New Perspectives on Late Antiquity
in the Eastern Roman Empire
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1. Introduction

Simon Swain once admitted that “understanding the social and political function of Greek rhetoric in the fourth century is not as easy as it might seem”\(^1\). According to Swain, rhetors of what is sometimes called the Third Sophistic (a controversial term\(^2\), not used by him) might have been looking back towards the literary tradition of the Second Sophistic, but they were operating in a world that had changed profoundly, a society that was becoming increasingly stratified, and thus commanded a heightened use of the rhetoric of praise: of description, encomium, and panegyric\(^3\). Himerios’ *Oratio* 41 is just such an example of the epideictic, encomiastic mode in oratory, so typical of the fourth century: it is, formally, a speech of arrival, an ἐπιβατήριος λόγος, delivered by Himerios in Constantinople during Julian’s stay there from December 361 until June 362\(^4\). The oration, in fact, has a double encomiastic function, in that it aims to praise both the city and the emperor Julian, who had summoned Himerios to his court.

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2 The term “Third Sophistic” was coined by Pernot 1993, 14, n. 9 – repeated also in *idem*. 2000, 271-2. In his most recent contribution on the topic, Pernot argues for continuity and similarity between the Second and Third Sophistic – see *idem*. 2006-2007. For recent discussions on the usefulness of this term see Quiroga 2007, and (more critically) van Hoof 2010.
4 For the importance of this oration in establishing some datable events in Himerios’ life see Barnes 1987, 207-9. On whether Julian himself was present or not when Himerios delivered his speech see Penella 2007, 35.
Who was Himerios and why was he invited to join Julian in Constantinople? Himerios, like Julian, was a pagan, and, as he says at the beginning of this oration, he had been recently initiated in the rites of Mithras, which Julian himself had established in Constantinople⁵; so, his religious inclinations must have been at least one factor in Julian’s approval of him. Apart from that, Himerios was a distinguished orator and teacher of rhetoric in fourth-century Athens, where he had gone to study as a young man, leaving his hometown, Bithynian Prusias. Alongside Libanios (in Antioch) and Themistios (in Constantinople), Himerios is one of the most important sophists of his time and a prominent figure in the revival of rhetoric in the fourth century. But, whereas Libanios and Themistios are increasingly becoming the focus of serious study⁶, Himerios does not seem to share their fortune. There are many possible explanations for this. One is the fragmentary state of part of his work (although a significant number of orations survive in full). Another is that modern criticism, following in the footsteps of ancient critics, tends to see Themistios and Libanios as “Atticists” (proponents of the simple, serious, and “manly” style)⁷, while Himerios can be assigned to the Asiatic trend, which, in ancient as well as modern times, has been associated with the degeneration of classical style and tradition. Himerios’ use of poetic diction and rhythm, word-play, pathos, and flamboyant metaphor led Eduard Norden to characterise his work as “Poesie in scheinbarer Prosa” (poetry in what only seems to be prose)⁸. In his recent reappraisal of Norden’s judgement, Völker has reinstated, with some added nuance, Himerios’ “starke Betonung des Poetischen”⁹, albeit noting briefly that

⁵ See Or. 41.1, with Penella’s note ad loc. (2007, 59, n. 64).
⁶ For just two examples see Vanderspoel 1995 on Themistios, and Cribiore 2007 and ead. 2013 on Libanios.
⁷ Libanios was even criticised by Eunapios (who wrote his Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists in 396) for his excessive Atticism. Swain 2004, 378, quotes the passage in question (Eunapios, Vitae phil. et soph. 496).
⁹ Völker 2006, 609.
influence from poetry is common in many Greek rhetors at least since the Second Sophistic.10

The objective of this article is precisely to examine the possibility that the gap between the Second Sophistic and later Greek rhetoric was not as great as it is sometimes assumed. Lieve van Hoof has recently called for abandoning the term “Third Sophistic” and looking at these Late Antique works “through the lens of the Second Sophistic”11. My argument is that at least some of the methodologies now frequently employed for the exploration of issues of culture and identity in the Second Sophistic can usefully be applied to the highly poetic speeches of Himeros as well: his Oratio 41 is taken here as a case study, which will suggest, through a series of close readings, that later Greek rhetoric can still play a significant role in political and social life, in spite of (or even through) its high degree of allusiveness, its obsession with the past, and its “eminently predictable form”12. These very same characteristics have been reclaimed and re-contextualised for the Second Sophistic, whose literature is now analysed as a compelling site for the performance of political and cultural self-definition13.

Unlike their predecessors of the Second Sophistic, the rhetors of later Antiquity are commonly perceived as frightened by, and alienated from, the new world they live in— they supposedly spend more time teaching than performing; they are more “university professors” and less “political or social agents”14. As van Hoof says, even if it is true that Late Antique sophists devoted more time and effort to their teaching activities, this does not necessarily detract from their socio-political standing15 — many of these sophists were, in fact, admired by emperors, had careers in politics, and exerted their influence on behalf of their local communities16. What is more, it is often clear from their own words that, just like the deuterosophists, their socio-political prestige depended to a great extent on their performance of paideia and the public self-promotion of their literary

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10 ibid. 590.
11 van Hoof 2010, 214.
12 Brown 1992, 42, who goes on to claim “the formalized speech of the upper classes was not designed to express sudden challenges and novel sentiments.”
13 For just one example of this approach see Whitmarsh 2001.
14 See, for example, Malosse-Schouler 2009, 163-4.
15 See van Hoof 2010, 218.
16 For the example of Libanius as “the local intellectual […] looking after local interests” see Swain 2004, 393; on Prohaeresios’ successful attempts to improve the corn supply of Athens see Kennedy 1983, 139-141.
sophistication. Himerios’ self-fashioning as a *pepaideumenos* and the agonistic display of his literary abilities will be highlighted in my analysis of his *Oratio 41*; his accomplishment of rhetorical virtuosity will be shown to have important consequences not only for the rhetor’s own self-promotion, but also for the construction of an elite, Greek identity, to which his audience would (or should) aspire.

2. Constantinople as the new Athens

Himerios might not be considered an Atticist (at least not stylistically), but he is obsessed with Athens and its cultural heritage. *Paideia* (in its double meaning of “culture” and “education”), and its close link to Athens and Athenian literature, is central in his own self-definition, just as it was for his predecessors of the Second Sophistic. It is not surprising, then, that one of the foremost strategies he employs in his praise of Constantinople, as the new world capital, is to associate it with Athens:

τοιγματιν παρ’ ύμιν φιλοσοφία ἡ μὲν θελείος, ἡ δὲ ἐγχώριος πάση τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ τῆς πόλεως ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀγαθῆς μέλλητά εἶ ὀκράτει τινῶν λέμονων κηρία πλάττοσα πάσαν ἐπιβάλλεται ἀνή, νῦν μὲν ἐμβομβούσα διάτροφος καὶ τῇ Ἀκαδημίᾳ καὶ τὸν Ἀρίστωνος δι’ ἐκπολής ὑμῖν συνάπτουσα (*Or. 41.12*).

Consequently – and given that the whole city is so attentive to it – philosophy dwells among you, both foreign-born and native philosophy. Like a good bee from undefiled meadows making honey, it feeds on the whole city. Now it buzzes in the theatres and through its personal efforts unites you to the Academy and to Ariston’s son [Plato].

The efforts of Constantinopolitan philosophers (and here we might have a reference to Themistios, the most important Constantinopolitan philosopher of the time) unite the new capital to the ancient seat of philosophical learning. What is significant here is that Himerios’ bee is Attic on more levels than just the linguistic one (μέλλητα and not μέλισσα): the phrase μέλλητα εἶ ὀκράτει τινῶν λέμονων is a direct allusion to Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, where we hear, in Hippolytus’ first speech, that “a spring-time bee makes its way through an undefiled meadow”, ὀκράτειτον μέλισσα

\[\text{17 For the text of Himerios I am using the edition by Colonna 1952. The English translation is that of Penella 2007.}\]
λειμῶν’ ἑρνή διερχεται (vv. 76-7)18. It is probably not a coincidence that Himerios is alluding here to an eminently Attic play (Attic, in that it is the work of an Athenian author, but also in that it is set in Attica), and indeed a play which is largely about purity and eclecticism. At the same time as it is an exceedingly classical image, the representation of philosophy or philosophers as a hard-working bee also resonates with the image of the ideal Late Antique author or reader who works just as hard as a bee, selecting the appropriate models from a vast tradition, which must have been difficult to control, especially in its moral implications19.

Himerios’ Attic bee shows us how Athens maintains its position as the “mother of learning”20, which Constantinople is now emulating with its own philosophers. Himerios himself is, in fact, a kind of personification of Athenian learning, coming to Constantinople to “spread the seed” of paideia:

ἔπειδή γὰρ ἐκεῖ τούτως [τοὺς λόγους] μετὰ τούς Ἀττικοῖς ἀθλείᾳ καὶ τὰ τῆς Παρθένου μεγάλα στέμματα, καὶ τὴν ἄλλην γῆν ἐξ Ἀττικῆς λόγου ἀρίστα σπέρματι, σὺκ ἐπὶ Ρήμον ἦγεν ἐσπέριον, οὐδέ ἐπὶ τὴν Ὀσκεινὸν μυθόδαι θάλασσαν καὶ τούτως τὴν ἀποδιμᾶν ἐπορθίωσεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐτι μὲν ἠμύντας καὶ οὐ vehement ἔχοντος παρ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἠγαγεν, ἵνα ἁπαλοῖς ἐπὶ τοῖς κάλυξιν ὄμοιν τῇ πόλει συμπλεξασθε. (Or. 41.2)

When this learning of mine, after enduring Attic contests and winning the great garlands of the virgin goddess [Athena], had to leave Attica and sow the rest of the earth with the seeds of learning it got there, fate did not take it to the Rhine in the West, nor did it carry it to the fabulous waters of the Ocean. No, fate brought it, while still in its prime and sprouting its first beard, to you, so that it might plait together a hymn for the city from still tender buds.

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18 Neither Völker 2003 nor Penella 2007 picks up on this allusion. It also goes unnoticed in the two most extensive overviews of Himerios’ poetic references: Rizzo 1898, and Cuffari 1983 – the latter’s section on “citations from drama” (pp. 94-9) only includes Menander and some anonymous works.

19 For an example of the Late Antique author working like a bee see Macrobius’ Saturnalia 1, Preface 5. For the reader as a bee see Basil of Caesarea’s address “To young men, on how they might derive profit from pagan literature” 4.7-8; an earlier precedent of Basil’s ideas can be found in Plutarch’s “On how a young man should study poems”; Moralia 14.12.

20 For how Late Antique rhetors considered Athens their spiritual home and strove to attach Constantinople and Thessalonice to Athens see Stenger 2009, 36-45.
Himerios is referring here to an earlier oration (probably Or. 62), which he had delivered in Constantinople when he was a young man. He imagines himself at the time as Triptolemos, a mythological young hero from Eleusis, who was instructed in the art of agriculture by Demeter, and was given a winged chariot drawn by serpents, from which he scattered grain-seed throughout the earth, departing, of course, from Attica. Himerios’ insistence that he did not take his learning to the West is, in all probability, a reference to his rival at Athens, Prohaeresios, who visited the emperor Constans in Gaul. Upon Prohaeresios’ request, Constans granted some islands to Athens, to secure its grain supply, and when the prefect of Illyricum confirmed the gift, Prohaeresios delivered a speech before him, in which he introduced the myth of Triptolemos and his gift of grain to humankind. If his rival becomes, through his emperor’s benefaction, a new Triptolemos, who brings literal grain, Himerios outdoes him by becoming, through mythological allusion, the cultural Triptolemos, who spreads the seed of paideia. The image of the travelling rhetor as another Triptolemos might, in fact, have come to Himerios from an author of the Second Sophistic. Lucian, in his supposedly autobiographic Somnium, describes a dream in which he chooses, while still an adolescent, Rhetoric over Sculpture as his profession, and where the personified Rhetoric takes the young Lucian up on a flying chariot; the author claims that he feels like a new Triptolemos spreading some kind of seed, although, he says ironically, he cannot remember what that seed was. The audience, of course, understands that what Lucian is spreading is learning and culture.

21 For the history of the detection of this allusion, see Barnes 1983, 208-9, who also puts forward the suggestion that Himerios’ reference to the “waters of the Ocean” alludes to Constans’ expedition to Britain in 342/3 – “an obvious and easy theme for any who wished to praise or flatter him”. Cf. Penella 2007, 60, n. 65. On the relationship between Himerios and Prohaeresios, and Eunapios’ interest in it, see further Penella 1990, 98-9.

22 The story is reported in Eunapios, Vitae phil. et soph. 492: [Prohaeresios] “cited Keleos and Triptolemos and how Demeter sojourned among men that she might bestow on them the gift of corn. With that famous narrative he combined the tale of the generosity of Constans, and very speedily he invested the occurrence with the splendour and dignity of ancient legend.” (Translation in Kennedy 1983, 141).

23 Lucian, Somn. 15: ἔπει δὲ ἀνήλθον, ἢ μὲν ἤλαυνε καὶ ὄρθιευ οὐκετέ ποτέ μὲν τί μενεμνήμα ν ο τί τὸ σπερμάδον ἔκειν ἦν, πλὴν τοῦτο μόνον ὅτι κατώθεν ἀφοροῦντες ἀνθρωποι ἐπήνουν καὶ μετ’ εὐφημίαις καθ’ οὓς γενομένη τῇ πτήσει παρέπεμπον.
through his works. The only possible verbal allusion here is between Himerios’ ἐπὶ Ρῆγον ἔγεν ἐσπάρυον and Lucian’s ἵψις πρὸς τὰ ἐσπάρυμα, but it is not necessarily enough to convince us that Himerios has in mind the Lucianic passage in its specific wording. No other author, however, refers to Triptolemos in connection with the spreading of learning, so it is not out of the question that Himerios is influenced by the Lucianic work, and makes explicit what Lucian leaves ironically implicit: that the sophist is the Triptolemos of literary culture, someone who is spatially superior to his audience (flying up in his winged chariot), and who, in Himerios’ case, will bring knowledge from the privileged and central place he comes from to the faraway lands he visits.

In this passage as well, Athens remains the place from which learning emanates. Constantinople, however, is singled out as the selected destination, the spiritual child of Athens. In the same paragraph, Himerios calls himself an “Attic Muse”, and says that Athens is addressing its own progeny (Ἀθηνᾶ τῶν οὐτῶν οὐδένας προσφέρει τὶς τῆς ἐνθοῦς οὐδένας μελέτουσα, Μοῦσας ἐπέτριψε τὴν τοῦτον φύσιν ματαιεσθαί). This is one of many passages in this oration where we find the imagery and vocabulary of childbirth and nursing – others will be examined later on. So, here, Athens is the mother-city of Constantinople, and Constantinople is the mother of Julian. Himerios relies on the tradition that made Byzantium a colony of Athens24, but he does not leave it at that. He goes on to create a competition between the metropolis and its colony: using what is a common topos in panegyrics on cities, he attempts to show that, in some ways, Constantinople is superior to the city to which it is advantageously attached25.

What is striking here is that the competition element is expressed through Julian (it is because of him that Constantinople can vie with Athens), who is said to be superior to Kekrops, the legendary first king of Athens: both of them are imagined as children, but also “founding” figures of their respective cities:

24 Cf. Amm. Marc. 22.8.8: Constantinopolis, vetus Byzantium, Atticorum colonia.
O city that lit the torch of freedom for all humankind! O city that conceived and brought forth a fortunate infant! O city that brought into the light a child who was even better than one whom your mother-city itself brought forth! For the first offspring of your mother-city was Kekrops. He was not yet a genuine human being, since from the waist down, he had his mother’s [serpentine] coils, and he did not yet speak Attic Greek. But your offspring, of course, has an unmixed nature. In him there is a conjunction of the highest good fortune and the highest virtue.

The vocabulary of pregnancy and childbirth is used repeatedly to speak about the personified city that, as a woman, conceives, carries, and brings forth the “fortunate infant”, Julian. Kekrops, the offspring of Athens, on the other hand, is not born of a woman, but springs from the earth (βλάστημα), and, therefore, has serpentine coils and cannot yet speak Attic Greek. The idea behind the comparison seems bizarre, but it is not unique in late Greek literature. In the Dionysiaca of Nonnos, a fifth-century epic, the poet praises Beirut by saying that its first inhabitants, who were autochthonous (like the first inhabitants of Athens), were perfectly formed, unlike Kekrops, who was an incomplete human, and scratched the earth with his snaky feet20. Again, there is no evidence to support the case for a direct allusion here; Nonnos might or might not have read Himerios; both authors could, in fact, be following the same rhetorical handbook. What we can say, at the very least, is that both Himerios and Nonnos, as it is typical for Late Antique intellectuals, are in a metaphorical frame of mind21: for them, everything needs to be compared to something (preferably ancient), and needs to have a precedent, and, then, within any given analogy the points of contact can multiply and proliferate, so that if Constantinople is a new and improved Athens, Julian must be a new and improved Kekrops.

Another figure (and a more “obvious” one) to whom Julian is compared is the Sun in his different manifestations, primarily as Mithra,

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20 See Nonnos, Dion. 41.59-64: Κέκροπος οὖ τόπον εἶχον, ὡς ιοβάλω ποδὸς ὄλκα / γαῖαν ἐπίζον ὑφάσκει πύρετο ταρσό, / νάρθη δράκων, καὶ ἐπερθεὶς ἀπ’ ἐξίος ἄχρι καρῆνο / ἀλλοφύς ἀτέλεστος ἐφαίνετο ἄγραν ἄνὴρ / οὐ τόπον ἔρημον εἶχον ἔρεμειν, ὅν τέκνα γαῖας / ἀνάλεικα γημελπός γαμήν Ἡφαίστου ἐξέρρη. For Nonnos’ Beirut and its superiority to Athens see Hadjittofi 2007, 377.
21 For this metaphorical “habit” in late antiquity see, for example, Hansen 2003, 197-257.
but also as Apollo. In paragraph 8 Julian is said to have “washed away the darkness that was preventing us from lifting our heads up to the Sun and has thereby given us the gift of raising us up to the heaven as if from some Tartaros or lightless life”\(^{28}\). Himeros goes on to say that Julian has healed the city from disease, and he has done that with immediate effect, unlike those who heal the sick with human skills. “After all, one would expect someone who links his nature with the Sun (\(\text{ἡλιος φύσιν συνάπτοντα}\) both to give light and to reveal a better life”. The Sun and Mithra are both important in Julian’s religiosity (even if their role is sometimes exaggerated in modern scholarship\(^{29}\), and in fact this oration started with Himeros saying that he has recently been initiated into the rites of Mithra, a fact which brings him even closer to Julian. In this paragraph, Julian is presented as a Mithra- or Sun-figure, who brings light to a city plunged in the darkness of Christianity, and then morphs into Apollo — the healer, who restores the city’s health\(^{30}\). The motif of illumination is recurrent throughout the oration (indeed, this very paragraph opened with Julian himself compared to a jewel which “shines on the city’s splendour more brightly than any gold”\(^{31}\)), and I will come back to it in the last section of this paper.

\(^{28}\) Or. 41.8: αὐτός τὸν κολλώντα ξύρον ἀναπνέειν χέρας εἰς Ἴηλιον ἅρτῃ καθήρας εἰς οὐρανόν ἀναπνέειν οἷον εἰς ταρτάρου τόν καὶ ἀλαμπόεις ὥσι διδοῖται. Prudentius gives the same image a Christian turn, when he presents the city (in his case, Rome) thrust into darkness and pollution but then set on the right path by an emperor, Theodosios, who is determined to drive away paganism; see C. Symm. 1.412-26.

\(^{29}\) See Penella 2007, 59, n. 64 with further bibliography.

\(^{30}\) Barnes 1987, 206 and 222 points out that this and the following paragraphs (41.8-15) indicate Constantinople had an exclusively Christian character prior to Julian’s introduction of pagan cults. Penella 2007, 62, n. 69 raises the possibility, which, however, he does not favour, that Himeros’ τελείας δὲ θείας καθηρίων τῇ πόλει ξένας (“he has established religious rites from abroad in the city”) suggests these pagan rites were essentially “alien” to the character of the city. It is true, however, that Himeros nowhere implies that Julian’s innovations constitute a “return” to the old ways, which he could conceivably have suggested, since Constantine himself was an initiate in the Mithraic rites, and continued to show his loyalty to the Sun god even after his conversion – see Alfeldi 1948, 56-8.

\(^{31}\) Or. 41.8: παντὸς μὲν χρυσοῦ φανότερος περιλάμπει τὴν ἀγκαλίαν τῆς πόλεως. In paragraph 3, quoted above, it is the personified city that lights up “the torch of freedom for all humankind”, τὸν ἐλεύθερον πορεύον ἀνθρώπος ὀπίου ἀνάμισος. Because of Himeros’ predilection for the motif of fire, Cribiore 2007, 168 calls him “Himerius the pyrotechnician”.

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238 Centring Constantinople in Himeros’ Oratio 41
However, returning to the issue of Constantinople’s centrality, there is one further passage in which the new capital enters into a competition with another “iconic” Hellenic location: Delos (in paragraph 4). The motif of childbirth is also present here: Delos had the honour of being Apollo’s place of birth (Ἀγούς τὸς θείας ὤνος Απόλλωνος), and, although it is a small island, it has become the subject of poems and songs. Constantinople should be praised by everybody, in poetry as well as in prose, Himerios says, because of its size, beauty, and geographical location. Even though it is not made explicit by Himerios, the fact that Julian, who is a manifestation of Apollo, as we have just seen, was born in Constantinople also helps this new city to appropriate (at least some) of the cultural capital and prestige of the ancient Greek core. In Himerios’ new “imaginary geography”, Constantinople can supplant the central position of the (once) central island of the Cyclades, while at the same time being on the edge (or at the beginning and at the end, as Himerios says) of two continents.

3. Describing Constantinople

There are two passages in this oration where Himerios speaks about Constantinople’s geography. The first is the one just mentioned, where Constantinople is favourably compared to Delos, and where we hear that this city marks the beginning and end of both Europe and Asia, and enjoys the waters of the Black Sea, the Bosphorus, and the Aegean. The second one is far more perplexing:

ἀρξάμενη γὰρ ἐκ μέσων μικροῦ τὸν τοῦ πορθμοῦ κομάτων ποτίζοντι, πολύν τινα δρόμον τὸ πρῶτο ἐπετέραν ἐξόραμεν, μεγάλην ποηθέσα πόλιν τὸ τῆς ἡπέρων δεχόμενον κενὸν δὲ ἀφήκα πόλεως οὐδ’ ὑπὸν εἰς ἔκρυνσας καὶ τὴν κύκλων περιβάλλουσαν νήσου ὑπάσαν μερίζεται, ἀλλ’ ἐπεσχεθὲς μὲν πάσαν αὕγαλον καὶ πάσι πεδίοις, ἡμπρόσσας δὲ καὶ αὐτὴν ἧδη τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ βουλαμένη μερίδα γενέσθαι πόλεως, σαλέουσαν φύσιν καὶ ἄστατον πεπηγήτην πεποίητην. (Or. 41.6)

This city begins to be bathed by the waters that are almost halfway across the straits. It extended itself quite a distance to the west, making a great

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32 For a similar process of reconfiguring the symbolic map of the eastern Roman Empire in Nonnos’ Dionysiaca see Hadjittofi 2011.
33 Or. 41.4: σὰν μὲν γὰρ Ἔοροτης ἀρχῆ, σὰν δὲ καὶ πέρας καθότητας· σὰν δὲ καὶ Ἀσίας τὴν ἴσην μοῖραν κεκληρωσαί.
city out of the mainland that welcomed it and leaving not even its crannies vacant nor the <shoreline> that circumscribes <the> whole peninsula. Once spread out over the whole shoreline and all the plains, it then actually turned the sea itself into part of the mainland and forced it to become part of the city; it has turned what by its nature is rolling and constantly on the move [the sea] into something immobile.

As Penella says, the part of the sentence which speaks of a peninsula circumscribed by something must be corrupt; he proposes that the words παράλιον τὴν have fallen out after περιπτύσσομαι, but even so, this sentence is difficult to understand 34. The general sense of the passage seems to be that Constantinople is a big city that completely took over the natural landscape in which it was constructed, and ended up turning part of the sea into land 35. This last point is definitely the most interesting and the one that stylistically stands out, not only because of the alliteration in περιγίγναι πελοίηκην, but also because of the double trochee in this phrase - the double trochee being characteristic of Asian rhythm 36:

δοστον περιγίγναι πελοίηκην

At the same time, Himerios’ description here implies a similar appreciation of paradoxical depictions of cities or other landscapes that we find in some texts from the Second Sophistic. The novel by Achilles Tatios, Leucippe and Clitophon, for example, reveals a predilection for landscapes where the same two elements, water and earth, intermingle 37. Achilles’ description of Tyre (2.14.3) comes quite close to Himerios’ Constantinople: the city is, in fact, an island, joined to the mainland by a narrow strip of land, which forms a kind of neck (τραγύλος) 38; the water flows underneath it, “so that it presents a curious spectacle: a city in the

34 See Penella 2007, 62, n. 68.
35 Penella (ibid.) refers to two other texts that describe this “invasion” of the sea by the land in Constantinople: Zos. 2.35.2, and Sidon. Apoll. Carm. 2.57-8. Both of these texts describe the city extending its shores, when the walls of Constantine were no longer able to contain its growing population.
36 See Innes-Winterbottom 1988, 8.
38 Cf. Himerios’ Constantinople having λαγύλος, which can mean both the flanks of a person and a physical space that lies on the side of something else, such as the banks of a river; see LJS s.v. λαγύλος.
sea and an island on land” (καὶ γίνεται τὸ θέαμα καινόν, πόλις ἐν θαλάσσῃ, καὶ νῆσος ἐν γῇ)\textsuperscript{39}.

When, in the following paragraph, Himerios gets to describe Constantinople as an urban, rather than a natural, landscape, he chooses to do it through the simile of a golden necklace:

> ὁπερ γὰρ ἐν ὀργῇ τοὺς λίθους ὁ χρυσὸς, οὕτω καὶ ἡ πόλις τῷ μεγάλῳ τῷ τῆς ὀρας ἄνθος ἐγκαίρωται. ἔνθε ὁ χρυσὸς μερίζει τὴν ὀψιν, ἐντεῦθεν τέχνη τοὺς θεομένους ἀνθέλλουσι θαύμασιν. ἐντεῦθεν τὸ τῆς βουλῆς ἐκλάμπει συνέδριον, θέλει τὰ λουτρά, προσδημαγωγεῖ τὰ θέατρα, κοστός ἀτεχνός τῆς Ἀφροδίτης τὰ σύμπαντα. (Or. 41.7)

For just as in a necklace gold <enhances> the gems, so too Constantinople combines the flower of beauty with its great size. Hence the city’s gold causes people to look now here, now there. The wonders of its craftsmanship attract those who behold them. Its senate-house shines forth, its baths are enchanting, its theatres also win people’s favour. Everything here is, quite simply, Aphrodite’s kastos.

The simile of the necklace is eminently typical of Late Antiquity in that, as Michael Roberts has shown in his influential study The Jeweled Style, Late Antique poetry has a distinct fascination with gold and jewels\textsuperscript{40}. But even here there are elements of continuity with modes of viewing and representing that are characteristic of the Second Sophistic. The spectator, looking at Constantinople as though at a precious necklace, does not know where to focus his attention (he looks “now here, now there”). Again, in Achilles Tatos’ novel we have a similar reaction to the beauty of a city, Alexandria. Clitophon, who is the main hero and narrator of the novel, sets his eyes on Alexandria for the first time, and falls into a state of utter confusion, not knowing where to look first; he is said to be unable to discipline his eyes, which are enchanted by the loveliness of the

\textsuperscript{39} Achilles Tatos’ Alexandria (described in 4.12) is also presented as a paradoxical landscape: here the flooding of the Nile allows agricultural and maritime activities to appear side by side – another “curious spectacle” (θέαμα καινόν). For this “inversion motif” in a fourth-century hymn to the Nile, see Cribiore 1995, 103-4. Himerios produces his own ekphrasis of Egypt in time of flood in Or. 48.8-9, where he highlights the “great wonder” of seeing “on a single plot of land […] the same man playing the part of sailor and farmer”. On Himerios’ Or. 48 see now Milo 2012, 193-210.\textsuperscript{40} See Roberts 1989, 52ff.
city\textsuperscript{41}. This “baroque” mode of viewing also looks forward to later works, where the confused gaze of the spectator is precisely the reaction desired by architects and commissioners of buildings. In Prokopios’ description of Hagia Sophia (De Aed. 1.1.47-9) we read a passage quite reminiscent of both Achilles Tatios and Himerios, in which the eye of the spectator is said to shift from one detail to the other unable to select which one to admire more than the others. Although there is “a single and most extraordinary harmony”, Prokopios says, the viewer is confused, drawn from side to side by an overwhelming and bewildering plethora of riches\textsuperscript{42}.

At the same time, there is a particular kind of eroticism present in the descriptions of both Himerios and Achilles Tatios\textsuperscript{43}. The cities attract and enchant the spectator; Himerios’ Constantinople is in its entirety Aphrodite’s \textit{kestos} (a kind of magical breast halter, with an irresistible erotic allure)\textsuperscript{44}. In \textit{Oratio} 62, a much shorter speech Himerios had published for one of his Constantinopolitan students, he presents the city as a nymph bathing in the sea, embraced by her lover, Poseidon (\textit{Or.} 68.2). Nonnos will later depict Beirut and Tyre in exactly the same terms in his \textit{Dionysiaca}\textsuperscript{45}. The Late Antique authors (Himerios and Nonnos) might live in a world radically different from that of Achilles Tatios and his contemporaries of the Second Sophistic, but the metaphors and general

\textsuperscript{41} On this passage see Morales 2004, 100-106.
\textsuperscript{42} On the “cumulative aesthetic” in Late Antiquity see Elsner 2004, 304-9, where the passage from Prokopios is cited. For the overstimulation of the viewer and his dazzled vision in late Latin poetry see Roberts 1989, 73-5, and \textit{idem} 2001, 546-9.
\textsuperscript{43} A contemporary of Prokopios, Chorkios of Gaza also describes a church, that of St. Sergios, in very similar terms, with the eyes of the viewer drawn from one point to the other (\textit{Laud. Marc.} 2.26): \textit{μεθάλκομηνς τῆς ὀψεως ἐκ ἐπερών:} - cf. Himerios’ \textit{τέχνη} τοὺς θεομένους \textit{ἀνθέλκουσι} θαύμασιν and Prokopios’ \textit{μεθέλκει} τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν ἔκατον.
\textsuperscript{44} For the “feminised and sexualised” Alexandria of Achilles Tatios see Morales 2004, 106.
\textsuperscript{45} By the end of the oration (\textit{Or.} 41.16), Himerios will claim that his “words are leaping without restraint around their beloved” (ἀμετρα σκαρπόντας περὶ τῆν ἔρωμην).
\textsuperscript{46} For the representation of Tyre as a swimming girl in the arms of Poseidon see 40.316-25, and for Beirut 41.28-37. Giraudet 2011, 151 argues that Nonnos was inspired directly by the description of Tyre in Achilles Tatios, where the city’s “neck” is mentioned (see above). Given that Himerios also describes a city as the beloved of Poseidon, who embraces and rejoices in her – a much closer parallel to the Nonnian images – the case for an “amplification” of a hint from Achilles Tatius seems weak.
conceptual frames they use to describe that world are not all that different. Himerios uses very skilfully all the cultural capital of Greece (literature, myths, sacred geography), to bestow more value on (and present as more central) those formerly marginal areas of the Greek East that are now important political centres. And, like his predecessors of the Second Sophistic, he is keenly aware of the task that he has to accomplish through his speech. The meta-literary or meta-rhetorical function of texts certainly does not disappear with the Second Sophistic.

4. Epilogue: The active orator

At the very beginning of this oration, Himerios says that he will “light not a torch, but an oration for the emperor and the city”, τῷ τε βασιλεία καὶ τῇ πόλει λόγον ἀντὶ λαμπάδος ἀνάψωμεν. He immediately adds that “speeches are the children of Apollo”, ὁ λόγος δὲ παῖδες Ἀπόλλωνος. In a brilliant conjunction of the motifs of light and filiation, Himerios’ speech becomes itself like Julian: it is Apolline, and it illuminates. If Himerios is, as Kennedy says, a Late Antique Pindar, like his archaic predecessor, he is also aware of the social and political value of his words of praise.

The most interesting display, however, of Himerios’ conception of himself as an author and intellectual is the way he represents other authors (both poets and prose writers) in his work. What Lieberg called the “Figur des handelnden Dichters” in Himerios is indeed striking: Himerios will often name the poet or prose author as the agent of actions, which are in fact carried out by characters inside the work of that author. In this oration we have two examples of this trope. In one he says, “When the poets were building the Argo […] they favoured it with a divine crew”. Obviously, it is not the poets who were physically building the Argo, but the characters inside their poems. The second example refers to a prose author: “in building up [a verbal picture of] an Assyrian city [i.e. Babylon] the Carian Muse – I mean Herodotos’ Muse [Hdt. 1.178-80], almost

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46 See Kennedy 1983, 147: “The speech is to the Fourth Century what the poems of Pindar were to the early classical period. Modern critics generally have more taste for Pindar than for Himerius, but the primary reason for that may be the freshness with which Pindar seems to strike his lyre and the oppressive weight of a thousand years of literary history which mutes to our ears the bell-like tones of Himerius”.
47 See Lieberg 1990.
48 For some examples from other orations see 9.4 and 19; 46.6; 48.11.
49 Or. 41.13: ποιηται μὲν ὄν τὴν Ἀργῳ τῷ τῆς Αθηνᾶς σκάψως πηγώμενοι, […] θείον αὐτῇ τὸν φόρτον οἴμαι χαρίζονται.
superior to poetry – divides and walls the city by means of a barbarian river [i.e. the Euphrates].”\(^{50}\) Herodotos, whom Himerios might as well have considered a good mirror for himself, as he composed his work in prose, but gave it poetic qualities that made it almost superior to poetry (hence the presence here of the Muse), literally builds up the Assyrian city (πόλιν ἐγείρουσα). Penella’s translation supplements “the verbal picture”, which is not in fact in the text. Having the “verbal picture” in this sentence would imply representation and phantasia in the meaning of “visualisation”. Himerios does not speak about representation; he highlights the power of speech and writing to actually create worlds – worlds which could, conceivably, outlast their “real” referents, like the work of Herodotos outlasted Babylon. Himerios, like Herodotos and the poets, has the power to “create” things, to build cities and ships\(^{51}\). And here we have an oblique, but important, acknowledgement of the orator’s realisation of his own authority and role as an agent in history and politics: he can “construct” Constantinople through his illuminating speech, and he can make it the new centre of the world\(^{52}\).

\(^{50}\) Or. 41.10: ἢ μὲν οὖν Καρίνη Μοῦσα, τὴν Ἑροδότου λέγω, τὴν μικρὸν νικῶσαν καὶ ποίησιν, Ἄσσυρίαν τινὰ πόλιν ἐγείρουσα, βαρβάρῳ ποταμῷ σχίζει καὶ περιβάλλει τὴν πόλιν.

\(^{51}\) In Or. 68.6, where Himerios refers to the (Neoplatonic) god, who is the creator and dispenser of all things, he calls him “the great sophist (σοφιστής) in heaven”. As Kennedy 1983, 148 puts it, “Sophistic creativity is a microcosm of the universe”.

\(^{52}\) I would like to thank Helen Morales, Jan Stenger, and Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.