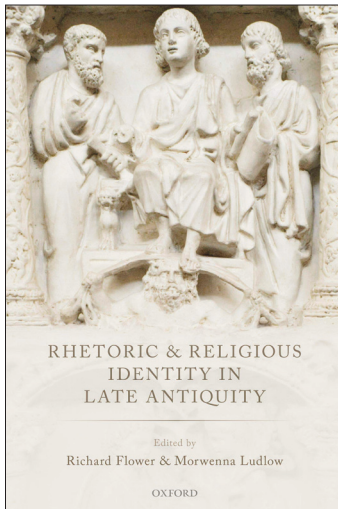


RHETORIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY



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RHETORIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY PRESENTS a collection of essays that seeks a deeper understanding of the reciprocal formation of rhetoric and identity in “the long 4th century”, from the period of the Tetrarchy to the Theodosians, except for one contribution, within the Roman Empire. Its goal is to “enrich our understanding of the expression of late anti-antique religious identity” and to explore ways in which “religious identity was ascribed, constructed, and contested” to furnish

“a new perspective on rhetoric in late antiquity” (p. 3). It builds on earlier studies that have crossed disciplinary boundaries dividing areas such as classics, philosophy, patristics, and medieval history to explore the dynamics, malleability, and overlapping forms of religious identity in antiquity. To investigate these dynamics, it seeks to move beyond a general discussion of the role of rhetoric in representation of religious identity to consider “*how* that rhetoric worked, *who* used it, and in *what forms*” (p. 2) it did so. These questions are especially important because alongside their dynamic aspects, identities are often crafted in contested, indeed hostile, situations. To capture these dynamic aspects, the essays necessarily deploy broad understandings of both identity and rhetoric, which is both a strength and weakness of the collection. It is a strength because it points to the fluidity of such phenomena, and it is a weakness because it is not always clear what different authors mean when they refer to them. The best essays are those that keep the thematic firmly in view, written with introductions that set the agenda and conclusions that discuss the results.

The editors have grouped the contributions into three parts corresponding respectively to issues of the way rhetoric functioned, who deployed it, and what forms it took. Part One, “The Nature of Religious Identities and their Representations”, consists of three contributions each of which examines categories of identity in scholarly debate and the uses of terms in historical analysis. The first by Éric Rebillard, “Approaching ‘Religious Identity’ in late Antiquity”, reprises earlier arguments dedicated to the issue of the dynamic qualities of Christian religious identity in antiquity and then considers Ausonius as a case study. Rebillard draws on the modern identity theory of Rogers Brubaker to consider the ways in which identity salience and groupness (the conditions of a membership set of role, group, and person) become determinative in different situations. Brubaker developed his theory of groupness in opposition to the idea of groupism – namely the assignment of identities to static collectives. As identity when considered under the aspect of groupness is never singular and always multiple, it is inaccurate as scholars often do to engage in “groupism” by describing Ausonius’ identity as semi-Christian or other indices that focus on religion as a sole classificatory principle. Ausonius is an example of a person who had several identities, one of which was Christian. The essay could have been expanded to illustrate ways in which differing identities come to the fore in differing situations and specifically how rhetoric functioned to serve in the construction of various identities. In “The Rhetoric of Pagan Religious Identities. Porphyry and his First Readers”, Aaron P. Johnson offers a subtle and incisive chapter that complements Rebillard’s formulation of groupness in the Latin West by referring to the “polythetic” aspects of identity in a case study of Greek religion in the East, specifically that of Porphyry and his earliest readers, Iamblichus, and Eusebius of Caesarea. Johnson examines their

use of the term “Hellene” as a designation embedded in several categories such as culture, philosophy, race, and nation. The term should not be used as a synonym for “pagan”, but rather functioned rhetorically to embed religion within larger identity constellations. Johnson alerts us to the fact that Eusebius in cross-examining Porphyry never uses the term “polytheism” as a noun, but always adjectively as a form of rhetorical disparagement, even as he deploys *Judaismos* rhetorically: “Indebted as they are to earlier ways of framing religious difference within and between peoples, the *-ismos* labels are used as a rhetorically effective means of signifying inadequacies of the two rivals of Christianity, at least as long as Eusebius’s construction of those ethnic identities remains in play in the reader’s historiographical, national, and religious imagination” (p. 38). Nevertheless, these authors *do* use terms that subordinate other identity indices such as ethnicity, while not erasing them: *theosophia* (Porphyry and Eusebius though used in different ways) and *theourgos* (Iamblichus). *Goēteia* by contrast was used in ways not marked by such larger categories. Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Eusebius did not have a notion of “religion” distinct from ethnic or national identities, but they did “mark an identification of religion and/as philosophy in such a way that doctrine becomes essential”. Douglas Boin in “The Maccabees, ‘Apostasy’, and Julian’s Appropriation of *Hellenismos* as a Reclaimed Epithet in Christian Conversations of the Fourth Century CE”, takes up another dimension of the term *Hellenismos* in use in the middle of the 4th century to move Julian from the domain of both ancient and modern Christian caricature. Specifically, rather than seeing Julian as “the last pagan” or an “apostate”, he examines his support for “*Hellenismos*” as an act of retrieval: “I suggest that Julian appropriated a term which had negative, in-group connotations to give it a positive, in-group spin” (p. 52). Julian could be considered an “apostate” by “uncompromising Christians” (Gregory of Nazianzus named him as such); Boin advances the thesis that the emperor was “building a broad collation to ensure toleration of all of Rome’s worship practices” (p. 53) and that treating him either an apostate or a convert to paganism occludes what Julian was trying to achieve. More delightfully, Boin, using modern theories of linguistic reclamation, argues that Julian championed the term *Hellenismos* that had by the mid 4th century become in Christian usage a slur (“acting too Greek”) as a way of creating an in-group identity (much as the term “gay” has been reframed). Julian deployed *Hellenismos* as a way of subverting the powerful narrative of “the rise” or “triumph” of Christianity (words that continue to grace modern studies of the period) and the story that the church was supplanting traditional cults. The emperor’s reclamation of *Hellenismos* was intended in part as an appeal for a way of imagining a society not torn apart by a zero-sum religious mentality; by championing “acting too Greek” he was in effect pillorying those who were practicing an intolerant Christianity: “In this interpretation,

the Roman World was *not* engaged in an empire-wide ecumenical dialogue about the universal appeal of different theological views or religious systems. It was being torn asunder by the fact that the Christian community could not agree on what it meant to be a ‘Christian’” (p. 63). Julian sought compromise; those who called him an apostate pursued a more militant vision.

The essays of Part Two entitled “Agents of the Representation of Religious Identity” tackle the question of “who is responsible for representations of religious identity in the fourth century” (p. 3). The essayists consider Julian (Shaun Tougher), Augustine (Susanna Elm), Libanius, John Chrysostom and Augustine (Rafaella Criboire), the Manichaean Kephalaia (Nicholas Baker-Brian), and a host of authors who used the term *magic* as a rhetorical slur (Maijastina Kahlos). Tougher’s “Julian the Apologist. Christians and Pagans on the Mother of the Gods”, sits alongside Boin’s discussion of Julian’s engagement with Christians and takes up the emperor’s apologetic treatise *To the Mother of the Gods* and the polemical discourses of Arnobius of Sicca and Firmicus Maternus, treatises that were written by authors roughly contemporary with each other. Yet whereas Boin asks us to interrogate language of the “conversion” of Julian to paganism, Tougher argues that the emperor’s discourse to the mother of the gods “situates him as a convert to paganism” and that he has “an anti-Christian agenda (p. 81). Tougher would have benefited from Boin’s litigation of terms when he writes, for example, that Julian “is responding to Christian attacks, and drawing on his own experiences and understanding as a Christian” (p. 82). He is right to attend to “the need for Julian to be seen firmly within the context of his own times and in relation to contemporary Christian culture” (p. 82). But the essay suffers from a treatment of terms such as “times” and “culture” as monoliths. So, he can say, “Christians were keen to attack this pagan touchstone of empire, to replace the Great Mother with Christ, whilst for the pagan convert Julian, she was a central part of his programme of religious restoration and restoration of the Empire” (p. 82). Tougher states that for both Christians and pagans “in rhetorical construction of religious identity (...) the mother of the Gods had a critical role” (p. 82), but then takes identities as static realities rather than treating them as dynamically constructed realities in the ways that the essays of Part One invite historians to do. Elm’s rambling “Bodies, Books, Histories. Augustine of Hippo and the Extraordinary *civ Dei* 16.8 and Plin, *HN* 7”, without introduction or conclusions, shoots wide of the mark of the collection’s purported aims to consider the mutual influence of rhetoric and religious identity. The closest the essay comes to the theme is a comparative discussion of extraordinary human bodies by Augustine and Pliny, but without any reference to rhetoric and religious identity. With “Classical Decadence of Christian Aesthetics? Libanius, John Chrysostom, and Augustine on Rhetoric”, Criboire stays

on point and embraces the attention to the dynamics of identity the opening essays champion when she writes of “pagan and Christian relations”, that the two groups “were not written in stone, were not bounded and enduring, but were in continuous evolution. Christian and pagan allegiances were defined not only by practices and convictions but also by social relations” (p. 100). She contrasts the different orientations of Libanius and Chrysostom on the one side and Augustine on the other to rhetorical training. Whereas Chrysostom learned from his teacher Libanius of the importance of traditional and lengthy training as requisites for persuasive speech and applied them to his sermons, Augustine was less convinced of the value of this kind of training for the rank-and-file preachers he engaged with and saw the need for accessibility of rhetorical modes of communication. Criboire’s observations would have been more focussed and serviced the aims of the collection better had she related them to the issue of rhetoric in fashioning the religious identity not only of preachers but also of listeners and how rhetoric might have helped to promote a particular kind of salience amidst the continuous evolution of pagans and Christians she rightly identifies. Baker-Brian’s brief “‘Very Great Are Your Words’. Dialogue as Rhetoric in Manichaean Kephalaia”, begins by promising a discussion of the rhetorical form of a dialogue in the construction of religious identity”. “This chapter argues that Manichaean kephalic material was instrumental in augmenting core aspects of the identity of the religion – as a cumulative, and universalistic faith – by portraying Mani as a forensic figure whose explanations for the origin and workings of the universe trumped all others” (p. 115), but gets somewhat lost in the weeds of redaction and manuscript history – undoubtedly critical to an assessment of the text, but not germane to the volume’s focus. The issue of Mani as creator of religious identity and practitioner of rhetoric finds thoughtful exposition in Baker-Brian’s analysis of Mani engaging in a dialogical form of teaching or as a master teacher who vanquishes opponents through demonstration of superior Manichaean wisdom and its relation to the elite culture of the Sasanian court of 3rd-cent. Iran. The second part concludes with the equally short but incisive “‘A Christian Cannot Employ Magic’. Rhetorical Self-Fashioning on the Magicless Christianity of Late Antiquity” by Kahlos. The argument focuses on “the use of rhetoric in building and reinforcing Christian identity in which magic had no part to play. The image of magicless Christianity was enhanced in many contexts – apologetic, treatises, tractates, sermons, and especially hagiography” (p. 130). Treating magic as “social discourse and discourse of alterity” (p. 130) helps Kahlos explore “how Christian writers and church leaders in their rhetoric also defined the relationship between beliefs and practices they accepted and those they condemned” (pp. 130-131). Yet while figures such as Augustine, Origen, and John Chrysostom championed a magicless Christianity, predictably everyday people saw

no contradiction with mixing and matching their beliefs with practices condemned as magic. Here the examination could have been strengthened with consideration of daily practices that constituted shifting identities in differing situations and their relations to freelance ritual experts. Kahlos helpfully considers how one person's holy person was another's sorcerer and the ways theologians tried to distinguish the two. Accordingly, rather than speaking of those who used magic and who did not, she helpfully refers to "rituals and ritual experts" to show how authority determined what was proper religion and what made for magic. Whether people were involved in religion is of secondary importance to "the issue of analysing rhetoric and self-image" (p. 142).

The third part, "Modes of Representation", comprised of six essays, focuses on the "how" of religious identity expression. These essays are central to the scope of the volume since it seeks to extend debate concerning religious identity to a variety of forms that include law codes and funerary art. "The Rhetorical Construction of a Christian Empire in the *Theodosian Code*" by Mark Humphries examines the legislation to observe "how the code represents a specifically mid-fifth-century perspective on recent imperial history" and the way they "produced a specifically Theodosian vision of a Christian empire" (p. 148), especially in Book 16, where "Theodosian" means any law issued between 379 and 438 CE. The essay repays rereading for Humphries' elucidation of the kind of religious and imperial vision of the past and present the Code promotes. Peter van Nuffelen examines a different formulation of the rhetorical construction of imperial past and present in "What Happened after Eusebius. Chronicles and Narrative Identities in the Fourth Century". He considers three case studies of Greek chronicles drawn from the large set of *chronica* composed in the period from after Eusebius (325 CE) and until Annianus (412 CE). Whereas there has been a tendency to interpret them in the light of the Arian controversy, van Nuffelen notes the noticeable lack of concern with doctrine. They are rather concerned to construct anti-pagan histories and to naturalize Christian belief and practice by aligning it with a history that begins with creation and with rituals in harmony with the solar calendar. Co-editor Richard Flower's "The Rhetoric of Heresiological Prefaces" considers Epiphanius's prefaces to the *Panarion*, Filastrius of Brescia's *Diuerarum hereseon liber*, and Augustine of Hippo's *De haeresibus* and their uses of "techniques that were widespread in ancient technical literature to guide their audiences to accepting a particular version of reality" (p. 182). Thus, rather than seeing the works as repositories for reconstructing the errors of heretics, Flower examines the way the prefaces draw on earlier literary conventions rhetorically to craft authorial identities burdened by the circumstances of error around them to address the many heresies that oppose right doctrine. The prefaces "each represent individual engagements with

both the rhetorical norms of ancient technical writing and the distinct concerns of Christian heresiological controversy, allowing their authors to craft religious identities for themselves as expert defenders of orthodoxy against its many enemies” (p. 197). The essay nicely examines authorial identity and appropriations of rhetorical conventions in framing these anti-heretical treatises. In a richly illustrated chapter, Robin M. Jensen turns to visual persuasion through an examination of funerary art in “Constructing Identity in the Tomb. The Visual Rhetoric of Early Christian Iconography”. With characteristic clarity and thoroughness, Jensen surveys the evidence to conclude that in contrast to earlier pagan sarcophagi with mythological iconographical schemes, Christians deployed a set of images “arguably as a compilation of proof texts” to “rehearse the story of salvation as a kind of visual catechism” (p. 217). In doing so they offered a “new kind of visual rhetoric. Perhaps they could be described as the catechism at a glance” (p. 218) and presented “a particularly Christian mode of viewing and a Christian type of *paideia*” (p. 218). “Renunciation and Ascetic Identity in the *Liber ad Renatum* of Asterius Ansedunensis” is the focus in a very brief essay by Hajnalka Tamas who explores Asterius’ theological-anthropological views and his exegetical strategies to defend ascetical renunciation of the world and complete withdrawal from society. By conferring ascetical meaning to passages and stories from scripture and translating their terms with ascetical vocabulary, Asterius “established a theological-anthropological programme that excluded any form of asceticism other than solitary asceticism, understood as renunciation of one’s relation to the world and the others” (p. 230). The question of how this relates to *rhetoric*, however, remains unstated and the essay rather devolves into a discussion of the ways in which Asterius’ conceptualization of asceticism overlapped with and differed from Jerome. The concluding essay by co-editor Morwenna Ludlow, “Christian Literary Identity and Rhetoric about Style”, examines the Cappadocians and their observations about rhetorical style in Scripture to litigate and deconstruct a common perception that they championed plain speech over against the elaborate rhetoric of Hellenism. The essay identifies “three ‘moods’ or ‘sensibilities’ evoked by texts, identified by three families of literary-critical terms” (pp. 233-235) – *i.e.*, “slender”, “pleasant”, and “majestic of sublime”. Rather than reading the two Gregory’s and Basil as siding for the “slender” over against the others, she rather argues that they championed all three but rejected styles of rhetoric that were inappropriately deployed. Moreover, they detected in the Bible the three styles of plain, majestic/sublime, and pleasant speech correctly deployed according to the mood a given passage was seeking to evoke. “For the Cappadocians (...) there is little evidence that they thought there was a clear distinction between an ‘elaborate’ discourse of the classical greats and a ‘plain

and simple' biblical discourse. In whatever they read, they identified the mood and judged whether appropriate means had been used to evoke it" (p. 249).

The strongest essays of this collection are those that work with a clear set of definitions and methods. Part One is by far the most useful section of the book and will repay the attention of readers since issues of identity and rhetoric are at the forefront. The essays that stay on theme and are organized in a way to take up the focus of the book's title are very good. Other essays only implicitly consider the way "religious identity was ascribed, constructed, and contested" and so indirectly offer "a new perspective on rhetoric in late antiquity" (p. 3); the reader is left to draw their own conclusions about this. In these essays it is not clear what "rhetoric" means: is it a form of discourse, a style, a way of talking about a socio-theological orientation? Further, the topic of identity is best serviced by those discussions that expressly refer to issues of the social construction of self and community and their fluidity.