

Laurent Pernot:

L'Ombre du tigre. Recherches sur la réception de Démosthène

Napoli: M. d'Auria editore, 2006

356 pages (bibliography; appendix; indices)

ISBN: 88-7092-260-X

Price: €80

This interesting book has an interesting title. The tiger in *L'Ombre du Tigre* ("The Shadow of the Tiger") refers, first, to Demosthenes himself, who was supposedly called by his political opponent Aeschines as 'the beast', and, secondly, to Georges Clemenceau, a great admirer of Demosthenes, who wrote a book on him early in the twentieth century and who was often called 'the Tiger'. Laurent Pernot thus indicates that the book will deal with critics of Demosthenes from the orator's own day until the twentieth century. The shadow refers to what one leaves behind, one's influence, what used to be called 'Nachleben', but what is usually referred to now as 'reception'. Thus, the topic of the book is how Demosthenes has been received since his death, which, according to Pernot, allows us to understand better not only Demosthenes but also the "mentalité" of those who have read and interpreted him (p. 6).

Pernot, however, does not undertake a traditional, comprehensive survey of Demosthenes's *Nachleben*, such as one finds, for example, in Engelbert Drerup's *Demosthenes im Urteile des Altertums* (Würzburg: C. J. Becker, 1923) but rather concentrates on four problems that, he argues (p. 7), have not been sufficiently researched but warrant more study. They are (1) the anecdote that Demosthenes had been a pupil of Plato, treated in Chapter I; (2) the reaction, often hostile, to Demosthenes's political policies from the Byzantine period to the twentieth century, treated in Chapter II; (3) a quotation that compares Demosthenes to Hermes, treated in Chapter III; and (4) reactions among critics to the famous oath by those who died in the Persian Wars from section 208 of the speech *On the Crown*, treated in Chapter IV. Preliminary versions of these relatively discrete discussions had already been published separately in article form but have been reworked to take into account material published after their original appearance, and the two that were originally published in Italian have been translated into French. Pernot has also added in Chapter V a collection of all the relevant texts (*testimonia*). Most of these are ancient, written in both Greek and Latin, but some are modern, in French, German, and English. Those not already in French are translated. Pernot claims that when we examine the aspects of "la légende démosthénienne" indicated above we encounter "a Demosthenes that is unexpected" ("un Démosthène inattendu", p. 8), sometimes vilified, sometimes praised as if he were a god.

In the first chapter, "À l'école de Platon" (pp. 21-60), which is rigorously logically organized, Pernot first examines the sources that indicate that Demosthenes was a pupil of Plato, the first of which dates to the third century BC, that is, about a hundred years after the time when Demosthenes was a student and two hundred years before the first extant sources record the story. Most of the sources, moreover, are tendentious, either rhetoricians or philosophers. Pernot concludes, consequently, that the sources themselves do not allow us to come to a sure conclusion. That leads to a consideration of how probable the tradition is. (If an argument based on fact does not convince, one uses probability.) This approach is also inconclusive since arguments can be made on both sides. The next logical approach is to look in the speeches of Demosthenes to see whether there are Platonic influences, either stylistic or thematic. This is

also inconclusive since most of the similarities between the two writers can be attributed to general cultural tendencies of the fourth century. Pernot concludes, therefore, quite rightly, I think, that the legend about Demosthenes having studied with Plato must be seriously doubted.

Pernot then examines why the story was so widespread and so persistent and argues that it can be attributed to the long-standing dispute between rhetoric and philosophy. Philosophers could use the story to demonstrate that only philosophy could teach true eloquence. Rhetoricians such as Cicero, on the other hand, who argued for the importance of philosophy in the education of the orator, could use it to prove their point. Rhetoricians opposed to philosophy could use the story to prove that Demosthenes could become a great orator only by abandoning the Academy. Many commentators, in turn, especially those who had an axe to grind, tendentiously interpreted passages from Demosthenes to prove that he had been a pupil of Plato. Pernot concludes, therefore, that, although we can never know whether the story is true, the study of it reveals much about biographical traditions in antiquity, criticism on Demosthenes, and the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric. This is a fine essay, a real joy to read.

Chapter II, “Une impossible politique” (pp. 61-127), deals with Demosthenes’s evolving reputation as a politician rather than as an orator. In treating this topic Pernot concentrates on three historical periods, the Roman Empire during the first, second, and third centuries AD, the Byzantine period, and the period of the First World War. There is no reason given for isolating these three periods, but they are interesting choices.

Pernot argues that among many Greek writers who wrote under Roman rule Demosthenes came to symbolize the past glory of the Greeks, “a sort of cultural and ideological counter power” (“une sorte de contre-pouvoir culturel et idéologique”, p. 67) to that of the Romans; other writers, however, he argues, saw the model of a patriot with democratic inclinations struggling against an autocratic form of government as dangerous and tended to project a very negative image of Demosthenes, particularly as an individual. The development of Demosthenes’s legend as a politician thus gives us an insight into the attitudes of Greek writers toward their Roman rulers. Most of the section on the Byzantine period is devoted to a discussion of Theodore Metochites’s essay, written circa 1330/1331 and published only in 1965, on Demosthenes and Aelius Aristides. In this essay Theodore developed the idea that an orator can admire the ancients but also adapt them to his own particular time and circumstances.

The third part of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of two contemporaries who worked in the early twentieth century, Engelbert Drerup, who loathed Demosthenes, and Georges Clemenceau, who admired him. Drerup argued that Demosthenes’s contemporaries felt very negatively about him and that the favorable image of him developed only much later, among those who did not know him. Drerup’s hostility to Demosthenes stems primarily from the fact that he saw the Greek politician in terms of the petty politicians who had caused so much disruption in Germany after the First World War (p. 118). Clemenceau, on the other hand, saw Demosthenes as a patriot, like himself, who had defended the fatherland and then been treated shabbily by his fellow citizens (p. 125). Thus, these two men demonstrate clearly how reactions to Demosthenes can be influenced by the historical circumstances of the critic himself.

Chapter III, “L’empreinte d’Hermès Logios” (pp. 129-175), in my opinion the least interesting in the book, deals with the tendency in late antiquity to confer on Demosthenes and rhetoric itself a sacred role, seen particularly in a phrase from Aelius Aristides in which he refers to Demosthenes as the “image of Hermes Logios”, the patron of eloquence and orators. Pernot traces the various reactions to this phrase, which evokes the attitudes of many authors toward rhetoric itself.

The fourth chapter, “Le serment par les combattants des guerres médiques” (pp. 178-238), is a comprehensive survey of ancient critical reaction to what may be the most famous passage in Demosthenes’s speeches, that is, section 208 of the speech *On the Crown*. Pernot argues, quite rightly, that the only ancient discussion of this passage that has been taken seriously by modern scholars is that of pseudo-Longinus, and undertakes to change that situation with a new survey of the ancient sources, which, he claims, will deepen our knowledge not only of Demosthenes but also of his interpreters. At the end of the chapter Pernot also considers a few modern evaluations of this passage. He ably uses various discussions of the oath by those who died in the Persian Wars to bring out the intellectual, political, and religious preoccupations of those who commented on the passage, which involves, like much of this book, a discussion of “the dialogue between rhetoric and philosophy, the relations between the Greeks and the Romans, and the confrontation between paganism and Christianity” (“le dialogue entre la rhétorique et la philosophie, les relations entre les Grecs et les Romains et la confrontation entre le paganisme et le christianisme”, p. 234). The chapter is a remarkable example of what French scholars do particularly well. (I am thinking of ‘explications de texte’.) Pernot exploits particular passages to get at much larger issues, and he does it very well.

The final chapter (Chapter V, “*Testimonia*”, pp. 239-298) is a collection of all the passages relevant to the discussions in the preceding four. This is, in theory, and often in fact, exceedingly useful, but so many of the passages say almost exactly the same thing that a complete inventory of them at times seems unnecessary. After the Conclusion (pp. 299-306) and an Appendix on “*Le Contre Aristide de Porphyre*” (pp. 307-309), there follow several excellent indices, of proper names (pp. 313-316), of Greek and Latin terms (pp. 317-321), of ancient and Byzantine authors and works (pp. 322-334), of modern scholars discussed (pp. 335-344), and of the *testimonia* (pp. 345-350).

I enjoyed reading this extremely handsome and meticulously constructed book. I would imagine, however, that for anyone who does not have a fair amount of background in the ancient world and in ancient rhetorical theory much of the discussion would appear opaque, in spite of the clarity of the presentation. The book is clearly aimed at professionals, and to any of them interested in Demosthenes, the history of rhetoric, or the general history of ideas I recommend it warmly.

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