

Themistius, Oration III

D 49
H 40c

Ambassadorial Oration on Constantinople, Spoken in Rome.

H 40d

It is not possible for another city, O most divine Emperor, to find a crown worthy of yourself, or any other thank-offering for your virtues, but they must fall far short of your deserts who try to bring, as payment, an honor which rivals the benefits which they have received; and as for the City which is named for your father, but in fact is yours rather than your father's, such an undertaking is utterly impossible. Indeed, if we bring forth all the wealth which it possesses, making it into crowns, we do not offer such virtue as a thing of our own, but we merely return the greatest part of what we received to him who gave it. Just as those who borrow many and great sums, and pay back a little, are not praised for what they pay off, but are called to account for what they fail to pay, so it is needful for us, when we have offered all our thanks, to be judged on the basis of this small part of what we owe. And not unreasonably does it happen to this City of ours alone, not to be able to attain an offering which is equal to your merit. The City itself, indeed, is wholly your crown and offering. Thus, why should there ^e be need of further forethought for the payment to you of thanks for the City's beauty and great size? The very fact that it is such honors him who wrought it. Nevertheless, even though the subject is so impossible to deal with, it is right to admire the Fair City because it found the form which enables it to seem not to fall behind the fitting measure.

H 41a

D 50

H 41b

There are two ways by which men make their thanks more august and greater, one, by bringing as many witnesses as possible to the honor which they do, the

other, by not seeming to flatter, but by acting spontaneously and by choice; the first of these makes their beneficence more famous, the latter puts their requital beyond suspicion. Both of these the City provided, so far as possible, for the things which are now being done by it, first by bringing forth the honor on the watch-tower of the whole world, and then by making use, as its minister, of a man who must of necessity tell the truth; and neither of these things was done casually, but so far as possible to the fullest measure.

H 41c

Look first, then, O most divine Emperor, at the city¹ in which it found the occasion for making the offering. Not in Olympia or Delphi does it proclaim the crown, nor does it gather the Hellenes to the Panathenaia or the Dionysia, as the Athenians of old once did, flattering the Macedonian masters; but in the ruler among cities does the City which, through you, is second in rule, bind the brow of the ruler of mankind, and thus it makes witness to the honor the city which alone is more august than the one which does the honor. And so our place of assembly is more brilliant, equally because of the crown and of the proclamation. Just as Thetis, in Homer², when Zeus journeyed to the Ocean, did not think it wise to make a request concerning her child, but when he came to heaven, or rather to the peak of heaven, she made her request and found him favorable; just so the Fair City does not purpose to trouble its Zeus when he was armed and turning his thoughts toward Ocean,³ but when he rises to Olympus and sits on the top of the pinnacle, she prays earnestly and honors him and strives to take part in the festival which heaven and the god⁴ are celebrating for each other, the one illuminated and the other bestowing light.

H 41d

H 42a

D 51

H 42b

And the festival is complete, for us, because of the city; for the city which shares both our good fortune and our name shares the festival with us and

comes to help us as we rejoice, and the chorus, composed of three perfect ones,⁵ is the most perfect of all. For the ruling cities sing together, while the leader is at their head, and all the earth and sea assent with a shout of applause. The hymn fills with harmony all the peoples of the East and all the races of the West, while the victories which rise with the sun and run brilliantly as far as the west come to rest, together with the Emperor, at the mother-city of trophies. Now does this chorus seem to you comparable to those of Daidalos, with which, as Homer says,⁶ he honored Ariadne in Knossos? Or is the creator of the chorus a better man, and are all the other things about it better?

H 42c

It is possible for you both to take pride in the present circumstances--for you [Constantius] to take pride in the hearth of the Empire, and for the new Rome to take pride in the old; for you, in that you are caught and held by such a city, and for it [the new Rome], in that it is the object of the zeal of such a man. Or rather it is possible for both of you, as you look upon these things--for you, to perceive what sort of a City it is, when the one which you possess is larger, and for the City, to perceive by what sort of a city it is surpassed in size. And there is no shame, in any case, for having second place instead of first, nor is it grievous or troublesome that it is in this city that you are first celebrating the victory festival of the prizes and trophies, to which the other [Constantinople] sped you and sent you forth.

H 42d

And there are still other things of a different kind which are common to both. I do not mean those alliances of old times, or the contributions and assistance which our City furnished to this one when it had just founded the Empire, setting sail along with Pompey, helping to destroy Mithridates, always

H 43a

D 52

furnishing the most experienced part of the naval force, actions whose trophies and epigrams it preserves to this day in common for the Romans, but the things which are its ^enew and recent symbols of good will, through the work of yourself and your father. It will be better to mention these alone.

Legg. 758a
Resp. 472a

H 43b

When that barbarian uprising occurred, and the Roman Empire was seized as though by a rough wave and a mighty swell, and the succession of Constantine was in danger of falling to a murderous barbarian tyrant, ⁶ the ⁷ ~~valiant~~ ^{valiant} part of that city ⁸ was the only part of the race which preserved the ⁹ glowing spark of loyalty and sent it to the ancient hearth of the sons of Aeneas, ¹⁰ and through the efforts of our founder Germans and Iazyges do not enjoy the results of the labors of the Romans ⁷ of old, nor is the august and mighty name of Rome insulted everywhere and wiped out, nor has it fallen to bastard and counterfeit successors, but it has returned to the true and pure blood of the Emperors and is preserved by us unhurt and unmixed. Setting ¹¹ ~~out~~ ^{out} from that city and from the remembrance of his father as it existed among us, this noble man exacted the ¹² justice which was due to the man who was maltreating this people, laying waste the Senate and filling with slaughter and pollution the pure stream of the Tiber.

H 43c

While men of olden times counted Camillus the second founder, ¹¹ because he preserved the remains left after the invasion of the Celts, shall the men of today not make you the founder in precedence over Romulus? When it was possible for you to keep the peace by indifferently dividing into two the territory of the Empire, you did not overlook or give up the freedom of the city, ¹² but you held over it your unconquerable hand, because of which it is possible to greet the Emperor of the Romans, and not to lie when we write and

D 53

speak ~~of~~ those august and ancient names, Caesar, Emperor, Consul many times, Father of the Senate; for these would all have been utterly empty and false, and a cause of tears to those who remembered them.

H 44a If, then, in private friendships it is a sign of unusual good will when men are found to have the same friends and the same enemies, how much more necessary is⁵ it for these cities to be closely united with one another, when the tyrant plotted against them before the others, and the Emperor struggled for them before the others? But is it because of the son that it is possible for them to employ such great symbols and tokens of good will toward one another, while those which they have from the father are weaker and smaller; or is it only the order of the works which is reversed, while the deeds themselves have not differed in the least respect? For the one,¹³ having previously freed this city¹⁴ from a similar tyranny, that of a man who was almost of the same name,¹⁵ then set out for the founding of the Fair City; while the other,¹⁶ having previously added to that city¹⁷ what it lacked, or rather what his father had wished for it, then gave this city¹⁸ its freedom;¹⁹ and so the two of them completed one and the ~~same~~⁵ cycle of benefactions to the cities, or rather the cities gave mutually to one another, that which had been set free giving the founder [of the other], that which had been founded giving the savior [of the other].

H 44b

H 44c The Fair City provided the scene of the presentation of the victor's crown, which is so brilliant and so kindly and so fitting for that City. And consider, O Emperor, the herald²⁰ through whom it has made the address, whether there is any way in which, in this respect, the payment of the thanks could be made more august. For seeking the way in which you might take most pleasure,

D 54

it did not find a man who was over-clever at speaking, or mighty and great-voiced and well able to bawl without drawing breath; but it is not for me to say what kind of a man it preferred and found, for it preferred a man of philosophy, and sought him, and it considered that he was the most fitting instrument and that he was the most suited for the honoring of an Emperor who is a good man and a man of philosophy. And you must allow me to say, O most divine Emperor, that now for the first time there comes forth a witness to your virtue who is frank and free from suspicion, who cannot be convicted of false witness, who cannot be indicted for having appropriated money, or for striving for power, so that the praises which he offers are not fitting; but a man who possesses such a name that he cannot be accused of producing even a brief discourse whose justification he cannot give in all time to come.

H 44d

cf. or. 1a

H 45a Wherefore it is necessary for him to bring testimony only to the things which he admires and comprehends thoroughly. Most people, in order to make something more agreeable, render the subject unbelievable. What, then, is it that he comprehends and admires? Not the great size of the realm, for Nero ruled over lands which were not less in size; nor that you have a golden throne and troops, for he could have admired Midas for this, or Cambyses; nor that you always hit the mark at the right time and in the right place;²¹ nor that you slaughter lions and make sport of leopards. But what does he come here to admire? What decree, made by philosophy, does he bring with him? That you conquer by gentleness, that you live more temperately than private persons of the most moderate kind, that you hold education in the highest regard, that you follow closely after philosophy. This is your power and your army and your guards and your spearbearers, by which you alone of your brothers are preserved

H 45b

uncontaminated, with which you have visited justice on madmen. Using this equipment you stood prepared against the old man,²² and using this you won the bloodless victory.

H 45c

I have also, O Emperor, seen the rostrum on which, by your power of speech, you took captive the man²³ who was madly seeking the purple robe.

D 55

I saw the trophy which was⁵ really yours, which no foot-soldier helped you set up, neither any horseman or bowman, your trophy of which the soldiers were witnesses rather than fellow-fighters. Those who praise the other things which you have done do not admire you, but admire your deeds, and they stray like cattle about the outer doors of the temple, but are unwilling to look at the statues within. It is the man whom external things do not astonish and distract

H 45d

who is capable of comprehending the true king. Wherefore he does not bring his vote secretly²⁴ or put another form on his words, or praise kingship while feeling no confidence in him who reigns; but mounting this lofty rostrum and standing in the midst of men he does not hesitate to proclaim you as conqueror with more frankness than Xenophon did Agesilaos and Aristotle did Alexander,

H 46a

or, finally, than the lover of Zeno did the king of his time.²⁵ For it is not of praise that the philosopher is ashamed, but of flattery, and he does not avoid testimony to true virtue, but adulation of evil. You, O Emperor, the wise Plato proclaimed before I did, and that you may understand that I do not in any way engage in subtlety, behold, I speak the words with no alteration, either major or minor. For he says²⁶ that life achieves its best and its happiest when there is a king who is young, temperate, with a good memory, brave, of a noble manner, quick to learn.

H 46b

Does he then seem to you to be a poorer prophet than the Sibyl of Erythrae, or do you think there is need of the oracle of Bakis²⁷ or of that of Amphilytos,²⁸

who shows us the catalogue of these fair and wonderful names, in which there shine forth together and are revealed the names of the kings of all times?

We shall find that each of the other emperors lays claim perhaps to one epithet, but that because the remainder are not appropriate to him he is deprived of what should be due him. But as for you, O divine one, when Plato in his treatise

H 46c described you as the exact model of the type, he scarcely achieved a real example.²⁹ And ~~if~~^f of the things which have been mentioned, nothing else existed in you save your zeal for philosophy, which, when it abandoned men, as the poets say of justice,³⁰ you brought back and converted and made it earnest and famous, I would not have shrunk from this testimony. But now you gain these words from a philosopher, and philosophy gains the truth from you, and you give thanks to it for its praises, because it does not lie.³¹

H 46d Over what sort of a City it is, O Emperor, that your cont^sest of good will takes place, and how competent this City is to find suitable expressions of thanks, it would be possible to say many things, but time does not permit. If we are to make only the first steps here, there are these two points, one, to recall first the things which we have gained from you, the other, not to ask for an addition to the things which have been given--for this is not possible--

H 47a but to ask for the safety of the things which you have given. The chief point of the defence of what is about to be said is that when nearly everybody supposed that the happiness of the City would come to an end with your father, you did not suffer this or permit it, nor did you make the City feel any sense of the change, but rather, if one must speak the truth, you created a great sense of betterment. For you did not merely guard unharmed your father's sacred trust, but you ^made it manifold and increased it, nor did you merely assent to possess

H 47b

the things which came from him, but you added many things of your own, and you struggled emulously, in this fair contest, with the founder, as to which of you should outrun the other in benefactions. Thus Emperor struggles against Emperor, and son against father. In such a contest did the gods struggle

D 57

once when they disputed over Attica, namely Athena and Poseidon, the latter ^{re}plying for his strength on the sea, the former displaying the young olive-shoot. But in our contest and rivalry it is the whole City which is the object of contention, and now it is difficult to discover to whom it really belongs, whether to the man who sowed ^d the seeds, or to him who tended them and brought

H 47c

them to perfection. Whichever of the two winds ^s, the vanquished rejoices, or rather the father rejoices, for this victory is the better for the City.

And thus it is. Your City differs more from your father's than his differed from the ancient one, and it has changed to true and durable beauty from false and evanescent beauty. Formerly, it would seem, it was a source of enjoyment for a vehement lover, designed to fill the eye of a passionately excited man, so that it shone forth and grew old at the same time; but the adornment which you bestowed upon it was designed both for beauty and for durability, and surpassing the creations of a day by its youthful vigor, it is far different from the oldest foundations in its strength.

H 47d

For when it was first coming to light from its birth pains and was left deprived of its parent ³² and in need of swaddling clothes, you, like a kind older brother, received it as though it were a small weak sister, and at once you provided for its proper care, and at once you saw to its milk and nourishment, and you finally exhibited it, in every way fair and great, such as a god

H 48a

and a king would love. Thus while at first the Senate received its honors under compulsion, and the honor seemed in no way to differ from punishment, now men come together voluntarily and of their own accord from every side, and where once, bought with much land and money, they looked upon the gifts made at the time of founding as bait, they now bring additional wealth of their own and take pleasure in their expenditures.

H 48b

The reason is that you listened well to the wise Plato and you understood

that desire is a stronger bond than necessity. And in this way you put an end ^t to fear and bound the settlers with love and yearning. Wherefore, formed and nourished by you, it has bloomed to its proper prime and has grown up, and so much love is poured about it and such a girdle of Aphrodite has blossomed upon

D 58

it and so many Loves dance round it, as though about a universal center of

H 48c

festivity. For when there flow together into one spot all good things, and those which are ordained by the leader of human happiness, each man has ready at hand the form of enjoyment which he chose before the others. And so the City is worthy of receiving from you this honor and even more. For god seems manifestly to keep guard over it and to give suitable reward to those who understand his intention. What proof of this shall I give? That you, who alone ^t of all the brothers labored on behalf of it, are the only one of all who has obtained the imperial rule.

H 48d

1. Rome.

2. Iliad, I, 413 ff.
3. During his campaigns in the West.
4. That is, Constantius, in his role of Zeus.
5. Themistius apparently means Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria.
6. Iliad, XVIII, 590-605.
7. Maxentius.
8. Constantinople.
9. Plato, ^aLaws, 677 B.
10. Latium.
11. of Rome.
12. Rome.
13. Constantine.
14. Rome.

15. Maxentius; his name was similar to that of ^gMagnentius, whose rebellion is mentioned a little below.
16. Constantius.
17. Constantinople.
18. Rome.
19. By suppressing the rebellion of Magnentius.
20. Themistius himself.
21. Iliad, IV, 185; VIII, 84.
22. Vetricano. Constantius' "bloodless victory" over him is described in greater detail in Or. IV^V, 56 a-b H. Constantius is said to have harangued Vetricano's troops so successfully that they abandoned their rebellion and Vetricano abdicated: A. Piganiol, L'empire chrétien, 325-395 (Paris, 1947), p. 87.
23. Vetricano is still meant.
24. Plato, Laws, 766 B.
25. Themistius refers to Persaios of Kition, a pupil (and reputed lover) of Zeno, who was sent by Zeno to the ^{lc.}Court of Antigonos ^gGonatas. While there,

o/ Persaios wrote a treatise On Kingship, now lost. See W. W. Tarn, Antigonos Gonatas (Oxford, 1913), pp. 231-232.

26. Laws, 709 E; 710 C (also quoted in Cr. IV, 62a H).
27. Herodotus, VIII, 20, 77, 96; IX, 43.
28. Herodotus, I, 62-63.
29. I.e., though Plato thought he was describing the perfect ruler, the ruler whom he described was not so perfect as Constantius.
30. Cf. Waser, art. "Dike," R.E., V, 577.
31. Perhaps, "because he [sc. the philosopher, Themistius] does not lie."
32. By the death of Constantine.