

Pseudo-Aelius Aristide. Arts Rhétoriques. Edited and translated by Michel Patillon. 2 vols. Paris : Les Belles Lettres. 2002. ISBN : 2-251-00505-6; 2-251-00506-4; ISSN : 0184-7155.

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First, this reviewer has to start by excusing herself for the lateness of this report: proverbial difficulties have for some time prevented me from presenting this important classic of ancient rhetoric to the readers of this publication. But now its time has come and I am really grateful for the opportunity to present here the rhetorical treatises ascribed traditionally to Aelius Aristides (but in fact produced by two – or more - unknown authors from the second century) and principally transmitted through a manuscript from the X-th century, *Parisinus gr. 1741*¹.

Under the masterful and knowledgeable editorial care of Michel Patillon, arguably the most authoritative continental specialist in Hermogenean rhetorical theory², these two treatises of rhetoric from the Greco-Roman world recover their textual presence in the normative and instructional *corpora* of the late classical culture: they address questions of style in the public speech sphere and thus add to a better understanding of the mainstream Roman rhetorical culture and its *paideia*. As is well known, and as M. Patillon explains in his quite extensive introductory presentations³, these two Greek treatises, surviving from the imperial age, do – in fact – complement each other, because one is about political speech, the other about “plain” (or simple or common), i.e., non-political (in this case – in fact - literary and “cultural”, mostly referring to historical writing models). Both are significant contributions to the theory of *ideai* – or qualities of style, a part of technical rhetoric that was influential in the later construction of both literary criticism and style awareness. Thus, the two treatises coming from the Second Sophistic “environment”⁴ – the golden age of rhetorical institutional developments – do constitute a rich and (until now, at least) an under-explored source for our ideas on the values and possibilities of the public discourse in imperial context⁵.

¹ As well as *Parisinus suppl. gr. 670*, and many different fragmentary *apographa*, some 30 in all, collated here for the first time in their entirety, as Patillon explains (p. LXIV-LXVI). It is on the strength of these many comparative readings that the Greek text is established and supersedes all other existing modern editions.

² See his classical *La Théorie du discours chez Hermogène le rhéteur*. Paris, 1988 and the 1997 edition of *Hermogenes. Traité de Rhétorique*, Lausanne: L’Age d’homme, 1997.

³ All in all the three studies, a general presentation and two introductory comments to each treatise, occupy some 300 pages, thus - in fact – constituting a quite synthetic and extensive update of the studies on discourse theory in Ancient times included in the *Théorie du discours chez Hermogène le rhéteur*. In particular well developed here is Patillon’s systematic exposition of the historical development of the two trends of rhetorical theories, the one structured according to the *genera dicendi* and the other constituted by a paradigmatic approach to the *virtutes orationis*.

⁴ Their Hermogenean orientation shows their general age, but does not prevent the possibility of their being variously composed *before* Hermogenes, as both Patillon and Pernot seem to agree.

⁵ Recently, however, Ian Rutherford published *Canons of Style in the Antonine Age* (Clarendon Press, 1998) that not only discusses extensively the “On the Plain Discourse” in its relation to Hermogenes but also includes an English translation of it – easy to use in a classroom.

The anonymity of the two treatises is an interesting case of *vexata quaestio*: it shows how unknown or forgotten masters were able to structure the rhetorical *doxa* of their time in a systematic and well articulated program of teaching. Moreover, the fallacious attribution to Aelius Aristides is, probably, a sign of their authority as well as an indication of their affinity with the culture of the Second Sophistic, while their content is clearly more akin to the Hermogenes of the *ideai*. In his introductory studies, Patillon ascribes the authorship of these two treatises to three little known sophists, thus trying to simplify the question of the general doxic identity of these rhetorical works. In the past, the spurious attribution to Aelius Aristides, supported mainly by marginal additions that exemplify some of the norms by passages from Aristides' works has vaguely obscured the value of these texts for critical studies. Even after this attribution was proven incorrect, the anonymity of the works prevented acknowledgement of their importance in understanding the Second Sophistic culture of communication and its system of stylistic and ethical values, sending many a classical scholar on wild chases. Seeking to simplify the whole question and to focus the discussion where it should be, that is, on systematic expositions of theory in the texts, Patillon puts names on the unknown authors. He thus proposes a "tentative" identification of authors that is not going to change much in the way we work with these texts or in the way we understand the Hellenistic discourse of rhetorical education, although, as I said, it might simplify the discussion. The advantage lies precisely in the fact that the new assignments of authorship are made in such a way as to support Patillon's main goal, the positioning of these two treatises within the tradition of the Ancient theory of rhetorical types or *ideai*. In Patillon's view, the two treatises should be ascribed as follows: the *Peri tou Politikou Logou*, being in his view a fragmentary and composite text, would belong to Dionysius of Miletus⁶ and Basilicus of Nicomedia⁷, while the *Peri tou Aphelous Logou* gets ascribed to Aelius Harpocraton⁸. This assignment of authorial identity to three minor Sophists that lived and taught in the second century AD adds a fairly controversial dimension to this critical edition, challenging other potential attributions.⁹ Together with the Hermogenean exposition of the *idea*-theory the two treatises form a discursive *corpus* of coextensive stylistic conceptualizations that suggest a meaningful discursive typology: their display of the possibilities and requirements of skilfully crafted discourses, mainly school declamations, but also written prose, provide quite an extensive source for our knowledge of the complex culture – both political and social - of the imperial Rome. The types of discourse associated with either the political (deliberative and forensic) or, respectively, the "plain" everyday situation are considered from the point of view of "communicative action" and thus clearly links the traditional "offices of the orator" to linguistic use and to character representation, *ethos*. While the focus is on conceptualizations of style the stress is on the relation between the paradigmatic expression of the arguments and the other paradigms of rhetorical values and dimensions, showing a marked restructuring of the

⁶ Immortalized by Philostratus in his *Lives (Bioi Sophiston)*, at #22, as the master of a memorable "eloquence of delight".

⁷ Given in the *Suda* as master of Apsines and credited with a number of works – though not the current one.

⁸ Also mentioned in the *Suda* – as having composed works on types of style and on Xenophon.

⁹ As, for example, by Malcolm Heath, in *Gnomon*, 77(2005), 2, p. 106-109. In his own review of Patillon's work G.Kennedy seems to agree with Heath, since he seems to support his re-assignment of authorship in the case of Apsines. Apparently, the Harpocraton assignment seems acceptable also to Heath.

whole scholastic approach to oratory and some of its developments towards literary prose and criticism. Their ideology of speech communication also marks a close link with the grammarian's approach, more functional and more fluid dialectically, so that the two treatises make – as Patillon rightly notes – somewhat of a proto-structuralist statement of method.

On the other hand, within the broader frame of their mistaken attribution to a single author from the second century (Aristides) and their common focus on the *ideai*, the two treatises also differ in their ideology of discursive argumentation, rhetorical values and procedures, as well as in their canonical representation of exemplary eloquence, since the first illustrates its doctrine by the citing Demosthene's orations, while the second demonstrates its notions by following models found in Xenophon's prose. Since oratory is – at this time – perceived to be only partially a teachable skill, a good part of the education process being taken up by “reasonable imitation”¹⁰, the models of excellence are a central part of instruction and so do, indeed, form an essential dimension of the process of cultural transmission represented in these texts. The two treatises then, one dedicated to political and the other to (“simple”) general discourse offer a privileged glance into the cultural interests and values of the time. Wider even, they can be said to offer a look into the Greek theory of discourse in the imperial period as technique of efficient communication, a technique that aims farther than persuasion in the Aristotelian sense and already shows signs of appealing beyond reason for its expectations of effectiveness.

Making sense of the political was never unproblematic, but in Antiquity the production of political meaning was closely related to the use of language in the public sphere. For this reason the normative and descriptive aspects of the *politikos logos* were situated at the very core of an educational *curriculum* seeking clear delimitations of concepts and procedures. The *Peri tou Politikou Logou* seeks to unfold the qualities of a good political oration by analyzing its qualities according to the three components of content (*gnômê*), verbal expression (*appagelia* or *lexis*) and figures of thought (*skhemata*). Thus, the discursive unit is analytically ordered on three levels that go from conceptual content to lexical realization, mediated by the figural. The three additional chapters on the *epideictic* sum up an integrative view of discursive use in political context, thus expanding the area from which deliberative declamations could draw their arguments and suggesting a more comprehensive typology for the political discourse.

By comparison, the *Peri Aphelous Logou* takes into account four elements of style, adding to the previous three rhythm (*ruthmos*). Thus the simple discourse (*oratio simpla*), defined by its opposition to the political one, is considered now as answering a different (if not more sophisticated) audience demand for communication. It thus supports a vision of rhetoric that is decidedly more extended in its drive for the charming and the pleasurable (*glukutês* or lat. *suavitas*), reaching beyond enthymemic logic and authorizing the polysemic expression. From the start, the second treatise defines the “simple discourse” by its attachment to a semi-private and conversational sphere, thus foregrounding its radical difference from the political discourse - constituted for the

¹⁰ Patillon's felicitous expression.

public sphere and described as essentially agonistic, pervaded by a logic of opposition, debate and controversy. While this Second Sophistic development is entirely within the scope of the trend towards aesthetisation, it is also a signal of historical changes in the ideology of the rhetorical with far-reaching consequences, because it is this very rhetorical theory of the *apheleia* that will support and reconstruct the new rhetoric for the Christian masses, destined to focus its efforts on the “plain” and the “straightforward”, while also cultivating the “seduction” by word.

Thus, the phenomenon of aesthetisation of rhetoric (*littérisation* or *letteraturizzazione*) recognized by Florescu and Kennedy¹¹ as an important direction in imperial rhetoric is quite well illustrated by the second anonymous treatise “On the Plain Discourse” (*Peri tou Aphelous Logou*), because the text provides a full blown articulation of a critical system that applies to fiction and to its expressive values, in clearly affirmed contradistinction with the political discourse. Centred on the ideal value of stylistic “simplicity” – *apheleia* – and basing its discussion on the model works of Xenophon, perceived to harbour eminently this sought-for quality, the treatise provides a very interesting and important discussion of ancient literary criticism, and, maybe even more important, a more precise image of a culture that acknowledges its transition from the oral to the written. For this particular reason, this book-long discussion of the direct and simple *logos*, from naivety to simplicity, is also inclusive of some controversial opinions. As a normative criterion, *apheleia* will constitute a thread of rhetorical crafts and will engage famous parallels and analogies, well beyond the Middle Age and the Renaissance, particularly pertinent for the reception and appreciation of many Christian authors. In modern times, the ideal of clarity and – correlatively – of forthright style has been strongly associated with the Classical outlook and, as such, perceived as primarily connected with a discourse of order and authority, rationality and power.

As a “proto-Structuralist” approach to style values, the *Peri tou Aphelous Logou* is also interesting because it develops a series of rhetorical concepts as literary (technical) elements and thus is quite capable to provide a link between other parts of rhetoric (usually classified according to the tradition of the three *genera dicendi*) and models of writing across the divide between the direct and the indirect discourse, the addressed (direct) and the reported speeches. This technical approach, while stylistic in nature, includes nevertheless a good number of observations and issues that do, indeed, expand on the very substance of prose writing, of the transition from oral to written, in this case, without mnemonic mediations¹², since the models are mainly written (from Xenophon’s works).

¹¹ See Vasile Florescu, *Retorica si Neoretorica* (Bucuresti, 1973); G.A.Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Traditio* (Chapel Hill, 1980) among others; however, Norden’s *Die Antike Kunstprosa* is, as usual, the unavoidable reference.

¹² Interestingly, Philostratus, in his later report on Dyonisius of Miletus, the presumed author of the first treatise discussed here, explains that there “is no such thing as an art of memory, nor could there be”, and argues that the charm of the oration is to be seen as a valid link to remembrance: “because the declamations of Dionysius gave them a pleasure of which they could never have enough” (*op.cit.*, 91-93), his pupils will repeat them “very often” and memorize them. Thus, the “beauty” of the speech is controlling its mnemonic potential, becoming a category of style.

The edition is bilingual, Greek and French, providing a “user-friendlier” version in a modern language¹³ and thus enlarging considerably the potential for classroom use. This addition to the available versions of rhetorical works from the Second Sophistic culture of declamation and criticism is certain to contribute to a better understanding of the history of rhetorical ideas; it is also quite important in its own right, marking one of the most interesting moments of cultural transition towards the progressive formation of a standard proper to written communication, in a world that is increasingly dominated by scriptural technologies, in both its elite (political) and “popular” exchanges. As a pre-Hermogenean moment in the history of the *idea*-theory these two texts show remarkably well how this theory has evolved in close articulation with the declamatory practices of *controversiae* and *suasoriae* prevalent in the schools of the Roman Empire. Its significance is also enhanced within a new understanding of the long-term dynamic of rhetorical ideas in late Antiquity, contributing to a more synthetic knowledge of the cultural negotiations that progressively did lead to a new discourse, the Christian one. These projections, clearly to be connected with the two treatises made available by Michel Patillon in French, remain to be so used by future scholarship.

¹³ As mentioned before, the second treatise has also been translated in English by Ian Rutherford (note 5).