

Isocrates' *Evagoras* as Paradoxical Encomium

In his *Helen* and especially his *Busiris*, Isocrates provides a sincere demonstration of his rhetorical and political philosophy (see recently Campbell 2020), while offering less than sincere praise to distant mythological figures. In this, he follows the sophistic tradition of the paradoxical encomium, in which praise was given to an unexpected or unworthy subject (Isoc. 10.12; Pl. *Symp.* 177b). To all appearances, Isocrates' *Evagoras* is a sincere encomium of its honorand, the king of Cypriot Salamis, and has typically been understood as a forerunner of moral biography (e.g., Hägg 2012). This paper argues that the *Evagoras*, too, is paradoxical: Isocrates provides a model for how praise of a contemporary political figure should be done, but Evagoras is yet another trivial subject.

Isocrates' game is revealed through his diction. The text refers repeatedly to the μέγεθος ("bigness, greatness") of the subject's deeds and virtues. Sheer numbers tell the story best: forms, including cognates and compounds, of the adjective μέγας occur forty-four times in the *Evagoras*, which is to say that they make up 9.13 words out of every thousand, or appear about twice per Teubner page. The Isocratean corpus as a whole has 4.61 instances of μέγας-words per thousand, with most texts clustering around that average; with nearly twice the frequency, the *Evagoras* is the clear outlier. "Greatness" in this text is relentlessly applied to the honorand as well as to the challenges he faces, and even the discourse markers play along, as Isocrates cites the "greatest proof" of this or that item and repeatedly claims that he is not boasting (lit., "talking big," μεγάλα λέγειν) about Evagoras (9.21, 39, 48). His approach can be seen as Pindaric (Race 1987), but it is also possible to read it as almost parodic amplification (*auxesis*).

The constant bruited of Evagoras's greatness intimates to the Athenian audience Salamis's relative insignificance from an Athenian perspective. On the one hand, Evagoras had received, decades earlier, a portrait statue and other honors from Athens, which made him an uninspiring 'safe bet' for praise; on the other hand, the encomium dances around his ultimate policy failures, which reduced his kingdom to its original miniscule size, and around his lurid death. In the end, like the other paradoxical encomia, the text is more about rhetorical method than about Evagoras. In crafting this speech, Isocrates removes the negative, as in the *Busiris*, and gives examples of *synkrisis*, as in the *Helen*; now *auxesis* is added to the mix. He inches closer to a true political encomium in praising a contemporary, but he intimates through his particular subject that providing a proper political role-model requires an author to take a greater risk.

The other extant fourth-century encomium of a contemporary is Xenophon's *Agesilaus* (see recently Pontier 2018 and Humble 2020 comparing these texts). By way of contrast, the *Agesilaus* has only 4.10 μέγας-words per thousand: Xenophon had no need to exaggerate the magnitude of Agesilaus' effects on Sparta and the Greek world. In taking on a more controversial subject, he provides one answer to Isocrates' invitation.

Works Cited

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