

Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

Band: 60 (2003)

Heft: 3

Artikel: The authorship of the Demosthenic Epitaphios

Autor: Worthington, Ian

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-46634>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 29.03.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The Authorship of the Demosthenic *Epitaphios*

By Ian Worthington, Columbia, Mo.

In 338, Demosthenes was chosen by the Athenians to deliver the funeral oration (*epitaphios*) over those Athenians who had died fighting Philip II at the Battle of Chaeronea (Dem. 18.285; Plut. *Dem.* 21.2)¹. An *epitaphios* survives in the Demosthenic corpus as Speech 60. Whether it is genuine or an imitation has been disputed since antiquity. Dionysius of Halicarnassus regarded it as spurious because it was a “rude, empty, puerile speech” and “absolutely uncharacteristic of [Demosthenes] in language and ideas, and the composition is vastly inferior in every way” (*Dem.* 44). Other ancient critics and a majority of modern scholars follow suit² – a contrast to the praise that is heaped on Hyperides’ *epitaphios*, for example³. Since Dionysius was rigorous in his methodology and careful as a critic we should not take his view lightly. There is also the question whether Demosthenes would have revised this speech for posterity. After all, the context for the speech arose from the failure of his anti-Macedonian policy, and the ensuing Macedonian hegemony of Greece⁴. It must have been very hard and emotional for Demosthenes, when he delivered his speech against that background, and so he may not have circulated it.

It is true that the speech we have today is different in style from Demosthenes’ surviving oratory. Nor can it be said to conform to what might be called the conventional structure of a funeral oration. It would appear from the six *epitaphioi* that exist⁵ that there was a similarity in content and struc-

- 1 Athens was the only polis in Greece to honour its dead with a public oration (Dem. 20.141); for a description of the solemn ceremony see Thuc. 2.34. On the genre of epideictic oratory, see further, G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963) 152–173; N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens. The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, Mass. 1986) passim; and S. Usher, *Greek Oratory, Tradition and Originality* (Oxford 1999) 349–352. There is a good introduction by R. Clavaud in *Démosthène, Discours d'apparat (Épitaphios, Éroticos)*, Budé Text (Paris 1974).
- 2 For example, F. Blass, *Die attische Beredsamkeit* 3.1 (Leipzig ²1898) 356–358; J. F. Dobson, *The Greek Orators* (London 1919) 267.
- 3 [Long.], *On The Sublime* 34.2; [Plut.] *Mor.* 849f; cf. Diod. 18.13.5; Blass (n. 2), 68–72; R. C. Jebb, *The Attic Orators from Antiphon to Isaeus* 2 (London ³1883) 387, 389–393; and Kennedy (n. 1), 165.
- 4 On the historical background, see most recently T. T. B. Ryder, “Demosthenes and Philip II”, in: *Demosthenes: Statesman and Orator*, ed. Ian Worthington (London/New York 2000) 45–89.
- 5 This is a small number given the decades that Athens was at war with other Greek states and then with Macedonia in the fifth and fourth centuries, hence there must have been a large number of *epitaphioi* delivered. The six that survive today are those attributed to Pericles (Thuc. 2.35–46), Gorgias, Lysias (2), Socrates (Plato, *Menex.* 236d–249c), Demosthenes (60), and that of Hyperides (6). The authorship of all of them is suspect, apart from that of Hyperides.

ture⁶. The speaker usually began with an apology for what he was about to say and that he would be detailing exploits of the Athenians' ancestors from as far back as mythological times⁷. Unlike a deliberative speech, the introduction of an *epitaphios* was not meant to gain the goodwill of the audience but to capture attention (Arist. *Rhet.* 3.14.2–4), thereby allowing the speaker to connect the ancestors' glorious exploits with those of the recently deceased, and to link their deaths to the defence of the common freedom (*eleutheria*) of the Greeks⁸. Other common elements include praise of Athens and of its democracy⁹, but the thrust of the speech is to recall the glorious exploits of the men of the past and the recently deceased. Historical allusions were most often to the Greeks' defeat of the Persians¹⁰, and to the Trojan War¹¹. The speaker may end by offering some words of condolence and even advice¹², often to the surviving children, and then simply dismissing his audience.

Demosthenes' speech is divided into six broad parts. He begins with a brief personal introduction about the importance of funeral speeches and the difficulties that face those delivering them (1–3). This is followed by an account of the exploits of the ancestors of those who died, from the mythical era to the Persian Wars (4–14). He then moves to the present and the war against Philip II and the Battle of Chaeronea (15–26). Scattered throughout this part is praise of the nature and patriotic spirit of those who died. An excursus follows on the ten Athenian tribes and their origins (27–31), before another eulogy to those who died and are now in paradise (32–34). The speech ends with the customary consolation to the families of the deceased (35–37) and dismissal (37).

While much of the expected subject material is included, there is little use made of past history and the excursus on the mythological origins of the ten Athenian tribes (27–31) appears very much out of place in this type of speech. At first sight, we can see why it was not considered genuine.

However, there are some valid arguments that point to a Demosthenic authorship. The fact that this is the only surviving funeral speech given in the immediate aftermath of so decisive a defeat for the Greeks is bound to have had some impact on form and content¹³. After the Battle of Chaeronea, the Athe-

6 Cf. Kennedy (n. 1), 154–166 and Clavaud (n. 1), 16–20. The following summary is taken from Ian Worthington, *Greek Orators 2, Dinarchus 1 and Hyperides 5 & 6* (Warminster 1999) 34–36.

7 Cf. Pericles at Thuc. 2.36–41; Lys. 2.4–60; Dem. 60.7–31; Hyp. 6.35–40; and almost all of Socrates' speech in Plato, *Menex.* 236d–249c.

8 Cf. Lys. 2.21–44, 55, 67–69; Dem. 60.23; Hyp. 6.5, 10–12, 16, 24–25, 37.

9 Cf. Pericles at Thuc. 2.37–43; Dem. 60.25–26.

10 Lys. 2.21–44; Plato, *Menex.* 239d–241c; Dem. 60.10–11; Hyp. 6.12, 37.

11 Cf. Dem. 60.10–11; Hyp. 6.35–36.

12 Pericles at Thuc. 2.44.3; 46.1; Plato, *Menex.* 246d–248d; Hyp. 6.40.

13 An exact date cannot be determined. However, the speech has no mention of the Common Peace that Philip established in winter 338. The only peace to which the speaker refers is that between Philip and Athens after Chaeronea (60.20). The tone of the speech and its references to the Greeks' mere "present misfortunes" (60.35) indicates a date before the League was formed –

nians expected Philip to besiege their city. Demosthenes left Athens ostensibly to secure corn (Dem. 18.248), but in reality to escape the potential wrath of the king. When Philip did not besiege Athens, he returned. Demosthenes' position was still precarious, given his opposition to the Macedonian king for almost the last twenty years. Therefore, he had to be careful what he said about Philip, and chose not to be as critical of the king as in his symbouleutic oratory.

Moreover, epideictic oratory was very different in style from deliberative or forensic oratory. As the DeWitts point out in the Loeb Classical Library edition, "the epideictic style, which the [funeral] ceremony required, was alien to the combative nature of Demosthenes"¹⁴, and Lysias' *epitaphios*, for example, was radically different from his forensic oratory¹⁵. So too was that of Hyperides (6)¹⁶. The language expected in a funeral oration was much more poetic than other types of speeches, and it is perhaps expecting too much, at least in our modern opinion (a point that needs to be stressed but seldom is), that those who wrote deliberative and forensic speeches could also write epideictic ones (Hyperides is the notable exception).

As for the excursus on the ten tribes, it has to be said that departures from convention were known. Hyperides' *epitaphios* was anchored firmly on the ideal of freedom, but he injected a novel and striking personal element into it with his lengthy eulogy on Leosthenes, the Athenian general in the first year of the Lamian War. Leosthenes becomes as central to the speech as *eleutheria*. Demosthenes may have been more likely to include a similar idiosyncrasy with the tribes than some later writers or imitators. The mythical material attached to the genealogy of the ten tribes denotes a military context as the Athenian army was organized by tribes, and hence an allusion to Chaeronea¹⁷. In any case, an *epitaphios* was a speech over those who had died in battle, and hence the excursus on the ten tribes suits the military context of this speech well.

Nothing in the funeral speech of Demosthenes is anachronistic, and three sections indicate that the speech we have is by that orator.

At Section 18, the speaker refers to the slackness of the Athenians during Philip's reign that was so dangerous for their safety and allowed him to grow so powerful. However, when they did start to listen to him they opposed Philip.

present misfortunes were very different from Macedonian hegemony and the end of Greek autonomy. Chaeronea was fought in September, and we must allow time for Philip's peace terms to be communicated to the Athenians and Demosthenes' return from his corn commission. Hence, a plausible date for the speech is sometime in October, perhaps even November.

14 *Demosthenes* Vol. 7 (Cambridge, Mass./London 1949, repr. 1986) 5.

15 Cf. S. Todd in *Lysias, The Oratory of Classical Greece* 2 (Austin 2000) 25: "The style of the speech is like nothing else in the corpus, but this may be partly a question of what was felt appropriate to the genre of funeral speeches." The authorship of this speech is controversial of course, and Todd rightly points out (pp. 25–27) that Lysias cannot have delivered it himself. However, the comment about the different styles still stands.

16 See Worthington (n. 6), 35–36.

17 As is noted by Usher (n. 1), 351.

Now, Demosthenes' earlier speeches against Philip (the first *Philippic* and the three *Olynthiacs*) called for a citizen army to be on stand-by for immediate deployment against the Macedonian king, attempted to rouse the Athenians from their lethargy, and urged them to combat Philip before it was too late. They were unsuccessful. It was not until his speech *On The Peace* of 346, shortly after the conclusion of the Peace of Philocrates that ended the first round of warfare with Macedon, and then the second *Philippic* of 344, that Demosthenes began to enjoy success. Even then, however, the Athenians refused to establish a citizen army, as he wanted. By 341, Demosthenes was at his persuasive best in *On The Chersonese* and the third *Philippic*; the Athenians' policy was virtually that of Demosthenes, and the culmination of his anti-Macedonian policy was seen in the alliance he effected with Thebes in 339. By then, it was too late, for in 338 the Greeks were decisively defeated at Chaeronea. Thus, we may have a sly allusion in this section to the Athenians' unwillingness to act on Demosthenes' proposals in his earlier speeches. Indeed, the imagery of this section is found in his *On The Crown* of 330 (18.19–20,62; cf. 159).

Second, at Sections 19–22, in the context of the Greek defeat at Chaeronea, the speaker blames the result of the battle on chance (*tyche*), not on the rank and file of the army. He says that the latter “being human, must be acquitted of the charge of cowardice”. The reference to cowardice is interesting, for in 330 Aeschines accused Demosthenes, who had fought at Chaeronea, of deserting his post, as did Dinarchus in 323¹⁸. Now, Demosthenes had left Athens very soon after the battle (and before Philip's terms were made public) to secure corn, which Aeschines would later allege (3.159) was a mere pretext to get him out of the city in case the king demanded his surrender. Aeschines, no friend of Demosthenes¹⁹, might have seized the chance even then to query his bravery at Chaeronea, perhaps even to indict him – our sources say that in the immediate aftermath of the battle Demosthenes was indicted “every day” in the courts²⁰. Demosthenes was not found guilty of cowardice, for those who were guilty of this crime lost their personal rights (Andoc. 1.73)²¹. Yet eight years later Aeschines repeats the accusation of desertion as part of general character denigration (3.159,161,175–176,187,253). If this scenario is valid, then the appeal to the Athenians not to accuse any soldier of cowardice in this funeral oration has a personal note to it. Moreover, assigning responsibility for men's fate not to

18 3.159,161,175–176,187,253; Din. 1.12; cf. 71,81; cf. Plut. *Dem.* 20.2.

19 On the enmity between Demosthenes and Aeschines, see now John Buckler, “Demosthenes and Aeschines”, in: *Demosthenes: Statesman and Orator*, ed. Ian Worthington (London/New York 2000) 114–158.

20 Dem. 18.249; see too Dem. 25.37; Plut. *Dem.* 21; [Plut.] *Mor.* 845f. At one stage, apparently, he had to get others to move decrees for him (Aes. 3.159; Plut. *Dem.* 21.3).

21 It is possible that the Athenians either suspended or simply ignored the law because of the catastrophe of the defeat, as did the Spartans after their shock defeat by the Thebans at Leuctra in 371 (Plut. *Ages.* 30.2–6).

their own actions but to *tyche* (19) is found also in Demosthenes' *On The Crown* (18.194,207–208,253–255,303,306).

Finally, in the account of the Hippothoöntidae tribe in Section 31, the DeWitts (ad loc.) believe that the speaker's reluctance to expand on the myth of Hippothoön, which would have meant detailing non-Athenian family connections, was an indication that the speech might be genuine. Hippothoön was exposed and saved by a mare's milk that was used as a food by the Scythians (Hdt. 4.2). The DeWitts link this to Demosthenes' apparent Scythian connections, for according to Aeschines (3.171–172), Demosthenes' father, a free man from Paeania, married a "Scythian" woman, and the product of this marriage was Demosthenes the orator²².

It is tempting to connect the authenticity of the speech with Demosthenes' reluctance to speak of this foreign marriage. However, there are grounds against this. Pericles' citizenship law of 451/0 demanded that both parents must be of pure Attic blood before children of the marriage were recognized as true Athenian citizens (*AP* 26.4; *Plut. Per.* 37.3)²³. Demosthenes, then, could not have taken part in political life if his mother had been non-Athenian. Thus, Aeschines was simply attacking an opponent's parentage, a common rhetorical technique²⁴. Of course, the marriage could have taken place during the Peloponnesian War when Pericles' law seems to have been suspended. If so, that would account for Demosthenes' unchallenged political activity.

As for my first two arguments for accepting the speech as genuine, much depends on whether Demosthenes would exploit such a solemn occasion for a personal protest, and even a veiled attack on Aeschines. We would see this as inopportune, in bad taste, and even leaving him at the mercy of a disaffected crowd. At the same time, he was brash and egotistical enough to do this, especially if he felt he was being unfairly worsted at the hands of his political enemies. In support of this, the analogy may be made to Demosthenes' third Letter. It begins by saying that Demosthenes will not talk about his own grievances that led to his exile in 323 for his part in the Harpalus affair, only about the unjust and inexpedient predicament of Lycurgus' sons and the need to acquit them of their father's crime. However, at the end (35–45) he has no final appeal for the children, but only for his own troubles! Demosthenes would, then, seize any occasion to speak on behalf of himself²⁵.

For the moment, the matter of the funeral oration's authenticity cannot be properly determined. However, we should not immediately reject what we

22 *Din.* 1.15; [*Plut.*] *Mor.* 847f; and *Rutilius Lupus* 3.9 refer to Demosthenes' alleged illegitimacy.

23 For a discussion citing bibliography, see P. J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenion Politeia* (Oxford 1981) 331–335.

24 See P. Harding, "Rhetoric and Politics in Fourth-century Athens", *Phoenix* 41 (1987) 29–32 and J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton 1989) 266–270.

25 The same is true of the first Letter, despite its apparent message: see J. A. Goldstein, *The Letters of Demosthenes* (New York 1968) 62 and 87.

have today just because it is so different from Demosthenes' other types of speeches. Its very nature meant that it should be different. With Athens so recently defeated and a triumphant Philip able to do anything he wished, we ought not to expect Demosthenes' *epitaphios* to resemble or even to attain the high rhetorical level of his other speeches. It is plausible that during the reign of Alexander, when Demosthenes was again politically ascendant²⁶, he saw fit to circulate it²⁷.

Correspondence:

Prof. Ian Worthington
University of Missouri-Columbia
Department of History
101 Read Hall
Columbia, MO 65211-7500, USA
E-Mail: WorthingtonI@missouri.edu

26 On this, see Ian Worthington, "Demosthenes' (In)activity during the Reign of Alexander the Great", in: *Demosthenes: Statesman and Orator*, ed. Ian Worthington (London/New York 2000) 90–113.

27 Cf. Loraux (n. 1), 254–255; Clavaud (n. 1), 20–25.