

My dissertation research is a philological, diachronic study of divine rumor (Ἔσσα, Φήμη, and Fama), a personified abstract concept that appears in the earliest known classical texts. The notion of rumor as a divine, immortal force of mass communication dates back to Homer: the first extant personification of rumor as a divinity occurs in *Iliad* 2, where ἔσσα is called “the messenger of Zeus” who “blazed” among the assembled Greeks. In the Latin tradition, her personification intensified. Virgil’s description of Fama in *Aeneid* 4 paints Fama as a monstrous composite of sensory organs that moves as a single creature – an individual crowd. Virgil’s depiction of Fama was highly influential, coloring subsequent descriptions of rumor throughout history, even to the present day. In the first two chapters of my work, I discuss the vocabulary related to rumor and its personification in antiquity. I trace the physical and sensory characteristics associated with divine rumor in Homer, Hesiod, Virgil, and Ovid, and summarize the methodological approaches used by previous scholarship on this topic. My third chapter makes a new contribution to the study of ancient divine rumor; I argue that Semitic analogues to pagan divine rumor exist – namely, the cherubim and seraphim, who share many of Fama’s monstrous physical characteristics and play important roles in prophetic initiations and the dissemination of divine words. My fourth chapter studies the use of Fama in late antique panegyric and declamation. The fifth chapter examines Fama’s personification and role in the *Res gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus; in this chapter, I argue that Ammianus used Fama (endowed with her full range of grotesque characteristics) to glorify Julian and legitimize public opinion before and after Julian’s usurpations. My sixth chapter treats Fama within a Christian framework: as she appears in the corpus of Jerome of Stridon, including his letters, exegetical works, and translation of the Vulgate Bible (which incorporates at least one overt classical quotation and a second allusion pertaining to Fama). I argue that Jerome uses personified Fama in a positive sense, and that his exegetical work suggests that he, too, may have perceived a connection between ancient divine rumor and the “hybrid angels” of Isaiah and Ezekiel.

My approach to this topic is primarily philological, but incorporates methodologies from comparative literature, comparative religion, and source criticism. I ground my analysis in close readings of Greek, Latin, and Semitic texts while examining broader historical questions about rumor and its power within society. Ultimately, I argue for the existence of a cross-cultural figure associated with divine rumor – a figure that retained specific physical characteristics across ethnic, religious, geographic, and temporal boundaries; these features point toward a consecration of the individual’s role in spreading news and emphasize the power of information flow through society. My work is not merely a reception study; it also contributes to the transcultural intellectual history of divine rumor. I began to develop interest in the topic while still an MA student in 2006, and since then, I have regularly presented my research at international conferences and smaller workshops. Recently, the field of “Fama research” benefited from the publication of a large volume written by Philip Hardie: *Rumour and Renown* (Cambridge, 2012). Hardie primarily concentrates on metapoetical readings of Fama in Virgil, Ovid and later imperial epic. He then treats (lower-case) *fama* in Livy and Tacitus before devoting the second half of his book to *Fama* and *fama* in the Italian Renaissance; he does not treat late antique authors aside from Nonnus. Hardie’s chapter titled “Christian conversions of *Fama*” states openly: “My focus in this chapter is on three Renaissance, neoclassical, epic narratives.” Hardie’s interest is almost exclusively in Fama’s metapoetical function within high literature. Thus, his work is important for my analysis, but his interests and focus are significantly different from mine. My work fills the late antique lacuna in the study of Fama and contributes to a comparative religious analysis of this being.