**Hecuba Revisited: Euripidean Echoes in Libanius Or. 22.22**

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In the aftermath of the ‘Riot of the Statues’ in Antioch in 387, John Chrysostom and Libanius devoted time and effort to composing rhetorical pieces with two main purposes in mind: to defend the Syrian city after its misdeeds and to disseminate their cultural and religious agendas. John Chrysostom composed and delivered twenty-four homilies (*De statuis*) as events were evolving after the riot, whilst Libanius’ orations 19–23 (despite their pose of contemporaneity with the events) were produced after the emperor Theodosius had forgiven the city. The two sets of texts constitute a paradigmatic case study of how a prominent Christian like John Chrysostom—at the time, a priest under the tutelage of the bishop Flavian in Antioch—and an influential figure of late paganism like the sophist Libanius dealt with a situation that required a determined display of their rhetorical prowess.

In this historical setting, it is particularly interesting that both authors used the same episode (a mother’s plea to an imperial emissary to save her son’s life) from opposing ideological positions. In what follows, I will pay particular attention to Libanius’ narrative of the episode, since it is my working assumption that the sophist adapted it as narrated by John Chrysostom and literaturized it by assimilating a real (or at least likely given the circumstances) event to characters and imagery in Euripides’ *Hecuba*. Thus, after a brief account of the

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1 Traditionally only twenty-two were included in this corpus. For the new number of homilies see A. Valevicius, “Les 24 homélies *De Statuis* de Jean Chrysostome. Recherches nouvelles,” *REAug* 46 (2000) 83–91.
events of the Riot of the Statues and of Chrysostom’s description of it, I turn to Libanius’ literaturized version of the same incident, exploring how he assimilated the situations and characters of Hecuba to the actual event. Finally, I will argue that his flexible use of a well-known piece of classical literature is a dynamic and distinctive example of the social and cultural ends toward which he employed classical paideia.

The Riot of the Statues

One of the most famous uprisings of Late Antiquity took place in Antioch, a city in which pagans, Jews, and Christians had been cohabitating for more than three centuries. We have numerous sources on the riot but lack a definite and unbiased account as the sources responded to diverse religious and cultural agendas. Although the different intentions behind the choice of issues addressed by Libanius’ orations 19–23 and by some of John Chrysostom’s De statuis (especially his homilies 3, 17, and 21) make it difficult to reach a consensus, agreement on basic facts has yielded a fairly exact idea of how events developed. In February 387, an extraordinary tax was imposed by the emperor Theodosius. After the honorati and curiales of Antioch found out about it, a multitude gathered in a spontaneous demonstration that culminated in desecrating and destroying the images and statues of the imperial family. Other sources are Ambr. Ep. 74; Soz. HE 7.23; Theodoret HE 5.20, HRel 13.7; Zos. 4.41.


4 On the responsibility for the violent actions Libanius (Or. 19.29–30: ὁ κακὸς/πονηρὸς δαίµων) and John Chrysostom (De statuis 21, PG 49.215: οἱ δαίµονες) blamed demons who orchestrated the riot, using the theatrical claque and foreigners to carry out the misdeeds. See P. Petit, Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IVe siècle (Paris 1955) 238–241; L. Cracco Ruggini,
rests and executions of some of the participants followed, while two emissaries—Caesarius the *magister officiorum* and Ellebichus the *magister militum*—were sent by the emperor to investigate the affair. The punishments (loss of the status of metropolis, imprisonment of *curiales*, closure of public spaces, and cessation of the distribution of food) led Antioch to send an embassy to appease the imperial wrath, which finally obtained the imperial pardon and the annulment of the punishments.

Among the many episodes that occurred before the city was forgiven by Theodosius, John Chrysostom and Libanius⁵ put special emphasis on the sufferings and bold actions of the mother of a young citizen whose liturgies and services had benefited Antioch. Both authors narrated how this mother interceded for her son’s life before Ellebichus. As we shall see, her courage and the desperation of her plea are the only points on which Libanius and Chrysostom agree. Their narratives differ greatly in the description of the mother, in the addressee of their praises, and, especially, in the literary strategy adopted.

Praising the monks: John Chrysostom *De statuis* 17

Chrysostom’s version of this episode attempted to cast a hagiographical light on the monks who inhabited the mountains around Antioch by eulogizing their actions on behalf of the city.⁶ According to the priest, they went to the city to per-

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⁶ For the relationship of Chrysostom with monasticism see Festugière,
suade the imperial emissaries to forgive the Antiochenes for their momentary frenzy. It is in the context of this effort to protect the city that Chrysostom narrates how

when the mother of one of the accused, uncovering her head, and exposing her grey hairs, laid hold of the horse of the judge by the bridle, and running beside him through the forum, thus entered with him the place of justice, we were all struck with astonishment, we all admired that exceeding tenderness and magnanimity. Ought we not, then, to have been much more impressed with wonder at the conduct of these men? For if she had even died for her son, it would have been nothing strange, since great is the tyranny of nature, and irresistible is the obligation arising from the maternal pangs! But these men so loved those whom they had not begotten, whom they had not brought up, yea rather, whom they had never seen, whom they had not heard of, whom they had never met, whom they knew only from their calamity, that if they had possessed a thousand lives, they would have chosen to deliver them all up for their safety.

The physical description of the mother is rhetorically articulated to increase the pathos of the scene. Her unveiling of her head and her grey hair contribute to the creation of the literary persona of a suffering suppliant mother in keeping with Christian standards. However, the final purpose of these lines


8 De statuis 17.4 (transl. Stephens).

9 On the multiplicity of significations of hairstyles in early Christianity, L. L. Coon, Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity (Philadelphia 1997) 32–34. Habits and occasions of veiling practices were changing and diverse: Dion. Hal. Ant.Rom. 15.9.2; Plut. Mor. 267A–C; Dio Chrys. 33.48. For an appraisal of the casting off of the veil in mourning see L. Llewellyn-Jones, Aphrodite’s Tortoise. The Veiled Woman in Ancient Greece (Swansea 2003) 303–305. On the different meanings of veiling in the early
was to praise the monks’ intervention, on the day of the tribunal when Antioch was in need of spiritual comfort, by turning the prisoner’s mother into the point of departure for a contrast. Her bold behaviour, Chrysostom details, was motivated by her motherly nature, a natural instinct that ruled her (ἡ τῆς φύσεως τυραννίς) and against which nothing could be done as it arose from motherhood (ἄμαχος ἡ τῶν ωδίνων ἄνάγκη). Her display of magnanimity and tender love (πάντες ἐθαυμάσαμεν τὴν φιλοστοργίαν, τὴν μεγαλοψυχίαν), therefore, was instinctively bound to protect her son.

What interests us is the marked contrast in the wording used by Chrysostom: while the anonymous mother acted as she did because she was carried away by a natural tendency, the monks Chrysostom was praising would choose to die instead of the prisoners (ἑλέσθαι πᾶσας ὑπὲρ τῆς τούτων ἐπιδοῦναι σωτηρίας). Their actions were not motivated by the link that motherhood entails nor was there an urge stronger than their will to act. These monks helped because they chose to. As Frans van der Paverd has shown, the underlying rhetorical strategy of


10 Van der Paverd, St. John Chrysostom 64–73. For the role of the mother Theodoret HRel 13.7 substituted a monk named Macedonius.


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Chrysostom’s homily intended to credit the monks with the postponement of the decision of the imperial emissaries in order to undermine the actions that pagans could have undertaken to help Antioch. If we are to believe Chrysostom, they even managed to send a written petition to the emperor to be read in Constantinople (17.2).12 Central to the larger strategy intended to support the Meletian faction of the Antiochene church in the context of an important religious schism,13 Chrysostom’s corpus of homilies on the Riot of the Statues deployed the episode of the brave mother confronting the emperor’s emissaries in order to support an a fortiori argument that the monks’ intervention was an important moment in the overall political and religious strategy to obtain the imperial pardon.14

Hecuba revisited: Libanius Or. 22.22

To a teacher of rhetoric steeped in classical literature and with a fondness for Euripides,15 the scene of a mater dolorosa begging for her son’s life to an authority figure in the aftermath of a violent conflict would have provided a tempting opportunity to portray the event in a Euripidean style.16 The ease of

12 Van der Paverd, St. John Chrysostom 19, 68–80, 148–149.

13 The development and implications of this schism fall outside the scope of this paper. See J. N. Guinot, “Evêque et pasteurs à Antioche sous l’empereur Théodose: L’engagement chrétien dans la défense de la cité après la sédition des statues,” in Vescovi e pastori in epoca teodosiana (Rome 1997) 461–467.

14 This strategy was not alien to John Chrysostom, for whom “a woman’s figure is used to comment on the customary activity of men” (Leyerle, Theatrical Shows 180).


such a comparison was positively sanctioned by the friendly connection that Libanius had with the addressee, the magister militum Ellebichus, who was himself acquainted with Greek literature and for whom the sophist had already composed an encomium (Or. 22.2).17

Compared with Chrysostom’s De stat. 17, Libanius’ Or. 22.22 offers a more complex account of the scene. First, Libanius provides us a glimpse of the young man’s achievements: “among those to be examined was a fine young man who had won renown in many embassies and all forms of public service, and had taken his father’s place in fulfilling civic duties.” After he was imprisoned, his mother, overcome, “bared her head and loosed her aged hair, ran to his bosom, took her hair in her hands and clasped it about him, pleading for her son with pitiful cries. Her tears flowed over the general’s feet, his over her head. No one dragged her away, nor yet did he himself repulse her.” Finally, it is Ellebichus who is praised by Libanius: “He so devoted himself to her long-drawn prayers that he seemed to be superhuman. From every side there rose prayers for the preservation of his daughter, since he so conducted himself to people in distress and had expelled all harshness and severity from his mind” (transl. Norman).

Libanius drew on the vocabulary and narrative pattern used in Chrysostom’s version, as the stylistic and linguistic similarities between the two texts show: both are divided into two sections, praising the anonymous mother and those who assisted her (the monks/Ellebichus), and in both accounts γυνώσατε is accompanied by several participles that describe her and the desperate acts she undertook to attract Ellebichus’ attention.18


18 Chrys.: γυμνώσασα τὴν κεφαλήν καὶ τὰς πολιάς δείξασα, τοῦ μέλλοντος δικαίζειν κατασχοῦσα τὸν ἱππον ἀπὸ τοῦ χαλίνου, καὶ παρατέρνουσα διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς οὕτως εἰς τὸ δικαστήριον συνεισήλθε. Lib.: γυμνώσασα μὲν
In this sense, Chrysostom and Libanius seem to follow Aristotle’s prescripts on how to arouse an audience’s sympathy by presenting a pitiable mother who was helped in a time of desperate need. After this, the priest and the sophist end their accounts by remarking upon the monks’ and Ellebichus’ sympathy, respectively. The striking resemblance of these two passages has not passed unnoticed by scholars and has provoked different opinions. Whilst Goebel accused Libanius of plagiarism due to a desire for public recognition (“ut laudis erat cupidissimus”), Norman excused the sophist, arguing that the common subject-matter should explain the thematic and verbal similarities. Petit and Leppin hold that each text was composed with different purposes in mind: Chrysostom would aim to emphasize the philanthropic character of the monks, and Libanius would underscore the civic and political import of the episode.

Clearly, the religious and political dimension of the riot has been the predominant criterion when examining the uprising and, consequently, has caused scholars to overlook the literary references in Libanius’ version. Obviously, Libanius wanted to counter the role of the monks in Chrysostom’s homily by underlining Ellebichus’ humane nature as the decisive factor in


20 R. Goebel, De Ioannis Chrysostomi et Libanii orationibus quae sunt de seditione Antiochensium (Gottingen 1910) 49; Norman, Libanias 239.

21 Leppin, in Gedeutete Realität 118; Petit, Libanias 243–244. For further implications of these accounts (especially Chrysostom’s) see van der Paverd, St. John Chrysostom 70–71.
obtaining Theodosius’ forgiveness. Or. 22 is part encomium, therefore panegyrical words were expected. In my opinion, the religious and political issues underlying Libanius’ work should be supplemented by a closer reading of the literary models on which he relied.

A suppliant mother such as that described by Chrysostom and Libanius was easily likened to the kind of “stylisation of passion” presented by the Euripidean Hecuba in the aftermath of conflict (Trojan War/Riot of the Statues), an aged mother pleads for the life of her offspring (Polyxena/the young man arrested) to an authority figure (Odysseus/Ellebichus). The assimilation between the two mothers was easy enough to make, especially for Libanius, a sophist whose mastery of classical texts was supplemented by his ability to find the appropriate kairos to deploy them. A confessed admirer of Euripides, he cited Hecuba in several contexts: in Or. 2.49 the tragedy appears in a list of classical plays (Oedipus, Hippolytus, Bacchae, Medea), which reveals the prestige of Hecuba in the late antique theatre—in fact, lines 596–597 are quoted in his Defense of the Pantomime (64.47). It is also important to note that he used 864–867 in the proemium of Or. 25.3, a very fitting quotation for an oration.

22 His more complete attack on monasticism is his Pro templis (Or. 30).

23 As to the literary genre of Or. 22, A. Cameron and J. Long, Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius (Berkeley 1993) 179, do not consider it a panegyric, but Norman, Libanius 240, and J. Ernesti, Princeps Christianus und Kaiser aller Römer. Theodosius der Große im Lichte zeitgenössischer Quellen (Paderborn 1998) 437, think otherwise.


26 On the symbolism of the setting where the tragedy takes place see F. I. Zeitlin, Playing the Other. Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature (Chicago 1996) 173–176.


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that deals with slavery and that capitalizes on these lines of Euripides, alluding to individual freedom, private constraint, or civic norms.\textsuperscript{28} The lyric tone of Libanius’ \textit{Ep}. 1424.2, in which he laments the death of the emperor Julian, is indebted to his use of line 285 (τὸν πάντα δ’ ὀλβον ἡμας ἐν μ’ ἀφείλετο), which had become a tragic axiom used in elegiac contexts.\textsuperscript{29}

Hecuba also appears in his pro gymnasmata as a motherly and pitiable figure in the invective against Hector (\textit{Prog}. 9.2.12) and in a speech in the character of Hector’s wife (11.2.2).\textsuperscript{30} Libanius, therefore, resorted to Hecuba (both the character and the homonymous tragedy) in two main contexts: the situation of the defeated after a conflict, and motherly lamentation,\textsuperscript{31} precisely the two main themes of \textit{Or}. 22.22.\textsuperscript{32}

In this passage, the strong symbolism of the unnamed mother who suffers for her son’s imprisonment\textsuperscript{33} is strengthened by Libanius’ emulation of Euripides’ physical portrait of Hecuba


\textsuperscript{29} Men. Rh. 434.12 mentions Hecuba in his theorization of monodies.

\textsuperscript{30} For Hecuba as a pitiable figure see C. Segal, \textit{Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow} (Durham 1993) 166–167.


\textsuperscript{32} For the rhetorical usages of Euripides’ \textit{Hecuba} see Mossman, \textit{Wild Justice} 94–141.

and by lexical similarities. The tragedian is consistent in making the *dramatis personae* and Hecuba herself stress that she is an old woman (59, 156, 170, 203, 389, 495, 621, 810), with aged hands (64, 143, 876–877) and white hair (500). In Libanius, the mother unveils her head and her white hair reveals her as aged (γυνώσασα μὲν τὴν κεφαλήν, λύσασα δὲ τὴν γεγηρα-κυών τρίχα). In the tragedy, Polyxena inquires why Hecuba is crying out (177), unaware that she will be told that she is going to be sacrificed; in the sophist’s passage, the mother also cries out for her son’s sake (ᾔτει µὲν τὸν υἱὸν ἐλεείνον βο-ῶσα). Both women could not refrain from shedding tears (*Hec.* 230, οὐδὲ δακρύων κενός; *Or.* 22.22, δάκρυα δὲ τὰ µὲν ἐκείνης) and from supplicating (*Hec.* 97, 145; *Or.* 22.22, τῷ µήκει τῆς ἱκετείας) to save the lives of their children (*Hec.* 74, 79; *Or.* 22.22, πανταχόθεν εὐχαὶ σώζεσθαι).

Thus, Libanius’ treatment of the suppliant mother as Hecuba was rendered deliberately unoriginal in order to make the assimilation between the two characters more easily recognisable. But what makes the account singularly dynamic is

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34 Cf. the sarcastic allusion to Hecuba’s age in an epigram about a woman making up to look younger, *Anth.Gr.* 2.408: οὔποτε φῦκος καὶ ψύμος τεῦξε τὴν Ἑκάβην Ἑλένην.

35 In *Prog.* 12.18 Libanius describes a statue of the sacrifice of Polyxena.


37 This scene resembles that of women mourning in Homer, see K. Der-derian, *Leaving Words to Remember. Greek Mourning and the Advent of Literacy* (Leiden 2001) 52–53. See also S. Lawrence, *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 2013) 214–215, and 218–224 for a *status quaeestionis* on how Hecuba’s character has been reappraised.

38 Hecuba played a secondary role in classical art and in most classical literature, see Mossman, *Wild Justice* 254–263, and 211: “late writers often blur the distinction between the Hecuba of Homer and those of the two Euripides plays”; 219: “by the end of antiquity, a conglomerate figure made up of the Hecubas of Homer and Euripides was a universally recognizable
that the sophist did not bow to the tragedian’s authority but revised the characteristic features of Odysseus, Hecuba’s antagonist in Euripides’ play, in order to present Ellebichus as a morally improved and more compassionate version of the hero. The enabling of praise of Ellebichus’ attitude was achieved by subverting the features of the manipulative Odysseus, whose renowned capacity for disguise and deceitfulness gives way to the irreproachable ethics of the magister militum who empathized with a suffering mother in a moment of extreme uncertainty. Unlike the Euripidean Odysseus, Libanius made Ellebichus occupy the moral high ground of the episode.

Ellebichus resembled Odysseus in that both held positions of command and shared a strong concern with the interests of the state, but the magister militum differs from the hero in that Ellebichus found a way to combine his personal sympathy towards an individual with decisions that affected the entire community. Libanius illustrated such empathy by paying particular attention to the physical contact between a pitiable and an authoritative figure, with the goal of intensifying the contrast between Odysseus and Ellebichus. In Hecuba, embracing—physical contact among the characters—is revealing of how their relations are conducted: Odysseus warns Hecuba to


surrender and not to compel him to separate Polyxena from her by force (225–226), and the suppliant Hecuba must swallow her pride and grasp Odysseus to beg him not to tear her daughter from her (275–278). Odysseus remains adamantly insensitive to Hecuba’s pleas despite the fact that she reminds him of when he came to spy on Troy and, after being recognized, touched Hecuba’s knees in supplication for his life (239–250). Ellebichus, by contrast, showed a compassionate disposition and allowed physical contact with the anonymous mother to the point that his tears flowed onto her head, completely the opposite of Odysseus who turns his head away so he would not be touched by Polyxena (342–344). By adding this humane gesture to his portrait of Ellebichus, Libanius makes the mother’s antagonist a sympathetic administrator of the moral justice denied to Hecuba in the Euripidean play. Likewise, in another reworking of the play, Libanius portrays Ellebichus’ physical contact with the mother as a sign of reciprocation and awareness of others’ suffering, a gesture “beyond human nature” (κρείττων εἶναι φύσεως ἀνθρωπείας), whilst in Hecuba the chorus of Trojan Women underestimates Odysseus’ imperviousness to the tears of a suppliant mother as they confess that not crying in such situation would defy “human nature” (296–298, οὐκ ἔστιν οὕτω στερρὸς ἀνθρώπου φύσις ἂν γόων σών καὶ μακράν ὀδυρόματος κλύουσα θρήνος οὐκ ἂν ἐκβάλοι δάκρυ), a state achieved by Odysseus, as he did not pity Hecuba nor cry.

41 For the importance of physical contact in this passage see C. E. Mercier, “Hekabe’s Extended Supplication,” TAPA 123 (1993) 154–156.
43 C. Collard, Hecuba, Euripides (Warminster 1991) 148: “Od. moves to avoid the physical contact by a suppliant which obliges response and curtails independence.”
44 Romero Mariscal, in En Grecia 489–490.
The purposes of reenactment

Beyond the lexical and thematic resonances, Libanius’ Or. 22.22 captured the oxymoronic hints of Euripides’ play (a barbarian woman lecturing Greeks on Greek virtues; a slave who is spiritually free enough to put into practice her own decisions; a powerful figure like Odysseus constrained by circumstances) and applied them to a similar setting (a moment of uncertainty after a convulsive event), yet with his own agenda. Libanius portrayed as Hecuba the mother of the young man, who displayed great courage when she approached Ellebichus, but the panegyric nature of Or. 22 called for a twist in the story: unlike the ruthless Odysseus, the magister militum was shown making a public demonstration of sympathy for those in need.

But why did Libanius assimilate the incident of the young man’s mother to Euripides’ Hecuba? What did the sophist want to achieve? In my opinion, opting for this literary approach enabled him to strike three different targets in a single and well-crafted blow.

First, from a religious viewpoint Or. 22.22 is paradigmatic of the rhetorical strategy adopted by the sophist in the corpus of orations on the Riot of the Statues, in that its main goal was to neutralize the influence of John Chrysostom’s preaching on the Antiochenes. The priest advocated a religious and cultural programme that condemned pagan practices and the attending of events based on pagan culture. Such caveats, summed up in his Contra ludos et theatra, are scattered throughout his work and are particularly incisive in censuring theatrical representations. Unlike Chrysostom, Libanius wanted his audience to

45 Zeitlin, Playing the Other 208–211.
enter and reenact the world of theatre, for in doing so the cultural and moral values transmitted by the classical theatre would come to life again. His choice to reenact a theatrical scene instead of developing a rhetorical counter-argument should not be seen as a pointless literary construction. As Isabella Sandwell has rightly pointed out, Libanius’ orations on the Riot of the Statues are subtle works in which he confronted the weakening position of pagan culture at the end of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{48} In this context, responding to Chrysostom’s praise of the monks with a theatricalized version of the same incident fit the sophist’s political and religious agenda.\textsuperscript{49}

Second, choosing to allude to a theatrical text as the means of expressing civic concerns should not surprise us, since Greek tragedy and a city’s political life had always been linked. In this connection, it is not unexpected that Libanius expressed his concern for Antioch’s safety after the uprising through recourse to a well-known scene in Euripides.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, if in the play Polyxena symbolizes Hecuba’s πόλις (160, 281, 494, 669, 811), in \textit{Or. 22.22} Libanius emphasizes the young man’s achieve-
ments in public service and liturgies in Antioch. Hecuba’s lament for being ἄπολις (669) after the death of Polyxena was a fear that Libanius to some extent shared. Denunciation of the ruinous burden of liturgies and the exhausted resources of the curiales became a theme of his work, so the reference to the detention of a young man who was fulfilling civic duties should be understood as a rhetorical strategy to symbolize the vital importance of the curiales to the wellbeing of Antioch. Unlike Odysseus’ decision which made Hecuba ἄπολις, Ellebichus’ thoughtfulness towards those on whom Fortune had turned her back (πρὸς ἄτυχοῦντας) caused him (and the other emissary

51 Note the rhetorical disposition of his renowned deeds, placed between μήτηρ and the participles modifying her: μήτηρ γὰρ δὴ τῶν ἐν τοῖς κρι


55 ἄτυχησιν/εὐτυχῆσιν are a recurrent image in the play (282–283, 301,
sent by Theodosius, the magister officiorum Caesarius) to issue an exonerating report that prevented further suffering for the mother and benefited the political and financial system of Antioch. Thus Libanius transferred Hecuba’s comparison of Polyxena and the πόλις to the civic sphere of late antique Antioch, implying that imprisoning curiales like the young man would bring the city to ruin.56

Finally, Libanius’ literaturization of an historical event and assimilating it to a famous theatrical scene was at the core of his conception of how Greek paideia should be displayed and performed. “Allusion was preferred to precision,” Leyerle has pointed out, “Libanius thought obviousness vulgar.”57 The sophist did not consider it necessary to make an explicit introduction to the literary passage he was about to use; instead, he regarded Greek paideia as a palimpsest that could be rewritten according to what the situation demanded. Lieve Van Hoof has argued for considering Greek culture as an active element in the political life of Late Antiquity.58 In this sense, Libanius’ use of Euripides’ Hecuba to portray a conflict exemplifies what he wanted Greek paideia to become: a flexible and useful language to manipulate and adapt to all circumstances.

Conclusion

The priest’s and the sophist’s cultural and religious agendas led to two different rhetorical strategies which, eventually, helped Libanius construct his own rewriting of the Euripidean

377, 404, 429, 541, 619, 751, 904, 970, 989, 1228).


Hecuba. His Or. 22.22 represents more than a few lines showing off his knowledge of Euripides and his sense of kairos. This passage gives us an example of the vitality of late antique literature, as it proves to what extent the classical legacy became a key player in religious and cultural struggles. The sophist knew how to capitalize on an episode that John Chrysostom had used to exalt the monks. By remolding it and likening it to one of the most iconic moments of Euripides’ Hecuba, Libanius ensured that his performance of a piece of classical paideia would have an immediate impact. His reenactment of the key leitmotifs of the Euripidean tragedy brought pagan paideia into action as part of a dynamic argument that could be recast into different shapes depending on the situation. Libanius did not simply assimilate the anonymous mother to the well-known character of Hecuba but also played on the male character. The creation of a morally improved version of Odysseus impersonated by Ellebichus shows that classical paideia was a powerful instrument flexible enough to be adapted to new and changing circumstances.59

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