



THE *ADLOCVTIO* AT THE ACCESSION OF THE ROMAN EMPEROR*

ABSTRACT

One of the most distinctive rituals of Roman imperial accession was the adlocutio, the speech delivered by the new emperor to a military assembly, which can be documented from the first to the fifth centuries A.D. This article seeks to explain the extraordinary endurance of this neglected genre of speech by examining its origins, setting and content. After outlining the unusual nature of the accession adlocutio when set against both earlier and contemporary Mediterranean practice, the first half of this article traces its origins to the military culture of the late Roman Republic. In particular, the adlocutio is related to two other rituals which rose to new prominence in the era of the Civil Wars: the acclamation of the victorious general as imperator and the granting of military gifts. In the second part of this article, the setting for the typical adlocutio of the Imperial era is discussed using the often-problematic evidence of our ancient historical sources. The content of the speech itself is then reconstructed primarily through a close reading of our one surviving example, the brief address of Leo I preserved by Peter the Patrician. Finally, the evidence for the origins and content of the speech are brought together in an argument for the speech's survival as a useful tool for emperors seeking to establish a permanent bond with the soldiers they commanded.

Keywords: emperors; *adlocutio*; acclamation; accession; *imperator*; donative; army

Shortly after the death of Emperor Claudius in A.D. 54, the 16-year-old Nero was carried to the camp of the Praetorian Guards outside the city walls. During this trip, the new emperor mounted a tribunal amidst the gathered soldiers and delivered an *adlocutio*, a military oration. He was also acclaimed by the soldiers as *imperator*, and promised a substantial financial bequest.¹ Four hundred and three years later and over fourteen hundred miles away, Nero's distant successor, a Thracian soldier named Leo, would mount a similar tribunal in a military camp outside the walls of Constantinople. There, he was hailed as ἀυτοκράτωρ and, through one of his officials, 'delivered' a brief oration in which he too pledged a generous donative.² The vast temporal gulf which separated these two events saw fundamental changes in the nature of both the Roman Empire itself and the office at its summit, yet this speech along with the rituals around it remained intact.

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¹ Suet. *Ner.* 8.1; Tac. *Ann.* 12.69.1–3; Cass. Dio 61.3.1.

² *De Ceremoniis* 1.91. Leo's ceremony was recognized by the sixth century as the last of an 'old' style of accession, subsequently replaced with a newer form that no longer included a military-style *adlocutio*: G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (New York, 2004), 59–64.

This article will consider the reasons for this survival by looking at the origins and substance of this almost entirely neglected speech genre. When the address' historical development is considered alongside its setting and content, it becomes evident that the accession *adlocutio* owed its improbable endurance to its utility as a tool for cementing the bonds between an emperor and his army. Rather than a piece of sophisticated oratory, this speech was a short, formulaic address which enabled the emperor both to respond to and to solicit the acclamations of his soldiers as *imperator* while promising them a donative. It thus formed a central component of an interlocking set of distinctively Roman legitimizing rituals which dated back to the Republic itself. In performing these traditional rites, the new emperor fulfilled his soldiers' ideological expectations and demonstrated his worthiness to rule.

The first section of this article will examine the significance of this oration with a particular emphasis on its historical uniqueness as a militarized speech-ritual forming part of an accession ceremony. The second part will set out its origins in the military oratory of the late Roman Republic, with particular emphasis on its relationship to the acclamation of *imperatores* and the distribution of rewards. The third section will examine what can be recovered of the setting of the *adlocutio* and the circumstances under which it was delivered. Finally, the most substantial section of this article will reconstruct the content of this speech as far as we can recover it through a close reading of the sole surviving example, the extremely brief remarks delivered by Leo in 457 that are preserved in the *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SPEECH

From the early first century until the late fifth, every adult emperor who was not promoted by a colleague began his reign with an address to a military audience.³ This was true regardless of the location of his accession and whether he was a dynastic heir or a usurper against an existing ruler.⁴ Such speeches are attested when the emperor was created at Rome—as was the case with Nero in the early Empire—or in the provinces—Septimius Severus in second-century Pannonia or Valentinian I in fourth-century Asia Minor—or at Constantinople—Leo at the very end of our period.⁵ Even where it is not specifically mentioned, the delivery of this address is suggested on many more occasions, when we are told of new emperors such as Domitian or Marcian appearing before their troops to receive their acclamations, a ritual which, as we will see, was closely linked with the *adlocutio*.⁶ It probably occurred too in instances

³ Child emperors were not required to deliver the *adlocutio*: see Elagabalus at Cass. Dio 79.31 and Hdn. 5.3.12, Severus Alexander at Hdn. 5.8.10, Gordian III at Hdn. 8.8.7, Gratian at Amm. Marc. 27.6, and Valentinian II at Amm. Marc. 30.10.5. On the adjustment of imperial expectations for young rulers: M. McEvoy, *Child Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West, AD 367–455* (Oxford, 2013). No address by the new emperor is recorded during collegiate accessions: Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 19; Amm. Marc. 26.4.3.

⁴ I follow Omissi's definition of a usurper as one who was either declared emperor without the consent of a reigning Augustus or participated in the assassination of an Augustus and then took his place: A. Omissi, *Emperors and Usurpers in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2018), 34.

⁵ On Nero and Leo, see nn. 1–2 above. Severus: Hdn. 2.10. Valentinian: Amm. Marc. 26.6.2–11; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 6.6; Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 4.5.

⁶ Domitian: Cass. Dio 66.26.3. Marcian: Theodor. *Lect. Hist. eccl. epit.* 354; *Chron. Pasch.* Ol. 307.

such as the successions of Titus or Antoninus Pius which were either too uneventful or too poorly covered by our sources to have left us any detailed contemporary notice.⁷ In many of these cases, this first speech was likely followed by a series of subsequent reiterations as the new emperor addressed himself to further military audiences as part of the ongoing process of accession, but it is the initial speech alone which is considered here, the first formal act of the new regime.

For much of this period, the accession *adlocutio* was not the only oration that a new emperor would be called upon to perform, nor even necessarily the most important. Nero followed up his speech to the cohorts with a Senate address and soon afterwards gave a poorly received *laudatio funebris* for his predecessor.⁸ Senatorial orations would remain a recurring element of accession for the following two centuries, even for emperors who initially took power abroad.⁹ Yet over time such occasions lost much of their significance, with the emperor's presence in both the Senate and Rome itself becoming steadily rarer.¹⁰ Theoretically of course, the reading of a speech in the absent emperor's name carried the same weight and force as his physical presence, just as his image was treated as an extension of the man, but contemporaries clearly understood that there was a real difference, whatever the ideological fiction.¹¹ The fact that new emperors continued to present themselves physically to deliver a military *adlocutio* thus set this oration apart from those accession addresses which were reduced to indirect communications earlier in imperial history.

Despite this extraordinary endurance, the fact of this speech has mostly been noted in passing by modern historians, receiving little attention even in dedicated discussions of the accession ceremonial.¹² It has consistently if understandably been overshadowed by the associated *acclamatio* which marked the official inauguration of a new reign and thus the moment of most profound political and constitutional significance.¹³ Nevertheless, the *adlocutio* was in itself an unusual custom for at least two reasons.

In the first place, it stands out because Rome did not develop the elaborate coronation rituals typical of ancient monarchy until the middle of the fifth century A.D.¹⁴ Romans were certainly familiar with accession ceremonies from the Hellenistic world, and Roman historians invented elaborate rituals of inauguration and enthronement for

⁷ Cass. Dio 66.18; *HA, Ant. Pius* 5.1–2.

⁸ *Tac. Ann.* 13.3.1; *Suet. Ner.* 9.1; Cass. Dio 61.3.1.

⁹ Such as Hadrian: *HA, Hadr.* 7.4.

¹⁰ R.J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton, 1984), 174–84; F. Millar, *The Emperor and the Roman World* (London, 1977), 341–55.

¹¹ C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and the Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2000), 106–8.

¹² W. Sickel, 'Das byzantinische Krönungsrecht bis zum 10. Jahrhundert', *ByzZ* 7 (1898), 511–57; F.E. Brightman, 'Byzantine imperial coronations', *JThS* 2 (1901), 359–92; A.E.R. Boak, 'Imperial coronation ceremonies of the fifth and sixth centuries', *HSP* 30 (1919), 37–47; O. Treuting, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell: Vom oströmischen Staats- und Reichsgedanken* (Jena, 1938), 7–31; A. Χριστοφιλοπούλου, *Ἐκλογή, Ἀναγόρευσις καὶ Στέψις τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ Ἀυτοκράτορος* (Athens, 1956) and, more recently, J. Szidat, *Usurpator tanti nominis: Kaiser und Usurpator in der Spätantike* (337–476 n. Chr.) (Stuttgart, 2010), 70–84. The best treatments of the speech are in military works: J. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (Oxford, 1984), 69–88; M. Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army in the Later Roman Empire, AD 235–395* (New York, 2017), 140–59.

¹³ The classic work remains J. Straub, *Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike* (Stuttgart, 1939). See also F. Kolb, *Herrscherideologie in der Spätantike* (Berlin, 2001), 91–102; Χριστοφιλοπούλου (n. 12), 60–4; Hebblewhite (n. 12), 140–59.

¹⁴ S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1981), 161–5.

their own archaic kings.¹⁵ Yet the Augustan monarchy famously began as a collection of scattered powers rather than as a single formal office, and no single ceremonial formula developed for a long time. Particular elements of Roman accession might wax or wane: for instance, the delivery of a funeral oration upon one's predecessor which expired with the Julio-Claudians, or the formal vote of the Senate that fades from record in the third century.¹⁶ Many of the visual *regalia* of the imperial office, most notably the diadem, became standardized only in Late Antiquity, in tandem with the development of formal coronation.¹⁷ However, while features of accession ceremony came and went, a speech by the new emperor to a military audience remained a central element of emperor creation which began in the informal, *ad hoc* process of the Principate and survived through the increasingly elaborate formalization of the ceremony in the Tetrarchic and Constantinian eras.¹⁸

The second reason why the accession address is so unusual is that in all the tremendous variety of coronation rituals in the ancient world there is no parallel for a military speech. Indeed, it was rare for there to be a speech of any sort. The Ancient Near East furnishes us with a considerable wealth of evidence for the ceremonial confirmation of a new monarch, often with common elements which would find their way into early Byzantine ceremonial, such as processions through the capital or changes into royal clothing.¹⁹ Yet nowhere in the complex ritual of Pharaonic enthronement or the anointing of the King of Israel was there a place for the new ruler himself to make any form of public address.²⁰ Indeed, the Pharaoh was deliberately held at arm's length from the public during his coronation, a 'passive and distant' figure seen only in a 'glimpse spied from afar'.²¹ The Hellenistic world, which did so much to shape Roman preconceptions of monarchy, provides us with a range of coronation scenes, from Polybius' detailed account of Ptolemy V's enthronement to Plutarch's sketch of the coronation of Antigonos Monophthalmos; yet again, however, nowhere does it offer a new *basileus* addressing his soldiers in a ritualized manner.²² This does not mean that these kings were always entirely silent; the Sasanian

¹⁵ Livy 1.18; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 60.3.

¹⁶ M. Hammond, 'The transmission of the powers of the Roman emperor from the death of Nero in A.D. 68 to that of Severus Alexander in A.D. 235', *MAAR* 24 (1956), 61–133 and B. Parsi, *Désignation et investiture de l'Empereur romain (I^{er} et II^e siècles après J.-C.)* (Paris, 1963). Some elements would return sporadically: Septimius Severus delivered a funeral oration for Pertinax after 193: Cass. Dio 75.4–5.

¹⁷ MacCormack (n. 14), 194–5; A. Alföldi, 'Insignien und Tracht der römischen Kaiser', *MDAI(R)* 50 (1935), 1–171, reprinted in A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche* (Darmstadt, 1970), 121–276.

¹⁸ Hebblewhite (n. 12), 142.

¹⁹ The literature on Near Eastern kingship is vast; see, above all, the classic H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Inauguration of Society and Nature* (Chicago, 1948), especially 101–39. For a more recent collection, see O. Hekster and R. Fowler, *Imaginary Kings: Royal Images in the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome* (Stuttgart, 2005). M. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth* (Berkeley, 2009) offers an interesting comparison of Roman and Sasanian royal ritual.

²⁰ H.W. Fairman, 'The kingship rituals of Egypt', in S.H. Hooke (ed.), *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* (Oxford, 1958), 74–104 and T.N.D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund, 1976). For more contemporary discussions: E.F. Morris, 'The Pharaoh and Pharaonic office', in A.B. Lloyd (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Egypt: Volume 1* (Oxford, 2010), 202–13; J. Day, 'Some aspects of the monarchy in ancient Israel', in R.I. Thelle, T. Stordalen and M.E.J. Richardson (edd.), *New Perspectives on Old Testament Prophecy and History* (Leiden, 2015), 161–74.

²¹ Morris (n. 20), 205.

²² Polyb. 15.25; Plut. *Vit. Demetr.* 18.1; see also Plut. *Vit. Artax.* 3.1–2. R. Strootman, *Courts and*

Shahanshah, for instance, would deliver a brief, formulaic address from the throne to an audience of nobles as part of his investiture.²³ Yet speech was confined to private remarks before a restricted, elite audience, rather than the open and military setting of the Roman *adlocutio*.

This matters not only because it distinguishes the Roman monarchy from its antecedents and contemporaries in the ancient world, but also because it suggests that this particular feature could not have been adopted from them either. In the absence of any external influence, we must therefore seek the origins of this peculiar speech in the earlier history and society of Rome itself.

FROM REPUBLICAN PRIVILEGE TO IMPERIAL PREREQUISITE

The Roman general stands before his gathered soldiers and delivers a fiery oration, castigating the tyranny of the current regime and promising a better future. His exultant audience responds with adulation, and with one voice acclaims him as their supreme commander, hailing him specifically as *imperator*. This account could be describing the accession ceremony of any number of usurpers in the Imperial era, yet in fact the subject is the Late Republican aristocrat Lucius Antonius, and the event is set in the Perusine War of 41 B.C., over two years before Caesar's heir would add 'Imperator' as a *praenomen* and over a decade before he would assume the name 'Augustus'.²⁴ As with so much of the Roman emperor's practice, we can find the roots of his acclamation and related *adlocutio*, along with the title of *imperator* itself, in the rituals of the Roman Republic from which his office originally emerged.

The salutation of victorious generals as *imperator* by their soldiers has left a sparse and complex trail in our sources.²⁵ While later authors situate the ritual as early as the Second Punic War, it is not mentioned in contemporary literary texts until the middle of the first century B.C., though it clearly predated this.²⁶ Major questions remain around the acclamation's constitutional significance and its relationship to the right to hold a triumph, but the key ambiguity for our purposes is around the ritual of acclamation itself. The number of recorded acclamations grew considerably throughout the Civil Wars, but almost all are described by our sources only with a brief note along the lines of *imperator appellatur* with no details on what this entailed.²⁷ In rare cases, we hear of soldiers acclaiming the *imperator* while still on the battlefield, flush with success, but it is far from clear whether this was the norm.²⁸ What is absolutely clear, however, is that a general who had received such a salutation had to respond to

Elites in the Hellenistic Empire: The Near East after the Achaemenids, c.330 to 30 BCE (Edinburgh, 2014), 210–32.

²³ A.S. Shahbazi, 'Coronation', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 6.2 (New York, 1993), 277–9.

²⁴ App. *B Civ.* 5.4.30–1. R. Syme, 'Imperator Caesar: a study in nomenclature', *Historia* 7 (1958), 172–88.

²⁵ R. Combès, *Imperator. Recherches sur l'emploi et la signification du titre d'Imperator dans la Rome républicaine* (Paris, 1966); cf. M.P. Rivero Gracia, *IMPERATOR POPULI ROMANI. Una aproximación al poder republicano* (Zaragoza, 2006); P. Assenmaker, 'Nouvelles perspectives sur le titre d'imperator et l'appellatio imperatoria sous la République', *RBP* 90 (2012), 111–42.

²⁶ Livy 27.19.4; Rivero Gracia (n. 25), 198–211; Assenmaker (n. 25). The title of *imperator* is attested both epigraphically and numismatically from the early first century: Assenmaker (n. 25), 121–8. For contemporary notifications of the acclamation, see Cic. *Pis.* 54, *Att.* 5.20.3; *Epit.* 2.10.3.

²⁷ Such as Caes. *BCiv.* 2.26.1, 3.31.1.

²⁸ App. *B Civ.* 2.44; Tac. *Ann.* 2.18.2.

it. Indeed, the subject of acclamations not only could but also should decline them at times. Plutarch criticizes Crassus harshly for accepting an undeserved acclamation, while praising Pompey for declining the honour even after a victory, preferring to wait until the war was won.²⁹ Appian likewise claims that commanders would accept the salutation only for the greatest victories, though he implies that this standard had slipped by his own day.³⁰

This raises the question of how such a response was delivered. Conceivably, it could be given in a non-verbal gesture, along the lines of Caesar's famous refusal of Antonius' diadem, although it is difficult to imagine this being communicated easily on the battlefield.³¹ It seems plausible, however, that any response—and potentially sometimes the initial acclamation itself—would be given in the more orderly venue of a post-battle *contio*, a military assembly. Such assemblies are amply documented and served as the standard setting for both Republican and imperial *adlocutiones*, when the general addressed his soldiers from an elevated platform.³² Livy depicts these addresses regularly in the aftermath of battles, including by inventing his own speeches, such as the oration of Scipio after the storming of Cartagena in 209 B.C.³³ From early on, a major function of these *adlocutiones* appears to have been the granting of rewards to particular units for successful combat operations, the *dona militaria*.³⁴ By the era of the Civil Wars, generals were also using them to promise, and probably also to distribute, significant cash gifts from their own coffers, sometimes called *largitiones*.³⁵ Even before the Principate, the *adlocutio* was thus frequently connected with military rewards, a natural development given the contemporary tendency to treat all such bequests as a personal gift of the commander himself.³⁶

By the end of the Republic, our sources thus draw repeated links between the phenomena of acclamation and response, *contio* and *adlocutio*, and the granting of military rewards. As we saw at the beginning of this section, Appian gives us one instance where an *adlocutio* seems to provoke an *acclamatio* after the surrender of a city.³⁷ The *Bellum Alexandrinum* presents us with another case in which Quintus Cassius Longinus granted his soldiers a *largitio* immediately after being hailed as *imperator* and then distributed the *dona militaria*, rituals we know were firmly associated with the *adlocutio*.³⁸ If the precise relationship of these rites is nowhere explicitly set out, this may itself be telling. We need not assume a single set practice; the entire process of acclaiming an *imperator* remained a loose collection of traditions rather than a codified ritual, and elements presumably fluctuated considerably between individual cases.³⁹ What we can say with certainty is that the *acclamatio*, the *adlocutio* and the personal granting of gifts by the

²⁹ Plut. *Vit. Crass.* 17.3, *Vit. Pomp.* 12.3.

³⁰ App. *B Civ.* 2.44.

³¹ Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 61.

³² F. Pina Polo, *Los contiones civiles y militares en Roma* (Zaragoza, 1989).

³³ Livy 26.48.3–5.

³⁴ S.E. Phang, *Roman Military Service: Ideologies of Discipline in the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge, 2008), 197–9. See the catalogue of *contiones* in Pina Polo (n. 32), 333–45.

³⁵ *BAlex.* 48, 52. The name was a derisive one.

³⁶ See, for example, the celebrated Bronze of Ascoli, which presents the awarding of citizenship to allied horsemen as a personal act of Pompey Strabo (*CIL* I 709).

³⁷ App. *B Civ.* 5.4.30–1.

³⁸ *BAlex.* 48.

³⁹ Assenmaker (n. 25), 134–8. A handful of Greek sources suggest that there was a minimum number of enemy casualties required for an acclamation but all are problematic. Dio gives no figure, Diodorus places the number at six thousand but the text may be a later interpolation, and Appian

victorious general were all firmly established Republican military rituals, that the latter two were clearly and closely interrelated, and that the former appears to have been increasingly associated with these by the time of the Civil Wars.

All three of these rites also fit within a larger trend in late Republican military culture in which generals increasingly sought opportunities to bind themselves personally to their soldiers. Oratory was a key part of this approach. While there has been considerable modern debate around the historicity of the battlefield exhortations so beloved of classical historians, there is little doubt that military rhetoric more broadly was a real and burgeoning genre in the first century B.C.⁴⁰ Just as the number of imperial salutations appears to have grown considerably at this time, so too did it see the emergence of what Campbell dubs a 'new tradition of military eloquence'.⁴¹ The success of techniques such as these in bonding *imperatores* and the men they commanded would remake the state itself from the time of Sulla onwards.

When the following century of revolution gave way to the order of the Principate, the new rulers understood from the beginning that theirs was a military monarchy resting on the support of those same soldiers.⁴² Following the death of Augustus in A.D. 14, Tacitus emphasizes that Tiberius immediately gave the watchword to the Praetorians as Emperor, sent out letters to the legions, and ensured that the *sacramentum*, the military oath, was sworn to him, all before addressing the Senate in order to feign reluctance to take power.⁴³ At the same time, he was able to reward the guards by distributing the thousand sesterces apiece left by Augustus in his will, a tradition he would follow and indeed double himself.⁴⁴ Yet it is interesting to note that no source describes Tiberius promising this payment to his soldiers in person, nor does he offer his own money. Indeed, he is nowhere recorded as delivering an *adlocutio* to either the Praetorians or any other unit, even as he made numerous speeches in other venues, including in the Senate and at the funeral of his adoptive father.⁴⁵ He also did not receive a new salutation as *imperator* at this time, which was perhaps understandable since he had already been acclaimed seven times.⁴⁶

Why then did the accession *adlocutio* develop in the later Julio-Claudian era if it had not existed at the commencement of the Principate? It can hardly have been for its rhetorical value; while the emperor was expected to pose as an 'orator par excellence'

claims only that it was ten thousand by his own time: Cass. Dio 37.40.2; Diod. Sic. 36.14; App. *B Civ.* 2.44.

⁴⁰ See M.H. Hansen, 'The battlefield exhortation in ancient historiography. Fact or fiction?', *Historia* 42 (1993), 161–80, which distinguishes between camp orations and battlefield exhortations at 166–7. Cf. E. Anson, 'The general's pre-battle exhortation in Graeco-Roman warfare', *G&R* 57 (2010), 304–18.

⁴¹ Campbell (n. 12), 70.

⁴² For discussions on the specific mechanisms, see E. Flaig, *Den Kaiser herausfordern* (Frankfurt, 1992); A. Pabst, *Comitia imperii* (Darmstadt, 1997).

⁴³ Tac. *Ann.* 1.7. J. Eaton, 'The political significance of the imperial watchword in the early Empire', *G&R* 58 (2011), 48–63; Campbell (n. 12), 19–32.

⁴⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.3.

⁴⁵ Suet. *Aug.* 100.3, *Tib.* 23; Cass. Dio 56.34.4–41.9; Tac. *Ann.* 1.11. See P.M. Swan, *The Augustan Succession* (Oxford, 2004); R. Pettinger, *The Republic in Danger: Drusus Libo and the Succession of Tiberius* (Oxford, 2012); J. Osgood, 'Suetonius and the succession to Augustus', in A. Gibson (ed.), *The Julio-Claudian Succession: Reality and Perception of the Augustan Model* (Leiden, 2012), 19–40; C. Vout, 'Tiberius and the invention of succession', in A. Gibson (ed.), *The Julio-Claudian Succession: Reality and Perception of the Augustan Model* (Leiden, 2012), 59–78.

⁴⁶ L. Schumacher, 'Die imperatorischen Akklamationen der Triumvirn und die auspicial des Augustus', *Historia* 34 (1985), 191–222.

and as an 'ideological model' of rhetoric, military addresses were not found in rhetorical handbooks, and they were not accorded the same respect as speeches in the Senate, the law courts and at funerals.⁴⁷ A clue can be found in the rites we have already seen associated with the Republican antecedents of the *adlocutio* and similarly omitted by Tiberius upon his accession: the imperial acclamation and personal granting of military gifts, particularly the donations of the Civil Wars given in kind.⁴⁸ Gaius was almost certainly acclaimed by the Praetorians at Misenum and very probably gave an *adlocutio* thereafter, and he certainly then awarded money to the soldiers, though like Tiberius this came primarily in the form of a legacy.⁴⁹ Claudius was likewise acclaimed by the Praetorians in their camp, may well have given an unattested *adlocutio* on this occasion, and was the first emperor to award the independent cash sum which would become ritualized as the *donatium*.⁵⁰ Nero is the first emperor who unquestionably did all three, and afterwards they became standard rituals of imperial accession.⁵¹ What united these men, and distinguished them from Augustus or Tiberius, was that none had serious military experience or had ever received a salutation as *imperator* before the day of their accessions. Indeed, after Junius Blaesus in A.D. 22, the title of *imperator* would be reserved for the *princeps* alone.⁵²

In this context, the new utility of the *adlocutio* alongside its accompanying rituals becomes rather clearer. Early in their reigns, Augustus and Tiberius could point to long and at least superficially impressive military careers.⁵³ Each had already won the respect of their soldiers and each had in particular already been repeatedly saluted as *imperator*, that ultimate mark of generalship, with Augustus adding it to his permanent nomenclature.⁵⁴ Both therefore took power with established histories as generals and patrons of their soldiers; it was thus possible, for example, for Augustus to be depicted on statues in military dress and with his hand raised in the traditional gesture of *adlocutio*, even as he almost never took to the field himself in his later reign.⁵⁵ This surely also helps to explain why these emperors could credibly claim credit for battles won 'under their auspices', also in the manner of the *imperatores* of the Republic.⁵⁶

When, however, their heirs took power without this same record to point to, it was still more urgent that they both win the consent of their soldiers and publicly demonstrate their support. The interwoven rituals of acclamation, *adlocutio* and the granting of gifts formed

⁴⁷ L. Pernot (transl. W.E. Higgins), *Rhetoric in Antiquity* (Washington, DC, 2005), 171; see Millar (n. 10), 205–12; C. Jones, 'Nero speaking', *HSPH* 100 (2000), 453–62.

⁴⁸ On the relationship of *largitio* and the *donatium*: Hebblewhite (n. 12), 72; cf. P. Veyne (transl. B. Pearce), *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (Cambridge, 1990), 339–40. The *donatium* remained firmly separate from the *dona militaria*, which were far more specialized, given in kind, and remained in use independently in the Imperial era: Hebblewhite (n. 12), 93–8.

⁴⁹ The acclamation can be deduced from subsequent senatorial confirmation: A.A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (New Haven, 1989), 53. An *adlocutio* is suggested by contemporary coinage: *BMC* I, 151, 33; Campbell (n. 12), 80–2.

⁵⁰ Suet. *Claud.* 10.4; Joseph. *AJ* 19.3–4.

⁵¹ See n. 1 above.

⁵² Tac. *Ann.* 3.74.6–7.

⁵³ Augustus at least had a record of sorts by the time he took on this title: Aug. *RGDA*, 2–4.

⁵⁴ Syme (n. 24); Campbell (n. 12), 124.

⁵⁵ As on his famous statue at Prima Porta; see the bibliography in E. Simon, 'Altes und Neues zur Statue des Augustus von Primaporta', in G. Binder (ed.), *Saeculum Augustum* 3 (Darmstadt, 1987), 204–33.

⁵⁶ F.J. Vervaeke, *The High Command in the Roman Republic. The Principle of the summum imperium auspiciumque from 509 to 19 BCE* (Stuttgart, 2014).

an obvious set of pre-existing mechanisms for extracting this consent with an impeccably Republican pedigree. Once adopted, they would be retained because they served precisely this function. Gaius would be acclaimed as *imperator* six more times while Claudius would record twenty-seven acclamations in total.⁵⁷ The *donatium* became a sum handed out not only upon accession but at important imperial anniversaries and occasions, its value rising over the course of the Principate.⁵⁸ In this context, it is unsurprising that the *adlocutio* too would endure, and indeed be celebrated. The first issues of *adlocutio* coinage would be issued in the first year of Gaius' reign, and they would continue into the fourth century.⁵⁹

While historians at the time tended to dismiss the accession *adlocutio* without much comment in order to focus upon speeches to the Senate or at imperial funerals, it was the military address alone which would become a permanent feature of accession in Late Antiquity. This peculiar speech was a Republican tradition which did not simply 'survive' but rather was actively revived and modified in the Principate precisely because it served an important function for these early emperors. It endured thereafter because it continued to have this utility for their successors. It remains then to examine exactly how this useful speech played out in practice, and how it retained its relationship with the rites of acclamation and donative-giving which had made it so indispensable.

THE SETTING

Any discussion of the accession ceremony at which the *adlocutio* was staged requires a note of historiographical caution. Much of the evidence for this event comes from a handful of literary historians, in particular Herodian and Ammianus Marcellinus. Yet these were authors who had larger agendas to advance even when they were well informed about events, which was not always the case. Historians understood well the importance of first impressions for a new emperor, just as Tacitus had famously set the tone for Tiberius' reign by inaugurating his discussion of it with the 'first crime of the new regime'.⁶⁰ Herodian in particular wrote about accession more than any other author, each time seizing the opportunity of the ceremony to establish some of the driving themes that would guide his discussion of the new ruler.⁶¹ Ammianus has long been recognized for his love of depicting vivid visual tableaux where historical plausibility often seems secondary to arresting imagery.⁶² This problem will only become more acute when it comes to the supposed texts of speeches themselves, as we shall see in the following section.

Fortunately, we are able to stitch together a reasonably coherent picture of what was probably a 'standard' accession ceremony from at least the late second century on, although there was doubtless considerable individual variation.⁶³ An emperor was

⁵⁷ Campbell (n. 12), 124.

⁵⁸ Campbell (n. 12), 186–98.

⁵⁹ *BMC* I, 151, 33.

⁶⁰ *Tac. Ann.* 1.6.1.

⁶¹ *Hdn.* 1.5, 2.2.6–9, 2.8.1–6, 2.10.

⁶² E. Auerbach (transl. W. Trask), *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition* (Princeton, 2003), 50–76; T.D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (Ithaca, 1998).

⁶³ See especially Kolb (n. 13), 98–9, which may however be somewhat overrigid in its formalization.

chosen, through means which fall outside the scope of this paper.⁶⁴ A military assembly was then called to ratify the choice. The location of this could vary widely, though it was typically at the Praetorian Barracks if the emperor acceded at Rome before 312, or the *campus Martius* at the Hebdomon if he acceded at Constantinople up to 457.⁶⁵ An announcement of the chosen candidate, the *pronuntiatio*, would be made by a senior official from a wooden or stone platform, to which the would-be emperor would then ascend, usually dressed in military clothing ‘to reinforce his role as *imperator*’.⁶⁶ He might first make a sacrifice in the pagan era, although this seems to have been more commonly performed after his acclamation.⁶⁷ Upon the platform itself, the chosen man would be surrounded by eagles and the *signa militaria* to ensure that he presented a suitably regal image, and he might also be accompanied by guards or other supporters; it is possible that Commodus, for example, was flanked by his father’s advisers.⁶⁸ Once imperial insignia such as the *paludamentum* and the diadem had been developed in the later period, it was at this point that the claimant would be invested with them.⁶⁹

The central purpose of the ceremony was to extract a ritual endorsement of the new emperor’s claim through an expression of consensus from the massed soldiers. This endorsement was won by the proclamation of the candidate as *imperator*, the *nuncupatio*, which would be answered by the *acclamatio* of the soldiers.⁷⁰ As we have seen, this acclamation as *imperator* was linked with *adlocutio* from the beginning and as a direct sequel to the salutation of Republican generals. The prominence of acclamations in broader Roman society only grew in the late antique period.⁷¹ Nor were these acclamations a single moment in the ceremony; rather, they were evidently stage-managed to precede and follow the new emperor’s *adlocutio* and even to interrupt it.⁷² Following the speech and any final acclamations, the ceremony would end with the soldiers taking an oath in their new ruler’s name.

This naturally raises the question of how far the audience were ever ‘reacting’ to the *adlocutio* as they heard it. Were their shouts prearranged, or genuinely unplanned? This issue is once again complicated by the ever-present tension in our historiographical sources between an accurate reporting of events as they knew them and the desire to construct a dramatic literary set-piece. We can see this tension vividly illustrated in Ammianus’ contrasting treatment of a pair of acclamations in Book 26, neither of

⁶⁴ See Pabst (n. 42); Flaig (n. 42); Parsi (n. 16); R. Pfeilschifter, *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel* (Berlin, 2013).

⁶⁵ The scant evidence for other capitals also supports the pattern of an extramural camp ceremony: see Majorian at Ravenna in *Fast. Vind. Prior.* s.a. 457, and Galerius at Nicomedia in Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 19. Emperors chosen on campaign were presumably acclaimed wherever the camp happened to be.

⁶⁶ Hebblewhite (n. 12), 155.

⁶⁷ *De munitionibus castrorum* 11; Hdn. 1.5.2, cf. 2.2, 2.6.12.

⁶⁸ Hebblewhite (n. 12), 156; Hdn. 1.5.2. Herodian had his own reasons for emphasizing the prominence of Commodus’ advisers, but Ammianus repeatedly suggests that the presence of others for *adlocutiones* was normal: Amm. Marc. 20.5.1, 21.13.9.

⁶⁹ Alföldi (n. 17), 167–74; MacCormack (n. 14), 194–5.

⁷⁰ The terms are modern, though derived from the language in our sources; see Kolb (n. 13), 105–7; J. den Boeft, J.W. Drijvers, D. den Hengst, H. Teitler, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXVI* (Leiden, 2007), 43.

⁷¹ C. Roueché, ‘Acclamations in the later Roman empire: new evidence from Aphrodisias’, *JRS* 74 (1984), 181–99.

⁷² *De Ceremoniis* 1.91; Amm. Marc. 15.8.9, 27.6.10; Hebblewhite (n. 12), 152.

which he witnessed.⁷³ As the soldiers began to chant for Valentinian I to appoint a second emperor at his accession in 364, Ammianus leaves no doubt that this represented the authentic will of the army. We are repeatedly told that the uproar emerged from all of the units present, and allegations from ‘a few’ later detractors that these were purchased are refuted because the outcry was heard from ‘the entire assembly’.⁷⁴ Once Valentinian promised that he would appoint a colleague, he won over everyone (*uniuersos*), including those who had been shouting most adamantly beforehand.⁷⁵ Later in the same book, however, when the usurper Procopius seized power in Constantinople, the historian writes off the acclamations which he received by claiming that they began not as a genuine declaration of spontaneous mass support but rather through a handful of men hired for the purpose.⁷⁶ In both cases, it is clear that the historian is less concerned with relaying what actually happened than with presenting a larger point: Valentinian was a legitimate Roman emperor who enjoyed the authentic consensus of his subjects while Procopius was not.⁷⁷

Regardless of personal motivations, it is clear from this contrast that our historians are unlikely to provide us with a clear insight into the true level of imperial control exerted over these events. The most that can be said is that each accession obviously took significant preparation, and the Roman world was certainly no stranger to claque and planned demonstrations of apparent spontaneity.⁷⁸ The *contio* had its own rituals which were commonly understood by those who partook in them, even if much of this procedure was never written down. We get a glimpse of this procedure in the description of how the soldiers reacted to the nomination of Julian as Caesar: ‘When the speech ended, nobody restrained themselves; instead, all the soldiers crashed their shields against their knees in an awful clamour, which is a clear sign of their approval.’⁷⁹

On the other hand, our historian immediately follows this by adding that the soldiers could also smash their shields against their spears when they wished to indicate anger and disapproval, so perhaps the emperor was not always wholly in control.⁸⁰ After all, the initial unanimity in chants at Valentinian’s accession described above reflected an audience that was actively making a demand of the new emperor, specifically that he appoint a colleague.⁸¹ This might have been prearranged in order to give him an excuse to elevate his brother Valens, but this is impossible to say with certainty.⁸² At the accession of Pertinax, we are told that soldiers were displeased by the speech but did not voice this

⁷³ While Ammianus was with the army that would eventually proclaim Valentinian, his use of the first person to describe its movements stops the prior year: Amm. Marc. 25.10.1.

⁷⁴ Amm. Marc. 26.2.4.

⁷⁵ Amm. Marc. 26.2.11.

⁷⁶ Amm. Marc. 26.6.18.

⁷⁷ See J. Szidat, ‘*Imperator legitime declaratus* (Ammian 30.10.5)’, in M. Piérart and O. Curty (edd.), *Historia testis. Melanges d’epigraphie, d’histoire ancienne et de philologie offerts à Tadeusz Zawadzki* (Fribourg, 1989), 175–88.

⁷⁸ See, for one well-documented example, the claque of Antioch: J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), 208–19.

⁷⁹ Amm. Marc. 15.8.15; translation mine.

⁸⁰ Amm. Marc. 15.8.15. The same gesture is used when Julian’s soldiers protest against his efforts to delay an impending battle at 16.12.13.

⁸¹ Amm. Marc. 26.2.3–4; Philostorgius, *Hist. Eccl.* 8.8; Sozom. *Hist. Eccl.* 6.6; Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 4.5.

⁸² Parallels in the description of Valentinian’s response across the independent source traditions in n. 78 above suggest that an ‘official version’ of these events may have been circulated by the court.

immediately, but once again this seems suspiciously redolent of literary hindsight given the circumstances of his fall thereafter.⁸³ Ultimately, two things may be stated with confidence: first, that the vast majority of accession *adlocutiones* seem to have passed without incident, and second, that ancient authors believed that their readers would find it plausible that this was not always the case.⁸⁴

The ritual staging of the accession *adlocutio* thus went a considerable way to demonstrating the functions for which it was adopted by the later Julio-Claudians. The explicitly military trappings of the ceremony place the emphasis firmly on the relationship between the emperor and his soldiers, while the central role of the *acclamatio* makes clear the utility of the ceremony in extracting their declarations of consent. Nevertheless, it was possible to have all of these elements without an accompanying address by the new ruler. It may even have been less risky to do so, if our accounts of various disruptions to the *adlocutio* can be believed. It remains to be seen then what exactly the emperor said in his speech to justify its survival, along with how this linked to the third of our key rites, the promise of the donative.

THE SPEECH AND THE MODEL OF LEO I

Unfortunately, we are far more poorly informed about what emperors actually said on these occasions than we are about the ceremony at which they spoke. Speeches were likely written down rather than delivered extemporaneously; Dio claims that Nero's was scripted by no less an authority than Seneca.⁸⁵ However, military speeches were never considered fit for independent publication and no variant of the *adlocutio* is even mentioned in rhetorical handbooks.⁸⁶ We are thus left in effect with three distinct types of evidence of varying degrees of utility.

At the heart of any effort to reconstruct the accession *adlocutio* must be the account of Leo I's accession in 457 preserved probably by the sixth-century courtier Peter the Patrician.⁸⁷ This document appears to draw on official records and is utilized by Peter as a potential model for future accession ceremonies drawing on older precedents. If we cannot be certain that every detail is precisely correct, this text none the less represents the closest we can come to an authentic transcript of an accession *adlocutio*, supplying not only the brief speech itself but also a detailed record of the proceedings that accompanied it. Unfortunately, even if we accept the broad accuracy of the text, it presents a number of problems in reconstructing the phenomenon of accession *adlocutiones* in general. As the final accession *adlocutio* to occur in the traditional military context, this account shows multiple indicators of the formalization typical of late antique ceremonial, including the use of a herald to deliver the oration as well as the incorporation of increasingly complex coronation rituals such as the crowning with a torque and elevation upon a shield. None of these practices is recorded any earlier than the middle of the fourth

⁸³ Cass. Dio 74.1.

⁸⁴ See Hebblewhite (n. 12), 158–9 on failed *adlocutiones* in other contexts.

⁸⁵ Cass. Dio 61.3.

⁸⁶ Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.33 and 11.1.45 do at least briefly allude to the possibility of delivering a speech to an audience of soldiers.

⁸⁷ Brightman (n. 12); J.B. Bury, 'The ceremonial book of Constantine Porphyrogenitos', *EHR* 22 (1907), 209–27, 417–39; MacCormack (n. 14), 240–7.

century, and even then it is not clear that they were standard yet.⁸⁸ Given the ceremony's characteristic flexibility, we cannot simply assume that Leo's speech was representative of all *adlocutiones* held in the first four and a half centuries of imperial history, even if it provides us with a useful starting point.

Peter's text can be supplemented in the first place with records of other *adlocutiones* preserved in documentation rather than by literary sources. Andriollo has recently identified five potential partial texts of imperial *adlocutiones* delivered to military audiences, of which the most important by far is Hadrian's well-known set of addresses to the army at Lambaesis.⁸⁹ Once again, these sources are problematic for our purposes. One is heavily fragmented; others are clearly conveying a speech in a different literary framework, such as that of an edict, and are thus heavily modified from the words actually spoken. Most obviously, none was delivered on the occasion of an accession; they are therefore useful for helping to reconstruct general elements of military addresses but not for the specific contents of the accession speech.

We also have another, even more challenging category of evidence: the speeches given by Roman historians. These are indeed the only direct records of accession *adlocutiones* prior to Leo's address and we have only eight in total, none of them by authors who were personally present. Of these, one is preserved by Tacitus, three by Herodian, two by Ammianus, and two in the famously problematic *Historia Augusta*—in its most heavily fictionalized books at that.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, all face severe limitations as sources for the *adlocutio*. As noted in the previous section, the accession of a new emperor offered ancient authors a clear opportunity to set a tone for their entire reign. The speech which Tacitus gives to Otho, for example, dwells heavily on the alleged harshness and lack of generosity shown towards the soldiers by his predecessor and rival Galba.⁹¹ This is a perfectly plausible topic given his audience, but it also corresponds exactly with the historian's treatment of Otho as a profligate opportunist who indulged his lazy and greedy men, and the speech thus serves as an efficient summary of his character.⁹² Likewise, Kemezis has noted that Herodian delights in having his new emperors offer analysis which his audiences knew would be comprehensively refuted or rendered ironic by subsequent events.⁹³ Thus Pescennius Niger in his accession speech is made to insist that it is foolish to hesitate when called to take action, only to immediately pause to enjoy the luxuries of the East when the historian tells us it was essential for him to make for Rome at once.⁹⁴ It is well documented that speeches in classical historiography show scant concern with accuracy at the best of times; when

⁸⁸ Julian's accession is the first appearance of both the torque coronation and elevation on a shield: Amm. Marc. 25.4.17–18. The former is recorded as a momentary expedient, and there is only one other mention of a new emperor being lifted on a shield prior to Leo: Philost. *Hist. eccl.* 8.8. See W. Ennsin, 'Zur Torqueskronung und Schilderhebung bei der Kaiserwahl', *Klio* 35 (1942), 268–98 and H. Teitler, 'Raising on a shield: origin and afterlife of a coronation ceremony', *IJCT* 8 (2002), 501–21.

⁸⁹ L. Andriollo, 'Imperial *adlocutiones* to the army: performance, recording and functions (2nd–4th centuries CE)', *GFA* 21 (2018), 67–99.

⁹⁰ See the Appendix at the end of this article.

⁹¹ Tac. *Hist.* 1.36–8.

⁹² C.A. Perkins, 'Tacitus on Otho', *Latomus* 52 (1993), 848–55.

⁹³ A.M. Kemezis, *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans: Cassius Dio, Philostratus and Herodian* (Cambridge, 2014), 252–60.

⁹⁴ Hdn. 2.8.3, 2.8.7–10.

combined with the dramatic incentives provided by the occasion of accession, the temptation to invent their content appears to have been irresistible.⁹⁵

Once again, however, our inability to rely on the details of these speeches does not mean that we should dismiss them entirely. Most obviously, they can be said to represent at least what ancient audiences believed would be appropriate for a new emperor to say on such occasions. Even if the Roman reader encountering these texts was not intimately familiar with authentic accession rituals, some details do seem to have been well known. The imperial habit of addressing his troops as *commilitiones* in military addresses is amply documented, for example, and it finds its way into half of the literary speeches, including the two most obviously fictitious cases.⁹⁶ Thus, while the speeches given by our historians cannot be used as independent evidence for the content of the accession *adlocutio*, they can none the less give us some idea of what ancient audiences believed was plausible, particularly when read alongside the transcript of Leo's brief address.

In what follows, I attempt to sketch out a handful of knowable points about the course of the accession *adlocutio* itself based on these disparate sources.

1. Delivery

There is little that we can say for certain about the manner in which the speech was delivered. The *adlocutio* was frequently depicted in Roman art, above all on coinage. Between the fall of the Julio-Claudians and the end of the Severans, only three emperors did not have an *adlocutio* coin struck, although these were of course not strictly associated with accession.⁹⁷ These types invariably feature the emperor with his right arm outstretched in what appears to be a sweeping gesture of command.⁹⁸ Gesticulation was an increasingly important aspect of Roman oratory in the late Republic and early Empire, and the raised right hand became emblematic of the *adlocutio*, perhaps most famously represented in the Augustus of Prima Porta statue as well as on contemporary columns and reliefs.⁹⁹ It was when Valentinian I raised his right hand at his accession that his soldiers realized that he was about to speak and interrupted the ceremony to protest.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, although evidence is sparse, we can expect that under the circumstances, the speech was typically an animated one on the whole, and we know of at least one instance when props were allegedly used to add a fresh element of theatre.¹⁰¹

Such gesticulation was especially necessary since without the aid of technology, the emperor's words can only have been expected to reach a small number of the gathered soldiers. It is possible that heralds were used to relay his words beyond this in a gathered assembly, but our sources do not record it. By the time of Leo I, the *adlocutio* was

⁹⁵ J. Marincola, 'Speeches in classical historiography', in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography, Volume 1* (Malden, 2007), 118–32.

⁹⁶ Campbell (n. 12), 32–9; Hebblewhite (n. 12), 23; Tac. *Hist.* 1.37.1, 1.38.1; Cass. Dio. 74.1; *HA, Tyr. Trig.* 8.8, *Tac.* 8.5.

⁹⁷ Campbell (n. 12), 71.

⁹⁸ R. Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage* (New Haven, 1963), 167–8.

⁹⁹ G. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1999), especially 85–164.

¹⁰⁰ Amm. Marc. 26.2.3; den Boeft et al. (n. 70), 44–5.

¹⁰¹ Suet. *Galb.* 10.1. See also S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, 1994).

apparently no longer even directly delivered by the emperor himself but rather ‘through a *libellarius*’, meaning that an official actually read the words.¹⁰² The account nevertheless treats the emperor as speaking throughout, even using the first person. This is the first documented instance of an accession *adlocutio* being delivered by a figure other than the emperor, although the reading of addresses by others on the emperor’s behalf had long precedent.¹⁰³ It is unclear when exactly this custom developed, but we are now a long way removed from the idea of oratorical talent as a core imperial virtue, even if the *adlocutio* itself remained.

2. Length

The most notable aspect of Leo’s address as recorded in the *De Ceremoniis* is that it is barely a speech at all, consisting of only five sentences and fifty-three words, heavily punctuated by acclamations from the assembly. Yet an *adlocutio* with what Tacitus dubbed ‘brevity suitable for an emperor’ looks less surprising when placed alongside our other evidence.¹⁰⁴ The inscribed addresses of Hadrian at Lambaesis, which explicitly purport to be a direct transcript of the emperor’s words, would have taken less than a minute each to deliver.¹⁰⁵ The other three potential military addresses catalogued by Andriollo are also all less than a hundred and twenty-five words in their preserved forms.¹⁰⁶ Even our most questionable evidence, the literary constructs of the historians, is relatively short for direct oratory; none exceeds three hundred words, which may reflect a general belief that military speeches of this sort were supposed to be succinct.

It is certainly possible that some addresses were longer, particularly in the early Empire. We have seen that Nero’s address was allegedly written by Seneca and it was said to be very similar to his Senate address which was subsequently inscribed on silver tablets, suggesting something longer than a handful of words.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere, Dio describes Macrinus’ accession speech as ‘lengthy and excellent’.¹⁰⁸ It has been noted that the ceremony of accession became more formalized over time, and it would be in keeping with this trend for the speech to have also become more minimalist and formulaic, especially as it moved from being spoken by the emperor to being delivered by his heralds. Nevertheless, while there was surely tremendous individual variation, there is no evidence that a lengthy accession *adlocutio* was ever standard, and military oratory as a genre tended towards concision.

3. Language

In addition to typically being short, the *adlocutio* was also linguistically straightforward. Quintilian tells us in a rare observation on military speeches that words addressed to soldiers should be *simpliciora* so that they would be easily understood by an audience

¹⁰² *De Ceremoniis* 1.91.

¹⁰³ Tac. *Ann.* 13.3.2; Suet. *Claud.* 41–2.

¹⁰⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 1.18.1.

¹⁰⁵ M.P. Speidel, *Emperor Hadrian’s Speeches to the African Army – A New Text* (Mainz, 2006), 88–92. Speidel thinks that this suggests that more words were spoken but not recorded; see, however, B. Campbell’s review of Speidel’s volume in *JRS* 98 (2008), 209–10.

¹⁰⁶ Andriollo (n. 89), 75, 79, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Cass. Dio 61.3.

¹⁰⁸ Cass. Dio 79.12.

untutored in oratory.¹⁰⁹ Fronto gave similar advice to Marcus Aurelius for addressing non-aristocratic listeners.¹¹⁰ Once again, our small corpus of military addresses is useful as a guide here, particularly the Lambaesis text. These brief *adlocutiones* demonstrate the guidance of the rhetors being followed exactly, using straightforward Latin amply peppered with soldiers' jargon and precise military terminology clearly tailored towards listeners who would appreciate it.¹¹¹ Likewise, the *De Ceremoniis* text uses no technical or complex language in Leo's remarks, but sticks to brief and direct sentences with no room for ambiguity. Either Leo spoke in Greek or his speech has been translated; his predecessors would presumably have almost exclusively spoken in Latin, but this might have been adjusted depending on the origins of the soldiers whom he was addressing and on his facility with both languages. Whatever language it was delivered in, our evidence is unanimous that the accession *adlocutio* was never a speech of great linguistic art.

4. Content

Recovering what emperors actually said in their *adlocutio* is a process which of necessity entails interrogating our only surviving example, the Leo speech in the *De Ceremoniis*. This fact along with the aforementioned brevity of these remarks makes it both possible and desirable to reproduce them here in full with translations. I include the acclamations with which the assembly responded to each line, as this also tells us something useful about the way in which the new Augustus interacted with his audience—or, rather, did not. Although the words spoken by the *libellarius* are always clearly addressed to the military assembly, they never directly respond to any of the chants. The acclamations, however, could respond to specific statements in the speech itself.¹¹²

1) “ὁ Θεὸς ὁ παντοδύναμος καὶ ἡ κρίσις ἡ ὑμετέρα, ἰσχυρώτατοι συστρατιῶται, αὐτοκράτορά με τῶν τῶν Ῥωμαίων δημοσίων πραγμάτων εὐτυχῶς ἐξελέξατο.” παρὰ πάντων ἐκράγη· : “Λέων αὐγουστε, σὺ νικᾷς· ὁ σὲ ἐκλεξάμενος σὲ διαφυλάξει· τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἑαυτοῦ ὁ Θεὸς περιφουρήσει. εὐσεβὲς βασιλεῖον ὁ Θεὸς φυλάξει. καὶ εὐσεβῆς καὶ δυνατός.”

‘Almighty God and your judgement, my most valiant fellow soldiers, have with good fortune selected me as the emperor of the Roman state.’

A cry from all: ‘Leo Augustus, may you conquer! May he who chose you keep you! May God guard his chosen one! May God protect his faithful empire! Both faithful and powerful!’

Dispensing with any preamble, Leo—or, rather, the *libellarius* speaking as Leo—begins by invoking his selection as a result of both divine and mortal elections, two of the standard legitimizing rationales invoked by Roman emperors.¹¹³ It is important to note that Leo was not discussing some abstract past event here but rather the present ceremony itself; the ‘judgement’ of the soldiers was given in their preceding

¹⁰⁹ Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.32; cf. 11.1.45.

¹¹⁰ Fronto, *Ep. Ad M. Caesarem* 3.1.

¹¹¹ Speidel (n. 105), 88–92.

¹¹² J.J. Reiske, *De Ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1829), 411–12. All translations are my own; I have also broken the text into a transcript format to clearly distinguish the speech from the acclamations.

¹¹³ J.R. Fears, *Princeps a diis electus: The Divine Election of the Emperor as a Political Concept at Rome* (Rome, 1977); Pabst (n. 42). See also *De Ceremoniis* 1.93.

acclamations of him as *imperator*. Indeed, by Late Antiquity, it was standard to argue both that the soldiers had the right to speak for the whole people through the *consensus exercituum*, and that their supposedly spontaneous vocalization of unanimous support itself constituted a sign of divine endorsement.¹¹⁴ The ancient rituals of saluting a victorious general and receiving his response are still recognizable, but they have been given a far deeper ideological and theological resonance. Leo's words are immediately affirmed by the subsequent round of acclamations, which explicitly demonstrate the *consensus exercituum* in action while also verbally confirming that his selection came through God. This deceptively simple and even formulaic first line thus immediately restates the political theology of the emperorship itself while both responding to and provoking the military *acclamatio*.

For all its ideological weight, it is worth noting that this sentence is fundamentally generic. It could have been delivered by any of Leo's predecessors with only the number of deities altered. Yet this ritualistic line, presented as a statement of fact, is as much explicit self-justification as Leo gives; there is no sustained argument as to why he in particular has a right to rule, despite being a virtual unknown and the first non-Theodosian emperor in the East for almost eighty years.¹¹⁵ When historians recreated these events, they delighted in filling them with lengthy arguments about personal worthiness.¹¹⁶ Perhaps this was indeed sometimes the case, particularly for usurpers who may have found it useful, but if so then it was clearly not essential to the *adlocutio* by 457.

There is also no hint of reluctance by Leo, and thus no hint of the well-attested ritual of *recusatio*, the performative refusal to accept a proclamation.¹¹⁷ Like the *adlocutio* itself, this tradition dated back to the imperial acclamations of the Republic and was present from the very beginnings of the Principate onwards.¹¹⁸ In his account of the elevation of Maximinus Thrax, Herodian explicitly depicts this refusal as being done from the tribunal, thereby forming a part of the accession ceremony itself.¹¹⁹ This seems plausible enough, since it would doubtless have prompted the mass affirmation of support that demonstrated the requisite consensus.¹²⁰ None the less, the absence of *recusatio* from Leo's speech suggests that, if it did sometimes form a part of the ceremony, it was a purely optional element. When verbalized as part of the *adlocutio*, it must have come at the very start, allowing the crowd to vocalize their desire for the new emperor to accept this role before he agreed and delivered the rest of his address.

¹¹⁴ Them. *Or.* 5.65c–d; Julian. *Or.* 1.7D; Eutr. 9.2, 9.12, 10.10, 10.15, 10.17; Symm. *Or.* 1.9; Straub (n. 13), 7–75. See M. Anastos, 'Vox populi, voluntas Dei and the election of the Byzantine emperor', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults. Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty. Part 2: Early Christianity* (Leiden, 1975), 181–207; F. Heim, 'Vox exercitus, vox dei. La designation de l'empereur charismatique au IVe siècle', *REL* 68 (1990), 160–72.

¹¹⁵ His predecessor Marcian became a member through his marriage to Theodosius II's sister Pulcheria.

¹¹⁶ Such as Commodus' dynastic appeal at Hdn. 1.5.5.

¹¹⁷ U. Huttner, *Recusatio imperii. Ein politisches Ritual zwischen Ethik und Taktik* (Hildesheim, 2004).

¹¹⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 52; Cass. Dio 54.1.4; Tac. *Ann.* 1.12–13; Vell. Pat. 2.124.2; Suet. *Tib.* 24.1; Cass. Dio 57.2.3; Pettinger (n. 45), 157–68.

¹¹⁹ Hdn. 6.8.5–6.

¹²⁰ J. Béranger, *Recherches sur l'aspect idéologique du principat* (Basel, 1953), 137–69; Huttner (n. 117).

2) ἀπόκρισις. αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ αὐγουστος· “ἔξεται με ἐξουσιαστὴν ἄρχοντα τῶν κόπων συστρατιώτην, ὧν μεθ’ ὑμῶν ἔτι στρατευόμενος ἔμαθον ὑπομένειν.”

παρὰ πάντων ἐβοήθη· “εὐτυχῶς· ὁ στρατός σε βασιλεύοντα, νικητὰ· ὁ στρατός σε βασιλεύοντα, εὐτυχῆ· σὲ ποθοῦμεν πάντες.”

Response: Emperor Caesar Augustus: ‘You will have me as your authority, managing the soldierly toils which I learnt to bear while serving as a soldier alongside you.’

A cry from all: ‘Good fortune! The army wants you as emperor, conqueror; the army wants you as emperor, fortunate one. We all want you!’

The second line of Leo’s address places heavy emphasis on the supposed camaraderie between the emperor and his new subjects. A variant on the word συστρατιώτης, fellow-soldier, already present in the first line, is here repeated, and Leo also emphasizes his own history as a soldier ‘alongside you’.¹²¹ While the language of *commilitiones* is standard, as noted above, the specific mention of Leo’s military service is obviously a reference to his past as a guardsman and thus the only clearly personalized element in the entire oration. This is interesting both as a reminder that such personalization could occur even within an extremely short text and because the one place in which this was done was to emphasize the connection with his soldiers. Even at this late date, the creation of the personal bond between an emperor and his troops remained at the heart of the accession ceremony in general and of the *adlocutio* in particular.

Each of the first two lines of the speech thus serves a distinct ritualistic function; the emperor announces his selection through the accepted mechanisms of divine and human election, then personally underlines his relationship with his army. We know that some emperors made distinct policy promises at the beginning of their reign; rulers in the Principate, for example, often swore an oath not to execute senators.¹²² Yet there is no hint of any such specific promises in Leo’s speech with one important exception. When historians insert them into their invented addresses, it is thus hard to avoid the suspicion that they are conflating a number of separate actions in the early accession period in one convenient literary set piece.¹²³

This only makes it more notable, however, that there is one extremely specific policy promise which appears in Leo’s accession speech, as brief as it is. This promise takes up the entire second half of the speech and serves to introduce the second purpose of the *adlocutio* beyond the acceptance of the acclamation.

3) ὁ αὐγουστος· “καὶ ἔγνω, ὅποια ὀφείλω δώματα παρασχεῖν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν.” ὑπὸ πάντων ἐκράγη· “καὶ εὐσεβῆς καὶ δυνατὸς καὶ λογιώτατος.”

The emperor: ‘And I know with what donatives I shall reward the soldiers.’
A cry from all: ‘Faithful and powerful and most eloquent!’

4) ὁ αὐγουστος· “ὑπὲρ ἐντεύξεως τῆς ἁγίας καὶ εὐτυχοῦς βασιλείας μου ἀνὰ ε’ νομισμάτων καὶ λίτραν ἀργύρου καταβοσκούλον δώσω.”

παρὰ πάντων ἐβοήθη· “καὶ εὐσεβῆς καὶ δαμιλῆς. διὰ σοῦ τιμαί, διὰ σοῦ οὐσίαι. χρυσέους αἰώνας βασιλεύουσα εὐτυχῆς εἶη ἡμῖν ἡ βασιλεία σου.”

¹²¹ Campbell (n. 12), 32–9.

¹²² A.R. Birley, ‘The oath not to put senators to death’, *CR* 12 (1962), 197–9.

¹²³ Cass. Dio 79.12; Amm. Marc. 20.5.7.

The emperor: 'For the commencement of my holy and fortunate reign, I will give five *nomismata* (*solidi*) and a pound of silver to each shield-bearer.'

A cry from all: 'Both faithful and generous! Through you honours, through your riches! May your reign be fortunate for us, a golden age!'

5) αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ αὐγουστος: "ὁ Θεὸς μεθ' ὑμῶν."

Emperor Caesar Augustus: 'May God be with you.'

It is here that we see again a close relationship between the words of the speech and the acclamations that punctuated it. Leo announces his intention to grant an accession donative and is praised for it; when he continues with the specific amount, then the result is a cacophony of praise specifically directed towards his supposed generosity. In fact, Leo was likely doing no more than was conventional, as the figure matches precisely the accession donative which Ammianus describes Julian offering in A.D. 360 as well as the accession donatives later recorded for Leo II, Anastasius and Justin I.¹²⁴ His specificity in a speech so utterly devoid of it is none the less striking. It is equally telling that these remarks come at the end of the address, and, as soon as the promise is made, the emperor can invoke divine blessing and then proceed into the capital. The announcement of the donative is clearly structured as the climax of Leo's speech as recorded; if more was delivered, then it was considered less worthy of note.

Here at least, the literary historians are in accord with the Leo text. Tacitus' Otho incites his soldiers against Galba by informing them that his 'house alone is equal to paying the donative which is never given to you'—he of course will do better.¹²⁵ Herodian's Commodus wins over his father's army from the tribunal not as a consequence of his rhetoric but because he immediately granted a 'generous' distribution of money, while his Pescennius Niger likewise invokes his predecessor's non-payment of promised rewards.¹²⁶ In some particularly telling cases, the entire speech is summarized by our historians simply as the emperors promising money, so that almost the only thing we know about the accession addresses of Marcus Aurelius and Pertinax are that the former offered his men twenty thousand sesterces apiece, while Pertinax offered 'only' twelve thousand.¹²⁷ In other instances, the *adlocutio* is not mentioned directly at all but suggested purely by the mention of the donative promise. Domitian rode into the praetorian camp immediately upon Titus' death and gave to the soldiers all that his brother had given before him, while Hadrian began his reign by pledging a double donative to his army.¹²⁸ It is extremely likely that these promises were made as part of speeches, but this was less important for our sources than the vow itself.

The accession *adlocutio* was thus inextricably bound up with the promise of a donative. We have seen that the ancestry of this connection predates the Empire itself, going back to the post-battle *contiones* of the Roman Republic and the speech accompanying the awarding of the *largitio*. Hadrian's Lambaesis address too, while delivered in the middle of his reign, included an explicit promise of a *donatium* in exchange for good performance

¹²⁴ Amm. Marc. 20.4.18; *De Ceremoniis* 1.94, 1.92, 1.93; cf. Hebblewhite (n. 12), 78–9.

¹²⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 1.37.

¹²⁶ Hdn. 1.5.11 and 2.8.5.

¹²⁷ *HA, Vit. Marc.* 7.9; Cass. Dio 74.1. Dio does go on to provide the closing line of Pertinax's address.

¹²⁸ Cass. Dio 66.26.3; *HA, Hadr.* 5.7.

during military demonstrations.¹²⁹ Allowing the emperor to associate himself personally with gifts to his soldiers had obvious practical benefits for maintaining their loyalty whenever it occurred in his reign. Seen through the most cynical gaze, the emperor's financial patronage of his troops has sometimes been seen as effectively bribery, with the *adlocutio* as its fine Republican veil.¹³⁰ This is characteristically the line adopted by Tacitus. In his description of Nero's accession *adlocutio*, the historian does not bother to record the words or even mention its alleged Senecan authorship, but dismisses the entire address as a perfunctory aside: 'After being carried to the camp, Nero gave a few introductory words that fit the moment (*congruentia temporis praefatus*), and was hailed as emperor with the promise of a donative on the model of his father's generosity.'¹³¹

As is so often the case, however, Tacitean cynicism gets at some fundamental truths but can obscure the fuller picture. It was certainly true that the grant of money to the troops was an important political tool, and the sum continued to increase throughout the Principate.¹³² Galba may have claimed that he chose his soldiers and did not buy them, but there is a reason that Galba reigned for only seven months.¹³³ However, the centrality of money may also be overstated by elite authors who drew on common senatorial prejudices and literary topoi about the greed of common soldiers.¹³⁴ This article has argued throughout that it must be viewed alongside the rituals of acclamation and *adlocutio* as part of a concerted ideological ritual to bind the emperor and his soldiers and cement his legitimacy as *imperator*.

Just as acclamation was a recognized symbol of consensus, the donative too had significant ideological value.¹³⁵ Its granting was a visible demonstration of *liberalitas*, the imperial generosity which was regularly commemorated on coins and constituted a core virtue for any emperor.¹³⁶ When Leo I awarded the same sum that several of his predecessors had given, he was demonstrating that he would uphold the munificence which his subjects expected from their rulers. He would not short-change his soldiers, the crime for which we have seen emperors such as Galba or Pertinax criticized. Rather than a dry contractual obligation or a simple bribe, the granting of the donative which had begun with Claudius became entrenched because it cemented the personal bond between the emperor and his men.¹³⁷ It has even been suggested that the emperor might sometimes have given soldiers their pay with his own hand to further this connection.¹³⁸ This in turn served as further evidence that he was the rightful and legitimate ruler, possessed of the qualities—such as *liberalitas*—which the soldiers demanded of any such ruler, proving that he was a worthy *imperator* who deserved the *acclamatio* of his men. The very act of granting the

¹²⁹ Speidel (n. 105), 14: '*Congiar[i]um accipite*'.

¹³⁰ Campbell (n. 12), 194; cf. Hebblewhite (n. 12), 74–6.

¹³¹ Tac. *Ann.* 12.69.3.

¹³² Campbell (n. 12), 186–91; Hebblewhite (n. 12), 77–9.

¹³³ Tac. *Hist.* 1.5.2.

¹³⁴ Flaig (n. 42), 25–32; Phang (n. 34), 155–62.

¹³⁵ Veyne (n. 48), 339–45; Phang (n. 34), 153–200.

¹³⁶ A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The emperor and his virtues', *Historia* 30 (1981), 298–323. C. Noreña, 'The communication of the emperor's virtues', *JRS* 91 (2001), 146–68 identifies *liberalitas* and offshoots such as *indulgentia* and *munificentia* as among the most common imperial virtues marked on coinage in the Principate: see 158–9.

¹³⁷ Campbell (n. 12), 181–5; J. Stäcker, *Prinsep und Miles. Studien zum Bundungs- und Nahverhältnis von Kaiser und Soldat im 1. und 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Zurich, 2003), 369–403; Hebblewhite (n. 12), 77–81.

¹³⁸ Cassiod. *Hist. Trip.* 6.30.6.

donative was thus itself a legitimizing mechanism independent of the actual sum granted.¹³⁹

Seen in this light, then, the *adlocutio* survived because it facilitated these two all-important ideological rituals. Neither the acclamation of a ruler nor the granting of donatives required a direct address, but the address enabled the emperor to respond directly to his salutation and to take personal ownership of the donative grant, both of which deepened his relationship with his soldiers. In this way, the speech itself became a part of those soldiers' expectations over time; a legitimate emperor was expected to receive their acclamation, he was expected to grant them a suitable donative, and he was expected to do so in the form of an *adlocutio* from the platform. In delivering that speech, however rote and even generic the words of the address might be, the new emperor performed one of the most distinctively imperial rituals in public for the first time. Indeed, his very appearance upon the platform was understood to be a sign to his soldiers that they should begin chanting the acclamations which the entire procedure was designed to elicit.¹⁴⁰ When discussing the prevalence of usurpation in the late Empire, the historian Orosius observed that the most important factor for any would-be emperor was 'to be seen wearing the diadem and the purple' before anyone discovered that they planned to rebel.¹⁴¹ As Orosius grasped so clearly, the mere act of appearing and acting as an emperor could itself serve as an act of legitimation, and there were few more recognizably imperial modes of behaviour than delivering an accession oration promising a donative. If, in Fergus Millar's famous words, 'the emperor was what the emperor did', then the accession *adlocutio* survived for four centuries because delivering it was seen as an important part of what it meant to be a Roman emperor at all.¹⁴²

CONCLUSION

The accession *adlocutio* was a distinctively Roman ritual which emerged organically from the military culture of the late Republic. Unlike most other imperial oratory, it survived the transformation of the emperorship itself to remain in use many centuries later and many hundreds of miles away. Our evidence suggests that the speech endured because it served as a tight, efficient vehicle for a single overriding objective: the strengthening of personal ties between the *imperator* and his soldiers. To accomplish this, the accession *adlocutio* allowed the emperor to respond to and solicit the legitimizing acclamations of his men and to personally promise the donative which bound them together. In performing these interlinked rituals, the emperor was simultaneously fulfilling his subjects' expectations of how an emperor should behave and confirming his suitability for the role. The long survival of this military address thus serves as a further demonstration of the enduring military character of the Roman emperorship itself.

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¹³⁹ Stäcker (n. 137), 185–6.

¹⁴⁰ Hebblewhite (n. 12), 152.

¹⁴¹ Oros. 7.40.6.

¹⁴² Millar (n. 10), 6.

APPENDIX: ACCESSION *ADLOCUTIONES* IN DIRECT SPEECH
IN THE ROMAN HISTORIANS

The following is a list of accession *adlocutiones* given in direct speech by Roman historians. As always with such speeches in these works, little stock should be placed in their verisimilitude. This list includes only speeches supposedly provided in full and not identified as fragments or paraphrases.¹⁴³

| | Emperor | Year of Address | Source |
|----|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 1) | Otho | A.D. 69 | Tac. <i>Hist.</i> 1.36–8 |
| 2) | Commodus | A.D. 180 | Hdn. 1.5 |
| 3) | Pescennius Niger | A.D. 193 | Hdn. 2.8 |
| 4) | Septimius Severus | A.D. 193 | Hdn. 2.10 |
| 5) | Marius | A.D. 269 | <i>HA, Tyr. Trig.</i> 8.8–13 |
| 6) | Tacitus | A.D. 275 | <i>HA, Tac.</i> 8.5 |
| 7) | Julian | A.D. 360 | Amm. Marc. 20.5 |
| 8) | Valentinian I | A.D. 364 | Amm. Marc. 26.2.2–11 |

¹⁴³ For example Pertinax's closing remark reported at Cass. Dio 74.1.