

## The Influence of the *epitaphios logos* on Atthidography

Those familiar with the genre of Atthidography are confronted with two different, but interrelated questions. First, why did it take such a long time for a genre of local Athenian history to develop that the first chronicle of Athenian history was written by a foreigner, Hellanicus of Lesbos? And second, why does the structure of the *Atthides* remain fixed for its entire existence, allowing (or forcing) subsequent Atthidographers to cover the same events as their predecessors? These questions are related because the answer to each of them can be found in the Athenian custom of the *epitaphios logos*, the annual state funeral oration for the war dead. This paper argues that *epitaphios logos* served a function similar to the local chronicle, which thus precluded such a genre of history from developing at Athens by its own citizens. Furthermore, the fixed structure of *Atthides* will be shown to be related to the rigid structure of the *epitaphios logos*.

Jacoby conceived of Atthidography as a highly political genre, in which individual Atthidographers engaged because they had a political stake in the accounting of the development of government at Athens (Jacoby 1949). Later scholars, however, have questioned aspects of this argument (Harding 1976; Rhodes 1981; Harding 1994). Moreover, understanding Atthidography as fundamentally political fits poorly with Hellanicus, the originator of the genre. Before turning to his chronicle of Athens, Hellanicus worked extensively with mythography, the study of myth as history, and chronography. This background allowed him to organize the problematic and contradictory oral tradition of mythic Athens into a chronological framework centered on the city's kings.

Related to this oral tradition of mythic history is the *epitaphios logos*, which included a catalogue of Athenian exploits to extol the dead. Although the *epitaphios logos* was held to

commemorate the war dead of the year, orators of this speech tend to ignore individuals and instead prefer to extol Athens and the Athenian accomplishments from the mythic past (Loraux 1981). They do this through a rather formalized treatment of standard *topoi*, which are used continually from our earliest example, Thucydides, to our latest, Hyperides. This rigid and repetitive oral history may have been enough for the Athenians to use as their means of memorializing and archiving the history of their city until Cleidemus writes his *Atthis* in the fourth century.

When the Athenians adopted Hellanicus' genre of the Athenian chronicle as their own, they retained his structure and all begin with the mythical history of Athens, leading to much repetition and what today would be considered plagiarism. Two explanations exist for retaining a structure that results in such repetition. First, Athens of the fourth century, despite its differences with the most ancient accounts of the city, is still a result of all these past events and developments. After the rule of the 30, this may have even been seen as an inevitable progression towards the democracy of under which each *Atthis* was composed. A history of the city then cannot possibly be composed without an account of its entire history.

The second explanation deals with the influence of the funeral oration on the local chronicle at Athens. Although the *topoi* seem to confine the various speakers of funeral orations and the individuality of the orator must yield to the genre, it is still possible "to speak in *topoi*...and to say something through a new arrangement of these *topoi*" (Loraux 1981, p. 249). Atthidographers engaged in the same sort of innovation. The placement of episodes or the different accounts given by an Atthidographer could be the result of a new autopsy or a reinterpretation of an event due to his personal experience. After all, the experience of

contemporary history helps in the interpretation of past history. Like the orators of the *epitaphioi*, the Atthidographers could innovate within the rather fixed structure of Atthidography.

This agonistic need to present events already recorded in new ways is directly tied to the funeral oration. One of its *topoi* was the agonistic nature of the *epitaphioi*. Orators competed with themselves from one year to the next. Lysias mentions that his contest is not against the deeds of those he is eulogizing, but rather against previous orators of the *epitaphioi* (Lys. 2.2). The same competition exists between the Atthidographers over who can arrange and explain the mythic and more distant historical events best before attempting to set the standard account of their own generation.

#### Bibliography

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