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## **A Tested Recipe for Crisis: Epicurean Invective and fourth-century Court Politics**

The death of an emperor typically introduces a period of anxiety and instability, as was the case with Theodosius I, the last emperor to rule the entire Roman Empire. The late fourth century, when Theodosius' sons, Honorius and Arcadius, succeeded him as rulers of the Western and Eastern empire respectively, is marked by the threatening presence of external enemies (the Vandals and the Visigoths in Europe and the Huns in Asia) and ongoing Christological debates that anticipate the numerous religious schisms that occurred then.

This is also the time when a discussion about traditional masculinity is under way (Kuefler 2001), touching the heart of the imperial court, where the sexual mores of the emperor and his courtiers are scrutinized for tendencies, practices, preferences, notably homosexuality, as signs of political weakness and inability to respond to the challenges afoot. The trend, presented as a marker of moral decline and tyrannical disposition, continues the theme of the rhetorical tyrant in late antiquity, a time obsessed with catastrophe (Carrié 1999, 25) and now in fear of the wrath of the Christian God. Eutropius, Arcadius' eunuch High-Chamberlain who became the target of Claudian's invective, is a clear example of the political rhetoric of the time (Guipponi-Gineste 2010, 133-199; Charles and Anagnostou-Laoutides 2021).

Thus, my paper revisits the fourth century debate on masculinity and discusses the role of pagan sexual types in the contemporary crisis rhetoric. Although scholarly debate has so far focused on the socio-political reasons that allowed the advancement of non-traditional sexual types, especially eunuchs, at the imperial court (for example, Hopkins 1978; Tougher 2015), my focus here is on the importance of pagan philosophy (Stoicism as in Anagnostou-Laoutides 2014 and 2016, but notably, even if surprisingly, Epicureanism) in shaping fourth-century sexual ethics and their use in staging leadership crises.

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The Harbingers of Crisis: Greed, Exploitation, & Inequality in Book VIII of the Sibylline Oracles

The Jewish pseudepigraphal corpus of the Sibylline Oracles provides powerful imagery of political resistance, condemning abuses of empire and foretelling the doom that awaits unjust systems with visions of divinely sanctioned justice and retribution. This paper centers on what Book VIII of the Sibylline Oracles presents as the roots of all crisis: greed, exploitation, and inequality. The Jewish sibyllist(s) see Rome as embracing these harbingers of crisis to the point

in which the current way of life is unsustainable, ushering in a time of judgment. Greed spreads like a disease impacting everyone from the microcosm of the family unit to the macrocosm of the empire. Building on views expressed in earlier Sibylline books as well as the wider Jewish prophetic tradition, Book VIII gives insight on how timeless issues of social justice were framed within the Jewish prophetic landscape of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. By comparing Book III (2nd century BCE) and Book VIII (2nd century CE), I argue we witness a shift in tone that stems from a progressive loss of faith in and growing hostility towards earthly rulers and I explore how this disillusionment impacts the way accountability and judgment were envisioned.

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### Julian on kingship

The paper considers Julian's views of kingship that would probably have directed his decision-making during his brief stint as emperor. The fourth century AD experienced a shift in the tectonic plates of the ancient world hitherto unknown, and Julian wished to reverse the Christianization of the empire for reasons still debated: was it a matter of personal piety or did Julian the politician make what he thought were shrewd moves to gather support from the pagan elites? The times saw a remarkable intellectual flourish and, like his learned contemporaries, Julian taps into the glorious past of Greece, its mythological and historical figures, and its literature. He does so through the mediation of discourses on kingship from the Second Sophistic, such as the kingship orations of Dio of Prusa. But Julian envisaged a world different from that of old Greece or the early empire and he applied his hermeneutics with himself playing the major part in the drama of Hellenizing the empire. The paper will focus on two texts in which Julian considers the task of leadership in a world in flux: his letter to Themistius, in which he expresses his reservations about becoming the ruler, and the invented myth (a variation on Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*) in his oration against the Cynic Heracleios, in which he presents himself as commissioned by the Greek gods.

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An Anatomy of a Crisis in Ecclesiastical Leadership: Isidore and Eusebius in Pelusium

The subject of my paper is a routine type of crisis in leadership in the Christian church after the change in imperial policy toward the church and its clergy made it more

acceptable socially and more advantageous financially to occupy clerical positions. For several decades in the early fifth century, Isidore of Pelusium and his network of friends reproached and lamented the venal conduct of Eusebius, bishop of Pelusium, and several clerics he appointed. Why did Eusebius' episcopate constitute a crisis in the eyes of Isidore and his friends, and why did their efforts to alter the situation have little effect? After reviewing the character and conduct of the principal offenders from Isidore's point of view, I will analyze the types of people who exchanged letters on the situation with Isidore in order to understand their location in the social and political configuration of Pelusium, and I will explore reasons why portions of the population in Pelusium supported Eusebius or were not so perturbed by his conduct, contextualising Isidore's account by what we know more generally about the exercise of clerical office in the fourth and fifth centuries. I will conclude with some observations on the limitations, in this instance, of forthright criticism (*parrhesia*) as a means of altering the actions or policies of the powerful.

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Crisis or Victory: retailing Julian's Persian war of 363 CE

There were few occasions in Roman history in which the office of emperor was less attractive than it was to Jovian on his accession in July 363. His predecessor, Julian, had been killed in battle north of Ctesiphon a few days before and what remained of the invading Roman army was hopelessly stranded on the east bank of the Tigris. After negotiating the release of the army and most of its leadership at a heavy price, Jovian returned to Roman territory and immediately ordered reports of a great victory to be sent out to the four corners of the empire. In the highly charged rhetoric of the period that followed debates between pagans and Christians would rage over who was responsible for what is still seen as a major crisis for the Roman Empire. This paper examines the extent to which the outcome of Julian's Persian campaign represented a crisis for the Roman Empire at the time and how it was later mobilised by religious and political leaders for rhetorical purposes.

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Managing imperial political crises in the reign of Zeno (474-491)

During his reign, the eastern emperor Zeno had to manage three attempts on the throne which were supported by his friends and family and two groups of Goths in the Balkans. In addition, the Acacian schism, the deposition of Romulus Augustulus, and Huneric's persecution in Africa

all made western relationships challenging. Nonetheless, Zeno reigned for 17 years and died peacefully in 491, but without an heir, leaving a final challenge: the succession. This paper uses Zeno's reign to examine the tools by which Late Roman emperors tried to manage such crises. It also examines the ways in which differing types of primary sources (government documents, letters, saints' lives, and histories) described how these crises were handled both at the time and later.

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Julian's *Caesares* - selection criteria for a Caesar

To a modern reader it is surprising when Julian's list of Caesars includes some 'emperors' that Suetonius/Plutarch don't, especially around the 'year of the four emperors' (69 CE). This suggests that the list of emperors was still not fixed - and it was not even fixed for Suetonius and Plutarch (one begins with Julius Caesar, the other with Augustus). Perhaps what Julian is doing reflects something that also happens in *Historia Augusta*, the inclusion of heirs and usurpers as well as 'emperors.' Ausonius does a similar thing. It is also interesting which ones Julian does mention but doesn't name (the so-called *damnatio memoriae*).

In this paper I will collect the characters Julian does and doesn't include that would be surprising, based on Suetonius/Plutarch and Eutropius (there being no 'control group' for this study). There was a flurry of writing about Caesars in the mid-fourth Century, which suggests a re-calibration was going on, but Julian's list does not quite match Aurelius Victor's *de caesaribus* or Ausonius' verses on the Caesars (both also in 360s). This makes it interesting to think about what sources Julian was using (but these choices should not be put down to the *Kaisergeschichte*/Suetonius auctus alone). Was there something about the fourth century, or something about a Caesar writing from the inside, that encouraged the inclusion of the non-canonical emperors? After the 'crisis of the third century' with multiplying claimants of the empire, the concept of 'usurper' had really come to the fore, and the changed dynamic of the tetrarchy (in the two generations before Julian) means there is in Julian's time a broader group of eligible heirs and usurpers- the group of 'Caesars' has just become a lot bigger. It might be that this encourages the writers of the fourth century to look back and see a wider group of Caesars, even in the first century.

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Localizing Crisis and Leadership in Late Roman Communities

Scholars working on contemporary responses to disasters emphasize the potentially conflictual relationship between the knowledge and voices of local stakeholders and the guidelines or impositions of external experts. This tension between “local” and “expert” perspectives tends not to emerge from our late antique sources—primarily because both the inclination and the resources for concerted state intervention in local crisis management were limited. Nonetheless, it provides a useful analytical frame for exploring interactions between local communities and powerful outsiders at moments of crisis. This paper analyzes a collection of anecdotal accounts of such interactions and uses their messiness, incoherence, and imperfection to examine the complex dynamics of local expectations and experiences of crises in the period.

**Professor Bronwen Neil**

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Who was the Antichrist in Late Antiquity? Answers from the Fourth Century

Late-antique Roman societies had a morbid fascination with the End of Days, and more importantly, determining their futures in the face of various kinds of crisis, whether political, environmental, or religious. Such crises offered an opportunity for a different kind of leadership, one that claimed direct access to God via apocalyptic visions. In the fourth to eighth centuries, frequent natural disasters, strange astronomical phenomena, and military defeats were interpreted as unmistakable signs that the world as the Romans knew it was about to end. They signalled to Christians that the Eschaton and the Day of Judgement were near and raised expectations that the antichrist might be about to appear.

An increasing level of eschatological concern is revealed in the production and increased consumption of apocalyptic literature in the Early to Middle Byzantine period. These works in various genres purported to pass on revelations of hidden knowledge about the end of human history and who would be saved. The notion of antichrist was an important feature of Christian apocalyptic and was adapted to deal with the transition to a newly Christian empire. I analyse the way the terms ‘antichrist’, man of lawlessness, and ‘pseudo-christ’ were reframed to deal with sectarian and schismatic Christians in the fourth century.

Four possible identifications of the antichrist are presented, based on four Christian authors: the north African Lactantius, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Cyril of Jerusalem. Their works reflect changing beliefs about the identity and intentions of the antichrist, before and after the crisis caused by Constantine’s conversion to Christianity and accession as sole ruler of the Roman empire in 312 CE. By comparing these texts of various genres, including histories, homilies, and apologetic treatises, we can see how their authors adapted to deal with the transition to a newly Christian empire and other changing circumstances for eastern Roman Christians in the turbulent events of the fourth century.

**Professor Pablo Ubierna**, CONICET-Universidad Pedagógica Nacional  
and **Diego M. Santos**, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional

The word *hrot* in Codex Tchacos fol. 33, 20

Since the *editio princeps*, the hapax legomenon *hrot* troubled both editors and translators. After a review of all published suggestions, especially David Brakke's latest seminal article on this topic, we will revisit our 2009 Spanish translation to offer an etymology that preserves our knowledge of pre-Coptic and Coptic phonology and orthography. Reflections on text circulation and lexical choice from a cross-cultural perspective will also be made.

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Ripping off the bandage: The literary creation of Domitian's tyranny

The division between good and bad rulers and advisors can be remarkably unstable. This talk will look at the creation of the story of Domitianic failure and tyranny by Nerva, Trajan, and authors working under them. Although Domitian seems to have been a reasonably successful and popular emperor during his life, he now stands as one of the three classic “bad” emperors of the first century. Drawing upon the propaganda of Nerva and Trajan as well as the literary works of Pliny, Tacitus, Plutarch, and Suetonius, this analysis reveals that many of the figures most responsible for defining Domitian as a bad emperor after his death were people who benefited greatly from his favor during his life. The redefinition of Domitian and his advisors as “bad” then had a couple of important effects. First, it sidelined some Domitianic advisors from the new imperial order while it insulated people like Pliny, Tacitus, and Trajan from charges that they were complicit in the regime’s most controversial actions. Second, the “badness” of Domitian also made it easier for Nerva and Trajan to discredit and ultimately walk away from some of Domitian's more successful policies. The shifting definition of “good” and “bad” among emperors and their advisors is sometimes a cynical rhetorical move that nevertheless has very real implications for the functioning of the state.

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“All the generalissimo’s men?”

The western Roman army’s chain of command in an era of crisis (395-493 CE)

Nearly a century ago, sir Ronald Syme astutely observed on the rise of Augustus in his pioneering work *The Roman Revolution* (1939), that “[h]owever talented and powerful in himself, the Roman statesman cannot stand alone, without allies, without a following.” While the fall of

the Roman Republic and the end of the Roman Empire in the West are separated by four/five centuries, the usefulness of Syme's adage equally applies to the latter era. The disintegration of the western Roman imperial state apparatus between 395 and 493 CE can be regarded as the severest crisis of the Late Roman Empire (until the Persian and Arab invasions of the seventh century). Yet this outcome was not inevitable and during the fifth century many men and women strove hard to keep the Imperial West at bay. At least the period of 395-454 was characterized by a form of dual-leadership described by Meaghan McEvoy as 'ceremonial emperors and military managers' (2013). The significance of these latter *magistri utriusque militiae*, also popularly known as 'Generalissimos', has long been recognized (Stein 1928, Cameron 1970, Demandt 1970, O'Flynn 1983). Men such as Stilicho, Constantius [III] or Aëtius achieved positions of secular authority that often threatened to marginalize even the emperors they were serving. Yet throughout this critical century, no 'generalissimo' or 'military manager' could tackle by himself the many crises plaguing the *Hesperium Regnum*, especially during times of war or domestic insecurity. This paper wishes to investigate commanders of the western Roman army who served underneath such 'military managers'. It will first try to give an overview of the many violent crises plaguing the Imperial West, then survey what (little) we know of other commanders in this era, and whether we can discern any noteworthy developments or features in their appointment or *modus operandi*.