

THE ADDRESSEES OF AELIUS ARISTIDES, ORATIONS 17 K AND 21 K*

Among Aristides' extant works there are five speeches concerning the city of Smyrna, namely the first Smyrnaean oration (17), a monody for Smyrna (18), a letter to Marcus and Commodus concerning Smyrna (19), a palinode for Smyrna (20) and the second Smyrnaean oration (21). The historical context and purpose of Orr. 18, 19 and 20 are well known and uncontroversial. In contrast, although the dating of Orr. 17 and 21 relative to the others is not in doubt, their context and purpose have been divergently interpreted. In this note I will reargue the case that the dominant modern scholarly tradition, which conceives the speeches as invitations to the emperors Marcus and Commodus respectively to visit Smyrna, is wrong. Rather the speeches were addresses of welcome to two proconsuls, father and son, on their respective arrivals in Smyrna. Secondly, I will briefly indicate the general significance of this identification.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE SMYRNAEAN ORATIONS

These orations, as published, stand in chronological order. Or. 17 cannot be precisely dated, but provides a rich, if allusive, description of the renowned splendour of Smyrna (esp. sections 9–22) before the destruction caused by the famous earthquake of A.D. 178.¹ Orr. 18, 19 and 20 are all intimately connected to the earthquake and its aftermath. Or. 18 contains Aristides' lament for Smyrna, and 19, written a day after the event, is the famous letter to the emperors Marcus and Commodus which begs for imperial aid. Or. 20, the palinode, contains references both to the generous response of the emperors to Smyrna's plight and to the process of rebuilding and reconstruction which is apparently well under way, if not complete.² Or. 21, also, postdates the earthquake and contains reference to the generosity of the emperors. Reconstruction has now so far advanced that Aristides can devise a neat conceit. In the past it had been impossible to conceive of a more beautiful city than Smyrna. That conception has now been proved false, since the rebuilt city can be deemed superior to its former state.³

THE ADDRESSEES OF ORATIONS 17 AND 21

If the relative chronology of the five Smyrnaean orations is uncontroversial, it is, also, clear that Orr. 17 and 21 are closely interconnected. In Or. 21.3. Aristides reminds the addressee that, previously 'during the first office which he shared with his father', he has heard Aristides speak of the history and beauty of Smyrna.⁴ Aristides then proceeds (sections 3–5) to paraphrase elements of Or. 17 (esp. sections 3–10 and 22). He ends Or. 21 by noting the good fortune that the addressee has 'exactly renewed'

* All references are to the 1898 edition of Aristides by Bruno Keil.

¹ A.D. 178 is the traditional date. For ingenious argumentation for a date of early A.D. 177 see C. A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 112, n. 68. The exact date of the earthquake does not affect the relative chronology of the speeches.

² See especially sections 5–11 (the emperors' generosity) and 21–3 (reconstruction).

³ Or. 21.11.

⁴ κατὰ τὴν πρώτην . . . ἀρχήν, ἣν τῷ πατρὶ συνήρχες.

(ἀκριβῶς ἀνανεώσασθαι) his father's office by his stay in Smyrna.⁵ The addressees of Orr. 17 and 21, then, were father and son, the latter having been present with his father at the delivery of Or. 17. By the date of Or. 21, the son has come to hold the same office as his father had.

Two distinct views about the character of the official position held by the two addressees have emerged in the modern literature. A. Boulanger in his classic work of 1923 on Aristides interpreted (with some hesitation) Or. 17 as an address to Marcus Aurelius designed to encourage him to visit Smyrna.⁶ Or. 21 was, in turn, an address to Commodus, as sole emperor, designed to encourage him to visit Smyrna.⁷ In contrast Wilamowitz, in his review of Boulanger and in his famous article on Aristides, was the first to argue that the addressees of Orr. 17 and 21 were both proconsuls of Asia, the addressee of Or. 21 having served as legate to his father during his father's proconsulship.⁸ Despite the *auctoritas* of Wilamowitz, the majority of modern accounts which have paid any attention to this problem have continued to uphold the traditional view. So Cadoux in his book on ancient Smyrna followed Boulanger.⁹ Similarly the major account of second- and third-century Greek literature by B. Reardon describes, without hesitation, Orr. 17 and 21 as 'invitations' to Marcus and Commodus respectively to visit Smyrna.¹⁰ To my knowledge only C. A. Behr in his ingenious and learned work on Aristides has taken up and developed Wilamowitz's hypothesis.¹¹

A brief examination of the content of the speeches, especially of Or. 21, will show the difficulties inherent in the view that they were either invitations to visit Smyrna (rather than speeches of welcome delivered in Smyrna) or addressed to Marcus and Commodus respectively. Although Or. 17 considered in isolation could be construed as either an invitation or a speech of welcome, Or. 21 is quite explicit.¹² Aristides begins with an apology that he cannot be present in Smyrna to deliver his speech in person. This absence deprives him of the opportunity both of being with the addressee and of enjoying the newly restored city.¹³ This passage of itself refutes the notion that

⁵ Or. 21.16.

⁶ A. Boulanger, *Aelius Aristide et la Sophistique dans la province de l'Asie au III^e Siècle de notre ère* (Paris, 1923), pp. 384–5, cf. p. 161. He can describe this identification as the then 'commune opinion', though he notes the possibility that the addressee was a proconsul (p. 385 n. 4).

⁷ A. Boulanger, op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 389–90, cf. pp. 161–2.

⁸ U. v. Wilamowitz-Möllerndorf, review of Boulanger in *Kleine Schriften*, iii (Berlin, 1969), pp. 420–5 at 424 and 'Der Rhetor Aristides', op. cit., pp. 426–53 at 452–3. Wilamowitz had gained this idea from the Russian scholar Turzewitsch.

⁹ C. Cadoux, *Ancient Smyrna* (Oxford, 1938), p. 278 (Or. 17) and p. 284 (Or. 21) though he conjectures that Or. 21 was never delivered. Compare R. Pack, 'Two Sophists and Two Emperors', *C.P.* 42 (1947), 17–20 at pp. 17 and 19.

¹⁰ B. P. Reardon, *Courants Littéraires Grecs des II^e et III^e siècles après J.C.* (Paris, 1971), p. 134, who cites both Wilamowitz and Behr in his bibliography.

¹¹ C. A. Behr, op. cit. (n. 1), esp. p. 91 note la; cf. idem, *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works*, ii (Leiden, 1981) at p. 356 and pp. 361–3. For equivocation, see L. Pernot, *Les Discours Siciliens d'Aelius Aristide* (New York, 1981), p. 10 ('grands personnages').

¹² The phraseology of Or. 17.7 may however, indicate the governor's presence: πολλοὺς δ' ἂν τις αὐτῆς ἔχοι λέγωνας καὶ ἄλλους, καὶ δὴ τοὺς τελευταίους τοὺς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ σὺν ὑμῖν ἐν παντὶ τῷ παραστάντι πολλῆς τιнос ἔργον σχολῆς διηγῆσασθαι. ἀλλὰ τί δεῖ περὶ ταῦτα τριβεσθαι; αἷς μὲν γάρ ἐστι τῶν πόλεων ἐν μύθοις ἢ διηγῆσασιν ἢ φιλοτιμία, εἰς ταῦτα εἰκὸς ἀναχωρεῖν, ἥτις δὲ εὐθὺς ὀφθεῖσα χειροῦται καὶ οὐκ ἐὰ ζῆτεῖν τὰ ἀρχαῖα, τί δεῖ ταύτην σεμνύνειν ἀπὸ τῶν παρελθόντων, ἀλλ' οὐ περιηγείσθαι [καθάπερ οἱ τῆς χειρὸς ἔχοντες,] μάρτυρα τὸν θεατὴν τῶν λόγων ποιούμενον;

¹³ Or. 21.1 Ἐβουλόμην ἂν, ὦ θαυμάσιε, μάλιστα μὲν τὴν πόλιν οἷαν κατέλιπες τοιαύτην φανῆναι, εἰ δὲ μή, παρὼν αὐτὸς ποιείσθαι τοὺς λόγους, ἵν' ἀμφοτέρως ἐκέρδαινον, σοὶ τε συνῶν καὶ τῆς νῦν ἀνιούσης ἡμῖν πόλεως ἀπολαύων τὰ γιγνόμενα.

Or. 21 was an invitation rather than a speech of welcome. Furthermore the references back to the earlier speech which the addressee had heard with his father strongly imply that father and son had been present in Smyrna on that occasion.¹⁴ If Or. 21 was not an invitation, a further difficulty supervenes for the traditional interpretation, namely that on no occasion after the earthquake of 178 did Commodus visit Smyrna or plan to do so (as far as we know). Marcus and Commodus had set out from Rome for the second German expedition on 3 August 178. After Marcus' death in March 180 Commodus conducted peace negotiations before returning to Rome in October 180. He was never to leave Italy again.¹⁵

These objections are probably sufficient to refute the hypothesis that the addressees were Marcus and Commodus. A final decisive objection can be elicited from the internal evidence of Or. 21. On three occasions Aristides refers to the emperors (*sc.* Marcus and Commodus) in the third person. In section two he notes he was the first to write to the emperors on behalf of Smyrna, only a single day after the earthquake (the letter preserved as Or. 19); in section nine he celebrates the help provided 'in word and deed' by the emperors to Smyrna and in section twelve the emperors are characterised as the new founders of the city. These references imply both that Marcus and Commodus are still joint emperors (at least as far as Aristides knows) and that the addressee is to be differentiated from them.¹⁶

If obstacles of internal sense and historical context stand in the way of the traditional identification, no similar problems inhere in the hypothesis that the addressees were proconsuls, father and son, who were visiting Smyrna. Proconsuls of Asia during their year of office routinely toured their province for the purpose of holding assizes. Smyrna was an assize-centre which each proconsul would be expected to visit.¹⁷ Proconsuls of Asia (and of Africa) were assisted by three legates as well as a quaestor, and it was not unusual for them to choose a close relation, such as a son, as a legate.¹⁸

If these arguments are correct, it could be attractive to try to identify the two proconsuls. Behr, with typical ingenuity, suggested that the addressee of Or. 17 was P. Cluvius Maximus Paullinus.¹⁹ On a variety of grounds the identification must be rejected.²⁰ A more plausible candidate is provided by C. Pompeius Sosius Priscus (*cos. ord.* 149) who was probably proconsul in the early 160s. His son served as legate to him, became *cos. ord.* in 169 and proconsul of Asia at an unknown date which is conventionally given as c. 184, but could have been earlier.²¹ Such an identification

For Aristides' custom, later in his life, of not delivering his speeches in person see C. A. Behr, *op. cit.* (n. 1) (1968), pp. 113–14.

¹⁴ Note Or. 21.3 and 5.

¹⁵ See only H. Halfmann, *Itinera Principum* (Stuttgart, 1986).

¹⁶ Cf. C. A. Behr, *op. cit.* (n. 1) (1968), p. 91 n.l.a and pp. 113–14.

¹⁷ In general see G. P. Burton, 'Proconsuls, Assizes and the Administration of Justice under the Empire', *JRS* 65 (1975), 92–106 with literature.

¹⁸ See B. Thomasson, *Die Statthalter des römischen Provinzen Nordafrikas von Augustus bis Diocletianus*, i (Lund, 1960), pp. 58–64 and W. Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian*, (Munich, 1970), pp. 45–7.

¹⁹ C. A. Behr, *op. cit.* (n. 1) (1968), p. 41 n.l.a, a suggestion repeated in *idem* (1981), pp. 356 and 361.

²⁰ For decisive refutation see G. Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen* (Bonn, 1977), p. 218, who (*inter alia*) shows that the younger Paulinus was consul in 152 (not 162) while the elder Paulinus died before taking up office in Asia.

²¹ See G. Alföldy, *op. cit.* (n. 20), p. 216 and P. M. M. Leunissen, *Konsuln und Konsulare in der Zeit von Commodus bis Severus Alexander* (Amsterdam, 1989), p. 221. The date of 'um 184' is based on the assumption of an average interval of fifteen years between consulship and proconsulship.

must remain hypothetical until further epigraphic evidence accrues to help fill the lacunose *fasti* of Asia for this period.

Finally one consequence of the identification of the addressees as proconsuls, rather than Marcus and Commodus, deserves emphasis. Proconsuls (indeed all provincial governors) like emperors were the recipients of petitions, embassies and letters. They also heard forensic speeches during judicial proceedings. They heard speeches of a diplomatic and ceremonial character on occasions such as their arrival in a city or their attendance at a major festival. Extant examples of forensic speeches to proconsuls in the first two centuries of the principate are extremely rare; in fact I know of only one, Apuleius' famous *Apologia* which was delivered before the proconsul of Africa, Claudius Maximus, in A.D. 158/9. *A priori* we should expect ceremonial or diplomatic speeches of welcome, delivered to proconsuls as they toured their province, to have been extremely common. Ulpian in the second book of his treatise on the duties of proconsuls advises them to bear with good humour (*non gravate*) some of the speeches they will hear on arrival in the cities of their province.²² However the only two other extant examples of such speeches survive in the works of Aristides' contemporary from North Africa, Apuleius. In one example Apuleius is honouring at Carthage the departing proconsul of A.D. 162/3, Sex. Cocceius Severianus Honorinus, who is about to return to Rome. *Inter alia* Apuleius eulogises Honorinus' term of office, his moderation, his example. In the person of his son, who has served as his legate, the proconsul has had an incomparable legate who has reproduced all his father's virtues as his deputy in Carthage while the proconsul was touring the province. No proconsul, therefore, has stayed longer at Carthage! And though the whole province mourns their departure, there is the solace that sometime in the future the son may return to Carthage as proconsul.²³ The second example is less informative, but was certainly delivered to another proconsul, Salvidienus Orfitus, at Carthage in turn due to leave the province.²⁴

In short Orr. 17 and 21 are of interest not only as examples of Aristides' mature prose style but, also, as very rare examples of a type of diplomatic or ceremonial speech of which literally thousands were delivered in the first two centuries A.D., but of which the only extant parallels are two works of Aristides' contemporary Apuleius.

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²² *Digest* 1.16.7.pr. The speeches are assumed to consist of commendation of the city and the singing of the praises of the proconsul. Note also that Menander Rhetor (Spengel, 377ff.) classifies speeches to visiting governors as one of his three categories of λόγοι ἐπιβατήριοι ('speeches of arrival').

²³ *Florida* 9, esp. 33ff. As R. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 159, noted, the speech also implies that Apuleius regularly gave such orations.

²⁴ *Florida* 17.