**Forms and symptoms of a “sickness of the memory” in Antiquity**

In the time of liquid modernity, memory has remained the prerogative of a few who can intimately contemplate their recollections of a time perceived as the past. The confusion that leads us to live in an eternal, continually revised present is probably the result of an anthropology that has produced the gradual weakening of memory, where memory is understood not as merely gnoseological but also as a sentimental capacity. Yet, this was the Idealistic (and therefore Romantic) view of time described by Schelling, who intended to emphasise the courage of those who know how to put aside their past in order to plan their future: “Der Mensch, der sich nicht scheiden kann von sich selbst, sich lossagen von allem, was ihm geworden und ihm thätig entgegensetzen, hat keine Vergangenheit oder vielmehr kommt nie aus ihr heraus.”

Ancient Greek literature poses a similar problem. The hold of the past is often so strong as to inhibit the emancipation of the individual: Athenaeus’ Poseidonians, immortalised by Cavafy, are an example of an entire community viscerally related to their origins. However, communal living and a culture of shame prevent confessions in an intimate dialogue based on memory: the exchange of secrets and memories between characters is rare, if not absent, in Attic theatre (the very lyrical “I remember”, you remember”), while it is the essence of the modern lyrical poetry.

A review of Antiquity characters that can be considered “sick with memory" highlights the figure of the emperor Julian, a man who is likely to have lived out of his time. The elusive character of his mother, who died shortly after his birth, the memory of a childhood spent reading Homer, and the dream of restoring the cult of the gods are some traits that denote his highly refined, almost neurotic sensibility, which emerges from the portrait drawn by Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oration* V 23). Julian lives in an ideal past, to which he would like the now-waning Antiquity to return: could this be a sentimental search for his past childhood, the typical attitude of an overly honourable man who could not come to terms with change?

**Bio**

After completing a PhD dissertation on the lexical innovations of the *Second Book of the Maccabees* at the Sapienza University in 2015, I have been teaching Greek philology at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome) as a Visiting Professor. My research interests include historical semantics, particularly shifts that can be interpreted through the theory of *subjectification*, Late Antiquity, and reception (Tyrtaeus).