



**Remembering the athenian  
defeat at Chaeronea**



## REMEMBERING THE ATHENIAN DEFEAT AT CHAERONEA RECORDANDO LA DERROTA ATENIENSE EN QUERONEA

### ABSTRACT

The paper considers the Athenians' reaction to the battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. as reflected in the oratory. The authors focus on the rhetoric of defeat and contrast it with the rhetoric of victory, which occurs in the same orators who remembered and com-memorated the events of the Athenian glorious past in their orations. This paper also includes all relevant exempla from these orations, which deal with heroism and patriot-ism, on the one hand, and treachery, on the other hand. It is argued that an important rhetoric method was to make contrast between the present and the past wars as well as the patriotism and the treason in the speeches specially dealing with the defeats. It is concluded that the rhetorical and emotional representation of the events is pre-vailing over the historical one since the main aim of the orators is to manipulate with the histor-ical memory of the people for their objectives.

KEYWORDS: history, international relations, defeat, Chaeronea, oratory, Athens.

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### RESUMEN

El documento considera la reacción de los atenienses a la batalla de Queronea en 338 a. C. Y como se refleja en la oratoria. Los autores se centran en la retórica de la derrota y la contrastan con la retórica de la victoria, que se produce en los mismos oradores que recuerdan y conmemoran los acontecimientos del pasado glorioso ateniense en sus discursos. Este documento también incluye todos los ejemplos relevantes de estas narraciones, que tratan sobre el heroísmo y el patriotismo, por un lado, y la traición, por otro lado. Se argumenta que un método retórico importante fue hacer un contraste entre la guerra presente y las guerras pasadas, así como el patriotismo y la traición en los discursos que abordan especialmente las derrotas. Se concluye que la representación retórica y emocional de los eventos prevalece sobre la histórica, ya que el objetivo principal de los oradores es manipular con la memoria histórica de las personas para lograr sus objetivos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: historia, relaciones internacionales, derrota, Chaeronea, oratoria, Atenas

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modern scholarship usually considers a Greek remembering the historical Past with respect to the allusions to the events in Greek historians, poets and orators [Boeder D., Sider D. (eds), 2001; Hall E., 1993; Carey C., 2007]. At the same time, while the Greek perception of the Persian wars is a common topic in historiography, other Greek military conflicts attract much less attention in the literature. The aim of this paper is to consider the Athenians' reaction to the battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. The Greeks used to commemorate their battles in the so-called sites of memory such as Aulis, Marathon, Plataea, Salamis, and Chaeronea, and in various literary texts. The Trojan and the Greco-Persian wars seemed to be the most glorious events from the Greek viewpoint and were often compared to each other by Greek authors. As for orators, they usually referred to the Greek wars in order to commemorate them in their epideictic orations such as funeral speeches by Lysias [1930], Demosthenes [1926], Hyperides [2001], Isocrates [1955], and some judicial speeches. (Yessebayeva, 2018)

However, the Greeks drew attention not only to victories, but also to defeats. There were some differences in the rhetorical representations between victory and defeat, which look as follows: glorification of victories / justification or diminishing of defeats; comparing of victories / contrasting of victories and defeats; celebration of victorious generals / denunciation of defeated commanders. Diodorus (16. 84–86) states the full description of the battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. The other references to it are scattered in the various speeches of contemporary orators such as Demosthenes, Dinarchus, Hyperides, Lycurgus, Demades [1962] and Aeschines [1958]. However, there are some orations, which relate to the battle of Chaeronea more specifically. (Ling et al., 2016)

## 2. METHODS

The paper is built up on the historical-comparative analysis of the Greek orators that enables us to give a detailed consideration of the Athenian treatment of the battle of Chaeronea from a rhetorical perspective. We will focus on the rhetoric of defeat and contrast it with the rhetoric of victory, which occurs in the same authors who remembered and commemorated the events of the Athenian glorious past in their orations. We will also collect all relevant episodes from these orations, which deal with heroism and patriotism, on the one hand, and treachery, on the other hand. We hope to argue in this article that an important rhetoric method was to make contrast between the present wars and the past wars as well as the patriotism and the treason in the speeches specially dealing with the defeats. We also intend to demonstrate a closer relationship between the rhetoric picture of the events and the possible 'historical picture' that may be deduced also from the other sources under examination.

## 3. RESULTS

In 338 Demosthenes was chosen by the Athenians to deliver the funeral oration over those Athenians who had died at the battle of Chaeronea (Dem. 18. 285; Plut. Dem. 21.2.1). This is the Epitaphius in the Demosthenic corpus of speeches; however, the authenticity of this oration has been questioned since the antiquity, by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. However, a number of scholars now accept that this speech actually may belong to Demosthenes: this opinion has been expressed by Ian Worthington, Leslie Shear and others [Worthington I., 2003; Shear J.L., 2013]. In this case this speech is more significant in the rhetorical aspect than as having historical resonances. Hyperides' oration against Athenogenes, Lycurgus' fragments of speeches against Lysicles and Autolycus, and, finally, his speech against Leocrates give us the contemporary evidence on the event.

The most important is Lycurgus' speech against Leocrates dated to 331/0 B.C. It includes some rhetorical judgments as well as historical details, which together may indicate at the Athenians' remembering the battle of Chaeronea almost seven years later. Lycurgus' speech is also a significant source for the Greek rhetorical treatment of patriotism and treason. Lycurgus used the Greek word *patris* 78 times to denote the father-land. The words

for 'treason' totally occur in orator 72 times: the nouns *prodotēs* (traitor) – 26 times and *prodosia* (treachery) – 13 times; the participles *prodous* and *prodi-dous* (betrayed) – 22 times; the verb *prodidōmi* (to betray) – 11 times (it is also used in such phrases as *prodotēs tēs patriδος* – traitor of fatherland; *prodotēs tēs poleōs* – traitor of city; *prodotēs tou dēmou* – traitor of people).

Thus, the patriotic rhetoric was the characteristic feature of the Lycurgus' speech in Leocratem and was used in the rhetorical picture of the battle of Chaeronea.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The orators' speeches have been considered in a number of modern scholarly monographs and articles, which mainly pay great attention to the orators' heroic rhetoric in the descriptions of the past wars, but rarely comment on their representations of defeat. The orators' judgments on the defeat of Chaeronea in many aspects provide us with a very typical rhetoric picture of the event. This battle is seen as the struggle for the Greek liberty; the soldiers are depicted as the brave men who defended the liberty; there is comparing between the present and the past wars (especially the Persian wars). These elements in the rhetorical representation of the past were regular in Attic orators when they dealt with the military history as well. Of course, before Chaeronea, various orators remembered not only the Athenian victories, but the defeats. Lysias in his *Epitaphios* (2. 58–60) and Isocrates in the *Panegyricus* (4. 119), stressed the unfavorable outcome for the whole Greece of the Athenian disaster at Aegospotami in 405 B.C. Demosthenes in his *Epitaphios* (19) even attempts to diminish the outcome of the Athenian defeat at Chaeronea when saying as follows:

«Of necessity it happens, when a battle takes place, that the one side is beaten and the other victorious; but I should not hesitate to assert that in my judgment the men who die at the post of duty on either side do not share the defeat but are both alike victors. For the mastery among the survivors is decided as the deity disposes, but that which each was in duty bound to contribute to this end, every man who has kept his post in battle has done. But if, as a mortal being, he meets his doom, what he has suffered is an incident caused by

chance, but in spirit he remains unconquered by his opponents» (tr. by N.W. DeWitt and N.J. DeWitt).

Ian Worthington [2003] notes that in the context of the Greek defeat at Chaeronea, the Speaker blames the result of the battle on chance, not on the rank and file of the army. Demosthenes says also that the latter "being human, must be acquitted of the charge of cowardice". According to Worthington, the reference to cowardice is interesting, for in 330 Aeschines accused Demosthenes, who had fought at Chaeronea, of deserting his post, as did Dinarchus in 323. However, this argument is not convincing. Demosthenes spoke of the men who fought in the battle; to a lesser degree, this passage can relate to the deserters; besides, one can remember that Demosthenes was accused by Aeschines and Dinarchus namely as a deserter from the battlefield. Polly Low [2010] asserts that the Demosthenic *Epitaphios* offers a relatively detailed analysis of the battle, in which the dead it is commemorating lost their lives, and goes at great length showing why their military defeat should nevertheless be counted as a moral victory. Finally Max L. Goldman [2017] notes that the main explicit function of a funeral oration, namely, the praise of the war dead, allows Demosthenes to reframe defeat as a species of victory. Goldman considers also that Demosthenes accomplishes this reframing by diminishing the fault for the defeat while highlighting the bravery of the fighting men and beginning with the banal generality that a battle necessarily involves a winner and a loser. According to Goldman's conclusion, this very banality diminishes the importance of victory while permitting Demosthenes to assert that the true victors are the men on both sides who died fighting at their post.

Continuing this discussion we can say that Lycurgus' notion (48–49) may be taken into consideration as paralleled to Demosthenes's. His speech includes a short encomium for Athens and soldiers who gave their lives for the city. Johanna Hanink [2014] may be right when saying that this section of the speech looks much like an abbreviated version of the traditional *epitaphios logos*. The difference between the two explanations of defeat is only that Demosthenes touches upon this subject more generally, whereas Lycurgus specifically refers to the battle of Chaeronea:

«They derived no benefit from their bravery while alive, but when they died, they bequeathed us their fame. They were not defeated but died where they were ordered to stand, defending our freedom. I must tell you something paradoxical yet still true: these men died victorious. The reason is that in death they won both freedom and valor, which for good men are the prizes of war. Furthermore, one cannot say that they were defeated, since they did not cower in fear when the enemy attacked. No one would have the right to say that men who died nobly in war have been defeated, since they chose a noble death and avoided slavery» (tr. by E.M. Harris).

Demosthenes and Lycurgus remove all the responsibility from the Athenian soldiers for the defeat of their army. The glorification of the war dead in both orators also fits with this case. The description of the military qualities of the soldiers was very typical for the funerary and other speeches in classical Greece. But in Demosthenes the reference to a valour (aretē) of the warriors appears in a more generic sense than in Lycurgus, whose evidence includes more details [Yoshitake S., 2010]. Lycurgus reminds the Athenians that the soldiers stood against the enemy on the borders of Boeotia – the geographical detail here is important since it makes the Athenians' remembrance about the battle more vivid. Another point in Lycurgus is a quite traditional concept that the men are better defence of the city than fortifications: "They did not place their hopes for safety in fortifications, nor did they let the enemy destroy their land". Lycurgus also uses more various words and phrases than Demosthenes to characterize the courage of the Athenians who fought on the battlefield: "courage was a firmer bulwark than walls of stone"; "they faced their share of dangers equal to the best"; "they derived no benefit from their bravery while alive, but when they died, they bequeathed us their fame". So, both orators consider the soldiers to be free from any accusations of the Athenian defeat at Chaeronea.

Meanwhile, both orators attract an attention to a role of commanders in the battle. Demosthenes only hints at the superiority of the Macedonian general over the Athenian commanders in their military capacities when speaking, that "the leader of our opponents prevailed over those appointed to the command of our army". However, it is clear

enough that Demosthenes' contemporaries considered their commanders, who headed the Athenian forces in the battle, the most responsible for the failure.

The Athenians were at Chaeronea under the leadership of three generals, Chares, Lysicles and possibly Stratocles. Nevertheless Lysicles was only the Athenian strategos, who was condemned and executed when Lycurgus put forward against him accusation of treachery. Lycurgus' oration against Lysicles has not survived to us, but Diodorus (16. 88. 2 = F. 12) cites a fragment from it. Lycurgus was very emotional in his accusation of Lysicles when speaking to him at the Athenian law court:

«You were a general, Lysicles, and after a thousand citizens died and two thousand were captured, after a trophy was erected to mark the defeat of the city, and all Greece fell into slavery, and after all these events took place under your command and generalship, you have the audacity to live and look on the light of day and thrust your way into the marketplace, when you serve as a reminder of our country's shame and reproach» (tr. by C.H. Oldfather).

According to the Greek law, a general was personally responsible for the possible failure or defeat. It is well illustrated by many trials directed against the Athenian generals in the classical period. Similarly, for example, Lysias in his Epitaphios explains the Athenian defeat at Aegospotami to have happened either by the fault of the commander or by the design of Heaven (2. 58). There is a question why only Lysicles, one of three Athenian strategoi, suffered for the commanding of the Athenian army. Jennifer Talbert Roberts [Roberts J.T., 1982] is right when noting that "Lysicles' condemnation was probably due principally to Chares' impulse to save himself".

The idea of freedom is prevailing in orators' appreciation of the battle. Demosthenes in his second speech against Aristogeiton (11) states that all classes should have united wholeheartedly in the struggle for liberty, and in his Epitaphios (23) he asserts that the freedom of the whole Greek world was being preserved in the souls of these men. Lycurgus' representation of the Athenians as the defenders of the Greek liberty is more emotional and consistent (42, 47–49). In one of his passages

the Persian Wars looks like struggle for the freedom of the whole Greece, and the battle of Chaeronea is being con-trasted to them and perceived as a fighting for own safety and own land (42).

«In the past we fought for the freedom of the rest of Greece; now we would have been glad to risk our lives for the secure defense of our own safety. In the past we ruled much of the territory of the barbarians; now we were struggling against Macedon to protect our own land» (tr. by I. Worthington).

The references to the Persian wars were also regular in some other passages of Lycurgus and other orators [Rung E., 2008]. Lycurgus argues against an analogy between leaving of Athens by their citizens when they had moved to Salamis during Xerxes' expedition and Leocrates who escaped from Athens after the battle of Chaeronea. Hyperides (3. 31) touches upon a position of Troezen in the Persian wars when blaming some metic Athenogenes for that he had escaped from Athens just before the battle with Philip. These orators consider desertion of some people from the city as treason.


## 5. SUMMARY

It is concluded that it is possible to differ the rhetorical representation of the battle of Chaeronea from the historical one. However, when the orators report of the historical events, they appeal to the emotions and remembrances of their fellow citizens, but even in this case their information is not to be neglected since it includes the facts absent from other sources. Of course, there is a lack of the historical details in orators. However, in case of orators' representation of the battle of Chaeronea, both rhetorical and historical, we cannot see such details which may be not untrustworthy or confusing. However, it concerns only the orators' reference to the battle of Chaeronea and its aftermath (this does not relate to orators' treatment of other historical events).

## 6. CONCLUSION

In general, the rhetorical and emotional representation of the events around the battle is prevailing over the historical one since the main aim of the orators is to manipulate historical memory of the people for their objectives.

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