Introduction

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The twelve declamations presented in this volume are examples of a standard kind of ancient rhetorical exercise. If we were to refrain from taking account of anything beyond their contents,1 we might plausibly imagine them to have been composed in any century of the Roman Empire from the time of Augustus on. The same could be said, for the most part, about the preliminary talks. But we know that these pieces are the work of the sophist Choricius, composed in sixth-century AD Gaza, and it is with Choricius that we begin.

CHORICIUS AND THE SCHOOL OF GAZA

Choricius was a member of the School of Gaza, which had its roots in the reign of the emperor Zeno (474–91) and extended into the reign of Justinian (527–65). The height of Choricius’ career fell roughly in the second quarter of the sixth century. The traditional terms “School” and “members” should not be taken to imply any formal cohesion, though there were features of the School that its members had in common; Nigel Wilson’s “circle”

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1 Echoes of earlier imperial sophists (e.g., Libanius), if we did not know Choricius’ date, would give *termini post quos*. For Libanian influence on Choricius, see Rother 1912 (the author was a student of R. Foerster). This influence has, however, been exaggerated, I believe; I find it hard to accept, for example, that Choricius “quotes Libanius 493 times” (Litsas 1980: 21; cf. Downey 1958: 312 and Ciccolella 2000: 123n): the citations of Libanius in the Foerster–Richtsteig edition of Choricius often show similarities between the later and the earlier sophist, but not certain and conscious borrowings (cf. Tosi’s criticisms [1981: 90–100] of some purported Thucydidean borrowings in Choricius). For an exemplarily nuanced study of Choricius’ use of Libanius in his *Defense of the Mimes*, see Cresci 1986. Photius contends that “Choricius imitated [Procopius of Gaza], to the extent that a pupil can, in his own orations” (*Bibl.* cod. 160, the whole of which is given below, pp. 270–1, 287–9, both in Greek and in English). Unfortunately, we have for comparative purposes only one epideictic oration by Procopius, the panegyric for Anastasius, and seven short *dialexeis* and *êthopoiiai*, wrongly labeled “declamations” in Garzya and Loenertz 1963. Choricius’ prose rhythm betrays him as late ancient (Kirsten 1894: 36–45; Dihe 1984: 461–4; Völker 2003: 73–8) and his Greek may contain features which would suggest that it is later rather than earlier.
or “group” would probably be better expressions to use. The School was a marked flowering of rhetorical, literary, and intellectual Greek culture, “[l’] ultimo bagliore dell’ ellenismo nella regione siro-palestinese prima della conquista musulmana” – “the last gleam of Hellenism” in the region, in Federica Ciccolella’s words, before the Muslim conquest. Already in the fourth century, the Expositio totius mundi speaks of Gaza as having “bonos auditores” (32) – therefore, we may probably assume, good speakers and teachers as well – and, according to Libanius, Gaza aspired to be a “workshop of eloquence” (Orat. 55.34, λόγου εἶναι βουλομένην ἐργαστήριον). We are naturally disposed to read these fourth-century remarks as pointing to the subsequent emergence of what we call the School of Gaza: a scholion to a verse written by one of the School’s members, John of Gaza, describes the city in John’s day as actually having reached the height of logoi. Another member of the School, Aeneas of Gaza, gives voice to local pride when he writes to a former pupil that “people no longer sail into the Piraeus in love with the Academy, nor do they frequent the Lyceum, for they think that the Academy and the Lyceum are to be found among us” (Epp. 18).

Although Gaza became culturally important in its own right in the fifth and sixth centuries, the influence of Alexandria, the great Egyptian center of learning, upon the Palestinian city was significant. The sophist Procopius of Gaza refers to the Egyptian city as “the common mother of logoi” and comments on its attractions for men of learning (Epp. 57, 104, 119 Garzya–Loenertz). Aeneas remembers “sporting with the Muses” on the banks of the Nile, presumably in Alexandria (Epp. 15). He probably studied there under the philosopher Hierocles: in his Theophrastus the character Euxitheus, who studied under Hierocles, is modeled on Aeneas himself. Zacharias Scholasticus studied in Alexandria; so did Timotheus of Gaza, under the philosopher Horapollon. (Although Zacharias, a native of Gaza’s port Maiuma, spent most of his life away from the Gaza region, he may be considered here in connection with the School of Gaza as illustrative of the pull Alexandria exerted on young men of greater Gaza in the late fifth

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4 Text in Ciccolella 2000: 118.
5 “[A]mong us” surely includes Gaza, even if it also refers to Smyrna, where Aeneas’ pupil Theodorus was teaching. For the phrase and its larger context, see Masa Positano 1962: 106–9.
6 The Procopius of this introduction is to be distinguished from Procopius of Caesarea, the well-known Justinianic historian, whose claimed ties to Gaza have no foundation (Cameron 1985: 6–7).
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But we also know that the elderly Procopius was once chided for inactivity, specifically for no longer giving public displays of his eloquence; on that occasion, Choricius defended “the freedom from activity that comes with age” (Prelim. Talk 6 [XI].1).

By the beginning of the sixth century the Christianization of Gaza was well along, and this is reflected in the religious make-up of the School of Gaza. Aeneas, Procopius, and Choricius were all Christians. In his Theophrastus Aeneas philosophizes in a manner he deems compatible with Christianity, attacking error and, through the interlocutor Euxitheus, professing his faith in the Trinity and the Incarnation (Theophr. pp. 44, 67 Colonna). Procopius wrote biblical commentaries. Choricius praises Procopius’ biblical learning, in the display of which “except for his clothing alone he was altogether a hieerus.” He also lauds him for his command of Christian dogma and apologetics.

Yet in other of their works the Gazans keep their Christianity out of sight. They normally compartmentalize their Hellenic paideia and their Christianity, glorying, in works that do not involve philosophico-theological or biblical themes, in a full display of their command of classical mythology, history, and literature. Their mimesis of the classical texts on which they were reared can go as far as to invoke and swear by the gods. Perhaps the most striking case in point is Procopius’ panegyric to the Christian emperor

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\] For the Christianity of Procopius and Choricius, see Phot. Bibl. cod. 160. Barnes 1996: 178–80 rejects Choricius’ Christianity and the reliability of Photius on this point. For an agnostic view of Choricius’ religious faith, see Malineau 2005: 168. Kirsten 1894: 6 made what seems to be a valid point: “neque cuiquam credibile erit rhetorem ullam ecclesiarum Christianarum, id quod bis [Orats. 1 (I); 2 (II)] eum fecisse constat.” And it is hard not to surmise from the phrasing of Orat. 3 [III].67 on the Virgin Mary that Choricius was a believer. Aeneas is, in M.-A. Kugener’s translation of the Syriac version of Zacharias’ Life of Severus 24, “le grand et savant sophiste chrétien de la ville de Gaza” (PO 2, 1). Of course, it is legitimate to raise the question whether an attested Christian was a convert, but see n. 20 below.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15}}\] Choric. Orat. 7 [VIII].21. Hierou is “priest” or “bishop.” Choricius uses the word of Bishop Marcianus in section 50 of the oration.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{16}}\] In Mai 1831: 274 ( = PG 87, 2: 2792b).

\[\text{\textsuperscript{17}}\] See Aen. Epp. 1 and 5. Aeneas can say “let us . . . pour drink-offerings to the god Hermes and to the mortal Herodotus [a contemporary]” and “Zeus, the god of friendship, sails with you” (Epp. 7 and 8). When he writes to a presbyter (Epp. 21), he naturally speaks of “God.” Procopius frequently invokes and swears by the gods in his letters. He can say “I do hope one of the gods will be kind to me” and “Zeus . . . bestows these things upon me” (Epp. 4 and 107 Garzya–Loenertz). (3) θεός and (5) θεος appear in his letters with roughly identical frequency. When we get a glimpse of his Christianity in the letters, it is “non in maniera chiara” (Matino 2005: 14–15).
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Anastasius, from the very early sixth century: with no explicitly Christian allusions in it, Procopius here swears by Zeus and hails the emperor as a descendant of Heracles and Zeus.\(^{18}\) Similarly, in his epithalamium for three of his students, the Christian Choricius says that he will pray to the gods of marriage on their behalf (Orat. 5 [VI.51]); and, on the occasion of Justinian’s Brumalia, the sophist compares the emperor to Zeus, but makes no reference to his Christianity (Dialex. 7 [XIII]). In Oration 8 [XXXII], in which Choricius defends the mimes and, in passing, a number of canonical authors as well from the assaults of puritanical critics – who by his day will have been predominantly Christians\(^{19}\) – he swears “by the gods” (152) and asks Dionysus to favor his speech (158).

This is all a kind of cultural posing, though.\(^{20}\) The same Choricius who regularly deploys mythology without comment makes clear, when addressing Gaza’s Bishop Marcianus, that he does not believe a mythological tale to be literally true and that an amusing smile is an appropriate response to the stories told by ancient poets (Orats. 1 [I].6; 2 [II.42]). For “flexible members of the educated [Christian] classes,” the use of mythology was “religiously neutral and aesthetically attractive.”\(^{21}\)

Not all Christians, of course, were so flexible about such mimicking of classical texts: the Byzantine Photius complains that, though Choricius “loves the right religion, . . . he irrationally introduces into his writings pagan fables and tales – I don’t know by what sort of negligence – when he should not do so, even when he is treating sacred subjects” (Bibl. cod. 160). The only thing approaching a “sacred subject” in the texts presented in this volume are the references to Bishop Marcianus and to the church of St. Stephen Protomartyr in

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\(^{18}\) Procop. Pan. 2 (cf. 11), 3, 6. The precise date of the oration has been disputed; see Chauvot 1986: 95–7; Matino 2005: 28–9. Procopius, Pan. 3–4, acknowledges Anastasius’ piety (ισότερον), underscored by his having been proposed as a candidate for the Antiochene bishopric, but explicit Christian terminology is avoided; see Chauvot 1986: 185–6; Matino 2005: 14, 22–3. There is nothing Christian, but much that is Hellenic, in Choricius’ Preliminary Talk 1 [I], which introduces Oration 1 [I] in honor of Bishop Marcianus and his newly built or restored church of St. Sergius.

\(^{19}\) This work has attracted considerable attention: see the Chorician bibliography in Amato 2005a: 107–11 and add Reich 1903: 204–30, Milazzo 2004, and Malineau 2005. Stephanis 1986 has provided a critical edition, with modern Greek translation and notes. I am grateful to A. W. White for sharing with me his English translation, which he plans to publish with notes and discussion.


\(^{21}\) I am quoting Roberts 1898: 336 in his discussion of Christian Latin epithalamia. Cf. Seitz 1892: 8, “. . . der heidnische Inhalt ist durchaus Nebensache und nur deshalb festgehalten, weil er unlöslich mit der Form verwachsen war.” A convenient way for Christians to hold on to mythology was to use it allegorically: see Ciccolella 2006: 89, 92–5 on John of Gaza.
Preliminary Talk 2 [II], which introduced Choricius’ second encomium of the bishop and his church. These references, though, are typically made in good Atticizing vocabulary (τέμενι, τὸν ἱερός, τὸν νεόν),22 and in them Choricius compares his upcoming description of the church of St. Stephen to Herodotus’ description of the temple of Babylon and draws a parallel between a festival celebrating the church’s inauguration and an ancient Delian festival, just as in Preliminary Talk 1 [I] he invokes ancient Spartan and Athenian usages in commenting on a festival celebrating the construction or repair of the Gazan church of St. Sergius.

Bishop Marcianus was a man of action; there are no indications in Choricius that he was an ascetic. He was a builder and repairer of edifices and of city walls and defenses and a deliverer of the city from troublesome soldiers. In the pages of Choricius, he looks to us like a latter-day curialis in episcopal garb.23 Choricius praises the prelate as much for his rhetorical as for his religious education – adding, of course, that the former allowed the bishop to present holy scripture more learnedly to others. Like Choricius, Marcianus had studied under Procopius.24 It has even been asserted that Bishop Marcianus directed Procopius’ school for a while after the latter’s death; those who have made that assertion, however, have attempted to extract more than is warranted from a passage in Choricius’ funeral oration for Procopius. The passage in question probably means only that the bishop’s good general leadership provided an ideal environment for the transfer of the school from Procopius to Choricius.25 In any case, Bishop Marcianus, like the lay elite of Gaza, clearly valued the traditional education.

Another important component of the Christianity of late ancient Gaza, in addition to its secular urban clergy, was the large population of monks in the region.26 What, if any, relationship did learned lay Gazans, such as sophists, have with them? The correspondence of the monks Barsanuphius and John, at Tawatha, near Gaza, in the first half of the sixth century,

22 The same terminology may be found in the encomium itself (e.g., Orat. 2 [II].3, 17, 25, 33, 76). Choricius never uses the voces propriae Christianae ὕπαλληλος or ἐπίσκοπος in the text of his works. Cf. Ashkenazi 2004: 200, n. 32, 203, n. 59.
23 See, in addition to Orats. 1 [I] and 2 [II] in general, 1.7, 78; 2.16, 18–20, 24; cf. 7 [VIII].52.
shows someone called a teacher of ή τοῦ κόσμου σοφία – apparently a philosopher – consulting them on personal matters (Epp. 664, 778 Neyt et al.). More remarkable, though, is Aeneas of Gaza’s consultation of the monk Isaiah on learned matters, as reported by Zacharias in his biography of Isaiah on the basis of a conversation he had had with a close associate of the monk. When Aeneas, “a most Christian and learned man,” had trouble understanding Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus and could get no help from experts, he would go to Isaiah, who would clarify the troublesome passages and give a critique of the pagan authorities with reference to the Christian faith, even though he was quite unversed in profane learning.  

This is tantalizing, and one wants more evidence. But it does warn us not to assume that Christian lay conversation on matters of paideia was exclusively with sophisticated urban clergy. On the other hand, we must not forget that monks and urbanites (both lay and clerical) inhabited different worlds: a monk was unlikely to give the same priority that a bishop would to “worldly” qualifications, such as administrative and rhetorical skills, in candidates for ordination.

Sophists had traditionally played a variety of extra-scholastic, civic roles. At Gaza, holders of what appears to be the major, publicly supported chair of rhetoric acted at times as the city’s mouthpiece. In Orations 1 [I] and 2 [II] Choricius lauded Bishop Marcianus and the churches of St. Sergius and of St. Stephen Protomartyr, the first constructed or repaired and the second inaugurated during Marcianus’ episcopacy. These two orations have attracted art-historical interest because of their detailed descriptions of the churches. He also gave a funeral oration upon the death of the bishop’s mother Maria (6 [VII]). Further, he was the panegyrist of the dux Palaestinae Aratius and the consularis Palaestinae primae Stephanus in Oration 3 [III] in 535/6 and of the dux Palaestinae Summus in Oration 4 [IV] in the late 530s. Praise was also bestowed on Summus in Choricius’ talk on the occasion of Justinian’s Brumalia (Dialec. 7 [XIII].14) – which, of course, mainly lauds the emperor – and Summus’ brother Julianus, an agent of

27 I rely on E. W. Brooks’ Latin translation of the Syriac (CSCO, Scriptores Syri, Series 3, Tome XXV, p. 8).
28 Barsanuphius and John, Epp. 808, 809, 813; Hevelone-Harper 2005: 115–17. “Figures like Bishop Marcian, who emerged from the urban aristocracy and sought association both with rhetors and anchorites, held in tension the competing world views of the urban elite and the ascetic prophets” (ibid. 118).
30 See PLRE IIIA s.v. “Aratius”; IIIB s.v. “Stephanus 7”; and II s.v. “Summus.”
31 PLRE IIIA s.v. “Julianus 8.”
the emperor, is complimented in *Oration* 4.33–4 and in *Dialexis* 7.15. Finally, it was Choricius who gave the funeral oration for his predecessor Procopius (*Orat.* 7 [VIII]). As for Procopius himself, fate has not been kind to his panegyrical orations, though we do have his panegyric to the emperor Anastasius, at the very beginning of which he makes clear that he is speaking on behalf of the whole city of Gaza. We know, too, that he, like Choricius, had been a panegyrist of Bishop Marcianus (*Choric.* *Orat.* 7.51), and his lost oration Ἐς τὸν σωφρόνος ἀφικότας was probably an encomium of an imperial official. As prominent sophists and urban spokesmen, Procopius and Choricius will have traveled in elite circles and have had many sons of the regional upper classes in their school. But the twelve major pieces presented in this volume have no connection in theme with the real world that their author inhabited.

**The Declamation**

Choricius’ declamations have imaginary themes, either deliberative (urging a course of action) or judicial (bringing or defending against an accusation). The speaker impersonates a specific mythical, legendary, or historical figure, with more or less adherence to the traditional story line, or a generic character (for example, a rich man or a tyrannicide); in the case of these non-specific themes, all details in the oration will normally be anonymous, and the action will occur in the generic land that D. A. Russell calls “Sophistopolis.” The Greek equivalent for the Latin-derived “declamation” is *meletē* (“[rhetorical] exercise”) or *plasma* (“fiction,” “invention”). When a heading survives for a Chorician declamation, it is (ἡ) *μελέτη* (*Decl.*** 9 [XXXV]; 10 [XXXVIII]; 12 [XLIII]). The term is also found in *Preliminary Talks* 12 [XXI].4; 14 [XXIV], title; 22 [XXXVI], title; 23 [XXXVII].7; 25 [XLII], title; and in *Declamations* 5 [XX], “Explanatory Comment” 6; 6 [XXIII], “Explanatory Comment” 1; and 9, “Explanatory Comment” 5. We routinely find μελετώμεν (“let us take the part of”) in the statement of a Chorician declamation’s theme (cf. *Prelim. Talks* 12, title, τὸν μελετώμενον; 21 [XXXIV], title, τοῦ μελετώμενον; *Decl.*** 12, “Explanatory Comment” 5, μελετήσει), and Choricius uses the term πλάσμα in *Declamations* 5, “Explanatory Comment” 1; 9, “Explanatory Comment.”

34 Kohl 1915 provides a helpful catalogue of historical themes in ancient declamations.
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The most fundamental context in which declamation must be situated is the literary-rhetorical educational system of the Roman Empire. Despite what we know about the great variety that existed in the organization of schooling in antiquity, it is still valid and useful to think of literary-rhetorical education as consisting of three levels – at least for those who were sufficiently socially and economically privileged to go through the whole course. The goal of the primary level was basic literacy and numeracy. At the secondary level students focused on reading the classical writers, primarily the poets. The texts were read closely, explicated, and interpreted. Reading of the classics continued at the third or advanced level, though the emphasis now was on prose texts, especially the orators and historians, and the central activity was rhetorical composition, modeled on those prose texts and nurtured by the study of rhetorical theory. It was this third level of education that was the proper domain of the sophist, and he hoped to turn out young men of eloquence. The Greek that students had been learning and exercising themselves in was not the spoken tongue, but classical Attic, which they would employ more or less strictly as adults in appropriate socio-linguistic situations. This “high-register” Greek, in a diglossic milieu, was a mark of elite status. Initiation in the ancient classics and in the personal and civic virtues transmitted by those classics also helped to give social identity and solidarity to the sons of the upper classes.

The culminating compositional exercise in the sophist’s school, “the crown of the curriculum,” was the declamation. The student produced full-scale deliberative and judicial declamations in which everything he had learned and was still perfecting was symphonically brought together: Attic Greek, all aspects of expression, invention of argument, arrangement of material, and skills of delivery. One did not jump immediately into

37 Note the juxtaposition of meletê and plasma in a life of Aeschines: τὰς λεγομένας μελέτας καὶ τὰ πλάσματα τῶν ζητημάτων (Martin and de Budé 1952: 7); cf. Phot. Bibl. cod. 61.
39 See Cribiore 2001: 2, 16–18, 36–44.

[The attention commanded by classicizing/atticizing Greek] is not surprising if we recall the importance the ancient elite accorded the literary-cultural events for which classicizing language was appropriate and, more than this, the intense pleasure they derived from their paideia, their ‘education’ in classical literature and moral/political thought, and from the distinction such education enacted between themselves as the heirs of the classics and the masses, whose stake in the past was necessarily limited.

41 Russell 1983: 12.
declamation. Simpler compositional exercises, called *progymnasmata*, preceded it; they were graduated and normally begun at the second level of education. Progymnasmatic modes might reappear as small units embedded in a declamation, for example, a *chreia* or anecdote, an *enkōmion* or laudation, a *synkrisis* or comparison, an *ekphrasis* or description. The progymnasmatic *diegēma* or narrative looks forward to the standard narrative part of a full-blown oration. Other progymnasmatic modes point, in a reduced and miniature way, to the central argumentative task of a declamation— for example, anaskeuē or katasekukē (the refutation or confirmation of something), *thesis* (arguing a generic thesis), or *nomou eisphora* (arguing for or against a proposed law). In another *progymnasma*, the *ēthopoiia*, the student impersonated someone, seeking to represent character through the ascribed words. We do find short *ēthopoiiai* embedded in declamations—for example, in Choricius’ *Declamation 2* [XII].87–9, the “speaker” Priam verbally personifies his daughter Polyxena—but, of course, more fundamentally every declamation is a sustained *ēthopoiia* of some historical or generic character. Choricius devotes two of his preliminary talks, 12 [XXI] and 21 [XXXIV], to underscoring the importance of persuasive and sustained representation of the impersonated character in declamation: “when it comes to a man whose business is his tongue, it is fitting for him to represent [well] whatever he has decided to contrive with it, so that comedy does not speak in vain when it calls the tongue a kind of sphere, easily managed and ready to turn in any direction it desires” (*Prelim. Talk 21.5*).

If representation of character was of fundamental importance in declamation, so was the invention of arguments. When in *Declamation 12* [XLII].69 Choricius has the impersonated orator say, “Come now and let us hunt out another argument from this discipline of ours,” he is really speaking in his own person, expressing his own drive to heap argument upon argument. Ancient declamation can seem argumentatively overwrought and sometimes strained to us—to follow Choricius requires effort on occasion—but in its own day the end product must have been viewed as a desirable tour de force. The student’s first efforts at declamatory argumentation were aided by the study of *stasis* or issue theory, which trained him in identifying the key issue of a theme and suggested argumentative heads for the various issues.43