

Laurent Pernot:

*La Rhétorique dans l'Antiquité*

(Le livre de poche; Références 553; Inédit; Antiquité)

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*La Rhétorique dans l'Antiquité* is a concise history of ancient rhetoric intended for a general readership. It opens with a preface followed by six main chapters, the titles of which mostly refer to different periods of Greco-Roman history: *La rhétorique avant la rhétorique*; *La révolution sophistique*; *Le moment athénien*; *La globalisation hellénistique*; *Rome, romanité, romanisation*; and *L'Empire, ou l'innovation dans la tradition*.<sup>1</sup> An epilogue, entitled *L'héritage de la rhétorique gréco-romaine*, rounds off the first part of the book. In the second part, Pernot presents a systematically arranged glossary of rhetorical terms: *Thesaurus. Le système de la rhétorique*, along with a chronological chart, bibliography, and four indices (of proper names, of subjects, and of Greek and Latin words, respectively).

In the preface (pp. 5-12), Pernot states that his aim is to present the history of rhetoric in Greco-Roman antiquity with emphasis both on the practice and the theory of rhetoric within various social contexts over time. In an excursus to the preface, Pernot demonstrates how rhetoric, which in many ways suits the modern and post-modern mindset, has become an indispensable approach in many fields within the humanities, not only in the study of antiquity.

The first chapter, "Rhetoric before Rhetoric" (pp. 13-23), takes up the earliest evidence for the rhetorical art as represented in the speeches in Homer. By letting his characters speak, Homer reveals the inherent qualities of each character, as well as the effectiveness of their words. Furthermore, Homer's work is seen as demonstrating an awareness of rhetoric – in terms of a technical vocabulary – already in the early part of the 1st millennium BC. In outlining the history of rhetoric in the following centuries, Pernot speaks of a gradual development of democracy in Athens. In this context I would like to call attention to the Norwegian scholar, Mona Renate Ringvej, who in a recent study convincingly argues that Athenian democracy was fully fledged already from 508 BC.<sup>2</sup> Ringvej sees this reflected in, for example, the deliberations of the Argives in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*.<sup>3</sup>

The second chapter of the book takes up "The Sophistic Revolution" (pp. 24-41), beginning with Corax and Tisias. Focussing on Gorgias, Pernot discusses the main tenets of the sophists regarding the art of rhetoric as well as their impact on contemporary Athenian society. With Alcidas as his point of departure, Pernot in an excursus argues against Edward Schiappa,

<sup>1</sup> Below, the French titles are translated into English by the reviewer.

<sup>2</sup> Mona Renate Ringvej, *Interpretation of a political idea. The radical democracy of 508-462 BC*, Acta humaniora 185 (Oslo: Unipub, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ringvej, *ibid.*, pp. 239-261.

who proposed that Plato was the first to coin the word ‘rhetoric’,<sup>4</sup> and against Thomas Cole, who saw Plato and Aristotle as the inventors of rhetoric proper.<sup>5</sup>

The first part of chapter three, “The Athenian Era” (pp. 42-81), concerns the role of rhetoric in the civic life of classical Athens, specifically in judicial, political, and ceremonial contexts, and compares the careers of Isocrates and Demosthenes. In an excursus, Pernot discusses the genesis and relevance of the canon of the ten orators. The remaining part of the chapter takes up the teaching of rhetoric, *The Rhetoric to Alexander*, Aristotle, Plato, and the interchange between philosophy and rhetoric, which, in Pernot’s view, does not necessarily involve a conflict.

In the fourth chapter, on “The Hellenistic Globalisation” (pp. 82-114), Pernot starts out with a discussion of the main achievements of Hellenistic rhetoric: the theories and systems within the fields of style, argumentation (i.e. stasis theory), and delivery. He then goes on to describe how political rhetoric flourished in the Hellenistic world – basing his discussion mostly on epigraphical evidence and referring, in an excursus, to Louis Robert’s works on numismatics and inscriptions.<sup>6</sup> Finally Pernot discusses the role of rhetoric in the different schools of philosophy.

In chapter five, “Rome, ‘Romanness’, Romanisation” (pp. 115-169), Pernot compares the very basis for rhetoric in republican Rome with that in democratic Athens, pointing in particular to the Roman emphasis on the speaker’s solemnity and authority (*gravitas* and *auctoritas*), and to the main rhetorical contexts of senate, assemblies, courts, and funerals. A chronological presentation of famous orators follows, beginning with Menenius Agrippa (494 BC) and paying particular attention to Marcus Tullius Cicero. This section includes a discussion of how the Romans appropriated Greek rhetoric and began developing a technical rhetorical vocabulary of their own. In an excursus Pernot also gives examples of the various uses of humour in Cicero’s speeches. In the last section, on Cicero’s contemporaries, Pernot mentions Hortensia, the daughter of the Roman orator Quintus Hortensius, and discusses the absence of female speakers in antiquity. Here (p. 169), Pernot points out the need for a study of how male writers make female characters speak. At the end of the chapter, Pernot describes how rhetoric developed, in theory and practice, through the Hellenistic and the Roman republican eras to become a pillar of Greco-Roman culture.

Chapter six, “The Empire, or Innovation within Tradition” (pp. 170-263), is concerned with the period of the pagan empire 27 BC-AD 305. Pernot first surveys various views of rhetoric expressed during the first hundred years or so of the Roman Empire – some observers seeing decay, others a renaissance. The problem is, according to Pernot, that the contemporary observers tended to compare the rhetoric of their own time with that of earlier periods, thus paying no heed to the fact that the use of rhetoric is always context dependent. Pernot gives much space to presenting both the teaching of rhetoric within the general framework of liberal education and the methods of teaching rhetoric: both progymnasmata and declamations are seen by Pernot as a means of preparation for real life. The subsequent presentation of the rhetorical theory of the period focusses on Quintilian and on Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style*. A short section treats the notion of the emperor as a paragon of rhetorical skill: Pernot sees the emperor’s habit of inspiring and consoling his subjects by way of speech as a clear indication of the importance attached to rhetoric in this period. After considering evidence for the use of speeches in the courts, in the Roman senate, and in the city assemblies of the empire, Pernot turns to the overall importance of panegyric, basing his discussion on the two treatises

<sup>4</sup> Edward Schiappa, “Did Plato coin rhetorike?”, *American Journal of Philology* 111 (1990), pp. 457-470.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Cole, *The origins of rhetoric in ancient Greece*, Ancient society and history (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Louis Robert, *Études de numismatique grecque* (Paris: Collège de France, 1951), p. 36, n. 1.

attributed to Menander Rhetor. There follows a presentation of the period's well-known orators, both Roman (Pliny, Fronto, Apuleius, Panegyrici Latini) and Greek (leading figures of the Second Sophistic, as known from the biographies of Philostratus, Dio, Favorinus, Lucian, Cassius Longinus, and, in an excursus, Aelius Aristides). The last section of the chapter deals with the influence of rhetoric on literature and includes examples mainly from poetry (Ovid) and philosophy (consolations).

This is where Pernot ends his history of ancient rhetoric, and where I felt somewhat disappointed. Would that Pernot had continued his exposition to include the two and a half centuries starting with Emperor Constantine! Pernot, however, takes the emergence of Christianity as his stopping point. As he reminds us, in the epilogue on "The Heritage of Greco-Roman Rhetoric" (pp. 265-277), Greco-Roman 'pagan' rhetoric was essentially concerned with producing arguments and dealing with conflicts in a civil manner. By contrast, doctrinal Christianity, representing the one and only truth, left little room for argumentation – albeit the church fathers certainly made use of rhetorical techniques. The last section of the chapter presents a selection of modern scholarship, mainly French, within the field of Greco-Roman rhetoric.

The second part of the book opens with a chapter on "Thesaurus. The rhetorical system" (pp. 279-301). This is a presentation of the technical Greco-Roman vocabulary related to the different parts of speech production. The four indices of *nomina*, of *res*, and of Greek and Latin words (pp. 323-349) are linked both to the "Thesaurus" and to the first, historical, part of the book. There follows a chronological chart, which lists names, titles of anonymous works, and important events in the history of rhetoric (pp. 303-305), and, finally, a bibliography (pp. 307-322), which is arranged in accordance with the chapters of the book.

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Throughout this engaging book, so rich in themes and views, one can feel Pernot's high regard for his subject. Pernot avoids negative moral assessments and sees rhetoric as a means of achieving aims that were considered important in their place and time. Whereas Manfred Fuhrmann, in *Die antike Rhetorik* (1984, p. 29), disdainfully referred to Anaximenes as an uncreative procurator of slick, opportunistic rhetoric, devoid of moral values,<sup>7</sup> Pernot (p. 62) sees in Anaximenes' *Rhetoric* a systematisation of earlier and contemporary rhetoric as well as a method for producing elegant and persuasive speeches by avoiding the perils of disorder, the bizarre, and the lack of inspiration. And whereas Werner Eisenhut, in *Einführung in die antike Rhetorik und ihre Geschichte* (1974, p. 77), described panegyrics to the emperor as glorification of the ideal ruler and as effusive praise of actual and alleged merits,<sup>8</sup> Pernot (p. 243) rather sees this genre as a subtle and refined means of political communication between the emperor and the higher echelons of society, both military and civilian. For Pernot, the history of Greco-Roman rhetoric is neither a story of flourishing and decay, nor is it confined to Athens and Rome. Instead, according to Pernot, rhetoric adapted itself to the needs and circumstances of its practitioners all over the Greek and Roman world.

<sup>7</sup> Manfred Fuhrmann, *Die antike Rhetorik. Eine Einführung*, Artemis Einführungen 10 (München/Zürich: Artemis, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Werner Eisenhut, *Einführung in die antike Rhetorik und ihre Geschichte*, Die Altertumswissenschaft. Einführungen (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974).

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In addition to the qualities already mentioned, it should be added that the book is written in easily accessible French. An English translation is forthcoming: *Rhetoric in Antiquity*, translated by W. E. Higgins (Catholic University of America Press).

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Kyrre Vatsend holds a Ph.D. in classical Greek. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on Emperor Julian's speech to the Empress Eusebia (*Die Rede Julians auf Kaiserin Eusebia. Abfassungszeit, Gattungszugehörigkeit, panegyrische Topoi und Vergleiche, Zweck*, *Acta humaniora* 74 [Oslo: Unipub, 2000]), and is currently studying the tradition of speeches of thanks in Greco-Roman antiquity.