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PLATO  
MENEXENUS

EDITED BY  
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*For Kirk Sanders*

εἷς φρονῶν μυρίων μὴ φρονούντων κρείττων ἐστίν

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## PREFACE

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Students of philosophy have, with good reason, been embarrassed by Plato's *Menexenus*. The former Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Cambridge University referred in print to the dialogue as "this astonishing little piece (which is, let us admit, of no great importance save as an illustration of Plato's versatility)." The very versatility that Plato displays, by composing an *epitaphios logos* that is, let us admit, a virtuoso tour de force of epideictic oratory that belies the philosopher's expressed disdain for rhetoric and his lack of formal training in the subject, disturbs those who patrol the boundaries of literary genres; already in antiquity Dionysius of Halicarnassus felt the need to demonstrate at some length that *Menexenus* was not quite as successful an oration as Demosthenes' *On the crown*. Also, historians have derided Plato for his historical inaccuracies and for misrepresenting contemporary military and political developments. On top of it all, Plato wishes us to accept a Socrates who can speak eloquently of events that occurred a dozen years after he drained the kylix of hemlock that ended his life.

Serious engagement with the problems posed by this astonishing little piece was inspired by the publication in 1981 of *L'invention d'Athènes* by Nicole Loraux, a brilliant study of the funeral oration as an instrument of Athenian ideology, later translated into English. The significance of this work was recently acknowledged by the organization of a conference held in 2018 at the University of Strasbourg, "The Athenian funeral oration: 40 years after Nicole Loraux." Loraux wrote the work originally as her PhD dissertation for the University of Paris. Another dissertation, this one for the University of Cologne, served as the basis for the splendid commentary on *Menexenus* by Stavros Tsitsiridis, published in 1998. This was the most substantial work ever devoted to the dialogue and was the first commentary of any sort to appear in almost a century. The most recent commentary in English, that of J. A. Shawyer, appeared over a hundred years ago. English-language students of Plato's Greek text deserve to have a more up-to-date introduction to this curious work than is provided by Shawyer's twenty-four pages of notes or the still older commentary by C. E. Graves. The idea of correcting this deficiency arose in the happy environment of Kirk Sanders' Greek Reading Group at the University of Illinois, where faculty and students read Plato and other prose authors in a relaxed and congenial atmosphere. It is a pleasure to dedicate this modest work to Kirk, in the fond recollection of many pleasant meetings.

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It is also a pleasure to thank Neil Hopkinson and Richard Hunter, whose vigilance and guidance have been most beneficial. Finally, the readers of this volume, along with its author, owe a great debt of gratitude to Jane Burkowski for her exemplary copyediting.

## ABBREVIATIONS

The names of ancient Greek authors and titles of their works are abbreviated according to the conventions of LSJ, sometimes expanded for clarity. In the commentary, the names of Menexenus, Plato and Socrates are abbreviated M., P. and S.

BA	R. J. A. Talbert (ed.), <i>Barrington atlas of the Greek and Roman world</i> , Princeton, 2000
CGCG	E. van Emde Boas et al., <i>Cambridge grammar of Classical Greek</i> , Cambridge, 2019
DK	H. Diels and W. Kranz, <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> <sup>6</sup> , Berlin, 1952
FGrHist	F. Jacoby et al. (eds.), <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , Berlin and Leiden, 1923–
Gildersleeve	B. L. Gildersleeve, <i>Syntax of Classical Greek, from Homer to Demosthenes</i> , New York, 1900–11
GP	J. D. Denniston, <i>The Greek particles</i> <sup>2</sup> , Oxford, 1954
Hornblower	S. Hornblower, <i>A commentary on Thucydides</i> , Oxford, 1991–2008
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> , Berlin, 1877–
KG	R. Kühner and B. Gerth, <i>Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache: Satzlehre</i> <sup>4</sup> , Hannover, 1955
LIMC	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , Zurich, 1981–99
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. Stuart Jones, <i>A Greek–English lexicon</i> <sup>9</sup> , Oxford, 1996 (with <i>Revised supplement</i> , Oxford, 1996)
Nails	D. Nails, <i>The people of Plato: a prosopography of Plato and other Socratics</i> , Indianapolis, 2002
PCG	R. Kassel and C. Austin (eds.), <i>Poetae comici Graeci</i> , Berlin, 1983–2001
Riddell	J. Riddell, “A digest of Platonic idioms,” in <i>The Apology of Plato</i> , 118–252, London, 1877
SEG	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum</i> , Amsterdam, 1923–
SMT	W. W. Goodwin, <i>Syntax of the moods and tenses of the Greek verb</i> , rev. ed., London, 1889
Threatte	L. Threatte, <i>The grammar of Attic inscriptions</i> , Berlin, 1980–96
Tsitsiridis	S. Tsitsiridis, <i>Platons Menexenos: Einleitung, Text und Kommentar</i> , Stuttgart, 1998