

Two Greek Rhetorical Treatises From the Roman Empire : introduction, texts and translation of the Arts of rhetoric, attributed to Anonymous Seguerianus and Apsines of Gadara. Edited by Mervin L. Dilts and George A.Kennedy. Leiden, New York, Koln: Brill, 1997. ISBN 90-04-10728-2.

Apsinès. Art Rhétorique. Problèmes à Faux-Semblant. Texte établi et traduit par Michel Patillon. Paris : Belles Lettres. 2001 ISBN: 2-251-00492-0

**par Mirela Saim**

The last decade has accustomed us all with a changed and transformed view of the history of rhetoric, particularly because of a new stress on the complex and sometimes paradoxical achievements of the Second Sophistic. A big number of studies and modern editions as well as accessible translations did push this previously obscure period to the forefront of rhetorical preoccupations. And rightfully so, because this is the normative discourse that has accompanied and informed the beginnings of Christianity and the dissolution of the classical world. In what follows I would like to point to two new volumes that support the previous remarks, while in the same time I will also try to show how much the English and French philological traditions differ in their approach to the same task of providing excellent tools for the work of the specialist in rhetoric.

The two treatises published in translation by Dilts and Kennedy provide an excellent resource for the assessment of the changes and adaptations underwent by the prescriptive discourse of public speech in the Roman Empire, at a time when both Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism received their written canons.

This is indeed a rhetoric that is representative for the technical and specialized evolution of the art of public speech, in its pedagogical strength, for the second and third centuries A.D. The publication of the English translation of both Anonymous Seguerianus and Apsines is extremely useful to those interested in the major changes underwent by the Hellenistic rhetoric during the flourishing times of the Second Sophistic. It situates these changes with a lot more precision and detail than previously known. And while the Spengel-Hammer editions (in the "Rhetores Graeci" series) of these treatises were usually available, it is no small achievement to provide a modern edition, collated from many more copies and thus a lot more precise in its readings, while for the translation in decent English we cannot sufficiently express our gratitude. With the handbook inherited from "Anonymous Seguerianus"<sup>1</sup> we finally have a text that can be used for ongoing analyses and research, yet, in the same time, we also have a text exploitable for citation in any virtual course of instruction on rhetoric and writing norms. And if we turn to Apsines, our gains in understanding the third century rhetoric and eloquence are obvious.

Apsines of Gadara was a professor of rhetoric from the third century A.D. who left us at least two handbooks of his art: despite their fragmentary preservation, these books can and should be considered representative for his time.

And while he is not the Athenian sophist on record as having overenthusiastic and particularly “devoted” disciples, ready to fight “the Spartan way” (i.e. coming to very “un-rhetorical” blows and fist fights) with the other students in rhetoric<sup>2</sup>, we can easily imagine the kind of life and of relationships that must have been current in the schools and academies of rhetoric in late Antiquity. From some of the stories reported by Eunapius in his chatty “Lives of Sophists”, we can see that some of the “*progymnasmata*” alumni were inclined towards a more mundane form of refutation, totally foreign to the fundamental rhetoric principle of solving conflicts by words alone!

Our Apsines of Gadara though is the “Phoenician” cited by Philostratus<sup>3</sup> in a brief concluding note: he was a more interesting fellow, being a teacher who seems to have been a thorough master of public eloquence, intent on displaying and discussing a complete set of technical problems and thus did provide us with a glimpse into what the rhetoric of his time must have been. Although he did practice his art in Athens at a time of strong anti-Christian sentiments, it is also possible to perceive how this sort of practice did influence the early Christian authors, themselves no mean rhetoricians as Arnobius and Tertullian show. While Apsines taught in Athens, his Gadaran origin leads us to logically assume that both his own training and his further influence were somewhat broader than the Greco-Latin world of post-Aristotelian rhetoric, in fact extending to the “Graecised Jewish” parallel world that has fashioned, at roughly that same time, both the Christian discourse and the rabbinical tradition, illustrated by the Talmud.

I will not discuss here the accuracy of the translation or the merits of the edition: they have been competently analyzed in a review published earlier by Harvey Yunis<sup>4</sup>.

Instead I will try to discuss a parallel edition-translation of Apsines, recently published by the prestigious French publisher “Belles Lettres”. Produced by Michel Patillon, well known for his creative and meticulous work on Hermogenes and his rhetorical discourse, the French version of Apsines includes an extremely rare but interesting work also associated with this author, his “Problèmes à faux-semblant” (*De problematis*), in this way clearly illustrating the links between the political eloquence prevalent in the declamations of the Second Sophistic professors and the more technical elaborations of the rhetoric of courtroom controversies.

The introductory essay, by Michel Patillon, is, as usual, very detailed, giving a wealth of information that situates the philological approach to text and translation in a wider general spirit, placing the work of Apsines Gadareus within a frame of analysis that is extensively detailed and accurate and very theoretical in its comparative understanding, embracing frequently the whole area of the *progymnasmata* currently known.

The introductory essay is in fact so extensive (112 p.) that it qualifies as a book in itself and probably should be treated as such, while the critical apparatus makes use of an extensive and extended access at all the manuscript sources and incunabula. A final introductory note also indicates the limitations of the Dilts-Kennedy edition, suggesting some corrections, dismissing other readings as conjectural, in the best tradition of the...querelles philologiques!...

Since I do not propose to contribute to this aspect of the matter, I would like to finish my brief review by noting again the accuracy and the richness of the complementary notes that, along with the notes in the text, provide an excellent working tool and really help the understanding of a text that is, by all estimates, difficult.