THE XII PANEGYRICI LATINI AND THE PERFECT PRINCE

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With the exception of the incomplete examination by Lester K. Born there has been no attempt to analyze the content of the excessive flattery contained in the XII Panegyrici Latini. A closer study reveals that these orations are concerned with presenting an image of the perfect prince including four elements: (1) all success derives from the favor of the divinities; (2) only the pious receive divine favor; (3) the most important indication of divine favor for the pious prince is military victory; (4) with the victory secured divine favor will produce peace and unity for the realm.

Born argued that the Panegyrici Latini had the primary motivation of eulogizing the ruler and a secondary motive of instruction for the perfect prince. The best evidence is the statement of the younger Pliny, author of the first panegyric, who said that he put his oration into permanent form for two reasons:

... in the first place to encourage our Emperor in his virtues by a sincere tribute, and secondly, to show his successors what path to follow to win the same renown, not by offering instruction but by setting his example before them ... to praise an excellent ruler and thereby shine a beacon on the path posterity should follow would be equally effective without appearing presumptuous.

(Ep. III, 18, 2-3)

Born further maintained, correctly, that much of this instruction is by implication underneath the obvious adulation.

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that there is substantial material on the ideal ruler in the XII Panegyrici Latini. This material is not presented by simply cataloging the various qualities of a good ruler, as Born suggested, but by presenting a complex image of the perfect prince.

The first element of this image, a recurring theme in the panegyrics, is the emperor’s intimate connection with divine forces. The divinity, as creator and

1. L. K. Born, 'The Perfect Prince according to the Latin Panegyrists', AJP, 55 (1934), 20-35. Ziegler ('Panegyrikos', RE, XVIII, 571-81) makes no attempt to discuss the content of the panegyrics. J. Mesk analyses them only in terms of rhetorical types: 'Zur Technik der lateinischen Panegyriker', Rh. Mus. 67 (1912), 569-90.

2. In addition to other ancient and modern panegyrics and the parallel genre, the specula principium.


4. Ibid., pp. 21-3.
arbitrator of earthly matters (IX,26; X,7), plays a role in the status of the emperor who has been honored divinely (II,1; VII,3,9), receives divine aid,ֶ and possesses god-given gifts (VI,12), and enjoys the fruits of divine power and favor (III,6). The empire, being bounded not by earthly frontiers but heavenly regions (II,10), has the benefit of divine intervention whether it be in the form of a celestial vision to the emperor and his army, vengeance on an enemy, successful campaigns in which helpers of the gods fight on his behalf, an imperial marriage (Constantine and Fausta) leading to renewal of the state, or to liberty for the city of Rome in the face of designs of men and counsels of the auspices.ֶ Constantine’s defeat of Maxentius in 312 was a victory of divina praecepta over superstition maleficia (IX,4).

The prince, protégé of the gods (VII,17), is considered to be equal to the gods, a gift of the gods, divinely chosen, a minister of the gods, or even the son of a god.ַ In response, the emperor seeks a god’s counsel and gives proof of his divinity by choosing an adequate successor.ָ He is addressed as divus (VI,14), called a divine man (VII,15), and referred to as having sancta divinitas (XI,32), or as receiving divine favors (II,14). Then, too, he is blessed with innumerable virtues all of which are divine: vigor, manliness, instinct, piety, judgement, dignity, swiftness, force and providentia. Others include his appearance, voice, mind, plan, glory, presence, foreknowledge, confidence, protection, intelligence, orations, expeditions, and instinct. Medicine brought by the emperor for the healing of the state is divine (VIII,11), while the health of the empire is attended to, in a positive way, by celestial vote (VII,7).

Further, the prince is immortal (VI,14), possessing immortal confidence, spirit, and intelligence.ֹ He rules an immortal empire with the help of immortal gods who created him princeps and who are interested in peace.ֻ He is an ‘eternal’ emperor with ‘celestial’ piety, will (mutus), and spirit.י

Even the dynastic line involves things higher than human. The emperor, with the gods as his parents (III,3; IV,20), belongs to an eternal gens and has a divine origin, descent, and divine ancestors.ֵ After his death the divine (IX,24,25) Constantius, father of the subject of the panegyric, Constantine, became a particeps caeli (X,14) and was admitted to the council of the gods (VI,3). The divine (VII,2; VIII,4) Claudius, presumed ancestor of Constantine,

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6. II,6,7,11,12; VI,8,13; VII,20; IX,2; X,13,14,16.
7. Pliny, Pan., I,4,5,8,14.
8. Ibid., 8,11. The emperor is worthy of a statue representing him as a god (IX,25).
9. II,10; III,6,8.
10. IV,17; VI,2,10; VII,22; VIII,13.
11. IV,3,13; VI,8,11,12,14; VII,17.
12. VIII,1: Flavia is an eternal name.
13. Pliny, Pan.; X,14; II,2; III,2.
was a 'companion of the gods' (VII,2). Continuing the blessed family, the prince's offspring are divine (IX,26). Nor did the panegyrist neglect the dynastic protector deity whether it be Jupiter, Hercules, or Apollo. 14

The prince's close contact with the divine is further emphasized by frequent reference to his felicitas, 15 the gift of the gods. 16 Addressed as 'Felix' (IV,3), the emperor possesses divine felicity (XI,27) while ruling over a felicitous city and empire which he holds in continuing felicity. 17 His felicitas is connected with various aspects of his reign: security, successful campaigns, the health of the times and the fertility of lands, the submission of barbarians, and the administration of a great empire. 18 The felicity of the past is a positive sign for the future (X,2). The princeps whose introspection is more felicitous than anyone's (X,11) is felix in command and felicior after command (VI,14).

The often-repeated form of address 'sacratissime imperator', 19 emphasizes the divine nature of the prince. He is referred to as a divinity 20 and, very important, the soldiers recognize his resemblance to certa divinitas (VII,17). The image is enhanced by frequent reference to the emperor's numer. 21

The princeps' repeated acts to the immortal gods (III,6) are important since they play a role in the destruction of enemies and the constancy of the state (IV,17; VI,10).

The second facet of the perfect prince image, his pietas, is a dominating note in the panegyrics. This is to be expected since piety, a quality close to the gods (III,6), and felicity, the ultimate gift of the gods, 22 are intimately connected (III,13,19). The emperor was born with equal pietas and felicitas (III,19), with his piety making him worthy of being felix (III,18). The panegyrist suggests that the prince is owed, in gold, a statue of divinity and a crown of piety. 23

Frequent reference to his piety 24 which is perpetual, impatient, celestial, extraordinary, and comes from indestructible origins, 25 reinforces the image of the reverent princeps. Piety of the current ruler is dramatically (X,12) contrasted with the previous impiety and nefaria amentia of the impious tyrant, Maxentius. 26

The pietas of the prince is apparent in relation to the gods (III,6) and to the

14. Jupiter—II,12,13; IV,4,13; VI,12; Hercules—II,1,2,4,13; III,3; IV,4; VI,2,8,11; Apollo—VII,21,22. Jupiter is the rector caeli and Hercules the pacator terrarum (II,11).

15. Especially Pan. III where the orator eulogizes the emperor's felicitas.

16. As opposed to something earned by human merit (VIII,2).

17. II,13; VI,10; X,2,38.

18. III,13,15,16; IV,16,18.

19. II,1,13; III,1,2,8,13,15,19; VIII,1,2.

20. IV,2,15.

21. II,1,13; IV,15; VI,8.

22. Play, Pan., 88: felicity is a tribute to luck, not character.

23. IX,25: together with a shield of virtue.

24. Eg., III,13; VI,7; X,16.


26. IX,4; X,6,7; XI,3.
empire which is governed by his piety (VII,22). It produces good character traits in the emperor including modesty, an invincible spirit, a *pia mens*, kindness, and a lack of lust for power.27 Good deeds emanate from the *pius princeps* (VII,7) as he directs the empire with pious hands (II,14). His piety keeps him faithful to his work (VII,20) preserving the human race, liberating the downtrodden, and maintaining *concordia*.28 The humble prince weeps from piety (VIII,9) as his subjects flock to him, not out of fear, but from attraction to his piety (II,11), which is a spectacle (III,11).

*pietas* is a factor in maintaining both the tetrarchal arrangement of Diocletian (IV,3) and the long life of the prince (IX,26). It celebrates the birth of the immortal city29 as the subjects of the empire, in giving thanks for the piety of their ruler (VIII,7), emulate this quality. They are permitted to make pious complaints (III,2). The voice of the panegyrist is pious (III,1) – his oration is really a pious remembrance of a pious emperor (VII,1). Foreign potentates look to the prince as a king for majesty but as a brother for piety (III,17).

Producing affection (VIII,12), the piety of the prince extends to the royal family. Constantius Chlorus, father of the prince, is remembered for his piety (VI,5) as his title ‘*Pius*’ is prominent.30 Accordingly, Constantine follows paternal piety (IX,4). It is the fruit of the prince’s *pietas* that makes him even greater than his father, now a *particeps caeli*.

Finally it is *pietas* that doubles for the prince the *fructus divinae potestatis* (III,6) especially military victory with which piety is intimately connected (VII,20). Constantine’s piety was responsible for his defeat of Maxentius (VII,14).

Accordingly the panegyrists did not neglect the third aspect of the perfect ruler, his role as a successful military leader. They stress this primarily by repeated reference to successful campaigns not only of the prince, as the subject of the oration,31 but also of his ancestor,32 father,33 and son (X,3). The prince is placed in the same light as great military heroes of the past including Gaius Fabricius, hero against Pyrrhus, Camillus, Scipio Africanus (to whom Maximian is even superior), Marius, Paullus Aemilius, Caesar, and even Alexander and Hannibal.34 A comparison with the wars of the Republic is invited (IV,11).

The blessing of the divinities shines on the successful campaigns of the prince (IV,8) who makes decisions under divine inspiration (IX,4) and wages war under favourable *auspicia*.35 The *fortissimus* (X,27) leader, whose titles

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27. II,4; IV,1; VI,11; VII,8; VIII,10.
28. VI,2; X,6,10.
29. II,1; VII,22.
30. VII,7,8,14; IX,4.
31. II,4,5ff; III,5,7,16; IV,5,6-19; VII,10-13; IX,16ff,21ff; X,16-18; XII,3,21ff.
32. VII,2 – Claudius the presumed ancestor of Constantine.
33. VI,4; VII,5-7; IX,24.
34. Pliny, *Pan.*, 13; II,8,10; III,9; IV,12; VII,10; IX,5,14.
35. VI,14; X,19.

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Imperator and Germanicus (Pliny, Pan., 9) are recalled, leads his army to victory with the unanimous support of the gods (IV,17). Of course, his felicitas is connected with victory (IV,7). Mars, impartial to begin with, assures victory after contemplating the person of the princeps (IV,15).

There is much to admire in the prince’s military capability. In his early career he served with distinction (Pliny, Pan., 16). Now, as commander-in-chief, he inspires confidence because of his felicity, he is close enough to his soldiers to recall nearly everyone by name, and he, like Hannibal, shares the inconveniences of campaign with the troops.36 The victorious prince has many qualities of good military leadership: fortiduo, virtus, ferocia, fortuna, audacia, prudentiâ, ardor, resolution, expertise, superior tactical ability, and invincibility.37 He sets an example for his army (X,29).

References to the submission or capture of foreign kings enhance the image of a successful Imperator (II,10; VII,10) as do descriptions of the uncertain (X,19) and formidable circumstances under which the victory was secured, for example, unfavorable auspices, difficulties of the war, an enemy protected by natural barriers, an enemy previously successful against powerful armies, or the superior numbers of the foe.38

The army of the prince is devastating. It is invincible, faithful, solid and confident, capable of rapid march, and highly disciplined.39 The soldiers show great affection for their leader obeying him as if he were a god.40 After battle the loyal troops turn to the protection of the frontier (IX,21). The wives of Roman soldiers are to be commended: they are, in fact, more courageous than men of other nations (III,3). Descriptions of the battle scene, involving massacres and devastation, vivify the success of the army as do reports of the ferociousness, valiance, insolence, and bad nature of the enemy which the prince can turn to fear (Pliny, Pan., 12).

Other suggestions magnify the military exploits of the princeps. He is repeatedly referred to as ‘invictus’.43 The emperor has earned trophies, Germanic (III,5), naval (III,19), and of the Nile (IV,5). Descriptions of the musical instruments played as the army marched into battle enlighten the military image as do references to the ensuing triumphs (IX,19), celebrations following the triumphs (III,5), and the importance of the campaign (IV,10). Needless to say, the frontiers are secure and the provinces are under control (II,7; IV,3).

The fourth, and last, aspect of the perfect prince image is his role as an

37. II,4; IV,10; VI,3; VII,11,12; IX,10,15; X,19,22-24,26,29; XII,3.
38. IV,9,13; VI,8; IX,2,3,4.
39. Pliny, Pan., 5,9,18,23; IV,15; VII,16,18; X,19.
40. VII,17.
41. II,7; IV,12,17; X,30.
42. II,5; IV,18; VI,8; X,9ff,17,24.
43. II,1,7; III,9; IV,1,2,3,5,6,9,14,17,20,21; VII,8,12.
44. X,26,30; IX,1: in Constantine’s army they used not only the Roman lutuus and tuba, but Spartan flutes.
outstanding ruler. The emperor, likened to great statesmen of the Republic (II,14), is the father of his people, rules a principatus (not a dominatio) under felicitissima auspicia with the help of good friends and advisers. Ruling not through fear but piety (II,11), he follows in the footsteps of his excellent father (X,4; XII,5) who was moderate and just (VI,4,5). His good rule is contrasted with that of past evil emperors (Pliny, Pan., 40), anxieties (IV,18), and the bad character of the adversary (IX,3) who did not respond to pleas for peace (X,10) and who was a tyrant.

The prince displays an abundance of qualities essential for a good ruler. Included are modesty, moderation, perfection, mildness, mercy, freedom from lust and greed, liberality, generosity, magnanimity, truthfulness, kindness, justice, prudence, clemency, faithfulness (as Rome had been faithful to Saguntum and the Mamertines (VIII,3)), compassion, natural excellence, a discerning mind, and an outstanding appearance. He subjects himself to the same restrictions of any consul and to the law of the land (Pliny, Pan., 65).

The prince brings many benefits to the empire. He is interested in the general welfare (Pliny, Pan., 44), correcting evil, reforming the youth, and establishing just legal procedure. The state, having been renewed (VI,13), is blessed by peace, justice, concord, security, contentment, clemency, joy, a flourishing cultural life (VII,16), soldiers displaying good character and clemency, happiness, tranquillity, liberty, a fair judicial system, and a solid treasury. Under the ideal ruler there is salubritas temporum and fertilitas terrarum (III,15), with all fields cultivated, the ages and numbers of men increasing, granaries filled with the harvest, and cornfields where there were formerly forests (III,15). The age is a felicitous one (III,15; XI,23).

Subjects of the empire respond well, delighting in their emperor (X,2) and following and imitating him (Pliny, Pan., 45-46).

In sum, the XII Panegyrici Latini provide much instruction for the perfect prince. They do this by presenting an image of the ideal ruler—one who is closely connected with divine powers through his piety. Being pious he could expect, and receive, victory as a just reward and then could confer benefits which only come with the peace that follows victory. This is the message contained in the flattery of the orators.
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