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THE OTHERS: CULTURAL MONOTHEISM AND THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF 'CULTURAL ALTERITY' IN LIBANIUS' PANEGYRICS*

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In memoriam P.L. Malosse

This paper aims to explore the cultural, religious, and political implications of the concept 'Cultural Alterity' in the works of the sophist Libanius of Antioch. His defence of the classical paideia *and his religious tenets contributed to shape Libanius' view of barbarian peoples and those unfamiliar with his cultural preferences.*

Introduction

Among the plethora of works that the sophist Libanius of Antioch left us, his epideictic compositions stand out as rhetorical pieces that contain information on many issues, although religion, politics, and culture are the prevailing themes. While modern scholarship has considered his rhetorical productions to be fruitful historical documents yet soulless literary works, his peers and audiences would disagree with modern criticism. Thus, it is very telling of the importance of Libanius to the cultural landscape of the fourth century that he addressed speeches to several emperors who professed different creeds (from Nicene orthodoxy to Arianism and paganism) and whose policies on pressing issues were radically opposed. Such orations, which closely followed the theoretical precepts of Menander the Rhetor and panegyrical compositions of the time, refer quite often to the ever-present threat of the barbarian peoples, who became an important part of the argumentation that substantiated the praise of the emperors' deeds[1]. In Libanius' panegyrics, the portrait of barbarians and other peoples alien to the Roman Empire is mainly employed to emphasize the glorious exploits of the emperor, with no concern for ethnographical digressions. Nor was curiosity about the cultural customs of other peoples a distinctive feature of the sophist's panegyrics.

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[1] Men. Rhet. 373.1-375.4; 377.14-19; 422.20-27.

However, along with this unoriginal view of the barbarians, Libanius created another type of barbarian that served his cultural and religious agenda. His adamant devotion and dependence on the Hellenic *paideia* – a term that holds the middle between training, education, and culture – turned those who did not practice it into cultural barbarians. In this context, the aim of this paper is twofold: first, I want to survey the role of the barbarian peoples in the panegyrical works that Libanius composed for the emperors Constantius, Constans, Julian, and Theodosius in order to determine the sophist's views on Cultural Alterity. The content and usage of his portrait of the barbarians is highly indebted to the patterns of Classical historiography. Yet what is interesting to this paper is how Libanius utilized the barbarians as a rhetorical strategy to praise the emperors and to strengthen the identitarian features of an Empire surrounded by numerous barbarian peoples. Second, I want to focus on another type of 'barbarian' ubiquitously present in Libanius' panegyrics. Those peoples and individuals within the Empire who did not share his cultural and religious tenets fell into the category of 'Cultural Alterity', a concept with evidently unflattering connotations in his thought that helped create the figure of the 'cultural barbarian'. Reluctance to acknowledge the supremacy of the Hellenic *paideia* was, in Libanius' eyes, coterminous with becoming a barbarian, an ethnical term that he used principally as a cultural label.

The uncivilized barbarian

There were two main factors that shaped Libanius' opinion of the barbarians. First, as with many other facets of his beliefs, Libanius' view of the peoples who lived beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire relied heavily on how they were considered in classical historiography[2]. The sophist's opinion of the barbarians resembled the Herodotean conception of the differences between Greekness and barbarism based on the assumption of "the kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech, and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the likeness of our way of life"[3]. In fact, his debt to that 'rhetoric of Otherness' to be found in Herodotus (see Hartog 1988, 212-259) goes beyond the mere use of a Herodotean terminology when referring to barbarians (see Malosse 2003, 43-44), as Libanius also concurs with the historian in emphasizing religious and cultural elements as differentiating markers of what being Greek (or a Hellene) implied. Second, the fact that Libanius spent most of his life in Antioch, a city that had been constantly threatened by a Persian invasion[4], contributed to making him feel that the Empire was "une île fortifiée assiégée de tous côtes par le flot des barbares" (Malosse 2003, 42).

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[2] Schouler 1984, 803-836. See also Maas 2012, 60-62.

[3] Hdt. 8.144: αὖτις δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, ἐὸν ὅμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ θεῶν ἱδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα. Translation taken from Godley 1982.

[4] Downey 1961, 587-594; Francesio, 2004, 38-41; Liebeschuetz 1972, 162-163, 262-263. Malosse 2003, 45, note 1: "Il y a une véritable obsession perse dans l'oeuvre de Libanios"; see also Amm. Marc. 23.5.3; Lib. *Or*. 16.6; 19.6.

Obviously, such views influenced his literary production. When it came to composing a panegyric and to eulogising emperors, Libanius closely followed Menander Rhetor's prescripts on praising their deeds and accomplishments. He used the barbarians as an argumentative element that helped him compose his panegyrics, underlining the negative facet of the cultural opposition represented by those peoples that were attacking the Roman Empire. The first example of references to barbarians and Cultural Alterity in a panegyric is his oration 59[5], a *basilikos logos* dedicated to the emperors Constantius and Constans. Modern scholarship disagrees in its evaluation: Norman considered this oration a "masterpiece of equivocation", the thorough analysis of Malosse rightly avoids an overall evaluation due to the complexity of the composition, and Lieu, Montserrat, and Dodgeon have regarded it as "a magnificent, if sometimes impenetrable, rhetorical tour-de-force, the result of a lifetime spent studying oratory"[6]. Although Libanius was fully aware of the ubiquitous presence of barbarians throughout the Empire[7], oration 59's allusions and references to Cultural Alterity mainly focus on the tense and belligerent atmosphere on the Persian frontier. In this sense, this panegyric provides us with relevant information about the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Sassanid Empire ruled by Shapur II in a period that ranges from the last years of Constantine's reign until the mid-340s[8]. As expected, the portrait of the Persians that Libanius offers us is redolent of derogative clichés in which the Persians are depicted as wicked, treacherous, untrustworthy, and arrogant (see Tuplin 2011). Thus, Libanius devotes long passages to cataloguing the Persians' moral and ethical faults[9]: they are keen on deceiving (59.62), arrogant in their manners (59.72), credited with the invention of a (59.80) "treaty for the cessation of hostilities and employed our lack of defence resulting from the oaths to further their advantage". To sum up, they were the embodiment of cowardice and revenge when it came to war (59.117-118).

Although Lieu and Montserrat are right in pointing out that in this oration "Libanius is discreetly non-sectarian and steers clear of religious matters in defiance of Menander's model"[10], it should be noted that the sophist did not hesitate

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[5] On the composition and content of this speech: Wiemer 1994, 512-515. Malosse 2003. MacCormack 1981, 187 was very critical of this oration: "Its sheer length and comprehensiveness make the oration on Constantius and Constans one of the least convincing panegyrics".

[6] Norman 1965, vii; Malosse, 2003; Lieu/Montserrat/Dodgeon 1996, 160.

[7] Lib. *Or*. 59.89: "We are all well aware that this section of the Empire is enclosed by the two greatest nations of the barbarians; on the one side beyond the Danube are the dense throngs of the Scythians, and on the other is the vexatious multitude of the Persians". See also chapter 59.124. Translation taken from Lieu/Montserrat/Dodgeon 1996.

[8] On the relationships between the Roman and Persian Empires in Late Antiquity, see Dignas/Winter 2007.

[9] However, it is necessary to take into account Drijvers's opinion (2011, 67) that the Sassanid Persians "were not generally considered by the Late Antique sources as common barbarians but are described in a somewhat more nuanced way".

[10] Lieu/Montserrat/Dodgeon 1996, 161. On the traditional image of Costantius as an enemy of pagan culture, see Van Hoof 2013, 388-389.

to bring matters to the cultural arena. His cultural tenets were well represented by contrasting the stereotype of the Persian that the Classical *paideia* had transmitted with the list of virtues that Constantius and Constans prided themselves on (e.g., paragraphs 59.139-150). These virtues, Libanius argued, allowed them to successfully manage (59.33) "the administration of the great business of the Empire, and by the other they were moulded for shrewdness in argument and the vigour of rhetoric".

The numerous compositions that Libanius dedicated to the Emperor Julian also abound in allusions to barbarian peoples, as the sophist gives us a detailed account of Julian's deeds in Gaul and his unsuccessful campaign against the Persians. The emperor who (Lib. *Or*. 13.27) "revealed the hunters [i.e., the barbarians] hunted and their cowering quarry in pursuit"[11] pacified Gaul when it was being sacked and devastated by hordes of barbarians, who eventually (Lib. *Or*. 13.30) "were compelled to rebuild the cities they had ruined, and their hands, schooled in devastation, were taught to engage in reconstruction". These lines implied that the victorious campaign of Julian in Gaul meant something more than a mere triumph in skirmishes against the barbarians that were destroying the Roman provinces there. Julian – the personification of the Hellenic culture in Libanius' ideology[12] – was triumphant over the barbarians who had destroyed the civilized life represented by the cities of Gaul. However, after their defeat, Julian forced the barbarians into a civilized task: building cities. The equation of civilization with building cities and of barbarism with their destruction is far from original, but is telling of Libanius' dependence on Classical *paideia* as regards defining 'Cultural Otherness'.

When dealing with people from outside the Roman Empire in his panegyrical compositions dedicated to Julian, Libanius' comments are an abridged version of what ancient historiography and ethnography made of Cultural Alterity: the Egyptians are fallacious and mercenary (Lib. *Or*. 14.55-56), while in his "Lament over Julian" Libanius highlights two main features of the Persians: their unparalleled taste for luxury and their legendary cowardice in combat (Lib. *Or*. 18.20-21)[13]. In a very significant passage, Libanius summarizes his conception of the barbarian world from a Hellenocentric perspective (*Or*. 15.26): "the barbarian, in his pride, rages and ravens like a wild beast; he slays his kinsman at his table and drinks a toast over his dead body; supplication is either fruitless or spurs him on to worse frenzy still. But with us, our chief aim is to separate ourselves as far from brute beasts as we can; our temper is wrought upon by tears and our seething rage is quenched by lamentation, and we forget our injuries when we see the sinner shamed"[14].

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[11] Translations of the Julianic orations taken from Norman 1969.

[12] On Libanius' opinion of Julian, see Wintjes 2005, 119-133.

[13] On these moral faults, see García Sánchez 2009, 39-53.

[14] For the presentation of barbarians as beasts, see also Amm. Marc. 31.2, especially 31.2.1: *Hunorum gens ... omnem modum feritatis excedit* ("The people of the Huns … exceed every degree of savagery"); 31.2.2: *ut bipedes existimes bestias* ("that one might take them for two-legged beasts").

These lines exemplify the stereotyped portrait of the barbarian at its peak: dehumanization of their manners is lexically represented by two direct references to wild animals[15] (τὰ τῶν θηρίων μιμούμενος; ἡ μεγίστη σπουδὴ τῶν θηρίων) and by allusions to their θυμὸς and ὀργή. Libanius thus describes the quintessence of what being a barbarian entailed[16]. If we compare these passages with the civilizing process carried out by Julian during his campaigns, it is easy to understand why Libanius believed that Julian's death meant the barbarian peoples' liberation (Lib. *Or*. 17.30): "breathe freely again, you Celts. Dance for joy, you Goths. Raise your cry of triumph, you Sarmatians. The yoke upon you has been broken and your necks are free".

Finally, a different treatment is perceived in Libanius' praising works to the Emperor Theodosius. In accordance with most of the representatives of late paganism[17], Libanius disagreed with Theodosius' policy towards barbarian peoples. In an oration dedicated to the emperor (yet never delivered in front of him, despite the sophist's efforts to make us believe that he did), Libanius reminded the emperor of his anger when a Scythian soldier was murdered without a trial in Constantinople (Lib. *Or*. 19.22; 20.14). In doing so, the sophist wanted his audience to realize how lenient, concerned, and excessively indulgent the emperor Theodosius was towards the barbarians. The emperor's disposition made Libanius' plea on behalf of Antioch for its misdoing during the Riot of the Statues more persuasive[18], since the Syriac capital was (Lib. *Or*. 19.55) "a city which the Persians would want either out of existence or in distress, since their own ends would then be furthered. Do not then further the desires of the barbarians"[19].

Therefore, Libanius created an unoriginal portrait of the barbarian peoples by borrowing clichés from the Classical legacy and by capitalizing on the cultural differences with those people that inhabited the lands beyond the limits of the Roman Empire. In inheriting the view of Classical historiography with regard to the barbarians without further elaboration, Cultural Alterity continued to be the distorting mirror of what Hellenes should be. Sustaining the conventional image of the barbarian thereby implied respect for the values transmitted by the Classical *paideia* that he taught for four decades. As Malosse rightly points out, "pour peindre un barbare, il suffit de prendre le contre-pied des valeurs com-

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[15] For the relationship between animalization, barbarism, and speech in Libanius' work, see Casella 2011, 59-60.

[16] Libanius used the image of the barbarian as a savage and a beast in similar terms in Lib. *Or*. 59.132: "They received officers from us as overseers of their behaviour and, discarding their bestial frenzy, they welcomed human reason".

[17] Paschoud 1997, 193: "La manière dont Théodose a tenté de maîtriser la conjuncture militaire dont il a hérité lors de son avènement, dans l´immédiat après-Adrinopole, est jugué d'une manière largement negative par la tradition historiographique représentée pour nous par Eunape et Zosime".

[18] On the Riot of the Statues, see Paverd 1991; Quiroga (forthcoming).

[19] Translations of Lib. *Or*. 19 taken from Norman 1969. Similar arguments in Lib. *Or*. 19.60-62.

munément admises dans l'oikoumenê" (Malosse 2003, 43). However, Libanius was fully aware that the composition of a panegyric could be an opportunity to put forward the main points of his cultural agenda. If we overlook the trivial generalisations on barbarians that proliferate in his panegyrics, a more profound reading comes to light and gives us the opportunity to fully comprehend Libanius' use of barbarians and Cultural Alterity in his panegyrical works.

Thus, in Libanius' panegyrics the barbarians were not only a constant threat to the safety of the Empire but also became the yardstick by which emperors were eulogized. In this sense, it is unsurprising that Julian, the ideal emperor in the sophist's eyes, invariably appeared as the persistent punisher of the barbarian peoples. He inspired such fear among them that (Lib. *Or*.13.35) "many tribes had been summoned to oppose you by enormous payments"; his (Lib. *Or*.12.73) "mere name cast out fear from us and, through seventy day's march from the Tigris, you caused panic among the Persians". Consequently, it is understood that, according to Libanius' exaggerating words, Julian's death implied a sea change in the hostilities with barbarian peoples since Julian was the emperor who (Lib. *Or*.12.78) "for the first time in years has bearded a barbarian". Libanius' extremely biased account of Julian's deeds against the barbarians can be contrasted with the mild and ironic comments on the attitude of Christian emperors towards such peoples. For instance, Constantius' refusal to confront the Persians undermined the Roman Empire's power (Lib. *Or*.19.49): "This and such-like behaviour seemed so noble and praiseworthy, that by his moderation his slackness in military matters was disguised. Every year the Persians nibbled away bits of our territories and increased theirs at our expense"[20]. Similarly, Theodosius' philobarbarian character was also targeted by Libanius' prose[21]. Note, for example, the sarcastic and mocking tone of these lines when expounding on Theodosius' military accomplishments (Lib. *Or*.19.16): "Instead of doing them [i.e., the barbarians] harm, which I feel any man might easily do, you ensure that your subjects shall be free from fear. Hence we can hear their attempts at definition, some saying that you are more of a warrior than a humanitarian, others that you are more of a humanitarian than a warrior".

Libanius' narrative of Constantius', Julian's, and Theodosius' exploits against barbarian peoples (mainly Persians) should be interpreted as a rhetorization of a well-known and commonly used trope that can be read on two levels: on the one hand, a more evident interpretation allows us to consider the description of the actions taken against barbarians by the emperors as part of the sophist's rhetorical weaponry in a customary way. On the other hand, however, a closer reading of these passages reveals that, other than encomiastic purposes, Libanius' treatment of the emperors' measures against the barbarian problem was part of his

[20] On Libanius' criticism of Constantius' policy against the barbarian peoples, see Lieu/Montserrat /Dodgeon 1996, 163-164. See also Lib. *Or*. 18.205-207.

[21] On Theodosius' philobarbarism, see Cameron/Long/Sherry 1993, 2-3.

own political, religious, and cultural agenda. Embedded within a traditionalist pagan cultural legacy, Libanius considered that Julian's aggressive campaigns against barbarians (especially against the Persians) were suitable in order to strengthen the boundaries between civilization (i.e. Greekness) and barbarism, as they were blurring under the guidance of Christian emperors. Thus, Libanius transformed a rhetorical device intended to praise the emperor's glorious deeds into an argument favouring his defence of paganism.

Therefore, the problem of the confrontation with barbarians and of the cohabitation with other cultures was greatly rhetorized for encomiastic purposes in Libanius' panegyrics, but a deeper reading shows that the sophist's approach to the barbarian problem betrayed his traditionalist views. The comparisons he drew (Lib. *Or*. 12.74; 15.2, 37; 18.11) between the situation in the fourth century and prestigious precedents from Greek history and literature (the Trojan War, the Persian War of the fifth century BC) are indicative of his longing to live in a '*sophistopolis*', a city populated by *pepaideumenoi*, educated readers, without a trace of other cultures[22].

The barbarian within

The abovementioned characteristics and features that Libanius resorted to when describing, or disserting on, barbarians were transferred to a smaller and more personal sphere, as if paralleling the macrocosms of the Empire with the microcosm of the milieus in which he could have an influence. The sophist reformulated the Herodotean sentence (Hdt. 8.144, see above and note 3) in order to create a new Hellenic identity suitable for a period in which the impact of paganism was firmly decreasing, and based on the reciprocity between the sacred and the Classical cultural legacy[23]. Libanius devoted much effort and many passages of his works to justifying and endorsing this interplay of ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι[24]. Read, for instance, the proemium of his *prosphôtetikos logos* to Julian (Lib. *Or*. 13.1): "In company with the worship of the gods (μετὰ τῶν ἱερῶν), Sire, there has also returned the reverence for the practice of eloquence (οἱ λόγοι), not merely because eloquence is perhaps no small part of such worship, but also because you have been inspired towards reverence for the gods by eloquence itself".

Intensified as Libanius became older (Criscuolo 1995, 85-86)[25], this obsessive defence of the educational role of the *paideia* shaped by the union of ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι was a frequent rhetorical trope in Late Antique paganism[26] to which

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[22] Malosse 2003, 42 considers that one of the many reasons Libanius had to compose a long excursus on barbarians was "pour opposer le présent au passé". Russell 1983, 21-39.

[23] In this work I am using the term 'identities' as "discursive social constructs that are formed and re-formed through on-going cultural negotiation" (Kahlos 2011, 3).

[24] On the affinity of these two elements, see Lib. *Or*. 62.8: οἶμαι, καὶ συγγενῆ ταῦτα ἀμφότερα, ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι ("I believe that those two certainly are familiar, worship and words").

[25] For a different opinion, see Cribiore 2013, 132-149.

[26] See Ritoré Ponce 2000, 36.

Libanius ascribed a meta-cultural dimension with implications towards identity[27]. Thus, in his speech on behalf of Aristophanes, the sophist presents his friend as a true Hellene as he is a lover of Greece, which involved the love of Greek ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι[28]. Similarly, the combination of ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι would have triumphed in the barbarian territory had Julian lived long enough to conquer Persia (Lib. *Or*. 18.282): "they [the Persians] would, we thought, change their language and dress, and cut short their hair, and sophists in Susa would turn Persian children into orators: our temples here, adorned with Persian spoils, would tell future generations of the completeness of the victory"[29]. Consequently, Libanius strongly believed that the further a civilization was from the Hellenic *paideia*, the closer it was to the concept of cultural barbarism.

By conceiving the concept of 'Cultural Alterity' as a form alien to the Classical *paideia,* the sophist equated barbarism with being uneducated in the *paideia*[30]. Numerous instances prove that cultural correspondence. "Moreover you know the power of rhetoric", Libanius writes in his epistle *Epist.* 369.9, "had it disappeared, we will soon become barbarians". Libanius' works insist on pointing out that the rhetorical *paideia* of the pagan ancestors became a remedy for more than one field: it was the cornerstone of the proper education of emperors (Lib. *Or*. 12.91-99; 13.3-19; 15.27-28; 59.32-34), the effective instrument to persuade the masses (Lib. *Or*. 12.30), a linguistic weapon that empowered whoever mastered it (Lib. *Or*. 12.54). To be succinct, Libanius deemed the rhetorical *paideia* to be a panacea in a passage that represents the climax of his conception of rhetoric and education (Lib. *Or*. 23.21): "Eloquence helps to conceal lowly origin: it hides ugliness, protects wealth, relieves penury and suffices cities for their protection, since in war it is more useful than any equipment and in battle is more potent than any superiority of numbers (…). Only those who excel in education (τοὺς παιδείᾳ διενεγκόντας) can be described as immortals too, for though they die in the course of nature, they live on their fame".

Practice of such a typical feature of the Hellenic identity had to take place in significant, meaningful places. Libanius transformed Antioch and Athens into the epi-

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[27] For Libanius' 'metacultural dimension' of ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι, I adopt Limberis' approach to the concept 'culture' (2000, 376): "the system by which a social order is expressed, reproduced, experienced, and investigated (…). Culture almost always becomes allied with a nation or a state, providing the sole criterion for delineating civilization from what is barbaric".

[28] Lib. *Or*. 14.27: οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτω τῆς αὐτοῦ πατρίδος ἐραστής, ὡς σὺ τοῦ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐδάφους ἐνθυμούμενος ἱερὰ καὶ νόμους καὶ λόγους καὶ σοφίαν καὶ τελετὰς καὶ τρόπαια ἀπὸ βαρβάρων ("There has never been a man such a lover of his country as you are of the soil of Greece, as you reflect upon its religion, its laws, its eloquence, its philosophy, ritual of initiation, and trophies won from the barbarians." [tr. Norman]). See also Lib. *Or*. 19.13.

[29] The same taste for rhetorical exaggeration is to be found in his dystopian account of the future of the Roman Empire after Julian's death, see Lib. *Or*. 19.12, 14, 16.

[30] Petit 1955, 346: "La paideia est le rempart qui contient l'assaut du monde barbare, ce qui nous rapelle qu'Antioche est une sorte de marche hellénique, face à la menace perse".

centres of the teaching of the *paideia* and the development of rhetorical activity. Both cities, entwined by the sharing of mythological ancestors (Lib. *Or*. 15.79), prided themselves on hosting schools of rhetoric and on being important cultural centres that made them impervious to any form of contamination of the essence of their Greekness, the Hellenic *paideia* (Lib. *Or*. 12.36; 18.28; 19.5). Libanius' concern for the practice of rhetoric and his Hellenocentrism made them active elements of city life. When Antioch fell into disgrace with the emperor Theodosius after the Riot of Statues, Libanius lamented that in Antioch (Lib. *Or*. 19.61): "the classes of rhetoric have melted away; so have the elementary classes. There is no one to teach and no one to learn. There is the pallor of illness, the voice of invalids, the mind of bewilderment. If they start on one topic, they fly off at a tangent to another".

Such were Libanius' standards in terms of culture. Whatever lay far and beyond the reach of his conception of ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι represented a type of Cultural Alterity that he attacked and fought by creating his own figure of the 'Other'. Failing to comply with what *paideia* prescribed, made any Roman who was ignorant of it a barbarian. Note, for instance, his praise of Julian's reforms once the latter became emperor (Lib. *Or*. 18.158): "it was with the same intention that he put the cities under the government of persons of ability in rhetoric and put a stop to the employment as provincial governors of those savages who, for all their skill in shorthand, had not a scrap of sense and upset the boat. Seeing that men full of poetry, prose, and subjects from which the art of government could be learned had been slighted, he once more put them in charge of provinces", or an enumeration *ad maiorem* in which 'barbarian' is identified with other moral faults and opposed to the practice of oratory (Lib. *Or*. 15.13: τῇ παρρησίᾳ τῷ σιγᾶν οὐδαμόθεν ἀπολογία…πονηρὸν καὶ μιαρὸν καὶ ὠμὸν καὶ βάρβαρον ("So, with such freedom open to frankness, there is no possible excuse for silence… [a man] base, despicable, brutal and uncivilized" [tr. Norman 1969, 157])[31]. Likewise, speaking or learning any language other than Greek was tantamount to barbarism. Libanius made of his dislike of the Latin language an unmistakable sign of his belonging to the Helleic cultural elites[32]. His criticism of those schools where Latin was taught (Lib. *Or*. 39.17) was paired with his disdain for Rome and her culture (Lib. *Or*. 1.179; 11.151; 15.25 – see Lib. *Or*. 1.234). Such low consideration of the Roman culture and language was used, as Criscuolo pointed out, as "uno degli strumenti con cui egli riteneva di potere giovare alla 'comunità degli

[31] A similar passage in Them. *Or*. 10.131b-c: "There is in each of us a barbarian tribe, extremely overbearing and intractable – I mean temper and those insatiable desires, which stand opposed to rationality as Scythians and Germans do to the Romans". Translation taken from Moncur 1991.

[32] An exceptional aseptic allusion to the learning of Latin can be found in Lib. *Or*. 18.21: "He [Julian] gathered together wisdom of every kind and displayed it – poetry, oratory, the various schools of philosophy, much use of Greek and not a little of Latin". Also Lib. *Or*. 1.3. The sophist was also hostile to the Syriac language (see Lib. *Or*. 42.31).

Elleni', risvegliandone l'orgoglio etnico e culturale contro gli attuali dominanti. ("one of the tools with which he believed to be of help to the 'Hellenic community', awaking their ethnic and cultural pride against the current dominant streams" [tr. editors]) (Criscuolo 1993, 153-154).

Yet Libanius' most conspicuous example of rhetorization of 'Otherness' is to be found in his references to Christianity. For centuries his works and thought have been likened to Julian's, but in the last decades the sophist's literary production and ideology have been approached from more nuanced perspectives (Cribiore 2013, 1-20). Libanius' hostility towards Christianity was based on cultural differences rather than religious disagreements (his correspondence with Christians and the numerous Christian students that attended his school bear witness to this: Misson 1920, 88-89; Petit 1957, 116-122). In his panegyrical compositions – the object of study of the present work – there are few direct references to Christianity as a form of Cultural Alterity. This is only normal as among the addressees of such compositions there were Christian emperors (Constantius, Constans, Theodosius). During the brief reign of the other addressee – the emperor Julian – Libanius could have elaborated a bitter critique of Christianity; however, he was not gifted with the ability to elaborate theological arguments nor was that his line of criticism. Instead, he based his consideration of Christianity as an alien form of culture on cultural arguments. In this way, Julian's conversion from Christianity in paganism is described as the consequence of a cultural choice (Lib. *Or*. 12.33-34), and it was in the cultural arena where Libanius aimed to attack and expose how Christians failed to grasp the indissolubility of ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι (Lib. *Or*. 16.47): "you expect to be admired for your educational system, and you call epic poetry part of it, and yet on the matters of prime importance you employ other teachers: you turn your backs upon instruction when the road lies open to it, though when it was barred you should have been loud in your laments".

Conclusions

The eulogistic nature of the corpus of works analysed in this paper should not be considered as an indicator of rhetorical fireworks and inaccuracies. On the contrary, the emphasis on rhetorical exaggeration or on the derogative portrait of the barbarian identity shed some light on those aspects that indicate the author's major concerns[33]. In Libanius' case, Cultural Alterity was a concept coterminous with barbarism and cultural heresy in his panegyrical works. For a traditionalist, brought up to perpetuate the texts and content of the Classical cultural legacy, any form of culture unsanctioned by the *paideia* and by the moral echoes of the pair ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι became a threatening opposition that endangered the pagan cul-

[33] Heather 1999, 242-243: "from the last quarter of the fourth century, the gap between rhetoric and reality was stretched seemingly to breaking point as Roman hegemony in Europe was overthrown in a number of distinct phases".

tural system that Libanius defended despite its crumbling state. By reviewing Libanius' panegyrical texts, therefore, it is possible to argue that the Antiochene sophist professed a sort of 'cultural monotheism' that excluded all forms of culture unrelated to the Classical tradition and that transformed them into a type of Cultural Alterity that, in Libanius' eyes, was fruitless and had contributed to the fragile situation of the pagan legacy in an increasingly Christian environment.

Although E.S. Gruen concludes in his thorough study that "to stress the stigmatization of the Other as a strategy of self-assertion and superiority dwells unduly on the negative, a reductive and misleading analysis" (Gruen 2011, 356), Libanius' attitude towards Cultural Alterity seems to contradict such a statement. It is tempting to argue that the "reductive and misleading analysis" to which the sophist consciously and purposely subjected all forms of Cultural Alterity was substantiated by the *paideia* he professed and taught[34]. Indeed the texts of Herodotus, Thucydides, and other influential historians[35] predisposed Libanius to portray Persians, Goths, and the like as uncivilized barbarians whose manners were poles apart from the civilized conduct and culture of the Hellenes. Equally, whoever among the Hellenes did not share and participate in the Classical *paideia* was deemed coterminous with a barbarian. In this sense, it is necessary to underline that Libanius' cultural monotheism help us to explain his unsympathetic attitude towards Christianity, as it advocated the division of ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι, that is, the learning of the Classical texts emptied of their religious and cultural content.

From a contemporary methodological point of view, Libanius' cultural monotheism and the mechanisms he employed to create identities is close to Miles' description of the process of identity creation as incorporating an element of instability that was ever-present during the fourth century[36]. "The construction of identity", Miles argues, "is, at its heart, a matter of an *imaginaire* rather than a fixed reality" (Miles 1999, 4). Contradictory as it may seem in a changing period such as Late Antiquity[37], rhetoric (and, especially, its most notable offspring, panegyric) safeguarded the stereotyped categories of the barbarians that the Classical world had kept alive for centuries. Such a literary legacy involved issues relating to culture, religion, and ethnicity, and allowed Libanius to integrate his own political agenda into the panegyrical works he composed. Libanius' involuntary refashioning of Herodotus' definition of what being a Hellene meant (Hdt. 8.144) left aside those who did not partake in ἱερὰ καὶ λόγοι and turned them into bar-

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[34] In similar terms, see Heather 1999, 236: "Immersion in classical literature exposed the individual to accumulated exempla of human virtue and vice".

[35] On such influence, see Schouler 1984, 518-535.

[36] Miles 1999, 1: "identity becomes an issue only when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty".

[37] Miles 1999, 5 summarizes such changes as follows: "the changes in imperial self-presentation and ideology, the influx of barbarians and their growing importance in the military and civil structures of the Empire, and the emergence of Christianity as a powerful force".

barians, either because their ethnicity excluded them from the heavy load of the historiographical tradition or because their Greekness was not proven by their loyalty to and practice of the rhetorical *paideia*.

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