
Having previously published at length on the epistles of Apollonius of Tyana and on Eunapius, Penella is no stranger to the study of those intellectuals of the early centuries AD who have failed to attract much attention from philosophers. The primary market for this volume will certainly be those ancient historians who have been attracted to the study of the fourth century AD and their senior pupils, particularly those who specialize in the world of Constantinople and the cities of the east. Themistius had the ear of a number of emperors, most notably of Constantius and Theodosius, who combined to promote his public career at Constantinople between AD 355 and the 380s, but also of others. These included the fascinating figure of Julian (Or. 31.354), who was another link between the political and the intellectual world in this period and who addressed to Themistius an extant Epistle.

On the intellectual front Themistius had a philosopher for a father, a man who seems to have been dedicated, not unusually for this period, to the explication of the great classical philosophers, including Plato and, more particularly, Aristotle. We get an interesting if not impartial picture of his father in Oration 20, the *Funeral Oration in Honour of his Father*. Themistius himself wore the philosopher’s cloak and seems to have carried on some teaching activities similar to those of his father. He is known to us from the Paraphrases of Aristotelian works that have come down to us, of which that on the De Anima has attracted much recent attention.

Philosophers who enter the political arena, however, tend to have trouble maintaining an unsullied image. Plato’s *Sophist*, a work well known to Themistius, introduced an investigation designed to separate out the sophist, politician, and philosopher. All would be concerned with matters of virtue, friendship, education, and persuasive speech such as pervade these orations. Rhetoric itself, indeed, was an activity more closely associated with the other two professionals than with the philosopher. Moreover the philosopher who entered politics generally had to be acutely conscious of his image (Themistius is a clear case of this), and the manufacture of images is closely associated with sophists in the Platonic tradition.
I believe that Themistius' manipulation of his own image, even when lauding his father, is one of the most interesting features of this collection of 'private' orations: for the term is used only to indicate that no sustained imperial panegyric is present, not that it was not intended for the public arena (8-9). Oration 34 is actually a reply to those who criticized him, as a philosopher, for accepting public office. This makes Themistius particularly conscious of the relations between previous leaders or emperors and eminent philosophers.

At first sight Oration 21 seems anomalous, insofar as the author adopts the pose of a sophist, and sets out to deny that he is a philosopher. However, the irony of this speech has been well explained by modern scholarship, and it is clear that, apart from encouraging the audience to think more about the benefits of what is said than the status of the speaker (21.245), Themistius' intention is to find an excuse to examine certain Platonic expectations about the philosopher (chiefly from the Republic), and to expose indirectly others who fall short of these expectations rather than himself. The self-denigration is an effective shock-tactic, going one step further than Socrates' famous 'irony'. Certainly Themistius would not prefer the title of 'sophist' as can be seen from Oration 23, which defends himself against those who denigrate him as a sophist. Plato is again called upon, this time for the definitions of a sophist in Plato's Sophist against which he will measure himself. Such speeches offer him a great deal of opportunity to fashion his image in close relation to that of the great philosophers of the past. However, just in case Themistius does not convince us that he is no sophist, we have Oration 29, which claims that some have misinterpreted his own Sophist (i.e. Oration 23), in supposing it to be an attack on actual sophists rather than on the application of a derogatory sense of the word to himself. It seems that the profession of sophist, nowadays probably to be equated with that of professor of rhetoric, was a perfectly honourable one, with shining classical precedents.

Given that the subject matter gives insights into important historical matters, that Themistius is a fascinating if not always admirable figure, and that he offers significant insights into the intellectual world of the later fourth century, how well does the translation and editorial matter present this to the reader? The 48 page introduction is informative and scholarly,
but offers basic help such as synopses of the various speeches, treating those with related themes together rather than in their conventional order. The footnotes to the speeches would typically take up about an eighth to a half of the printed page, and contain useful material in condensed form. There is a twelve-page bibliography, and a rather brief but indispensible index.

As for the translation, I found it readable, and while I had limited occasion to check it against the Greek, it is clear that considerable thought has been given to finding the best English word, particularly where the choice has implications for one's understanding of Themistius' world. Square brackets are often used to include explanatory words without a counterpart in the text, to include references, to give a translation of Greek that is untranslated, or to indicate the Greek work that has been translated. Greek in these cases appears in Greek script. The result is a work that can readily be used by student and scholar alike, and it is to be welcomed.

It may seem somewhat ironic that, given Themistius’ concern for his image, I felt that I could relate these Orations more closely to the study of the Second Sophist than to the study of late imperial philosophy, known to us principally through the other-worldly Neoplatonists. Parallels in Lucian, for instance, often struck me. Yet this should serve to remind us just how daunting a task it was for the educated public to categorize, and to choose between, the various intellectual flavours available to them in these imperial centuries.

H.A.S. Tarrant
University of Newcastle, New South Wales