

# AFTERWORD: HELLENISTIC ORATORY IN CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>

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*In memory of Martyn Richards (1959–2011)*

Aspects of oratory, and of rhetoric, the body of theory on which it has been based, have suffered a bad press in an age alert to the devices that politicians and other public figures employ to project their arguments in the mass media. Charges of ‘spin’ were frequently levelled at a purportedly progressive British government in the late 1990s. The role of speechwriters and public-speaking consultants has become ever more important as the ‘sound byte’ has come to dominate political discourse and the ‘24-hour news cycle’ has prevailed.

All this might incline one to cynicism about rhetoric. Yet one adviser on speechmaking, who has worked with political leaders of different ideological complexions, argues for the genuine worth of good public speaking. For while ‘our passion for high-tech is cooling as we realise that a PowerPoint presentation is a poor substitute for a person talking to us with passion, sincerity and interest’, it remains true that ‘[a] great speech [. . .] will only work if the speaker is honest, sincere and every word is their own’.<sup>2</sup>

As we realize the increasing importance of such modes of communication and the value of mastering them, rhetoric and its technical aspects are enjoying an explicit revival. University courses are growing in number, particularly in North America. At the same time ‘rhetoric’ is becoming increasingly familiar in everyday discourse. The author of a popular self-help

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<sup>2</sup> Jones (2004: 2 and 4).

book—previously entitled *Thank You for Arguing* but now reissued by a major paperback publisher under the more aggressive title *Winning Arguments*—does not hesitate to make extensive and explicit use of Aristotelian terms such as ‘enthymeme’, ‘hypophora’, and the *logos–ethos–pathos* triad.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the author can countenance using rhetorical techniques for selfish ends, such as evading a speeding ticket, does not detract from the persuasive nature of his own text.

The point has been made previously that oratory was central to Greek public culture. Introducing Aristotle’s *Art of Rhetoric*, the editor of the Penguin Classics edition comments,

Many . . . would be tempted to throw their hands up in despair and pronounce the art of oratory to be a wholly unscientific and unsystematic affair, in which it would be vain to look for valuable instruction. This approach was not that of the ancient Greeks. If there are two definitive features of ancient Greek civilization, they are loquacity and competition.<sup>4</sup>

As the editors of the present volume show in their introduction, oratory had deep roots in Greek consciousness, but had also evolved through many changes down to the end of the classical period, when Aristotle composed his book.

Hellenistic history was until recently a neglected field, at least in Anglophone scholarship. Interest has mushroomed in the past thirty years, yet scholars have rarely focused upon rhetoric as a central aspect of hellenistic society. The present volume is testimony to a resurgence of interest. Such an inquiry may, paradoxically, enjoy an advantage in coming late onto the scene, compared with investigation into other aspects of the age such as religion, politics, economies, landscapes, and literature. Because substantial advances in how we

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<sup>3</sup> Heinrichs (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Lawson-Tancred (1991: 1–2).

understand the events of the period and its social and economic history now command general assent, research is moving into a more specialized phase and each new project begins on a firmer footing than its predecessors.

One of the watchwords of current scholarship is that there was no absolute caesura in culture or society at Alexander's accession or at his death.<sup>5</sup> The *polis* (city-state) retained its primacy in the lives of free male citizens;<sup>6</sup> democratic constitutional forms were more widely adopted than before, though elite domination of politics increased with time;<sup>7</sup> and new modes of discourse were developed to allow Alexander's Successors—at first military commanders, later monarchs—and the *poleis* within the areas they controlled to find a new way of coexisting to their mutual benefit.<sup>8</sup> It is a strength demonstrated repeatedly in the preceding chapters that their authors are able to contextualize written evidence within a sound understanding of such historical developments. Edwards's tracing of linkages between Isaeus's 'forceful' (*deinos*) style, its recognition in the early hellenistic work *On Style* attributed to one Demetrius, and the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus at the other end of the period demonstrates another example of continuity between classical and hellenistic culture—a continuity that was not static but developmental. Even the Stoics, often supposed to have eschewed rhetoric, displayed a keen interest, as Wildberger shows.

Even in the late hellenistic period, Strabo can speak of oratory's influence in the present tense. He observes that kings manipulate cities through benefactions or through force, not through oratory: 'persuasion through words is not a characteristic of kings but of orators; we call persuasion royal when they bring benefactions and lead people in the direction they want

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<sup>5</sup> For the general thesis about continuity, or continuous evolution, see Shipley (2000: e.g. 2–5, 31, 59–60, 88–9, 106–7, 130, 153, 170–1, 175, 190–1, 229, 351, 356, 365–6; on oratory, 129).

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Shipley (2000: 86–107).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Crowther (2002).

<sup>8</sup> See esp. Ma (1999).

to' (9. 2. 40). This only makes sense if Strabo believes that *poleis* are still governed by assemblies where rhetoric counts.<sup>9</sup> Several of the studies in the present volume confirm that oratory retained its central role in public life. Volonaki, Carey, and Martin show that poets and comic playwrights could rely on their readers' or audiences' familiarity with the theory and practice of oratory. They felt able to display their skill at playing games with our expectations of a literary genre, or even entertaining us by displaying the very antithesis of oratorical skill, like Theocritus in *Idyll* 11. Even in the far east of Mediterranean at the end of the period, a widely distributed awareness of rhetorical ideas may be reflected in Paul's letters, and even more in *Acts*, where Porter identifies a potential for fruitful analysis in future studies.

Oratory was not merely ubiquitous, it was highly sophisticated. Hall's study of the cross-over between oratory and an increasing range of dramatic performances and contests, with vocal performers almost equating to the stars of today's operatic circuit and critics responding accordingly, demonstrates that we are dealing with a still evolving performance practice deeply rooted in the past. Kremmydas's study of preserved rhetorical exercises reinforces a picture of an educational field with a complex structure of complementary skill-sets and terminologies; a field that did not stand still but engaged dynamically with existing oratorical texts and styles.

Continuity is also observable at the hellenistic–Roman transition, though—just as classical rhetoric was modified to serve new needs in the Successor period—the Romans demonstrated their capacity for adaptation of hellenistic practice, such as in their early dramas, as Manuwald's paper shows. The Romans were equally imbued with rhetorical awareness; their interest at a middle Republican date is not impugned by Powell's demonstration that the embassy of the three philosophers to Rome in 155 B.C. has been partially mythologized,

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<sup>9</sup> Gauthier (1993: 213–14).

probably by Cicero; or by Cato the Elder's reported comment that the rhetoric of the philosopher Carneades was so persuasive that one could not judge his arguments rationally—a revealing paradox. Roman interest in, adaptation of, and even innovation within Greek-style rhetoric is seen in Cicero's consciously non-standard organization of the *Pro Marcello* (in Tempest's chapter), a speech designed to persuade Julius Caesar in person, who, as Cicero knew, shared the same level of rhetorical sophistication as himself.

Because we have no surviving primary texts, we must deduce the presence and impact of oratory from others. It is not entirely fanciful of Thornton to portray Polybius as 'the Hellenistic orator we know best', given the variety of oratorical forms attested in his *Histories*. Rubinstein and Chaniotis demonstrate the presence of rhetorical norms underpinning both diplomatic dealings between hellenistic states and honorific decrees of *poleis* for their own citizens or outsiders.

Here it is vital to bear in mind—even if it is not specifically mentioned in any given source—the political contestation that took place incessantly inside a *polis*. The decision to honour, for example, a citizen of another *polis* may have been taken by a majority vote in the council or the assembly, or both. It seems unlikely that votes were normally unanimous, which means that on most occasions some citizens voted against such proposals. Why would they do so when, to all appearances, the decision was in the interests of the *polis* as a whole? Because a *polis* is a *political* society and one in which (from the late fourth to the second century and beyond) the wealthy gathered increasing political power.<sup>10</sup> One can imagine a leading member of the elite thinking to himself, 'How can I seize the initiative from my opponents? I will persuade a friend to propose a diplomatic mission to Alexandria; I will get myself and my friends appointed to it; and my opponents will either be silenced into assent or, if they openly object to my proposal, will open themselves to accusations of acting against

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<sup>10</sup> Crowther (2002) again, identifying a change around the 2nd cent.

the interests of the *demos*’; and so on. There is hardly a hellenistic decree of which it would not be reasonable to ask whether political rivalries played some part in its enactment. Even though fulsome praise may be lavished upon an honorand—such as in the famous Athenian decrees for Callias of Sphettus and his brother Phaedrus from the mid-third century<sup>11</sup>—one should always bear in the mind the possibility that a contrary view has been suppressed. In such circumstances it is scarcely imaginable that all the tricks of the orator’s trade had not been deployed to persuade the citizens to vote the decree through—not to mention the more underhand dealings all too often associated with politics.

A striking example of the use of rhetoric to advance a city’s case *vis-à-vis* a ruler is king Lysimachus’s arbitration between Samos and Priene in 283/2 B.C.<sup>12</sup> He was approached first by a deputation from Priene claiming that a certain area of mainland Ionia belonged to their city. The islanders countered this claim.

King Lysimachus to the council and people of the Samians, greeting. There came before us the envoys who had been sent from yourselves and from the Prieneans, concerning the land (*chōra*) about which they had disputed previously in our time. Well, if we had known in advance that you had owned and cultivated this land for so many years, we would certainly not have received the request to judge the case; but at the time we understood that (your) intervention had been for a wholly minimal period of time, for in their former speeches (*logoi*) the envoys of the Prieneans made their case to us in this sense. But in fact, since the people from you and the people from the Prieneans were (both) present it was necessary to

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<sup>11</sup> Shear (1978) (Callias); *IG* ii<sup>2</sup> 682 (Phaedrus); Osborne (1979).

<sup>12</sup> *IG* xii. 6. 155; Welles (1934: no. 7); Burstein (1985: no. 12); Shipley (1987: 181–2 and 267 no. 4611); Ager (1996: no. 26); Brodersen *et al.* (1996: no. 309); Bagnall and Derow (2004: no. 12). The date is deduced from the reference to this arbitration in *I. Priene* 37, line 125.

listen to the whole account rendered by each side.

So the Prieneans tried to show that possession of the Batinetis land had been theirs from the beginning, by histories and other testimonies and arbitrations,<sup>13</sup> together with the Six-year Treaty. And later they agreed, when Lygdamis<sup>14</sup> came upon Ionia with force, that the rest of the people would leave the land and the Samians would withdraw to the island (*of Samos*). And Lygdamis, having occupied it for . . .<sup>15</sup> years, once more gave back to them the same possessions, and the Prieneans took them from him; but none of the Samians at all was then present, except if any happened to be living among them, and he made available the produce of the fields to Prieneans. Later, the Samians returned and took the land from them by force. So Bias was sent from the Prieneans as plenipotentiary about a resolution of the dispute with the Samians: and he resolved it, and those living there withdrew from the Batinetis land. They said, therefore, that matters had rested there, and right up to the latest time they owned the land. And now they thought that we, in accordance with their ownership from the beginning, should give them back the land.

But the envoys sent from you said that the possession of the Batinetis land that had been theirs from the beginning had been taken over from their ancestors. And after the assault by Lygdamis they agreed, like the rest of the people, to leave the land and withdraw to the island. But later . . . a thousand Samians dwelt . . .<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Δικαιώματα; see Welles ad loc.

<sup>14</sup> Leader of the non-Greek Cimmerians.

<sup>15</sup> A number: three, seven, or ten (Welles).

<sup>16</sup> Welles's text (layout of ll. 31–2 modified): Βασιλεὺς Λυσίμαχος Σαμίων τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ χαίρει[ν· κα]τέστησαν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς οἱ τε πρέσβεις οἱ παρ' ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ παρὰ τῶν Πρ[ιη]νέων ἀποσταλέντες ὑπὲρ τῆς χώρας ἧς ἐτύγχανον ἡμ[φισ]βητηκότες πρ[ό]τερον ἐφ' ἡμῶν. εἰ μὲν οὖν προείδειμεν τῇδε τῇ γ[α]λῶραν ὑμᾶς ἐκ [τ]οσοῦτων ἐτῶν ἔχειν καὶ νέμε[ι]ν κ[αθ'] ὅλον οὐκ ἂν ἐπεσπασάμεθα τῇ κρίσει· νῦν δὲ ὑπελαμβάνομεν ὑπογύου τινος χρόνου παντελῶς γεγονέναι τὴν ἐπέμβασι[ν· ο]ὔτω γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐποιοῦντο

(my trans.)

The facts are far from clear.<sup>17</sup> We do not have the full Samian story, or the reasons why Lysimachus adjudicated in their favour. What is particularly absorbing in the text itself is that it purports to record not only a full summary of the arguments set out in 283/2, but also the king's expression of annoyance—itself, for all we know, a conscious rhetorical device—at

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τὴν μνείαν ἐν τοῖς πρότερον λόγοις οἱ τῶν Πριηνέων πρέσβεις· οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ παρήσαν οἱ τε παρ' ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ παρὰ τῶν Πριηνέων ἀναγκαῖον ἦν διακοῦσαι ἃ ἀποδίδοται παρ' ἐκατέρωθεν. οἱ μὲν οὖν Πριηνεῖς τὴν μὲν ἐξ ἀρχῆς γεγενημένην αὐτοῖς κτῆσιν τῆς Βατινήτιδος χώρας ἐπεδείκνυν ἐκ τε τῶν ἱστοριῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μαρτυρίων καὶ δικαιωμάτων μετὰ τῶν ἐξετῶν σπονδῶν. ὕστερον δὲ συνωμολόγουν Λυγδάμεως ἐπελθόντος ἐπὶ τὴν Ἰωνίαν μετὰ δυνάμεως τοὺς τε λοιποὺς ἐγλιπεῖν τὴν χώραν καὶ Σαμίους εἰς τὴν νῆσον ἀποχωρῆσαι· τὸν δὲ Λύγδα ἀτασχόντα τρίτῃ αἵματι αὐτοῖς πάλιν ἀποδιδόναι τὰς αὐτὰς κτήσεις, τοὺς δὲ Πριηνεῖς παρειληφέναι, Σαμίους δὲ οὐθέναι παραγενέσθαι παντελῶς τότε πλὴν εἴ τις ἐτύγχανεν παρ' αὐτοῖς κατοικῶν· τοῦτον δὲ τῶν ἀγρῶν τὸ γινόμενον προσενέγκασθαι Πριηνεῦσιν· ὕστερον δὲ ὑποστρέψαντας μετὰ βίης Σαμίους παρελῆσθαι τὴν χώραν· ἀποσταλῆναι οὖν παρὰ τῶν Πριηνέων βίαντα περὶ διαλύσεων τοῖς Σαμίους αὐτοκράτορα· τοῦτο δὲ διαλῦσαι τε τὰς πόλεις καὶ τοὺς οἰκοῦντας ἀποχωρῆσαι τῆς Βατινήτιδος χώρας. πρότερον μὲν οὖν ἔφασαν τὰ πράγματα αὐτοῖς μένειν ἐν τούτοις καὶ μέχρι τοῦ ἐσχάτου χρόνου κρατεῖν τῆς χώρας· νῦν δὲ ἡξίουσιν ἡμᾶς κατὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κτῆσιν ἀποδιδόναι αὐτοῖς τὴν χώραν. οἱ δὲ παρ' ὑμῶν ἀποσταλέντες πρέσβεις τὴν κτῆσιν τὴν γεγενημένην αὐτοῖς τῆς Βατινήτιδος χώρας ἔφασαν ἐκ προγόνων παρειληφέναι. μετὰ δὲ τὴν Λυγδάμειος εἰσβολὴν ἐγλιπεῖν συνωμολόγουν ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν χώραν, ἀποχωρῆσαι δὲ εἰς τὴν νῆσον· ὕστερον δὲ οἱ  
c.25 ]:.[.]  
οἱ κεῖν χιλίους Σαμίους — ]

<sup>17</sup> Bagnall and Derow (2004: 26): 'Why the Prieneans made the claim in the first place is not clear, for it seems . . . that there was not much question as to whose the territory was. It may be that they thought the king would favour them over the Samians. The tone of the letter and the fact that it was inscribed at Samos indicate that he did not.' Literary sources for some of the background events, including Plut. *QG* 20, are assessed by Welles ad loc.



being bothered (allegedly twice) by the Prieneans with a case he deemed flimsy. His decision, like his annoyance, may have been politically motivated rather than based on a dispassionate appraisal of the evidence.<sup>18</sup>

Welles notes rhetorical features of the Greek, such as ‘the frequency of μὲν–δέ, τε–καὶ pairings’ and the syntactical structuring of the whole summary using conjunctions and particles. In the light of the studies in the present volume, further aspects gain importance. The Prieneans of the archaic period had employed a respected public figure, Bias, to negotiate the settlement with the Samians, just as, much later, hellenistic *poleis* sent members of their social elites to represent them.<sup>19</sup> Lysimachus addresses his response to the council and people of Samos, implying that it was by a popular vote in the Samian assembly that their envoys had been selected. The Prieneans of the early third century, and perhaps the Samians too, presented literary and documentary evidence in support of their case,<sup>20</sup> but did not think this sufficient on its own: they thought it important also to argue the matter orally before the king in person.<sup>21</sup> Prime importance was thus placed upon oratory, and the envoys were surely drawn from an elite that had experience of rhetorical training. If we knew more detail of the speeches delivered that day, we would no doubt see the influence of rhetorical training on the cases presented—in matters such as the choice of argument when one’s case is strong or weak, the sequence of points in the argument, and the organization of the appeals to evidence—that would confirm that rhetorical training was a central part of the life of

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<sup>18</sup> Welles’s commentary discusses many of the problems of the text.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rubinstein, above, on the selection of envoys whose *ethos* would do you credit.

<sup>20</sup> A similar use of literary evidence—with specific local historians named—is seen in *I.Priene* 37, recording a Rhodian arbitration in the 190s B.C. between Samos and Priene about the border fort of Karion and the land around it. Ager (1996: 93) takes this as evidence that Lysimachus did not award the whole of the disputed territory to Samos.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Rubinstein, above.

politically active citizens.

This was a very different rhetorical occasion from those analysed by Rubinstein. It did nothing to build bridges between the communities or invest in their future relationship. But it is another example of the central importance placed upon oratory by hellenistic political communities. From the Samian point of view, it was no doubt considered sterling proof of the efficacy of oratory.

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