

Robert J. Penella (ed.):

*Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations*

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In the wake of Late Antique studies in general, recent years have witnessed a rapidly growing interest also in the later phase of the so-called Second Sophistic (a phase sometimes referred to as the 'Third Sophistic') and in authors such as Themistius, Himerius, and Libanius. To these authors may be added Choricus, whose *Declamations* and *Dialexeis* are now available in English translation. Choricus was a member of the so-called School of Gaza, which flourished in the sixth century. His extant works may be characterised as traditional oratory in a highly classicizing style. This is true not least with regard to his declamations, some of which deal with mythological-historical themes from Homer and Herodotus, while others are based on generic characters and situations resembling those of the so-called New Comedy. As Robert Penella notes at the very beginning of his introduction to the book under review: "If we were to refrain from taking account of anything beyond their contents, we might plausibly imagine [Choricus' declamations, DW] to have been composed in any century of the Roman Empire" (p. 1). Nevertheless, in spite of their classicising subjects and style, Choricus' declamations are an important source not only for the history of the genre but also for our knowledge of the everyday life of Late Antique Gaza, not least when supplemented by other sources such as the *Letters* of Barsanuphius and John (the monk) of Gaza.

There are not many translations of Choricus into modern languages, let alone into English. The major contribution has been an unpublished dissertation, which contains the panegyric orations.<sup>1</sup> An annotated translation of Choricus' *Defence of the Mimes* by theatre historian Andrew White has also been announced. The declamations have never been translated before, nor have all of the *dialexeis* ("preliminary talks"), that is, prefaces to more extensive rhetorical works, which are among the most elaborate found in Greek rhetoric. The book under review, *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations*, is a remedy for this situation. A collaborative translation, it is produced by a team of renowned scholars of Late Antique rhetoric, headed by Robert Penella, who has earlier contributed to making difficult Late Antique rhetoricians such as Themistius and Himerius available in reliable English translations.<sup>2</sup> Apart from Penella himself, who has translated the *dialexeis*, the translators are D. A. Russell (*Decl.*

<sup>1</sup> Fotios K. Listas, *Choricus of Gaza: An Approach to his Work* (unpubl. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1980). Apart from the difficulties of accessibility, the quality of these translations is uneven.

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. Penella, *The Private Orations of Themistius* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000); id., *Man and the World: The Orations of Himerius* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2007).

1, 2, 5 and 6), Simon Swain (*Decl.* 3 and 4), Malcolm Heath (*Decl.* 7 and 9), G. A. Kennedy (*Decl.* 8 and 12), William W. Reader (*Decl.* 10), and Terry L. Papillon (*Decl.* 11). The volume begins with an introduction by Penella (pp. 1-32) on the cultural context of the School of Gaza and Choricus, and on the declamations and preliminary talks. It concludes with an “Epilogue” by Eugenio Amato (pp. 261-302) on the reception of Choricus. The book is completed by an extensive bibliography (pp. 303-319) and a general index (pp. 319-323).

Penella’s introduction deals with the cultural and ideological background of the Gaza school, making the point that its members “normally compartmentalize their Hellenic *paideia* and their Christianity” (p. 4), and that their classicism involves “a kind of cultural posing” (p. 5). The social context is also addressed, as are the relations of the school with the monks who inhabited the region and who exercised an increasing cultural influence. Penella then turns to the genre of declamation (pp. 8-14) and provides an overview of Choricus’ declamations, focusing on their themes and principal arguments, especially from the perspective of issue-theory (pp. 14-26). There is also a section dealing with the so-called *dialexeis* (pp. 26-32). These stylistically relaxed “preliminary talks” are of special importance for the historian of rhetoric, since they contain valuable comments on the circumstances surrounding the oratorical performance and on the expectations of the audience.

Chapters 1 to 13 contain the translations. The first chapter presents Penella’s translations of Choricus’ *dialexeis*, the 23 brief “talks” that preceded the oratorical works. Included here are also three *dialexeis* (*Dial.* 1-3) that were not delivered together with the *Declamations*, but with Choricus’ *encomia*. On the other hand, the autonomous *Dial.* 4 (Choricus’ epithalamium to his student Zacharias) and 7 (a brief “talk” on the occasion of Justinian’s *Brumalia*) are left out. In chapters 2 to 13, there follow the translations of the twelve extant declamations, accompanied by brief notes, usually remarking on sources, parallels, and on the translator’s deviations from the Greek text in the edition by Foerster and Richtsteig (1929).

The final section of the book is an exhaustive and erudite “Epilogue” by Eugenio Amato on “the fortune and reception of Choricus and of his works”. In contrast with Penella’s introduction, the epilogue does not have titled subdivisions. This is a pity, since the mass of information offered here is sometimes bewildering. The epilogue deals with Choricus’ *Nachleben* in Byzantium (and, to some extent, in the Italian Renaissance). After a few brief remarks on the difficulty of assessing the reception of Choricus among his contemporaries, Amato turns to the presence of sentences drawn from his orations in the *florilegia* (collections of maxims) of the tenth and eleventh centuries. In particular the so-called *Florilegium Marcianum* is discussed at some length (pp. 263-270). Amato concludes that Choricus’ presence in this collection reflects “a revival of a historiographical tradition on Choricus of Gaza and of a renewed diffusion of his works in the mature Byzantine period” (p. 269). Amato then proceeds to a discussion of codex 160 of Photius’ *Bibliotheca* (pp. 270-278), noting its significance as “the oldest and most explicit evidence for the circulation in Byzantium of a corpus [...] of Choricus’ orations” (p. 270). An examination of a number of other *florilegia* serves to chart Choricus’ popularity between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries (pp. 278-284), leading Amato to conclude that “Choricus was regarded as belonging in the ranks of the great orators” (p. 284). Furthermore, the epilogue deals with the inclusion of Choricus’ work in the curriculum of the rhetorical schools and with Byzantine theoretical comments on his writings (pp. 284-292). Amato adduces evidence from sources that range from the lexicon *On Syntax* (seventh century) to John Doxapatres (eleventh century) and Thomas Magistros (early fourteenth century). Then follows a discussion of the direct textual tradition, which also includes the transmission of manuscripts to Italy (pp. 292-298). The epilogue ends with a survey (pp. 298-302) of the reuse of

Choricius' orations by later authors, a reuse "encouraged by the sometimes general sententiousness of his prose and by the ease with which it can be adapted outside its context" (p. 298). Amato's general conclusion is that although Choricius did not enjoy the fame of, for example, the fourth-century rhetorician Libanius, he nevertheless "was able to secure for himself a position of complete respect in the cultural imagination of Byzantium" (p. 302).

The dustjacket states that the book "will be of interest to students of late antiquity, ancient rhetoric, and ancient education". In his foreword, however, Penella is more restrictive, noting that the translated texts are "primarily of specialized interest" (p. xi). This applies also, and especially, to Amato's epilogue, which is often rather technical and, in fact, requires a fairly substantial knowledge about textual transmission and also some competence in Greek. One example can be found on p. 291, where Amato refers to the rhetorical vice of *periautologia* ("talking about oneself"). The word is neither transliterated nor given any further explanation. The reader will also need a working knowledge of Hermogenean theory: the sentence, "This second protasis leads to an apodosis that is not a petition to the jurors, but a resolution in the shape of an epiphonematic *basis*" (p. 291), is probably obscure to most readers. Thus, this part of the book is very much aimed at the specialist, who, on the other hand, will find it highly rewarding.

The order of the declamations follows the one in the 1929 edition of the Greek text. One wonders, however, why the *dialexeis* ("preliminary talks") are separated from the declamations to which they belong, and printed in a separate chapter. In many instances, the *dialexis* directly comments on the contents of a declamation and the circumstances surrounding its performance. *Dial.* 17, for example, which introduces the second part of *Decl.* 8 ("A Spartan Citizen"), considers the contrast between Laconian brevity and Choricius' own lengthiness. Penella presupposes just this kind of close connection between *dialexis* and declamation on p. 29. On p. 31, however, he writes that *Dial.* 9 and 24 probably introduced pieces that were delivered in connection with the festival known as the "Day of the Roses". Does this imply that *Dial.* 9 and 24 were not delivered in connection with *Decl.* 4 and 11, with which they are printed in the 1929 edition of the text? Or should we assume that *Decl.* 4 ("Miltiades") and 11 ("Patroclus") were performed on the "Day of the Roses"? The relationship between *dialexis* and declamation remains obscure. Until it is clarified, it would perhaps have been better to print the *dialexeis* together with the declamations, rather than as independent 'essays'.

The translations read smoothly, though the style varies (as one would expect) among the various declamations. The translators have clearly been given a large amount of individual freedom. Penella points this out in his foreword, remarking that in the case of a corpus of discrete texts that are "being translated for the first time", a consistent style is not necessary (p. xi). This pragmatic stance is reasonable; nevertheless it detracts slightly from the value of the collection *qua* collection. Without consistency between the translations it is difficult to make comparisons between the various declamations, for example with regard to terminology and concepts. On the other hand, the translations are probably more readable in this way, with each translator having been allowed to use his own idiom. Perhaps a compromise would have been to present important Greek terms within brackets, or at least collected at the end of the book. As it is now, the reader has to return to the Greek text in order to find out how Choricius employs rhetorical terminology. As a brief example, we may take the word *plasma*. In his introduction, Penella notes that the word is one of the Greek equivalents for "declamation", and translates it with "'fiction,' 'invention'" (p. 8). Against this background, the translation of *plasma* as an "imaginary case" in the explanatory comments to *Decl.*

5 [XX] (tr. Russell) and 9 [XXXV] (tr. Heath), though perfectly justified in context, obscures the technicality of the term (especially when used in theoretical remarks). As a further consequence, the *termini technici* that appear in the index refer only to the introduction and never to the translations.

Penella's introduction is lucid and informative. One could wish, however, that he had said a bit more about the role played by declamation in society at large. He observes (p. 10) that "every declamation is a sustained *ēthopoiia* of some historical or generic character", and that Choricus specifically addresses the issue of "persuasion and sustained representation of the impersonated character" in two of his *theoriai*. This is an important observation, which could have been further developed, especially with regard to the subsequent discussion on the invention of arguments and Hermogenean *stasis* theory. Note 43 (p. 10) tells us that "Heath 1995:178-9 analyzes Choric. *Decl.* 7 [XXVI] from the point of view of *stasis* theory". What it does not tell us, however, is that Heath concluded that *Decl.* 7 "resists analysis according to the Hermogenean division" (Heath 1995, p. 178).<sup>3</sup>

The tension in Choricus' declamations between representation of character and invention of argument has been discussed in a recent article by Ruth Webb. Suggesting a higher degree of what she calls "literariness" in Choricus, she finds that, to him, "the exploration of the *ēthos* and of the psychological motivation of both the speakers and of the other characters is of paramount interest".<sup>4</sup> As a consequence "the technical introductions (*theōriai*) [...] focus not on the technical issue at stake in each speech and the argumentative strategies he will use, but rather on the *ēthos* that is to be created for each character" (Webb, *ibid.*). Thus, Webb argues, Choricus' declamations tend toward fiction rather than argumentation (in support of Webb's discussion, one could also note Photius' remark that Choricus "is true to life in representing character", cod. 160.102b). The importance placed by Choricus on the fictional, theatrical, and psychological aspects of declamation is somewhat lost in Penella's introduction, which instead proceeds to a discussion of the importance of declamatory argument as "a transferable skill" (p. 11).

Penella mentions "the entertainment value of oratorical displays", but suggests that "declamation was a more acquired taste than epideictic oratory and did not have so much power to attract those who were less than fully educated", that is, those who would fully appreciate the subtleties of argument (p. 13). But if declamation is viewed as a kind of one-man-performance on a mythological-historical subject, and if one considers Choricus' interest in issues such as gestures and voice modulation together with the similarity of declamatory characters to those of the so-called New Comedy, this conclusion perhaps becomes less self-evident.<sup>5</sup> This reviewer would have liked to see

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also the identification of various *staseis* in the summaries of Choricus' declamations on pp. 20-26. With regard to Choricus' views on *stasis*-theory, Russell's translation in *Decl.* 2 [XII], "How shall I help the old man by putting the right issues at each point" (§2 of the Explanatory Comment), is slightly infelicitous as it may give the impression that Choricus is using a technical term, where he merely says "advancing what is just (*ta dikaia*) at each point". *Stasis* always means "strife" in Choricus, and the word never occurs in the technical sense of "issue".

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Webb, "Rhetorical and Theatrical Fictions in Choricus", in Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (ed.), *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas A. Schmitz' article "Performing History in the Second Sophistic" (in Martin Zimmermann (ed.), *Geschichtschreibung und politischer Wandel im 3. Jh. n. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), pp. 71-92) is listed in the bibliography, but the important discussion in this work of declamation as performance is not mentioned, as far as I can tell, in the text or footnotes of the book under review.

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a little more on the aspect of declamation as ‘display’, since this might have told us something about Choricus’ own concerns with the role of a performing declaimer; about the rhetorical tradition to which his work belongs; and about the (singular?) status and functions of declamation in Gaza in the sixth century – in short: about the *history* of declamation.

As regards the extensive bibliography, the following article should be added: Delphine Renault, “The Influence of Alexandria on the Intellectual Life of Gaza (Fifth-Sixth Centuries AD)”, in Tomasz Derda, Tomasz Markiewicz, and Ewa Wipszycka (eds.), *Alexandria: Auditoria of Kom el-Dikka and Late Antique Education* (Warsaw: Warsaw University, Institute of Archaeology, Dept. of Papyrology, 2007), pp. 169-175.

*Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity* brings attention to an important representative of the rhetorical environment at the end of antiquity. The reliable translation makes a difficult Greek author accessible to a wider audience, and Amato’s meticulous epilogue fills a gap in Chorician scholarship that truly needed to be filled. Taken as a whole, the book will be an indispensable aid to anyone interested in Choricus. Together with Penella’s earlier publications (that is, his translations of Themistius and Himerius), this translation ensures that also readers without knowledge of Greek now have access to yet another of the main works of late antique rhetoric.

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