

This paper examines Pliny's negotiation of maritime iconography in the *Panegyricus*. Pliny's anxiety over the rhetorical originality and sincerity of his imperial eulogy is evident in multiple authorial asides which have been discussed extensively [Bartsch 1994, 148-93]. While I agree with Bartsch's general conclusion that Pliny protests the futility of his endeavor, I argue that his deployment of nautical motifs diverges from, and reinvents, the contrived *topoi* of imperial encomium. Pliny's representation of marine vignettes from Trajan's life simultaneously invests the panegyric with anecdotal qualities, thus promoting the impression of originality, and sets Trajan squarely within the conventional semantics of seamanship as a metaphor for successful leadership.

Pliny employs three distinct sets of metaphors to praise Trajan and contrast him favorably to Domitian. In the first set, most evidently influenced by the 'ship of state' *topos*, Trajan is cast as a seasoned captain, navigating the common welfare [*publicae salutis gubernaculis*, 6.2]. Pliny revitalizes this traditional image of political theory by elaborating on the emperor's appropriately relevant hobby, sailing [81.4-82.7]. Here, Trajan is a weathered seaman navigating his boat in rough waters [*in maria...gubernaculis adsidet*, 81.4], while the sea-sick Domitian depends on others to haul his boat up and down the placid lake at Baiae [*velut capta nave sequeretur*, 82.3]. In the second set, Trajan's leniency and retaliatory strictness are praised through complementary images of the emperor standing on the shore, bidding adieu to a ship preparing for a long voyage [34-5; 86]. In one instance, Trajan sends out Domitian's *delatores* to drown in the open water, in a boat without sails or captain [*ultionem hominum...dis maris commendasset*, 35.1]. In another, he prays for the safe voyage of his praetorian prefect who has just resigned from office [*in litore amplexus...precatusque...prona maria...celeremque...recursum*, 86.3-4]. Finally, the emperor is fashioned as an unruffled and all-embracing ocean. This treatment reverses another political metaphor, which parallels the body politic to a calm or stormy sea, depending on its societal order [*cf. Aen.* 1. 148-53]. Trajan physically lowers himself to see or listen to his subjects better [*aequatus plebis ac principis locus*, 51.4; *princeps aequatus candidatis*, 71.3], practically leveling the ground, or surf [*<aequor*], of Rome's social landscape. Similarly, he is presented as a safe harbor, protecting those deceived and shipwrecked by the treacherous waters of Domitian's ocean [*naufragia multorum...insidiosa tranquillitate...improvisus turbo perculerat*, 66.3].

Camouflaging his rhetorical ingenuity as ingenuousness, Pliny suggests that an honest encomium is possible only when it mirrors the simple life of a worthy imperial *laudandus*. Through such marine anecdotes, Pliny cleverly provides a sense of naturalism for his highly stylized panegyric, even as he modestly professes his inability to break from the old and exhausted molds of senatorial discourse.