

Coping with Ancient Gods, Celebrating Christian Emperors, Proclaiming Roman Eternity: Rhetoric and Religion in Late Antique Latin Panegyrics

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The present contribution provides an examination of the relationship between the emperor and the divine sphere in Latin panegyric poetry of the fifth and sixth centuries. Following the path magisterially set forth by Claudian, poets like Sidonius Apollinaris and, later on, Corippus employ the same literary genre to praise the newly-come Germanic kings or the Eastern Emperor. They have, however, to face a profoundly transformed historical and political realm, not to mention a different approach towards religion. Whereas Panegyrici Latini and Claudian could make wide use of mythological similes to celebrate Rome, her grandeur and the deeds of the emperor, his successors deal with the ancient gods in quite a clear-cut or, so to say, crystallized way. They show a conservative (and, to some extent, nostalgic) attitude and still believe in the endurance of Rome, which is fated to last eternally. The sacralization of Rome (with the concurring ideas of a Christian providence and the literary cliché of pagan aeternitas) is integrated within the frame of an empire that has become totally Christianized and, especially in the East, finds in political theology a privileged terrain to establish its roots. In particular the link between Christianity and the emperor as vicar of God is well outlined by the symbolism of court ceremonial and gesture, which panegyrics describe in great detail.

*The ties between Us and Our people have always
stood upon mutual trust and affection.
They do not depend upon mere legends and myths.
They are not predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine.*
Imperial rescript issued by Hirohito on Jan 1st 1946

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Introductory Remarks: Panegyric Literature and its Rhetorical Strategies

This article will discuss some rhetorical devices in Latin panegyrics,¹ both in prose and in verse, which are most suitable for being interpreted from a religio-historical perspective, in order to construct a consistent ideological strategy capable of outlining the fundamental tenet of a heavenly-favoured form of regality and an eternally enduring providential empire. After a general introduction providing an overview of recent scholarship, the main thrust of the paper focuses on some relevant cases, showing how similar themes recur in various authors and periods. These range from the imagery of light, the phoenix and the goddess Rome, as well as the idea of eternity and everlasting empire, or divine protection granted to a good ruler. Particular attention is given to the collection of the so-called *Twelve Panegyrics*, which shares (although in a trivialized way) some interesting patterns with contemporary philosophy, and to lesser-known poets like Sidonius and Corippus, who make use of ideas dating back to the Theodosian age (and even earlier, to Virgil's *Aeneid*). Because of their importance, in itself deserving of a study, and on account of an increasing amount of secondary literature, authors from that period such as Claudian and Ambrose are not considered *per se*, but insofar as they represent a yardstick for demonstrating both the continuity and change evident in the theme of "religion and power" – a theme particularly disposed to a multifaceted approach. A striking case is represented by the development of a new style of Christian language, which however is grafted onto traditional pagan motifs. The paper offers a diachronic analysis of these texts, with cross-references outlining the most relevant similarities and differences. Therefore, it focuses on different panegyrics treating the same emperor, or, more often, follows the development of a single motif in different authors. A detailed and more extensive treatment of Sidonius and Corippus has already been put forward in papers specifically dedicated to these two authors.²

The recent scholarly revival of panegyric literature has come after a long period in which, although it was not actually condemned, such a genre provoked discomfort in many readers. This was mainly on account of its encomiastic features, which often merged with overt aspects of promotion, not to mention the implicit message wherein a panegyric might spring from lies or a distortion of the facts, as acknowledged in a well-known retraction passage of the *Confessions*, where, recalling his career as a professional orator at the court in Milan, Augustine explicitly

links praise and lies.³ In addition, Late Antique panegyrics were far more to blame, because of the biases that affected the literary production of the last centuries of the Roman Empire, whereas, rather paradoxically, the organized propaganda machine of Augustus did not suffer the same fate, but was counted as further proof of his political cleverness and insight.⁴ Moreover, since many modern sensibilities had, as Nelis puts it, "difficulty in taking seriously the extravagant and highly mannered rhetoric of much ancient encomium", some interpreters sought (without being persuasive, in my opinion) "to find in it destabilizing elements which permit them to offer readings in which mockery and insincerity come to the surface".⁵ This surely oversimplified picture is now, for the most part, water under the bridge, for, together with a general re-evaluation of the last centuries of the Roman empire, scholars have underlined not only some salient features characterizing the structure of panegyrics and encomia, but also their cultural significance or their connections with artistic creations. Such panegyrics which were established in order to reinforce, through different means, both visual and literary, a consistent image of imperial power and, in the last analysis, the creation of consensus.⁶

The 'rediscovery' of the rhetorical treatises by Menander, propitiated by the English translation and commentary of Russell and Wilson in the early Eighties and, ten years later, by Laurent Pernot's influential study on the rhetoric of praise, led to a deeper understanding of the composition strategies. Such strategies were developed from a series of fixed schemes, and, at the same time, offered confirmation of the hypothesis already put forward at the beginning of the twentieth century, that Late Antique prose panegyrics (among which the so-called λόγος βασιλικός) were mainly drawn from manuals, in particular Menander's Περὶ Ἐπιδεικτικῶν. To this famous treatise it is also worth adding a list of attributes recorded by Pollux (1, 41-42), which consists of standard epithets for a sovereign.⁷ Furthermore, the amount of encomiastic literature from the fourth, fifth and even sixth century is surely unprecedented, not only in quantity, but also in formal structure, as witnessed by the reformulation, when not strictly speaking of an actual creation, of poetical panegyric, ingeniously achieved by Claudian.⁸ As either

1 The author wishes to thank Maijastina Kahlos for her kind invitation to contribute to the volume and Elizabeth MacDonald and Mark Shackleton for revising the English text.

2 Tommasi 2013 and 2015.

3 *Confessiones* 6, 6, 9: "and how didst Thou deal with me, to make me feel my misery on that day, when I was preparing to recite a panegyric of the Emperor, wherein I was to utter many a lie, and lying, was to be applauded by those who knew I lied, and my heart was panting with these anxieties" (transl. by E. B. Pusey).

4 See at least the epoch-making book by Zanker 1987. For a literary perspective that involves religion, see also Citroni (2015).

5 Nelis 2011, 262, who shares the idea that these encomia are to be interpreted as serious: in particular he deals with the praise of Nero in the first book of Lucan's *Civil War* – a passage for which it is still worth reading Nock 1926; see also the insightful reading put forward by Penwill 2010.

6 For a general reassessment of these categories, see also Ando 2000.

7 Russell Wilson 1981; Pernot 1993. It seems worth remembering that Eduard Norden, in his magisterial commentary on the *Aeneid* (Leipzig-Berlin 1903), explicitly employed Menander to discuss the final lines containing the eulogy of the dead Marcellus.

8 A thorough history of this genre is provided by Schindler 2009.

a concise, systematic and simple celebration of the emperors and their virtues (as in the case of the prose panegyrics) or a sophisticated means of asserting their almost supernatural power, by equating the praised ruler with an epic hero (as in the poetical works), these works represent an unparalleled means of political communication. At the same time, they offer proof of how classical forms inherited from the past could adapt themselves to the new sensibility of a deeply changed environment.⁹ It should be added that the emperor's public or private virtues (which in the rhetorical treatises also relied on philosophical concepts) were quite often integrated into the ceremonial, the individual stages of which had the function of universalizing them.¹⁰

Notwithstanding some intrinsic difficulties involved in adapting the modern idea of propaganda and the creation of consensus to ancient contexts, where it often remains unknown how the addressees of an official encomium reacted and, above all, it is impossible to determine the precise audience of a panegyric speech, which was frequently delivered at a spectacular ceremony,¹¹ Having said that, it seems sound nonetheless to agree with the conclusion reasserted by many scholars – namely that official panegyric or cognate works like the *gratiarum actiones* (“thanksgiving speeches”) can to some extent be considered a means of publicity and a way of legitimizing imperial power, if not of reconstructing a consistent theory of imperial power. At the same time, they are often a means of performing a bottom-up form of communication, and thanks to a powerful mediator, elevating the diplomatic aspirations of the local community towards the emperor.¹² Moreover, an effective means of propaganda has been identified in other communicative forms performed by the collectivity, such as Christian liturgies; on the other hand, scholars have outlined the flexibility of panegyric elements, which also appear in other genres, mainly historiography.¹³ Such eulogies were obviously meant to

9 An interesting perspective is offered by Formisano 2008, who outlines the fact that, together with the celebration of the ruler, a panegyric was a glorification of its talented and skilled author. Likewise, George 1998 concludes her remarks on Merovingian panegyric by stating that for a trained poet, the composition of a eulogy, where the deployment of the full panoply of the genre interacted with a sensitive capability of adapting to each person and circumstance, meant being part of a glorious literary tradition, while at the same time offering a demonstration of active political engagement as a consequence of the public role of the poet himself.

10 MacCormack 1981, 76.

11 Consolino 2011, who also reconstructs the main lines of the debate that arose in the aftermath of Alan Cameron's seminal book (1970) dedicated to *Poetry and Propaganda* in Claudian, namely, whether it is lawful to label ancient panegyric as propaganda, insofar as a concept that implied the engagement and involvement of a larger number of persons was unknown in ancient societies. It should also be remarked that the word propaganda at the beginning (which, as is known, goes back to the Congregation *de propaganda fide*, established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622) and even in its 'secular' usage (during the French Revolution and onwards) did not possess the negative nuance that we are accustomed to in the wake of its use by many totalitarian regimes in the last century.

12 Sabbah 1984.

13 See, e.g., the various essays collected by Whitby 1998. For recent attempts at considering other forms such as hymns as panegyrics, see Williams 2013. In the following pages we will consider Ambrose's funeral orations as partly falling into the province of panegyric. For a parallel perspective, such as the poetry promoted by the imperial court in Medieval China, which can be considered a kind of panegyric, see Fu 2008.

stress how gifted the orator was and to promote a message capable of influencing and orienting public opinion, while documenting the technical skill and sensitive awareness of their author. In this regard, it is also important to hint at the close links that panegyric literature shares with the art of that time: as already outlined by Gibbon, who described Late Antique ceremonies as “splendid theatre”,¹⁴ this idea of a spectacular representation delighting all the senses, which would be gradually developed in both political ceremonial and liturgy, has been stressed in many recent works. As is well known, the connection between literature and the visual arts in Late Antiquity also gave rise to the widespread use of descriptions, which were an effective device for reflecting on the nature of art and aesthetic values and advancing a laudatory function. On a larger scale, official monuments or coinages are patently to be understood as capable of channelling a particular ideology or message that spread directly from the political authority.¹⁵ From this perspective, the relationship between written media and art might perhaps be worth investigating further, taking into account McLuhan's famous (and sometimes questioned) statement about hot and cool media, according to which different media invite different degrees of participation on the part of a person who chooses to ‘consume’ them and that a medium affects the society in which it plays a role, not by the content delivered through the medium, but by the characteristics of the medium itself.¹⁶

Religious Elements in Encomiastic Literature

The excellent and in many respects pioneering study by Sabine MacCormack on *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* must be credited with providing an extensive survey of some key tenets in panegyric literature. Her comparison of panegyrics with artistic products such as triumphal arches, coins and ivory diptychs show the deeply political significance and impact of the images represented, as well as the iconographic changes which resulted from the gradual Christianization of the empire. The final chapter, significantly entitled “The Parting of the Ways”, marks the independence achieved by the Christian ideology of power and, so to speak, its political theology during the three centuries that divide Constantine and Heraclius, even though traces of the classical way of celebrating an emperor still emerge here

14 *Decline and Fall*, I. 2, Chap. 16: “By a philosophic observer, the system of the Roman government might have been mistaken for a splendid theatre, filled with players of every character and degree, who repeated the language, and imitated the passions, of their original model”: cf. also MacCormack 1981, 9. Ware 2012, 26 notes that Claudian's poetry shares many details with prose panegyrics and also emphasizes the spectacular dimension. Van Nuffelen 2012 discusses the intermingling of religion and politics in these and similar ceremonies. For the iconography of the triumph, see McCormick 1986; on the *adventus*, Dufraigne 1994 and Guidetti (forthcoming).

15 See Tommasi 2010 and, more recently, Rees 2013.

16 McLuhan-Fiore 1967. See also his pioneering posthumous study on media and religion (McLuhan 1999).

and there. Indeed, “the new religion was expressed by adding to the old imagery without destroying it”.¹⁷

Bearing in mind the strong intertwining and interdependence of religion and politics that permeated Roman society, MacCormack concentrates her inquiry on three significant moments – *entrée*, funeral and accession – which are also chosen for their religious implication. If the coming of the emperor could function as a reassertion of his status as *deus praesens*, who, rising like a star, endows the multitude of the subjects with his benevolent gifts, the very moment of death was a prelude to his deification and apotheosis, whereas the enthronement represented an official sanctioning of his power thanks to a supernatural agency, insofar as he ruled by the will of God and acted as vicar on behalf of the divinity (especially according to the Christian political theology inaugurated by Eusebius).¹⁸ Furthermore, panegyric literature, when elaborating the aforementioned rhetorical schemes, inclined to confer a religious nuance on many stock motifs, such as the emperor's lineage and birth or the celebration of his deeds (in both peace and war, according to the stock division between *πράξεις κατὰ πόλεμον* and *κατ'εἰρήνην*), usually by means of examples and *synkriseis*, and one must not forget the concluding prayer and wishes for a future and success.

A characteristic statement of Greco-Roman paganism such as the cult of the ruler, which was widespread especially in the first three centuries of our era, contributed to reinforcing the already strong link between religion and power.¹⁹ Fostered by an all-pervasive and efficacious promotion machinery, and practised as the official state cult of Rome, as municipal cults in cities in the empire, or even as private worship, the cult of the ruler was surely meant as an act of homage made in return for the bestowal of particular benefits upon the community, which then acknowledged the sovereign as gifted with superhuman power. Moreover, it can be understood as a powerful response to the need for unity and common beliefs in a pluralistic society.²⁰ Quite significantly, however, while the emperor's worship enjoyed a large cultic diffusion and is attested mainly in epigraphic sources, the contemporary literary theorizations of the βασιλικοί λόγοι (“imperial orations”) put it in the shade, and do not offer any explicit hint as to the divine nature of the

17 MacCormack 1981, 58.

18 For a paradigmatic text such as Eusebius' biography of Constantine, see Cameron and Stuart Hall 1999. A useful survey on the fourth century can be found in Heim 1992, while general perspectives on ancient and modern political theologies are investigated by Bettiolo and Filoramo 2002 and Filoramo 2005.

19 On the idea of divine kingship in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern civilization, see the classical monographs by Frankfort 1948 and the more recent perspectives collected in Brisch 2012.

20 Among an increasing number of studies it is worth mentioning here at least Taeger 1957-69; Den Boer 1973; Fears 1977; Price 1984. Martin 1982 deals with the theme of providence. For more on the idea of late antique sovereignty, see the classic study by Straub 1939.

emperor.²¹ This attitude has been explained as being the symptom of a deliberate wish not to confuse the two plans of the all-powerful God and human rulers or, in literary terms, as a legacy of the classical genre of the encomium, which was clearly distinct from the hymn.²² Therefore all the allusions to the religious sphere which we read in these eulogies may be considered a substitute for the emphasis put on the relationship between the emperor and the supernatural dimension; nonetheless, they increase noticeably during Late Antiquity, as the panegyric production of the period attests to. It is thus possible to outline some elements pertaining to ‘religion’ (in a broader sense) in works of this kind, in order to reconstruct a consistent picture of the intermingling of political power and theology as it appears in encomiastic literature. As a matter of fact, the insistence on the eternity of the empire and of the powerful link between the emperor and a godhead is also enriched by the constant use of basic and fully understandable metaphors, such as metaphors of light.

Prose Panegyrics and the Trivialization of Philosophical Motifs

Whatever its purpose actually was, the collection of the twelve *Latin Panegyrics*, assembled and edited by the rhetorician Pacatus Drepanius, himself the author of the last speech which he dedicated to Theodosius,²³ adopts a varied approach in its treatment of religious matter, which depends, of course, both on the different writers and their stylistic features and on the different historical circumstances surrounding the performance of each piece. Moreover, there is no need to remember the gradual switch from paganism (still evident in the first speeches, dedicated to pagan emperors like Diocletian and his colleague Maximian, overtly equated with their prophylactic gods, Jupiter and Hercules respectively)²⁴ to Christianity, via a hybrid condition where the audience was supposed to be a mixed one, as happens in the age of Constantine. For the sake of brevity it is not possible to consider here the lengthy debate involving the conversion of Constantine – whether it was advocated by sincerity, flattery, tolerance or mere convenience – which in part seems to contrast with other evidence suggesting a persistent attachment to the old religion. Be that as it may, a sensitive awareness is displayed in the careful use of official formulas, which can also explain the inconsistent terminology in

21 A striking exception is represented by an account in Philostratus (*Vitae Sophistarum* 1,25, 533), who mentions that Polemon, in praising the restoration of the Olympieion in Athens accomplished by Hadrian, and in the presence of the emperor himself, stated that such an achievement had been made possible thanks to agod.

22 Campanile 2001.

23 For all the problems involved, see Nixon and Rodgers 1994; Rees 2002. As is well known, the first speech is Pliny's panegyric to Trajan, which we will not take into account for chronological reasons.

24 See, e.g., *Panegyrici Latini* 2,1; 2,11 and 2,13; 6,8. Further, more complex, references are discussed at greater length in the following pages.

defining Constantine's consecration and his status as *divus* or in the employment of iconography fitting for both a Christian and a pagan audience.²⁵ A remarkable case is offered by some allusions in the poetical works of Optatianus Porphyrius, where some connections with panegyric literature are worth outlining.²⁶

Besides stereotypical references in the *Latin Panegyrics* to the sacred nature of the emperor, his fortune (*fortuna* or *felicitas*) and the divine power that assists him,²⁷ and even to cities or objects related to him,²⁸ it is also possible to come across a subtler approach to religious matter, which, for example, is reflected in the repeated wishes for eternity²⁹ and harmony³⁰ or in the emphasis of the sudden, epiphanic appearance of the emperor, together with the swift accomplishment of his deeds, often favoured by the gods.³¹

In this opening passage of *Panegyric 2*, expressions like *deus praesens*; *divina origo* (2,2) also recur. In addition, the prince's deeds are *miracula* (4,1) and he acts

25 For the present inquiry it is worth mentioning Calderone 1973; De Giovanni 2003; Tabata 1995 and Cecconi 2012 on the Hispellum inscription; Carlà, Castello 2010. The Italian *Enciclopedia Costantiniana* (Rome 2013) offers an updated outline of the many questions arising from such an emblematic figure. In this context Eusebius' *Triakontaterikos*, the discourse written to celebrate the thirtieth regnal year of Constantine, is particularly meaningful. It shows many parallels with the Hellenistic treatises Περὶ βασιλείας and with Menander's work, but shows some connections with the Platonizing idea of a universal monarch as well: see the detailed analysis provided by Amerise 2005, with further bibliography.

26 Wienand 2012, 366 ff.

27 See e.g.: *Panegyrici 2*, 1 (the numbering is in accordance with Galletier's edition): the usual apostrophe *sacratissime imperator* (which also recurs at the end, chap. 13; and elsewhere in the other orations: 3,1; 3,5; 3,6; 8,1; 9,12) is reinforced by the idea that the honours he deserves are equal to those of the gods, since he is a *numen* (*numen* is also largely employed, as is *deus*, *divinus*, *divinitas*: 3,2; 4,1-2; 15; 6,12; 8,7; 9,5; 12,17-18). See also Marotta 2010.

28 See, e.g., 3,1: *sacosantum faenus*; 4,1: *divinae aures*; 4,8: *divinae expeditiones*; 4,19: *caelestis exercitus*; 6,3: *divinum iudicium* and *caelestes vultus*; 6,6: *fastigium divinae potestatis*; 8,1: *vox divina*; 10,1: *beata devotio*. The Tiber is sanctus (9,18) and the splendour of the monuments equates Rome, an *urbs sacra* (9,1), with the sky (7,22).

29 As is stated in 2,2; 3,3 (a very significant passage where the idea of *aeternitas* is considered immutable and fixed, and Diocletian is equated with Jupiter, who defeats the Titans). The same tenets are repeated in some of the panegyrics to Maximian (4,13: moreover, his *adventus* is that of a god); Constantine: 5,16; 6,2; the empire is imperishable, the princes are eternal and the perpetual offspring of the previous emperors; 6,13 (*di immortales, quanta romano imperio renovastis, quae iam, ut res est, cesserant vetustati*, therefore putting forward the idea of the *renovatio imperii*) and, above all 10,6: *constituta enim et in perpetuum Roma fundata est, omnibus qui statum eius labefactare poterant cum stirpe deletis*. ("Rome has been established and founded for eternity, since all who could weaken her condition have been destroyed root and branch". Here and in the following passages we have adopted the translation by Nixon and Rodgers 1994.

30 The theme of the concordia between the two Caesars is alluded to in 2,10: *vos vero qui imperium non terrae, sed caeli regionibus terminatis, tantam vim, tantam potestatem mutuo vobis impartire divinae profecto immortalisque fiduciae est, quam cupiditas nulla perturbet* ("but you, whose command is not confined by earthly boundaries, but reaches the heaven, by sharing with you such great power, demonstrate a divine and truly immortal loyalty, which no covetousness disturbs"). Ware 2012, 71, stresses how Claudian, the more the political situation changed, switches from the theme of the *unanimi fratres* Arcadius and Honorius to that of the division and enmity between the two.

31 4,17: the emperor wins because the gods decreed so; 10,7: victory could be achieved either through a god or through the army's affection for Constantine. In the same text (chap. 14) the Gallic victory is like a miracle performed by the divinity (*divinitus*) and Constantine himself appears like a god; he is protected by a god (26); *divina Gloria, Fama, Victoria* and the elements themselves helped him (32).

by means of *providentia* (2,5; 4,6; 5,5); he is endowed with godlike virtue (2,5) or benevolence (5,15); or fortune (3,18; 7,2); his piety is strictly linked to their virtue (3,6). To sum up, the present emperor ought to be praised just as we are used to worshipping and celebrating gods (7,1), because there is an explicit correspondence between earthly and heavenly sovereignty (7,1). A statue in the shape of a god is said to have been a tribute by the Senate to Constantine (9,25). It is worth remembering the insistently religious language put forward in 5,1: Constantius' words and senses are celestial and divine; in this same context, moreover, the author develops the metaphor of the temple with its sacred mysterious penetralia and cell.

The equation to a god is extremely widespread, for example in 3,4; 3,10-11 *vestrum numen effulsit* (your divine power shone like an epiphany or a sudden miracle); 8,10; 9,7 (a propos of the *adventus*); 11,9; 12,10 (the swift action of Theodosius) and 21. 7,7 offers an interesting treatment of this motif, for the emperor is said to arrive not by means of public service, but on a divine chariot. Usually the comparison between Jupiter, the heavenly ruler, and the earthly sovereign – the emperor – is achieved by employing cosmic metaphors such as the all-encompassing sight of the sun, or his benevolent nod³² and, last but not least, by recalling the struggle between Jupiter and the Titans or the Giants to describe the overcoming of the barbarians and, conversely, the return of a golden age.³³ It is also worth remembering the image developed in 4,3-4, an eternal spring, where the four elements rejoice all over the world because of the divine splendour of the emperor, whose eyes shine and whose solicitude protects his subjects.

In 2,4 the traditional metaphor of the ship of state is followed by an allusion to the gigantomachy; in 11,13 Julian's adversaries are depicted like chthonian monsters that hate light; in 12,34 Theodosius' enemies are dragon-like monsters defeated by the celestial gods. Later on (chapters 30 and 39), divine revenge over the wicked is taken and victory is announced by prodigies and testified to by divine favour. This had been a propagandistic motif since the Hellenistic period, and would be

32 2,3: after having described his traditional attributes, the nimbus and the crown, the emperor is represented as a god who placates the storms; 2,6: an explicit parallel with Jupiter (who, nonetheless, seems slower than the emperor – thus provoking a sort of grotesque effect; the same grotesque effect in 8,13: *hoc nobis est ista largitio quod Terra matrem frugum, quod Iuppiter moderator aurarum: quidquid illi parcius dederant, nobis tamen ex beneficio tuo natum est* ("that largesse of yours is for us what Earth is, mother of crops, and Jupiter, master of the winds; whatever they have given too sparingly is produced for us from your benefaction"); 2,7: the emperor's deeds are a new, great miracle (*novum et ingens miraculum*), and, once again, there is a parallel with Jupiter's nod; 6,14, once again the image of the emperor as similar to Jupiter recurs; 11,28: Julian's visage is like that of a god, whose gestures command the elements; moreover (22), his outstanding career is compared to exceptional events in nature. In 6,5 the idea that the ruler holds the weight (*moles*) of so great a virtue is probably a legacy of Stoicism.

33 See, e.g., 5,18: *adeo, ut res est, aurea illa saecula, quae non diu quondam Saturno rege vigerunt, nunc aeternis auspiciis Iovis et Herculis renascuntur* ("thus in actual fact that golden age, which once flourished briefly when Saturnus was king, is now reborn under the auspices of Jupiter and Hercules"); 10,38; in 2,13 Rome is said to be *felix*, even happier than when it was ruled by Romulus and Remus.

employed, like many other such motifs, by later poets such as Claudian, Sidonius and Corippus.³⁴

Mythological similes are sometimes used to ennoble the emperor,³⁵ as is the insistence on brightness and radiance.³⁶ In 10,29 the golden shining of his arms, especially the shield, is recorded (likewise in 6,6). The death of Constantius Chlorus at York merges the 'exotic' localization at the boundaries of the Northern Ocean with the image of the perpetual light the dead emperor enjoys in a sort of paradise, where he has been welcomed by Jupiter (7,7). Once again, the sensitiveness displayed in the image of the welcoming god must be underlined, whose hand, in extending towards Constantius, shares many points of contact with consecration coins of the same era.

In addition, quite interestingly, the coming of Constantine from a far region like Britannia is paralleled to other gods who came from far regions, like India or Egypt (7,9)³⁷; besides, the same Constantine is said to be escorted by Apollo (7,21) and possesses the beauty of a god (7,17).³⁸ There are also some passages mentioning prodigies and miracles in connection with the newly-enthroned emperor.³⁹

A final aspect should be outlined, namely, the constant reference to a 'divine mind' or 'instinct' that guides and addresses the emperor, whose soul is eternal and heavenly. Among the numerous, often stereotypical references,⁴⁰ two passages referring to Constantine are worth being quoted:⁴¹

you must share some secret with that divine mind, Constantine, which has delegated care of us to lesser gods and deigns to reveal itself to you alone

³⁴ An important analysis of this motif is provided by Cracco Ruggini 1983; any relationship between the *Panegyrici Latini* and the contemporary giant-columns that represents an anguipede overthrown by a god remains uncertain, even though they can be considered representative of a peculiar *Zeitgeist*. The reprises in Corippus are outlined in Tommasi 2007, 187, with further references. For Sidonius, see the very beginning of *Carmen* 6, along with the considerations of Furbetta 2010-2011. Claudian's treatment of the theme (besides his two minor poems on the subject, see e.g. 8,108 and 28,185), is outlined by Ware 2012,129 ff.

³⁵ Cf. 11,8.

³⁶ See expressions like *fulgor oculorum*, *totius corporis circumfusa maiestas*, *oris dignitas* (9,19) or *salutare sidus and splendor* (11,2 and 3) or the solar imagery that concludes 4,2.

³⁷ A similar motif is developed in Claudian 24,58 ff.

³⁸ A similar reference occurs in 6,6, with the expression *divina species*.

³⁹ The most significant is the episode of the Palladium (according to the tradition, a chryselephantine statue of Minerva, which was counted among the seven pledges that were supposed to guarantee the Roman state) and its mysterious fall from the sky, which Mamertinus skilfully links to Julian's sudden appearance. The passage has been thoroughly examined by Lagioia 2004.

⁴⁰ *Divina mens*: 2,8; 5,6; 6,7; 5,8 (*pro divina intellegentia mentis aeternae*); 5,15 (*sacra mens; sacrum pectus*); 3,8 (*divinus impetus*); 10,17 (*instinctus divinus*); it is also worth remembering Constantine's victory obtained by means of 'divine inspiration [*instinctu divinitatis*]', as stated in the commemorative inscription on his triumphal arch), on which see Hall 1998 and Lenski 2008.

⁴¹ 9,2: *habes profecto aliquod cum illa mente divina, Constantine, secretum, quae delegat nostri diis minoribus cura uni se tibi dignatur ostendere*; 8,10: *sic ingenui largique fontes ut ubique prosint ire festinant, sic celeriter in terras caelo missa perveniunt, sic denique divina illa mens, quae totum mundum hunc gubernat, quidquid cogitavit facit*.

and

so do natural and copious springs hasten to flow so that they may be beneficial everywhere; so do things sent from heaven arrive swiftly on earth; so finally does that divine mind, which governs the whole of this world immediately put into effect whatever has conceived.

This idea seems to rely on a sort of trivialized philosophy, perhaps Platonism or, most probably, Stoicism, whose influences, as is well known, still affect much literature of the Constantinian age. Stoic influences are, in fact, to be understood in the fiery and immortal nature of the soul (3,8: *igneae immortalesque*), as well in the tenet that divinity is vivified by perpetual motion (9,22: *quae divinitas perpetuo vigen motu?*). The statement in 3,13 is also very important: the two emperors are compared to the sun and the moon, so that no part of the world is deprived of their presence, even when they are absent. This idea is reinforced in the following chapter by means of a famous Virgilian line, whose pantheistic accents made it one favoured by philosophers, *lovis omnia plena*.⁴² Significantly enough, a divine mind encompassing the universe is recorded in the famous lines of the concluding prayer in 9,26, whose henotheistic flavour we have already discussed:⁴³

For this reason, you, supreme creator of things, whose name you wished to be as many as the tongues of the nations (for what you yourself wish to be called we cannot know), whether you are some kind of force and divine mind spread over the whole world and mingled with all the elements and move of your own accord without the influence of any outside force acting upon you, or whether you are some power above heaven which look down upon this work of yours from a higher pinnacle of Nature: you, I say, we beg and beseech to preserve this prince for all ages.⁴⁴

Panegyric literature, therefore, while re-elaborating schemes that had long since been codified, such as virtues, lineage and deeds, tended to confer on them a universalistic dimension, without separating it from the religious one. The religious dimension found its completion in the final prayer for good fortune and prosperity. This statement is much more significant when one considers that the

⁴² As is testified to by Augustinus, *De Consensu Evangeistarum* 1,22,31; Servius, in *Vergilii Bucolica*, ad loc.

⁴³ Tommasi 2012, 205 ff., with further references to contemporary philosophical trends. See also Gee 2013, 174-175. It seems worth noticing, however, Stoic images like the one of the god as sower and the reminiscence of Virgil, *Aeneid* 6,724-727: *Principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis / lucentemque globum lunae Titaniaque astra / spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus / mens agitat molem et magno se corpore miscet*, and Lucan, 9,580: *Iuppiter est quodcumque uides, quodcumque moueris*.

⁴⁴ *Quamobrem te, summe rerum sator, cuius tot nomina sunt quot gentium linguas esse voluisti - quem enim te ipse dici velis, scire non possumus - sive tute quaedam vis mensque divina es, quae toto infusa mundo omnibus miscearis elementis, et sine ullo extrinsecus accedente vigoris impulsu per te ipsa movearis, sive aliqua supra omne caelum potestas es, quae hoc opus tuum ex altiore naturae arce despicias: te, inquam, oramus et quaesumus ut hunc in omnia saecula principem serves*.

apex of the imperial panegyric coincides with an age largely pervaded by religious anxiety and in particular by the idea that the cycles of destiny were fated to come to pass.⁴⁵ Interestingly enough, the intermingling of the cosmic and the political imagery, which had been used to express and assert a multilevel hierarchy of the divine realms from the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *On the Kosmos* onwards, also enjoys a remarkable treatment in Plotinus, who describes the procession of his supreme principle equating it to the retinue of the Persian king – a passage which seems inspired by contemporary customs:⁴⁶

Before the great King in his progress there comes first the minor train, then rank by rank the greater and more exalted, closer to the King the kinglier; next his own honoured company until, last among all these grandeurs, suddenly appears the Supreme Monarch himself, and all – unless indeed for those who have contented themselves with the spectacle before his coming and gone away – prostrate themselves and hail him. In that royal progress the King is of another order from those that go before him, but the King in the Supreme is no ruler over externs; he holds that most just of governances, rooted in nature, the veritable kingship, for he is King of Truth, holding sway by all reason over a dense offspring his own, a host that shares his divinity, King over a king and over kings and even more justly called father of Gods.

In this connection, it also seems worth recalling the eighteenth treatise in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which probably dates back to the age of Diocletian and close to Menander's precepts on the celebration of a sovereign. Although it appears quite eccentric with respect to the Hermetic collection, and its stylization has been judged as rather plain or even dull, this text represents another witness to the idea – widespread in philosophical milieus – that the cosmic order, where a beneficent king rules over the elements and the minor gods, is reflected in the terrestrial realms. In addition, an explicit connection between the supreme ruler of the universe and the earthly sovereign is at the very end, after having been introduced by means of appropriate similes, such as that of musicians tuning their instruments and singing hymns to a king; or that of the children's cheering of their father, who, notwithstanding their lisps, accepts their homage and rejoices:⁴⁷

Therefore, let us praise god, but next let us descend to those who have received their sceptres from him. We began with kings, and the practice we had with them also accustomed us to giving panegyrics and singing reverent hymns to the almighty, so we must first begin our praise with god and use it as training and then exercise the training

45 See already Seston 1947, 252; and particularly Mazzarino 1974, 17, who recalls the coins' legends *fatīs victricibus* (probably the Parcae). Seminal indications on the links between religious themes and late antique panegyrics are offered by Béranger 1970 and Rodgers 2012 (1986).

46 Enn. 5,5 (32), 3, quoted in McKenna's translation. The text is discussed by Soares Santoprete (forthcoming).

47 A similar image is presented in *Panegyrici Latini* 6,9: the emperor is compared to a god, who forgives humans when they complain about them by pretending they neglect human affairs.

through god; the purpose is to have in us the exercise of reverence for god as well as praise for kings.⁴⁸

It follows the prescription of celebrating the ruler as giver of peace and promoter of harmony.

Poetical Interpretations of Eternity and Sovereignty: Claudian

Together with the increasing perception of a sacred aura, a further step towards the sacralization of power is represented by the use made of panegyric poetry, whose structure (from the hexameter onwards) immediately recalls hymn formulas or epic imagery. The superimposition of epos on eulogy resulted therefore in a hybrid genre, whose exact status has been much debated.⁴⁹ In any case, panegyric poetry, which enjoyed a certain popularity after the example provided by Claudian, aimed not only at mythologizing the sovereign or legitimizing his politics, but it tended also to reassert and defend the role of the elites, whose prerogatives and integrity appeared endangered, especially in the fifth century. Needless to say, however, it also had to face a profoundly transformed historical and political realm, not to mention a different approach towards religion. Thanks to the sensitive deployment of an archaic style of vocabulary, the constant re-use of classical imagery and the refined allusions to history and mythology, poetical panegyrics undoubtedly reflect and combine different tendencies. They simultaneously embody the efforts of an elite to seek refuge in literacy and survive after momentous catastrophes and are a way to exorcise the fear of the barbarians. They also display a conservative (and, to some extent, nostalgic) attitude by continuing to believe in the endurance of Rome, which is destined to last eternally.⁵⁰ The sacralization of Rome (with the concurring ideas of a Christian providence and the literary cliché of pagan aeternitas)⁵¹ is integrated within the frame of an empire that has become totally Christianized and, especially in the East, finds in political theology a privileged terrain in which to establish its roots. An important and in some respects brilliant witness to the persistence of these motifs is offered by Claudian's poetry. While a thorough investigation of his entire production would alone deserve a specific study,

48 *Corpus Hermeticum* 18,15, which we quote in B.P. Copenhaver's translation.

49 See recently Müller 2011, 83 f., Gillett 2012 and Ware 2012, 53 ff. on the blending of epic and encomium owing to the innate encomiastic elements of epic.

50 Tommasi 2013, with further references, among which are the classical works by Paschoud 1967 and Brodka 1998. See also Inglebert 1996 and the monographic issue 2 (2007) of the online journal *Camēnae* sponsored by the University of Paris IV Sorbonne (<http://www.paris-sorbonne.fr/article/camēnae-no-2-juin-2007>, retrieved July 2014).

51 See the still invaluable considerations put forward by Charlesworth 1936.

but would risk being an addendum to recent insightful analyses,⁵² highlighting the treatment of some significant themes may conversely function as a touchstone or a better understanding of the way these trends are dealt with in subsequent poetry. Such is the case of the emphasis on the continual perpetuity of the empire, divinely ordained, where contemporary Rome and the threats she had to face are reformulated in epic terms, by epitomizing history.⁵³ Moreover, although the divine machinery appears in a classical fashion, the gods are transformed and are rather to be interpreted as the driving forces in an eternal struggle between good and evil,⁵⁴ at the end of which Rome is nonetheless destined to be victorious and the emperor is accompanied by divine favour.⁵⁵ In any case, the almost overwhelming use made of mythological similes is meant to enrich laudatory modules thanks to the implicit equation between the human world and the divine sphere. In this respect personification too plays an important role: an interesting example is provided by the virtues a good ruler ought to possess, which are described in 22,6-7 (*Clementia* as a cosmic force) and 100-101 (*Iustitia; Patientia; Temperies; Prudentia; Constantia*). One wonders whether this can be considered a legacy of the specifically Roman tendency to worship abstract entities.⁵⁶

It would seem that Franz Altheim's well-known statement that the causes of Rome's greatness lay exclusively in religious belief, *pietas* and *fides*, and that obedience to the divine will made her great,⁵⁷ ought to be qualified by taking into account a variety of different factors and causes. Nonetheless, old models continue to survive, despite being incorporated into a new context, as we tried to demonstrate in a recent contribution, which was dedicated to the late antique development of the Virgilian idea of an *imperium sine fine*, limitless and endless (with sensitive use of negative particles to emphasize both temporal eternity and spatial limitlessness),⁵⁸

52 Such as those by Müller 2011 and Ware 2012. See also the classical pages by Cameron 1970, 439 ff. and the still invaluable contribution by Duval 1984, who contextualizes Claudian's relationship to the emperors by diachronically examining his different poems.

53 Ware 2012, 90. Müller 2011, 232, notes the development of these motifs especially in *Carmen* 24. On Claudian's treatment of Rome, see also Consolino 2002 and Zarini 2007. A long celebration of Rome's history appears in Sidonius Apollinaris (*Carmen* 7), which was discussed in Tommasi 2014.

54 Ware 2012, 44 and 49 ff.

55 See, e.g., 7,87 ff. and 96 ff.

56 Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2,23,61; Arnobius, 4,1; Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1,20,1.

57 Altheim 1938, 411 ff.

58 Vergilius, *Aeneis* 1,277-8, with the sensitive considerations by Turcan 1983. Ware 2012, 101, offers an example of how Claudian deals with this theme, emphasizing his connections with Ovid and the cosmological motifs implied in his *carmen perpetuum*. An interesting passage here is 8,284 ff., which seems permeated by Stoic reminiscences in a political context (already in Aelius Aristides, 794 Dindorf, as noted by Barr 1981, *ad loc.*). See also 24,159: Rome is endless (*nec terminus umquam / Romanae ditionis erit*), whereas the other empires of the past have come to an end. There are, however, limits that humans must not transgress (8,304), for otherwise a good ruler will turn into a haughty tyrant.

it was embodied thus by the concrete presence of the emperor.⁵⁹ Indeed, the idea of the *Urbs aeterna* became a powerful device in the Roman religious structure and theological framework, and was enhanced by its association with the goddess Roma since the early imperial period.⁶⁰ More importantly, it was linked with concepts like the renewal of the centuries, the golden age and the assimilation of Rome with the cosmos, as summarized in the other Virgilian line, *magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo* and in Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*.⁶¹ In this context it is worth remembering Claudian's description of the Cave of Time (22,424-425), represented as a snake devouring its own tail, which is an original way of revisiting the motif of *aeternitas*.⁶² By the beginning of the fifth century, therefore, the eternity of Rome came to coincide with the notion of a universal empire,⁶³ established and ordered by providence, where even the defeat of enemies was part of a natural law (it goes without saying that, once again, the Virgilian lines about the taming of the proud and the subject being forgiven constituted a powerful intertext).⁶⁴ This feeling would be increasingly reinforced by the gradual embodiment by the sovereign of the idea of empire itself and found sanction in the charismatic perspective characterizing the later phase of the empire.⁶⁵

It may be possible to see an anticipation of this in the idea of the divine mind that assisted the emperor and addresses his acts.⁶⁶

59 MacCormack 1981, 61.

60 On Roma as goddess, see Mellor 1981; Müller 2011, 232 and 355 ff. (on Claudian). An interesting literary example is represented by Melinno's Greek hymn in praise of Rome, which has been variously dated (from the third century BCE to the second CE) – an important text that has not escaped the philologists' attention (as Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2010, 130, claims), for it was discussed earlier by Norden 1913. For Late Antiquity it will be sufficient to recall here the famous passage in Rutilius Namatianus (1,47 ff.), where Rome is addressed as *dea*. A recent analysis is provided by Schierl 2013, with further references; see also Tommasi 2015.

61 Ware 2012, 171 ff. As we suggested elsewhere (Tommasi 2013) Sibylline literature can also be advocated as a source of inspiration: it is worth remembering that Norden (1924) had earlier proposed a link between Virgil's fourth eclogue and the Sibylline oracles.

62 Tommasi 2012, 115. In addition, at the beginning of *Carmen* 28 Claudian introduces the ancient Roman goddess of *Fortuna Redux*, thus hinting at the theme of an eternal return (see also 8,4: *reduces fasces*).

63 See, for example, Claudian 8,42 ff. (Theodosius' exploits are introduced by describing all the regions of the empire).

64 See, e.g., 8,113-14. Cf. also the treatment of Victoria as a goddess in 24,204 ff.

65 Ware 2012, 52 shows that Honorius is represented as a counterpart of Jupiter and notes the symbolic purport of Rome, which "stood for the principles of *imperium sine fine* that were established by Augustus and given expression in the *Aeneid*", so that the city is honoured as much as the emperor.

66 As stated above, with many examples of the idea of a *mēns* or *νοῦς* that inspires and directs the acts of the ruler: this sensitive observation by MacCormack (1981, 83) can be proved in the light of our previous observations about its traces of Stoicism.

Crucial Transformations in the Age of Theodosius

In the decisive century running from the Tetrarchs to the death of Theodosius (395), the complex ritual of *apotheosis*, or *relatio in numerum divorum*, underwent a deep transformation, ultimately culminating in its abolition.⁶⁷ This is to be understood not only as the natural end of a practice strongly connoted in a pagan sense (even though the attitude towards it of many Christian writers, including Augustine, was rather bland), but as a development of its inner essence, because, at least from the Tetrarchy onwards, divinity had come to be understood as if the function only, and not the person of the emperor, were endowed with divine power.⁶⁸ Moreover, the emergence of an idea such as that regarding ‘holy men’ was superimposed on the purely political implication of the apotheosis and favoured its metamorphosis.⁶⁹

Such an achievement was made possible by a slight change in the usual meaning of consecration, the assignation of which nevertheless remained a prerogative of the Senate.⁷⁰ If the last sovereign to whom *caelestes honores* were attributed is Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine, consecration is attested throughout the fourth century, up to Theodosius senior, father of Theodosius I, and many of the emperors of that period still bear the title of *divus*. It may be of some interest to observe that a poet with archaic leanings like Sidonius, in the middle of the fifth century, employs the technical term *divus* to designate dead emperors; the same happens in Corippus.⁷¹ As a pagan, Claudian naturally addresses the emperor in classical terms as a *praesens deus* and openly describes Theodosius’ apotheosis.⁷²

At the same time, both Christian and pagan authors were concerned with the idea of eternity, sanctioned and guaranteed by God, which meant that they also had to face more concrete issues, such as dynastic succession. The external apparatus and the performance of an imperial funeral also represented a crucial component in ensuring a smooth transition to the rule of a new emperor.

67 Tommasi 2005, with previous literature; see recently Abbondanza, Coarelli and Lo Sardo 2014; Gnoli and Muccioli 2014. For the particular case of apotheosis in the fourth century Cracco Ruggini 1977 is still fundamental; see also more recently, Bonamente 1988; 2002; 2013; 2014; 2014a; 2014b. Teja 2014 discusses Christians reactions to imperial cult, on which see also Brent 1999.

68 Seston 1947, 197.

69 This crucial passage is discussed by Cracco Ruggini 1977, 450 ff. (where the differences between saints, sages and divinized emperors are outlined) and 463. See also Bonamente 2011.

70 Cracco Ruggini 1977, 455.

71 Sidonius, Carmina 2,210 and 318 (and I. 481, *divale sidus*); Corippus, *Laus Iustini* 3,127; this custom also remains in official documents like *Novellae* 1,2 (447 CE) and *Codex Iustinianus* 1,17,1.

72 *Decus aetherium* (7,175), followed by the golden age theme. This imagery is mostly employed in *Carmen* 28 (the panegyric for Honorius’ sixth consulship): I. 36, Rome is said to be inhabited by a god; 55, Theodosius as *divus*, who reached the Olympus (101); see also *numen* (II. 17 and 656); *imperii praesens genius* (612); 27,23, *en princeps, en orbis apex aequatus Olympo!* Although Cameron 2011 discusses Claudian’s supposed paganism, we nonetheless prefer to maintain the usual interpretation and consider him a worshipper of traditional religion.

A case like that of Theodosius I, the emperor who legitimized Christianity as the state religion of the empire, is particularly significant. As we have already observed, Pacatus’ speech, delivered in 389, is still suitable for addressing a mixed audience, on account of its use of neutral terms appropriate for both pagans and Christians,⁷³ despite his open characterization of Theodosius as a god, as is the case of the temple erected to the highest goodness: *sacrae aedes et dicata numini summo delubra* (12,21).⁷⁴ Again, chapter six presents some themes that we already outlined, such as the emperor’s *felicitas*, his divine soul and the capability exceptionally awarded to him, namely to investigate the *arcanum caeleste*. Indeed, the final lines in this chapter depict Theodosius as a god, for they state that it is he “who is adored by people, to whom private and public prayers are addressed all over the entire world, from whom a man about to make a voyage seeks a calm sea, a man about to travel a safe return, a man about to enter battle a happy omen”.⁷⁵

The same fluctuation can be observed a propos of Theodosius’ death: if Claudian, still in keeping with pagan tradition, describes it as a catasterism or transformation into a star,⁷⁶ conversely the Christian bishop Ambrose, writing a funeral sermon in praise of the *christianissimus princeps* Theodosius,⁷⁷ provides overt opposition to the consecration ritual by emphasizing the idea of Theodosius’ dead body juxtaposed with Christ’s living one. At the very beginning, however, he moves along the lines of the classical tradition when the celestial prodigies announcing Theodosius’ death are described.⁷⁸

Idealized Portraits of Christian Rulers: Ambrose, Prudentius, Ennodius

Ambrose’s text deserves some closer attention, because it is to the insightful approach of the Milanese bishop, who follows a path already inaugurated by

73 It has been recently suggested, however, that the orator was a Christian: cf. Turcan-Verkerk 2003, who also inclines to credit him as the author of a lost poetical panegyric usually attributed to Paulinus Nolanus (*infra* n. 86); Cameron 2011, 227 ff.

74 See also, e.g., 12, 2: after the opening cosmic imagery, it is stated that the emperor is to be worshipped (*te adorandum*); his godlike status is reasserted in chapter 4: *deum dedit Hispania quem videmus*; and at the very end: 12,47: *adnuente numine tuo*.

75 *Qui gentibus adoratur, cui toto orbe terrarum privata vel publica vota redduntur, a quo petit navigaturus serenum, peregrinaturus reditum, pugnaturus auspiciam*. Chapter 18 alludes to the usual theme of the divine mind that guides the prince’s deeds (*sacra mens tua; maiestatis tuae particeps deus; vis divina*), because he knows the heavenly secrets (12,19: *consciis caelestis arcani*).

76 MacCormack 1981, 124 ff. and 140. In *Carmen* 28, Italy is inserted in a cosmic eulogy (19 ff.) and the emperor is a *sidus* (23): for a detailed commentary on the passage, cf. also Dewar 1996, 78.

77 For its ideological thrust, see Bonamente 1979; Consolino 1984a. A global portrait is offered by Groß-Albenhausen 1999.

78 Although this tradition also seems to be shared by Christians, for the Gospels record darkness obscuring the earth when Jesus died.

Eusebius,⁷⁹ that we owe the rethinking and formulation of an alternative for the traditional themes of apotheosis and divinization.⁸⁰ It displays the intermingling of different forms of both classical and Biblical origin,⁸¹ among which the panegyric certainly plays a role, although with substantial differences in style and content. Lacking the fripperies of the panegyric speech, the emperor is treated as a Christian ‘everyman’, that is without any reference to his ancestors (or *genos*, according to the traditional reference list) and without any flattery implied in the usual panegyric form. Relying on Eusebius, who did not deify the subject, but presented the emperor as receiving his status directly from God, Ambrose further accentuates the submission to divine law.⁸² In more solemn a way than he did in the *De obitu Valentiniani*, where imagery of Paradise borrows many elements from the locus *amoenus* imagery and the beauty and youth of the dead king are emphasized, Ambrose is also concerned with the idea of the transmission and legitimization of power,⁸³ especially considering that Theodosius’ heirs, and in particular Honorius, were quite young and inexperienced. Such a legitimization is achieved by superimposing the patriarchal image of Jacob onto that of the dead emperor (3), therefore implying that Honorius is, like Joseph, destined to accomplish great deeds,⁸⁴ and, even more significantly, it culminates in the final section (43 ff.), which recalls the story of Helena and her finding of the true Cross – a legend of probable Western origins, which Ambrose is the first to fashion, probably following a brief allusion in Eusebius.⁸⁵ The choice of linking Helena, mother of Constantine and endowed, like Mary, with a salvific and providential function, to the Theodosian family, is a skilful device that allows Ambrose to fulfil a twofold purpose. On the one hand, he is able to show that Constantine’s dynasty finds its natural completion in that of Theodosius. On the other, in a wider perspective, by means of stating that a nail of the cross was encapsulated in the imperial crown and another one in the bit of the imperial horse (47), he is able to confer the cross with a deep political meaning, transferring the theme of the legacy of the Christian faith to political power and extending it to all Christian rulers. Finally, the newly-established paradigm of the Christian ruler – modelled on the Old Testament ‘kings’ like Moses (with the emphasis on legal aspects), David or Solomon – who was able to gain his victories without bloodshed and thanks to his unshakable faith, and whose

79 Another interesting author to consider is Juvencus, who states that Constantine would receive his peace through Christ (4,806 ff.).

80 Bonamente 2014a and 2014b.

81 Duval 1977.

82 As interestingly suggested by Lunn Rockcliffe 2007, 191.

83 Bonamente 1977.

84 This comparison can be paralleled with that put forward by Claudian, who, moving alongside the Virgilian model, superimposes another famous pagan familiar model onto the emperor and his son, namely that of Aeneas and his son Ascanius (Ware 2012, 57 and 69).

85 See the pioneering considerations put forward by Consolino 1984b.

piety, compunction, mildness, philanthropy, and mercy were added to ‘classical’ (i.e. pagan) virtues such as clemency and fortune (*felicitas*).

Together with Ambrose, to whom we owe this complex picture, other writers share this view. If too little is known about Paulinus’ lost panegyric, which was probably dedicated to exalting the battle of Frigidus and the defeat of the ‘pagan’ tyrannical usurpers, Roman hegemony acquires a specific function in the context of Christian salvation history.⁸⁶ By stressing the advancement of history and the progressive substitution of the old religion with the new (and better) one, Prudentius’ *Contra Symmachum*, an original mix between epos and apologetics, seems to offer confirmation of the crucial link between religion and the state. Thus, when he outlines the triumphant history of Rome, its progresses and its victories, Prudentius accepts the so-called *Reichstheologie* in the tradition of Origen and Eusebius (it is worth remembering here the long-lasting scholarly debate involving the favour gained by Christian monotheism insofar as it reflected the divine supremacy parallel to that of the emperor).⁸⁷ The senators are described as eager to abandon the old errors in which they lived and follow Christ. Theodosius, who establishes peace and overcomes the barbarians, is praised as the saviour of the Roman state, even surpassing great Republican heroes such as Marius and Cicero. He endows Rome with eternal youth and vigour, giving her safety and peace. Therefore, the attempt by the dwindling and waning pagan party to revive its traditions, is displayed against the larger background of history. Obviously, as a poet, the backbone of Prudentius’ ideology may be found in the *Aeneid* and its teleology, which encompasses the civilizing mission of a pious hero. Generally speaking, the sense of a mission hallowed by gods was a characteristic of the Augustan period, when world domination appeared to be assured. Throughout the entire poem, Prudentius develops his own consistent conception of Rome, her past and her present. Certainly, according to a still invaluable analysis by E. K. Rand, “the attack on Symmachus is an obvious form of Christian apologetics, which here as in Augustine’s *City of God* passes into a larger literary form”, but, even more significantly “it is an apology not so much for Christian belief as for Christian culture”, so that “his purpose is not to supersede pagan culture, but to include it”. According to Rand, this is demonstrated by the fact that the poet “read the old authors with minute understanding and with deep delight”.⁸⁸ According to the functional and useful idea of *chresis*,⁸⁹ however, Virgilian motifs are here radically subverted or reformulated.⁹⁰ Both the old pagan gods and

86 On which see Duval 1984, 139 and, in more detail, Sivan 1995; Pricoco 1998.

87 Zarini 2010, 96, labelled this phenomenon ‘trivialized Eusebianism’; see also Zarini 2015. Bonamente 2011 sensitively outlines the development from ‘pagan’ *divus* to Christian ‘saint’. Fontaine 1984 provides an insightful analysis of how Christian poetry dealt with the figure of the prince.

88 Rand 1920, 83.

89 As discussed by Gniska 1984 and 1993.

90 Döpp 1988. See also Barnes 1976 and Bureau 2009 (who compares Claudian’s *Panegyric for Honorius’ Sixth Consulship* and Prudentius’ *Contra Symmachum*).

the new menaces threatening the empire are fated to be overthrown by the positive values of Roman culture and, evidently, by Christianity.

A deep link with Ambrose (with some slight changes, however, for example in the motif of bloodless victory, which is here reformulated in the sense that the king deliberately opts for peace) is established in the prose panegyric composed by Ennodius in 507 or 508 and dedicated to the Ostrogothic king Theoderic.⁹¹ Developing the theme of the *rex* as priest, which in all likelihood is modelled on David rather than the *pontifex maximus* of the Roman tradition, and celebrating the Gothic king as *summi Dei cultor* (thus omitting the sensitive issue of Arianism), Ennodius explicitly connects the success and the merits of Theoderic to his faith (chapters 50, 80) and mentions Providence as a companion to his deeds (*advocasti Providentiam, actuum tuorum comitem*, 51). This can perhaps be considered a reversal of the theme of the comitatus gods of pagan panegyrics. Furthermore, the description of the kingly virtues attests to God, for there is none among men from whom Theoderic could have assimilated the qualities that he exhibits: 59, *o geminam in uno principe virtutum plenitudinem, quae Deum resignat auctorem, quia non habet inter homines a quo videatur sumpsisse quod exhibet*. In any case, already in the introductory section, among the traditional topoi of inadequateness for the task of celebrating such mighty a sovereign, Ennodius provides an explicit comparison between the godhead and the ways to praise him. On the other hand, Ennodius revisits themes that are strongly rooted in classical panegyrics, such as the idea that the victorious sovereign is capable of subduing nature and taming the elements (7-10) or the rejuvenation of Rome thanks to his power and valour (56).

Sidonius Apollinaris

This latter image also recurs in Prudentius, Claudian and Sidonius Apollinaris: it must therefore be considered a classicizing relic that demonstrates the persistence of the eternity motif. In Sidonius the contrast between Rome's description as a dowager and her regained youth thanks to the mature Avitus (whereas a young prince like Valentinian III provoked her ruin) is central to understanding the entire panegyric,⁹² whose complex texture also emerges by taking into account some echoes of Rutilius, for example as far as the image of Rome destined to "flash forth out of her calamities; since from her very beginning it hath been her fixed destiny to grow greater by misfortunes" is modelled on Rutilius Namatianus 1,140, *ordo*

⁹¹ Edited and commented on by Rota 2002.

⁹² Delivered in 456 on the eve of Avitus' (significantly, Sidonius' father in law) accession to the throne in the wake of the momentous assassination of Valentinian III and the sack of Rome by the Vandals.

renascendi est crescere posse malis.⁹³ The mention of Claudian faces us with a well-known way of dealing with laudatory and celebrative motifs, such as the favour of the gods who uphold their protégé during a crucial battle (interestingly enough, Ambrose shares with Claudian the idea that the ruler is close to God (*proximus deo / proximus dis*)⁹⁴; the willing submission of the elements to a victorious hero; the radiance that shines from the ruler, who is regarded as the sovereign of the entire cosmos; the prodigies surrounding him and foreshadowing his deeds; the providential link with a city, which may be the legacy of a municipal consuetude; and the rejoicing of nature during the accession to the throne of a new sovereign. All these authors are capable of integrating religious themes into their works. Nevertheless, while Claudian manages to make extensive use of mythological similes to celebrate Rome, her grandeur and the emperor's deeds, his successors deal with the ancient gods in quite a 'crystallized' or stereotypical way. For example, the theme of the returning golden age characterizes all three panegyrics written by Sidonius ("who accomplished his task with some vigour and more imagination than he is usually credited with"),⁹⁵ who, once again follows in Claudian's steps.⁹⁶ Whereas the image of the *fulva ... saecula* significantly concludes the poem dedicated to Avitus, this possibility is evoked either as a wish or a promise in the other poems, such as the panegyric to Anthemius, delivered in 468: the Earth herself endows Anthemius with the prediction of a golden age, and his own birth or infancy is accompanied by marvels or prodigies – the same propitious omens that shone on other famous infants. In particular it is worth recalling here the flames surrounding Ascanius' head (in which the old Indo-European motif of the *xvarenah* or glory may be identified)⁹⁷; the dream that came to Cyrus' grandfather; the she wolf that suckled Romulus (significantly called Quirinus); Alexander the Great and Augustus conceived by a snake-god; and eagles surrounding the head of many persons fated to be great heroes (the eagle appears likewise as a symbol of royal apotheosis). The young Anthemius is then paralleled to the young Hercules,

⁹³ For a more detailed discussion of Sidonius' treatment of elements pertaining to the religious sphere in Sidonius, see Tommasi 2015. This passage has been discussed thoroughly by Brocca 2003-2004; for the image of Rome rejuvenating (employed also by Ambrose and Symmachus in the famous controversy on the altar of Victory) see, among others, Roberts 2001. In *Panegyrici Latini* 6,11 and 10,13 a prosopopoeia of Rome recurs as well.

⁹⁴ Ambrose, *De Obitu Theodosii* 7 and Claudian, 24,130 (Stilicho); 17,227. Significant differences between Claudian's and Prudentius' treatment of Theodosius, and in particular of the battle at Frigidus, motivated by religious matters, are outlined by Gualandri 2000.

⁹⁵ MacCormack 1981, 223.

⁹⁶ Claudian explicitly links the inauguration of a consulship to the idea of renovation and a golden age, emphasizing its cosmic dimension; see 22,474: *aureus et nomen praetendit consulis annus; / inque novos iterum revoluto cardine cursus / scribunt aethereis Stilichonis sidera fastis*.

⁹⁷ On the surviving traces of which, see Tommasi 2006. The same prodigy is recorded by Claudian, 8,192ff., who manages therefore to establish a link between the young Honorius and Ascanius (Ware 2012, 97): significantly enough, Claudian introduces this simile after having described Honorius' arrival in Constantinople, which is, in turn, compared to the sun dissipating the foggy clouds (170 ff.); the image recurs in 28,537 ff. as well. In the same poem dedicated to Honorius' fourth consulship, Claudian had already stated that the most famous oracles predicted the glory of the future prince (142 ff.).

whereas the recurring idea of the purple clearly alludes to his royal lineage – a standard motif in many eulogies.⁹⁸ The panegyric of Anthemius introduces the theme of the appeasement of the rivalry between Rome and Constantinople, by means of the famous personification of Aurora, which is meant to hint at the east, the land where the sun rises and where the new emperor comes from.⁹⁹

It is no wonder, therefore, that there is such insistence on the imagery of light and brightness, which is usually employed in encomiastic literature,¹⁰⁰ especially in privileged places such as the introduction or conclusion. A particularly interesting passage may be found in Claudian's preface to the panegyric for the third consulship of Honorius (*Carmen* 6), where an elaborate simile compares the poet and the emperor (also addressed to as *deus*, l. 16) to the eagle's chicks that become accustomed to gazing at the sunlight; the result is an implicit homage to the emperor as an earthly sun. Sidonius too, in the opening lines of *Carmen* 7, dedicated to Avitus, provides an explicit comparison between the sun and the emperor: *Phoebe, peragrato tandem visurus in orbe / quem possis perferre parem, da lumina caelo / sufficit hic terries*;¹⁰¹ the astronomical image is immediately followed by a further apostrophe to the stars, in order to celebrate the perpetual radiance of Rome, who is capable of recovering from her calamities, just as the stars rise again day after day. The same imagery appears at the end of the poem (ll. 576 ff. and 598 ff.), where the dawn of a new day provides a careful *Ringkomposition*, which is enriched by the historical accuracy of the costume alluded to by the poet, namely the crowning of the emperor by the soldiers¹⁰² and by the image of the golden ages spun by the Parcae.

In this context an important reference needs to be made to the phoenix theme, which is recalled by Sidonius in both the Panegyric to Avitus (lines 353-6) and to Anthemius (lines 407-17). In the first passage the poet clearly establishes a link between the mythical bird that rises from its ashes and Rome that rises from her calamities, while in the second the idea of unity and harmony is stressed. It seems

98 MacCormack 1981, 193 and 204, paralleling Claudian, 8,121 ff.

99 A possible precedent is Claudian, 28,84. See Kelly 2012.

100 See, e.g., Statius, *Silvae* 4, 1, 3, *atque oritur cum sole novo, cum grandibus astris / clarius ipse nitens et primo maior Eoo* (hinting at Domitian); *Panegyrici Latini* 2,3: the emperor is like the sun, therefore in pronouncing his eulogy, the orator turns towards the east; see also Claudianus, 8,170 (discussed at n. 97).

101 ("O Sun-god, now at last the circle of thy wandering thou canst see one that thou art able to brook as thine equal; so give thy rays to heaven, for he is sufficient to lighten the earth". Transl., here and in the following passages, by W.B. Anderson).

102 *Tertia lux refugis Hyperiona fuderat astris: / concurrunt proceres ac milite circumfuso / agger composito statuunt at torque coronant / castrensi maestum donantque insignia regni; / nam prius induerant solas de principe curas* ("the third day had spread the sun's light over the retreating stars: the lords of the land assemble in haste and with soldiers all around set him on a mound-platform; there they crown their sorrowing chief with a military collar and present him with the outward emblems of sovereignty (hitherto the only attribute of an emperor he had assumed was his cares)"). A similar custom is also recorded by Corippus (see n. 117), while the allusion to the anxieties of the prince and the subsequent comparison to Hercules' labours are fully in line with a Stoic interpretation of the suffering hero.

superfluous to recall how the symbolism of the phoenix is one favoured in Late Antiquity by both pagans and Christians.¹⁰³ Moreover, its connections with the sun (in all likelihood of Egyptian origin) and with the rejuvenation of the world or a new era, come at the end of a section where Avitus is twice invoked as *orbis salus* (l. 339) and *spes orbis* (l. 352). The same theme recurs at greater length in the eulogy to Anthemius (ll. 407-17), with particular emphasis on the marvellous lands of the Orient, where the phoenix too dwells among exotic plants and flowers.

Sidonius' imperial panegyrics, richly stylized and highly elaborated, provide a consistent reassessment of the theme of the providentiality of the empire and the glorious destiny of Rome by means of an accurate selection of the motifs suitable for the different circumstances. No wonder therefore that after the momentous calamities of 455 the theme of the resurrection of Rome is stressed, whereas the imagery of light and harmony between East and West is underlined in the poem to Anthemius. Sidonius' optimistic, sometimes illusory, confidence in the *res Romana* leads him to describe, in persistently classical terms that avoid any reference to the Christian religion, a nostalgic realm whose elements reinforce the theology of victory and aim at testifying to the everlasting power of the Roman empire, where even past misfortunes can be integrated into a providential scheme.

Corippus

The same confidence in endurance and eternity to which the Roman Empire is destined sustains Corippus' poems. It may be worth considering it in more detail than has been done by earlier interpreters. Generously interspersed with classic reminiscences, his works stands as a swan song to Latin ideals, but nevertheless paves the way for the further development achieved in Byzantine poetry or ceremonial. Moreover, his case is emblematic, insofar as he celebrates the classical values of *Romanitas* in a Virgilian Latin style before a Greek-speaking audience, be it the Byzantine generals in the newly-conquered Carthage or even the imperial couple of Justin II and Sophia.¹⁰⁴ Once again, the boundaries between epic and panegyric seem to intermingle: while his first poem, the *Iohannis*, may definitely be considered an epos combined with eulogistic elements, the *Laus Iustini* represents the apex of the development of poetical panegyric in a Christian sense. In particular, the link between Christianity and the emperor as vicar of God clearly emerges, not only in the description of court ceremonial and its fixed gestures, but also in the way its symbolism is underlined. In addition, the idea that God helps and assists the Roman sovereign (by letting him triumph over his enemies) is fundamental. Notwithstanding the highly idealized portraits and the tendency towards a rarefied atmosphere, there are some indications that point to contemporary situations and

103 See van den Broek 1971, 217.

104 For a global perspective and an updated bibliography on Corippus, see Goldlust 2015.

therefore add a touch of 'realism'. In the *Laus Iustini*, furthermore, it seems that the division between the sacred and secular sphere has been abolished, for religion is all pervasive and even those details which may pertain to purely political aspects receive a religious connotation. For example, Justin is advised in a dream by the Virgin of the death of his uncle Justinian and his future accession to the throne (1,32 ff.),¹⁰⁵ and consequently, in order to fulfil the ceremonial, the imperial couple goes to the basilica of Saint Sophia, therefore allowing the poet to present a poetical paraphrase of the Creed of Chalcedon (4,293 ff.).¹⁰⁶ Justinian's burial is also particularly significant, the complex ceremony of which is described in two different sections, in the middle of Book One (his funeral robe) and at the beginning of Book Three (the embalment) respectively.¹⁰⁷ The emperor's appearance is calm and dignified, his death is compared to sleep, the corpse shines as if alive (*non mutans morte colorem / solito candor nitens*, 1,237-8), because he has died in the peace of God, leaving a legitimate heir. Indeed, the accession of the new sovereign to the throne is constantly presented as having been disposed and ordered by God in person (1,85 and 182): therefore the inevitable sorrow for the deceased prince can be integrated into a dynastic perspective, where the ideal of continuity is also stressed.¹⁰⁸

However much you are moved by the love for your virtuous father, let not your love for your country come second to that you have for him. Your uncle himself as he was dying ordered you to hold sway. See the greatness of the old man's farsighted concern for our city and the world together. God has brought about on your behalf all that he wished to happen. Mount your father's throne, and rule the world in subjection to you, mighty emperor. A golden age shall dawn when you are on the throne, nor will the Roman court be seen to change its ruler.

That the succession has taken place in fulfilment of a fixed order is reasserted in Justin's speech about the mutual ties that bind the different social classes (a passage which seems inspired by the apologue of Menenius Agrippa and is not exempt from some paternalistic nuances).¹⁰⁹ The final section of an otherwise unfinished poem reasserts the theory that imperial power comes directly from God.

¹⁰⁵ As usual in Christian hexameter, the model poet nevertheless remains Virgil.

¹⁰⁶ It can be added that in book eight of the *Iohannis* there is also a description of the Mass, which probably found its model in a passage of Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum* 2,708 ff. For a detailed examination of this and other prayers, see Tommasi 2004-2005.

¹⁰⁷ Carile 2014 draws attention to this description and to the development of the imperial funeral in the Byzantine court.

¹⁰⁸ 1,178 ff.: *Quantumcumque boni moveat dilectio patris, / non sit amor patriae patrio minor. Ipse tenere / sceptrum tuus moriens te iussit avunculus ore. / Aspice quanta fuit nostrae simul urbis et orbis / provida cura seni. Pro te deus omnia fecit, / quae fieri voluit. Solium conscende paternum, / et rege subiectum, princeps fortissime, mundum. / Aurea nascetur vobis regnantibus aetas, / nec mutans dominos Romana videbitur aula.* The passage, here and elsewhere, is quoted in Av. Cameron's translation.

¹⁰⁹ 2,185 ff., on which Tommasi 2013, 284.

The mention of Saint Sophia, the imperial basilica, which is even more splendid than the renowned temple of Solomon, also points to the same idea. While it was Justinian himself who had the temple built, its project was nevertheless already in the mind of God (4,266 ff.). The cathedral and the imperial palace are closely paralleled, for they represent the two powers, the spiritual and temporal, of which however the first takes precedence.¹¹⁰

According to Averil Cameron, the intermingling of classical elements and Christian customs attests to the liminal and transitional moment represented by the reign of Justin II, where the same tensions can also be observed in the visual arts.¹¹¹ Though patently Christian and deeply rooted in Christian symbolism, in this period it is possible to notice an attempt at revitalizing some Roman customs, not only the triumph, but the remarkable consular adventus and all its apparatus, which significantly is set on Sunday morning in a shining Constantinople.¹¹² Such a dialectic may be applied to many passages in Corippus' panegyric, for example the end of book one, where people gathering in the Hippodrome to celebrate Justin are paralleled with birds acclaiming the resurrection of their king, the phoenix, and the name of Justin is explained through the symbolism of its initial letter, the 'holy iota'. It is possible to suggest that Corippus is inspired by Sidonius, but even more by Claudian, who employed the same idea of rejoicing birds to describe the jubilant crowd welcoming Stilicho,¹¹³ whereas Sidonius celebrates the greatness of Rome by means of the same image and establishes a connection between the bird resurrecting from its ashes and Rome recovering from her ruins. Many elements seem to concur in such a complex image, which appears carefully chosen: Corippus definitely employs the simile of the phoenix welcomed by her fellow-birds with the aim of stressing the harmony between the crowd and the emperor, whose analogy with the sun is reinforced by the well-known notion that the phoenix is also a solar symbol. Moreover, although relying on a classical iconography strongly permeated by pagan ideology, like that of the circus races, Corippus bends it in a clearly Christian sense, as suggested by the reference to God, the true sun, and the Incarnation. There is no need to stress once again the importance of light imagery in this context (which is particularly privileged, for it represents the conclusion of a book). It may be that this passage can be perceived as an ultimate echo of the rhetorical theme of the magistrate or emperor, who has to be welcomed like a star or the rising sun through universal consensus, and is sometimes linked with

¹¹⁰ 4,288: *principis haec, haec aula Dei. Deus illud utrumque / glorificavit opus, sed maiestatis honore / plus templum terroris habet* ("This is the hall of the emperor and this of God. God glorified both buildings, but the temple inspires more fear by the glory of its majesty").

¹¹¹ Cameron 1975-76 and Tommasi 2010.

¹¹² See in particular 4,105 ff. The passage imitates the opening of Claudian's *Carmen* 3.

¹¹³ Claudian, 22,414 ff. with the sensitive observations of Ware 2012, 111 ff., who recalls also the solar imagery which recurs elsewhere in Claudian (1,1 ff.). See also n. 100.

seasonal imagery.¹¹⁴ Insistence on brightness is a key motif throughout the entire poem and is a patent reminder of the Christian, but previously pagan, association with the sun, and therefore with heavenly protection which allows darkness and evil to be overwhelmed. No wonder, then, that the description of the throne hall (3,179 ff.) is openly paralleled to the vault of heaven – a passage for which, among other references, we suggested as a model for the opening section of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Olympus is compared to the Augustan palace. In addition, Corippus emphasizes the sacral aura emanating from the richly-adorned hall and from the throne itself, decorated by winged Victories (according to an iconography that underwent slight transformations in the passage from paganism to Christianity), so as to present the arrival of the emperor as an epiphany.¹¹⁵ The same epiphanic theme also recurs in the consular procession of Book Four, where, once again, much emphasis is given to the jubilant crowd. Likewise the apparently static description of the official clothes and the crowning of Justin (2,100 ff.), where, once again, the brightness of gold, purple and jewels gains a strong symbolic purport,¹¹⁶ conveys the suggestion that the emperor is like the rising sun and functions as an anticipation of the final, hyperbolic simile, which also takes as its starting point the raising of Justin on a shield – a ceremony known as 'lever du roi', which has its roots in ancient military customs and would have lasted for many centuries.¹¹⁷ The crowning by the soldiers is also ratified by ecclesiastical power (2,159 ff.) and by the senators, among the jubilant acclamation of the crowd (2,178 ff.), which praises the emperor's mercy and *clementia*.¹¹⁸ The people are shown acclaiming Justin in two other passages (3,76 ff. and 4,131 ff., the latter one occurring at the end of the description of the *adventus* and the consular procession, which was usually characterized by an imperial donation to the people): both express the idea of the

114 See MacCormack 1981, 21 and 202, with the perceptive observation that the technical term ἀπαντήσις designating the emperor's official entrance is the same employed for Christ's entering Jerusalem; the unanimous acclamation is interpreted in the lines of the saying *vox populi, vox Dei*, thus meaning that the people acclaim together an emperor ratifying God's will.

115 On this passage, see Carile 2008 and Tommasi 2010. It is worth remembering that the inner chamber of the emperor is also described as being bright and resembles the house of the Sun-god (1,97 ff.).

116 For a similar description, see Claudian 8,518; 552; and 594.

117 2,137 ff. (and, previously, Claudian 28,632 ff.). This custom is magisterially discussed by Kantorowicz 1963. See also MacCormack 1981, 194 and 251.

118 2,357 ff. The cancelling of debts and the clemency towards prisoners was one of the inaugural acts of a new ruler: Corippus' passage, however, is permeated by a strong Christian flavour, for Justin is considered an image of Christ and thus his clemency is closer to Christian mercy than to the classical virtue.

rejuvenation of the cosmos and the return of a golden age, therefore embodying the wishful expectations of eternity.¹¹⁹

'After its old age,' they said, 'the world rejoices to grow young again, and the golden age is rising in your time, Justin, hope of the city and the world, light of the Roman Empire, glory added to all the emperors who have reigned before, whose conquering wisdom has gained the highest peaks of your father's throne.'

and

'With you as consul and with you as emperor, may the world flourish in blessedness. Greetings, not the first among emperors in order of number, but first in order of merit, bestower of riches, bestower of honour, peak of freedom, head of the world, sole virtue and manifest safety of all, restorer of an honourable name. The ancient fasti restore a new age; you have renewed the ancient age of Augustus Caesar; but yours is more famed and greater. The first year of yours welcomes your joys with you in happiness and the New Rome celebrates more prayers with your triumphs'.¹²⁰

Therefore, following the path magisterially set forth by Claudian, poets like Sidonius Apollinaris and, even later, Corippus, employ the same literary genre to praise (and legitimize as emperors) the outsiders of provincial aristocracy or the Eastern Emperor. Far from being pure flattery, Late Antique panegyric literature shows a consistent moral stance that integrates a live and changing literary tradition rooted in the Roman pagan past in order to transform it into a sophisticated, relevant and effective form of political interaction. More generally, in addition to the persistent secular idea of the providential empire when dealing with these themes, Corippus, however, seems inspired by Christian political theorizations such as those of Ambrose or Augustine, and offers an interesting perspective on the relationship between religion and power, setting the ruler in harmony with – when not in subordination to – the Church (as is clear, for example, in the figure of Justinian in the *Iohannis* or the imperial couple in the *Laus*).¹²¹

119 'Post senium' dicunt 'sese iuvenescere mundus / gaudet, et antiquae repetit primordia formae. / Ferrea nunc abeunt atque aurea saecula surgunt / temporibus, lustine, tuis, spes urbis et orbis, / Romani iubar imperii, decus addite cunctis / retro principibus, cuius sapientia victrix / obtinuit patrii fastigia maxima regni.' Once again we are faced with the theme of the *renovatio imperii*, on which see nn. 29, 62 and 96, together with Straub 1972-1986; see also a similar tenet in Claudianus, 8,619: *prospera Romuleis sperantur tempora rebus / in nomen ventura tuum. Praemissa futura / dant exempla fidem: quotiens te cursibus anni / praeferit, / totiens accessit laurea patri* ("prosperity awaits our empire; thy name is earnest for the fulfilment of our hopes. The past guarantees the future; each time that thy sire made thee chief magistrate of the year the laurels of victory crowned his arms"); and 28,640: *iamque novum fastis aperit felicibus annum* ("and now, his double head crowned with laurel, Janus opens the New Year with auspicious calendar", transl. by M. Platnauer).

120 'Consule te felix, te principe floreat orbis. / salve, Augustorum numeri non ordine prime, / sed meriti, largitor opum, largitor honorum, / libertatis apex, mundi caput, unica virtus / et rerum manifesta salus, reparator opimi / nominis. Antiqui redeunt nova saecula fasti. / Augusti priscum renovasti Caesaris aevum: / clarius est meliusque tuum. Tuae gaudia tecum / hinc vester primus feliciter excipit annus, / vota que plura tuis celebret nova Roma triumphis.'

121 For applying such a remark to the case of Corippus we are partly indebted to the insightful analysis of Venantius' panegyric poetry put forward by George 1998, who states that Venantius himself relies on similar concepts derived from Christian theorists.

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