

**A RHETORICAL STUDY  
OF THE LEPTINEAN  
ORATIONS**

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LEPTINEAN ORATIONS

BY

J. E. HARRY

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## A RHETORICAL STUDY OF THE LEPTINEAN ORATIONS.

### I.—INTRODUCTORY.

The second century A. D. was peculiarly favorable to mental work. Peace and prosperity prevailed almost universally, and men had time to turn their attention to intellectual pursuits. Gibbon says (p. 216): "If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus." Trajan's conquests secured peace to the empire, a peace which the ubiquitous and versatile Hadrian sought to maintain even by unwarlike means, while the reign of Antoninus Pius is justly said to be without a parallel in the history of the world. Clouds began to darken the horizon again while Marcus Aurelius was on the throne, but, with the exception of the Jewish outbreak in 132, the greater part of this century was singularly free from war and tumult. In such a time the intercommunication of peoples and the interchange of ideas became possible to a greater extent than ever before. Various religious cults, philosophical tenets, and superstitions found access to almost every nook and corner of the then known world.<sup>1</sup> Greek thought and Greek culture made their way into all parts of the empire. Itinerant teachers, itinerant professors of wisdom multiplied. Like their predecessors of the fifth century B. C. they were called *σοφισταί*, but they are not the same in character. In later Greek the sophist and the rhetorician are absolutely identical; in earlier Greek the sophist meant much more. Travel, which was distinctive of the sphere in the days of Gorgias and Protagoras, had now become the fashion. Even the emperors, with the exception of Antoninus, visited almost all the provinces of their vast domain<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Baumgart, *Aelius Aristides*, pp. 62 and 91.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gibbon, vol. I, p. 144, note.



and aided the assimilating effect, for in this constant intercourse of the states the difference between Roman and subject was gradually fading out.

That the intellectual pursuits of the age were chiefly literary and, more than that, sophistic and epideictic, can be explained by the fact that it was not an age of progress but of decline.<sup>1</sup> Men sought to revive the glorious past rather than penetrate the dark future. Hence the desire arose to imitate those monuments of classic literature left by the great prose writers; for the name of poet was almost forgotten. The Greeks were happier in the selection of their models than the Romans. The latter went back beyond Cicero and affected the archaic forms and style of Ennius. Writers in the Roman tongue that are worth reading no longer appear. Greek becomes henceforth the literary language of the world. The models selected by the Greeks were Plato, Thukydides, Demosthenes; and these were imitated with a considerable degree of success. These imitators, however, keen in the perception of some things, allowed others to escape their notice. This they overdid, that they neglected. That their works want life is natural. Under the empire it was impossible, especially in Greek countries, to foster a spirit of oratory, since there were no living questions to engage attention. As a substitute, the disputes and quarrels of ancient Greece were revived, but merely as subjects for school-room declamation and rhetorical display. Of course, it was a step forward to read the works of the ancients again, but the sophistic methods could not develop this beginning, for the creative power was wanting.<sup>2</sup>

More attention was paid to the form than the thought.<sup>3</sup> Baumgart makes the assertion (p. 39) that not a single independent thought is developed in the 55 extant orations of Aristeides. An earnest endeavor to communicate the truth was seldom found. The essential of a liberal education was an acquaintance with the idiom of the best Attic literature. The importance attached to rhetoric may be seen in the high place it occupied in the academic system of education. From the time of Vespasian the various

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Baumgart, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schmid, *Der Atticismus in seinen Hauptvertretern von Dionysius von Halikarnass bis auf den zweiten Philostratus*: Stuttgart, 1887 and 1889. See also A. J. P. IX 99.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Professor Gildersleeve's analysis of "The Double Indictment" of Lucian: *Essays and Studies*, p. 305. Cf. also p. 308.

seats of learning had not suffered for want of funds. The lecturers, salaried by the imperial treasury, enjoyed an ease and position accorded to few.<sup>1</sup> Athens, still pre-eminent as the mistress of eloquence and learning,<sup>2</sup> had three principal chairs: rhetoric, politics, and philosophy. Of these rhetoric held the first rank and was endowed with a stipend of 10,000 drachmae, while numerous other emoluments were heaped upon the fortunate occupant. Hadrian and Antoninus Pius seem to have been especially liberal.<sup>3</sup>

Among the many sophists who, born in the various cities of Greece and Asia Minor, gravitated to the "ancient classic university of the civilized world"<sup>4</sup> was the celebrated rhetorician Aelius Aristides, surnamed Theodoros. The date of his birth is 117 A. D.<sup>5</sup> From his home in Adriani, almost at the foot of the Mysian Olympus, Aristides came to Athens and received instruction in rhetoric from the great teachers of the day, Herodes, Alexander, Aristokles, and perhaps from Polemon, though Aristides speaks of none but Alexander.<sup>6</sup> The emperor Hadrian is mentioned but once by the rhetorician; he was no longer on the throne when Aristides made his visit to Rome.<sup>7</sup> The sophist also visited Sicily, Greece, Egypt,<sup>8</sup> and Asia Minor.<sup>9</sup> His fame outran him. Monuments were set up in his honor in the towns through which he passed. The sickness of which he makes so much in his speeches, and which caused him to repair to the various temples of Asklepios seeking relief, came upon him, as he tells us in the beginning of the fourth Sacred Discourse, ten years before the proconsulate of Severus, which Waddington places in the year 153-4. Masson in his *Collectanea* gives 168-9. Whether Waddington is right or not in this, he is certainly wrong in assigning

<sup>1</sup> Les rhéteurs ou sophistes ont joué un grand rôle à l'époque des Antonins; ils étaient choyés par les chefs de l'empire, ils parvenaient aux plus hautes fonctions de l'État et ils amassaient de grandes richesses: *W. H. Waddington, Mémoire sur la chronologie de la vie du rhéteur Aélius Aristide*, Paris, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aristeid. *Dind.* I, p. 298.

<sup>3</sup> For a picture of the age see Nettleship, *Amer. Jour. Philol.* IV 414.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Aristeid. *Dind.* I, p. 318.

<sup>5</sup> Waddington, p. 65. So Letronne.

<sup>6</sup> *Dind.* I, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> Waddington, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Dind.* II 347.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Dareste, *Rhetor Aristides, prolegomena*.

17 instead of 13 years to the duration of the illness.<sup>7</sup> See Baumgart, p. 11. Aristeides met Marcus Aurelius (with whom he formed a striking contrast in character) and delivered an oration in his presence.<sup>8</sup> During the latter part of his life the rhetorician made his home in Smyrna, from which city he wrote a letter to the emperor in 180 A. D., imploring aid for the inhabitants, who had suffered from an earthquake.<sup>9</sup> Little more is known of his life. He died early in the reign of Commodus; according to Waddington, 185 A. D.

In the second speech of the *τεπὰ λόγῳι* Aristeides gives us a full account of his sickness and wonderful cure. The most paradoxical remedies which Asklepios prescribed,<sup>4</sup> the vaticinations, the extraordinary baths and so forth,<sup>5</sup> are described in detail, while through it all runs a thread of self-praise. The whole of the fourth discourse is occupied with attributing to the care of the god his renown as an orator. Everywhere is the greatest stress laid on that which has reference to the field of rhetoric; but the properly medical allusions occupy so little space that Baumgart thinks they were introduced only for the purpose of recommending this new and peculiar method of healing to the hearers by means of speeches. Compare Dind. I 508-510, 518, 522. Did Aristeides betake himself to the temple of Asklepios in the firm belief that the god would point out to him through dreams how he was to regain his health? There seems to be no good reason to doubt it. How then are the extraordinary stories he relates to be explained (for extraordinary they manifestly are, and do not bear the "stamp of truth," as Welcker maintains)? Did the sophist believe them himself? Yes. At least in the main. He deceived himself, and this self-deception was the result of his peculiarly constituted nature and the incessant adulation of his hearers. He lacked critical acumen, was unsceptical, unspeculative, had no originality, but was constantly striving to be thought original,<sup>6</sup> was always endeavoring to relate something truly marvellous and striking. The piety of a devotee is not to be traced in his writings, nor is he to be passed over slightly with the appellation of "lunatic," nor to be looked upon as an impostor. The modern hypnotic theory with regard to his wonderful cure is barely worth mentioning.

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoire*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Dareste*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Dareste*, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dind. I 46.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dind. I 67.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Diad. I 9.