

## Quintilian's Frustration with Declamation

This paper will explore Quintilian's complex relationship with Latin declamation and examine his position within the historical and cultural context of the late first century CE. Earlier modern scholars such as Greer and Bonner, following the trend of ancient critics, read Quintilian's comments on declamation through the lens of assumptions about his non-extant *De Causis Corruptae Eloquentiae* as a general condemnation of declamation or, at the very least, a sign of the decline of Roman rhetoric. However, views on Latin declamation have shifted in more recent decades, which necessitates a reevaluation of Quintilian's place in that discussion. Kennedy disputes that Quintilian subscribed to the cultural decline narrative common among his contemporaries, and the most recent scholarship (especially Bloomer and Mendelson) has argued for a more positive view of Latin declamation as a whole, emphasizing its use as a tool to reinforce Roman cultural values.

In view of this new scholarship, I argue that Quintilian recognized the value of declamation not only in rhetorical training but also in the general education of a Roman citizen. I base my argument on 1) his explicit comments on declamation and its value in education, 2) his use of declamation themes in the *Institutio Oratoria*, and 3) Quintilian's position as a state-sponsored teacher of rhetoric during a transitional period in Latin declamation.

While Quintilian's offhand comments about declamation are overwhelmingly negative, his section dedicated to the discussion of declamation (*Inst.* 2.10) is far more mixed, balancing complaints about the rhetorical distance between declamation and actual public speaking against the usefulness of declamation as the capstone of rhetorical education. In addition, Quintilian seems content to ignore his own advice on declamation and instead follow the prevailing methods of his time when composing sample declamation themes. These methods correspond

with the shift in declamation happening throughout the first century CE: the focus of rhetorical training across the Roman world changes as the law courts lose power, and as panegyrics before the emperor gain prestige. The new focus on overt displays of rhetorical ability in addition to the increased Hellenization of the Roman empire lead to changes in rhetorical standards that Quintilian largely accepts, despite his bitter complaints.

### Bibliography

- Bloomer, W. M. 2011. *The School of Rome: Latin Studies and the Origins of Liberal Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bonner, S. F. 1949. *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Greer, W. J. 1925. "Quintilian and the Declamation" in *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Oct. 26, 1925), pp. 27-31.
- Kennedy, G. 1969. *Quintilian*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Mendelson, M. 1994. "Declamation, Context, and Controversiality" in *Rhetoric Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 92-107