



## [Latin Panegyric XII \(2\).23](#)

The complaint of the Gauls regarding the neglect of the imperial centre towards their fate

**Name of the author:** ?

**Date:** 389 CE

**Place:** Rome

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** Eulogy / Panegyric

**Title of work:** Latin Panegyric

**Reference:** XII (2).23

**Commentary:**

The extract presented here comes from the latest work of the corpus of the *Latin Panegyrics*, even though in the manuscripts it is placed at the beginning, just after Pliny's *Panegyric of Trajan* (about the XII *panegyrici latini*, from which this text is extracted, see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).1](#)). These two points have led scholars to conclude that the author of this panegyric of Theodosius, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, must have been responsible for the collection of the various speeches (among the first scholars who defended this opinion see Pichon, *Les derniers écrivains*, p. 137; followed by Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 6-7; Rees, "Bright Lights," *contra* L'Huillier, *L'Empire des mots*, p. 169). Latinus Pacatus Drepanius was a Gaul, possibly born at Aginium, modern day Agen (see Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letters* VIII.11.1-2), and who then probably lived in Bordeaux where he must have taught rhetoric in one of the schools of the city (on the fact that the author lived in Bordeaux, see *Latin panegyric* XII (2).2.1; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 437). Ausonius does not mention him in his *Commentario professorum Burdigalensium*, probably because Pacatus was still alive when he composed it (see Galletier, *Panegyriques Latins*, p. 49). The two men must have been close friends, as Ausonius dedicated various works to him.

Concerning the context of composition and elocution of this speech, Pacatus pronounced it at Rome, slightly after Theodosius's final victory over Maximus at the end of August 388 CE. Concerning Maximus's usurpation and reign, it should be recalled he had been proclaimed Augustus by his troops in Britain, where he fulfilled the military office of 'companion' of the Britains (*comes Britanniarum*), during the spring of 383 CE. He then invaded Gaul and defeated the emperor Gratian at Lutetia. One of his men killed the emperor retreating on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August at Lyon. One direct consequence of Maximus taking control of Gaul and killing Gratian was that many barbarian groups threatened anew various provinces. The Picti and Scots re-invaded Britain. The Huns and Alani went into Pannonia, and the Juthungi into Rhetia – Pannonia and Rhetia being provinces that were under the authority of the young half-brother of Gratian, Valentinian II, who was then 8 years old and lived in Milan. Maximus then established his residence in Trier and asked Valentinian II to join him there. After the sending of legations, Theodosius recognised Maximus as emperor in August 384 CE with the condition that he did not attack Valentinian's territories, namely Italy and Illyricum. Maximus was then entrusted with Britain, Gaul, and Spain. During this period, Maximus proceeded to various administrative reorganisations in the provinces of Gaul and Spain, and nominated officers among his supporters. In 387 CE, Valentinian II and his mother Justina asked Maximus for help to push back a barbarian offensive in Pannonia. Maximus accepted, but then he broke his commitments and invaded Italy. Valentinian II fled to Thessalonica. Maximus arrived in Milan and took the consulship for the year 388 CE. Theodosius decided to react and, with the permission of the Senate of Constantinople, he led a military operation with the help of numerous barbarians, especially Gothic contingents, which ended with Theodosius's victories in Illyricum and in Italy. He definitively defeated Maximus at Aquileia and executed him on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 388 CE. After a long stay in Milan, Theodosius stayed in Rome, where he celebrated a triumph for his victory over Maximus, from the 13<sup>th</sup> of June to the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 389 CE.

The speech from which this text is extracted from had been pronounced in Rome, in front of the emperor and the Roman Senate, a year after Theodosius's victory over Maximus. Two passages suggest that Pacatus may have pronounced this speech shortly after Theodosius's arrival in Rome and before the celebration of the triumph (see XII (2).46.4 and 47.3-4; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 444). As Theodosius stayed in the *Urbs* from June to August 389 CE, it has been deduced that the speech must have been delivered during this period. There is no explicit piece of evidence in the speech which confirms that Pacatus was part of an official *legatio* sent by some



Gallic cities or provinces in order to defend their interests and also to ensure Theodosius of the loyalty of the Gauls. In fact, during the five years of Maxentius's usurpation/reign, the Gallic aristocratic milieu had been divided between those who gave their support to Maximus, and those who had suffered from Maximian's confiscations, exactions and religious persecutions especially against Priscillianists. However, the fact that Pacatus speaks in the name of all the inhabitants of Gaul, as exemplified in the short extract presented here (*Galli*), and that he enumerates the various misfortunes experienced by them under the "tyrant" and "beast" Maximus (XII (2).24.4-6), show that he may have delivered this speech as the official representative of some Gallic aristocratic groups who may have suffered heavy losses under Maximus's usurpation/reign and who surely wanted to gain Theodosius's support (about this point, see Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 438-439).

The main theme of this panegyric is the praise of Theodosius for having annihilated the "tyrant" Maximus. The praise is structured in three parts. In the first one he praises Theodosius's origins and some aspects of his personality, especially his beauty and his maturity (§ 4-7). Then Pacatus praises others of his virtues that enable him to be a good military commander and also a good emperor (§ 8-20). In the third part of the speech, the orator describes some firm examples of Theodosius's public achievements. If references to his campaigns against various barbarian peoples and to his submission of the Persian king are very brief (§ 22), this third part is mainly dedicated to the description of his campaign and victory over Maximus (§ 23-46). The text presented here appears at the very beginning of this section.

The first striking point in the text presented here is the freedom of speech demonstrated by Pacatus when he asserts that his words are not going to be pleasant for Theodosius's ears, and when he speaks on behalf of the Gauls in order to express their anger (*irascimur*). It is possible to put the passage in which he deals with the "triumphs" of Theodosius in relation to the triumph performed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 386 CE at Constantinople to celebrate Theodosius's victory over the Greuthungi. The *Consularia Constantinopolitana* is the sole source that mentions this triumph and it presents it as an imperial victory without mentioning the name of Promotus, the general who actually led the campaign (for the triumph see *Consularia Constantinopolitana* a. 386, p. 48-49 of Becker, Bleckmann, Gross and Nickbakht's edition; about the military campaigns Zosimus, *New History* IV.38-39). Second, the passage in which Pacatus implicitly reproaches Theodosius for having "[hastened] towards those natives of the first light and the very resting place of the sun" has been variably interpreted by scholars. Otto Seeck has associated the reference to Theodosius having extended the border of the Roman Empire up to the most extreme Eastern regions with the fact that, in 383 CE, Theodosius would have started a journey towards the East in order to negotiate in person with the Persians, a journey which would have been interrupted by the news of Maximus's usurpation. To prove his point Otto Seeck quotes Themistius, *Speech* XVI, 213a which refers to the negotiations between the Roman emperor and the Persians and the address of CTh XII.1.103 which refers to the fact that the law was given at *Salamaria*, which Otto Seeck has interpreted as being an unknown place on the road towards Syria (see Seeck *Geschichte, Fünfter Band*, p. 69 and *Geschichte, Anhang zum vierten Bande*, p. 453; interpretation followed in Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later*, p. 475, n. 75). However, this reading has been challenged thanks to the correction of '*Salamaria*' in the address of CTh XII.1.103 to '*Selymbria*', which corresponds to a small harbour of the Propontis (this correction has been later adopted in Seeck, *Regesten*, p. 263). Thus, as stated by Sylvain Destephen, Theodosius's journey or planned journey towards the East in order to negotiate personally with the Persians probably did not occur. We actually know that Theodosius was in Constantinople on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July and on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 383 CE and that between these two dates he may have been present at Selymbria in the Propontis on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July. We thus follow Sylvain Destephen when he suggests interpreting Pacatus's words through his personal condition, that is that of a Gaul talking from Rome who probably considered that the Levant included the whole Eastern part of the Empire and not necessarily regions located outside of its borders (see Destephen, *Le voyage impérial*, p. 71 and n. 100). It is thus highly plausible that, by referring to Theodosius hastening towards the rising and setting places of the sun, Pacatus does not refer to specific events but uses images that were traditionally employed to refer, in a positive way, to the universality of the Roman Empire. However his perspective is different. In fact, this universality of the Empire is put in perspective by the requests of the Gauls to benefit from the effective presence of the emperor in their provinces. Pacatus thus puts implicitly in opposition the expectations of the Gauls and the huge extent of the Roman Empire. Finally, the disdain of Pacatus for Eastern affairs that appears in this passage fits in with the global perspective of this panegyric, in which the author never mentions the other capital of the Empire, Constantinople, where Theodosius had spent most of his time during the last decade. Moreover, he also neglects the seat of the imperial court of Valentinian II, Milan (note that Valentinian II is only implicitly mentioned once in XII (2).47.5; on this silence see Rees, "Bright Lights," p. 210-211). One consequence of these voluntary silences of Pacatus is that it is Theodosius's presence in Rome that is clearly highlighted. According to the words of Roger Rees: "Pacatus' speech presents the empire as a community of cities looking to Rome and Theodosius for their lead, and in the tense context of 389, this model exerts considerable political leverage" (Rees, "Bright Lights," p. 211). Considering



this panegyric within the global collection of the *Latin Panegyrics*, which must have been composed by Pacatus himself, it appears that this collection can be viewed as a “manifesto for Gaul’s clear preference for Rome over Constantinople” (Rees, “Bright Lights,” p. 221).

This initial admonition of Pacatus, in which he reproaches Theodosius for having taken care of the Eastern affairs only and this in spite of the troubles that affected the western provinces, did not prevent him from praising Theodosius for having defeated Maximus in the rest of the panegyric. However, it would be erroneous to minimise the importance of this initial admonition, or to interpret it as solely a ploy whose aim would have been to neutralise all the critics of Theodosius. On the contrary, we consider that, through this initial admonition, Pacatus speaks on behalf of the Gallic aristocratic milieu who were actually angry with Theodosius for not having reacted to Gratian’s murder and, more globally, for not having taken care of the security and stability of the Western provinces. Another event must have aroused the anger of the Gauls towards the central Roman power, and must have led many of them to support Maximus: from 381 CE onwards, Trier lost its role as the imperial residence – whereas Trier had been the permanent seat of the imperial court from 367 to 381 CE. The imperial court had been definitively moved towards Northern Italy, where it had been established at Milan the next year. This event must have been perceived by the Gauls as a symbol of the fact that the defence of the Rhenan frontier was not considered a priority by the imperial power. Thus, as has been the case in the past, as for instance with the emergence of the usurper Postumus and of the so-called “Gallic Empire” in 264 CE, many Gauls probably supported the usurper Magnus Maximus, not so much because they wanted to establish Gallic provinces that were independent of the rest of the Roman Empire, but precisely because they wanted the defence of their provinces to be a priority of the central power. When the author of the *The Description of the Entire World and its Nations* (*Expositio totius mundi et gentium*), composed in 359 CE, describes Gaul, he highlights the fact that this province required the emperors to reside in it or at least to visit it frequently in order to avoid the emergence of an usurper: “After Pannonia, the province of Gaul. As it is very large, it always has need of an emperor, it makes one of its own (*hunc ex se habet*)” (*Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 58; quoted in Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats*, p. 18-19). Indeed, it is important to note that after the so-called Gallic war led by Postumus and then Tetricus, and after the usurpation of Carausius who controlled parts of Northern Gaul under Maximian, Gaul had been the region of the Empire in which most of the western usurpations for the period 337-395 CE occurred: 5 out of a total of 8 (the usurpations of Magnentius, Silvanus, Julian, Magnus Maximus and Eugenius; for a comparative study of the usurpations in the Roman Empire from 337 to 476 CE, see Szidat, *Usurpator tanti nominis*, for a count see p. 222).

As shown by Roger Rees, this passage of the panegyric of Theodosius should be interpreted as fitting in with the ideological and political themes promoted by the selections and choices of the author of the whole collection of the *Latin Panegyrics*, that is probably Pacatus himself. In this passage, Pacatus expresses the idea that the Gauls asked the imperial power to be more present and invested in their political affairs and in the defence of their security. It is an obvious demonstration of the loyalty of the Gallic provincials to the central power and this in spite of whether usurpations had arisen pretty frequently during the fourth century in this very part of the Empire. Many of the panegyrics of the corpus deal with this question of the relationship between Gaul and the imperial centre and are here to prove the loyalty of the Gauls. As rightly stated by Roger Rees, among the numerous speeches and panegyrics that must have been composed during the entire fourth century for the various illegitimate emperors that had established their seat in Gaul, no one has been incorporated in the corpus of the *Latin Panegyrics* (see Rees, “Bright Lights,” p. 209-210). Moreover, another major theme common to most of the panegyrics of the corpus is that these works are vectors expressing the expectations of the Gauls who wanted the affairs of their provinces to be considered a matter of interest by the imperial power. For instance, we have seen a passage of the panegyric of Maximian delivered on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 289 CE, on the occasion of Rome’s birthday, in which the Gauls asked the emperor, who then spent most of his time at Trier and who had to go for the first time to Rome, to visit them frequently and not to forget the fate of the Gauls (see [Latin Panegyric II \(10\).14](#)). The similarities between this text and the one presented here, although they are separated by one century, are striking. In 289 CE, the inhabitants of the North-Eastern quarter of Gaul were also experiencing an usurpation, that of Carausius – even if it had been partly tamed by Maximian –, and they were enduring frequent barbarian raids. In that context, they reminded the emperor that their defence should remain a priority, even if he went back to Rome. In 389 CE, Gauls, here represented by Pacatus, admitted the fact that the Eastern emperor evolved far from their provinces but they did not accept the fact that he had not intervened in Western affairs while seeing that the legitimate Western emperor had been killed.

To conclude, this short passage is particularly interesting as, given its place in the whole collection of the Latin panegyrics, which must have been selected and arranged by Pacatus himself, it conveys two important messages that pervade many works of the collection. The first one is that Pacatus implicitly asserts the superiority of Rome over Constantinople, an assertion that can be interpreted as a veiled critic of the fact that Theodosius chose in



383 CE to make the Eastern affairs his priority instead of having ensured the political stability in the West. The second important message here conveyed is that, in spite of the numerous usurpations that occurred in Gaul during the fourth century, the Gauls remained loyal to the central and legitimate power. Pacatus's assertion that the Gauls wanted the imperial power to be more present and invested in their affairs could be interpreted as a way to excuse the aristocratic groups who supported Maximus. Finally, the last point which is striking in this text is the freedom of speech of the rhetor towards the emperor. One should remember that in a previous passage of the same speech, Pacatus had expansively demonstrated that Theodosius was the incarnation of the *civilis princeps*, the emperor-citizen characterised by his exceptional virtues, his *moderatio*, and, most importantly for our purpose, by the fact that he accepts free speech and criticism (see [Latin Panegyric XII \(2\).12.3-6](#)). Even if this ideology of the *civilis princeps* is full of pretences, we could interpret this veiled admonition of Pacatus as being a good example of an occasion during which a provincial prudently experienced the very limited freedom of speech he claimed for himself by referring previously to this ideal of the *civilitas* of the praised emperor, in order to expose the reproaches of his Gallic fellow citizens one year after the end of Maximus's usurpation.

Keywords in the original language:

- [auris](#)
- [Galli](#)
- [gratia](#)
- [imperator](#)
- [lux](#)
- [Oriens](#)
- [regnum](#)
- [scelus](#)
- [sol](#)
- [terra](#)
- [triumphus](#)
- [tyrannus](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [freedom of speech](#)
- [Gaul](#)
- [Gauls](#)
- [imperial visit](#)
- [Magnus Maximus](#)
- [provinces](#)
- [provincials](#)
- [Roman triumph](#)
- [Rome \(city\)](#)
- [Theodosius I](#)
- [tyrant](#)
- [usurper](#)

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