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Tiresome or Pamphleteering? The Use of Periautologia in Libanius of Antioch's *To Those Who Called Him Tiresome* (Or. 2)

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Abstract: The study of periautologia (“self-praise”) in Ancient Greek literature has been somehow overlooked even though its presence is felt in numerous works. The absence of the analysis of periautologia is even more remarkable in the case of the works composed by the sophist Libanius of Antioch given the autobiographical nature of most of his speeches. Thus, in this paper I surveyed the use and the purposes of periautologia in one of his speeches—*Or. 2, To those who called him tiresome*—in order to ascertain which rhetorical and literary strategies were deployed by Libanius. The sophist’s concern with losing his influence in the cultural and political milieu of the end of the fourth century AD contributes to explain the frequent use of periautological passages in his *Or. 2*.

Keywords: periautologia; Libanius of Antioch; Plutarch; late antique rhetoric; late antique paganism; pagan party



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1. Introduction

In her *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity*, Averil Cameron (2014, p. 23) described Late Antiquity as a period “full of talk”. It is almost impossible to disagree with this statement, but it can be nuanced in a number of ways. Where did that talk take place? Who conducted it? Under which circumstances? How was it carried out? To begin with, we know that orators, philosophers and sophists had a difficult task in public speaking occasions. On top of persuading their audiences, they needed to present themselves as ethically and morally unblemished figures whose speeches only sought the common good. When reading their texts, one is under the impression that they were sources of eloquence and delight to those fortunate enough to hear them, but the reality was quite different. Composing, memorizing and delivering a speech meant hard work. In spite of its anecdotal nature, the following passage by Synesius speaks volumes about the technical aspects involved in a rhetorical delivery. In *Dio*, Synesius parodies the anxieties suffered by a sophist desperately willing to meet the expectations of a demanding audience. “He has endured many nights without sleep”, Synesius states (Fitzgerald 1930, *Dio*, chp. 12), “and has been on the strain many days, and has come near to distilling away his soul by hunger and anxieties, that he may compile something good . . . he has also bathed himself before the appointment and has gone to meet it with brilliant dress and appearance in order that he too may be a noble spectacle”¹. The orator’s efforts, however, proved insufficient to please an audience that “would like him merely to open his mouth and gape with uplifted hand like a statue, and then become more voiceless than a statue, for thus they could leave, as they had long desired”.

Thanks to the analysis of passages such as Synesius’, our understanding of the dynamics of communication processes in the late antique period has grown significantly over the last few decades, yet there is still room for improvement. Just as Synesius’ speaker shows us the toils that the performative dimension of a speech involved, late antique *pepaideumenoi* struggled when it came to making their actions known without being seen as egotistical. They needed to skilfully navigate the muddy waters of publicizing their

triumphs while being perceived to be humble. It was on such occasions that the appropriate use of periautologia, i.e., speaking about oneself in positive terms, became indispensable. Periautologia afforded public speaking figures the rhetorical and literary strategies that allowed them to promote themselves and to announce their achievements without breaking the codes of conduct of their time.

This paper, therefore, aims to show how periautologia worked in the late antique cultural milieu by focusing on its use in the speeches of one of the most representative figures of the fourth century AD: the sophist Libanius of Antioch. In the first place, a survey of periautologia in ancient sources and its treatment in modern scholarship is provided. Then, I analyse Libanius' *To those who called him tiresome* (*Or. 2*) through the lens of periautologia, as this speech stands out in his oeuvre because of the extent of the self-praise exercised by Libanius. Finally, I will contextualize the use of periautologia in his *Or. 2* as part of Libanius' strategy to try to remain an influencing member of the political and cultural elites of Antioch.

2. A Theoretical Approach to Periautologia

Apart from Plutarch's opusculum *On praising oneself inoffensively* (which will be dealt with below), ancient literary and rhetorical treatises did not address periautologia thoroughly from a theoretical point of view. The most recurrent topic in these sources focuses on the ethos of the speaker and the possibility that his public persona could be associated with moral and ethical flaws on the grounds of self-boasting. Aristotle, for instance, warned of the risks involved when talking about oneself, as the ethos of the speaker could be compromised. In this case, he recommended that someone else speaks on their behalf (Freese 2020, *Rh.* 1418b 23–27)²: “In regard to character, since sometimes, in speaking of ourselves (περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγειν), we render ourselves liable to envy, to the charge of prolixity, or contradiction, or, when speaking of another, we may be accused of abuse or boorishness, we must make another speak in our place”. Cicero's and Quintilian's estimation of periautologia ran along the same lines. Both thought that speaking about oneself could damage the auctoritas of the speaker if he did not restrain the extent of self-praise. Quintilian argued this point by contrasting Demosthenes' improper use of periautologia exemplified in his self-boasting attitude with Cicero's subtle and nuanced praise of his own actions (*IO* 11.1.22–24)³: “I am not saying that an orator ought not sometimes to speak about his own achievements, as Demosthenes (to quote him again) does in his speech for Ctesiphon. There however he put matters right by showing that he had been driven to this, and throwing all the odium back on to the man who had forced him into it. Likewise, Cicero often speaks of the suppression of Catiline's conspiracy; but he sometimes ascribes it to the courage of the senate, and sometimes to the providence of the immortal gods. It is when opposing his enemies and detractors that he commonly makes greater claims for himself, because he had to defend his policies when they were brought up against him”. Therefore, for Quintilian, self-defence and sharing one's achievements with others were circumstances that made periautologia admissible. The precepts given in *On forceful speaking*, a rhetorical work attributed to Hermogenes⁴, were even more concise. The author offered three methods that render periautologia advisable: generalization of language (κοινότης λόγου) so the speaker did not need to resort to the first person when speaking about himself, but counted himself within a larger group of people; claim of necessity (ἀνάγκης προσποιήσις) by showing that the circumstances forced the speaker to talk about his own virtues and merits; and change in person (προσώπου ὑπαλλαγῆ) when the speaker addressed his boastful remarks to his adversaries.

Consequently, throughout Antiquity, instructions on how and when to praise oneself sought to circumvent the faults usually attached to periautologia: deceitfulness, arrogance, and vanity on the speaker's part. However, it would be hard to find a context in which a public figure, to a greater or lesser extent, did not need to talk about himself in a flattering tone. In addition, in the particular case of the political and cultural arenas of Imperial times, those contexts multiplied to such an extent that the knowledge and use of periautologia

became essential to remaining as an influencing member of the decision-making circles (Fields 2008, pp. 153–55). This is why the advice given by Plutarch in his *On praising oneself inoffensively* is an essential testimony for our understanding of the rhetorical and literary strategies deployed by public figures when speaking about themselves in a complimentary way. Although designed to assist politicians and statesmen when it came to defending their actions, this work compiled strategies and recommendations that were also relevant for sophists, philosophers and leading religious figures. Modern scholarship is increasingly paying more attention to this work, yet approaches vary when summarizing the occasions on which Plutarch deemed the use of periautologia to be suitable. Lea Niccolai, for example, has catalogued those occasions into nine cases: periautologia when the speaker defends themselves from an unjust or unfortunate accusation; contrasting how shameful the behaviour of the speaker would have been if he had acted in the opposite way; combining one's self-praise with that of the audience; eulogizing others' similar qualities; giving chance, fortune and the gods part of the credit for the praise; correction of the praise mentioned by others; adding shortcomings of one's own; explanation of the difficulties overcome to gain the praise; and finally, periautologia should seek the common good⁵.

A very different attitude towards periautologia can be found in Aelius Aristides' *On an Incidental Remark* (*Or.* 28), a work that combines advice on how to praise oneself with Aristides' own experience on the matter. The orator justified self-praise in those instances in which speaking positively about oneself indicated self-knowledge understood as a philosophical virtue (Miletti 2011, p. 14). Incidentally, self-knowledge was considered a quality that needed the gods' approval, so, in the end, for Aristides, periautologia also became a form of both obeying and honouring the gods.

These sources related to periautologia have been revisited by modern scholarship with the aim of explaining the role of self-praise in the context of political, cultural and religious debates in both Imperial and late antique times. Laurent Pernot has delved into the social roots of the interactions between the individual and his historical context that came to legitimize the use of periautologia, as exemplified by Demosthenes' political speeches. The works by Chrysanthou, Fields and Niccolai have focused on the purposes of self-praise in the work of particular authors (Aristides, Plutarch and Julian), but in these three instances the emphasis is placed on how the use of periautological strategies helped those authors advance their cultural and political agendas. The edition and analysis of Aristides' *On an Incidental Remark* by Lorenzo Miletti has renewed interest in the role of periautologia in Imperial times and has shown the multi-layered dimension of this concept. On the other hand, the convergence of early Christian studies and Classics has made possible the analysis of Christian texts—principally those written by Paul—through the lens of periautologia (see Bianchini 2006; Pernot 1998; Chrysanthou 2018; Fields 2008; Niccolai 2017; Miletti 2011; Kowalski 2013; Smit 2014). All these references are valuable not only for their intrinsic interest, but also because they interact with other fields of study from the late antique period that help us to have a better knowledge of the self-perception of cultural elites in Antiquity.

3. The Use of Periautologia in Libanius' *To Those Who Called Him Tiresome* (*Or.* 2)

Examples of the use of periautologia can be found in most of the works by the sophist Libanius of Antioch, since he was one of the most self-referential authors in Antiquity. However, for the sake of clarity and consistency, this paper deals with the sophist's deployment of periautological strategies in his *To those who called him tiresome* (*Or.* 2). Composed in the winter of the years 380–381, this speech cannot be ascribed to a single rhetorical genre, as *Or.* 2 contains elements of autobiographical literature as well as examples of epideictic and forensic rhetoric. Libanius wrote it when he was 67 years old and was going through a critical period in his career and in his personal life⁶. Some of those problems had been motivated by the attacks he was receiving for his criticism of contemporary mores and of what he thought was the sharp decline of public institutions in an increasingly Christianized society. Although he did not give the names of his enemies, it is not difficult

to appreciate that Libanius' response to those attacks was aimed at those Christians with habits opposed to the Classical values that he wanted to embody and persistently heralded. It was this insistence on the vindication of the Classical values that gained him the reputation of being tiresome and that explained the composition of *Or. 2*. To this accusation he replied by adopting the pose of an uncompromising laudator temporis acti, surprised at being verbally abused in his later years (*Or. 2.2*): "it might justifiably be a matter for surprise how it is that these criticisms have not been aired during all this long time past. Plenty of other criticisms have been made, falsely of course and by my personal enemies, but later on they came to feel sorry and almost fell on bended knee to beg for the pardon, which they got, for their utter stupidity. And now this crops up, after waiting for my 67th year to do it"⁷. This statement prompted a number of rhetorical questions that, in turn, offered Libanius the opportunity to praise his own actions in several spheres of the cultural and public life (e.g., his own family—*Or. 2.10*; his self-control over earthly temptations—*Or. 2.12*; his success in the oratorical milieu—*Or. 2.13*).

It is in these first sections of the speech (*Or. 2.2-25*) that the sophist showed his prowess in mastering periautological strategies. Libanius conveyed what underlay the attacks against him (i.e., his defence of the old values and the independence of cities from the Imperial administration—*Or. 2.26*) and challenged his rivals to (*Or. 2.29*) "prove that the cities were no better off before". From this point on, Libanius unfolded his cultural, political and religious agenda under the premise that the Christianization of the institutions of cities had caused the empire to deteriorate drastically. From pagan rites to agriculture, from city councils to the army, the sophist complained about the general decline that was altering the form of the world as he knew it. His rebuttal is toned down in the last part of the speech. Libanius told his audience that, unlike the attacks he had received, his concerns were more than justified (*Or. 2.65*), and he finished by asking for divine intervention if things were going to get any better (*Or. 2.74*): "What recourse have we, then? Pray the gods to stretch their protecting hand over temples, farmers, councils and the language of the Greeks, to bring low all that has improperly been raised up, to allow what is unjustly despised to recover its due, and to grant me, in place of my present woe, full cause for joy".

Libanius capitalized on the criticism he had received in order to use periautological strategies in the first part of the speech. Although he did not explicitly state it, Libanius relied on one of the moral principles that, according to Plutarch, allowed speakers to praise themselves. Plutarch contemplated the use of periautologia when the speaker was not fortunate (541A): "the unfortunate (δυστυχοῦσι) as well can boast and extol themselves with better grace than the fortunate. For the fortunate are felt to lay hands on glory, as it were, and take their pleasure of it in gratification of their pride, but the others, far removed from ambition by their plight, are looked upon as breasting ill-fortune, shoring up their courage, and eschewing all appeal to pity and all whining and self-abasement in adversity"⁸. Libanius casted himself in this light throughout the speech as he set himself up as the gatekeeper of the thriving state of ancient cities that at that moment were not enjoying the favour of *τυχή* (*Or. 2.26*): "The complaint is that I am constantly praising and longing for what is dead and gone, denouncing the present day, harping on the past prosperity and the present misery (δυστυχῆν) of the cities, and that this is my tale, everywhere, every day". Therefore, *δυστυχία* served Libanius as a form of excuse that allowed him to develop the arguments of his periautologia.

In addition to this example, Plutarch's influence on the vocabulary and cases in which periautologia could be used looms large in Libanius' *Or. 2*. To begin with, the sophist's recourse to periautologia fits in one of the main cases provided by Plutarch (540C): "self-praise goes unresented if you are defending your good name or answering a charge"⁹. Indeed, Libanius was being attacked by those who had accused him of defending a system of values that had long since been overturned. Yet, he was perfectly aware that his speech could be received as an exercise of immodest self-boasting, so the very first words of the speech tried to cushion this effect by addressing it directly (*Or. 2.1*): "Tiresome and overbearing! (Ὄζις δὲ βαρύς, ὤζις δὲ ἐπαχθής) This is how I have been described by some

people". These two adjectives—βαρύς and ἐπαχθής—are used in the same sentence by Plutarch in his caveat against unmeasured self-praise (547D: οὐτως ἐπαχθής οὐδὲ βαρύς), hence it might be the case that Libanius was replicating Plutarch's warning about the misapplication of self-praise in the proemium of his speech. In any case, Libanius' speech pivoted around βαρύς, an adjective whose meaning had a very wide semantic range¹⁰. In *Or. 2*, however, the sophist makes clear what βαρύς meant for him (*Or. 2.17*): "I suppose that any benefactor who keeps harping on his kindness is tiresome (βαρύς), for his attitude is akin to reproach, and that causes discomfort". In this way, Libanius imbued βαρύς with a moral dimension and, in doing so, he anchored it to his mission as the (self-appointed) spokesman of the pagans in Antioch. This idea is expanded in Section 55, in which Libanius complained that his active defence of common problems had gained him the reputation of being βαρύς (*Or. 2.55*): "Isn't it the case, then, that you can see nothing wrong with them in this change and undermining of their fortunes, whereas anyone who cannot keep silent on this matter is vulgar and tiresome?".

In order to cast away resentments and antagonism, Plutarch also recommended the addition of one's self-praise in the praise of others (542D): "For as one who vilifies another in terms that apply to himself does not deceive the audience, which sees that he vilifies himself rather than the other, so when one good man commends another he reminds hearers conscious of his merit of himself, so that they at once exclaim: "And are not you one of these?"". At the beginning of *Or. 2*, Libanius stated that he had come to know the attacks against him because "Andromachus¹¹ told me so, and gave me his solemn word, though I would believe him without it, for he is a gentleman, a pupil of mine, and one who did not enjoy hearing such remarks. So, he was the most unlikely person ever to have fabricated such comments against me if they had not been made". Regardless of the degree of sincerity of these complimentary words about Andromachus, it is clear that the sophist carefully chose them to open his speech right after repeating the accusation against him (*Or. 2.1*: Ὡς δὲ βαρύς, ὡς δὲ ἐπαχθής). This arrangement is not gratuitous, but a premeditated way to show, from the beginning of the speech, the contrast between his enemies and the probity of his acquaintances (in this case, Andromachus). This comparison could imply that Libanius shared the virtues with which he credited Andromachus. In a similar way, Libanius refuted accusations of being tiresome for talking about his family's public service to Antioch. As a matter of fact (*Or. 2.10*), "I could say to all but a very few that, as far as families go, they couldn't even look me straight in the face, but I never have done so". By mentioning his family's merits on behalf of the city, Libanius intimated that he also partook in providing that public service, and this caused his enemies to call him βαρύς in the sense that Libanius gave to the term, i.e., being "a benefactor who keeps harping on his kindness" (*Or. 2.17*).

On sharing one's self-praise with others, Plutarch advanced another precept involving the gods (542E): "But those who are forced to speak in their own praise are made more endurable by another procedure as well: not to lay claim to everything, but to disburden themselves, as it were, of honour, letting part of it rest with chance, and part with God". Unlike in his *Autobiography*¹², in *Or. 2* Libanius did not seem so interested in sharing his self-praise with gods, but he resorted to mentioning them in order to vouch for his self-discipline when he was young (*Or. 2.12*): "Now, in my youth I succeeded in avoiding what it was not particularly easy to avoid, and besides the omniscient gods I have as witnesses for it those of my contemporaries who still survive, now frail, but then we were in our prime".

Correcting others' praise was another principle given by Plutarch. By making people change the terms of their praise, a speaker (543B) "leaves the impression not of delighting in encomiasts but of being displeased with them for praise that is unbecoming and bestowed for the wrong reasons, using his better points to draw attention from the worse, not from a desire for praise, but to show how to praise aright". In *Or. 2*, Libanius wanted to give the impression of being displeased (*Or. 2.23*) when he commented on the applause and excessive compliments with which his rhetorical performances were greeted, and confessed

that he had tried to correct his audiences (*Or.* 2.24): “I know that I have restrained them, and verbally too, and begged them not to weary themselves too much or to exhaust themselves in their applause for me”. Libanius was, in fact, familiar with the concept of correction (ἐπανόρθωσις) as a literary device, for he invoked it in the first lines of his *Autobiography*. In this work, ἐπανόρθωσις had a programmatic use because it allowed the sophist to regulate sayings and rumours concerning whether he had led a successful life (*Or.* 1.1): “Now each of these verdicts is far removed from the truth, and I must endeavour to correct (ἐπανορθῶσαι) them by a narration of my past and present circumstances, so that all may know that heaven has granted me a mixture of fortune, and that I am neither the happiest nor the unhappiest of men”¹³.

If words were not enough to avoid criticism for self-praise, Plutarch also gave advice on displaying some signs of modesty, such as blushing when praised by others (547B). A similar gesture of humility is shown by Libanius when he narrated that governors came to visit him. On those occasions, Libanius indicated that (*Or.* 2.9) “in my distaste I kept my eyes fixed on the ground and made it clear by so doing that I was embarrassed at the compliment”.

However, Libanius did not only follow the instructions given by Plutarch concerning periautologia. As commented above, the treatise *On forceful speaking* that has been attributed to Hermogenes also contained suggestions on what strategies to use when speaking about oneself in terms of praise. The generalization of language is one of the strategies recommended in this work and is presented with an example from Isocrates in which the rhetorician spoke (442) “about good and bad men and distinguishing the characters of good and evil friends, and thus he seems himself to be one of the good men”¹⁴. Similarly, Libanius did not give the names of the individuals that had criticized him but grouped them together as a single unit against him (*Or.* 2.2): “Plenty of other criticisms have been made, falsely of course and by my personal enemies, but later on they came to feel sorry and almost fell on bended knee to beg for the pardon, which they got, for their utter stupidity”. By employing this use of periautologia, Libanius wanted his audience to see him emerge as a merciful character in contrast with those who fabricated lies about him. Ps.-Hermogenes also cited the claim of necessity (ἀνάγκης προσηγοίης) as an excuse to resort to periautologia, a case that Libanius made when he intended to justify why he had brought up the topic of his reputation in front of his students, as seen above in the analysis of *Or.* 2.13 (“Did I ever mention such things unnecessarily-οὐκ οὔσης ἀνάγκης-, and take vain pride in them?”).

It should also be borne in mind that periautologia contains a strong forensic component, hence it should not surprise us to find rhetorical strategies belonging to this field, such as eikos arguments, that is, those arguments built on likelihood and probability in which conditional tenses and “what-if” scenarios are presented as a probable outcome¹⁵. An instance of the use of eikos as a means to refute accusations of being tiresome can be found in *Or.* 2.15–16, in which Libanius defended himself of accusations of being too boastful about his triumphs in rhetorical agones: “Haven’t you learnt this from other sources?”, Libanius reproached his accusers. “If it weren’t for them, you would be unaware of my triumphs, as far as I am concerned . . . Yet what was to be expected of me, if I were such as these people say I am? Every place, every occasion would reecho such a tale, every day, morning, noon and night”. By developing an eikos argument, Libanius claimed to be innocent of the accusation of spreading news about his success and, at the same time, managed to divulgate it without seeming to say it explicitly by playing with the likelihood of the conditional period and the mood of the verbs¹⁶.

4. The Political Purposes of Periautologia in Libanius’ *Or.* 2

The previous section aimed to show that Libanius made an extensive use of rhetorical and literary strategies relating to periautologia in his *To those who called him tiresome*. What I want to show in this section is the personal and political motivations that moved Libanius to compose a self-praise pamphlet like *Or.* 2. As stated above, he wrote it when he was

67 years old in a time that was shaped by dramatic and quick changes at the political and religious levels. The Antioch in which he was born in 314 was very different from the same city in the early 380s. Bowersock succinctly yet accurately illustrated those changes in the late antique society: “In 325 it was the emperor who ordered the bishops to assemble at Nicaea, but in 390 it was a defiant bishop [i.e., Ambrose of Milan] who was able to order the emperor to abase himself in public and alter his conduct”¹⁷. In addition to this, a number of unfortunate personal episodes narrated in his *Autobiography* (*Or.* 1.182-185) had weighed down the sophist’s morale by the time he composed his *Or.* 2.

These circumstances have prompted modern readers of Libanius to give different interpretations of the tone and the intention of the speech. Norman considers that the aggressiveness against Christians in some sections reflects Libanius’ sense of having lost his influence on social issues and “of his growing insecurity”. Martin, on the other hand, thinks that Libanius could never have composed a speech as acrimonious as *Or.* 2 if his status during the first years of Theodosius’ reign had not been strong enough¹⁸. López Eire underlines the quixotic vein of the speeches of Libanius during the reign of Theodosius and highlights their commitment to fighting against social inequalities. This was a sign, Eire believes, of Libanius’ *parrhesia* with Theodosius. For Eire it seems clear that “el emperador ante el que Libanio se sentía más libre, una vez muerto Juliano, fue Teodosio I”¹⁹. Watts agrees with Martin’s opinion and gives a more detailed explanation of the positive responses that Libanius’ complaints received from the emperor Theodosius in the 380s, especially those concerning anti-pagan legislation (Watts 2015, pp. 265–68).

Either in the context of a “pagan party” or as a member of the “pagan intelligentsia”²⁰, it is evident that in the 380s Libanius was still striving to be one of the main spokesmen of late antique paganism in a decade when the process of Christianization of the empire had been firmly established. In addition, the competitive atmosphere among pagan *pepaideumenoi* made things even more complicated for him (Van Hoof 2013). It could be argued, then, that Libanius employed periautologia in *Or.* 2 not only to defend himself from specific attacks, but mainly to retain the influence he had gained over the past few decades. His self-glorifying narrative in *Or.* 2 was designed to present him as an exemplar figure whose efforts for different sections of society made him indispensable if issues relating to religion, politics and culture were to improve²¹.

Indeed, the practice of periautologia was positively perceived when it encouraged the imitation of noble acts and exemplary behaviour. Plutarch repeated time and again that periautologia was understood as a seed from which (539F) “a greatest harvest of yet nobler praise springs up”. In another passage, he said that it can be likened to a piece of advice given by Nestor for its capacity to (544D) “exhort hearers and inspire them with emulation and ambition”. Consequently, in Plutarch’s opinion, an appropriate use of periautologia should result in showing the figure of the speaker as (545D) “a man who offers his virtue and understanding to his friends as security against despair”. This idea was behind some passages from the sophist’s *To those who called him tiresome*. For instance, when answering accusations of boasting about his oratorical and rhetorical abilities, Libanius replied that he had never unnecessarily volunteered information about his “labours in rhetoric” and that he had declined the offer to take up the chair of rhetoric in Athens. Obviously, the reason for this confession was made in the form of periautologia. “I have mentioned them to my students often enough”, Libanius clarifies (*Or.* 2.13), “but to encourage them, and to this the term “tiresome” is the last that should be applied”²².

However, above all, Libanius wanted to present himself as a link in the chain of public figures whose rhetorical and oratorical prowess had put them in the position to defend causes greater than themselves²³. Among the figures to whom Libanius wished to be associated, Demosthenes takes precedence over the rest of the orators from Classical Antiquity. Libanius, who was actually known as “little Demosthenes” or “Demosthenes the Second” in the Byzantine cultural tradition, composed a corpus of hypotheses to accompany the speeches of Demosthenes, in which his extensive knowledge of these works is proven. Libanius’ hypothesis of Demosthenes’ *On the crown* seems to be the template

upon which his *To those who called him tiresome* was composed. In this hypothesis, Libanius dedicated several sections to praising Demosthenes' commitment and loyalty to Athens. When the Athenian orator was repaid with a gold crown, envy makes its appearance, as envy is presented as the catalyst that moved Aeschines to denounce the gift of the crown. Demosthenes was well aware that in his defence he needed to talk about his own merits with moderation (*Or.* 18.4: ὡς μετριώτατα), which in itself was a burden because of the troubles involved in self-praise (*Or.* 18.4: ὁ δὲ πᾶσιν ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἐνοχλεῖ). Libanius, then, could have modelled his *Or.* 2 after Demosthenes' *On the crown*, as both compositions shared the same premise: an orator committed to the well-being of a city, who has to make his own defence using terms of self-praise because his rivals could not stand his success.

Another figure after whom he wanted to fashion his public persona was the sophist Aelius Aristides, whose *On an Incidental Remark* has been previously mentioned. Aristides' approach to periautologia was different than Plutarch's: while the latter was more audience-led, the former was culture-led, as he prioritized the sacred nature of rhetoric and culture over the reception that self-praise could have in the audience. It is this aspect of Aristides' approach to rhetoric that merited Libanius' admiration (Cribiore 2008, pp. 263–65). Both shared a conception of culture and rhetoric as a life-long work that was divinely inspired and representative of Greek culture, which is one of the main topics of Libanius' *Or.* 2. In *On an Incidental Remark*, Aristides made the point that talking about oneself in positive terms constituted a characteristic of the Hellenic spirit (18): "Hear the nature and the number of the examples which have escaped you, so that you may know that pride in one's action is in every way an old custom and a Greek one too, and that without this pride there would be accomplished among mankind neither a memorable deed nor a significant word, nor anything else"²⁴. This approach to periautologia did not exclude ethics, since Aristides understood self-praise as a philanthropic exercise (119), given that it was a generous act carried out by a person endowed with the divine gift of rhetoric (Fields 2008, pp. 163–66).

5. Conclusions

In his *Against Celsus*, Origen of Alexandria refuted Celsus' criticism of Christianity. In his rebuttal, Origen argued that Christ preferred acts over words, and for that reason he avoided talking about himself (I.48: περιῆστατο τὴν περιαιτολογία). Unlike Christ, Libanius wanted to accompany his actions with words, as I have tried to show in this paper. In his *To those who called him tiresome*, Libanius frequently resorted to rhetorical strategies based on periautologia. Most of those strategies had already been surveyed and catalogued by Plutarch, but influences from Demosthenes and Aelius Aristides can also be found in Libanius' speech. In addition to countering the accusations levelled against him as a result of being βαρῦς through periautologia, Libanius displayed his rhetorical prowess by turning around the charge of being tiresome. The sophist, therefore, resemantized the meaning of βαρῦς, so in *Or.* 2 "tiresome" did not have negative connotations but came to mean a (*Or.* 2.17) "benefactor who keeps harping on his kindness". In this way, being labelled as βαρῦς gave Libanius the opportunity to present himself as an exemplary figure who still had the social weight to maintain his influence in the decade of the 380s.

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Notes

¹ Translation taken from Fitzgerald (1930).

² Translation taken from Freese (2020).

- 3 Translation taken from [Russell \(2001\)](#).
- 4 On this treatise, see [Kennedy \(2005\)](#).
- 5 [Niccolai \(2017, pp. 1066–67\)](#). Other classifications can be found in [Gómez Cardo \(2022\)](#), who has established four cases, and [Smit \(2014\)](#) for whom there are eight.
- 6 On the personal issues Libanius experienced in his last years and how they affected him, see [Watts \(2015, pp. 253–56\)](#).
- 7 Translations of Libanius taken from [Norman \(1977\)](#).
- 8 Translations of Plutarch taken from [De Lacy and Einarson \(1959\)](#).
- 9 In a similar vein, Plutarch states that (543D): “But a man reproached for his very triumphs is entirely pardonable and escapes all censure if he extols what he has done. For this, it is felt, is not recrimination but self-defence”.
- 10 The *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* gives 18 entries for βάρυς.
- 11 On the identity of Andromachus, see [Martin \(1988\)](#).
- 12 In the role of gods (principally, the goddess Tychê) in Libanius’ *Autobiography*, see [Van Hoof \(2014, pp. 35–36\)](#). On the connections between the genre of autobiography and periautologia, see [Pernot \(1998, p. 124\)](#): “la periautologia devient autobiographie”.
- 13 See [Van Hoof \(2014, pp. 9–10\)](#) for an analysis of ἐπανορθῶσαι in Libanius’ *Autobiography*.
- 14 Translation taken from [Kennedy \(2005\)](#).
- 15 On the use of *eikos* arguments in forensic oratory, see [Gagarin \(2014\)](#).
- 16 *Or.* 2.15: εἰ δ’ οὐκ ἀπήγγελλον, ἡγνοεῖτ’ ἂν ἕνεκά γ’ ἐμοῦ τὰς νίκας. See [La Roi \(2020\)](#) for the grammatical construction of those periods.
- 17 [Bowersock \(1986, p. 299\)](#).
- 18 [Norman \(1977, p. 4\)](#); [Martin \(1988, pp. 5–7\)](#). [Gálvez \(2001, pp. 10–13\)](#) tries to reconcile these two antagonistic views.
- 19 [López Eire \(1991, p. 50\)](#). It should be said, though, that López Eire takes the content of Libanius’ speeches at face value without questioning their reliability as historical sources.
- 20 On the existence of a real pagan party or intelligentsia, see [Geffcken \(1978\)](#).
- 21 On the narratological implications of autobiographical passages in Libanius, see [Van Hoof \(2014, pp. 17–33\)](#).
- 22 Becoming an inspiration to his students and having a fruitful relationship with them was probably one of Libanius’ biggest concerns. On these topics, see his *Or.* 3 (“To his students about his speech”).
- 23 On Libanius’ understanding of the functions and mission of the sophist in Late Antiquity, see [Cabouret \(2001\)](#).
- 24 Translation taken from [Behr \(1981–1986\)](#).

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