

Analyzing the Audience in the *Protheoriae* and *Dialexeis* of Choricus

Although we have several extant works from Greek authors of the Second Sophistic, we are essentially missing half of every piece because these works were not meant to be simply read, but to be performed and shared with a live audience. Furthermore, the audience, especially in Greek declamation, plays a major role in the content of the sophistic speeches. Not only could the audience propose the theme to the declaimer, but even the slightest interaction from the audience could help to shape the direction of an orator's speech. Martin Korenjack (2000) discussed the interactions between a sophist and his audiences and argued that the performance was fundamentally a two-way communication. Because the audience has such an influence on the orator, one could assume that the composition of the audience would affect the speeches as well. For example, the education level of the audience could conceivably limit the orator's use of literary allusion or complexness of his speech. The evidence from the primary sources that we have on these audiences is scattered, sparse, and sometimes conflicting, which leads scholars to come to different conclusions about the general social standing, educational background, and age of the audience. Thomas Schmitz (1997) proposed that the sophists performed in front of mass audiences; in response, Tim Whitmarsh asserted that the speeches were "usually performed by the elite before an audience consisting primarily of the elite" (2005, 20). Continuing the discussion, Robert Penella leaned more towards an educated audience because "declamation was more of an acquired taste than epideictic oratory and did not have so much power to attract those who were less than fully educated" (2009, 13). However these are broad generalizations not only about the orators but the performance itself. It is necessary to take a closer look at the primary sources and analyze them case by case. In order to paint a more complete picture of the audience of at least one sophist, Choricus of Gaza (491–518 CE), I will be analyzing his

dialexeis and *protheoriae*. These two preliminary speeches give us much information about his audience because he is directly communicating with them during these speeches. The *dialexis* is described as a “conversational chat” between the audience and the rhetorician (Russell 1983), and in the *protheoria*, Choricus would sometimes address the audience and say something personal. After examining the evidence, I argue that his audience, which ultimately was affected by the place and occasion of the performance, was composed of his students and, preferably, the educated elite, although this was not always the case. Furthermore, there are instances in which Choricus is responding directly to his audience, whether he is trying to influence their interpretation of his speech or to deflect potential criticisms his audience may bring against him. I hope to show that a close-reading of a single author may shed some light on how other Late Antique orators interacted with their audience and who might have been in the audience for their declamations.

Bibliography

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