

FINAL REMARKS: RHETORIZING CULTURAL ALTERITY
IN LATE ANTIQUE HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PANEGRYRICS

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Cultural Alterity in Late Antiquity was contextualized in a period in which the establishment of religious orthodoxy was supplemented by that of new cultural canons, the creation of Christian scholarship, and the reaction of pagan cultural elites. Thus, the Christian turn, internal crisis, new literary references, and the making of literary orthodoxy contributed to create a period – the third to sixth centuries – in which the search for canons became crucial. Note, for instance, the constant concern in Christian literature to clearly delimitate the role of the perfect bishop (see Chrysostom's *De Sacerdocio*, Ambrose's *De Officiis*, Jerome's *Epistle 22*, Basil's *Epistle 42*, and many more), or the debates within pagan elites to delineate the function of sophists and philosophers in an increasingly Christian society. Therefore, in a context in which the creation of role models, canons, and orthodoxy were so important, Alterity and Otherness would apparently have had very little room. However, the presence of references to Cultural Alterity is ubiquitous in Late Antique texts. Either as an allusion to an emperor's knowledge of a non-native language, or as the portrayal of the barbarian peoples that were threatening the Roman Empire, the notion of cultural identity became one of the Leitmotifs of Late Antique sources.

In fact, these texts (most notably, panegyrics) dealt with Alterity and Otherness in order to reinforce cultural and religious identities among Late Antique elites. Augustine, for example, was an expert in creating the religious 'Other', as his portrait of Manicheans as performers of eschatological practices shows. Alterity and Otherness involved self-propaganda and self-definition. In this sense, Herodotus' basic tenets of Greekness (in *Hdt.* 8.144) – that is, the communion of kinship, language, religion, and a common way of life – proved its validity in Late Antiquity. In this case, panegyric compositions acted as the guardians of a common (yet not unanimously shared) cultural legacy, as a reservoir of arguments that supported a cultural identity whose nucleus was the *paideia* that intellectually sustained Late Antique *pepaideumenoí*.

The cases of Ammianus Marcellinus and Claudian are especially remarkable; two Greek native speakers who chose to compose their works in Latin, although as Kelly and Sánchez-Ostiz have shown, Greek culture and language were

always at the back of their minds. As their contributions prove, some passages from Ammianus betray his belonging to a language and to a cultural background different from the Latin language in which he wrote his *Res Gestae*. In my opinion, the extent to which Ammianus' and Claudian's bilingualism involved a change in their cultural identities is worthy of further study, as this represented much more than the linguistic ability to command more than one language. Bilingualism played different roles in the rhetorical strategies of Late Antique authors: it became an encomiastic topic, as Torres Guerra has shown, or, as Gualandri and Sánchez-Ostiz have pointed out, it could act as a marker of cultural identities. It is curious to note that bilingualism and multilingualism have been approached by modern scholarship from different perspectives depending on the languages studied: the study of the relation between Latin and Greek has been mostly connected to theological and political issues, whilst command of Greek and Syriac has been generally linked with asceticism and rural Christianity. However, in contrast to the positive appraisal of multilingualism, there were some Late Antique authors who were not so keen on learning a second language. I am thinking of Libanius of Antioch, who despised Latin and considered it inferior to the Atticist Greek he taught and wrote, on the grounds that Latin symbolized the supremacy of bureaucracy over culture. Also Theodoret of Cyrillus showed us how reluctant the monks that inhabited the deserts of Syria were to learn Greek (even the playful demons that rivalled and challenged those monks spoke in Syriac, according to his accounts). There were, therefore, different attitudes towards multilingualism and bilingualism. It is quite tempting to draw parallels with modern situations of bilingualism: in Spain, Euskera, Catalan, and Galego are languages that may bear political connotations, and the situation of the Spanish language in the USA was an important issue at the last general elections. The findings of new papyri and the recent wave of studies on the ancient Greek novel (a literary genre in which bilingualism is usually integrated into the plot of the work, such as in the case of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*) should contribute to consolidating the study of a very rewarding field, as the attitude of authors towards bilingualism usually mirrors their views on issues related to religion and politics. Thus, Libanius' aggressive attitude towards Latin, the importance and the impact of Aramaic and Semitic languages in theological debates (especially in authors such as Jerome, Theodoret, or Evagrius Ponticus), or the aforementioned approach of Ammianus Marcellinus and Claudian to a non-native language point us to issues pertaining to politics and religion, especially in the fourth century, a period that witnessed the transition from the Classical city to the Christian city (or, in sociological and cultural terms, the transition from *sophistopolis* to *episcopopolis*).

It is not surprising that Late Antique historiography and panegyrics are our main sources with which to study Otherness and Cultural Alterity as these two literary genres – especially panegyrics – contributed to delineating the boundaries of orthodoxy in the religious and cultural arena as well as to delimiting what and who 'the Other' was. It should be noted that, a few decades ago, the study of Late

Antique rhetoric and historiography would have met with an adverse readership, as the literary works of this period were considered to be the black sheep of the Classical legacy, a meaningless echo of a splendid era. Current research, however, regards such productions not as the swan song of our cultural heritage, but as thriving and multi-layered compositions whose intrinsic value goes beyond the estimation of Late Antiquity as a mere reservoir of historical information and events, or a melancholic *laudatio temporis acti*. In this sense, the understanding of panegyrics is still linked with terms such as flattery, adulation, or linguistic flamboyance, but recent studies shed new light on their political and philological dimension. They are not regarded as empty templates that professional orators filled up with rhetorical topics. The increasing specialization on the subject has helped us to read Late Antique panegyrics not only as subtle works that openly expressed the political and philosophical tenets of their authors. Reading a panegyric or a historiographical work calls for hermeneutical skills as concealed messages were inserted in the shape of innuendos or intertextual allusions when complete *parrhesia* was not granted. Thus, the panegyric delivered by Eumenius of Autun in 296 on the occasion of the restoration of *Scholae Maenianae*, which had been closed during the disorders of the third century, aimed to encourage the emperor Flavius Constantius to rehabilitate the schools and to restore their former prestige. For this purpose, he appointed the rhetor as their director and as his own *magister memoriae*. Although it is a public and official *gratiarum actio*, pronounced in the presence of the provincial prefect, Eumenius not only thanks the emperor for the appointment and praises him, but also makes use of this opportunity to highlight, using himself as an example, the dignity and importance of the rhetorician's labour. In the prologue to his speech, Eumenius defines the secret nature of the type of education provided by the school as (IX(5)2.3) *nostra illa secreta studiorum exercitia* ("those private exercises of our studies" [tr. Nixon/Rodgers 1994, 153]), thus considering the acquisition of education at school to be a sort of initiation into a quasi-religious knowledge that bestows the educated with the power and the dignity to become the spokesmen of the community. In this manner, teaching is compared to the sacred and presents the learning and teaching of rhetoric in a religious light that could also befit imperial propaganda (Lopetegui 2013).

Rhetoric, religion, and philosophy are also intertwined in a panegyric by the philosopher Themistius. Not long before the fatal battle at Hadrianopolis (in 376 or early in 377), Themistius composed an oration in honour of Gratian, Valens' nephew, who had been appointed Augustus and, at the death of Valentinian, became emperor. The speech praises the young emperor's virtues and – which is quite important – his physical beauty, hence the title of the oration, *Erôtikos*, with the subtitle or alternative title, *On Royal Beauty* (περὶ κάλλους βασιλικοῦ). The vocabulary deployed by Themistius includes terms such as παιδικά, ἐραστής, and countless allusions to κάλλος. This vocabulary is drawn from Plato's and Aristotle's conception of love, and also recalls the content of the letters exchanged between Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Marcus Cornelius

Fronto. In defining himself as Gratian's lover, Themistius made a bold move, and in doing so he took recourse to intertextual references that aimed to present himself as the adequate counsellor of the young emperor (Konstan 2013).

The point I want to make is that, even in propagandistic pieces of oratory, rhetors, philosophers, and sophists managed to implement their ideology without neglecting the praising sections of their panegyrics. Two recent papers by Pilar García (2008a and b) have explored the political intention of works dedicated to Emperor Julian, and for what purposes their authors – Claudius Mamertinus and Libanius of Antioch – composed these pieces. Precisely the latter, Libanius of Antioch, constitutes a key figure in the field of panegyrics as he wrote *encomia* for several emperors (Constans and Constantius; Julian; Theodosius) whose policies on culture and religion were poles apart. The panegyric tone of his *Oration* 19 is particularly noteworthy. This was a speech addressed to the emperor Theodosius after the Riot of the Statues in Antioch 387. Libanius pretends that he is delivering the oration in front of the emperor in Constantinople, but in fact he never left Antioch. This speech exemplifies panegyric works that serve both the writer and the recipient; the former had an opportunity to climb the social ladder and divulge his ideology, either by means of clear allusions or through intertextual references; the latter saw how his political programme was approved by a member of the cultural elites.

The half-blood brother of panegyrics, that is, the *psogos* or blame, was also present in Late Antique literature. It is obvious that the political circumstances of the Roman Empire did not invite the composition of vituperating works, and that it is simply preposterous to think of Pacatus, Mamertinus, or Claudian openly criticizing high-ranking officials or an emperor at a public event. However, the few instances of *psogoi* (diatrabes) that we possess are useful, not only as historical sources but also as signs of how we might precisely locate the ethical and moral faults that came to constitute the core meaning of Alterity in Late Antiquity. Julian's *Misopogon* is a valuable source that provides first-hand information on the emperor's ideological programme, and an accurate insight into his construction of Otherness (in this case, the naughty Antiochenes embody everything that leads to an unfruitful and despicable life from Julian's philosophical point of view). Likewise, Libanius' *Oration* 23, in which the sophist chastises those who left Antioch right after the Riot of the Statues, epitomizes the concerns of the old-fashioned elite pagan that Libanius was: the loss of cultural values represented by the abandonment of cultural disciplines such as rhetoric, a general lazy disposition towards the problems of the city, and amazement at people's daily preoccupations were at the core of this *psogos* that portrays what the average 'Other' looked like in Libanius' eyes. Gregory of Nazianzus also resorted to *psogos* to portray the emperor Julian as the perfect religious 'Other' in his *Orations* 4 and 5, and works by Claudian or by Epiphanius of Salamis (especially his *Panarion*) rested on *psogoi* in order to substantiate their criticism of heretical sects or public figures.

Rhetoric and panegyrics are no longer the dirty words they used to be and have

overcome all kinds of prejudices that have portrayed them as the quintessence of garrulousness and futility. It would be desirable that the encomiastic form of Late Antique panegyrics and historiographical works do not blind future generations of scholars. In this context, the purpose of this volume is to claim the indisputable centrality of rhetoric and historiography to the religious, political, and cultural milieu of Late Antiquity. Let the content of these works shine and illuminate our knowledge of such a transitional period.

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