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978-0-198-52523-3 - Greece and Rome: New Surveys in the Classics No. 32: The Invention of Prose

Simon Goldhill

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BY

SIMON GOLDHILL

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PREFACE

Greece & Rome Surveys are changing. They were inaugurated thirty-five years ago as brief essays to direct bright students and their teachers towards significant areas of critical concern in a major author's work and the relevant bibliography. Since then, they have moved on to more extended essays on areas of thought, as well as on particular authors. This essay is designed to introduce such a general area – namely, the world of fifth- and fourth-century Greek prose. There are already Surveys on historiography and on science and on 'ancient thought' (primarily philosophy). This book is not intended to reproduce or cannibalize those excellent studies. Rather, this Survey takes a different, complementary look at the cultural revolution of the classical *polis* through one of its new ways of writing. Central to this project is *rhetoric* as a science and a practice – but it has proved impossible to think about rhetoric seriously without looking at it across the differing developing prose genres. It is an essay designed first to put rhetoric in a nuanced context of writing; second – and perhaps most importantly – to recapture some of the novelty and excitement of a period when genres now so familiar to us were being established. This is not a book on 'prose style': the requirements of translation and transliteration forbid extensive analysis of such precisions of expression. Nor is this a full survey of the possible or even common discussions of all of the authors and genres mentioned: in the notes I have provided a spare and critical (rather than exhaustive) bibliography, focusing on works in English for what I assume will be a mainly Anglophone readership, and indicating where further work can be found. I have not indicated every debt, so as not to burden the text with an excessive apparatus, and the notes are solely for following up issues of interest for the reader. If this book turns some of its readers back towards Greek prose writing with a fresh eye – and a wish to read on, more deeply and with a new sense of the critical issues involved – then the project will have been a success.

My thanks are gratefully recorded to Robin Osborne for reading and commenting on the whole manuscript, and to Robert Wardy for reading Chapter IV.

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