

Omissi, A. and Ross, A. J. (edd.) 2020. *Imperial Panegyric from Diocletian to Honorius. Translated Texts for Historians, Contexts 3*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. Pp. xi + 296. ISBN 978-1-78962-110-5. US\$120.00.

Few genres of literature are so intimately associated with Late Antiquity as imperial panegyric. With such a plethora of examples surviving from the late third century onwards, especially in comparison to the Principate, it used to be seen as a quintessentially late Roman phenomenon, an index of the empire's decline into the military autocracy of the Dominate. In recent decades, the re-evaluation of Late Antiquity has been accompanied by a corresponding rehabilitation of panegyric, with scholars such as Sabine MacCormack spearheading a new appreciation of its possible roles within delicate political communication and intricate court ceremonial. Many studies have focussed on a single author, such as Themistius or Libanius, or on the eleven late-antique speeches contained in the Gallic collection known as the *Panegyrici Latini*, but without always giving sufficient attention to their place within a wider literary context. This interesting and focused new volume, published as a *Contexts* supplement to the long-running *Translated Texts for Historians* series, has the stated aim of bringing different panegyric texts into conversation, particularly by drawing together Latin and Greek material that might ordinarily be treated independently. The eleven contributors achieve this to varying degrees, with many important insights along the way.

Laurent Pernot's opening contribution, entitled 'What is a "panegyric"?' (pp. 25–39), is not, as one might expect, an exploration of the genre of laudatory oratory, which had already been given some consideration in the editors' thoughtful introduction (pp. 1–22). Instead, Pernot surveys the history of the Greek term πανηγυρικός and its Latin transliteration *panegyricus*, tracing their development across antiquity. While this chapter is necessarily descriptive, it offers many important methodological observations, most notably that πανηγυρικός was frequently used simply to refer to anything (including an oration) associated with a festival and that many of the texts now labelled as 'panegyrics' were not known by that term in antiquity, thereby questioning the notion of a clear 'genre'. Roger Rees also ranges widely in his chapter '(Not) making faces: *prosopopeia* in Late Antique panegyric' (pp. 41–65). Starting with the recommendations for the use of this rhetorical figure in the Greek handbook by Menander Rhetor, Rees notes the relative dearth of examples in late-antique Greek orations. In

contrast, the Latin tradition presents a mixed picture, with a trend towards greater use across the course of the *Panegyrici Latini* but no corresponding enthusiasm for προσωποποιία in the late-fourth-century authors Symmachus and Ausonius, suggesting that the Gallic collection represents a ‘relatively hermetic ecosystem’ (p. 61). This nuanced account concludes with an important reminder to consider possible performance contexts, especially given Menander’s observation that panegyrists used προσωποποιία ‘as if in a play’. This text features even more prominently in Grammatiki Karla’s chapter, ‘Libanius’ imperial speech to Constantius II and Constans (*Or.* 59): context, tradition, innovation’ (pp. 67–90), which argues that this oration drew directly on Menander’s instructions for the composition of a βασιλικός λόγος, even down to specific verbal borrowings. While some interesting similarities are highlighted, the argument would benefit from further close attention to the text(s) and greater consideration of how many of these features are to be found in other examples of late-antique panegyric.

Belinda Washington provides an excellent, illuminating analysis of Julian’s *Oration* 3, in praise of the empress Eusebia, examining how the future emperor adapted the conventions of imperial panegyric in order to praise a woman, ‘Playing in conventions in Julian’s *Encomium to Eusebia*: does gender make a difference?’ (pp. 93–116). Discussing how the text forms a diptych with *Oration* 1, celebrating Eusebia’s husband, Constantius II, Washington also employs frequent comparisons with Claudian’s unfinished *Laus Serenae*, as well as placing *Oration* 3 within a wider context of representations of imperial women in panegyric and invective. The result is a well-argued account of how Julian created an innovative portrait of Eusebia and her distinctive virtues. Shaun Tougher keeps the focus on Julian by comparing the treatment of a number of topics in his panegyrics and *Letter to the Athenians* with their use in Mamertinus’ *gratiarum actio* to the same emperor in his chapter, ‘Julian and Claudius Mamertinus: panegyric and polemic in East and West’ (pp. 117–40). The highlighted differences between these authors’ attitudes towards members of the Constantinian dynasty, especially women and the ill-fated usurper Nepotianus, are particularly interesting, with Tougher making considered suggestions for the reasons behind them, as well as arguing convincingly for not positing a clear distinction between panegyric practice in Latin and Greek, or East and West. James Corke-Webster then turns attention to Constantine himself and his biographer Eusebius of Caesarea, exploring how the bishop consistently innovated in adapting panegyric for a new Christian context in a piece entitled ‘How to praise a Christian emperor: the panegyric experiments of Eusebius of Caesarea’ (pp. 143–65). This chapter moves deftly across the

Ecclesiastical History, In Praise of Constantine and *Life of Constantine* to demonstrate how Eusebius articulated his own vision of the emperor's position with regard to both God and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. While the first part of the chapter might benefit from more sustained engagement with Pernot's discussion of possible meanings of πανηγυρικός, this is an insightful exploration of Eusebius' panegyric writings.

The next two chapters are tightly focused on specific Latin works, starting with Diederik Burgersdijk's discussion of possible philosophical elements in the speeches to Constantine from 313 and 321 preserved in the *Panegyrici Latini*, 'Neoplatonic philosophy in Tetrarchic and Constantinian panegyric' (pp. 167–88). The chapter presents a compelling case for the circulation of these ideas within the intellectual milieu of these Gallic orators and offers some parallels with Neoplatonic texts. As with Karla's chapter, however, it would be helpful to place these within a broader framework of panegyric practice and thus demonstrate how distinctive their use of these themes actually was. Robert R. Chenault's piece, entitled 'Roman and Gallic in the Latin panegyrics of Symmachus and Ausonius', then uses the speeches of these two politicians, delivered in 369–79, to show how they dealt with the 'inside-out' empire of the fourth century, in which a senator might have to travel from Rome to the far limits of Gaul to address the emperor (pp. 189–208). By exploring the use of the city of Rome itself, both past and present, in these speeches, alongside pertinent examples from the *Panegyrici Latini*, Chenault provides an insightful and nuanced account of how orators subtly adapted their themes for different contexts.

Adrastos Omissi's chapter, 'Civil war and the Late Roman panegyric corpus' (pp. 211–32), takes a more historical approach than most, highlighting how frequently the subject of usurpers and civil conflict appears in the panegyrics and also how much information about these events is only knowable through these texts, especially for the reigns of Carausius and Allectus. Omissi also provides illuminating examples of how panegyrics were used to smooth over difficult political situations, possibly including the accession of Theodosius I in 379, and how their exaggerations and distortions sometimes fed into later historical accounts. Robert Stone's 'Inviting the enemy in: assimilating barbarians in Theodosian Panegyric' also explores the role of panegyrics in presenting shifting imperial policies and concerns in his discussion of Themistius' treatment of 'barbarians' in *Orations* 14, 15, and 16, delivered during 379–83, as Theodosius sought to deal with the Goths in the Balkans (pp. 233–54). The chapter provides a clear account of how orator and emperor responded to changing circumstances, together with a coda on the same theme in Pacatus' speech from 389. This

oration also features prominently in Alan J. Ross' concluding chapter on 'The audience in imperial panegyric' (pp. 255–78). After considering the meagre surviving evidence for real audience reactions offered by Libanius' *Orationes* 1 and 12, Ross proceeds to explore the use of a 'constructed' audience (p. 263) by a range of panegyrists, including their seeking to bind speaker and audience into a united 'we' who benefitted from imperial favour or, in the case of Pacatus, to present the Gallic elite as witnesses and victims of Magnus Maximus' usurpation, rather than collaborators. This excellent discussion of an understudied aspect of panegyric is followed by a useful appendix listing editions and translations of relevant works.

This collection makes an important contribution to the study not only of these particular texts but also of late-antique panegyric as a whole. Some of the most successful contributions explore neglected works, such as those by Ausonius and Symmachus, or strive for meaningful comparisons between the Latin and Greek examples. The volume's many approaches to reading panegyrics also remind us of the difficulty of reconstructing their ancient reception and real-life impact: for example, Omissi remarks that 'whether any member of these audiences was ever much taken in by the hyperbole, the outrageous flattery, and the patent absurdities that the panegyrics presented is highly doubtful' (p. 227), before quoting Augustine of Hippo's famous recollections about his own experience as a panegyrist in *Confessions* 6.6. Such statements are common in modern scholarship, but should probably become less confident, especially given recent examples of political rhetoric. Moreover, as Omissi also notes two pages later, 'we can point to manipulations, half-truths, and outright lies of panegyric that have made it into historical accounts of civil wars or of a usurper's reign, and so have become accepted as historical fact in the modern world' (p. 229). The questions of how late-antique panegyric was interpreted, and should be interpreted, remain at the heart of our understanding of late-antique political culture.

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