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Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.- A.D. 400 (review)

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Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400*. Leiden: E.J. Brill,

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Mega biblion, mega kakon. That's a good Hellenistic aphorism, right?¹ By such a criterion, Porter's new contribution to the study of Hellenistic rhetoric would be *kakiston*. In this case, however, we may safely dispense with the Callimachean maxim, as Porter's handbook is a most valuable resource.

The handbook tradition in classical rhetorical instruction is just about as old as the discipline itself. Ancient lore has it that Corax and Tisias compiled rhetorical handbooks.² Other sophists, such as Gorgias and Protagoras, seem to have done the same. Though some today refuse to believe him, Quintilian insists that Isocrates wrote a *tekhnê* too.³ Aristotle, whose own *Rhetoric* is in some ways the most important (if not the most widely influential) rhetorical treatise ever penned, produced for the edification of his own students a *Sumagôgê Tekhnôn*, or 'compendium of handbooks,' in which he summarized the *tekhnai* of his predecessors -- so successfully, it seems, that it effectively supplanted them.⁴ An author writing at about the same time as Aristotle (we generally finger Anaximenes of Lampsacus) produced the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, which evinces some superficial resemblance to Aristotle's own work.

Then all Hellenistic breaks loose. As captured Greece begins to take her Roman captor captive, the spread of formalized oratory, and of rhetorical precept, is pervasive throughout the Mediterranean world. Those who could afford to do so traveled to Greece to study rhetoric there (as Cicero went to Rhodes to study under Molon), but there were certainly rhetorical schools elsewhere (e.g. the one at Tarsus in Asia Minor, in which I strongly suspect St. Paul learned his craft).

Speculations are that some ancient handbooks were collections of commonplaces, while others were treatises on rhetorical precept. But Porter's massive volume, while termed a 'handbook,' is not exactly either of these.

As the discipline became increasingly formalized in antiquity, it was inevitable that its conceptualization should be ever more elaborate, and that such elaborations should find their way into both the handbook-tradition and oratorical practice. Porter's book is the chart of this progress during the Hellenistic period, to which he gives the boundaries of 330 BCE and 400 CE. He has marshalled a veritable phalanx of

contributors for the project, including some of the greatest luminaries in rhetorical scholarship worldwide. Moreover, he has cast his nets wide.

The work is divided *grosso modo* into three sections: Part I, Rhetoric Defined; Part II, Rhetoric in Practice; and Part III, Individual Writers and the Rhetorical Tradition. Part I begins, as well it might, with two chapters by George Kennedy, a 'Historical Survey of Rhetoric,' and 'The Genres of Rhetoric.' Kennedy has had to rehearse such material many times already, but he rescues it from boilerplate dullness by including new details (and, of course, new bibliography). The rest of Part I follows a Quintilianic format, with a chapter on Arrangement (51-87) by Wilhelm Wuellner, one on Invention (89-119) by Malcolm Heath, one on Style (121-157) by Galen Rowe, and one by Thomas Olbricht (159-167) that offers a combined treatment of Memory and Delivery.

Wuellner's treatment synthesizes a vast amount of material that has hitherto received insufficient scrutiny. He actually begins well before the Hellenistic period, nodding to Homer before giving an overview of the early sophists, Plato, and Aristotle. As with all recent treatments of arrangement, his owes much (here largely not explicit) to the magisterial work of Friedrich Solmsen.⁵ Modern technographers are also inventoried (77-80), and Wuellner concludes by suggesting five 'areas warranting further research' (80-83).

Malcolm Heath was the obvious choice for a chapter on Hellenistic invention, which he provides in a most engaging manner. Naturally stasis-theory, which (though already adumbrated in Aristotle) reached its *floruit* in the Hellenistic period, plays a prominent role here.

Style is the topic of Galen Rowe's chapter, which he sensibly divides according to the Theophrastean virtues of Correctness, Clarity, Ornamentation, and Propriety. The third of these is the most developed, with examples in both Greek and Latin (all translated) of various figures and tropes. (I was just a bit surprised not to see book 4 of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* figuring prominently in this section, but Rowe provides copious examples of his own collecting.) The historical period under consideration was, of course, crucially important for the development of stylistic analysis, and Rowe's could easily have been much the lengthiest chapter in the entire book. Constraints of space may have kept him from dilating further on such topics as the period (151-153) and prose-rhythm, perhaps the most technical aspect of rhetorical style.

While invention, arrangement, and style can be analyzed in both oral and written contexts, memory and delivery are qualitatively different in that they can only pertain to the speech as performance. Since that part of ancient oratory is lost to us, it is not surprising that Olbricht's chapter is so brief. His material is drawn from Cicero, the *Ad Herennium*, and Quintilian. I would have liked to see Olbricht exploit the latter author much more in this chapter, since Quintilian is one of our richest sources for what can be known about these topics.

Part II (pp. 169-504) addresses 'Rhetoric in Practice.' The approach in this section is by genre -- epistle, history, philosophy, poetry, biography, oratory and declamation, homily and panegyric sermon, romance, apocalyptic and prophetic literature, and drama. Each of these, of course, merits a book-length treatment, and indeed some of

the chapters in this section approach monograph-length. Jeffrey Reed begins the section with a chapter on the epistle, exploring the similarities and differences between letter-writing and oratory. Dirk Schenkeveld is next with a hefty chapter on philosophical prose, reaching as far back as the Platonic period; such authors as Cicero, Musonius Rufus, Plutarch, and Lucian make their appearance here, as do such topics as protreptic and diatribe. The section on Philodemus -- definitely an author to watch in the coming decade or two -- is particularly welcome; one only wishes that it were longer still. Stefan Rebenich provides an even lengthier essay on historical prose, with an excellent section on Caesar and Sallust. The surprises in this chapter -- one substantive, one methodological -- are the relative brevity of the sections on Livy and Tacitus, and the lack of reliance upon the work of Hayden White.⁶ Ruth Webb offers an essay on 'Poetry and Rhetoric' that well points up the complex and problematic relationship between those two disciplines. Here an introductory section is followed by sections on declamation, didactic poetry, satire and invective, and poetry and epideictic. There is obviously more to be said on this topic, but Webb has laid some crucial foundations for future discussions. The next chapter is Richard Burrige's on biography, a particularly vivid and dense essay that reaches back to Isocrates and treats such authors as Tacitus, Plutarch, and Suetonius. D. H. Berry and Malcolm Heath have collaborated on a chapter treating oratory and declamation, which focuses on Cicero (of course), the Elder Seneca, pseudo-Quintilian, and Libanius. Folker Siegert's 'Homily and Panegyric Sermon' is interesting (and somewhat unusual) in that it does not seek simply to use Jewish material to illuminate Christian (or vice versa); rather each is considered on its own terms, and this includes an attempt to isolate in the Hebrew and Greek scriptures possible antecedents to an 'art' of preaching. Ronald Hock contributes a (basically propaedeutic) chapter on the rhetoric of romance, which exploits the traditions of *progymnasmata* and handbook rhetoric (the latter only minimally) in assessing the texts of the ancient novel. Jonathan Knight's chapter, like Siegert's, will be of interest primarily to those concerned with religious texts (both Hebrew and Greek) from this period. Ruth Scodel's 'Drama and Rhetoric' follows in the footsteps of Buxton's *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1982), but broadens its scope to consider the case of comedy (and of Latin literature as well as Greek, so there is some useful material here on Seneca and declamation).

Part III, 'Individual Writers and the Rhetorical Tradition,' is unusually rich in material of use to those interested in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It begins with four chapters focusing on the early Christian writings: the Gospels and Acts (Richard Burrige), the Pauline epistles (Stanley Porter), the general epistles (Lauri Thurén), and the Johannine corpus (Dennis Stamps). These are followed by two chapters on patristics: Wolfram Kinzig on the Greek Fathers, and Philip Satterthwaite on the Latin. Thomas Conley's essay on Philo provides a good deal of material on that author's style, *topoi*, and arrangement, while Donna Runnalls treats the rhetoric of Josephus -- both that of his own narrative and that of the orations his characters deliver.

With Hubert Martin's chapter on Plutarch, we find ourselves back in pagan antiquity. Such a prolific author deserves a very lengthy treatment, of course, but Martin has provided a good handbook-length foundation for that task, ranging appropriately across the corpus, and managing to invoke a good deal of specific detail in the process.

The remaining chapters in this section, which do not really focus on an individual author apiece, seem to have been placed here for lack of a more appropriate home. Ronald Hock contributes a chapter on 'Cynics and Rhetoric,' while Richard Pervo treats specifically of the rhetoric of the Christian apocrypha. The chapter on Greek and Latin translations of the Hebrew scriptures (by John Lee and Kevin Lee) is something of a *tour de force*, and should be most illuminating to anyone interested in the transmission of texts in the ancient world. Part III concludes with Edwin Judge's very interesting chapter on the rhetoric of inscriptions, both Greek and Latin. This is grouped under five headings: Oracle and Epigram, Vow and Offering, Grace and Favour, Trust and Tribute, and Death and Glory.

This, then, is the text of the book (which is equipped with seventy pages of indices, to ancient sources and to modern authors). Given nine hundred pages to address the topic (s) under discussion, how many other groups of contributors now alive could surpass -- or even equal -- what has been achieved in this volume? Not, I ween, very many. All broad targets are easy to hit, and it would be as simple as it would loutish to carp (any more than I have already done) at putative errors of omission or commission. The main questions I think one should ask about a handbook of this sort are: Are all the contributors competent (and, where possible, expert) in the areas they address? Is there sufficient breadth of coverage in the text to justify the title? Does each chapter focus primarily on the forest, and secondarily on the trees? Is the volume likely to have a long shelf-life as a genuinely basic reference-work, rather than limited interest as a curio? My answer to these questions is Yes, Yes, For the most part, and I'll bet. For this weighty achievement (my copy tips the scales at over 600 g) the editor, the contributors, and the publisher are to be congratulated. One heartily wishes that the latter could have contrived to produce the book (which is undeniably sumptuous) at a somewhat less staggering cost; this volume is not likely to find its way into many personal libraries. But we should hope that every scholarly institution will acquire a copy.

Notes:

1. In fact it is not: the exact locution is *to mega biblion ison ... tõi megalõi kakõi* (Callimachus fr. 465 Pf.).
2. Quintilian 3.1.8, *Artium autem scriptores antiquissimi Corax et Tisias Siculi*, though we are not at all sure what their works contained -- nor, come to that, whether Corax ever actually existed. Thomas Cole's suggestion -- that Corax was Tisias -- is provocative and intriguing ('Who Was Corax?', *Illinois Classical Studies* 16 [1992] 65-84). Moreover, it is worth pondering whether the *et* in Cicero's *artem et praecepta* (*Brutus* 46) is exegetical, or whether the two nouns may somehow signify two different things.
3. Quintilian 3.1.14, *Ars est utriusque [scil. Aristotelis et Isocratis], sed pluribus eam libris Aristoteles complexus est*. Cf. the complicated and perplexing testimony of Cicero, *Brutus* 48. Was the 'tekhne' of Isocrates actually a collection of sample speeches? See e.g. Ludwig Radermacher, *Artium scriptores (Reste der Voraristotelischen Rhetorik)* (Vienna 1951) 155-156 (ad B XXIV 14, 16); George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963) 54-57; K. Barwick, 'Das Problem der isokratischen Techne,' *Philologus* 107 (1963) 42-60; Thomas Cole, *The*

Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece (Baltimore 1991) 81 and n. 11; Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton 1994) 48-49.

4. Cicero, *De inuentione* 2.6-7.

5. 'The Aristotelian Tradition in Ancient Rhetoric.' *American Journal of Philology* 62 (1941) 35-50, 169-190.

6. I think especially of White's *Metahistory* (Baltimore 1973) and *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore 1978).

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