

## Libanius' Biography: New Perspectives on Roman Education

### Libanius' Autobiography (*or.* 1)

#### 1) Response to studying in Athens

My mother was in tears and could not bear even the mention of the matter (transl. Norman)  
ἡ μὲν οὖν μήτηρ ἐδάκρυεν οὐδὲ τὸν λόγον ἀνεχομένη τοῦ ἔργου (Lib., *or.* 1.13)

#### 2) Persuasion of Libanius' family

Libanius' younger maternal uncle Phasganius "persuaded [his mother] to bear the grief" (τὴν μὲν πείθει λύπην ... ἐνεγκεῖν) and "opened the door" for Libanius (ἐμοὶ δὲ ἀνοίγει τὰς πύλας, Lib., *or.* 1.13).

#### 3) Libanius' Odyssey

I was (...) in the hands of people I wanted none of; and the day after, I was in the hands of yet other people, and these I wanted none of, either. I was unable even to catch a glimpse of the teacher from whom I had come to learn, for I was cooped up in a cell about as big as a barrel—such is the reception they give students on their arrival. (transl. A. F. Norman)  
ἐν χερσὶν ὧν οὐκ ἂν ἐβουλόμην, ἔπειτα τῆς ὑστεραίας ἐν ἑτέρων αὖ χερσὶν ὧν οὐδὲ τούτων ἐβουλόμην· οὗ δὲ ἦλθον μετασχίσων, τοῦτον οὐδ' ὄρᾶν εἶχον ἐν πίθῳ μικροῦ καθειργμένος οἷα τὰ ἐκείνων εἰς τοὺς ἀφικνουμένους τῶν νέων. (Lib. *or.* 1.16)

#### 4) Libanius' Impostor Syndrome

My intention was to spend another four years additional to those I had already completed and then to leave Athens, since I felt that my intellect needed to be improved still further: however sufficient my ability might seem to other people, it did not seem so to me, and I was harassed by the dread that the pundits, who were everywhere about me, would wish to trip me up by exhaustive examination, and so I must still continue to research and increase my knowledge. (transl. A. F. Norman)

γνώμην δὲ εἶχον ἕτερα τέτταρα ἔτη τοῖς ἡνυσμένοις προσθεῖς οὕτως Ἀθήνηθεν ἀπελθεῖν, ὡς τῆς μοι ψυχῆς δεομένης γενέσθαι βελτίονος· καὶ γὰρ εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα ἀποχρώντως ἔδοκουν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἔχειν, ἀλλ' οὐκ αὐτός γε ἐφαινόμην ἐμαυτῷ, δέος δὲ με ἐξετάραπτεν, ὡς περιστάντες οἱ ἕκασταχοῦ σοφοὶ μυρία βασάνῳ κατενεγκεῖν ἐθελήσουσι· δεῖν οὖν ἔτι ἐπιζητοῦντα μανθάνειν. (Lib. *or.* 1.26)

### Eunapius' biography of Libanus (*vit.* 495-496)

#### 5) Libanius' lack of traditional education

Libanius came of a noble family and ranked among the first citizens. While he was still a youth and his own master, since his parents were dead, he came to Athens, and there, though he too came from Syria, he did not attach himself to Epiphanius, who enjoyed the very highest reputation, nor did he attend the school of Prohaeresius. This would have been to run the risk of being obscured, partly by so great a crowd of fellow-pupils, partly by the celebrity of his teachers. But he fell into a trap that was set for him by the pupils of Diophantus, and therefore attached himself to that sophist. (transl. W. C. Wright)

Λιβάνιον δὲ Ἀντιόχεια μὲν ἠνεγκεν ἢ τῆς Κοίλης καλουμένης Συρίας πρώτη πόλεων, Σελεύκου τοῦ Νικάτορος ἐπικληθέντος ἔργον. ἦν δὲ τῶν εὖ γεγονότων καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἄκρους ἐτέλει. νέος δὲ ὧν ἔτι καὶ κύριος ἑαυτοῦ, πατέρων ἀπολελοιπότων, ἀφικόμενος Ἀθήναζε,

οὔτε ὡς ἐκ Συρίας Ἐπιφανίῳ προσήλθε μεγίστην ἔχοντι δόξαν, οὔτε παρὰ Προαιρέσιον ἐφοίτησεν, ὡς ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῶν ὁμιλητῶν καὶ τῷ μεγέθει τῆς δόξης τῶν διδασκάλων καλυφθησόμενος. ἐνεδρευθεὶς δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν Διοφαντείων, Διοφάντῳ προσέειπεν ἑαυτὸν· (Eun. *vit.* 495)

6) The confident Libanius

As he gained confidence in his eloquence and convinced himself that he could rival any that prided themselves on theirs, he resolved not to bury himself in a small town and sink in the esteem of the world to that city's level. Therefore he crossed over to Constantinople.

(transl. W. C. Wright)

θαροσήσας δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λέγειν καὶ πείσας ἑαυτὸν ὡς ἐνάμιλλος εἶη τοῖς ἐπὶ τούτῳ μεγαλοφρονουῖσιν, οὐχ εἴλετο περὶ μικρὰν πόλιν κρύπτεσθαι, καὶ συγκαταπίπτειν τῷ τῆς πόλεως ἀξιώματι, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν Κωνσταντίνου πόλιν διαβαλὼν (Eun. *vit.* 495)

7) The untalented Libanius

His style of eloquence in his declamations was altogether feeble, lifeless, and uninspired, and it is very evident that he had not had the advantage of a teacher; indeed he was ignorant of most of the ordinary rules of declamation, things that even a schoolboy knows. (transl. W. C. Wright)

Ὁ δὲ λόγος αὐτῷ, περὶ μὲν τὰς μελέτας, παντελῶς ἀσθενῆς καὶ τεθηκῶς καὶ ἄπνους, καὶ διαφαίνεται γε οὗτος μὴ τετυχηκῶς διδασκάλου· καὶ γὰρ τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν κοινῶν καὶ παιδὶ γνωρίμων περὶ τὰς μελέτας ἠγγόει· (Eun. *vit.* 496)

**Libanius' Autobiography (or. 1)**

8) Libanius' framing of his background

My family was one of the greatest in a great city – in education, wealth, the provision of shows and games, and in oratory which opposes itself to the ill-temper of governors. (transl. A. F. Norman)

ἐν δὴ μεγίστη μεγίστους εἶναι συνέβη γένος τοῦμον παιδείᾳ τε καὶ πλούτῳ καὶ χορηγίαις καὶ ἀγῶσι καὶ λόγοις, ὅσοι φοραῖς ἀρχόντων ἀπαντῶσιν. (Lib. *or.* 1.2)

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