Sophistry and Sorcery in Libanius’ Declamations

Jeremy J. Swist

The association between rhetoric and magic has a long history.¹ What began as a neutral analogy by Gorgias was co-opted by Plato and the Attic orators, who cast sophists negatively as sorcerers (γόητες) in order to undercut their persuasiveness.² Combined with Old Comedy, most importantly Aristophanes’ Clouds, these writers transmitted the models of intellectual caricature to the canonical school texts of the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. These foundational texts influenced the literary productions of professors and students of rhetoric, whose “crown of the curriculum” were the fictional speeches, delivered by stock or historical characters, known as declamations (μελέται).³ The majority of surviving declamations in Greek are by the Antiochene sophist Libanius (314–393 CE).⁴ Several of these model


³ For an introduction see D. A. Russell, Greek Declamation (Cambridge 1983); M. Winterbottom, Roman Declamation (Bristol 1980).

⁴ To Libanius are attributed 51 declamations, 17 of which are either spurious or of uncertain authorship. For discussion see R. Foerster and K. Münscher, “Libanios,” RE 12 (1925) 2509–2518; D. Najock, “Unechtes

Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 57 (2017) 431–453
© 2017 Jeremy J. Swist
exercises are delivered by characters who attack orators, sophists, and philosophers by employing the traditional literary stereotypes, which often link their professions to illicit magic. While declamations have been traditionally read as recyclers of classical material in the vacuum of an anachronistic fantasy world that has been called Sophistopolis, it is now increasingly accepted that declamations often had serious educational and social functions. \(^5\) Likewise, cases can be and have been made for how certain declamations, especially those of Libanius, directly reflect their authors’ anxieties about contemporary events, such as the plight of traditional religion and education. \(^6\)

I will demonstrate here how the interplay of magic and sophistic stereotypes opens another pathway between declamation’s real and imagined worlds. The anti-intellectual rhetoric in Libanius’ *Declamations* can be connected to how he perceived


and presented problems that Hellenic, pagan paideia faced in the second half of the fourth century, when associations between sophistry and sorcery became a dangerous aspect of the competition between the pagan intellectual elite and the new political establishment under Christian emperors. I begin by analyzing the ethological declamations before considering the contemporary context, and then read Libanius’ famous defense of Socrates (Decl. 1) in light of that context. This analysis at the very least should establish and reinforce that the Declamations deserve consideration in discussions of Libanius’ engagement with his world outside the lecture hall.

The refutation of the mage

The strongest links between sophistry and sorcery in Libanius’ declamations are made in Decl. 41. Of his large corpus of declamations, Decl. 41 is the only one in which an actual magician and magic are the focus. Its theme is as follows: a city is suffering from a plague, which the Delphic oracle predicted would be ended by the sacrifice of a human child. The child chosen by lot is that of a mage (μάγος), who promises to end the plague himself should they spare his son. This de-

---


8 There are no surviving Greek declamations devoted to magical topics before Libanius, and few magical themes; see [Hermog.] De Inv. 3.10; Sopat. In Hermog. 3.85–86; Syr. In Hermog. 96; Anon. Problematum Rhetorica 48 [Walz VIII 410]. Russell (Greek Declamation 26 n.38) explains this lack by noting the absence of such themes in classical Attic literature. They were evidently more popular in Latin declamation, as suggested by Quintilian’s dismissal of such themes as irrelevant to real-world deliberation and litigation (Inst. 2.10.5). See [Quint.] Decl.Mai. 4, 10, 14, 15.

liberative speech is delivered against the mage’s proposal by a fellow citizen, who early on attacks the mage’s character with the commonplace stereotypes of his profession, such as grave robbing, necromancy, and fraternizing with evil demons (41.7, 30). In addition to using the more negative label “sorcerer” (γόης), the speaker also employs stock terms of abuse against sophists and orators. He accuses the mage of long-windedness and falsehood (μακρολογία, ψευδολογία, 41.1–3). The mage, he claims, is playing the charlatan (ἀλαζονευόµενον), is an impostor (φενακίζει) who aims at misleading (παράγειν ἐπιχειρεῖ), and takes pay for his services (µισθόφορος, 41.8, 15, 22). These terms of abuse occur elsewhere in Libanius’ Declamations, but they are laid on the mage with considerably more frequency, especially when aimed directly at the speaker’s rhetorical opponent. Nor are the mage’s qualities as both a sorcerer and sophist mutually exclusive (41.3):

Two things especially about the mage’s public speaking (δηµηγορίας) bother me, citizens, first that many of the citizens here, charmed by this man’s words (τοῖς τούτοις κεκηληµένοι λόγοις) (and he is guilty of these things too) are dying of the plague...

This initial denigration plays with the tradition of associating rhetoric and magic, and sets up the remainder of the speech as a refutation not only of the mage’s arguments, but also of the efficacy of his technē. The speaker aims at leaving the impression that only the sorcerer’s eloquence possesses any semblance of magic, and that his ability to stop the plague cannot be trusted. For instance, he had not been able to foretell, and thus forestall, his son being chosen by lot to be sacrificed (41.31). Instead the speaker makes his own prediction that the
mage will rhetorically invent (εὑρήσεις) a host of arguments for delaying his stopping of the plague (41.34).

On the surface, *Decl. 41* is a bare invective against magic, but when juxtaposed with Libanius’ own experiences and attitudes regarding magic, its message is not so clear.\(^\text{13}\) As is the case with all declamations, the viewpoint of the fictional speaker is not necessarily that of the author. While *Decl. 41* features no description of the speaker himself, its Hypothesis presents a morally ambiguous case that could be convincingly argued either way. Although the speaker depicts the mage as impiously defying the god of Delphi, the oracle demanded a human sacrifice, which to a traditional Hellene was a barbaric rite and counter to the value of *philanthropia*. The humanity of the mage, on the other hand, and his paternal instinct should not be discounted.

Moreover, the speaker’s skepticism toward magic in *Decl. 41* is not shared by Libanius. However exaggerated might have been his critics’ depiction of him as “more superstitious than all mankind,” Libanius’ own writings document a firm belief in the efficacy of magical practices and the existence of *daimones*, benevolent and malevolent.\(^\text{14}\) A functional hypochondriac, he believed that daemonic spirits could inflict diseases, and he often resorted to magical alternatives to medical treatments.\(^\text{15}\)

Furthermore, the speaker’s vendetta against magic contradicts Libanius’ approach in his orations and letters. While the

---

\(^{13}\) Libanius’ writings are frequently mined for discussions of magic in Late Antiquity, but *Decl. 41* is seldom included. C. Bonner, “Witchcraft in the Lecture Room of Libanius,” *TAPA* 63 (1932) 40–42, cites it for evidence of the role of demonology in the magical practices of Libanius’ day. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts* 298–299, sees it mainly as recycling classical authors’ constructions of mages and magic.


speaker argues that the spellbinding nature of the sorcerer’s eloquence distracts the audience and serves evil ends, Libanius more often gives the association of persuasion and spellbinding a positive spin. In the Antiochicus he celebrates the city councilors’ ability to moderate the behavior of their governors “as though by incantation (ἐπῳδῇ) … thus they possess a spell (φάρμακον) mightier than those men’s authority.”16 Much as Libanius sought magical as well as medical cures for his own ailments, so he thought that the charms of persuasion to temper a ruler’s character had a pharmaceutical aspect. Logoi as pharmaka in the positive sense, moreover, is a theme in a number of Libanius’ letters.17

In another passage the speaker characterizes the mage as the type that fraternizes with malevolent daimones, with whose aid he is able to put curses on various body parts of his enemies, including making them tongue-tied (γλῶτταν ἀπέστρεψαν, 41.29). In Libanius’ day, these were typically defixiones cast, allegedly at least, between rival athletes and rival sophists, Libanius himself having been a victim. Yet even his reaction to being personally attacked by sorcerers reveals his reluctance to condemn their art. In 386 he experienced a sharp decline in his physical and mental health that compromised his ability to declaim, which his doctors diagnosed as magically caused. In his Autobiography he reports his dismissal of his friends’ advice to prosecute certain men solely on the grounds that they practiced magic: “I was not of that attitude.”18 Upon finding a dead chameleon in his lecture hall, which confirmed for him that he had in fact been hexed, he delivered Or. 36 (Περὶ τῶν φαρμά-

17 E.g. Ep. 581.4, 698.2.
18 Lib. Or. 1.248: ἑτοὶ δὲ οὐτε' αὐτὸς τι τοιοῦτον ἐπισχόν.
κων), which despite the title amounts to a defense of his career against all possible guilty parties, rather than an accusation against any one of them. Nowhere in the oration is sorcery condemned per se, or the “certain sorcerers” who were hired by the guilty party to do the deed (36.1). Norman vaguely suggests that Libanius wished to avoid “stirring up a hornet’s nest” if he brought suit against anyone;\(^{19}\) it is possible that Libanius did not wish to ignite another mass hysteria of magic trials that would implicate sophists and sorcerers both (discussed below).

In sum, when read against the historical background, it is plausible that Decl. 41 goes beyond recycling literary commonplace and reflects a contemporary controversy over magical practices in its author’s time, especially in connection with rhetorically trained intellectuals. The speaker’s prejudices against magic, along with his rhetorical associations between sophistry and sorcery, may reflect popular perceptions of Libanius’ profession, as a number of related declamations also suggest.

**Anti-intellectual rhetoric in the Declamations**

Decl. 41 applies anti-intellectual labels to a professional sorcerer. A number of Libanius’ other declamations do the reverse, dressing sophists and orators not only in the traditional language of comic ridicule, but in some cases also of sorcery. We find this occurring almost exclusively in the ethological declamations, which are entirely fictional and often delivered by anonymous stock characters familiar from New Comedy.\(^{20}\)

To begin, we find anti-sophistic rhetoric in Libanius’ famous Decl. 26, in which a talkative wife drives a grouch (dyskolos) to petition for suicide before the city council.\(^{21}\) To build his ethos,

\(^{19}\) A. F. Norman, *Antioch as a Centre of Hellenic Culture as Observed by Libanius* (Liverpool 2000) 125.

\(^{20}\) These types of declamation were particularly popular in Libanius’ day; see Russell, *Greek Declamation* 88.

the silence-loving grouch first establishes his disdain for the “long-windedness” (μακρολογία) of professional orators and sees no “profit in the spoken word” (τοῦ ῥήματος τὸ κέρδος, 26.3–7). He then proceeds to inveigh against his wife’s loquacity in similar terms as though she were an orator herself. In a reversal of gender roles, the husband prefers a quiet existence within the oikos, while his wife constantly inquires into civic affairs outside the oikos (26.15). Like a sophist, moreover, she delivers an encomium of a rooster, and her husband petitions for suicide because filing for divorce might cause her to break into the courtroom and orate (ῥητορεύσει) on her own behalf (26.14, 45, 51). 

Decl. 29, another prosangelia, is a request for suicide, made by a parasite whose host, a rich man, has taken up a life of philosophy, thus forsaking the worldly wealth on which the parasite made his own living. But he does not accuse his host of any wrongdoing, rather those who persuaded him to abandon luxury, people who “abuse themselves with wakefulness, fasting, and hard labor … pasty-faced men who don’t wear shoes, and who go about half-naked.” They took his host and “bewitched him with their many words (κατεχοῦσαν πολλαῖς ῥήμασι) … evil sorcerers (γόητες ἄνθρωποι καὶ πονηροὶ) capable of persuading anyone of anything: poverty, derangement, 

22 Like many of Libanius’ declamations, Decl. 26 is a προσαγγελία, or self-denunciation, in which the speaker begs for legal suicide (see Russell, Libanius: Imaginary Speeches 35–37). Many προσαγγελίαι were possibly meant as “figured speeches” (ἔσχημαςμένοι λόγοι), whose goal of persuasion was other than their professed aim (see Whitmarsh, Second Sophistic 57–59). Russell (113) thinks the husband’s true intention is for the council to ratify a divorce, bypassing his wife’s right to due process. In Decl. 29 the parasite perhaps wished, instead of his own suicide, that his host return to his former lifestyle; see Penella, in Libanius: A Critical Introduction 112.

23 Decl. 29.22: δεινοὶ τινὲς εἰς παρ’ ἡμῖν ἐπέρους διαφθείρειν ὑπὲρ κακοδαίμονες αὐτοὶ τὴν τύχην, οἷς ἐργον οὐδὲν ἢ τὸ τιμωρεῖσθι σφάς αὐτῶς ὡς ἀδικοῦντας καὶ πιέζειν ἄγρυπνία καὶ λιμῷ καὶ πόνοις, τοὺς ὕψιστας λέγοντας, τοὺς ἀνυποδήτους, τοὺς γυμνοὺς ἐξ ἡμισείας, οἷς ἀπεύξατ’ ἐν τὶς καὶ περιτυχεῖν.
hunger, and becoming one of the walking dead.” The physical descriptions as pallid zombies borrows heavily from the Urtext of intellectual parody, Aristophanes’ Clouds, in which philosophers and sophists are targeted as threats to the traditional values of Athenian aristocrats. As Phidippides in the Clouds forsook his athletic physique and complexion along with horsemanship, so the parasite’s host in Decl. 29 abandoned aristocratic symposia and was transformed into a ghost of his former self. The language of sorcery (κατεγοήτευσαν … γόητες) associated with intellectuals, on the other hand, is not Aristophanic, but derives from later authors such as Demosthenes, Aeschines, and Plato who drew the parallels to stigmatize sophistic persuasion.

We also see sophistry and sorcery mixed in Decl. 48, in which a son pleads for his own disinheritance (apokeryxis) as his reward for heroism after his father refused to grant the original award he had requested, namely to annul the disinheritance of the son’s brother. He blames his brother’s disinheritance on the jealousy of those who persuaded his father to disown him. These same men oppose the son in this trial as well:

24 Decl. 29.23: ἐκεῖνοι τὸν τρόφιον λαβόντες κατεγοήτευσαν πολλοῖς ῥήμασι παθόντες μὲν οὐδὲν δυσχερές … γόητες ἀνθρώποι καὶ πάντα πείθειν δυνάμενοι … πενίαν, παράνοιαν, λιμόν, τὸ τεθνηκότας ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἶναι, οὕτωι μοι τὸν τρόφιον ἑπολιαλέκασι.


27 Decl. 48.50–51: οἶδα τοῖν ὡς οὕτωι τὴν αὐτὴν προσείσουσι μηχανὴ καὶ τοσοῦτο ρόσον παράξεισιν, ὅσοι συνείσθεις εἰρετῶς ἀποκηρύσσετει καὶ τολμᾶτε ἐν δικαιστηρίῳ βοᾷ· ἄλλοτρον ὁν γεγέννηκα ποιοῦμαι· οὐκ ἀνθε-ξεῖς τοὺς συφισταῖς τοὺςτοὺς, ὁ πάτερ, οὐδ’ ἂν σφόδρα ἐθέλεις τὴν ἀριστείαν αἰδεῖσθαι. Βούλει σι προείσει καὶ τὰ ῥήματα τῶν γοήτων;

---

Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 57 (2017) 431–453
I know, then, how these men will apply the same device and will mislead you (παράξουσιν) as easily as you have been accustomed to readily disown and dare to shout in the courtroom: “I am making a stranger the one I sired!” You will not hold out against these sophists (σοφισταῖς), father, nor would you be very willing to revere my heroism. Do you also wish me to foretell you the words of these sorcerers (γοήτων)?

The son, who plays to the democratic audience by confessing his own lack of speaking experience (δέδοικα… τὴν τοῦ λέγειν ἀπειρίαν, 48.5) undermines his father’s case by associating him with sorcerer-sophists who have relied on rhetorical/magical means to mislead the father.

In Decl. 33, we find a miser (φιλάργυρος) too cheap even to spend money on sacrifices or libations for the gods.28 His hoplite son had requested a crown of olive as a prize for heroism in battle instead of a pot of gold. As a result, his father tries to disinherit him, “since he is wiser (σοφότερος) than his father and has condemned the lifestyle that I esteem”—σοφότερος meant sarcastically.29 In the narrative section, the miser recalls his deliberations over his son’s education (τὰ παιδεύματα, 33.11). He had decided to invest in military training for his son in hope of material rewards, rather than send him to the “thinking-shops” (φροντιστηρίοις) of the philosophers, since they despise material wealth (33.12). Nevertheless, the son had evidently fallen under the spell of these intellectuals in his choice of reward, and has become one of them. When the son objects that the law permitting fathers to disown their sons does not apply to war heroes, the father retorts “here you’re being a skillful sophist (κομψὸς καὶ σοφιστής), but when there is a need to get rich, you’re a fool!”30 He calls his son’s arguments that

29 Decl. 33.2: ἔπει όν σοφότερος ἐστι τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ ὃν μὲν ἐγὼ τιμῶ βίον, τοῦτον κατέγνωκεν, αὐτὸς δὲ ἐτερον ἐξεύρεν ἐαυτῷ, ζητείτω καὶ οἰκίαν ἐπέραν.
place glory over wealth “the stuff of those delusional, pretentious men (ἀλαζόνων) who dazzle people’s imaginations (δοξοκοπούντων), in whose company you would find nothing but cheeks full of hot air, but much hunger within. Those people gave you such an education (ἐπαίδευσαν).”

Decl. 12, finally, mixes Aristophanic parody with sorcery accusations as well. Here we see an ethological character of the misanthrope (µισάνθρωπος) merged with the historical figure of Timon of Athens. The speech is simultaneously a request for suicide to escape being in love with Alcibiades, and an accusation of Alcibiades for aiming at tyranny. But to build his ethos as a misanthrope, he first spews venom at humanity at large, and he cynically unmasks the true nature of sophists and philosophers. Anyone clever at speaking (δεινὸς εἰπεῖν), he claims, “makes false accusations and commits perjury,” while anyone who philosophizes is “a sorcerer who pries into the heavens (γόης ἐστι καὶ τὰ οὐράνια πολυπραγμονεῖ).” He implicates Alcibiades in these charges by identifying sophists and philosophers among the pimps and flatterers in his entourage (12.39).

\[31\text{Decl. 33.42: τὰ τῶν τετυφωμένων, ὦ παῖ, μοι λέγεις, τὰ τῶν ἀλαζόνων, τὰ τῶν δοξοκοπούντων, παρ’ αἰς οὐδὲν ἄν εὕροις ἢ γνάθους πεφυσημένας, τὰ δ’ ἓνδον λυμὸς πολύς, ἐκεῖνοι σε ταῦτα ἐπαίδευσαν.}

\[32\text{Philolstr. VA 2.5, 3.50, 6.6, 6.9, VS 509, Imag. 1.27; Them. Or. 13.165b, 175a; Synes. Regn. 19.}

\[33\text{For literary accounts of Timon see Ar. Lys. 805 ff., Av. 1547; Plut. Ant. 70; Luc. Tim.}

\[34\text{Russell, Greek Declaration 121–122.}

\[35\text{Decl. 12.9: δεινὸς εἰπεῖν συκοφαντεῖ, δικάξειν ἐπιχειρεῖ: τὰ τῆς ἐπι- ὁρκίας ἐπέται, φιλοσοφεῖν ἐπιχειρεῖ γόης ἐστι καὶ τὰ οὐράνια πολυπραγ- μονεῖ.}

\[Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 57 (2017) 431–453\]
suits\textsuperscript{36} is combined with charges of goeteia. Overall, Timon represents how the misanthropos, the opposite of a philanthropos, typically views philosophy and oratory.

*Between imagination and reality*

Intellectual stereotypes such as we have examined occur almost exclusively in the ethological declamations, which place the Old Comedy ridicule of intellectuals, particularly from Aristophanes, into the mouths of ethically deficient, New Comedy characters. Characters in Libanius’ historical declamations, exemplary figures such as Demosthenes whose moral arguments serve Libanius’ educational goals, rarely adopt this rhetoric.\textsuperscript{37} The ethological speakers, on the other hand, wield no edifying arguments, leading most scholars to conclude that these comic declamations served no higher purpose than pure entertainment: as Russell put it, “there is no pill inside the sugar coating.”\textsuperscript{38} Yet the pill arguably exists in the fact that a sophist’s declamations are model exercises in both the faithful portrayal of character and the construction of an argument designed to be persuasive to a specific audience.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Ar. *Nub.* 225, Pl. *Ap.* 19B.


characters must be persuasive to the fictional audience of fellow democrats, of an Athens-like *polis* where sophists and philosophers, as in the *Clouds*, are held in suspicion. But for the sophist’s real audience, moral instruction and social comment may also be implicit: whereas Aristophanes comically exploited the flaws of both the rustic Strepsiades and the sophistic Socrates, these declamations of Libanius portray only the former type, and create the morally instructive effect that antipathy to *pepaideumenoi* correlates with defects in moral character and lack of public spirit. Beneath the evident humor of *Decl.* 26, for instance, is the more serious implication that the refusal to exercise civic duty is a surrender of one’s masculinity, and in the *dyskolos* we may read the targets of Libanius’ frustration at the decline of civic engagement and service in the *curia* of contemporary Antioch. The declamatory dramas construct a reality that would likely influence how Libanius’ actual audience in the fourth century CE perceived the real world around them, who would connect the comic characters’ assault on philosophy and rhetoric to analogous problems in their own day.

It is arguable that much as the tyrants of his declamations may be mirrored by tyrannical figures in the real world, Libanius’ comic characters may in turn be read as parodic and typological representations of the forces he perceived as threats to pagan, Hellenic *paideia*, whose marginalization corresponded, as he saw it, to the expansion of imperial bureaucracy and an ascendency of “uneducated” *nouveaux riches* under Christian emperors. In a number of his *Orations* Libanius...

40 Russell calls this imaginary *polis* Sophistopolis, on which see *Greek Declamation* 22–39.

41 Cf. Kraus, in *Libanios, le premier humaniste* 148.


43 Lib. Or. 62.21–23; see also 1.255, 3.26, 58.21–22. Cf. P.-L. Malosse,
represents these men in the same language as the misers and misanthropes of his *Declamations*[^44], while he likewise rhetorically exaggerates the poverty of his own profession in correspondence to the malnourished zombies of the declamatory intellectuals.[^45] In *Oration 31*, for instance, in which he requests public funding from the city council of Antioch to support his teaching assistants, he reproves those who would not sell off any public property as too “miserly, tightfisted, and money-loving” (νῦν φιλάργυρος, νῦν γλίσχρος, νῦν φιλοχρήματος) to save *paideia* from extinction.[^46] In rhetorical exercises, *φιλάργυρος* invariably denotes the miserly type, and Libanius’ use of it outside of those contexts is rare. Moreover, Libanius consistently advanced the notion that rhetorical *paideia* was no longer valued as one’s ticket into the political establishment. Much like the miserly father in *Decl. 33*, who refused to send his son to the schools of the sophists because such a profession would not make him rich, Libanius presents in *Or. 62.21* a similar, popular dismissal of his profession: fathers would rather send their sons to Beirut to study Latin and Roman law to launch a more lucrative public career. The growing disparity between men in power and men of letters, he claimed, made the latter into targets of mistrust and resentment.[^47]

[^44]: See Lib. *Or.* 31.41; 42.24; 62.10.


[^46]: *Or. 31.41*: ἀλλ’ ὁ λαμπρός ἰπποτρόφος, Ἡλίε, καὶ ὁ τοὺς ἀθλητὰς ἔξ ἀπαντος ἀγείρων μαχοῦ καὶ ὁ θηρίων πλήθος ἐνούμενος καὶ τοὺς πρὸς ταύτα μαραθούντας ἱνευόν, ἣν ἐκαστόν διασείειν χάριν τῶν λειτουργοῦντας τὰς υστεριὰς, νῦν φιλάργυρος, νῦν γλίσχρος, νῦν φιλοχρήματος, ἐν ὧν τὸ μὲν κινδύνευμον λύοι, τὸ δὲ σώσα τοῖς δυνάμενοι πλέθρα γῆς.

Such social competition, according to Peter Brown, was also a driving force behind sorcery accusations in the late fourth century.\textsuperscript{48} Declamatory sorcery accusations may thus have been a creative expression of such concerns, parallel to Libanius’ claim in \textit{Or.} 62 that “being a competent orator is now the grounds for accusation.”\textsuperscript{49} The atmosphere in which these charges occurred was filled with the rhetoric of Christian bishops who added a religious dimension to the association of \textit{paideia} and magic, with claims that “the Hellenes” bewitch (\textit{γοητεύουσιν}) the soul,\textsuperscript{50} and that “tyrants, emperors, sophists with their irresistible eloquence, sorcerers, magicians, and demons” are in an unholy alliance against the truth of God.\textsuperscript{51} Libanius himself in a letter of 363 observes that those who “think the gods are nonsense” are the same as those who “think that people who wear the \textit{tribon} are sorcerers (\textit{γόητας}),” here referring to the white cloak of philosophers and sophists.\textsuperscript{52} Even during his reign, the emperor Julian acknowledged this phenomenon, and how the modern, “uneducated” Cynics were complicit with the Christians in their assault on \textit{paideia} by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} P. Brown, “Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages,” in M. Douglas (ed.), \textit{Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations} (London 1970) 22–24. Accusations were also made among rival sophists, much as they were among athletes, to try to expose their success as illegitimate and assisted by magical means, especially in a case where one sophist is accused of hexing another’s speaking ability. Libanius was both the victim and the alleged perpetrator of such sorcery.
\item \textsuperscript{49} \textit{Or.} 62.44: \textit{νῦν δὲ πλεονέκτημα μὴν τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι λέγειν, ἐγκλήμα δὲ τὸ ῥητορεύειν ἱκανῶς.}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Joh. Chrys. \textit{De Babyl.} 11: τὰ μὲν γὴρ παρ’ ἡμῖν ἀ φατε πλάσματα εἶναι καὶ τύραννοι καὶ βασιλεῖς καὶ λόγον ἄμαχοι σοφισταὶ ἥδη δὲ καὶ φιλόσοφοι καὶ γόητες καὶ μάγοι καὶ δαιμόνες καθελεῖν ἐσπούδασαν.
\item \textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ep.} 803.4: γόητες ἔγειτο τοὺς ἐν τοῖς τρίβωσιν ἔκεινος ὃς καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἔγειτο εἶναι φλάγναφον.
\end{itemize}
teaching the young that “the genuine devotees of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle are ... sorcerers, sophists, lunatics, and poisoners.” This illustrates how both the bishops and the declamatory characters see no meaningful difference between philosophers and sophists.

Declamatory sorcery accusations went beyond parroting and parodying the enemies of paideia: they may have reflected existential fears among pagan intellectuals not only for their professions but also their persons. Under Constantius II, Valentinian, and Valens, several pagan philosophers and sophists in Rome, Antioch, and elsewhere were executed on the charge of illicit and treasonous magic. As Christian bishops were quick to associate pagan religion with illicit magical practices, in the minds of educated pagans such allegations were often perceived as pretexts for persecution against pagan paideia at the hands of imperial bureaucrats, especially after the death of Julian when educated pagans whom Julian had elevated found themselves in a dangerous position. Sorcery accusations were an occupational hazard throughout Libanius’ career, to the point of being investigated at Valens’ personal request. Libanius was acquitted, he reports, much to the emperor’s chagrin. A century later, the pagan historian Zosimus would claim likewise that sorcery and pagan paideia were closely linked in the paranoid minds of these emperors. Valens suspected “all those who were then renowned in philosophy or otherwise classically educated,” and dispatched the proconsul Festus to

53. Jul. Or. 6.197d: οἱ Πυθαγόρου καὶ Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους χορευταὶ γνήσιοι γόητες εἶναι λέγονται καὶ σοφισταὶ καὶ τετυφωμένοι καὶ φάρμακες. See also Jul. Or. 6.193a, 7.224a-c; Mis. 353b.


55. Lib. Or. 1.43, 50, 71, 162.


57. Zos. 4.1.1–2; cf. Amm. Marc. 26.4.4; Lenski, Failure of Empire 218–219.
Asia “so that there would be no man of letters left.”58 Another pagan historian, Ammianus, notes that the libraries of several of those executed were publicly burned on the grounds that they were illicit tomes (inliciti), when in fact they were mostly “titles of various liberal disciplines and law.” As discussed by Salzman and Sandwell, the legal ambiguity bound up in the term superstitio between pagan religion and illicit magic was exploited by zealous governors to justify the summary prohibition of pagan practices and the demolition of temples. Yet as noted by Trzcionka, the religious persuasions of these authors did much to frame sorcery accusations and inquisitions as convenient means to attack paganism, despite the more likely reality, as demonstrated by Lenski and others, that political factors more concrete than a monolithic pagan-Christian polarity

were at play. Libanius professed nevertheless that *hiera* and *logoi* were inextricably linked, and so an attack on one was an attack on both. Libanius’ *anti-paideia* declamations may reflect the growing persecution complex, later fully expressed by Zosimus, that many of his contemporary pagans may have felt in his own time. Behind the grouch’s wish for orators to be silent in *Decl.* 26, or the rich man cutting out the orator’s tongue in *Decl.* 36, may have been Libanius’ real fear of Hellenic oratory being forced into silence.

It is plausible that both religious partisanship and social competition with the *apaideutoi* were reflected in the boorish declamatory characters’ opposition to the *pepaideumenoi* in the declamations of Libanius, who himself had been accused of magic multiple times. Real-life sorcery accusations may have prompted him to inject magical language into the stock Aristophanic formulae of intellectual parody, especially when they independently can connect with his general concerns for the state of traditional *paideia*. The vulgar, comic characters who deliver such anti-intellectual rhetoric may reflect popular attitudes in Libanius’ own day, attitudes fueled by bishops and bureaucrats, but also by rival sophists. These characters, while constructing caricatures, can be themselves caricatures of those who make such accusations in real life, however exaggerated for literary effect. While persuasive to the fictional audience that feeds on sophistry-sorcery stereotypes, their appearance as their own stereotypes discredits their arguments in the eyes of the real-world audience who may then view real-world sorcery accusations with skepticism.

63 See *Or.* 30.8, where amid the monastic destruction of pagan shrines, priests are forced “to be silent or die” (*σιγᾶν ἢ τεθνάναι*). On Libanius’ fear of silenced oratory see A. J. Quiroga Puertas, “Libanius’ *Horor Silentii,*” in *The Purpose of Rhetoric in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen 2013) 223–244; Swist, *Phoenix* 70 (2016) 184–186.
The defense of Socrates

In light of what we have discussed, we may examine one more declamation, one cast in a different mold. Those so far examined have included attacks on intellectuals, but in Decl. 1, Libanius’ apologia of Socrates, we have a defense. Libanius here gives creative voice to concerns about his own profession from a different perspective, and of all his declamations, Decl. 1 has received the most scholarly recognition as communicating with Libanius’ own day. H. Markowski had proposed that the speech be read as an allegorical defense of the emperor Julian, while Bernard Schouler has more recently argued that it defends Libanius’ own career. Following on Schouler I will show that one of Decl. 1’s strategies of defending Hellenic, rhetorical paideia is to distinguish its genuine form from its various misrepresentations both past and present.

Decl. 1 is a work of historical fiction in which an anonymous advocate steps in after Socrates gives his own apologia, i.e. that written by Plato or Xenophon, and Libanius uses the historical situation to his advantage. He throws the arguments of Socrates’ accusers, that he corrupted the Athenian youth, in their faces:

64 For translations and analyses see Russell, Imaginary Speeches 17–57; W. M. Calder III et al., The Unknown Socrates (Wauconda 2002) 39–110.


66 Russell, Imaginary Speeches 18–19.

67 Decl. 1.102–103: νέοι δὲ πατέρων τε πρότερον άγοντες ἑκέντρων, ὡς λέγεις, καὶ πρεσβυτέρων ἀδελφῶν ὑπερορῶντες καὶ καθάπερ ὑπὸ γόητος ἐλκόµενοι τοῦ Σωκράτους τί πλέον ἀν ἐξήτησαν τὸν νεῦσαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον; ... τίς ὁὖν πατὴρ ἀπεκήρυξε τὸν αὑτοῦ φάσκων πονηρὸν διὰ Σωκράτην γεγονέναι; τίς οἶκος καθεϊρξε τὸν υἱόν, ὡς μηκέτ’ ἀκούοι τῶν διαφθει-
As for the youth, who hold that man in higher regard than their fathers, as you claim, and despise their brothers insofar as they are drawn on by that sorcerer (γόητος) Socrates, what more would they have sought than his nodding? … So what father has disinherited (ἀπεκήρυξε) his son claiming that he has become a bad person because of Socrates? Who has shut his son indoors, lest he hear his corrupting words any longer? Nobody.

Libanius represents his opponents’ position as directly accusing Socrates of being a genuine sorcerer. Such a characterization of Socrates is found in a number of Plato’s dialogues. Yet in Plato these characterizations are always metaphorical representations of the effect of Socrates’ words on his interlocutors and made by other characters such as Thrasymachus in the Republic. Moreover, as Meno points out in the eponymous dialogue (80b), Socrates’ charming rhetoric could be dangerously misconstrued as actual sorcery, which is what the anonymous speaker in Decl. 1 suggests here. Furthermore, Socrates’ advocate asks whether any scenario in which fathers disowned their sons on account of their being educated by Socrates has actually ever occurred. For the imaginary Athenian audience, the answer is no. But Libanius’ real audience has seen this, not in real life, but in other declamations, such as Decl. 33. Fathers’ disinherence of sons (apokeryxis/abdicatio) was a popular declamatory theme, especially in the Libanian corpus. The miser in Decl. 33, as we have seen, disowns his son because the son had been taught by intellectuals to despise material wealth. For both the real and the imagined audience, Libanius tries to show that the accusations against Socrates are no truer than sophistic stereotypes.

Yet as stereotypes, they may still be used by Libanius to his rhetorical advantage before an imagined Athenian audience. Like Libanius’ contemporary Himerius, the speaker distinguishes Socrates from the ‘First Sophistic’ sophists such as Ῥόντων ῥημάτων: οὐδεὶς.

68 See de Romilly, Magic and Rhetoric 33–34.
Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, and Thrasy machus.\textsuperscript{70} These are the sophists he casts as “those who bewitch everyone” (τοῖς ἅπαντας γοητεύουσιν, Decl. 1.22, 153). Likewise for Libanius’ real audience he may reinforce the Philostratean distinction (VS 1.481) between the original sophists as underminers of society and sophists in their own day as stewards of paideia and Hellenic civilization. The speaker also repeatedly emphasizes the profiteering motives of the Sophists, while Socrates never charged money for his teaching (Decl. 1.16, 22, 166). Here is a sure parallel with Libanius, who himself claims in more than one oration not to have required any fees for his teaching, only accepting donations in proportion to his students’ means.\textsuperscript{71} The lack of description of the speaker’s own character invites us to place Libanius in both the imaginary and the real-world contexts of this speech’s performance, yet still achieving the rhetorical aims directed at either audience. To the fictional Athenian demos, Libanius uses popular mistrust of sophists to his advantage to persuade them that Socrates does not fit the stereotypical description of them; yet in his own image he presents Socrates as the ideal sophist nonetheless.\textsuperscript{72} He asks “who is the better counselor (σύµβουλος) for the city, the one who is mad with desire for money … or the one who exhorts us to wisdom rather than wealth?”\textsuperscript{73} Libanius turns the arguments of the anti-intellectual declamatory characters on their heads, asserting that paideia, not wealth, is what confers eloquence,

\textsuperscript{70} Him, Or. 35.8–21, 38.4–7; cf. R. J. Penella, “Himerius’ Orations to his Students,” in T. C. Brennan and H. I Flower (eds.), East and West: Papers in Ancient History presented to Glen W. Bowersock (Cambridge [Mass.] 2008) 141.

\textsuperscript{71} Or. 36.9, 62.19. Since he held the imperial chair of rhetoric at Antioch, Libanius’ school was subsidized by the imperial government; see R. A. Kaster, “The Salaries of Libanius,” Chiron 13 (1983) 37–59.

\textsuperscript{72} B. Schouler, La tradition hellénique chez Libanios (Paris 1984) 130.

\textsuperscript{73} Decl. 1.89: πότερον οὖν βελτίων, ὦ Αθηναῖοι, σύµβουλος καὶ πόλει καὶ ἰδιώταις ὀστίς ἐκμαίνει περὶ χρηµάτων ἐπιθυµίαν … ἢ ὦστις ἐπὶ τὴν φρονήσειν µάλλον ἢ τὸν πλοῦτον παρακαλεῖ;
and also qualifies one to best advise the state.\textsuperscript{74} The miserly father of \textit{Decl.} 33, in contrast, asserts that “wealth makes an orator more intelligent, renders a plaintiff more credible, and secures a defendant’s acquittal.”\textsuperscript{75} Overall, \textit{Decl.} 1 is an \textit{apologia} of \textit{paideia} made palatable for a classical Athenian audience, as a speech designed to compensate for the rhetorical tactlessness of Socrates’ own \textit{apologia}, as well as for a contemporary late antique audience for whom the utility of a sophist must be reinforced.

\textit{Conclusion}

Of all extant declamations, Greek and Latin, those of Libanius are the only ones that dramatize anti-intellectual viewpoints.\textsuperscript{76} This fact alone, however, does not convincingly turn correlation with contemporary issues into causation. First, there is the simple accident of transmission, for while ethological declamations predominate in Libanius’ corpus, there is sufficient evidence that comic characters had appeared in declamations since at least the second century CE, and some of these lost texts could have employed anti-intellectual rhetoric.\textsuperscript{77} Second, the bare fact that declamations can rarely be convincingly dated, especially within such a broad span of time as Libanius’ career, usually precludes any claims that these works may be reactions to specific historical events, e.g. the magic trials at Antioch. Finally, the intellectual stereotypes employed, including those that link rhetoric and magic, are largely unoriginal and derived from classical sources, especially Aristophanes and the Attic orators.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Decl.} 1.88: ὥρθως οὖν ὑπολαμβάνει Σωκράτης τῶν πεπαιδευμένων, ἀλλ’ οὐ τῶν εὐποροῦντων τὸ δύνασθαι λέγειν ἡγούμενος.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Decl.} 33.53: ὁ πλοῦτος καὶ ῥήτωρ φρονιμώτερον ἔδειξε καὶ κατήγορον πιστὸν ἀπέφηνε καὶ φεύγοντα ἐξῃτήσατο.

\textsuperscript{76} The declamatory characters of Choricurus of Gaza (fl. 510 CE) use stock accusations of sophistry, but only as brief rejoinders to the voiced objections of their legal opponents. It is also likely that Choricurus, active a century later, was influenced by Libanius. See Choric. \textit{Decl.} 6.29, 7.51, 10.40.

\textsuperscript{77} Luc. \textit{Salt.} 65; Russell, \textit{Greek Declamation} 88.
With these points of caution in mind, it is nevertheless worth considering that this material was selected and manipulated by a master sophist who in his orations and letters was so personally invested in the status of traditional *paideia* under an ascendant Christian imperial establishment. When a boorish miser attacks sophists and philosophers on the stage, it is not farfetched that certain audience members, or readers of circulated texts, would be reminded of the persecution of pagan intellectuals in the real world. Such a dissolution of the fourth wall is also nothing new. One recalls Euripidean characters, such as Hecuba in *Trojan Women*, who profess anachronistically modern ideas about the nature of the gods, only to be met with confusion and rejection by less sophisticated characters like Menelaus.\(^78\) Libanius’ declamations, while looking backward to the past, could also function as mirrors held up to his own society in order to identify, through parody, how those who possessed wealth and political power were in opposition to the cause of eloquence and education. As Socrates at the end of the *Symposium* argued that the same author could write both comedy and tragedy, so the comedy of intellectual caricature as presented by Libanius may reflect the tragedy of *paideia* in the late fourth century CE, and the conflict of power and wealth with its perennial nemesis: eloquence.\(^79\)


\(^{79}\) An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Classical Association of the Middle West and South annual meeting in Williamsburg in 2016. I am grateful to Craig Gibson for his assistance in the revision process, and to my anonymous readers and the editor of *GRBS* for their valuable criticism and suggestions.

---

*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57 (2017) 431–453