

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction**Robert J. Penella*

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,<sup>1</sup> 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 Choricus, composed in sixth-century AD Gaza, and it is with Choricus that we begin.

## CHORICIUS AND THE SCHOOL OF GAZA

Choricus 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 Choricus' 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"

<sup>1</sup> Echoes of earlier imperial sophists (e.g., Libanius), if we did not know Choricus' date, would give *termini post quos*. For Libanian influence on Choricus, 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 Choricus "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 Choricus often show similarities between the later and the earlier sophist, but not certain and conscious borrowings (cf. Tosi's criticisms [1981: 99–100] of some purported Thucydidean borrowings in Choricus). For an exemplarily nuanced study of Choricus' use of Libanius in his *Defense of the Mimes*, see Cresci 1986. Photius contends that "Choricus 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 *ēthopoiai*, wrongly labeled "declamations" in Garzya and Loenertz 1963. Choricus' prose rhythm betrays him as late ancient (Kirsten 1894: 36–45; Dihle 1994: 463–4; Völker 2003: 73–8) and his Greek may contain features which would suggest that it is later rather than earlier.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)

or “group” would probably be better expressions to use.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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, λόγων 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*.<sup>4</sup> 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).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> Wilson 1983: 30–1.

<sup>3</sup> Ciccolella 2000: 120. On the School in general, see Ciccolella 2000: 118–26 and the works cited there in n. 10, to which add Stark 1852: 631–45; Seitz 1892; Glucker 1987: 51–7.

<sup>4</sup> Text in Ciccolella 2000: 118.

<sup>5</sup> “[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 Massa Positano 1962: 106–9.

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> See Colonna 1958: vii–x.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

3

century.<sup>8</sup>) Procopius, Choricus' teacher, recalled his days on the banks of the Nile (Alexandria?) in his letters (48 [ἔτι παρὰ τὸν Νεῖλον οἰκῶν]; 96 [ὡς συνῆμεν ἀλλήλοις παρὰ τὸν Νεῖλον]; 127). And Choricus himself, in his funeral oration for Procopius (7 [VIII].15), narrates an incident in Procopius' life that took place in a city neighboring on "the Egyptian river," most likely Alexandria: when Procopius was still young, he defeated a veteran in an oratorical contest there.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, these passages fail to make clear whether Procopius actually studied in Alexandria, although we can assume with some degree of confidence from Choricus, *Oration* 7.15, that he did.<sup>10</sup> As for Choricus himself, he mentions in *Oration* 2 [II].64 that he attended a festival along the Nile – was this in Alexandria and during a period of study? One specialized influence that came from Alexandria was its Neoplatonism, readily apparent in Aeneas of Gaza's *Theophrastus* and in Zacharias' *Ammonius*, though that intellectual current has no immediate bearing on the texts presented in this volume.<sup>11</sup>

The rhetorical formation of the members of the School of Gaza was very pronounced.<sup>12</sup> Choricus is emblematic of this feature of the School in a special way, in that he held the apparently publicly supported chair of rhetoric in Gaza, succeeding his former teacher Procopius.<sup>13</sup> In his funeral oration for Procopius, with its expected hyperbole, Choricus asserts that all sophists regarded the precocious Procopius as the best (7 [VIII].5, 16, 31). This new Demosthenes excelled both in his own eloquence and as a teacher (7.7, 10). He brought great glory to Gaza, we are told, causing Antioch, Tyre, and Palestinian Caesarea to envy her (7.12–13). He spent some of his old age in retirement – Choricus flatteringly says that he often tried to slow down his energetic predecessor in the latter's old age (7.17).

<sup>8</sup> Zacharias: Minniti Colonna 1973: 20, 22–3; *PLRE* II s.v. "Zacharias (the Rhetor) 4." Timotheus: Seitz 1892: 30; *PLRE* II s.v. "Timotheus 3." I do not understand why Wilson 1983: 31 thinks that Timotheus should perhaps not be considered a member of the School on the ground that "he is stated to have been a pupil of Horapollon, who taught in Egypt and later in Constantinople [*sic*]."

<sup>9</sup> πρὸς ἄνδρα πάλαι μεθοδεύοντα λόγους . . . ἀπεδύσατο . . . καὶ τέχνη καταπαλαίσις . . . Litsas 1980: 217 badly mistranslates "Procopius was trained there by a master of rhetoric . . . and, after he completed his study in the art . . ."

<sup>10</sup> As does W. Aly, "Prokopius 20," *RE* 23, 1 (1957): 261–2.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Procopius' rejection, in his commentary on Genesis (*PG* 87, 1.30ff.), of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the eternity of the material world, rejected also by Aeneas and Zacharias. Note also the fragment of a critique by Procopius of the Neoplatonist Proclus, in Mai 1831: 274–5 (= *PG* 87, 2: 2792e–h) with Westerink 1942 and Whittaker 1975.

<sup>12</sup> Seitz 1892: 36: "Eben weil die Rhetorik das Band ist, welches alle angeführten Gazäer umschliesst, und da gerade in rhetorischer Hinsicht die Eigenart und Bedeutung derselben am deutlichsten hervortritt . . ."

<sup>13</sup> For the publicly supported chair, see Glucker 1987: 53; Ashkenazi 2004: 199. For Choricus' succeeding Procopius, see Phot. *Bibl. cod.* 160.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)

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, Choricus 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 Choricus were all Christians.<sup>14</sup> 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. Choricus praises Procopius’ biblical learning, in the display of which “except for his clothing alone he was altogether a *hiereus*.” He also lauds him for his command of Christian dogma (τὰ δόγματα τῆς εὐσεβείας) and apologetics.<sup>15</sup> In his critique of the Neoplatonist Proclus, Procopius invokes the authority of “our theologian Gregory.”<sup>16</sup> Choricus feels veneration (σέβας) for the protomartyr Stephen, admiring how he entrusted his well-being to God and had the courage to die for his εὐσέβεια (*Orat.* 2 [II].27).

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.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the most striking case in point is Procopius’ panegyric to the Christian emperor

<sup>14</sup> For the Christianity of Procopius and Choricus, see Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 160. Barnes 1996: 178–80 rejects Choricus’ Christianity and the reliability of Photius on this point. For an agnostic view of Choricus’ religious faith, see Malineau 2005: 168. Kirsten 1894: 6 made what seems to be a valid point: “neque cuiquam credibile erit rhetorem ullum ethnicum orationes habuisse in consecratione ecclesiarum Christianarum, id quod bis [*Orat.* 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 Choricus 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, 1.90). Of course, it is legitimate to raise the question whether an attested Christian was a convert, but see n. 20 below.

<sup>15</sup> Choric. *Orat.* 7 [VIII].21. *Hiereus* is “priest” or “bishop.” Choricus uses the word of Bishop Marcianus in section 50 of the oration.

<sup>16</sup> In Mai 1831: 274 (= *PG* 87, 2: 2792h).

<sup>17</sup> 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). (Οἱ θεοί and ὁ θεός 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).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

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.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in his epithalamium for three of his students, the Christian Choricus 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 Choricus 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<sup>19</sup> – he swears “by the gods” (152) and asks Dionysus to favor his speech (158).

This is all a kind of cultural posing, though.<sup>20</sup> The same Choricus 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.”<sup>21</sup> Not all Christians, of course, were so flexible about such mimicking of classical texts: the Byzantine Photius complains that, though Choricus “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

<sup>18</sup> Procop. *Pan.* 2 (cf. 13), 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 (εὐσεβεία) and the priestly aspect of his rule (ἱερεὺς), 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 Choricus' *Preliminary Talk* 1 [I], which introduces *Oration* 1 [I] in honor of Bishop Marcianus and his newly built or restored church of St. Sergius.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Barnes 1996: 178–80 would not agree. I am not inclined to try to make sense of the apparently “schizoid” nature of Gazan *paideia* by assuming that we are dealing with converts rather than with born Christians (cf. Seitz 1892: 24; J. Freudenthal, “Aineias 4,” *RE* 1 [1894]: 1021–2; Chauvot 1986: 275, n. 49).

<sup>21</sup> I am quoting Roberts 1989: 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.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)

*Preliminary Talk 2* [II], which introduced Choricus' second encomium of the bishop and his church. These references, though, are typically made in good Atticizing vocabulary (τεμένη, τὸν ἱερέα, τὸν νεών),<sup>22</sup> and in them Choricus 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 Choricus 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 Choricus, he looks to us like a latter-day *curialis* in episcopal garb.<sup>23</sup> Choricus 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 Choricus, Marcianus had studied under Procopius.<sup>24</sup> 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 Choricus' 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 Choricus.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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,

<sup>22</sup> The same terminology may be found in the encomium itself (e.g., *Orat.* 2 [II].3, 17, 25, 33, 76). Choricus never uses the *voces propriae Christianae* ἐκκλησία or ἐπίσκοπος in the text of his works. Cf. Ashkenazi 2004: 200, n. 32, 203, n. 59.

<sup>23</sup> See, in addition to *Orats.* 1 [I] and 2 [II] in general, 1.7, 78; 2.16, 18–20, 24; cf. 7 [VIII].52.

<sup>24</sup> Marcianus' learning: Choric. *Orats.* 1.6–7; 2.7–9. Procopius his teacher: 2.7, where I take τῷ κορυφαίῳ . . . τῶν Ἑρμοῦ χορευτῶν to be Procopius (cf. Ashkenazi 2004: 196).

<sup>25</sup> I am questioning the interpretation of Litsas 1980: 68 and 308, n. 66; Ashkenazi 2004: 200–1. The passage in question is Choric. *Orat.* 7 [VIII]. 50, ὁ δὲ [sc., Προκόπιος] τὴν [ναὺν] ἐνεγκοῦσαν [ἑαυτὸν] ἀφῆκεν εἰς ἀσφαλὴ τε καὶ μέγαν ὀρμιζομένην λιμένα, τὸν ἱερέα [Μαρκιανόν]. The ship metaphor is continued from section 49 and seems to refer, as Litsas 1980 *ad loc.* notes, to Procopius' school.

<sup>26</sup> On Gazan monasticism, see the relevant articles in Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004; also, Hevelone-Harper 2005; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

shows someone called a teacher of ἡ 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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] Choricus 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> Praise was also bestowed on Summus in Choricus' talk on the occasion of Justinian's Brumalia (*Dialex.* 7 [XIII].14) – which, of course, mainly lauds the emperor – and Summus' brother Julianus,<sup>31</sup> an agent of

<sup>27</sup> I rely on E. W. Brooks' Latin translation of the Syriac (*CSCO, Scriptores Syri*, Series 3, Tome XXV, p. 8).

<sup>28</sup> 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).

<sup>29</sup> For the churches, see Saliou 2005b: 171–2, 180–5. For earlier art-historical interest, see the bibliography provided by Amato 2005a: 107–11 and add Smith 1950: 38–40; Maguire 1978; Webb 1999: *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> See *PLRE* IIIA s.v. "Aratius"; IIIB s.v. "Stephanus 7"; and II s.v. "Summus."

<sup>31</sup> *PLRE* IIIA s.v. "Iulianus 8."



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the emperor, is complimented in *Oration* 4.33–4 and in *Dialexis* 7.15. Finally, it was Choricus who gave the funeral oration for his predecessor Procopius (*Orat.* 7 [VIII]). As for Procopius himself, fate has not been kind to his panegyric 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 Choricus, had been a panegyrist of Bishop Marcianus (*Choric. Orat.* 7.51), and his lost oration Εἰς τὸν σωφρόνως ἄρχοντα<sup>32</sup> was probably an encomium of an imperial official. As prominent sophists and urban spokesmen, Procopius and Choricus will have traveled in elite circles and have had many sons of the regional upper classes in their school.<sup>33</sup> But the twelve major pieces presented in this volume have no connection in theme with the real world that their author inhabited.

## THE DECLAMATION

Choricus' 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,<sup>34</sup> 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."<sup>35</sup> The Greek equivalent for the Latin-derived "declamation" is *meletē* ("[rhetorical] exercise")<sup>36</sup> or *plasma* ("fiction," "invention"). When a heading survives for a Chorician declamation, it is (ἡ) μελέτη (*Decls.* 9 [XXXV]; 10 [XXXVIII]; 12 [XLII]). The term is also found in *Preliminary Talks* 12 [XXI].4; 14 [XXIV], title; 22 [XXXVI], title; 23 [XXXVII].7; 25 [XLI], 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, τῶν μελετωμένων; 21 [XXXIV], title, τοῦ μελετωμένου; *Decl.* 12, "Explanatory Comment" 5, μελετήσεις), and Choricus uses the term πλάσμα in *Declamations* 5, "Explanatory Comment" 1; 9, "Explanatory

<sup>32</sup> Bekker 1814: 139.      <sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Penella 2005: 135–6.<sup>34</sup> Kohl 1915 provides a helpful catalogue of historical themes in ancient declamations.<sup>35</sup> Russell 1983: 21–2.<sup>36</sup> For the Latin "declamatio," see Bonner 1949: 20–2, 41; Stroth 2003. On the term *meletē*, see Civiletti 2002.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

9

Comment" 3; 12, "Explanatory Comment" 2; and in *Preliminary Talk* 14, title.<sup>37</sup>

The most fundamental context in which declamation must be situated is the literary-rhetorical educational system of the Roman Empire.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

The culminating compositional exercise in the sophist's school, "the crown of the curriculum," was the declamation.<sup>41</sup> 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

<sup>37</sup> Note the juxtaposition of *meletē* and *plasma* in a life of Aeschines: τὰς λεγομένους μελέτας καὶ τὰ πλάσματα τῶν ζητημάτων (Martin and de Budé 1952: 7); cf. Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 61.

<sup>38</sup> See Marrou 1982: 150–75, 194–205; Gianotti 1989: 438–66; Morgan 1998; Cribiore 2001: 160–244.

<sup>39</sup> See Cribiore 2001: 2, 16–18, 36–44.

<sup>40</sup> On Atticism, see Swain 1996: 17–64; Schmitz 1997: 67–96; Whitmarsh 2005: 41–9. Note Swain 1996: 63–4:

[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.

<sup>41</sup> Russell 1983: 12.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84873-2 - Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations

Edited by Robert J. Penella

Excerpt

[More information](#)

IO

ROBERT J. PENELLA

declamation. Simpler compositional exercises, called *progymnasmata*, preceded it; they were graduated and normally begun at the second level of education.<sup>42</sup> 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 *diēgēma* 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 *kataskeuē* (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 *ēthopoia*, the student impersonated someone, seeking to represent character through the ascribed words. We do find short *ēthopoiai* embedded in declamations – for example, in Choricus' *Declamation 2* [XII].87–9, the “speaker” Priam verbally personifies his daughter Polyxena – but, of course, more fundamentally every declamation is a sustained *ēthopoia* of some historical or generic character. Choricus 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 Choricus 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 Choricus 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.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> For the *progymnasmata*, see Kennedy 1983: 54–70; Schouler 1984: 51–138. Kennedy 2003 provides, in English translation, a collection of Greek theoretical discussions of the *progymnasmata*. See also Gibson's English translation of the Libanian *progymnasmata* (2008).

<sup>43</sup> Kennedy 1983: 73–86; Russell 1983: 40–73; Schouler 1984: 170–85; Heath 1995; 2004: *passim*. Heath 1995: 178–9 analyzes Choric. *Decl.* 7 [XXVI] from the point of view of *stasis* theory.