

Seeing Isokrates' *Evagoras* as an *Epitaphios Logos*

Discussions of the genre of Isokrates' *Evagoras* have tended to situate the work in the sphere of biography (Poulakos 2020) or encomium (Race 1987; Pontier 2018). However, as a native Athenian, Isokrates was consciously aware of a genre that was wholly peculiar to the Athenians: the *epitaphios logos*, the funeral oration. In a sense, we can see the *epitaphios logos* as a biography of the city of Athens and its citizens; Isokrates' novelty is transforming the 'biography' of a *demos* to that of a single individual by utilizing tropes of the *epitaphios logos*.

Close scrutinization of the *Evagoras* evinces multiple ways that Isokrates appropriated the typical features of the funeral oration, transferring what was originally praise for deceased Athenian citizens to a non-Athenian monarch. Moreover, about a decade before his *Evagoras* (circa 370 BCE), Isokrates published his *Panegyricus* (380 BCE), which some have seen as an adaptation of the *epitaphios logos* (Blank 2024), although one that does not rigidly adhere to its traditional structure as the *Evagoras* does. This new interest with experimenting with the *epitaphios logos* in the early fourth century BCE is also evidenced by Lysias' rhetorical example (speech 2) and Platon's almost parodic example in the *Menexenus*. The fluid yet fixed nature of the *epitaphios logos* allowed Isokrates to repurpose many of its elements, transferring praise of a collective to a single individual, while still maintaining its recognizable character.

Structurally, the *Evagoras* mirrors the traditional four-part structure of the *epitaphios logos*: introduction (*prooimion*), praise section (*epainos*), consolation (*paramythia*), and conclusion (*epilogos*). However, it is the more minute parallels that truly bring out the influence of the *epitaphios logos* on the *Evagoras*. Isokrates begins his work by saying that he was convinced to write the *Evagoras* when he saw Nikokles "honoring his father's tomb" (ὀρῶν, ὃ

Νικόκλεις, τιμῶντά σε τὸν τάφον τοῦ πατρός, 9.1). Because we assume that Isokrates was not present at Evagoras' funeral in 374/373 BCE, the use of the present participles here (falsely) portrays the speech as actually taking place at the funeral itself, and thus an *epitaphios logos* at the burial itself. Isokrates goes on to say that in death Evagoras would appreciate someone adding an account of his deeds to the games, gifts, dances, and songs that Nikokles put on, which is precisely what the funeral oration does in Athens. Just as Athens is the “school/education of Hellas” for Thoukydides' Perikles (τῆς Ἑλλάδος παιδευσιν, 2.41.1), “many good and noble Greeks” flocked to Evagoras' Kypros (τῶν γὰρ Ἑλλήνων πολλοὶ καὶ καλοὶ κάγαθοί, 9.51). Isokrates tells Nikokles that he is not using examples of other Greeks to inspire him, but those of “your family” (οἰκείοις, 77), just as the funeral orations are meant to inspire Athenians to emulate virtuous Athenian—the children to emulate their deceased fathers in particular (just like Nikokles).

Given that Isokrates intended for this speech to be disseminated to the wider Greek world (as he implicitly suggests in section 74), two of the most important purposes of the *Evagoras* were to promote Isokrates' more pragmatic version of philosophy as well as his panhellenistic views, both of which we see Evagoras exhibiting throughout the text. These rhetorical purposes are only thinly veiled behind the curtain of praising Evagoras and his son Nikokles. I argue that this novel genre of ‘biography’ that Isokrates produced descends from a peculiar Athenian tradition and would therefore have been especially recognizable and even more persuasive to the Athenians themselves as well as other Greeks who read the Athenian funeral orations of Thoukydides, Lysias, and Platon. Encomium of a king, and a non-Athenian king at that, could thus be more easily reconciled in the minds of Isokrates' democratically oriented readers by

putting this praise in the structure of a funeral oration, a genre distinct, as far as we know, to Athens.

Bibliography

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