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Praising the Otherness  
Linguistic and Cultural Alterity in the Roman Empire:  
Historiography and Panegyrics

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## PREFACE

This volume is about the role of ‘Linguistic and Cultural Alterity’ in Late Antique historiography and panegyrics. Studies on the relationship between rhetoric and historiography have traditionally proven fruitful, and are still opening new avenues of research. Historically, the relationship between rhetoric and historiography has dealt with the formal and thematic analysis of the orations delivered by figures from historiographical works. More recently, discussions of rhetoric in ancient historiography have often centred on the role of fiction in this genre (Woodman 1988). However, current historiographical trends have added a new dimension to this relationship, namely the rhetorical nature of the construction of historiographical narratives (Dominik/Smith 2011; Kempshall 2011, 121-264). In this sense, Late Antique rhetoric and historiography are now considered to be intimately intertwined within a structural and internal bond that strengthens their relationship (Gardiner 2013, 244-247, 266-268; Van Nuffelen 2012, 9-15, 77-82).

This new approach provides a perfect framework for the study of the concept of Cultural Alterity in rhetorical and historiographical works. With a long tradition behind it, Cultural Alterity became an important strand in Late Antique literature, a sign of the times in a changing period. Praising an emperor’s ability to command a second language or mocking the distinctive features of barbarian peoples are characteristic elements of a moment at which the Roman Empire was threatened by continuous external aggression as well as convulsed by internal changes at all levels. The central notion in these contributions draws on the concept of Alterity, that came forth from the broader field of cultural analysis (the term originally being coined by Levinas 1970 [translated into English by M.B. Smith 1999]). This field of research was thriving in the second half of the twentieth century, and has been particularly applied, as for the ancient era, in historical studies (recently by e.g. Gruen 2011, Kahlos 2011, Woolf 2011). Alterity or Otherness presupposes a difference between the self and the other, in an individual sense as well as on the level of the group. This volume aims to bring the discussion further by taking literary texts as point of departure. The fourth century, in which processes of cultural transition took place more rapidly than in previous centuries, provides the historical frame for study. In this era differences in language, culture, and religion were clearly present within the realm of the Roman Empire (e.g., between Greek and Latin, pagan and Christian, East and West).

In this context, the International Research Group *Graecapta* is determined to survey the importance of bilingualism and biculturalism when the Roman Empire

was still unified (AD 324-395<sup>1</sup>) and the presence of such cultural phenomena in the works and thoughts of relevant public figures such as emperors and writers. The contributions to this special issue of *Talanta* were first debated and discussed in an international workshop held in Pamplona (Spain) in October 2012. This seminar became a forum devoted to the study of references to Cultural and Linguistic Alterity as well as to other languages and cultures in two literary genres that are bound together: panegyrics and historiography.

The contributions to this volume deal with the themes and subjects discussed at the workshop. Thus, panegyric strategies and the relevance of Cultural Alterity in Latin and Greek encomiastic texts addressed to public figures (most prominently, the emperor Constantine) and composed by Late Antique authors (Ammianus Marcellinus and Claudian are principal representatives of the two aforementioned literary genres) are at the core of the present volume.

Their central tenets draw on the concept of Alterity and Professor Gualandri (Università degli Studi di Milano) has been kind enough to clarify this notion in her introduction in this volume. In doing so, she has proven again to be a notable *connaisseuse* of elements key to the literary, political, and religious sign of the times of Late Antiquity, as she frames how concepts such as identity, alterity, and interculturality are expounded upon in each contribution, and are coherently deployed throughout the volume.

Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas provides some notes at the end of the volume in order to draw attention to the impact of rhetoric in Late Antique culture, and to the centrality of the study of panegyric strategies in order to obtain a more accurate knowledge of the many identities that came to cohabit under the same regime.

The editors wish to acknowledge their gratitude to the contributors to this volume for their prompt collaboration and response in producing the papers that compose it. Our gratitude also goes to the Editorial Board of *Talanta* for offering their prestigious journal to publish the proceedings of the conference. Pilar García also wishes to thank Alberto J. Quiroga for his enthusiasm and effort at all stages of this international conference. It goes without saying that the contributors of this volume must be credited with the interesting insights that their works provide.

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<sup>1</sup> All the years in this volume are CE, unless otherwise indicated.