Manipulation Strategies and Techniques in the Letters of Antim Ivireanul

Ovidiu-Adrian ENACACHE

J'ai voulais présenter dans cet article quelques-unes des techniques de manipulation les plus importantes qui Antim a utilisé dans les lettres adressée au Constantin Brancoveanu. J'ai identifié la présence des stratégies et des techniques suivantes pour la manipulation : la stratégie d'implorer la pitié, la stratégie d'identification, la stratégie de minimisant, la technique des attaques personnelles, la technique d'amélioration, la technique de reconnaissance des erreurs d'une importance inférieure et la technique d'inventer l'allié, puis j'ai les examiné brièvement dans cet ordre.

Mots-clés: techniques de manipulation, sermon, rhétorique, style religieux.

The volume of sermons entitled *Didahii* includes not only religious discourses delivered by Antim Ivireanul during various religious holidays of the year, but also two letters of exoneration that were addressed to Constantin Brâncoveanu, the king of Wallachia: *Scrisoarea la leat 7220, în luna ghenarie, în 13 zile* şi *Duminică la fevruarie 3 zile, răspunsul ce am dat a doa oară*. These two letters prove that there was a conflict between the metropolitan leader and the king of Wallachia. This conflict is one of the consequences of the military events that took place in Urlaţi. According to many historians, Antim assisted Toma Cantacuzino in his conspiracy against Constantin Brâncoveanu. Gabriel Ştrempel considers that, because of his involvement, Antim "was very close to lose the Metropolitan chair. But on the 13th of January and on the 3rd of February, he defended himself brilliantly and Constantin Brancoveanu forgave him"[1].

I identified, in these letters, many strategies of manipulation. In this article, I will analyze four of them: the strategy of supplication, the strategy of intensification, the strategy of minimization and the invention of an ally.

The strategy of supplication

Supplication is often mistaken with a request full of obedience in the attempt to obtain forgiveness. On the other hand, Pierre Fontanier observes that "rhetoricians

[1] Antim Ivireanul, *Opere*, Ediţie critică şi studiu introductiv de Gabriel Ştrempel, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1972, p. XXII.

BDD-A3933 © 2014 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 09:10:36 UTC)

define it differently. They consider that it consists of a most passionate and persistent request in order to obtain what is desired, using the most appropriate words to soften, to persuade and to convince the audience"[2].

Considering it one of "the discursive figures of ideas or thoughts"[3], Dimitrie Gusti defines it as "the figure that consists of prayers and tears. It could be easily used to acquire something in our or someone else's favor"[4]. The researcher highlights its bipolar nature. According to his definition of the supplication, this strategy can be used both to support ones cause and to counteract all arguments that are adverse to the speaker's cause.

"The emotional effect"[5] that results from its use in these two letters is helping Antim to manipulate the king. Extrapolating this feature of the prayer, the Metropolitan of Wallachia uses it in his letters: "numai mă rog măriei-tale să-ţ fie milă de bătrînéţele méle şi de néputinţele ce am"[6] (Ivireanul, 1972: 233), "şi nu lăsa să es obedit şi cu lacrămile pe obraz" (Ivireanul, 1972: 233). The quotes that have just been presented help us extract a clear similarity between Antim's letters and the religious discourse: the use of supplication. This strategy is one of the strategies that occur very often in sermons, including Antim's sermons. It is not encountered only in sermons, but also in prayers. It is one of the main features of a prayer.

The prayer is first of all an act of communication, a discourse through which people praise God or ask God fervently and gratefully for forgiveness of sins and salvation. The similarity between prayer and supplication is emphasized not only by the stylistic and poetic works, but also by the Romanian dictionaries.

Through his touching words, Antim seeks to impress the king (as people do through prayer), to convince him that his removal from the leadership of the Orthodox Church would be a great mistake. This technique of manipulation, that can be easily described as the recourse to the king's mercy: "să-ţ fie milă de bătrînéţele méle" (Ivireanul, 1972: 233), addresses only his emotional side, his soul, and it is a pure expression of pathos in speech.

The strategy of intensification. The technique of "personal attack"

The strategy of intensification has two main implications in the letters. Antim presents in an exaggerated manner both his enemies' flaws (through direct personal attacks) and Constantin Brancoveanu's qualities.

---

[2] Pierre Fontanier, *Figurile limbajului*, Traducere, prefaţă şi note de Antonia Constantinescu, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1997, p. 395.

[3] D. Gusti, *Retorică română pentru tinerime*, în *Retorică românească. Antologie*, Ediţie îngrijită, prefaţă şi note de Mircea Frînculescu, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1980, p. 157.

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] Mărioara Petcu, *Elemente de retorică juridică*, în „Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «Goerge Barițiu» din Cluj-Napoca", tom VII, Series Humanistica, Editura Academiei Române, Bucureşti, 2009, p. 355.

[6] Prin recurgerea la *pathos*, mitropolitul îl manipulează pe domnitor.

BDD-A3933 © 2014 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 09:10:36 UTC)

Without altering his dignity, the Metropolitan leader uses, in his letters, words that are characterized of an unmeasured vehemence towards his enemies (he calls them *clevetitori*): "nu lăsa să-ţi spurce unii şi alţii auzurile" (Ivireanul, 1972: 232), "obraze mari bisericeşti şi mireneşti, pline de zavistii şi de răutate" (Ivireanul, 1972: 226), lowering them in the king's eyes.

On the other hand, Antim Ivireanul uses words full of beauty, respect and loyalty when he talks about Constantin Brancoveanu, words that are in a clear contrast to those presented in the former paragraph: "prealuminatul domn" (Ivireanul, 1972: 226), "măriia-sa" (Ivireanul, 1972: 226), "domn milostiv şi iubitoriu de Hristos" (Ivireanul, 1972: 226), "făcătoriului mieu de bine" (Ivireanul, 1972: 227), şi "domn creştin" (Ivireanul, 1972: 230).

Antim uses only words that are sweet like honey, words that have no other purpose than to manipulate the ruler, to obtain his forgiveness. This technique of manipulation based on personal attacks is a technique "de discreditare foarte la îndemână – date personale, amănunte reale sau inventate, descrieri şi caracterizări ale persoanei -, lăsând în plan secund sau abandonând pur şi simplu mesajul lansat"[7]. At the discursive level, this technique can be easily identified, since it consists of imprecations, ironies, and antithesis.

The author of the letters is extremely ironic[8] in the letter entitled *Duminică la fevruarie 3 zile, răspunsul ce am dat a doa oară* when he speaks about the clergy led by Mitrofan de Nisa who blamed him of treason: „vei lăsa pre Irod (pre carele te indeamnă să face aceasta) ca pre un mincinos, că nu ştie a cînta alliluia". We can extract from these words full the pathos Antim's hatred and anger towards his opponents. His aversion towards Mitrofan de Nisa is so powerful that he compares him with one of the most negative characters in the history of Christianity: Herod.

The quotation presented in the previous paragraph proves that this technique of manipulation from the Metropolitan's letters borrows some of the features of other manipulation techniques that are specific to the political discourse: the technique of demonizing one's opponents.

The manipulation technique of personal attacks goes hand in hand with the rhetorical figure of antithesis. Antithesis can be defined as a contrast which has a hyperbolic effect, reinforcing therefore the perception of negativity implied to the characters denigrated by Antim in his letters. That is to say that the words that are meant to convince the king of Antim's innocence can achieve this goal more easily when are closely accompanied by gentle words addressed to Constantin Brâncoveanu.

Furthermore, this alternation of words, of praise addressed to the ruler and of hatred addressed to those who blamed Antim, gives the letters a fast rhythm, the king's attention and goodwill (captatio benevolentiae) being certainly attained from

[7] Ştefan Stănciugelu, Logica manipulării: 33 de tehnici de manipulare politică românească, Editura C.H. Beck, Bucureşti, 2010, p. 179.

[8] Acest tumult şi sarcasmul apar preponderent în cea de-a doua scrisoare, în prima scrisoare Antim adoptând un ton mai temperat.

BDD-A3933 © 2014 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 09:10:36 UTC)

the first lines of the letters. The dramatic and pathetic tone reaches very high levels in these two letters not only because of the vocabulary that shocks the reader: complaints and praises, but also because of the rapid alternation between them. The antithesis is not the only central figure of our technique, but also the irony. Therefore, the technique of personal attacks is of great complexity in Antim's letters.

All in all, Antim used this technique skillfully in his letters, being fully aware that he is in the middle of a discursive confrontation with those people who accused him of "vorbe otrăvicioase". His fate[9] depended entirely on his letters' success.

The strategy of minimization. The technique of acknowledging mistakes of little importance

The strategy of minimization is one of the most effective persuasive strategy that can be, other times, one of the most effective strategy of manipulation (depending on the type of discourse). In Antim Ivireanul's letters it takes the form of admitting mistakes that are of little importance.

This manipulation technique "se bazează pe crearea unei aparenţe de normalitate"[10]. The mistakes (or sins in religious terms), are characteristic to people, in general. A basic rule of Christianity says that all humans are subject to errors and that there is not a single man/ woman in the whole world without a sin, God being the only exception.

Antim accepts this characteristic of humanity. The author of the letters humbly states that he made mistakes when he was the leader of the Orthodox Church: "ai aflat chiverniseala acelor trei pungi (precum mi-au zis Nisis) să afli şi celorlalte 4 şi să-mi iai zapisele de la datornici să mi le dai în mîna mea" (Ivireanul, 1972: 233). The quote that has just been presented belongs to Antim's latter letter *Duminecă la 3 fevruarie 3 zile, răspunsul ce am dat a doa oară*.

Antim talks about this debt also when he denies with arguments the eleventh accusation of a total of twelve, all mentioned in his first letter: "pre măriia-ta te auz totdeauna zicînd cum că iaste datoare ţara cu doao sute şi mai multe de pungi; oare acea datorie măriia-ta o faci, au întîmplările vremii? Adevărat, întîmplările vremii. Şi acéstia au dus şi pre alţii şi pre mine la datorie" (Ivireanul, 1972: 231).

The main purpose of this discursive technique is to prove the king that Antim admits his mistakes when he makes them. The technique that is subject to our analysis must be correlated with another technique of manipulation, that of false allegations (Antim denied his involvement in Toma Cantacuzino's plot) because it helps the latter one to achieve its goal. These two techniques are closely related,

[9] "ni-au zis au să fac paretesis de bună voia mea, şi să-mi las scaunul, să es, au să mă scoaţă măriia-sa cu sila şi să scrie la Ţarigrad să mă catherisească" în Scrisoarea la leat 7220, în luna ghenarie, în 13 zile din lucrarea *Opere* de Antim Ivireanul, Ediţie critică şi studiu introductiv de Gabriel Ştrempel, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1972, p. 226.

[10] Bogdan Ficeac, *Tehnici de manipulare*, Editura Nemira, Bucureşti, 1997, p. 113.

BDD-A3933 © 2014 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 09:10:36 UTC)

thus helping to create cohesive texts[11]. If the Metropolitan leader admits a couple of mistakes, why wouldn't he admit that he helped Toma Cantacuzino in his acts of betrayal? In other words, if he had lied when he said he did not betray the king, why wouldn't he have lied now? I will try to give reasonable answers to these questions.

I think that it's not a coincidence that Antim admitted a mistake that is less important than that of betrayal. The repercussions and the punishment of making a little mistake are not to be compared with those of betrayal, a mistake of greater importance, as a universal law states that the punishment is proportional to the intensity and severity of the mistake. Therefore, a small mistake will be punished less severely than a big mistake. Following the logic of those just exposed, by admitting some mistakes of little importance, Antim is to be punished less severely than if he admitted plotting against the king.

On the other hand, the admittance of mistakes has the immediate effect of gaining the trust of the audience, the king in this case. Therefore, the author of the letters manages to manipulate not only with the help of techniques and strategies, but also with the help of the correlations established between them.

Another point of interest for us is represented by the understanding of how Antim explains his mistakes. Talking about guilt and its consequences, Bogdan Ficeac states that "vinovăţia poate fi de mai multe feluri. Astfel, vina istorică este cea prin care se creează culpabilizarea general"[12]. This is exactly how Antim explains his mistakes: "adevărat, întîmplările vremii". "The historical guilt is based on inducing a sense of complicity"[13] between him, Antim, and the accuser, the king Constantin Brâncoveanu. The accuser and the accused are now accomplices, Antim taking advantage of the fact that there has been created a strong connection between them. When he tries to explain his mistakes, he doesn't exonerate only himself, but also the king, since they both are to be blamed for similar mistakes: „datorie măriia-ta o faci, au întîmplările vremii? Adevărat, întîmplările vremii".

In conclusion, the psychological effect that emerges from this technique is essentially manipulative, since the common fault is known to create a strong connection between the psychological accomplices.

The invention of an ally

This technique occurs only in the first letter written by Antim: *Scrisoarea la leat 7220, în luna ghenarie, în 14 zile*. Ştefan Stănciugelu considers that this technique " este obişnuită în construcţia imaginii unui personaj politic"[14].

---

[11] Despre coeziunea şi coerenţa textelor vorbeşte pe larg Carmen Vlad în *Sensul, dimensiunea esenţială a textului*, Editura „Dacia", Cluj-Napoca, 1994, p. 116-120.

[12] Bogdan Ficeac, *Tehnici de manipulare*, Editura Nemira, Bucureşti, 1997, p. 83.

[13] *Ibidem*.

[14] Ştefan Stănciugelu, *Logica manipulării: 33 de tehnici de manipulare politică românească*, Editura C.H. Beck, Bucureşti, 2010, p. 196.

BDD-A3933 © 2014 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 09:10:36 UTC)

Through their speeches, the politicians' aim is to create an alliance between them and the audience, often speaking on their behalf. This alliance is created exclusively at the discursive level, between the politicians and the audience. It can be identified with ease because it comes along with some syntactic features. One of them is represented by the subjects of the sentences. The great majority of them in the political speeches are not the first person singular, *I*, but in the first person plural, *we*. The orator assumes the role of spokesman for the audience, speaking therefore on behalf of all those who are present at the place where the speech is being delivered, thus creating a strong alliance with them. This feature typical to the political discourse is encountered in other types of oratorical speeches, for example in Antim's sermons.

This technique of manipulation is known as the invention of an ally. It has a couple of interesting features in Antim 's first letter that was sent to Constantin Brâncoveanu. Antim Ivireanul finds an ally in God, claiming God's will for his actions. As a consequence, he is not to be blamed for his actions since he only put into practice God's will. Antim states that clearly in his first letter to the king: Iar de vréme ce Dumnezeu, cel ce pe toate le orînduieşte spre mai bine, aşa au vrut, să rădice din pământ sărac şi din gunoiu să înalţe méser, pentru a-l aşeza pe el cu boierii poporului său, eu ce puteam face? M-am supus Domnului şi l-am rugat pe el" (Ivireanul, 1972: 227, 228). Antim makes use of this technique also in the fifth paragraph of his first letter: „Mitropoliia n-am luat-o cu sila, nici cu mite, nici cu rugăciuni. Facă-mi Dumnezeu răsplătire de va fi urmat vreuna din acéstia, ci aşa au fost plăcut înaintea stăpînului Dumnezeu" (Ivireanul, 1972: 228).

In conclusion, *Scrisoarea la leat 7220, în luna ghenarie, în 14 zile* includes in its structure the manipulation technique of the invention of an ally. Its purpose is to exonerate him from all the accusations.

Bibliography

Vlad, Carmen, *Sensul, dimensiunea esenţială a textului*, Editura „Dacia", Cluj-Napoca, 1994

Ficeac, Bogdan, *Tehnici de manipulare*, Editura Nemira, Bucureşti, 1997

Stănciugelu, Ştefan, *Logica manipulării: 33 de tehnici de manipulare politică românească*, Editura C.H. Beck, Bucureşti, 2010

Ivireanul, Antim, *Opere*, ediţie critică şi studiu introductiv de Gabriel Ştrempel, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1972

Fontanier, Pierre, *Figurile limbajului*, Traducere, prefaţă şi note de Antonia Constantinescu, Editura Univers, Bucureşti, 1997

Gusti, D., *Ritorică română pentru tinerime*, în "Retorică românească. Antologie", ediţie îngrijită, prefaţă şi note de Mircea Frînculescu, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1980

Petcu, Mărioara, *Elemente de retorică juridică*, în „Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «Goerge Barițiu» din Cluj-Napoca", tom VII, Series Humanistica, Editura Academiei Române, Bucureşti, 2009

BDD-A3933 © 2014 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 09:10:36 UTC)