

## Libanius the Mythographer: Cultural Competition in the *Antiochikos*

In this paper I examine Libanius' account of the mythical foundation of Antioch as presented in the *Antiochikos* (*Or.* 11.44-58) in terms of his cultural competition with Athens. Delivered in 356 CE at the Antiochene Olympics, Libanius had recently returned to his native city and founded his own rhetorical school after having been dissatisfied with his experience in Athens. While scholars have previously studied the speech for topographical and historical details of the city (Downey 1961: 659-664), generic conventions of the encomium (Pellizzari 2011), temporality (Wiemer 2003), and social memory (Saliou 1990-2000), more recently there has been a growing consensus that the oration is a critique of Athens which stakes Antioch's claim to importance, something which may be characteristic of Libanius' literary project in general (Wenzel 2010; Criboire 2007 and 2013). While these studies tend to focus on Libanius' explicit references to Athens, I seek to further this line of argument by demonstrating how Libanius is engaged in competition with Athens in the mythical section of the *Antiochikos*.

In particular, I first argue that the themes of *xenia* and *synoikismos* in the mythical section are meant to rival Athenian foundation myths. For example, Libanius employs the wanderings of Io, which traditionally represented displacement, exile, and life on the furthest edges of the *oikoumene*, as a way to introduce Triptolemus' (and his Argive companions') search for Io. Upon reaching Antioch, they give up their search and settle in the region due to the hospitality of the inhabitants and the allure of the land (*Or.* 11.47-49). Displacement and exile are replaced by *xenia* and *synoikismos*, and this is true of every mythical episode Libanius introduces. Further settlers from Crete, Cyprus, and members of the Herakleidae (*Or.* 11.53-57) are all compelled to settle in the region because of the hospitality of the inhabitants and the attractiveness of the land. The mythical process of *synoikismos* realizes its completion with Seleucus' "historical"

foundation of Antioch and the suburb of Daphne (*Or.* 11. 91-100). Thus the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural foundation of Antioch challenges Athens' reputation as a city welcoming to refugees and foreigners—indeed, Libanius will later say that although Athens opened up their city to foreigners, Antioch surpasses them in that regard (*Or.* 11.167).

Furthermore, and more importantly, I argue that Libanius designed the mythical section to praise Antioch by crafting Antioch's identity as traditionally un-Athenian. Later in the oration (*Or.* 11.184), Libanius notes that whereas previously the two main powers of Greece were Athens and Sparta, in his time they are Athens and Antioch. Libanius, I suggest, subtly anticipates this idea in the mythical section, where each of the peoples involved in the foundation (Argives, Cretans, Cypriots, Herakleidae, and Seleucus) have, in some way, a Dorian connection: in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, the Dorians are linked to Argos through the marriage of Doros to the daughter of Phoroneus, the son of Inachos (F 11), and Argos was certainly a Dorian *polis* in the classical period; the Cretans also have Dorian ties, for already at *Odyssey* 19.177 we see Dorians living in Crete; while the Cypriots traditionally were peoples displaced by Dorians, in Libanius' oration they become linked to the Dorian Cretans through marriage; the Herakleidae reclaimed their territory in the Peloponnese with the help of the Dorians, and the two groups became tightly linked in mythical thought; finally, the Seleucids linked themselves to the Dorians through the Herakleidae, and Libanius makes Seleucus a descendant of Temenus, a leader of the Herakleidae. In this sense Antioch becomes a new Sparta—Athens' greatest rival.

Thus, this paper offers hitherto overlooked evidence for the claim that the *Antiochikos* is not only a speech in praise of Antioch, but also a critique of Athens. No doubt motivated by his disenchantment with Athens and the anxiety of founding his own rhetorical school in Antioch,

Libanius crafted the mythical narrative in the *Antiochikos*, replete with themes of hospitality and Dorian elements, in order to establish Antioch as the new and worthy rival of Athens.

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