

Greek Oratory: Demosthenes

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Greek Oratory

- Evolves out of Rhetoric and Sophistry: *sophist* = wise man
- Gorgias, 5th c. Sicilian but travelled throughout Greece
- Founder of Sophism: practical application of rhetoric toward civic and political life
- Sophists took money for instruction: taught thesis AND antithesis
- Legal and Political Language

Gorgias' Key Tropes

- *Antithesis: opposite phrases in close proximity:*
“Ask not what your country can do for you; but what you can do for your country.”
- *Symploce: Repetition at beginning: I have a Dream...*
- *Anadiplosis: repetition of words at the end of clause or phrase*
- *Isocolon: use of successive phrases or clauses, similar in length and parallel structure*

Demosthenes (384-322 B.C.)

- Orphan
- Suit against guardians was successful
- Career as a Logographer and lawyer;
Accusation by Aeschines
- Trierarch in 363, 359, 353; Choregos, 350
- Philippics attacked Philip of Macedon
- Committed suicide

First Philippic, 351 B.C.

- 357, Amphipolis and Pydna; 352, The Athenians stopped Philip at Thermopylae; but he defeated the Phocians the same year
- The Subject: 1) Need for Preparedness and Resistance to Philip

First Philippic: Warning Athens

- When, Athenians, will you take the necessary action? What are you waiting for? Until you are compelled, I presume. But what are we to think of what is happening now? For my own part I think that for a free people there can be no greater compulsion than shame for their position. Or tell me, are you content to run round and ask one another, “Is there any news today?” Could there be any news more startling than that a Macedonian is triumphing over Athenians and settling the destiny of Greece?

Olynthiacs, 349

- Olynthus, an ally of Athens, was attacked by Philip
- Demosthenes urged that Athens help
- One point more, men of Athens. Do not forget that you can today choose whether you must fight there or Philip must fight here. If Olynthus holds out, you will fight there, to the detriment of his territory, while you enjoy in security the land that is your home. But if Philip takes Olynthus, who is to prevent his marching hither?

Peace of Philocrates, 347

- Demosthenes, Aeschines, and Philocrates went to Pella to conclude a peace treaty
- Philip imposed terms
- Athens accepted but when the delegates went to ratify, Philip was campaigning
- Demosthenes accused his fellow delegates of being bribed

“On the Peace” 347

- After the Peace of Philocrates was ratified, but before the ambassadors could get back to Athens, Philip passed Thermopylae and went against Phocis, with no help from Athens
- With the support of Thebes and Thessaly, Philip won the seats of Phocis on the Amphictyonic League
- The right to precedence in consulting the oracle was transferred from Athens to Philip; Philip excluded the Spartans from the sanctuary; and the Pythian games were celebrated under his rule
- Athens had not been there for the vote, and “On the Peace” was delivered in the Assembly and supported acknowledging Philip’s election to the league

Second Philippic, 344 B.C.

- Demosthenes travels through the Peloponnesus to warn against Philip
- The cities complained to Athens
- The Second Philippic is a response to these criticisms and an even stronger denunciation of Philip

Warning the Messenians

- “Can you not imagine,” I said, addressing the Messenians, “how annoyed the Olynthians would have been to hear a word said against Philip in the days when he was handing over to them Anthemus...? Do you imagine they expected to be treated as they have been, or would have believed anyone who suggested it? Nevertheless,” said I, “after a brief enjoyment of other men's territory, they have long been robbed by Philip of their own, expelled with disdain, not merely vanquished but betrayed, bought and sold by their own country-men. For truly such close communications with tyranny corrupt good constitutions.

Prelude to The Crown

- Demosthenes worked to try and gain new alliances and repair old to combat Philip
- Byzantium, Persia, Thrace, Rhodes,
- Organized a league against Philip
- For his efforts, he was awarded a gold crown at the Great Dionysia festival in the theatre
- 341-0: War broke out over a small island attacked by Philip; Byzantium and Persian soldiers helped; Byzantium was besieged and a declaration of war was made against Athens
- Philip withdrew

Controversy of the Crown

- In 337 Demosthenes supervised the Festival and the Fortifications of the City
- In 336 Ctesiphon proposed and the council agreed to grant D. another Crown
- Aeschines indicted Ctesiphon for this
- Meanwhile, Alexander came to power and demanded anti-Macedonians be turned over; Thebes was enslaved

Aeschines' Charges

- 1) It is illegal to crown someone who has not come before the Board of Auditors following their term
- 2) Illegal to confer it at the Dionysia, except if conferred by a Foreign State
- 3) Illegal to put untruths in public records; and Demosthenes' record was falsely reported

Demosthenes' Defense of Ctesiphon

- 1) The rule had been broken before
- 2) The law forbidding the announcement at the festival was commonly broken and a different law contradicted it
- 3) Most of the defense has to do with clarifying the truth of Demosthenes' record of service and counter accusations against Aeschines

Demosthenes won the case; Aeschines, by failing to win a fifth of the votes was fined heavily, lost some rights as a citizen, and left to live in Rhodes

The ruling vindicated Demosthenes' loyalty and service to the Polis

Conclusion

- Greek oratory developed in response to the importance of public speaking and debate in a democratic polis
- Politics, and even law, could be used to launch personal attacks—like today
- Demosthenes is worthy of studying because of his style, which emphasized clarity of ideas
- Although his efforts to resist Macedonian Imperialism failed, he deserves our recognition as a historic voice for democratic ideals