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## PERFORMING *PAIDEIA*: GREEK CULTURE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL PROMOTION IN THE FOURTH CENTURY a.d.

Lieve Van Hoof

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## PERFORMING *PAIDEIA*: GREEK CULTURE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL PROMOTION IN THE FOURTH CENTURY A.D.

*Paideia* – i.e. Greek culture, comprising, amongst other things, language, literature, philosophy and medicine – was a constituent component of the social identity of the elite of the Roman empire: as a number of influential studies on the Second Sophistic have recently shown, leading members of society presented themselves as such by their possession and deployment of cultural capital, for example by performing oratory, writing philosophy or showcasing medical interventions.<sup>1</sup> As the ‘common language’ of the men ruling the various parts of the empire, Greek culture became a characteristic of, and thus a *de facto* condition for, leading socio-political positions. Whilst most elite men would have taken for granted a good cultural education no less than a leading position, an outstanding command of the classical Greek language, literature and tradition as displayed in epideictic performances allowed some orators, philosophers and doctors to move distinctively up the social ladder, sometimes reaching the ears of, and thereby wielding influence over, the emperor himself.

In the absence of studies of comparable refinement examining the link between culture and power in late antiquity,<sup>2</sup> it is often assumed that the great sophistic tradition lost the vibrancy and dynamism that had characterized it under the Early Empire: pagan Greek culture, fighting its last against the new religious, linguistic and pedagogical trends that would soon carry the day, was now a body of dead material confined to the schoolroom. Although elites across the eastern half of the Mediterranean would therefore be acquainted with it, it had, so it is suggested, lost much of its social relevance: Greek culture was no longer the vital step on the ladder of social mobility that it had been during the first and second centuries.<sup>3</sup> With regard to the fourth century,

<sup>1</sup> S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, A.D. 50–250* (Oxford, 1996); T. Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht. Zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit. Zetemata* 97 (Munich, 1997); T. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford, 2001). The dynamic, constructivist view of identity and status underlying these studies has now replaced the earlier structural approach represented most clearly in K. Hopkins, ‘Elite mobility in the Roman Empire’, *P&P* 32 (1965), 12–26.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Cameron, ‘Education and literary culture’, in ead. and P. Garnsey (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XIII. *The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425* (Cambridge, 1998), 665–707, at 696.

<sup>3</sup> Thus H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938); P. Wolf, *Vom Schulwesen der Spätantike. Studien zu Libanius* (Baden Baden, 1952); M. Hose, ‘Die Krise der Rhetoren. Über den Bedeutungsverlust der institutionellen Rhetorik im 4. Jahrhundert und die Reaktion ihrer Vertreter’, in C. Neumeister and W. Ræck (edd.), *Rede und Redner. Bewertung und Darstellung in den antiken Kulturen. Kolloquium Frankfurt a.M., 14.16. Oktober 1998* (Frankfurt, 2000), 289–99; R. Criboire, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton, 2007); A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, 2007), 40; P.-L. Malosse and B. Schouler, ‘Qu’est-ce que la troisième sophistique ?’, *Lalies* 29 (2009), 161–224, at 164.

this discourse of socio-cultural change is usually doubled up with reference to religious changes: Greek culture fared badly under the Christian emperors of the Constantinian dynasty, was then brought to a last great flourishing under Julian and finally died out under the Christian emperors that succeeded Julian. This view, based on carefully selected passages from the sophist Libanius, Julian himself, his panegyrist Mamertinus and, above all, the historian Ammianus Marcellinus,<sup>4</sup> was already held by Edward Gibbon, and is still maintained by some scholars today.<sup>5</sup>

Over the last two decades or so, however, studies in late antiquity have replaced the paradigm of change with one of transformation.<sup>6</sup> With regard to Constantius II specifically, Peter Brown has stressed that few people deprived of cultural credentials made it to the top during his reign, whilst the cultured elite continued to make successful careers in local and imperial politics.<sup>7</sup> This idea was subsequently elaborated by scholars such as Eva-Maria Seiler and Nick Henck, who both stress Libanius' prejudices in depicting Constantius in a negative light.<sup>8</sup> Henck adduces numerous sources that argue quite the opposite view: authors such as Themistius and Aurelius Victor actually stress Constantius' cultural education, his contacts with cultural figures, and his promotion of the liberal arts. Following this different set of sources,<sup>9</sup> scholars have thus challenged the traditional image of Constantius as an enemy of Greek culture.

Whilst the negative point – how *not* to see Constantius – made by these scholars is undoubtedly correct, their methodology is questionable. Indeed, what Henck and others seem to be doing is to prove the incorrectness of certain sources (Libanius, Ammianus, Mamertinus) by adducing other sources, which present what these scholars think is a

<sup>4</sup> For a survey of passages giving this presentation, cf. H.-U. Wiemer, *Libanius und Julian. Studien zum Verhältnis von Rhetorik und Politik im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Munich, 1995), 24 and n. 49; Hose (n. 3); and N. Henck, 'Constantius' *paideia*, intellectual milieu and promotion of the liberal arts', *PCPhS* 47 (2001), 172–87, at 181–2. A brief confrontation between Ammianus' views on Constantius' education and that found in the panegyrics of Libanius, Julian, Aurelius Victor and Themistius can be found in M. Whitby, 'Images of Constantius', in J.W. Drijvers and D. Hunt (edd.), *The Late Roman World and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (London and New York, 1999), 77–88, at 82.

<sup>5</sup> E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J.B. Bury, vol. 2 (London, 1935), 449–50; Hose (n. 3); J. Stenger, *Hellenische Identität in der Spätantike. Griechische Autoren und ihr Unbehagen an der eigenen Zeit*, Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 97 (Berlin, 2009), 87–8.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. J.H.D. Scourfield 'Introduction', in id. (ed.), *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity: Inheritance, Authority, and Change* (Swansea, 2007), 4. Cf. also Cameron (n. 3), 705; Malosse and Schouler (n. 3), 167–8.

<sup>7</sup> P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992), 38. For the uninterrupted flourishing of rhetoric under Constantius, see also P. Barceló, *Constantius II. und seine Zeit: Die Anfänge des Staatskirchentums* (Stuttgart, 2004), 29. On the continuity of the social background of senators in the fourth century, see also P. Heather, 'Senators and senates', in Cameron and Garnsey (n. 2), 184–210; P. Heather, 'Themistius. A political philosopher', in M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1998), 125–150; P. Heather and D. Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century. Select Orations of Themistius*, Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool, 2001), 59.

<sup>8</sup> E.-M. Seiler, *Konstantios II. bei Libanios. Eine kritische Untersuchung des überlieferten Herrscherbildes*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe III 798 (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 171–9; Henck (n. 4).

<sup>9</sup> To these literary sources, one could add *CTh* 14.1.1, an edict jointly issued by Constantius and Julian in February 360, in which they state that 'no person shall obtain a post of the first rank unless it shall be proved that he excels in long practice of liberal studies and that he is so polished in literary matters that words flow faultlessly from his pen'.

more trustworthy account.<sup>10</sup> In reality, however, none of the authors mentioned aims to give an objective description of reality. A clear indication of this can be found in the fact that whereas both Libanius and Themistius wrote a panegyric for Constantius, it is Libanius (usually adduced to prove Constantius' negative attitude towards Greek culture) and not Themistius (often thought to be much more positively disposed towards Constantius) who explicitly commends the emperor for his good cultural education (Lib. 59.32–4). Statements or silences about imperial attitudes towards Greek culture, then, should be read for what they are: rhetorical claims.

This article presents a close yet contextualized analysis of a selection of interlocking texts concerning the cultural–political interface between emperors and cultural figures in order to illustrate the potential and pitfalls of Greek culture as an instrument for social promotion in the fourth century A.D. Taken together, these texts, written by Themistius (§ I), Constantius (§ II), Julian (§ III) and Libanius (§ IV), show that the story of the success or failure of Greek culture as an instrument for socio-political promotion under the reigns of Constantius or Julian is a complex one: far from being dependent on either particular emperors and their religious preferences, or the beliefs and prejudices of individual authors, Greek culture in the fourth century, no less than before, was a powerful but also strongly contested instrument of social promotion. By thus highlighting the vitality and performative aspect of Greek culture under Christian and pagan emperors alike, this article opens up a different perspective on late antique Greek culture – a perspective that has thus far been largely neglected, but that needs to be taken into account alongside more traditional interpretations if we are to come to a full understanding of the role and place of traditional Greek culture in late antique society.

## I. THEMISTIUS, *ON THE LOVE OF MANKIND OR CONSTANTIUS*

Themistius' first oration is a panegyric for Constantius, delivered in either 347 or 350.<sup>11</sup> The most frequently followed pattern for such imperial panegyrics was that described by Menander Rhetor as the βασιλικὸς λόγος, which subsequently praises an emperor's fatherland, family, birth, nature, education, accomplishments, military actions and actions in times of peace.<sup>12</sup> Themistius, however, explicitly refuses to follow this pattern, and instead chooses to focus on one spiritual quality: φιλανθρωπία. Crowning

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of all the sources concerning Constantius II, see C. Vogler, *Constance II et l'administration impériale* (Strasbourg, 1979), 12–81.

<sup>11</sup> For the date of Oration 1, see W. Portmann, 'Zum Datum der ersten Rede des Themistius', *Klio* 74 (1992), 411–21; T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 313 n. 21; J. Vanderspoel, *Themistius and the Imperial Court: Oratory, Civic Duty, and Paideia from Constantius to Theodosius* (Ann Arbor, 1995), 73–7; O. Ballériaux, 'La date du Περὶ φιλανθρωπίας ἢ Κωνσταντίου (Discours I) de Themistios', *Byzantion* 66 (1996), 319–34; and Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 69–71, all with extensive discussion and bibliography on earlier propositions. On Oration 1, see furthermore G. Downey, 'Themistius' First Oration', *GRBS* 1 (1958), 49–69; Vanderspoel (this note), 71–83; and Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 69–77.

<sup>12</sup> The βασιλικὸς λόγος is discussed at the beginning of the second Treatise attributed to Menander. Cf. D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford, 1981), 76–95 and 271–81. For the popularity of the scheme, cf. C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rogers (edd.), *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley, 1994), 10–12; and Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 7, with further bibliography in n. 19.

more traditional virtues such as justice, self-control, courage and reasonableness, philanthropy makes the emperor similar to God (8b–9c). According to Themistius, he is the first one to speak in the way he does (*vũv ... πρῶτον*, 1.1a). In fact, however, Quintilian had already proposed a division of praise according to the various virtues as an alternative structure for a panegyric alongside the scheme that would later be propagated by Menander:

Namque alias aetatis gradus gestarumque rerum ordinem sequi speciosius fuit, ut in primis annis laudaretur indoles, tum disciplinae, post hoc operum id est factorum dictorumque contextus; alias in species virtutum dividere laudem, fortitudinis, iustitiae, continentiae ceterarumque, ac singulis adsignare, quae secundum quamque earum gesta erunt.

(Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.7.15)

It has sometimes proved the more effective course to trace a man's life and deeds in due chronological order, praising his natural gifts as a child, then his progress at school, and finally the whole course of his life, including words as well as deeds. At times on the other hand it is well to divide our praises, dealing separately with the various virtues, fortitude, justice, self-control and the rest of them and to assign to each virtue the deeds performed under its influence.

(tr. Butler [1921], 471)

At least one of the twelve speeches preserved in the *Panegyrici Latini*, probably composed in 291, follows Quintilian's second course, dividing his material on the emperor Maximian (285/6–305) amongst the spiritual qualities of piety and felicity.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Themistius' new mode of speaking differs in two significant respects from Quintilian and the author of the Latin panegyric. First, there is Themistius' choice of philanthropy. On the one hand, this makes Themistius stand out because he selects only one (ἐν, 1a; cf. also 16c) spiritual quality – thus going against Quintilian's advice and the Latin panegyric's practice to divide (*dividere*) praise according to different virtues. On the other hand, philanthropy was not one of the cardinal virtues recognized by philosophers from Plato onwards but may, instead, have been inspired by the specific mid-fourth century context:<sup>14</sup> not only was philanthropy an ideal that could be shared by Christians and pagans alike,<sup>15</sup> but the main example Themistius gives of the emperor's philanthropy – that he suspended executions (14b) – also clearly taps into the ideal of an 'unstained rule', an ideal that was taking shape around that time. Indeed, as has recently been demonstrated from various sides, the combination of philosophical, religious, legal and political-ideological ideas made clemency, and in particular the abstention from executions, increasingly important as a standard against which emperors and

<sup>13</sup> *Pan. Lat.* 11(3).6.1. On the importance of piety and felicity in the panegyric, as well as in the reign of Maximian, cf. Nixon–Rogers (n. 12), 90 n. 40.

<sup>14</sup> At the end of the speech, Themistius, looking back on his own speech, states that 'this, then, is the true and honest and pure offering to you from philosophy your contemporary' (τοῦτο δὲ σοὶ παρὰ φιλοσοφίας τῆς ἡλικιώτιδος ἀνάθημα ἀληθινὸν καὶ ἄδολον καὶ ἀκίρατον). The word ἡλικιώτις, which can mean either 'comrade' or 'contemporary', may thus acquire a new sense: apart from pointing to Themistius' friendship with Constantius (Downey [n. 11], 69) and the fact that both men were born in the same year and were thus 'contemporaries' (Heather and Moncur [n. 7], 96 and n. 151), Themistius may also be highlighting that the philosophy he is offering Constantius is adapted, and particularly suited, to the mid-fourth century.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 24 and 67; Malosse and Schouler (n. 3), 202; Stenger (n. 5), 122–3. For Themistius' concept of philanthropy, see also L. Daly, 'Themistius' concept of philanthropia', *Byzantion* 45 (1975), 22–40.

officials were weighed in late antiquity.<sup>16</sup> The second major difference between Themistius on the one hand and Quintilian and the Latin panegyrist on the other, concerns the elaboration of the chosen virtue(s). Quintilian clearly suggests that virtues such as courage, justice or self-control offer good headings under which to discuss the deeds (*gesta*) performed under their influence. The Latin panegyrist, for example, discusses the harmony between Maximian and his fellow Augustus Diocletian as an instance of piety, and the despair of the barbarians as a result of this harmony under the heading of felicity, with specific examples adduced to illustrate each of these virtues. Reading the Latin panegyric thus gives one a reasonably good idea of Maximian's reign and achievements. The same is not true in Themistius' panegyric. Apart from the reference to Constantius' suspension of the death penalty (14b), there is only one rather vague allusion to a Persian military move (12b), and a reference to Constantius' young age (16c–17b), which is said to make the possession of virtues all the more remarkable.<sup>17</sup> Yet apart from those three instances, Themistius largely speaks about 'the philanthropic king' in general, in the third person. He will say, for example, that 'the philanthropic king' (ὁ φιλόανθρωπος βασιλεύς, 4b, 9a, 10c, 12c, 15b and 17b)<sup>18</sup> treats his subjects well. Such sentences can, of course, be read as a description of Constantius' deeds, but in the absence of specific references to Constantius, they rather convey the impression of giving general advice as to how a good king should behave or how, in other words, Constantius *should* behave if he wants to be (praised as) a good king.<sup>19</sup>

Taken together, these characteristics of Oration 1 create a well-defined impression: Themistius' choice of a treatment not according to Menander's scheme but according to virtues,<sup>20</sup> his reference, alongside philanthropy, to traditional virtues such as courage and justice, his stress on the fact that these virtues will make the good king similar to god and his general rather than specific treatment of kingship – all these make for a

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2001), 136–50; P. Van Nuffelen, 'The unstained rule of Theodosius II. A Late Antique panegyric topos and moral concern', in T. Van Houdt (ed.), *Imago Virtutis: Studies on the Conceptualisation and Transformation of an Ancient Ideal* (Leuven and Namur, 2004), 229–56. Themistius' first oration, although not discussed by Van Nuffelen, may in fact be one of the earliest panegyrics exhibiting the greater importance attached to the ideal of the 'unstained rule'.

<sup>17</sup> On the lack of concrete examples in Themistius' first oration, cf. Stenger (n. 5), 127 and 181.

<sup>18</sup> Attributively used, the adjective φιλόανθρωπος distinguishes the philanthropic king from another kind of king. Given that Constantius is not being explicitly compared to any other emperor in the speech (if delivered in 350, Constantius was already sole Emperor; but even if delivered before, Constans is not mentioned in Themistius' speech, as opposed, for example, to Libanius' *Panegyric for Constantius and Constans*), the opposition nevertheless concerns the philanthropic king versus the tyrant more generally. This opposition is made explicit in 3v, 6a, 8c, 11b, 13a and 17d.

<sup>19</sup> Constantius is addressed in the second person only in 1a, 2b, 14b and 18a. A clear case in which Themistius' advice is rather general occurs in 6a, where Themistius uses φημι with infinitive ('to contend that') rather than λέγω with a ὅτι-clause ('to state that') when contending that justice is the most important characteristic of a king. At other points, it is less clear whether Themistius is describing Constantius' practice or prescribing rules, yet often such ambiguous cases are surrounded by what are clearly general rules rather than specific actions. A case in point can be found in 5b, which follows 5a and is followed by 5c. In 5a, Themistius in fact explicitly points out that his discourse is not dependent on Constantius: καθ' αὐτὸν ὁ λόγος βαδίζει καὶ οὐκ ἐπερείδεται βασιλεῖ τοῦ προελθεῖν ἀσφαλέστερον ('my speech goes its own way, and is not dependent upon the king in proceeding with greater certainty'). The independence of Themistius as a praise-giver in this speech is also noted by Stenger (n. 5), 117.

<sup>20</sup> Whilst it would be wrong to see Quintilian's 'second course' as inherently more philosophical than Menander's – Libanius' speeches in honour of Julian, for example, clearly present Julian as a philosopher whilst following Menander's scheme (cf. Stenger [n. 5], 188) – this and the other elements enumerated here add to the philosophical nature of the text.

panegyric of a remarkably philosophical kind. Themistius thus adroitly selects *topoi* and generic conventions of imperial panegyrics in order to present his speech as a work of philosophy. This presentation suits the *êthos* of the speaker very well, as Themistius was establishing himself as a teacher of philosophy and commentator on Aristotle's works when he delivered this oration.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, at the beginning of his text, Themistius confidently contrasts his own, philosophical praise of Constantius with 'average praise-givers' who, he claims, are unable to grasp the emperor's virtues (1a–2b).<sup>22</sup> A few pages later, Themistius offers the audience the opportunity to challenge his philosophical credentials if they can find falsehoods in his discourse about Constantius:

εἰ μὲν τι καὶ σμικρὸν φενακίζοντα ἐξεύροίτε, λοιδορεῖν τε καὶ ἀποθεῖσθαι καὶ ἐκβάλλειν φιλοσοφίας, ὡς οὔτε ὅσα δρῶντα οὔτε ζύμφωνα τοῖς ἐκείνης νόμοις· εἰ δὲ ὅσα ἐπαινέσεται, τοσάδε καὶ ἀληθεύσεται, μὴ τοι πρὸς αὐτὸν δυσκολαίνειν μηδὲ οἴεσθαι κόλακα ἀντ' ἐπαινέτου· ὡς κολακειᾶς μὲν οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅ τι δυσμενέστερον ἀληθείᾳ, ὁ δὲ ἔπαινος μαρτύριόν ἐστιν ἀρετῆς· μαρτυρεῖ δὲ ἕκαστος καλῶς ἃ γινώσκει. ὥσπερ οὖν τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστου μάρτυς ἀγαθὸς ὁ ἐπισταμενος, οὕτω καὶ ἀρετῆς οἱ ταύτην εἰδότες. Ξυνήκατε οὖν ὃ ξυντέθεικεν ὁ λόγος, μόνους εἶναι τοὺς φιλοσόφους μάρτυρας ἀρετῆς.

(Themistius, Oration 1.3c–d)

If you discover it [i.e. the speech] to be cheating even in the smallest degree, insult and reject it and cast it from philosophy for doing things which are neither righteous nor in accordance with her laws. But, if in all that it praises, it tells the truth, then do not be angry with it, nor think it a flatterer instead of a praise-giver. For nothing is more inimical to truth than flattery, but praise is virtue's witness. Each man bears witness to what he knows. And so, as he who understands one particular thing among everything else is a good witness to it, so too those who recognise it are good witnesses to virtue. You understand then what my discourse has established: only philosophers are witnesses to virtue.

(tr. Heather and Moncur [n. 7], 80)

This professed openness to criticism did not entail too much of a risk for Themistius: not only was his rather general discourse not very likely to contain blatant lies, but objecting to Themistius' claims to truth in praising Constantius would also entail belittling and thereby insulting the emperor – something not many people in the audience would dare to do, especially not with the emperor present during the original delivery of the discourse.<sup>23</sup> If not an act of bravery, then, Themistius' seemingly magnanimous gesture surely was a clever rhetorical strategy: if the audience, although explicitly invited to, does not deny his speech the status of philosophy, then surely Themistius can lay claim to being a philosopher and, as such, a truthful praise-giver.

The propagation of a philosophical self-image in an address to an emperor was, of course, not new. Themistius' first oration comes close, in this respect, to Dio Chrysostom's *Kingship Orations*.<sup>24</sup> No less than in the second century, then, philosophy

<sup>21</sup> For the importance of making clear the speaker's *êthos* or 'moral character' in the speech in order to convince the audience, cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1.2.3–4.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Themistius' Oration 24, his only surviving speech to have been delivered before Oration 1; in it Themistius favourably compares his own, philosophical rhetoric, to that of other, more sophistic(ated) orators.

<sup>23</sup> For the original delivery of the discourse, see below § II. Note that some years later, Julian, in his *Letter to Themistius* 253c–254b, derides Themistius' claims to truth in praising him as Heracles or Dionysus. Cf. Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 20–1.

<sup>24</sup> For the Dionic echoes in Themistius' philosophical self-presentation, see Whitby (n. 4), 78. I leave aside here the discussion of whether Dio delivered his *Kingship Orations* in Trajan's presence: what matters is that Dio purports to be addressing Trajan, and can reasonably be assumed to have

can be and is being used in the fourth century in order to gain access to power.<sup>25</sup> Yet although Themistius may have been influenced by Dio's third Kingship Oration in particular, he in no way merely copies the topos of the truth-speaking philosopher, but adapts it to suit a different context: Themistius lays more stress on the positive point that he is a truth-speaking philosopher, whilst Dio seems to feel more of a need to defend himself against, or at least to distance himself from, accusations of flattery.<sup>26</sup> At first sight, this may seem paradoxical, as Themistius clearly presents his oration as a panegyric, whilst Dio's speech is for a considerable part laid in the mouth of Socrates. Yet consideration of the situation in which each author found himself whilst delivering his kingship oration explains these differences. Dio's third Kingship Oration was written under Trajan, which means that Dio must have been at least fifty, quite possibly more than sixty, years old, and a long-established figure on the cultural scene.<sup>27</sup> If this meant that he did not need to establish himself as a philosophical authority, it also implied that he was open to the charge of having thrived so much and so long because of being a flatterer.<sup>28</sup> For Themistius, on the other hand, Oration 1 seems to have been, as far as we can see, one of his first entrances on the public scene: only one other oration chronologically precedes his panegyric for Constantius.<sup>29</sup> At the time of delivery, Themistius was at most 33 years old and, on top of that, he did not come from anything near as privileged a background as Dio: his father, like Themistius himself, was a teacher of philosophy from Paphlagonia, a rather remote part of the Roman Empire.<sup>30</sup>

In line with his louder claim for philosophical credibility, Themistius also seems to go further than Dio in detaching himself from worldly motivations. Indeed, whilst Dio denies speaking for money, his attitude towards reputation seems to be deliberately unclear: initially Dio suggests that reputation, like money or pleasure, is a bad motive, yet while he explicitly rejects the latter two, he merely states that flattery is not the best way to build up a good reputation (third Kingship Oration, 14–17) – thus suggesting that his philosophical praise *will* yield honour. Themistius, on the other hand, explicitly denies that he is speaking for either money or τιμή, honour or office:

hoped to reach the emperor's ear either directly or indirectly. On the question of Trajan's presence, cf. Swain (n. 1), 193–4 and Whitmarsh (n. 1), 186–8 and 325–7, with further bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> For philosophy as a way of gaining access to power, cf. J. Hahn, *Der Philosoph und die Gesellschaft. Selbstverständnis, öffentliches Auftreten und populäre Erwartungen in der hohen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart, 1989); Whitmarsh (n. 1), 181–246.

<sup>26</sup> There are more than ten mentions of flattery in Dio's third Kingship Oration (3.3, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 149), as against just the two in Themistius (twice in 3c). Conversely, 'philosophy' does not occur in Dio's third Kingship Oration, whilst it occurs seven times in Themistius' first oration (1a, 3c, 3d, 9b, 13b, 18a, 18b).

<sup>27</sup> According to J. Moles, 'The Kingship Orations of Dio Chrysostom', *PLLS* 6 (1990), 297–375, at 361, the third Kingship Oration was the last to be written by Dio.

<sup>28</sup> Dio indeed admits to have been familiar with Trajan for a long time (3.2), yet he evokes his freedom of speech under Trajan's cruel predecessors (3.12–13) in order to 'prove' that he will definitely not flatter the mild emperor that Trajan is. Nevertheless, he feels the need over and over again to set himself apart from flatterers (cf. n. 26 above). Note also that Themistius will have to counter similar criticisms after assuming the Urban Prefecture of Constantinople under Theodosius (cf. *Or.* 17, 31 and 34).

<sup>29</sup> Oration 24, to be dated in the early 340s. For the date of Themistius' so-called private orations, see R.J. Penella, *The Private Orations of Themistius* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2000), xiii and 1–48. Oration 1 is the first (also chronologically) of the so-called public orations.

<sup>30</sup> For Paphlagonia's reputation for backwardness, see C. Marek, 'Paphlagonia', *DNP* 9 (2000), 282–3.



τοῦτο δὴ σοι παρὰ φιλοσοφίας ἡλικιώτιδος τὸ ἀνάθημα ἀληθινὸν καὶ ἄδολον καὶ ἀκίρατον, ... ὧν γὰρ ἔνεκεν ἄνθρωπος ὑποκρίνεται τοὺς ἐπαίνους, τούτων ἐλευθέρᾳ ἐστὶ φιλοσοφία. χρημάτων τε γὰρ αὐτῇ οὐδὲ εἰς λόγος τιμῆς τε οὐκ ἔνδεής, οἴκοι τὸ τίμιον ἔχουσα.

(Themistius, Oration 1.18a–b)

This, then, is the true and honest and pure offering to you from philosophy your contemporary ... Philosophy is free from those reasons why man feigns his praises. For her, money is of no consideration at all, nor does she require honour, keeping what is of value within her.

(tr. Heather and Moncur [n. 7], 96)

## II. CONSTANTIUS, *LETTER TO THE SENATE CONCERNING THEMISTIUS*

This apparently straightforward declaration of philosophical detachment on Themistius' part should not delude us, however, as it did not in any sense impede Constantius from conferring honour on Themistius, nor Themistius from accepting the honour. Indeed, with the so-called *Demegoria Constantii*, a Greek translation of a Latin letter of the emperor Constantius to the senate of Constantinople, Constantius announced the adlection of Themistius to the senate in September 355. Traditionally, scholars have read the letter as Constantius' answer to Themistius' first oration. Some have even suggested that the letter was originally ghost-written in Greek by Themistius, and then translated into Latin before being read to the senate.<sup>31</sup> Yet whilst Constantius' letter does pick up on various topics that we have encountered in Themistius' oration,<sup>32</sup> closer examination shows that Constantius did not so much take over Themistius' ideas, as enter into dialogue with them. At stake, in this dialogue, is the relationship between philosophy and society and, by extension, the power balance between Constantius and Themistius.

Themistius, as we have seen, established a strict boundary between philosophy and society: he opposed himself to other praise-givers and truth to flattery; and he explicitly denied worldly ambitions in praising the emperor. As Constantius explicitly indicates, he is well aware of the fact that Themistius wishes to be praised only for his philosophical qualities,<sup>33</sup> but refuses to go along with the philosopher's wishes. Indeed, according to Constantius, all men of good sense, including rhetoricians and philosophers, strive towards one and the same summit of repute (19b). If Constantius thus calls

<sup>31</sup> Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 97 n. 154. Given the different power balance in the *Demegoria* as compared to Themistius' first oration, however, I do not think it likely that Themistius was the author of the *Demegoria*, as has been suggested.

<sup>32</sup> e.g. the importance of virtue: 19c, 19d, 20b, 23c; Themistius' status as a philosopher: 19a, 19d, 20a, 20b, 21c, 22a, 22b, 22c, 22d ff.; the importance of speaking the truth: 19a, 20c. S. Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2012), 81 therefore talks about 'Constantius's endorsement of Themistius's philosophical concepts', stating that 'Themistius's views and his philosophical life stood for Constantius's interpretation of the philosophical life as governance'. As this article shows, however, Constantius' view on the philosophical life does not entirely coincide with that of Themistius.

<sup>33</sup> εὖ οἶδα ὅτι τῶν κατελεγμένων ἐπαίνων οὐ μετὰ τῆς ἴσης ἡδονῆς ἀπάντων ἀκούει Θεμιστίος, ἀλλὰ μόνους τοὺς ὑπὲρ φιλοσοφίας οἰκειοὺς ἡγεῖται, τοὺς λοιποὺς δὲ ἢ λέγεσθαι μετρίως ἢ σιωπᾶσθαι βούλεται ('I know well that Themistius does not listen to this whole catalogue of praises with equal pleasure but only has regard for those which relate to philosophy and wishes the rest either to be spoken of in moderation or left in silence', 22c tr. Heather and Moncur [n. 7], 113).

Themistius' bluff when he claims not to be moved by either money or honour,<sup>34</sup> he also refuses to follow Themistius' suggestion that virtue is the only ground for true praise: instead of praising Themistius only for his philosophy, Constantius also commends him for his financial situation, marriage and ancestry in order to show that even 'philosophy aside, the man is worthy of the Senate' (21d; cf. also 21c–23b). As opposed to Themistius' public self-image as projected in Oration 1, the philosopher thus appears from Constantius' presentation as a rather more worldly figure – and this is how it should be, according to the emperor. True philosophy as Constantius sees it, is in no way opposed to society: 'do not think that the true philosophy banishes itself completely from communal life or turns itself entirely away from the care of common affairs' (22b). Or, to put it differently, if one wants to be a true philosopher – that is, a philosopher appreciated by Constantius – one should not withdraw from society but engage in it.

Constantius as it were highlights his rejection of Themistius' view on philosophy and society by repeatedly talking about the τιμή given to Themistius (19a, 19b, 19d, 21a, 21c, 23d) – τιμή having been explicitly rejected by Themistius as a motivation for Oration 1. Constantius' adlection of Themistius to the senate thus becomes a proxy for his redefinition of the relationship between philosophy and society. The following passage is highly significant in this respect:

ὥσθ' ὅπερ ἀρχόμενος εἶπον, κοινήν ὑμῖν καὶ Θεμιστίῳ δίδωμι τὴν τιμὴν. μεταλαβὼν γὰρ παρ' ἡμῶν ἀξιώματος Ῥωμαϊκοῦ ἀντισταφέρει σοφίαν Ἑλληνικὴν, ὥστε τὴν πόλιν διὰ τοῦτο δεικνύσθαι τὴν ἡμετέραν κορυφὴν ὁμοῦ τύχης καὶ ἀρετῆς. νικῶσα γὰρ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀγαθοῖς νῦν προσλαμβάνει τὸ τιμιώτατον. εἰ γὰρ τεῖχεσι μὲν αὐτὴν περιφραγνύουσι, κοσμεῖν δὲ τοῖς ἔνδον οἰκοδομήσασι, δήμου δὲ πλήθει στενοχωρεῖν, σημεῖον ἀγαπῶντός ἐστι βασιλέως, πόσῳ μᾶλλον αὖξιν τὴν γερουσίαν τοιαύτη προσθήκη, ἢ τὰς ψυχὰς βελτίους ποιήσει τῶν ἐνοικοῦντων καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων οἰκοδομημάτων καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀναστήσει γυμνάσιον; ... ὥς ὁ μὲν τῇ πόλει τὰ ἄλλα σκευαζόμενος τὰ πρῶτα δίδωσι τῶν ἀγαθῶν, φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ παιδείας ἐπιμελούμενος τὸ κυριώτατον ἐκπορίζει.

(*Demegoria Constantii* 21b–c)

As I said at the beginning, I offer this as a shared honour for you and for Themistius. For he gets from us a share in Roman dignity and, in return, introduces Hellenic wisdom, so that our city is shown to be the summit of good fortune and, at the same time, of virtue. For being pre-eminent in all other good things, she now acquires the most valuable one as well. For if it is the sign of a loving emperor to fortify her with walls, to adorn her with buildings within, and to crowd her with a host of citizens, how much more so is it to augment the senate with such an addition that shall improve the souls of those who dwell in her and raise up the gymnasium of virtue along with all the other buildings? ... So that he who furnishes the city with the rest, gives it most important advantages, but he who takes care of wisdom and education supplies it with the sovereign boon.

As the first sentence of this passage indicates, Constantius, throughout the *Demegoria*, presents his adlection of Themistius to the senate as a gift not only to Themistius, but also to the senate: Constantius gives Themistius to the senate, and the senate to Themistius. This stress on the twofold gift has two implications. First, giving something implies, and thereby confirms, the giver's power: by giving political honour to Themistius and philosophy to the senate Constantius, in other words, presents himself as a man of both worlds, whom the worldly values of his audience, the senators, do

<sup>34</sup> Note also that Constantius stresses that Themistius, 'though careless of wealth, is nevertheless not oppressed by poverty' (22a).

not escape, but who also shows himself to be a cultured ruler, able to appreciate philosophy (21c, 20d, 21b–c, 23c–d). The second implication of Constantius' 'giving' of Themistius to the senate and vice versa is that it is clearly intended to change both: whilst true philosophy is said to engage in society, the body politic is to become more virtuous.<sup>35</sup> *Ipsa facto*, then, Constantius, in uniting philosophy and political power within his own person, presents himself as the example to be followed by both Themistius and the senate.

Like Themistius in his first oration, Constantius also refers to the opposition – familiar from the Second Sophistic, including Dio's *Kingship Orations* – between Greek wisdom and Roman power.<sup>36</sup> The interpretations of the topos given by the two authors are very different, though. In Themistius' presentation, it is the philosopher who sets the rules: as in Dio Chrysostom,<sup>37</sup> the emperor is judged against the standards of philosophy. Constantius, on the other hand, although referring to the Dionic topos much more explicitly than Themistius, empowers himself as an emperor: acquainted with, and successful in, both philosophy and society, it is the emperor who is in control.<sup>38</sup> This new power balance is illustrated very clearly in the passage just quoted:<sup>39</sup> if Constantius adlects Themistius to the senate, this adds to the glory of Constantinople.<sup>40</sup> Themistius thus becomes a means, alongside others, through which the emperor embellishes a city inextricably linked, through its very name, to the Constantinian dynasty represented by Constantius.

Given the Themistian echoes in Constantius' *Demegoria*, Themistius' adlection to the senate may at first sight seem to be the result of his first oration.<sup>41</sup> This impression is strongly reinforced by the fact that the *Demegoria* follows, in modern text editions, immediately upon Oration 1. In the manuscripts of Themistius, Oration 1, the *Demegoria* and three other early Themistian orations are each preceded by a *hypothesis*. If it is correct, as scholars have argued, that these *hypotheses* show Themistius' hand in the publication of the first edition of these works as a group,<sup>42</sup> it may well be that he consciously used Constantius' letter in order to create the impression of a smooth and effortless promotion as a result of Oration 1. It should not be forgotten, however, that at least five, and possibly eight, years went by between Themistius' first oration and

<sup>35</sup> The senate's concern for virtue is highlighted in 19c–d.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Swain (n. 1), 6, 40, 88 and Whitmarsh (n. 1), 1–20.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Whitmarsh (n. 1), 210–13.

<sup>38</sup> In his speech of thanks, written in response to the *Demegoria*, Themistius will once again judge the emperor against the standards of philosophy (*Or.* 2.25a, 26a–b, 30b, 36b–c, 40a), whilst at the same time presenting himself as a philosopher thoroughly engaged in society (*Or.* 2.31a–b, 32a, 34d).

<sup>39</sup> See also 20d, 21a, 21d, and 22b.

<sup>40</sup> See also 20d, 21a, 21b, 21d, 22b. For the early development of Constantinople, see furthermore G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris, 1974); C. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople (IVe – VIIe siècles)*, Travaux et Mémoires 2 (Paris, 1985); and Vanderspöel (n. 11), 51–70; on the Constantinopolitan senate, see A. Skinner, 'The birth of a "Byzantine" senatorial perspective', *Arethusa* 33 (2000), 363–77; for the choice of senators in Constantinople, cf. P. Heather, 'New men for new Constantines? Creating an imperial elite in the Eastern Mediterranean', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 2 (London, 1994), 11–33.

<sup>41</sup> e.g. Vanderspöel (n. 11), 77 ('it may have led to his appointment at the city') and Stenger (n. 5), 117 ('... in seiner ersten Rede, mit der er Zugang zur näheren Umgebung des Constantius erlangte').

<sup>42</sup> For the manuscript tradition, see G. Downey, *Themistii Orationes quae supersunt* (Leipzig, 1965), vii–xxv; Heather and Moncur (n. 7), xv–xvi. For the authorship of the hypotheses preceding Themistius' Orations 1, 2, 4 and 20 and Constantius' *Letter to the Senate*, cf. Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 75–6 and Henck (n. 4), 179.

his political promotion – years in which other cultural figures too were attracting Constantius' attention with speeches in his honour.<sup>43</sup> One can refer, for example, to Himerius<sup>44</sup> and Bemarchius,<sup>45</sup> but by far the most famous speech for Constantius alongside Themistius' orations is Libanius' *Panegyric for Constantius and Constans* (Oration 59).<sup>46</sup> When comparing Themistius' and Libanius' speeches for Constantius and their ensuing careers, it looks at first sight as though Themistius was much more successful: Themistius probably delivered his panegyric in the emperor's presence,<sup>47</sup> was adlected to the Senate and became an advisor to Constantius, whilst Libanius may never have met Constantius<sup>48</sup> and, after having spent some ten years in Constantinople, ended up returning to his home city Antioch. The truth of the matter is, however, more complex. After having delivered his first oration for Constantius in either 347 or 350,<sup>49</sup> Themistius, as we have seen, had to wait until 355 in order to be officially honoured by Constantius with the adlection to the senate. Libanius, on the other hand, had not only been ordered to stay in Constantinople by imperial decree even before delivering his panegyric, he also received an imperial summons to return to Constantinople shortly after delivering his *Panegyric*,<sup>50</sup> traditionally dated in 348/9.<sup>51</sup> This means that Libanius' *Panegyric* was probably rewarded much more quickly than Themistius' first oration, and above all that Libanius received imperial acknowledgement more than five years before Themistius

<sup>43</sup> On the Latin side one can think, for example, of Firmicius Maternus, and Aurelius Victor.

<sup>44</sup> A fragment (fr. 1.6: R.J. Penella, *Man and the Word: The Orations of Himerius*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 43 [Berkeley, 2007], 272–4) has been preserved of a speech for Constantius by Himerius, probably delivered in Sirmium on the occasion of Gallus' Caesarship (March 351). Cf. also T.D. Barnes, 'Himerius and the fourth century', *CPh* 82 (1987), 206–25, at 209, 212, 224. Himerius seems to have been active, or even based, in Constantinople between 343 and 352. Active: Penella (n. 44), 3–4; settled: Barnes (this note), 210, 212, 224.

<sup>45</sup> Bemarchius is called a 'staunch supporter of Constantius' (μάλα δὲ τὸν Κωνσταντίου ἠρῆκῶς ἀνῆρ) in *Lib. Or.* 1.39. Cf. also n. 55.

<sup>46</sup> In *Ep.* 440 Foerster, Libanius refers to himself as a 'man who has often sung his (Constantius') praises'. In *Ep.* 48 Foerster, Libanius reacts to an invitation from the Master of the Offices Florentius to come to court and speak for Constantius, saying that whilst his bodily condition prevents him from coming, he might give a speech for the emperor if he comes to Antioch. Cf. Wiemer (n. 4), 27–8.

<sup>47</sup> According to its *hypothesis*, Oration 1 was 'delivered at Ancyra in Galatia when he first met the king, while still a young man'. In his *Letter to the Senate* 22c–d, Constantius also indicates that he has long been familiar with Themistius.

<sup>48</sup> Pace W. Portmann, *Geschichte in der spätantiken Panegyrik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 128 and W. Portmann, 'Die 59. Rede des Libanios und das Datum der Schlacht von Singara', *ByzZ* 82 (1989), 1–18, at 6, neither Constantius nor Constans can have been present when Libanius delivered his panegyric. Cf. P.-L. Malosse, *Libanios. Discours LIX*, Collection des Universités de France (Paris, 2003), 8. And whilst Constantius spent much time in Antioch between 337 and 350, Libanius was away from his home city between 336 and 354.

<sup>49</sup> For the date of Oration 1, see above, n. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Imperial decree before panegyric: Oration 1.37, referring to 340/1 (δόγματά τε ἐγράφετο παρὰ τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἐπαγγέλλοντα τὴν ἐμὴν αὐτοῦ μονήν); imperial summons to return to Constantinople after panegyric: Oration 1.74, referring to 348/9 (βασιλευίσις γράμμασιν). As will be shown in § IV, Libanius' first oration is no 'objective' account of the sophist's career. With regard to official documents, however, he could hardly tell blatant lies. Moreover, as R. Kaster, 'The salaries of Libanius', *Chiron* 13 (1983), 37–59 has shown, Libanius continued to enjoy an imperial salary for much of his career as a teacher, except for a brief period some time after his return to Antioch.

<sup>51</sup> For the traditional date of Oration 59 in 348/9, cf. G.R. Sievers, *Das Leben des Libanios* (Berlin, 1868), 56 n. 13 and R. Foerster, *Libanii Opera* (Leipzig, 1903–23), 201. Since the new dating of the Battle of Singara (cf. Portmann [n. 48]), it has been suggested that Oration 59 may date from 344/5, yet as P.-L. Malosse, 'Enquête sur la date du Discours 59 de Libanios', *AntTard* 9 (2001), 297–306 and (n. 48), 9–10 has demonstrated, the *terminus post quem* for Oration 59 is 346, which makes a date in 347/8 most likely.

did.<sup>52</sup> In addition, before adlecting Themistius to the senate, Constantius bestowed numerous gifts on Libanius (Lib. *Or.* 1.80). Libanius, then, seems to have been well on his way to becoming Constantius' preferred sophist. If in the end the job went to Themistius, this was not in the first place Constantius' decision but Libanius' own: when Libanius left Constantinople for Antioch, this was against the explicit and repeated wishes of the emperor.<sup>53</sup> It is noteworthy in this respect that Themistius' adlection to the senate in September 355 follows a year and a half of letters trying to bring Libanius back to Constantinople, and precedes by only a few months a letter in which Libanius writes that his friends have told him that the emperor has finally accepted his move to Antioch (*Ep.* 480 Foerster, early 356).<sup>54</sup>

Thus far, four conclusions can be drawn regarding the situation of Greek culture under the reign of Constantius. First, in order to build up the city of Constantinople, Constantius apparently thought it important to invite cultural figures: fortifying a city with walls, adorning her with buildings and crowding her with citizens may be important advantages, yet the crown goes to intellect and learning.<sup>55</sup> And indeed, Constantius had established a sophist from Cappadocia in the chair of rhetoric in Constantinople by the early 340s,<sup>56</sup> he repeatedly tried to keep Libanius in Constantinople throughout the decade and, after that failed, adlected Themistius to the city's senate. Second, Constantius was apparently happy to promote people who possessed a very traditional kind of cultural capital, in which Hellenic tradition went hand in hand with pagan beliefs: there is no sign, in the texts we have looked at, that Constantius would have given preference to cultured Christians over pagans such as Bemarchius, Libanius or Themistius.<sup>57</sup> On the contrary: as was shown by Peter Heather, 'Themistius' participation in a Christian-led regime carried something of a talismanic quality. For a whole series of Christian emperors, employing Themistius affirmed a commitment to continuity – vital for attracting elite support – in the midst of cultural transformation. As a philosopher, he was the guardian of traditional *paideia*. If he could speak in favour of a particular Christian emperor, and if that emperor was happy to favour him, this sent

<sup>52</sup> Lib. *Or.* 59: delivered between 344 and 349, acknowledgement for it in 349 at the latest; Them. *Or.* 1: delivered in 347 or 350, acknowledgement for it in 355.

<sup>53</sup> For Libanius' return to Antioch and imperial efforts to bring him back to Constantinople, cf. J. Wintjes, *Das Leben des Libanius*, Historische Studien der Universität Würzburg 2 (Rahden, 2005), 99–115. It is possible, in fact, that Constantius also implicitly criticizes Libanius when commending Themistius because 'he chooses the city of his own free will and is not forced to lie here because he has to, but would leave only if forced to do so' (*Letter to the Senate* 22b). For the criticism of Constantinopolitan senators implied in this commendation, cf. Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 113 n. 205.

<sup>54</sup> Whilst it is true that some forty-five letters precede Libanius' letter of congratulation to Themistius at the occasion of his adlection (*Ep.* 434 Foerster), Libanius may well have decided to start publishing his letters in books after his return to Antioch had been secured. The importance of Themistius' adlection in his own return to Antioch may be mirrored in the central position of the letter of congratulations in Book 5 (*Ep.* 390–493).

<sup>55</sup> For Constantinople as a city of culture, see also Henck (n. 4), 177–9.

<sup>56</sup> Lib. *Or.* 1.35, referring to 340/1, states that upon his arrival in Constantinople, a Cappadocian held a chair 'βασιλέως πέμποντος'. The verb πέμπω can refer either to the fact that the emperor sent him <a letter> to invite him to the chair, or to the fact that the emperor sent this man from Cappadocia <to Constantinople>, thus stressing Constantius' efforts in building up the new capital.

<sup>57</sup> It should be noted, however, that all three authors seem to have adapted their religious ideas in their orations for Constantius. For Themistius' accommodation of Christians as well as pagans in Oration 1, cf. n. 12 above. Libanius' Oration 59, on the other hand, was termed by Malosse (n. 48), 63 a monotheistic discourse. And of Bemarchius, Libanius states that 'although he personally was a worshipper of the gods, he spoke in praise of him who had set himself up against them, and discoursed at length upon the church Constantius had built for him' (*Or.* 1.39).

an important signal to Hellenic elites'.<sup>58</sup> Third, it should be noted that Constantius not only promotes Greek cultural figures but also takes an active part in Greek culture himself. *Paideia* is, in other words, not only held in honour by him, but also used for his own ends: by entering into dialogue with classical and contemporary Greek texts, the emperor adroitly furthers his own ends.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the actors involved clearly understood the game. Far from conveying the impression that Constantius' reign offered no possibilities for men of traditional culture and religion, the texts discussed show that an intense competition was going on, not only between different individuals striving for the most powerful places, but also between different kinds of cultural capital: Themistius poses as a philosopher and Constantius presents him as a teacher of philosophy, whilst Libanius presents himself as a sophist and a teacher of rhetoric.<sup>60</sup>

### III. JULIAN, *LETTER TO NILUS DIONYSIUS*

Given the success enjoyed by the philosopher Themistius under Constantius, and given Julian's own well-known interest in philosophy,<sup>61</sup> it is not hard to understand why people might think philosophy to be a good way of approaching the new emperor. A case in point was the Roman senator Nilus Dionysius. Some time in mid-361, after having been proclaimed Augustus by his troops in Paris against the will of Constantius II, Julian offered Nilus an office. Fearing the upcoming civil war between Julian and Constantius, Nilus refused. Julian then wrote the senator a brief letter in which he repeated the offer – a letter to which Nilus did not reply, thus again refusing to take up office under Julian. Soon afterwards, however, Constantius II died (November 3rd 361) and Julian became sole Emperor. As a result, the tables were reversed. Nilus hastened to court, probably in Constantinople in winter 361 or spring 362, yet Julian refused to receive Nilus in audience. Nilus therefore wrote Julian a letter, in which he apologized for his past reactions and suggested that he would accept if Julian summoned him again to take up public office. Julian replied to this with a letter of his own, and it is this letter that has been preserved (*Ep.* 50 Wright).<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Heather and Moncur (n. 7), 23–4. Themistius' moderate 'paganism' as an Aristotelian philosopher – maybe in deliberate opposition to some Neoplatonic philosophers who vehemently opposed the emperor's Christianity (cf. G. Fowden, 'The pagan holy man in late antique society', *JHS* 102 [1982], 33–59) – will have argued in his favour.

<sup>59</sup> One can of course argue that the letter was written by the *ab epistulis* (cf. F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC – AD 337)* [London, 1977], 91–4) rather than by the emperor himself. Be that as it may, what matters is that the letter was approved by the emperor and presented to the senate as a letter from Constantius.

<sup>60</sup> Julian also seems to have taken part in the battle for Constantius' cultural attention: as shown by S. Schorn, 'Legitimation und Sicherung von Herrschaft durch Kritik am Kaiser. Zum sogenannten zweiten Panegyrikos Julians auf Kaiser Constantius (Oratio 2 [3] Bidez)', in T. Baier and M. Amerise (edd.), *Die Legitimation von Einzelherrschaft im Kontext der Generationenthematik* (Berlin, 2008), 243–74, Julian, in Oratio 3, tried to present himself rather than Themistius as a good candidate to be Constantius' court philosopher. Themistius, conversely, seems to have tried to dissuade Julian from presenting himself as a philosopher. Cf. Stenger (n. 5), 136–51.

<sup>61</sup> See the differing assessments of Julian's philosophical qualities in P. Athanassiadi, *Julian and Hellenism: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford, 1981) and R. Smith, *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate* (London, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> For a long time, scholars dated Julian's *Letter to Nilus Dionysius* to New Year 362–3. Cf. R. Asmus, 'Julians Brief an Dionysios', *AGPh* 15 (1902), 425–41, at 432 n. 11; W.C. Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA and London, 1923), 157; and

To state that Julian's letter shows that the emperor was upset with Nilus would be an understatement. The fact that Nilus did not immediately choose Julian's side and accept his offer of an official position will not, of course, have disposed the emperor positively towards the Roman senator. Yet in itself this unhappy political choice can hardly account for Julian's furious letter: many others found themselves in the same situation and did not receive any invective.<sup>63</sup> As Ammianus tells us, the Roman senate as a whole rejected Julian's advances to them and openly supported Constantius.<sup>64</sup> It should also be pointed out that Julian, upon Nilus' initial refusal of his offer, first wrote what was clearly a friendly letter, whereas the letter we have was written only after Julian had received Nilus' letter.<sup>65</sup> Julian's letter, then, is in the first place an answer to Nilus' letter, rather than to his decision not to accept office.

As a result, Julian's arguments offer good insight into Nilus' letter as well. The picture that emerges is that Nilus, offended by Julian's refusal to receive him in audience, donned the robes of a philosopher in order to press Julian to summon him again to take up office. Julian's last quotation from Nilus' letter offers a good illustration:

οὐ γὰρ τοὺς ἐξ ἑτοίμου φῆς ἤκοντας οὐδὲ τοὺς ἐφεδρεύοντας ταῖς ἀρχαῖς, ἀλλὰ τοὺς βεβαία κρίσει χρωμένους καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ δέον αἰρουμένους, τούτους δεῖν ἀλλὰ <οὐ> τοὺς ἑτοίμως ὑπακούοντας αἰρεῖσθαι. καλὰς γε ἡμῖν ἐλπίδας ὑποφαίνεις οὐδὲν δεομένοις ὡς ὑπεῖξων, ἣν αὐθις <σε> καλωμένον ἐπὶ κοινωνίαν πραγμάτων.

(Julian, *Letter to Nilus Dionysius* 446B)

You tell me indeed that it is not those who arrive offhand or those who are hunting for public office whom we ought to choose, but those who use sound judgement and in accordance with this prefer to do their duty rather than those who are ready and eager to obey. Fair, truly, are the hopes you hold out to me though I made no appeal to you, implying that you will yield if I again summon you to take part in public business.

(tr. Wright [1923], 175)

Although Julian had not asked him for anything, Nilus had pointed out how one should (δεῖν) choose one's collaborators. The senator had thus taken an authoritative stance *vis-à-vis* the emperor. With a few misplaced words or unhappy comparisons here and there, it is not difficult to imagine why Julian may have been disgruntled. In order to justify his stance and avoid such an interpretation, Nilus had appealed to the tradition of the

M. Caltabiano, 'Il senatore romano Nilo e la paideia ellenica', in *Collectanea Philologica II in honorem Annae Mariae Komornicka* (Lodz, 1995), 41–51. More recently, however, H.-U. Wiemer, 'Das Missgeschick des Nilus. Zeit und Umstände von Julians offenem Brief gegen den römischen Senator Nilus Dionysius', *Klio* 78 (1996), 192–7 has convincingly shown September/October 362 to be the *terminus ante quem*.

<sup>63</sup> It is well known that Aurelius Victor, for example, was made consular governor of Pannonia Secunda by, and received a statue from, Julian in 361 notwithstanding his previous position under, and support for, Constantius. Cf. C.E.V. Nixon, 'Aurelius Victor and Julian', *CPh* 86 (1991), 113–25. On Victor's adoption by Julian, cf. Amm. Marc. 21.10.6; on his position under Constantius, cf. H.W. Bird, *Aurelius Victor. De Caesaribus* (Liverpool, 1994), viii and Henck (n. 4), 173.

<sup>64</sup> Amm. Marc. 21.10.7. A number of individual senators, on the other hand, chose the opposite course and accepted political office when Julian offered it to them: Ammianus (21.12.24–5) refers to Rufinus Vulcatus' nephew Maximus (made prefect of the city), Mamertinus (praetorian prefect of Illyricum made consul) and Nevitta (made consul).

<sup>65</sup> Julian himself explicitly points out that although Nilus, as a senator, disobeyed a command from his emperor, he chose not to punish him, although he would have had legal grounds for doing so. Instead, he wrote him a letter, hoping to convince him (446A). The punishment, i.e. the current letter, came only after Nilus' own letter.

free-speaking philosopher<sup>66</sup> giving advice to the king. Dio Chrysostom, as we have already seen, presented the acceptance of *παρρησία* as the mark of a good king, as opposed to the tyrant who would exile free-speaking philosophers. As is clear from Julian's letter, Nilus seems to have referred to his frankness in the face of Constans, from whose court he claimed to have been chased 'because he gave offence in the cause of truth' (*ὕπερ τῆς ἀληθείας φῆς προσκρούσας ἀπηλλάχθαι*, 445B). On the one hand, mentioning his past frankness served to underscore his long-standing philosophical credentials. On the other hand, mentioning Constans' bad reaction to his frankness may have been intended by Nilus as an apotropaic, negative example for Julian. Julian, however, is not impressed by Nilus' reference to this episode: since many base men were driven away by Constans, the emperor argues, Nilus' removal does not prove his dedication to truth. In addition, Julian points out that 'it does not happen to a virtuous and temperate man to go away obnoxious to those in power' (445B): Nilus was no true philosopher, as true philosophers are either cherished by good kings, or executed by bad ones.

Julian's reply, then, calls Nilus' bluff when presenting himself as a philosopher. Indeed, the emperor explicitly states that Nilus exhibits 'what Plato calls a twofold lack of knowledge': not only does he not have any knowledge, he also does not realize his own lack of knowledge. Plato and, by extension, philosophy, are thus turned against the would-be philosopher. Again, if Nilus boasted of his fearlessness (*ἀφοβία*, 444A) and great courage (*μέγα θάρσος*, 444A), Julian terms it lack of knowledge (*ἀμαθία*, 444B) and ignorance (*ἄγνοια*, 444B), and, at another point, 'excessive audacity, boldness, licence of tongue, ferocity of soul, madness of wits and perverse fury in every respect' (446A). Or again, Julian compares Nilus' so-called 'freedom of speech' to Thersites' (445B), and calls it not *παρρησία*, but *ἐμβροντησία*, suggesting uncontrolled noise with possibly devastating consequences. In all these passages, then, Julian demonstrates that Nilus is not the philosopher he pretends to be. This process of unmasking, of tearing down Nilus' philosophical self-presentation, is, in fact, the key to Julian's letter, as he himself indicates:

†... μή τι καὶ νομισθεῖς ἀνὴρ, οὐκ ἀνὴρ ὢν, καὶ παρρησίας μεστός, ἐμβροντησίας ὦν πλήρης, καὶ παιδείας μετεσχηκώς, οὐδὲ γὰρ λόγων ἀπάμενος, ὅσα γε εἰκός ἐστι ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς σου τεκμήρασθαι. τὸ γὰρ 'φροῦδος' οὐδεὶς εἶπε τῶν ἀρχαίων ἐπὶ τοῦ προφανοῦς, ὡσπερ σὺ νῦν, ἐπεὶ τὰς ἄλλας σου τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ἀμαρτίας οὐδεὶς ἂν ἐπεξελεῖν ἐν μακρῷ πάνυ βιβλίῳ δυνθεῖη.

(Julian, *Letter to Nilus Dionysius* 446A–B)

†...lest you should be thought to be a man, when you are not, or brimful of freedom of speech, when you merely flow over with uncontrolled noise, or that you have had the advantage of education when you have not the smallest acquaintance with literature, as far, at any rate, as one may reasonably judge from your letters. For instance, no one of the ancients ever used *φροῦδος* to mean 'manifest' as you do here, – for, as for the other blunders displayed in your letter, no one could describe them even in a long book.

(tr. Wright [1923], 175 modified)

In addition to freedom of speech, Julian – in a combination familiar from the second century<sup>67</sup> – here denies Nilus manliness and education. Nilus' effeminacy pops up at various other points in the text. At the beginning, for instance, Julian addresses Nilus

<sup>66</sup> Cf. also the references to sound judgement (*κρίσει*) and duty (*τὸ δέον*) in this passage.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, 1995), 82–158; Whitmarsh (n. 1), 109–16.



with a line from the comic poet Philemon, in which a woman (γύναι, 443D) is reproached for praising herself. At another point (446A), he adduces a Homeric verse that is addressed, in *Iliad* 5.428, by Zeus to Aphrodite, stating that Nilus is made not for the works of war, but for those of love. Although pretending to be a man, Nilus thus turns out to be effeminate. In addition, as Pierre-Louis Malosse has demonstrated, Nilus is implicitly and explicitly said to have prostituted himself.<sup>68</sup> As such, these comments about Nilus' gender become a proxy for his behaviour towards Julian: although pretending to be a philosopher he is, in fact, merely selling himself to Julian in return for an office. If he offended Julian, it was by expecting the same reaction from Julian as he got from previous emperors to whom he offered himself uninvited (443D) – as was the case with Constans who, at least initially, received Nilus in his camp. Julian's other denial in the passage quoted regards Nilus' education. In what surely is one of the most vivid scenes illustrating the value attached by the Second Sophistic to Atticism, Julian points out Nilus' lack of mastery of the (classical Attic) Greek language: he reproaches him with having used the word φροῦδος in a sense not attested in the classical canon.<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere in his letter, Julian also reproaches the senator for his lack of *literary* education. When bringing up literary references to widely read authors such as Plato, Babrius or even Homer, for example, Julian suggests that although Nilus may have heard of their texts, he may well not actually have read them or know them well enough. Lucian's satires of would-be intellectuals are not far removed from this.<sup>70</sup>

No matter, then, how great Julian's interests in Greek culture and philosophy were, his *Letter to Nilus Dionysius* serves as a clear warning to all (οὐ σοὶ μόνον ... πᾶσιν, 446B), as he himself explicitly states at the end of his letter, that not just any claim to philosophy or education will do in order to be embraced by the emperor.<sup>71</sup> Promotion because of one's cultural capital not only required a great mastery over the classical Greek language and literature and a persuasive self-presentation, it also required *Fingerspitzengefühl*, a feel for the game: no less than in the second century, one had to seize the opportunity (καιρός) to say the right thing to the right person in the right place and in the right way.

#### IV. LIBANIUS

A good illustration of the prestige and influence Greek culture could still wield in the fourth century is offered by Libanius. As stated in the introduction, Libanius is usually

<sup>68</sup> P.-L. Malosse, 'Rhétorique, philosophie et prostitution', in D. Auger and E. Wolff (edd.), *Culture classique et christianisme. Mélanges offerts à Jean Bouffartigue* (Paris, 2008), 57–70, 65–7.

<sup>69</sup> On the missed opportunity, in Nilus' letter, to highlight the writer's *paideia* through a correct use of the Attic language, see K. Luchner, 'Grund, Fundament, Mauerwerk, Dach? Julian's φιλοσοφία im Netzwerk seiner Briefe', in C. Schäfer (ed.), *Kaiser Julian 'Apostata' und die philosophische Reaktion gegen das Christentum* (Berlin and New York, 2008), 221–52, at 242–3. For the importance of Atticism in the Second Sophistic, see W. Schmid, *Der Atticismus in seinem Hauptvertretern von Dionysius von Halikarnass bis auf den zweiten Philostratus* (Stuttgart, 1887–97); Swain (n. 1), 43–64; Schmitz (n. 1), 67–96; Whitmarsh (n. 1), 6–7 and T. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*, New Surveys in the Classics 35 (Oxford, 2005), 41–7.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Lucianic texts such as *Against the Ignorant Book Collector*, *Nigrinus* or *Philosophies for Sale*. Likewise, Dio Chrysostom, in his fourth Kingship Oration, states that having read many books in itself does not make one a *pepaideumenos*, let alone a good man (§ 30). For a discussion of such would-be *pepaideumenoi*, see Schmitz (n. 1), 146–56.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. also Malosse (n. 68).

adduced as an example of a person who was promoted by Julian because of his Hellenic culture in a world where this was fast losing importance. As we shall see, it is not difficult to find passages in Libanius' works that seem, at least at first sight, to confirm this impression. In reality, however, things were much less straightforward. In order to demonstrate this, I briefly discuss the context of Oration 14 in general, and then look in some more detail at a few paragraphs of Libanius' *Autobiography*.

Libanius and Julian in all probability first met whilst Libanius was teaching and Julian studying in Nicomedia in the 340s.<sup>72</sup> Notwithstanding a letter that suggests 'cordial relations'<sup>73</sup> between the two men in the 350s, however, Libanius seems to have been nothing more than one amongst many cultural figures known to Julian. During and after the civil war, he was not amongst those who either hastened to, or were summoned by, the new Augustus.<sup>74</sup> Even when Julian came to Antioch in July 362, Libanius did not immediately enjoy an influential position. In fact, his first speech to the emperor, Oration 13, whatever its pretensions, was delivered not upon the official arrival of the emperor in the city, but after it. In addition, Hans-Ulrich Wiemer has shown that this speech, in which Libanius suggested that Julian adopt him as his court orator, was not successful.<sup>75</sup> The next speech Libanius delivered for Julian, Oration 14, on the other hand, was very successful: in September/October 362, Libanius asked and got a lucrative job for his friend Aristophanes of Corinth, who had been accused of treason as well as of corruption under Constantius. Julian's reaction to Oration 14 came to Libanius in the form of a highly enthusiastic letter, in which the emperor announces Aristophanes' acquittal, praises Libanius' speech and invites the orator to come and discuss what job would be best given to Aristophanes (Julian. *Ep.* 53). What, then, accounts for Libanius' sudden success?

One explanation is that Julian was extremely pleased by Oration 14 itself, which is indeed not only carefully constructed in accordance with the rules of the art, but which also brims with allusions to the emperor's programme of cultural revival and presents Aristophanes as a defender of that cultural programme.<sup>76</sup> As the text makes clear, however, Libanius was sure of his success even before he first sent the speech to Julian.<sup>77</sup> How, then, if not (only) through Oration 14, did the change in Julian's attitude towards Libanius come about between July and September/October 362? Two elements seem to have played a role. First, Libanius himself had definitely prepared well for Aristophanes' case: before sending his oration to the emperor, he lobbied for him by

<sup>72</sup> The best surveys of Libanius' relations with, and orations for, Julian are R. Scholl, *Historische Beiträge zu den Julianischen Reden des Libanios* (Stuttgart, 1994) and Wiemer (n. 4), on whom I rely heavily in this paragraph.

<sup>73</sup> S. Bradbury, *Selected Letters of Libanius from the Age of Constantius and Julian*, Translated Texts for Historians 41 (Liverpool, 2004), 52. For the identity of the addressee, see Wiemer (n. 62).

<sup>74</sup> For Libanius and Julian before Julian's arrival in Antioch: Wiemer (n. 4), 13–47, discussing the initial lack of contact after Julian came to power on pp. 35–47 and the situation of other cultural figures at the same time on pp. 32–5.

<sup>75</sup> Date of delivery: *Ep.* 736 Foerster; no success: Wiemer (n. 4), 43 and 77–123.

<sup>76</sup> For the structure of the speech according to the guidelines of the συμβουλευτικός λόγος, as well as for a survey of its contents, see Wiemer (n. 4), 125–7 and 135–41. Focussing on Libanius' comments on Aristophanes' paganism, Wiemer comes to the conclusion (p. 146) that religious affiliation was Julian's top priority when taking decisions. Although valuable in itself, this analysis seems to put rather too much weight on religion to the neglect of Greek culture more generally as well as extra-textual elements influencing Julian's reaction.

<sup>77</sup> *Pace* Stenger (n. 5), 291–2. The speech was not delivered, but sent to Julian in written form. Cf. Lib. *Ep.* 760 Foerster and Julian. *Ep.* 96 and 97.

writing letters to a range of courtiers, to whose support for Aristophanes he refers in his speech. He used, in other words, his network at court. Nevertheless, one could never be sure about a letter's reception, as is clear from a letter in which Libanius tells Julian how Aristophanes feared that he would undergo Nilus' fate.<sup>78</sup> The second element that contributed to Libanius' growing influence at court has to do less with the orator than with the emperor. During his stay in Antioch Julian, from August 362 onwards, fell out with Antioch and its city council. As a result, he could well use a local spokesman.<sup>79</sup> Eloquent, sharing several of his ideas and hailing from a curial family, Libanius obviously made for an excellent candidate. Whilst Julian may therefore have started to invite Libanius to court from some time in August onwards, his endorsement of Libanius was openly sealed with his enthusiastic letter following Oration 14. As Themistius had probably done with Constantius' *Demegoria*, Libanius decided to append this letter of Julian to his speech.<sup>80</sup>

If, then, Julian's political needs and Libanius' curial background played a major role in his adoption by the emperor, Libanius himself in his *Autobiography* ascribes his rise and position under Julian exclusively to his oratorical talents. Indeed, in the paragraphs of his *Autobiography* that deal with Julian's stay in Antioch, Libanius presents the emperor as highly desirous of his oratory from the very outset: according to Libanius, Julian says that hearing Libanius is the main advantage of travelling to Antioch, he asks him during the *adventus* ceremony when he will hear him declaim and he soon issues a series of letters and invitations. The latter offer a striking contrast with Nilus. According to Libanius' *Autobiography*, Julian sent him a letter when he did not turn up when the emperor sacrificed in public, as opposed to a throng of other people, designated by Libanius as flatterers. The tone of Julian's letter, Libanius says, was one of gentle reproof (μετὰ χαρίτων καθήπτετο, Oration 1.122). As such, then, it may have been comparable to the initial, brief letter sent by Julian to Nilus after the latter first refused his offer of an office. The sequence, however, is very different. Like Nilus eventually, Libanius sent a letter to Julian in reply: Libanius reproved Julian as much as Julian had reproved him. Yet, as opposed to Nilus, he did so with equal charm (καὶ αὐτὸς σὺν χάρισιν, Oration 1.122) and thereby managed to make Julian blush rather than make him angry. Later, the emperor therefore asks him over for lunch. Libanius answers that he does not go out for lunch, only for dinner. The emperor therefore asks him for dinner, yet Libanius has the guts to say that he will not come because of a headache. When the emperor therefore tells him to visit him often, Libanius pictures himself as replying that he will do so *if invited*. Whilst the emperor considered Nilus' suggestion that he issue another invitation an abuse, Libanius comments that the emperor consented and did as he asked. Libanius thus appears as the genius who manages to outwit the emperor.

<sup>78</sup> Lib. *Ep.* 758 Foerster = 95 Norman. As Libanius recounts it in his letter, the anecdote is clearly intended to be amusing. It should be taken into account, however, that the letter was written in reaction to, and thus after, the enthusiastic letter in which Julian expressed approval of Libanius' oration (Julian. *Ep.* 53 Wright). While at this point in time Libanius could join in the courtiers' laughter, it is much less certain that he would not have been concerned before receiving the emperor's approval, given the serious fate that had recently befallen Nilus, as well as his own earlier lack of success in convincing Julian.

<sup>79</sup> For Libanius as a helpful voice in the 362/3 Antiochene crisis, see L. Van Hoof and P. Van Nuffelen, 'Monarchy and mass communication. Antioch A.D. 362/3 revisited', *JRS* 101 (2011), 166–84, at 178–84.

<sup>80</sup> Lib. *Ep.* 758 Foerster = 95.4 Norman.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the *Autobiography* was written by Libanius more than ten years after the events, in the knowledge of his spectacular rise under Julian. If we compare it to the historical facts about the relationship between Libanius and Julian as described above, the sophist's presentation of his relationship with the emperor is much more positive than what actually happened.<sup>81</sup> Libanius himself betrays this discrepancy when stating that the only reason why it seemed to people – although, he hastens to add, not to himself – that he was quite out of favour with the emperor, was a jealous courtier who prevented Libanius and Julian from becoming intimate (Oration 1.123). In addition, Libanius' *Autobiography* suggests a rather one-way desire: it is Julian who courts Libanius, whilst Libanius' own efforts to gain Julian's attention, for example through the delivery of Oration 13, are passed over in silence. If, then, the *Autobiography* seems, at first sight, to confirm the traditional image of Julian as a highly cultured emperor who adopts people such as Libanius as his advisors because of their cultural achievements, this is not so much an objective description of reality, as a carefully constructed image. Composed with hindsight, the *Autobiography* conceals fears and failures in order to promote its author as a disinterested oratorical genius. Context, in other words, greatly matters.

## CONCLUSION

The texts discussed in this paper all show the vitality of traditional Greek culture in the fourth century, and that in two senses. First, Greek culture, far from being moribund or severely menaced by new trends such as Christianity, legal studies or shorthand, was fully alive: even a Christian emperor such as Constantius, often depicted as a strong promoter of advocates and shorthand writers, attached great importance to traditional Greek culture when designing the capital and empire of the future. Moreover, far from being confined to the classroom, as several recent studies seem to suggest,<sup>82</sup> Greek culture also appears from these texts as very much present in society: shared by 'pagans' and Christians, professionals and amateurs alike, oratory, philosophy and literature could be and were in fact used in order to attract attention, be assigned political office, promote one's friends or, conversely, to block someone's ascent in society. In order to be successful, however, orators, philosophers and writers needed to realize the vitality of Greek culture in the second sense: Greek culture was not a fossilized set of ready-made topoi, but needed to be performed successfully. In addition to knowing one's classics, one also had to be able to play with them and adapt them flexibly to ever-changing circumstances: mere reference to, or unsuccessful manipulation of, the classics could be as detrimental for one's reputation and position as it had been in the second century. Greek culture, then, could be an instrument for social promotion, yet in order to cash in one's cultural capital for political capital, one had to master it perfectly, handle it carefully and try and create optimal circumstances.

It will be clear that the image of late antique Greek culture sketched here differs substantially from the traditional interpretations presented in the introduction, which focus

<sup>81</sup> For a detailed analysis of Libanius' *Autobiography* as a narrative text constructing Libanius' past and identity, see L. Van Hoof, 'Libanius' *Life* and life. A narratological analysis of Libanius' *Autobiography*', forthcoming in L. Van Hoof (ed.), *Libanius: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>82</sup> e.g. Criboire (n. 3); Malosse and Schouler (n. 3), 179.

on the question of whether or not certain emperors are favourably disposed towards Greek culture, and whether or not certain authors present these emperors' cultural achievements truthfully. Irrespective of the answers given to these questions, those traditional views are rooted in the paradigm of continuity versus change, often with a clear preference for the latter due to the adoption of an equally dichotomous religious perspective ('pagans' versus Christians). Recent research on late antiquity, however, is distancing itself both from the dominant focus on religion and from the discourse of change, as these dichotomies have been shown to be too simplistic to account for the variety of voices and trends in the fourth century, which can be explained much better in terms of transformation and adaptation. Clear either/or divisions have thus made way for more complex and dynamic explorations of how traditional elements were adapted to ever-changing circumstances.<sup>83</sup>

Drawing inspiration from these new approaches to late antiquity, this article has demonstrated that the social position of Greek culture under the reigns of Constantius and Julian was rather more complex than has often been suggested. Constantius, as we have seen, not only allocated an important role to men of culture when building up his new capital, but also managed to play along with the game and manipulate Greek culture to suit his own ends. In the case of Julian, we have seen that whilst a text such as Libanius' *Autobiography* seems to confirm the image of an emperor willing to endorse men of culture at almost any cost, allowing them to determine the terms of their interaction with him, this is not an innocent description of historical reality but a rhetorical strategy designed to present its author in the best possible light. Other texts make clear, moreover, that Julian was not willing to promote just anybody with literary or philosophical pretensions: Nilus was straightforwardly rejected and even Libanius' fate seems to have depended on much more than just rhetorical ability. Thus both Constantius and Julian engaged with Greek culture but neither of them was willing to promote it unconditionally: traditional structures and topoi could still be used, but a successful performance required not only a credible self-presentation and desirable assets, but also adaptation to new values and to changing political circumstances.

As will be clear from this, adaptation and transformation imply both continuity and change. If the case studies presented in this article convey the impression of stressing continuity, this is not to be seen as a negation of change: in no way would I like to suggest that the implementation or position of Greek culture did not change at all in the fourth century, or that the traditional image of its situation in late antiquity is entirely wrong. But in reaction to the traditional view that has tended to highlight change, the case studies selected for this article show that this is not the only perspective possible. The real point, then, is that the debate cannot be framed in simple terms of either continuity or change: as this article has shown, a contextualized rhetorical analysis of individual texts is needed in order to understand the complex uses to which Greek culture was put in fourth-century society. Only through such analyses will we be able to come to a full understanding of the dynamics of late antique Greek culture as well as the role and place of *paideia* in late antique society.

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

LIEVE VAN HOOF  
 lieve.vanhoof@arts.kuleuven.be

<sup>83</sup> e.g. A.P. Johnson, 'Hellenism and its discontents in Late Antiquity', in S.F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2012), 433–66 on Hellenism as a toolbox.