

Introduction

Emperors, Rhetoricians, and Panegyric

The Roman Empire was the largest multiethnic state in the ancient Mediterranean world. In the fourth century CE, it stretched from what is today northern England to Morocco and from Portugal to northern Iraq. In such a vast and complex state, the potential for crises to erupt that could destabilize society was real. This had been the case between 235 and 284, when the Roman world was subjected to regional rebellions, civil wars, foreign invasions, and political and economic instability. One of the factors contributing to these crises in the third century was Roman subjects' perception of the emperor as physically distant and administratively detached from their everyday concerns. It was only with great difficulty that emperors during this period maintained their hold on power and territory for any length of time. The empire and emperor that emerged after 284 were more integrated and more interdependent than ever before. This was the era of big armies and "big government,"¹ and it was against this backdrop that imperial panegyrics, speeches of praise on emperors, became increasingly important. Speeches celebrating emperors played a significant political role in this period, with speechmakers serving as conduits to communities and elites and facilitating emperors' public images and imperial administrations, sometimes directly as both panegyrists and high officeholders.

In summer 337, few contemporaries could have predicted that Flavius Claudius Iulianus, who witnessed the massacre of much of his family in Constantinople at about age six, would produce speeches of praise on the very man responsible for

1. E.g., MacMullen 1967: 49–76 and 1976; Drinkwater 2005; Lo Cascio 2005. Lactantius describes this new era polemically but not inaccurately (*DMP* 7).

that massacre: his cousin Constantius II.² Fewer still could have predicted that he would do so while helping to govern part of the empire as Caesar (Deputy Emperor) alongside this same man, and then succeed him to rule the entire empire in his own right. In light of the massacre above, his speeches on Constantius are also remarkable for their image management and diplomacy, as we shall see below. Julian, as he is known to us, was the last member of the Constantinian dynasty to rule over the entire empire.³ Further, he performed many roles as emperor: “the military commander, the theosophist, the social reformer, and the man of letters.”⁴ And he continues to fascinate in the nearly seventeen hundred years since his death on 26 June 363.⁵

This sustained fascination is due in no small part to Julian’s diverse and elegant writings in Greek, which received new life in numerous editions during the Renaissance.⁶ Interest in the orations and letters increased in the eighteenth century, with the publication of some of the first modern biographies of Julian.⁷ In fact, we have more material from Julian’s pen than from any other Roman emperor (or rather more writing attributed to him; *notarii*, or secretaries, would have been responsible for producing most of Julian’s literary output, at his direction).⁸ His earliest and most notable works are two panegyrics addressed to Constantius and a third to the latter’s wife, Eusebia, that belong to a unique class: capably constructed speeches by one emperor, a Caesar, for his Augustus (Emperor). There is also the *Epistle to the Athenians*, which Julian wrote later as part of a public relations offensive during his brief civil war with the same Constantius. Altogether, we have ten orations, two political pamphlets/essays in the form of epistles, and other variously complete or fragmentary letters written by Julian that number over one hundred in Joseph Bidez’s magisterial edition.⁹

2. Kienast 1996: 314–17, 323–25. For Julian’s date of birth, see chapter 1, n. 22. On Constantius’s culpability in the massacre of much of the imperial family in 337, see Burgess 2008 and Marcos 2014.

3. For introductions to Julian, see Hunt 1998 and Fontaine 2013. For a small sample of studies on Julian, see Bidez 1965, Browning 1978, Klein 1978, Bowersock 1978, Athanassiadi 1992, Tougher 2007, Baker-Brian and Tougher 2012, and Rebenich and Wiemer 2020. The last Constantinian to rule was Constantia Postuma, who reigned as Western empress (see McEvoy 2016).

4. Downey 1939: 305. Cf. *Lib. Or.* 18, 176, for Julian as “priest, writer, seer, judge, soldier and universal saviour, all in one” (trans. Norman).

5. On the fascination with Julian, see Tougher 2007: 3–11; and Rebenich and Wiemer 2020: 1–12.

6. On Julian’s *Nachleben*, see Rebenich 2020.

7. See Rebenich and Wiemer 2020: 13–29.

8. On Julian’s manuscript tradition, see Bidez 1929 and Prato 2013. On Julian’s letter collection, see Trapp 2012 and Elm 2017. On Julian’s philosophical and political epistolography and its cultural milieu, see Marcos 2018a.

9. Bidez 1924. Bidez also preserves a fair amount of apocrypha and letters of doubtful authenticity that raise Julian’s epistolary corpus to over two hundred pieces. See also Wright 1923 and Prato 2013.

Those who have written about the emperor have naturally focused on his voluminous writings in attempts to (re)construct the “historical” Julian. Prominent among these writings is Julian’s extant correspondence, which has been described as a broken mirror that reflects the figure of the emperor well.¹⁰ But we should be careful with this broken mirror, for emperors were complex figures who used their writings to project skillfully constructed images of themselves to the contemporary public and to posterity, few of which should be accepted at face value. We can say, however, that Julian’s first three orations are now finding, or rather rediscovering, their place as valuable tesserae in efforts to restore the complex mosaic of his personality.¹¹ We should note, in addition, that emperors’ writings responded to issues and circumstances that were themselves complex. This is not to say that we can never understand the public personality and motivations of historical figures such as Julian, rather that private aspects of who they were are necessarily hidden from us, and so we should approach them as the complicated individuals they no doubt were instead of painting them with broad brushstrokes. “For,” as Julian himself put it in a letter to his friend Philip shortly after becoming sole emperor in November 361, “it is often impracticable to make one’s language harmonise with one’s real sentiments [in writing].”¹²

(RE)CONSTRUCTING JULIAN

Not unlike the fourth-century rhetorician and bishop Gregory of Nazianzus, whose two invectives on the emperor proved so influential,¹³ some modern scholars have tended to see Julian as something of a duplicitous figure as Caesar, and later, as sole emperor, as a religious zealot, and a “puritanical pagan,” because of his rejection of Christianity and his support for the *cultus deorum* (worship of the gods).¹⁴ On the other hand, others have been empathetic and even somewhat sympathetic.¹⁵ Taking all of this into consideration, it is evident that we have a good deal to gain from a more balanced approach to Julian, that we should take greater stock of the known and unknown and consider nuanced positions in attempting

10. Alonso-Núñez 1972: 55.

11. Pagliara 2015: 109. Cf. Brunt 1988: 89. See also Fontaine 2013: LXX–LXXVII (“chi fu Giuliano?”).

12. *Ep.* 30 Wright (40 Bidez): οὐ γὰρ ἐθέλει πολλάκις ὁμολογεῖν ἢ γλῶττα τῇ διανοίᾳ (trans. Wright).

13. On which, see Elm 2012: 336–77 (*Or.* 4) and 433–77 (*Or.* 5).

14. E.g., Müller-Seidel 1955, for Julian as Caesar consciously planning usurpation; Bowersock 1978, chap. 8, titled “The Puritanical Pagan”; and Rosen 2006, chap. 9, “Der Verlierer” (The Loser). Bowersock 1978 has been an influential *libellus*.

15. See Bidez 1965; Browning 1978; and Athanassiadi 1992: vii–xv, esp. x, for her adroit response to Bowersock’s review, in which she is placed alongside the praise-giving Libanius, by likening Bowersock to the condemnatory Ephrem the Syrian.

to (re)construct his or any emperor's portrait in all its complexity—in sum, we should always leave room for some doubt. To some of his contemporaries, such as Gregory of Nazianzus, his detractor, and Ammianus Marcellinus, his admirer, Julian was a somewhat eccentric public figure.¹⁶ Thus we should not neglect Julian's peculiarities in assessing him, his acts, and his motives as emperor. But neither should we focus on his eccentricity, religious or otherwise, to the exclusion of other features of his public personality and his reign, which was quite traditional, particularly in the administrative sphere.¹⁷ Scholars have focused more on Julian the imperial pontifex and theologian than on Julian the politician in other contexts. For example, Julian's panegyrics, both those by him and to him, thus his roles within imperial government as a distributor (Caesar) and a recipient (sole Augustus) of praise, two distinct and critical aspects of his public career, have not been explored and considered comprehensively.¹⁸ Nor have these speeches been considered fully alongside those of his contemporary the rhetorician-senator Themistius. By closely considering all of Julian's panegyrics, in which his idiosyncrasies and traditionalism are on full display, we can gain greater insight into Julian himself and into panegyric as a form of elite communication during the fourth-century Roman Empire. In short, like his complicated uncle Constantine, Julian had many faces,¹⁹ and only some of these faces have been studied.

To be sure, imperial panegyrics as a genre have not been neglected. They have often been mined for "facts" about emperors, about their deeds, images, policies, ideologies, and courts,²⁰ and explored for the form and function of their narratives and underlying methods.²¹ Studies on panegyrics have even taken the form of

16. E.g., Greg. Naz. *Or.* 5, 23; Amm. 22.7.2, for Julian fining himself ten pounds of gold after infringing on a prerogative of the consul Claudius Mamertinus; 22.7.3, for Julian's disregard of his station and unseemly rush (*exsiluit indecore et qui esset oblitus*) out of the senate house of Constantinople to embrace the philosopher Maximus of Ephesus in early 362; cf. Lib. *Or.* 18, 154–56. See Amm. 22.10.2, for Julian as chief judge sometimes asking, at an unsuitable moment, what each one of the litigants before him worshipped (*quid quisque iurgantium coleret, tempore alieno interrogans*); Lib. *Or.* 1, 129.

17. See Pack 1986, Brendel 2017, and Schmidt-Hofner 2020, who focus on Julian's extant legislation and conclude that he was largely not a reformer; López Sánchez 2012, who sees a very Constantinian emperor on Julian's coin issues; and Marcos 2019b, for Julian's trenchant and largely traditional treatment of Christians.

18. For individual studies on Julian's panegyrics, see Tantillo 1997: 11–50 (*Or.* 1); Tougher 2012 (*Or.* 1); García Ruiz 2012 (*Or.* 2) and 2015 (*Orr.* 1 and 2); Drake 2012 (*Or.* 3); Pagliara 2015 (*Orr.* 1 and 3); Alvino 2016 (*Or.* 3); and Ross 2018b (*Or.* 1). For past approaches to Julian, see Rebenich and Wiemer 2020: 12–29.

19. Constantine's words and deeds as emperor offer useful comparanda for Julian's. For discussion and analysis of the "many faces of Constantine," see Lenski 2016: 1–23.

20. E.g., Straub 1964, esp. 146–74; A. Cameron 1970; MacCormack 1990; Vanderspoel 1995; Wiemer 1995; Rees 2002; Wienand 2012a; Omissi 2018; and Ross 2018b.

21. E.g., Maguinness 1932 and 1933; Bartsch 2012; and Rees 2010.

meta-discourse.²² Sabine MacCormack read them as a way to understand imperial art and ceremonial and the imperial ideal better, and in so doing highlighted their prominent role in late antique cultural and political life among the elite.²³ References in the correspondence of Libanius—who was a prominent rhetorician and panegyrist from Antioch—to copies of imperial panegyrics in circulation and to his requests for such copies are suggestive of the importance of such praise-giving.²⁴ Like coin issues from imperial mints at Rome, Sirmium, Constantinople, and Antioch (see map 1), and imperial pronouncements issued at and to the same cities, among others, imperial speeches of praise were part of the “communicative actions” of Roman government that sought to foster loyalty to it among provincials.²⁵ In discussing the workings of panegyric and its relation to Roman imperial administration in the fourth century, I follow the view that Latin imperial panegyric was not a mere display of flattery before a Roman emperor but an integral part of how Roman government functioned.²⁶

In fact, “flattery” and “arguments” were some of the most potent (and nonviolent) prerogatives and tools that emperors used to achieve their ends,²⁷ and panegyrists could tap into the power of these same tools and reverse its flow on behalf of their own interests, or at least appear to. Panegyric represented a vital oral and literary medium for disseminating imperial ideology/propaganda and other messages (publicity) to the empire’s subjects, what has been termed “descending communication” (*communication descendante*), and, conversely, for influencing imperial ideology/propaganda and policy by means of “ascending communication” (*communication ascendante*).²⁸ In short, a panegyrist was both a publicist for and a mediator with the emperor. Indeed, “diffusion” (*diffusione*) and “promotion”

22. E.g., R. Flower 2013.

23. MacCormack 1990 remains a classic exposition.

24. Lib. *Ep.* 30 Norman (369 Foerster), *Ep.* 88 Norman (736 Foerster), *Ep.* 102 Norman (818 Foerster), and *Ep.* 116 Norman (1430 Foerster). See also n. 92 below.

25. On these “communicative actions,” see Ando 2000, esp. 73–273. See also Hopkins 1978b: 197–242, for emperor worship; Rees 2002, for layers of loyalty in the Latin panegyrics on the Tetrarchs; Noreña 2011a and Manders 2012, for imperial virtues and ideals via coinage; and Hekster 2015: 25–38, for imperial representation and “media.”

26. Espoused by Sabbah 1984, in his influential article and subsequently adopted by Rees 2002, 2012. On Roman government in the later empire, see A. H. M. Jones 1986; Matthews 2007: 253–78; and C. Kelly 1998 and 2006.

27. E.g., Euseb. *HE* 9.9a.2: *κολακείᾳ καὶ προτροπαίᾳ* (the praetorian prefect Sabinus on behalf of Maximinus Daza); *VC* 2.46–61.1, 4.55 (Constantine); Jul. *Ep. ad Athen.* (21 Wright, 60 Bidez) 380C: *παράινειν καὶ λόγους*; Ruf. *HE* 10.33: *praemiis honoribus blanditiis persuasionibus* (Julian).

28. In addition to what Sabbah (1984) has highlighted in the Latin panegyrics, note Him. *Or.* 48, 27–31 (Colonna), who, in a Greek panegyric to the orator and proconsul of Achaia, Hermogenes, frames communication by this means as useful in informing ruler and ruled. See also Ware 2019; and n. 25 above. On imperial ideology during late antiquity, see Kolb 2001.

(*promozione*) have been utilized as correlative terms of such communication in a study on the Latin panegyrics on Constantine,²⁹ in addition to reading panegyrics as means by which the imperial persona and authority were constructed in efforts at consensus-building with Roman subjects. And as the following chapters will demonstrate, consensus-building, which is not usually associated with Julian, was one of his concerns and is a prominent feature of his speeches of praise as Caesar and Augustus.

The inner workings of panegyric thus can provide insights into the inner workings of Roman government and those who participated in government at a high level. And while all imperial panegyrics have common features, since there were established rules for this literary genre, as in the rhetorical handbook of Menander Rhetor, for example,³⁰ no two speeches of praise are exactly the same. Like other forms of public speech, panegyric was a mode of political communication that reflected its subject, author, and immediate context,³¹ a political substance that took on the shape of its container. Moreover, the momentous occasions that these speeches consistently commemorated illustrate communication and power in the fourth-century empire best. Imperial panegyrics were constructed from material, purportedly historical, taken from the distant and the recent past, and, to a great extent, they were shaped to fit the needs of the moment.³² But such panegyrics have not been considered more prospectively in terms of what, I will argue, were their objectives in certain cases—that is, not only with an eye to the present but also to the future, to building consensus for particular political positions or postures, and alongside the motives behind them.³³

A literary genre and a mode of political communication, panegyrics were one aspect of the complexity of Roman imperial government. In this study, these speeches have great potential to shed light on Julian as a Caesar and on his conception of good government as such, for his panegyrics on Constantius and Eusebia center on proper rule in the context of his governing Gaul. As sole emperor, Julian was not wholeheartedly a traditionalist or reactionary any more than any leader, ancient or modern, is all one thing or another. Instead, it would be better for us to approach Julian based on the premise that, like his predecessors and successors in imperial office, he was both traditional and innovative, depending on the issues and circumstances.

29. Maranesi 2016: 24–26.

30. See n. 72 below.

31. E.g., MacCormack 1975: 159–66 and 1990: 179, for the anonymous Latin panegyrist's flexibility and preparation for contingencies in 307; Wiemer 1995: 367–76; and Errington 2000.

32. MacCormack 1975: 159.

33. Cf. MacCormack 1975: 159–66 and 1990: 268–70. MacCormack saw imperial panegyrics as expressions of politics and indicators of political circumstances but not of the specific political objectives that I argue for here. See n. 98 below.

Julian's two panegyrics on his cousin Constantius are cases in point, speeches of praise that display originality and are at odds with how Julian subsequently presents Constantius in his *Epistle to the Athenians* during their brief civil war: as a villain of the first order. In light of the latter pronouncement, scholars have commented on Julian's presumed insincerity in praising Constantius.³⁴ But we should consider that, even if he did not believe in much of the substance of his Constantian speeches, Julian at least believed in the underlying purpose behind his praise to a great degree, that is, that it aided his public career, and so it need not be judged as completely disingenuous; there were often chasms between private thought and public action.³⁵ Julian could even have believed in some of the substance behind his praise at the moment when he produced it. In any event, a panegyrist's declaration of sincerity, such as that of the second-century Roman senator Pliny the Younger, was a stock claim.³⁶ More important than his sincerity of speech would have been his credibility overall, that he possessed (or could claim to possess) some familiarity with his emperor,³⁷ and thus that he possessed the authority to praise him more meaningfully than another speaker. It is in this respect, in part, that Julian's panegyrics provide a better broken mirror or reflection of him than his letters, because the genre of panegyric had stricter rules regarding what an author could (or should) say, and so both adherence to and deviation from those rules are revealing of the complex mosaic of personality and purpose. This is not to say that panegyrics reveal exact reflections of their subjects, rather that the reflections that they do provide can help us to improve assessments and approximations of those subjects. By situating Julian within the panegyric tradition, by assessing his approaches to praise-giving alongside those of Themistius, Claudius Mamertinus, Himerius, and Libanius, we can gain a new understanding of emperor, empire, and genre.

THE PANEGYRIST-CAESAR AT WORK

As Fergus Millar succinctly put it some time ago in a well-known formulation, "The emperor 'was' what the emperor did."³⁸ Millar went on to elaborate on this description of the emperor by presenting a rather reactive and static figure (from Augustus to Constantine), by conceiving of the model of "petition-and-response."³⁹ This model of what the emperor did has been influential. No doubt his responding to petitions was true to a great extent when one includes numerous ministers of

34. See Wright 1913: I.3; Browning 1978: 75 (implied); and Athanassiadi 1992: 61–62.

35. Cf. n. 61 below.

36. Plin. *Pan.* 2–3. On Pliny's art of sincerity, see Bartsch 2012, esp. 182–85. See also *Pan. Lat.* 6(7).7.4; Lib. *Or.* 59, 126; Aus. *Grat. act.* 2.6; Prisc. *Pan. Anast.* praef.

37. Plin. *Ep.* 6.27.2: *intellegens principis nostri*; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3, 2; *Pan. Lat.* 8(5).1.4. 3(11).

38. Millar 1992: viii, repeated at 6.

39. Millar 1992: 6. Cf. Hopkins 1978a.

state and their secretaries, that is, those who actually responded to most petitions and who represented what “the emperor” or “government” was to its subjects. But emperors and the circumstances in which they operated were more complex than that. As sociologist and Roman historian Keith Hopkins has noted, not all emperors were equally active and interested in dispensing justice in the form of answering petitions; and there is no way that emperors read all petitions to them, as there were always other demands on their time, nor was the system in which they exercised their authority so limited and simple.⁴⁰ Furthermore, emperors were not always passive, nor were they expected to be, by either emperors themselves or their subjects. Indeed, “passive” is not how we tend to think of emperors such as Augustus, Hadrian, Diocletian, and Constantine, to name but a few examples. Consequently, scholars since Hopkins have revised Millar’s model in the course of revisiting the reigns of these and other emperors.⁴¹

Julian was a particularly energetic (and educated) ruler, and his usefulness as another corrective to Millar’s emperor, I will argue, is manifest in his three imperial panegyrics on Constantius and Eusebia, all of which appear to have been produced both actively and voluntarily. Indeed, these speeches of praise allow for a close study of a rare breed of historical actor: the panegyrist-Caesar at work. Why did Julian produce panegyrics? How exactly did he expect to benefit by writing and circulating them? And how would Constantius, Eusebia, and others have understood them? The ability to direct all manner of regional action and to persuade others of its efficacy could take an emperor far, since many Roman subjects looked to him as chief executive to address their concerns (or at least appear to) and provide practical solutions. Solutions to their subjects’ concerns were fundamental for emperors if they wished to maintain power, for a lack of elite or popular support could invite challenges to an emperor’s position. In this light, it is not surprising that image management or “publicity” figures prominently in Julian’s three speeches on his two imperial benefactors, as it was a function of all imperial panegyrics. The panegyrist-Caesar also crafted his orations to serve a diplomatic function, related to Constantius’s “good press” as a successful and collegial emperor and reflective of Julian’s interest in maintaining his own position by sustaining imperial concord. An emperor’s charisma, natural or borrowed, might be convincing to those in his immediate orbit, that is, his advisers, administrators, and soldiers,⁴² but that alone was not always enough. While imperial speeches of praise

40. Hopkins 1978a.

41. See Potter 1996; Corcoran 2000; Lenski 2002 and 2016; Schmidt-Hofner 2008; Edmondson 2015; and Cortés Copete 2017.

42. On the charisma of the emperor, see Ando 2000: 27–48, who builds on Weber. Cf. Lendon 2006, who rejects Weberian legitimacy. Galba did not have even that—he was too old and weak and he lacked sufficient charisma to stay alive in January 69 (Tac. *Hist.* 1.6, 14–41). Later, in early 366, Valens needed to borrow the charisma of Arbitio in order to defeat the usurper Procopius (Amm. 26.9).

preserve ossified measures of an emperor's charisma (indirectly, when a panegyrist relates an emperor's words and their impact or when he responds to them), they also speak to his interest in addressing common, contemporary concerns among his subjects, conveying what I suggest is an emperor's responsiveness to his subjects, and, as I will argue, his interest in projecting and preparing for future action.

That emperors were at times responsive to their subjects of course shows the partly reactive nature of the imperial office; Millar's model is still useful in evaluating emperors. But, like their occasional displays of charisma, emperors' responsiveness and their projection of/preparation for future action indicate that consensus was critical to their rule,⁴³ and that panegyric played a prominent role in forging it. Communication was crucial to political support and consensus, and panegyrics disseminated messages about and between emperor and subject.⁴⁴ Panegyrics do not tell us whether emperors achieved agreement with those they ruled, or to what degree, but they do tell us that both ruler and ruled considered speeches of praise a significant medium for building consensus in specific contexts.⁴⁵ Besides Libanius's references to copies of panegyrics in circulation, mentioned above, that Julian and Themistius between them wrote six panegyrics on Constantius (seven if we count Constantius as an additional audience of the panegyric on Eusebia) in diverse circumstances is suggestive of the importance and the usefulness of praise-giving. Thus speeches of praise can help us to better understand what consensus was reached, and why.

PRAISE-GIVING, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, AND GENRE

Though far less than Julian, Themistius, too, has stimulated scholarly interest,⁴⁶ as a rhetorician, philosopher, senator of Constantinople, and panegyrist of emperors. While in the second century, Dion of Prusa (or Dio Chrysostom) had joined praise-giving with philosophy in numerous Greek panegyrics on the emperor Trajan, eastern cities such as Alexandria and Tarsus, and other topics that were well known to Themistius,⁴⁷ my focus here is primarily on the utility of Themistius's "official" and "public" speeches during Julian's tenure as Caesar, that is, his *Orations* 1–4.⁴⁸ R. M. Errington has argued that Themistius was a kind of official court

43. On emperors and consensus, see nn. 57 and 58 below.

44. On the role of panegyric in building consensus between civilian and military elites, see McCormack 1990: 162. See also Pernot 2015: 98–100: "Epidictic rhetoric is the social order's rejuvenating bath" (98). On the creation of consensus, see Ando 2000: 175–205.

45. See Maranesi 2016; more below.

46. E.g., Dagron 1968; Vanderspoel 1995; Heather 1998; Errington 2000; Penella 2000; Heather and Moncur 2001; and Swain 2021.

47. See C. P. Jones 1978; Moles 1990; and Swain 1996: 187–241.

48. For Italian and Spanish translations of *Orations* 1–4, see Maisano 1995 and Ritoré Ponce 2000, respectively. For English translations of *Orations* 1 and 3, see Heather and Moncur 2001.

propagandist, a “spin-doctor,” citing Themistius’s consular oration to Jovian (*Or.* 5) and considering that the emperor had communicated religious tolerance prior to the delivery of this oration (1 January 364), which thus would suggest that Themistius was just repeating the official line.⁴⁹ But this is not a certainty. It may be that Themistius was not simply repeating official policy already enacted so much as arguing for its permanence, which is a very different thing.⁵⁰ If so, this would show that Themistius was more independent and proactive as a panegyrist. In fact, in *Oration 1* Themistius has been credited with boldly and deftly portraying Constantius’s Christianity as not incompatible with Hellenism,⁵¹ a depiction and effort described as “the sign of a great risk-taker.”⁵² This view, which I also subscribe to, precludes his having been a mere propagandist; and Themistius’s subsequent speeches, if less risky, also do not show him to have been just a “spin doctor.”⁵³ Themistius had offered Constantius something new, a novel type of panegyric that was subsequently well known to and used by Synesius of Cyrene for his speech *Peri basileias/De regno* (On Kingship) regarding the emperor Arcadius at Constantinople ca. 398,⁵⁴ for Synesius adopts the philosopher’s mantle in his praise of this emperor in much the same way that Themistius does for Constantius (*De regno* 1), although Synesius also displays his *parrhesia* (freedom of speech) by pointedly challenging imperial policy in the area of financial administration and the inclusion of “barbarians” in the Roman state.⁵⁵

In addition to Julian’s and Themistius’s speeches, three panegyrists of Julian, the rhetoricians Claudius Mamertinus, Himerius of Prusa, and Libanius of Antioch, have left us four panegyrics between them that they delivered before and on behalf of the emperor in 362–363. These orations reveal many of Julian’s concerns as sole emperor, first during his stay at Constantinople and subsequently at Antioch, and show a close alignment with the imperial court. Ammianus Marcellinus, a contemporary of the three rhetoricians and a highly placed and well-educated staff officer in the Roman army (*protector domesticus*), is also a vital eyewitness of much of the fourth century. By 391, he had produced an indispensable Latin *History* (*Res gestae*)

49. Errington 2000: 864–65, 876–77. Cf. Drijvers 2022: 102–8.

50. Drijvers 2022: 107 reached a similar conclusion. Cf. Heather and Moncur 2001: 154–58 and 168 n. 98, who argue for Themistius providing Jovian with political flexibility in his relations with bishops who would have opposed his policy of toleration.

51. Heather and Moncur 2001: 61–62, 73–74.

52. Heather and Moncur 2001: 74.

53. Cf. Errington 2000: 864–65, who sees the panegyrist as “the spin-doctor” (865); and Heather and Moncur 2001: 5–6, 12–42, esp. 38–42, for Themistius as “spin doctor and faction leader.” The question here is to what extent his position as a faction leader was an extension of his emperor’s power and to what extent it was an expression of his own. This question leads me to the intermediate view of seeing prominent panegyrists as “semi-independent”; see n. 66 below.

54. On Synesius’s speech and its context, see Petkas 2018a.

55. On the *parrhesia* of the philosopher, see Brown 1992: 61–70.

of events during his own lifetime (353–378), a period that includes the entirety of Julian's public career and nearly eight-year hold on imperial power (355–363).⁵⁶ While Ammianus's *History*—most of which is dedicated to Julian—is not a panegyric, it nonetheless reflects his keen use of the genre as well as the intersection of panegyric and historiography, and so demonstrates the value of speeches of praise in fourth-century historical discourse. Indeed, Ammianus was so well-educated and displays such a penchant for persuasion in his work that we can classify him as both a historian and a rhetorician. Furthermore, Ammianus's work is critical for the light it sheds on the contexts of speeches of praise by and to Julian.

Thus, as I have suggested above, the focus of this study will be first and foremost Julian, emperor and rhetorician, with Themistius, Ammianus, Claudius Mamertinus, Himerius, and Libanius occupying subordinate positions. While the imperial office in this age was to a great extent autocratic (or simply militarized) in nature, nevertheless the power of the office was based on the occupant's ability to maintain a healthy relationship not only with the Roman army, but with many others.⁵⁷ Local and regional elites and the populace at large were also essential to an emperor's stable rule.⁵⁸ Studying Julian's panegyrics as Caesar alongside the first four orations of Themistius, whose audiences were primarily (or perhaps initially) non-military, thus can provide new insights into those nonmilitary and political relationships that emperors such as Constantius and Julian had to cultivate and to maintain in order to retain a strong hold on the imperial power.⁵⁹ The necessity of cultivating and maintaining these relationships is also evident in the subsequent panegyrics of Claudius Mamertinus, Himerius, and Libanius to Julian as sole Augustus. Considering the interaction between these emperors and rhetoricians and their audiences through their speeches of praise will help to illuminate further the connection between communication and power during the fourth-century Roman Empire.

READING PANEGYRICS: METHODOLOGY

It would seem that the two options available to practitioners of epideictic oratory, that is, to praise or to blame, were not really choices at all with respect to what could or should be said before Roman emperors. Nonetheless, a panegyrist could

56. For Ammianus's Julian, see Fontaine 1978 and Ross 2016b.

57. On the imperial office, see Millar 1992; and Matthews 2007: 231–52. On the emperor and the Roman army, see Campbell 1984.

58. E.g., MacMullen 1967; Yavetz 1969; Matthews 1998; Millar 1992; Brown 1992; Ando 2000; Salzman 2002; C. Kelly 2006; and Edmondson 2015.

59. On the imperial power in the fourth century, see Valensi 1957 and Béranger 1972. See also Heather and Moncur 2001: 29–38, who discuss Themistius's audience and his value to emperors.

convey criticism safely by neat configurations of praise.⁶⁰ My focus in this book is on Julian the emperor and rhetorician, but what follows is not a biography by any means. As has been noted, “Writing biography is a dangerous business.”⁶¹ *Emperors and Rhetoricians* is a comparative study that seeks to understand these actors and the world in which they lived better through the prism of panegyric, one that focuses on people, products, and processes at particular points in fourth-century social, political, military, and religious settings. In short, my aim is to explore how praise was configured and deployed in order to understand the historical “reality” of the fourth-century empire better. Imperial panegyrics often contained neatly constructed messages about emperors that emperors would have wished to be disseminated, not only about themselves as individuals but also about their governments and policies, of which they were the face.⁶² Critical to decoding these messages are the contexts in which they were broadcasted, the expectations that Roman subjects had of emperors, and how emperors and their top officials understood and went about responding to those expectations—all can be seen to be expressed and linked within the tapestry of skillfully woven imperial speeches of praise.

The method of analysis adopted in this comparative study is both historical and literary, one that primarily examines the speeches and associated writings of Julian, Themistius, Claudius Mamertinus, Himerius, and Libanius diachronically from about 350 to early 363 in terms of their development, and in turn in terms of what that development tells us about the utility of their praise-giving. This study approaches panegyrics as social and above all political communications and products, and my analysis follows earlier scholarship on Libanius and Julian, in which the rhetorician’s various orations on and to the emperor are evaluated in chronological order and in context for what they reveal about Libanius’s and Julian’s interests and interactions.⁶³ My method is to organize their orations into particular units of time and to assess them in groups, since their dating shows that several of them were

60. See Ahl 1984, who, drawing upon Demetrius of Phaleron and Quintilian, considered a “figured speech” in oratory, a type of speech that consisted of using emphasis and ambiguity as ways to communicate criticism safely; and Pernot 2015: 102–11. See also Bartsch 2012, for the coexistence and overlapping of praise and blame in Pliny.

61. Adams 1979: 460: “Writing biography is a dangerous business. It compels us to generalize on the basis of single instances; it invites us to extrapolate on the assumption that a person’s actions and thoughts are consistent, when in truth a person is often ‘compelled in his public and official capacity to do things which in his private and personal capacity he heartily deploras.” Further, ancient and modern approaches to writing biographies, such as those on Julius Caesar, have been highly problematic, as Morstein-Marx 2021 has shown. Modern biographies on Julian Caesar have displayed similar teleological flaws.

62. E.g., Straub 1964: 146–74; A. Cameron 1970; MacCormack 1990; Rees 2002; and Maranesi 2016.

63. See Wiemer 1995. Barnes 1981 and 1993, Rees 2002, and Elm 2012 have provided inspiration as well.

produced not far apart,⁶⁴ so as to make thematic and linguistic comparisons. There is another grouping as well: Ammianus's historical narrative of Julian's acclamation at Paris and his revolt in 360–361 is considered alongside one of the historian's key contemporary literary sources for this period: Julian's *Epistle to the Athenians*.

By carefully analyzing these texts in sequence, by reading these speeches as they would have been listened to (or read), we can see what items and themes were discussed and prioritized, and so we can learn more about the contexts in which they were produced; in fact, we are mostly dependent on internal evidence from these speeches for their specific contexts. Each panegyric is quite distinct and reflective of the position of the panegyrist who fashioned it. For example, Themistius's speeches of praise are largely philosophical in substance and orientation, whereas Julian's concentrate more on the emperor as military commander and politician. And yet there is still overlap: the panegyrist-Caesar does not neglect philosophical themes, or rather virtues, such as Constantius's *philanthropia* (humanity), which Themistius had said was particularly manifest in Constantius the emperor. Neither panegyrist followed the traditional outline of imperial panegyric precisely. In fact, as I will argue, their speeches exemplify literary and political versatility, critical modes of public communication among elite audiences empire-wide that could be applied in the interest of advancing various political objectives on the part of the panegyrists, and Julian, Themistius, and their fellow praise-givers saw great value in producing panegyric for these reasons. This makes panegyric more slippery in terms of how it was defined and practiced, and so it is even more important to ascertain and to demarcate when a praise-giver spoke for himself and when he spoke for the emperor, and to what audience.

The central questions that *Emperors and Rhetoricians* thus seeks to answer are these: How did Julian, Themistius, Ammianus, Claudius Mamertinus, Himerius, and Libanius conceive of praise discourse in relation to the exercise of Roman imperial power? And in what ways and to what ends did they apply this literary genre during their public careers (or postmilitary career, as in the case of Ammianus)? How the genre of imperial panegyric functioned, even as it was expressed in different forms, is of some importance for understanding the later Roman Empire. While panegyrics must be used carefully as historical evidence, since orators could take great license with the historical details that they chose to present (or omit) in keeping with their agendas, they nonetheless afford rare windows into how panegyrists and political actors manipulated both the conventions and fabric of praise-giving in specific contexts, and what such manipulations tell us about panegyrist, emperor, audience, and genre.⁶⁵ To answer the central questions above,

64. See appendices A and C.

65. On the historical value of the Latin panegyrics, see Nixon and Rodgers 2015: 33–35. See also MacCormack 1990: 1–14; Omissi 2018: 47–67; Ross 2020b; and nn. 90 and 91 below.