

War and Peace in Themistius' Oration 10

This paper will analyze Themistius' speech *Ἐπὶ τῆς εἰρήνης* (Oration 10) and, through this analysis, evaluate the role of the orator and the Constantinopolitan Senate in the stipulation of the treaty between Valens and the Goths in late 369 and will place Themistius' ideas about the First Gothic War and the resultant treaty within a broader literary context.

Themistius delivered Oration 10 in early 370 ((Maisano 1995; Vanderspoel 1995) at Constantinople to which Valens had returned after the Gothic War of 367-369. This speech has been interpreted in different ways. Dagron (1968) considered it a celebration of the pacifist and antiwar policy that was supported by Themistius and the Constantinopolitan Senate in contrast to the militaristic agenda of Valens, and thus a document attesting to the opposition of Themistius to Valens' militaristic policy. Dagron believed that in 369, when Themistius travelled to the Danube, the orator was able to convince Valens to seek peace with the Goths. Dragon's interpretation has been popular and followed by other scholars (Daly 1972; Roberto 1997; Chauvot 1998). Heather (1991) interpreted the speech differently. For the British scholar, Oration 10 is mere propaganda and Themistius did not oppose Valens' policy. Errington (2000) has a similar view of the speech. A more balanced interpretation of the oration has been proposed by Vanderspoel (1995) and Raimondi (2000). The former points out that Themistius does not devalue the importance of the military operations but "he emphasizes different solutions, for financial and other reasons" (175) and believes that Themistius had a certain influence on Valens. The latter nuances the idea of a rigid opposition between Themistius-Valens and peace-war and puts the oration in context of the First Gothic War.

The argument of my paper lies in the middle ground marked out by Raimondi. I argue that Oration 10 is neither a mere celebration of the peace treaty of 369 nor a disapproval of

Valens' martial agenda. A careful analysis of this speech suggests that Themistius actually believed that defensive military operations were necessary in order to achieve and maintain peace. For Themistius, war and peace complemented each other; he wrote that "peace is the price of war" (131A) and also "peace has been extended along nearly all the frontiers, but the preparation for war has likewise been extended. For the emperor knows that they especially prove peace true who have been especially preparing for war" (138 B). In a long passage of the Oration (135B- 139A), Themistius enthusiastically talks of the strengthening of the Danubian *limes*, the restorations of old forts, especially *quadriburgia*, and the construction of new ones by Valens (Lenski 2002). Repairing, stocking, and garrisoning old forts and building new strongholds were the real means through which Valens put an end to the Gothic threat. Continued maintenance of military outposts and vigilance on the border are to be effective guarantees of peace after victory. From this perspective it seems that Themistius shares with other authors of the period (Ammianus, Vegetius, Eunapius, perhaps the anonymous writer of *De Rebus Bellicis*) concern over the coming of the Goths. However, unlike them, he considers peace and integration – the yoking of war and peace as handmaidens to each other- a possible solution to the Gothic problem.

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