PART THREE

ARISTIDES AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE OF HIS TIMES
AELIUS ARISTIDES AND ROME

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Aristides sang the praises of the Roman emperors and of the Roman Empire in many of his works: in the Smyrnean Orations, in the speech To the Cities Concerning Concord, in the Panegyric in Cyzicus, in the Funeral Oration in Honor of Alexander of Cotiaeum, and of course, in his speech To Rome. He repeatedly expressed the greatest respect for the emperors; he celebrated the advantages of Roman rule, and he asked the gods to keep the imperial family in their favor. Such a display of loyalty is not surprising from a man who was a member of the provincial nobility, possessed Roman citizenship and had numerous contacts with influential Romans and even with the imperial court.

Scholars have often said and written, and rightly so, that Aristides is representative of the fidelity of Greek-speaking elites to the Roman Empire. He contributed to what L. Robert called, in a phrase that summarizes the spirit of the age, 'la symbiose gréco-romaine dans l’empire romain'.\(^1\) Aristides’ works are marked by the ideology of concord and consensus, an ideology that he himself shaped and spread with the aid of epideictic rhetoric. On account of its elevated language and cultural and moral authority, as well as the public and ceremonial conditions of performance, epideictic rhetoric gave political messages persuasive force.

All of these facts are known, and I myself have contributed to some extent to establishing them in regard to the rhetoric of praise and to the speech To Rome in particular.\(^2\) Therefore, the subject of the present paper may seem paradoxical. It is thus necessary to begin with some preliminary comments. Reading and re-reading Aelius Aristides, with a view to the edition being prepared for the Collection des Universités de France by an international team based in Strasbourg, my attention was

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\(^1\) Robert 1970, 16.
\(^2\) Pernot 1993a; id. 1997.