

**Claudia Brunello, *Storia e paideia nel Panathenaico di Isocrate. Studi e Ricerche*, 31. Roma: Sapienza Università Editrice, 2015. Pp. 290. ISBN 9788898533558. €22.00.**

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This book, which is a slightly revised version of Brunello's doctoral thesis, aims to elucidate the meaning of the *Panathenaicus* (the most enigmatic and contentious of Isocrates' discourses) through a close study of the ways in which Isocrates employs historical *exempla* and through an assessment of his *philosophia*. In doing so it provides a much-needed update and extends the scope of Schmitz-Kahlmann's 1939 monograph on the same subject.

Isocrates' aim in writing the *Panathenaicus*, Brunello argues in her "Introduction", was to provide a demonstration of his educational practice. She finds evidence for this view in the programmatic comments concerning the nature of the discourse and the serious educative aims that Isocrates emphasised both in the prologue and in the conclusion. *Philosophia* is the name Isocrates gave to his educational programme by means of which he aimed to turn out consummate politicians. Although he was the beneficiary of the sophistic movement, the influence of which Brunello traces in his rhetoric, particularly (but not exclusively) in her final two chapters that deal with *paideia*, Isocrates consciously distanced himself from it, aiming to teach 'truth' in the moral sense of the word. The rhetorical devices Isocrates employed in his discourses, and especially his use of the historical *exemplum*, were therefore designed to convey his *philosophia*. Brunello's Isocrates is therefore a teacher of rhetoric and political ethics to the would-be rulers of Athens and Greece. Brunello concludes her "Introduction" with some observations on Isocrates' unconventional praise of Athens in the *Panathenaicus* which, unlike the *epitaphioi*, mixes criticism with eulogy. We have to wait for an explanation of the work's unconventional form until the end of chapter 2 where (importantly for interpreting the *Panathenaicus*) Brunello concludes at the end of her study of the historical *exemplum* that Athens and Sparta are depicted as paradigms of praiseworthy and blameworthy political action based on Isocrates' own philosophy. The depiction of these two states was not intended to convey historical truth.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide an exhaustive examination of Isocrates' use of history in the *Panathenaicus* and constitute for this reviewer the strength of the book. Unlike history, which attempts to establish facts, rhetoric persuades through its use of historical *exempla*. Brunello compares the accounts of Minos and the Carians at *Panathenaicus* 43-44 with the same events described by Herodotus and Thucydides. She argues that the version of events that depicts Athens expelling the Carians from the Cyclades was chosen by Isocrates in order to provide a rhetorico-historical justification for Athenian hegemony. By examining different historical accounts of the Athenian punishment of Melos, Scione and Torone, Brunello shows how Isocrates interpreted the same historical facts in different ways in different discourses. In the *Panegyricus* Isocrates adopted the view Thucydides attributed to the Athenians, namely that force was justified by the necessity to maintain the stability of the empire, whereas in the *Panathenaicus* he acknowledged the criticisms of Athens but softened the blame through his rhetorical argument that even the gods are not blameless, and by minimising Athens' fault in destroying tiny places largely unknown to Greeks. Following an extensive analysis of the ways in which fifth and fourth century historians and orators calculated the respective periods of the Athenian and Spartan hegemony, Brunello concludes that there was no direct dependence on Isocrates' part on them: like other fourth century orators he adopted the historical periodization that suited his argument at the time. An instance of this is Isocrates' decision in the *Panathenaicus* to ignore the excesses of the Thirty as crimes against fellow Athenians by dating them to the ten-year period of the Spartan hegemony, that is to 404-394.

In Chapter 2 there is a detailed discussion of the way in which Isocrates takes up and reworks the *topoi* that constitute the traditional praise of Athens in the *epitaphioi logoi*, the inception of which Brunello dates to after the Persian Wars. In doing so she assumes the concept of ‘intentional history’, which refers to the passing down and elaboration over time of stories that ‘create’ a civic identity. She also discusses the use Isocrates makes of documents like the so-called Peace of Callias, but there is perhaps little to be gained from the discussion of his silence in regard to the oath of Plataea or the ban on the reconstruction of the temples destroyed by the Persians. Brunello concludes that in terms of Isocrates’ teaching the originality of an author consists as much in the selection of historical themes as in the detail with which he presents well-known facts.

In her discussion of the Agamemnon digression [74-83] Brunello concurs with the weight of recent scholarship in dismissing a contemporary allusion to Philip II. Rather, she interprets the portrayal in terms of the immediate argument in the *Panathenaicus*: the comparison is with Isocrates himself and his teaching, which Agamemnon embodies. Similarly allusion to contemporary politics in the presentation of the Adrastus story [168-174] is rejected: the peaceful resolution of the quarrel between Athens and Thebes, it is argued, provides a model of how conflict among Greeks should best be settled.

Chapter 3 aims to explain the controversial dialogue scene in which a former student provides a defence of Sparta that contradicts that of his master. Brunello argues that there is no inconsistency in Isocrates’ decision not to comment on the student’s argument: Isocrates the character in the discourse disagrees with the student’s stated view on Sparta, but Isocrates the author, consistent with his teaching of the art of rhetoric, provides a concrete and dynamic example of his own educational practice.

In chapter 4 Brunello considers the *philosophia* of Isocrates in the context of the debate on imperialism and concludes that the orator’s position on *archê* is similar to that of Thucydides. In particular she postulates direct influence of the historian on Isocrates’ acceptance of the inevitable dynamics of power in relations between states, and also of the possibility of drawing valid lessons from the identification of ‘historical constants’ in human nature. The comparative method, which treats Athens and Sparta as paradigms, Brunello argues, is more than a rhetorical expedient; rather it is a means to identify and better understand the intrinsic characteristics of empire. There is also a discussion of the *nomos – physis* debate, from which the conclusion is drawn that Isocrates is closer to Thucydides and other fifth-century thinkers than he is to Plato. In her discussion on the correct use of rhetoric Brunello argues that Isocrates rejected the moral relativity characteristic of some sophists in favour of a position that judged everything according to the good or bad use to which it is put based on shared *polis* values of wisdom, justice and piety; these values she regards as being characteristic of the ruling class of the *kaloï kai agathoi*. Isocrates’ own position in the debate with his former student is therefore approved not because it is technically more effective but because it is more ‘true’, being more ‘just’.

The book concludes with a discussion of Isocrates’ relationship to traditional *paideia*.

Brunello holds that Isocrates’ *paideia* is completely based on the practice of rhetoric and on the principle of imitation, through which his students are invited to learn his discourses as models, not by memorising them but by assimilating their content and developing novel arguments. Like Plato, Isocrates developed new prose forms to convey his *philosophia*. Brunello does well to compare the *Panathenaicus* with Plato’s *Timaeus*, both of which deal with the glorious deeds of ancient Athens and employ alternatives to the traditional civic literary forms of poetry and the *epitaphios*. Whereas Plato makes a clean break with tradition, Isocrates chose to work with traditional content. Both authors consciously choose to relocate the praise of Athens from the public to the private intellectual sphere. Brunello notices that both *Panathenaicus* and *Timaeus* are set at the time of the Panathenaic festival, the great patriotic celebration of Athenian identity, but she does not relate this to Isocrates’ disappointment expressed in the prologue to the *Panathenaicus* (cf. *Letter 2*, 22- 23) at the lack of recognition he has received for his service to Athens. The context of intellectual alienation in democratic Athens would seem to be relevant here, implying a need on Isocrates’ part to depict his work in a patriotic context for posterity.

In summation, Brunello has produced a stimulating discussion of Isocrates' use of history and his educational methods in the broader historical context of fifth and fourth century literature. This study does not aim to present a complete interpretation of the *Panathenaicus* but it does succeed in elucidating some of its most important features. Scholars of Greek rhetoric and history should find this book thought provoking.<sup>1</sup>

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Brunello's bibliography is comprehensive, one notable exception being R. Lehmann, *Die unter Xenophons Namen überlieferte Schrift vom Staate der Lakedämonier und die Panathenaische Rede des Isokrates* (Greifswald 1853). Lehmann's interpretation of the paradigmatic treatment of Athens and Sparta has significant points of contact with Brunello's own argument. There is a subject index, at the end of which is a useful index of Greek terms discussed, and a source index.