

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-01377-3 - Libanius: A Critical Introduction
Edited by Lieve Van Hoof
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LIBANIUS

A professor of Greek rhetoric, frequent letter writer and influential social figure, Libanius (AD 314–393) is a key author for anybody interested in Late Antiquity, ancient rhetoric, ancient epistolography or ancient biography. Nevertheless, he remains understudied because it is such a daunting task to access his large and only partially translated oeuvre. This volume, which is the first comprehensive study of Libanius, offers a critical introduction to the man, his texts, their context and reception. Clear presentations of the orations, *progymnasmata*, declamations and letters unlock the corpus, and a survey of all available translations is provided. At the same time, the volume explores new interpretative approaches of the texts from a variety of angles. Written by a team of established as well as upcoming experts in the field, it substantially reassesses works such as the *Autobiography*, the Julianic speeches and letters, and Oration 30 *For the Temples*.

LIEVE VAN HOOF is a postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University, Belgium. Trained as a classicist, historian and political scientist, she studies the interplay between literature and politics, culture and power. After publishing *Plutarch's Practical Ethics: The Social Dynamics of Philosophy* (2010) and a range of articles on the Second Sophistic, she turned her attention to Late Antiquity. She has published several articles on Greek literature in the fourth century AD, and is currently preparing a monograph on the letters of Libanius.

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To Pierre-Louis Malosse († 2013)

Ὁ βίος βραχύς,
ἢ δὲ τέχνη μακρή.

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Preface

The year 2014 is the first centenary of one of the most devastating conflicts in world history. At the same time, it is the seventeenth centenary of the birth of Libanius (AD 314–393), one of the most influential authors of late antiquity. That World War One is being commemorated universally whilst almost nobody remembers Libanius is obvious. After all, the sophist from Antioch has been almost completely forgotten by the wider public, and is little studied even within the world of Classics today. There were times when this was different: Libanius, whose life spanned the entire ‘short fourth century’ from Constantine through Julian to Theodosius, communicated with the most powerful people of his day, provided model writings for generations of Byzantine scholars, became a popular figure in the Western Middle Ages, was the object of a large-scale forgery by one of the leading humanists, and seemed to be known widely enough even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to be included as a character in Henrik Ibsen’s *Emperor and Galilaeen* and, about a century later, Gore Vidal’s *Julian*. In a sense, Libanius has remained *incontournable* for classicists and ancient historians until this very day: few studies on Late Antiquity fail to mention the author who is often our best or even our only source on particular aspects or people of fourth-century society. But what has often gone unnoticed is that he is much more than that: an influential public figure with a unique personal network, a pivotal point in the history of ancient rhetoric, (auto)biography and epistolography, and a highly debated figure in the struggle for the reception and interpretation of the clash between Graeco-Roman and Christian culture. As a multitalented and sophisticated writer in his own right, Libanius therefore has much to offer to any classicist or ancient historian with an interest in topics as diverse as ancient rhetoric, social history, biography, epistolography, religion, Late Antiquity, the Second Sophistic or reception studies. In the last few decades, however, Libanius, although studied by a small group of specialists, has often gone unnoticed in wider classical and historical circles.

The reason for this general neglect is twofold. First, it is difficult *to gain access to Libanius*: his variegated oeuvre is the third largest to have survived from classical antiquity, and translations and studies, having appeared piecemeal and in different languages, must be puzzled together. Once one does have a grip of the material, there is, secondly, the difficulty *to realize its potential*: quarrying Libanius' oeuvre for information on particular questions, as is still often done, fails to do justice to the richness of his texts, and thereby carries the risk of misinterpretations and, above all, of missing out on the most interesting insights which these rich texts can yield. As a result, a more sophisticated approach is needed.

Having personally experienced these hurdles – I turned to Libanius after writing my PhD and a monograph on Plutarch and the Second Sophistic – I thought it might be a good idea to produce *A Critical Introduction to Libanius*: an accessible volume introducing the author and his oeuvre, offering guidance to translations and studies, and proposing future avenues of research; but above all a volume demonstrating that Libanius is a vitally important author whose complexities demand our close attention and, once so attended to, yield unique insight into the world of Late Antiquity, but also into ancient rhetoric, biography and epistolography, and into the reception of antiquity from Byzantium to the present.

At the beginning of this book, I would like to express my thanks to three groups of people without whom the production of this book would not have been possible. First of all, I thank those who supported me during the different stages of this book's production. The proposal was developed during my time as Visiting Member of the Corpus Christi Classics Centre in Oxford, when I was funded as a Postdoctoral Researcher of the Flemish Research Council. The project largely took shape during my time as Senior Postdoctoral Researcher of the Humboldt Foundation based at Bonn University. Most of the editing, finally, was done during my time as Invited Fellow of the Lichtenberg Kolleg – the Göttingen Institute of Advanced Study, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. I wish to thank all the organizations that funded me, all the institutions that hosted me, and all the colleagues I had the pleasure to work with, in particular Peter Gemeinhardt, Owen Hodkinson, Neil McLynn, Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, Thomas Schmitz, Peter Van Deun, Peter Van Nuffelen and Tim Whitmarsh.

Secondly, I would like to thank Michael Sharp and his team at Cambridge University Press for their willingness to endorse this project and their help in realizing it. A special note of thanks has to go to the Press' anonymous reviewers, whose incisive comments and stimulating suggestions at an early stage have had a formative influence on this volume.

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My greatest gratitude, finally, goes to the contributors to this volume, whom I wish to thank not only for their enthusiastic response to my proposal, but also for their generous contributions and patient collaboration. Thank you very much, Ed, Raffaella, Pierre-Louis, Bob, Craig, Bernadette, Heinz-Günther, Uli, Scott, Jan and Peter! Sadly, Pierre-Louis Malosse passed away in July 2013, after he had finalized Chapter 4 but before the volume as a whole was ready. It is to him, as a great Libanius scholar, colleague and friend, that this volume is dedicated.

LIEVE VAN HOOF

Abbreviations

- CJ* Krüger P. (1877) *Corpus iuris civilis*. Berlin.
- CTh* Mommsen T., Meyer P. and Krüger P. (eds.) (1905) *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis*. Berlin. (=1962).
- ELF* Bidez J. and Cumont F. (1922) *Imperatoris Caesaris Flavii Claudii Iuliani Epistulae Leges Poematia Fragmenta Varia*. Paris.
- FrGrHist* Jacoby F. et al. (1922–) *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Leipzig and Leiden.
- PG* Migne J.P. (1857–1866) *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*. One hundred and sixty-one volumes. Paris.
- PLRE* Jones A.H.M., Martindale C. and Morris J. (1971) *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. Volume 1: *A.D. 260 to 395*. Cambridge.