see men dressed in wildness, imposing cruelty on the beast, and the beast kissing the feet of the virgin, teaching them what was due from men’.[[39]](#footnote-39) The metaphor of a male executioner protecting the virgin from the rest of the community was the perfect parallel to Ambrose’s personal story as an imperial officer who had previously been entrusted with enforcing imperial legislation and had subsequently turned into a defender of the vulnerable of Milan.

This self-portrait emerges more clearly in the third book of On *the Virgins*, in which Ambrose recalled his family’s long Christian tradition. The section opens with Ambrose’s account of Marcellina’s consecration in Rome by Pope Liberius, and continues with a description of her especial ascetic virtues. Ambrose went on to mention the example of the virgin Pelagia, who was martyred in Antioch, and devoted the treatise’s last paragraph to discuss the death of Sotheris, who is presented as a role model for Marcellina: ‘But why do I use examples of distant people to you, sister, whom the inspiration of hereditary chastity has taught by descent from a martyred ancestor?’[[40]](#footnote-40) Despite these references to his female relatives, Ambrose does not provide any further information about Marcellina and Sotheris, apart from some details relating to the latter’s martyrdom. The main focus of this book is therefore Ambrose who, much like the repentant executioner in his martyr narratives, is implicitly presented as the protector of his consecrated sister and his martyred ancestor.

The particular depictions of Sotheris and Marcellina enabled Ambrose to foreground a distinctively Christian model of authority, which differed somewhat from traditional aristocratic rule. For the Roman nobility, family was not simply a domestic institution made up of a series of affective ties; it was politically significant too.[[41]](#footnote-41) Roman aristocrats had long advertised their illustrious relatives in order to communicate the idea that the holding of public office was their natural place in society. Accordingly, male ancestors and their political achievements were frequently discussed in aristocratic sources from the Republic to late antiquity. An example is Symmachus, a pagan senator and Ambrose’s contemporary, who included twelve letters to his father Lucius Aurelius Avienus, the prefect of Rome in 364 and 365, in his letter collection. Many of these letters emphasised the importance of patriarchal authority and the family patrimony, stressing aristocratic status and suggesting that Symmachus had been raised to take up office in the imperial bureaucracy.[[42]](#footnote-42) On the contrary, Ambrose only makes one reference to his ancestry, to Sotheris. He did not refer to his father who, according to Paulinus had been the prefect of Gaul. This has raised the suspicion of scholars, who have speculated that Ambrose’s father had been executed due to his involvement in an unsuccessful coup against the emperor Constans (d. 350).[[43]](#footnote-43) However, silence over male ancestors generated a Christian family history that suited Ambrose’s recently acquired episcopal dignity. This enabled Ambrose to downplay the role of his aristocratic pedigree and prior involvement in the imperial bureaucracy in his election. By using Sotheris and Marcellina as models of social and political behaviour, Ambrose emphatically rejected the imperial administration and embraced the Christian clergy.

Ambrose exploited the potential symbolic capital of his female relatives on other occasions. On the one hand, Sotheris was mentioned again in the sermon *Exhortation to Virginity*, preached almost twenty years after On *the Virgins*. During the intervening period, Ambrose had become one of the most renowned bishops of the West: Gallic and Spanish clerics often appealed to him to sort out their differences, and emperors entrusted him their spiritual wellbeing.[[44]](#footnote-44) Ambrose’s position was markedly stronger in the mid-390s, yet he returned to his martyred ancestor in the *Exhortation to Virginity*. He delivered this sermon in Florence in 394 on the occasion of the consecration of a church that had been paid by the local *matrona* Iuliana, whose three daughters were consecrated virgins. Ambrose had left Milan on the eve of the invasion of the usurper Eugenius (d. 394), who had assumed the imperial power after the death of the emperor Valentinian II in unclear circumstances in 392. It seems that in order to avoid becoming embroiled in the political conflict, Ambrose started a tour of the churches of Aemilia-Liguria, including Bologna and Florence. This strategy is also identifiable in Ambrose’s letter to Eugenius, in which he avoids making any reference to the addressee’s political legitimacy, and explains that he had absented himself from Milan out of fear of God, because the usurper had made concessions to the pagans.[[45]](#footnote-45) In the *Exhortation to Virginity*, Ambrose presents Sotheris’ martyrdom as an example of female independence and endurance that dignified Iuliana’s position as the head of an ascetic family. In addition, as at the start of his episcopacy, Ambrose used Sotheris to emphasise his Christian past and to conceal his involvement in secular politics in a moment of political turmoil.

On the other hand, Ambrose made a number of allusions to Marcellina in the two funeral orations for their brother Satyrus, delivered in 378. Ambrose seized the opportunity to stress the family’s Christian and aristocratic background in front of the Milanese flock; he alluded to the siblings’ ‘inheritance neither distributed nor diminished’, and described Marcellina again as a pious virgin requiring the assistance of her two brothers.[[46]](#footnote-46) Ambrose’s portrait of his sister as a vulnerable domestic figure contrasts sharply with the topics that he discusses in his three letters to her, which contain accounts of some of his most remarkable interventions in imperial politics.

**Exposed domesticity and high politics in Ambrose’s letters**

Ambrose’s letter collection is a complex composition. It was published in two stages.[[47]](#footnote-47) A first batch of seventy-nine letters organised in ten books came out shortly before Ambrose’s death. Most of the letters in the first nine books focus on issues of ecclesiastical discipline, such as pastoral care and theology, and were mostly addressed to north Italian clerics and citizens. Letters in book ten of the collection, in contrast, concentrate on issues of empire-wide concern and are addressed to key religious and political actors such as the bishop Theophilus of Alexandria and the Emperors Valentinian II and Theodosius I. After Ambrose’s death in 397, another seventeen letters were published, twelve of which were addressed to the aforementioned emperors and Gratian I (d. 383). This group, the so-called *Letters outside the collection,* deals with some of the most controversial episodes of Ambrose’s episcopate, such as the excommunication of Theodosius I, the Council of Aquileia, and his interactions with the usurper Eugenius.

Two of the letters to Marcellina, *Ep.* 76 and *Ep.* 77, appeared in book ten of the collection, while the other, the *Ep. extra coll.* 1, was included among the letters outside the collection. The first two are dated in 386 and focus on the so-called Conflict of the Basilicas, which brought Ambrose into conflict with the Homoian Empress Justina, the mother of Valentinian II.[[48]](#footnote-48) The episode is only known through Ambrose’s writings, meaning that it is difficult to develop a full understanding of the events, but the dispute seems to have been about the court’s authority to implement its religious agenda without the obstruction of bishops.[[49]](#footnote-49) The conflict started in 385 and escalated in December that year when the court accused Ambrose of misusing ecclesiastical funds and causing public disturbances. In January 386, the court increased the pressure on Ambrose by issuing a law that imposed the death penalty for those who impeded Homoian ceremonies. Despite the threat, however, Ambrose refused to surrender a Milanese basilica to the Homoians, an act of disobedience that is revealed in *Ep*. 75 to Valentinian II. Imperial politics gave Ambrose some room for manoeuvre in his conflict with the Homoian court at Milan, which had to share power with two Nicene emperors, Maximus (d. 388) and Theodosius I. Nevertheless, Justina seems to have tried to expel Ambrose from his see and replace him with the Homoian bishop of Durostorum, Auxentius. It was at this moment that Ambrose composed his *Sermon against Auxentius*, preserved as *Ep*. 75a. A second round of the conflict occurred during Easter 386, when Ambrose thwarted the court’s attempts to seize a church for the Homoians by resisting with his congregation inside one of the Milanese Basilicas. The court replied by besieging the Basilica with imperial soldiers over night, but withdrew the following morning. *Ep.* 76 to Marcellina was written after the court had lifted the siege.

Two months later, in summer 386, Ambrose discovered the relics of Gervasius and Protatius, two saints that soon became a symbol of his recent triumph over the court.[[50]](#footnote-50) Ambrose’s *Ep.* 77 to Marcellina explains the discovery and the ceremonies of relocation of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius in Milan and is the only contemporary source for this episode.

The other letter to Marcellina (*Ep. extra coll.* 1) narrates Ambrose’s clash with Theodosius after a church of the Valentinian sect and a synagogue were burned in Callinicum (Asia Minor) in late 388 or at the beginning of 389. Theodosius ordered the bishop of Callinicum to pay for the reconstruction of the synagogue and to put on trial the persons that caused the destruction. Ambrose protested, and Theodosius revoked his decision, which did not prevent Ambrose from later writing two different letters of reproach. In this instance it seems that the bishop had the upper hand. Theodosius had just arrived in Milan after his victory over Maximus in 388 and was trying to consolidate his power in the west. In this context, it was more important for the emperor to maintain the loyalty of the courtiers of the western imperial capital than to deal with a distant case of public disorder.[[51]](#footnote-51) After Theodosius’ withdrawal Ambrose wrote two almost identical letters to the emperor: *Ep. extra coll.* 1a and an edited version of the former, *Ep*. 74, which reproduces almost verbatim the *Ep. extra coll.* 1a, except for the last paragraph, on which I shall comment later in this paper. Lastly, Ambrose wrote the *Ep. extra coll.* 1 to Marcellina, the only one that narrates the whole episode.

The three letters to Marcellina have three characteristics that differentiate them from the rest of the collection. First, Marcellina is the only woman and the only relative among Ambrose’s addressees. Second, all three letters describe controversial episodes in which Ambrose justified public disagreement with imperial policy. Third, these are the only letters that narrate past events. In all of the other letters Ambrose intervenes in on-going affairs. These texts provide chronological accounts that explain and contextualise the Conflict of the Basilicas and the burning of the Synagogue of Callinicum, which were sketchily depicted in other letters, and constitute the only piece of contemporary evidence for the discovery of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius. These events would be extremely obscure without the letters to Marcellina, which seem to have offered Ambrose opportunities to craft particular accounts of past controversies in an attempt to determine how they were subsequently remembered.

There are three other cases in which additional letters seem to have been incorporated into Ambrose’s collection in order to guide the readers’ interpretation of specific episodes. One example is the records of the Council of Aquileia, which had been held in 381, in which Ambrose is shown taking up a leading role during the council and which accompanied his letter to the emperors announcing the decisions of the assembly.[[52]](#footnote-52) Another case is the debate about the Altar of Victory, in which Ambrose conflicted with the pagan senator Symmachus. Ambrose included Symmachus’ *Relatio* 3, asking the emperors to restore the Altar of Victory to the Senate House, within his letter collection but bookends it with his own responses, refuting pagan arguments. This seems to have been intended to highlight Ambrose's rhetorical dexterity when confronting one of the most famous orators of his time.[[53]](#footnote-53) Finally, Ambrose included a letter from Pope Siricius asking him to summon a provincial council to condemn the Jovinianist controversy. This letter functioned as a de facto confirmation of the metropolitan status of Milan – and therefore of Ambrose.[[54]](#footnote-54)

The letters to Marcellina also seem to have been intended to exaggerate Ambrose’s authority. These texts display an unusually triumphalist tone that contrasts with that adopted in other letters dealing with the same episodes. For instance, *Ep*. 76 on the Conflict of the Basilicas presented the court’s retreat as the result of the unconditional support of the Milanese Christians for their bishop: ‘I was asked to restrain the people. I answered that it was in my power not to spur them up; but in God’s hands to appease them.’[[55]](#footnote-55) On the contrary, Ambrose’s two other writings on the matter, *Ep.* 75 and the *Sermon against Auxentius*, suggest that he was in a much weaker position, using legal arguments to defend himself from the charges: ‘No one should consider me contumacious when I affirm what your [Valentinian II’s] father of august memory not only replied verbally, but also sanctioned it in his laws, that […] clerics should judge about clerics.’[[56]](#footnote-56)

Similarly, *Ep*. 77 contains an inflated description of the ceremonies of discovery and translation of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius. Ambrose briefly admitted that these relics raised some opposition in Milan: ‘Those who usually do so are jealous of your fame; and because of their envious disposition they cannot endure your fame, they hate the cause of your fame, and go so far in their madness that they deny the merits of the martyrs, whose services even the evil spirits acknowledge.’[[57]](#footnote-57) Most of the letter, however, is devoted to describing the enthusiasm of the Milanese: ‘I addressed the people then as follows: When I considered the multitudinous and unheard number of you who are gathered together, and the gifts of divine grace which have shone in the holy martyrs, I must confess that I consider myself unworthy of this.’[[58]](#footnote-58)

The contrast between the victorious atmosphere of the letters to Marcellina and those sent to emperors is still more evident in the case of the synagogue of Callinicum. Ambrose’s *Ep*. 74 to Theodosius shows him obsequiously requesting the revocation of the punishment of the bishop and the monks of Callinicum: ‘I have gathered these matters in this sermon, Emperor, out of love and fondness for you.’[[59]](#footnote-59) Ambrose showed more determination in the version that was published after his death, the last paragraph of which includes a threat to the emperor: ‘I certainly have done all I could, while still being respectful, so you hear me in the palace, so it might not be necessary for you to hear me in church.’[[60]](#footnote-60) The letter to Marcellina (*Ep. extra coll*. 1) describes the supposed meeting in the church between Ambrose and Theodosius: Ambrose interrupted the services to admonish the emperor, who recognised his mistake and agreed to revoke the punishment of the bishop and the monks of Callinicum. The letter closes with a boastful restatement of Ambrose’s triumph: ‘And so, everything was done as I wished.’[[61]](#footnote-61) His earlier letter to Theodosius, however, suggests that the emperor had by this point already pulled back.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Apart from providing an inflated vision of the scale and success of his political interventions, Ambrose was able to exploit the fact that his sister Marcellina was the recipient of these letters. In the epistolary genre, the addressee is not a passive reader, but a key character that mediates the interpretation of the writing. Within Ambrose’s collection, Marcellina was a very unique actor and analysis of her presence can thus uncover potential new meanings and nuances.

Ancient letter collections were a form of public literature. Authors edited their contents before publication, in the process producing carefully tailored self-portraits.[[63]](#footnote-63) Given its dialogical nature, however, the epistolary genre creates an illusion of private interaction between the author and the addressee, fostering a feeling of voyeurism among readers that influences the way the latter understand letters.[[64]](#footnote-64) In so carefully crafting his 'private' letters to Marcellina, Ambrose sought to encourage his audience to lower their critical guard and to assume that he was sincerely describing to his sister real events that could not be explained openly in the official 'public' letters to the emperors. Privacy and sincerity were further emphasised by the use of a closer, less formulaic language and a blunter phrasing, perceptible in Ambrose’s immodest insistence in his own success.

Conversely, with Marcellina in the position of addressee, Ambrose was able to 'domesticate' the episodes he was describing, minimising their political implications. Instead they could be presented as Ambrose's honest efforts to defend the spiritual wellbeing of the community. As a consecrated virgin, Marcellina was the quintessential embodiment of femininity and domesticity, an outsider who was far from the arena of high politics in which Ambrose was involved. The bishop elaborated his message according to this rationale; these three letters make reference to fewer legal technicalities and contain more Christian language and imagery, helping him to emphasise the risks that he faced in opposing emperors and to mask just how opportunistic his interventions had actually been.

Ambrose further enhanced the sense of tension through the use of martyr imagery. A good example is the letters about the Conflict of the Basilicas. In *Ep.* 75 Ambrose protested the harshness of the January 386 law that prescribed the death penalty for those who impeded Homoian cult: ‘suddenly through many provinces it has been commanded, that whoever acts against the Emperor will be beheaded, that whoever does not surrender the temple of God will be immediately put to death.’ Ambrose went a step further in *Ep.* 76 to Marcellina and presented the case not as a prosecution against those who opposed imperial law, but as a persecution against the Nicene community: ‘many very heavy penalties were threatened against respectable men, if they did not surrender the basilica. Persecution erupted, and if they had opened the gates; they seemed likely to break into every kind of violence.’[[65]](#footnote-65) The later letter included four classical elements of martyr narratives: the object of pity, embodied by the Nicene community; the vulnerable virgin; the oppressive empire; and the righteous ex-official who confronted the oppressive state – Ambrose himself. Ambrose presented events in a similar way in his letter about the synagogue of Callinicum, recounting how he had defied the emperor by recalling that ‘the prophetic or priestly authority has to be straightforward, and to advise not so much what is pleasant as what is useful’.[[66]](#footnote-66) However, it seems that in reality and unlike martyr narratives, Ambrose did not triumph by enduring torture and suffering death, but by a strategic combination of opposition and appeasement of imperial authority. Nor should be underestimate his ability to craft selectively accounts of past events to maximise his spiritual capital and authority as bishop. Much like *On the Virgins*, therefore, the letters to Marcellina were exercises in self-legitimisation. Ambrose overstated the importance of his interventions in the imperial arena. In addition, Addressing the letters to Marcellina bestowed greater credibility on Ambrose’s account and allowed the bishop to reframe his interventions as martyr narratives, exaggerating the risks he had incurred and the magnitude of his triumph over the emperor.

**Conclusion**

Despite their apparent simplicity, Ambrose’s references to his female relatives were the product of a carefully constructed process of rhetorical composition that built on Roman and Christian traditions. Ancient narratives on womanhood portrayed women as passive, nurturing, and fragile individuals that needed male surveillance and protection.[[67]](#footnote-67) Female bodies thus acquired important symbolic power and could be deployed rhetorically to convey ideas of (il)legitimate authority and (un)righteous violence. The motif of illegitimate violence against female bodies became central to Christian martyr literature, a large part of which presented defenceless women as recipients of excessively cruel male violence.[[68]](#footnote-68) Centuries of production and consumption of such Christian narratives turned vulnerable women into objects with the potential to carry powerful emotional messages and evoke sentimental responses. After the great persecutions of the third century, martyr literature became a window from which Christian Romans could peer out into the sufferings of their predecessors. Such writings maintained their popularity at the end of the fourth century, when social change and political unrest heightened domestic insecurity and distrust towards imperial authorities. At this point in time, the symbol of imperilled women seems to have had particular potential to spark public fears about the despotic exercise of authority. Ambrose's allusions to his female relatives thus seem to have been designed to exploit such ambiguities and anxieties.

Marcellina and Sotheris were presented in Ambrose’s writings in ways that fulfilled two main objectives. They were key to constructing Ambrose’s identity and authority as a bishop. Marcellina and especially Sotheris helped Ambrose to overlook his past as an imperial officer and flaunt an illustrious family history without seeming incongruous his present position as a bishop. In addition, by identifying himself with female ascetic relatives Ambrose’s episcopal legitimacy was enhanced. Traditional attributes of feminine virginity, such as purity, decorum, and modesty were a good fit for the public image and authority of the bishop. Female relatives symbolised affective ties and contrasted with the institutionally sanctioned violence of paternal and imperial authority.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Ambrose also used his female relatives to present very particular interpretations of his interventions in the arena of imperial politics. The letters to Marcellina offered Ambrose the opportunity to rewrite his controversial conflicts with the emperors in ways, understating the motivating role of politics and exaggerating their spiritual and moral dimensions instead. Ambrose did this by minimising the legal and political terminology and by using a purportedly ‘feminised’ language, which built on Christian imagery and evoked a series of sentimental values. He reframed these accounts as martyr narratives, helping him to attribute negative moral characteristics to the groups with which he was disputing and defining himself as the protector of a threatened 'insider' community.[[70]](#footnote-70) The trope of female vulnerability thus contributed to legitimating an individual bishop’s resistance against the empire.

Ambrose’s writings were not exceptional. A contemporary rise of sentimentalism and pity in political discourse reveals a change in public language and behaviour, exposing deep social transformations to view. Broader changes in family dynamics at the end of the fourth and into the fifth century led to the rise of a domestic ideology, which emphasised the confinement of women to the home, but also increased their potential social and political relevance. Exposing women’s literary and moral achievements to public scrutiny became a way of displaying familial grandeur and negotiating male authority.[[71]](#footnote-71) The case of Ambrose shows that the portrayal of female weakness, intended to evoke compassionate responses, enabled authors to put across alternative social and political messages. Deploying the trope of female vulnerability reinforced Ambrose’s legitimacy and fuelled support for his agenda as bishop. For Ambrose, as for the Christian martyrs, vulnerability thus functioned as the seed of triumph.

1. Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, 3, A. Bastiaensen (ed.) (Milan: Mondadori, 1975), 51-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ambrose, *De excessu fratris*, O.Faller (ed.),Sancti Ambrosii Opera, CSEL73 (Vienna: OeAW, 1955), 207-325. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 3.1.1, Franco Gori (ed.), Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolensis Opera, 2 vols. (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1989), vol. I, 99-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 3.7.38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ambrose, *Exhortatio Virginitatis*, Franco Gori (ed.), Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolensis Opera, 2 vols. (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1989), vol. 2, 197-278. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ambrose, *Epistulae* [hereafter: Ambrose, *Ep*.] 76, O. Faller and M. Zelzer (eds.), *Sancti Ambrosi Opera, Epistulae et Acta* CSEL 82.3, (Vienna: OeAW, 1982), 123-124; *Ep*. 77, CSEL 82.3, 135-140; Ambrose, *Epistulae extra Collectionem* [hereafter: Ambrose, *Ep. extra coll*.] 1, CSEL 82.3, 145-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. E. A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), esp. 177-203; E. A. Clark, 'Ideology, History and the Constitution of "Woman" in Late Ancient Christianity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies,* 2 (1994), 155-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 93-101; Kate Cooper, 'Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure and Private Power in the Roman Domus', *Past & Present*, 197 (2007), 3-33; K. Cooper, 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 82 (1992), 150-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. N. B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 53-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. V. Burrus, 'Reading Agnes: The rhetoric of gender in Ambrose and Prudentius', *Journal of Early Christian Studies,* 3 (1995), 25-46; V. Burrus, '"Equipped for Victory": Ambrose and the Gendering of Orthodoxy', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 4 (1996), 461-75; D. G Hunter, 'The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine', *Church History*, 69 (2000), 281-303. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, esp.1-53; D. H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 116-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. V. Zangara,’Eusebio di Vercelli e Massimo di Torino. Tra storia e agiografia’ in E. Dal Covolo, R. Uglione and G. M. Vian (eds.), *Eusebio di Vercelli e il suo tempo*, Biblioteca di scienze religiose 133 (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1997), 257–322. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. H. I. Marrou, 'Ammien Marcelin et les “Innocents” de Milan', *Recherches de science religieuse,* 40 (1952), 179–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. R. Gryson, *Scolies ariennes sur le Concile d'Aquilée*, Sources Chrétiennes 267(Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1980), 81-5; Williams, *Ambrose of Milan*, 65-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, 9.3; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. F. H. Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose* vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 65; Y. -M. Duval, 'Ambroise, de son élection à sa consécration' in G. Lazzati (ed.), *Ambrosius episcopus: atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Ambrosiani* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1976), 243-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan*, 112-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ambrose, *De excessu fratris*, 1.47. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii*, 8; C. Corbellini, 'Sesto Petronio Probo e I'elezione episcopale di Ambrogio', *Rendiconti dell'lstituto Lombardo, Classe di Lettere, Scienze morali e storiche*, 109 (1975), 181-9; M. Sordi, 'I rapporti di Ambrogio con gli imperatori del suo tempo', in L. F. Pizzolato and M. Rizzi (eds.), *Nec timeo mori* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1998), 107-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 44-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Palladius, *Scholia Ariana*, 343v, 3-4; N. B. McLynn, 'The ‘Apology’ of Palladius: Nature and Purpose', *Journal of Theological Studies*,42 (1991), 52-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ambrose composed his *De Fide* between 378 and 380. An example of Ambrose’s intellectual insecurity is *Ep*. 32 in which, fearing criticism, he asked Sabinus of Piacenza to review (*vellica*, literally to pluck) one of his writings, probably the *De Fide*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 60-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Jerome, *Ep*. 22, I. Hilberg (ed.), *S. Eusebii Hieronymi Opera Epistulae*, CSEL 54 (Vienna: OeAW, 1996 [1910]), 144; N. Adkin, 'Ambrose and Jerome: The Opening Shot', *Mnemosyne*, 46 (1993), 364-76; R.A. Layton, 'Plagiarism and Lay Patronage of Ascetic Scholarship: Jerome, Ambrose and Rufinus', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 10 (2002), 489-522. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 1.2.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 1.7.33. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Y. -M. Duval, 'L´originalité du “De virginibus” dans le mouvement ascetique occidental: Ambroise, Cyprien, Athanase', in Y. -M. Duval (ed.), *Ambroise de Milan: Dix études* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1974), 9-66; V. Burrus, *Begotten, not Made: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 141-151; Hunter, ‘The Virgin, the Bride’, 281-303. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ambrose, *De Paradiso,* 10.46-48, C. Schenkl (ed.), *Ambrosius*, CSEL 32.1, (Vienna: OeAW, 1896), 265-336; Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 75-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 1.2.5-19; 1.3.19-21; Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 14.15-20, H. J. Thomson (ed. and trans.) *Prudentius*, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949) [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 2.3.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 2.4.22-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 1.6.31. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 1.12.63. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 118-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. L. L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 28-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 2.4.28-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 4.3-4, R. A. Lipsius (ed.), *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1891 [repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1972]), 235-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 2.3.20; Burrus, *Begotten not Made*, 140-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 3.7.38. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Cooper, 'Closely Watched Households’, 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. M. R. Salzman, 'Symmachus and his Father: Patriarchy and patrimony in the Late Roman Senatorial Elite', in R. Lizzi Testa (ed.), *Le trasformazioni delle "élites" in età tardoantica* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2006), 357-75; C. Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus: a Political Biography* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 23-4; M. R. Salzman, 'Reflections on Symmachus´ idea of tradition', *Historia*, 38 (1989), 348-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. S. Mazzarino, *Storia sociale del vescovo Ambrogio* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1989), 10-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ambrose, *De Obitu Valentiniani*, O. Faller (ed.), *Ambrosius*, CSEL 73 (Vienna: OeAW, 1955), 327-367; Ambrose, *De Obitu Theodosii*, O. Faller (ed.), *Ambrosius*, CSEL 73 (Vienna: OeAW, 1955), 369-401; *Acta Conc. Taur.* 6, C. Munier (ed.), *Concilia Galliae a. 314-506*, CCSL 148, 57-8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ambrose, *Ep. extra coll.* 10.1; M. R. Salzman, 'Ambrose and the Usurpation of Arbogastes and Eugenius: Reflections on Pagan-Christian Conflict Narratives', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 18 (2010), 191-223; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 330-340; J. Szidat, 'Die Usurpation des Eugenius', *Historia*, 28 (1979), 487-508. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ambrose, *De excessu Fratris*, 1.33-34; 1.59. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. M. Zelzer (ed.), Sancti Ambrosi Opera, Epistulae et Acta, vol. 2, CSEL82.2 (Vienna: OeAW, 1990, pp. xx-xxviii; M. Zelzer, ‘Plinius Christianus: Ambrosius als Epistolograph’, *Studia Patristica*, 23 (1989), 203-208; H. Savon, 'Saint Ambroise a-t-il imité le recueil de lettres de Pline le Jeune?', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*, 41 (1995), 3-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The chronology of the Conflict of the Basilicas and Ambrose’s letters on the matter are debated, see J. H. W. G., Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan: Political Letters and Speeches* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 130-35; T. D. Barnes, ‘Ambrose and the Basilicas of Milan in 385 and 386: The Primary Documents and their Implications’, *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*, 4 (2000), 282-99; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 181-96; G. Nauroy, ‘Le fouet et le miel. Le combat d'Ambroise en 386 contre l'arianisme milanaise’, *Recherches Augustiniennes*, 23 (1988), 3-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. C. M. Chin, 'The Bishop's Two Bodies: Ambrose and the Basilicas of Milan', *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, 79 (2010), 531-55; M. L. Colish, 'Why the Portiana?: Reflections on the Milanese Basilica Crisis of 386', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 10 (2003), 361-72; D. H. Williams, 'Ambrose, Emperors and homoians in Milan: The first conflict over a Basilica' in M. R. Barnes and D. H. Williams (eds.), *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the fourth century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 127-46; A. D. Lenox-Conyngham, 'Juristic and Religious Aspects of the Basilica Conflict of A.D. 386', *Studia Patristica*, 18 (1985), 55-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 204-14; J. San Bernardino, '*Sub imperio discordiae*: l´uomo che voleva essere Eliseo (giugno 386)' in L. F. Pizzolato and M. Rizzi, (eds.), *Nec timeo mori: atti del Congresso internazionale di studi ambrosiani* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1998), 709-36; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 209-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 95-123; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 298-314. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Gesta Concilii Aquileiensis* 1-2, O. Faller and M. Zelzer (eds.), *Sancti Ambrosi Opera, Epistulae et Acta,* CSEL 82.3, (Vienna: OeAW, 1982), 126-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Symmachus’ *Relatio* 3 is preserved as *Ep*. 72a in Ambrose’s letter collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Siricius’ letter is preserved as *Ep. extra coll.* 41a in Ambrose’s letter collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ambrose, *Ep*. 75.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ambrose, *Ep.* 77.16. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ambrose, *Ep*. 77.2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ambrose, *Ep.* 74.25. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ambrose, *Ep. extra coll.* 1a.33. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ambrose, *Ep. extra coll.* 1.28. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ambrose, *Ep*. 74.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. T. E. Jenkins, *Intercepted Letters: Epistolarity and Narrative in Greek and Roman Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 1-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. J. G. Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1982), esp. 57-59; 87-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ambrose, *Ep.* 76.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ambrose, *Ep. extra coll*. 1.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. K. Wilkinson, *Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 58-60; E. A. Clark, 'Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the "Linguistic Turn"', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6 (1998), 413-30; A. Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 230-255; G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 94-118. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. K. Cooper, 'The Voice of the Victim: Gender, Representation, and Early Christian Martyrdom', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 80 (1998), 147- 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. On the importance of narratives about the familial past for reconstructing identity, see the classic works of S. Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', *New Left Review*, 209 (1995), 3-14; J. L. Peacock and D. C. Holland, 'The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process', *Ethos* 21 (1993), 367-83; R. L. Ochberg and G. C. Rosenwald, *Storied Lives: the Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. H. A. Drake, 'Intolerance, Religious Violence, and Political Legitimacy in Late Antiquity', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79 (2011), 193-235. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman* *Household*, 93-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)