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8 | Gorgias' *Funeral Oration*

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8.1 Points of Departure

Within the group of classical Greek texts that we call *epitaphioi logoi* ('funeral speeches'), two have been passed down to us only in fragmentary form. We have just one single sentence from Archinus' *Epitaphios*,[1] and we know only a small number of relatively short quotations and paraphrases from Gorgias' *Epitaphios*. Not surprisingly, these two texts are the least studied and the least well understood within the group of known funeral speeches.[2] While there is almost no research at all on Archinus' *Epitaphios*,[3] the situation is slightly better for Gorgias, although, to date, no comprehensive historical analysis of this text has been published.[4] However, as this chapter sets out to show, Gorgias' *Epitaphios* played a vitally important role in the early formation of the literary genre. Likewise, we can only fully understand Thucydides' approach to the Athenian public funeral oration as well as Isocrates' *Panegyricus* if we integrate Gorgias into the broader picture. In order to gain a clear understanding of his *Epitaphios*, this chapter begins with an

[1] Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6.2.22.4–5: 'Archinus says: "Sooner or later, everyone has to die".' The testimony of Photius (487b32–35) suggests that the text was known not only to Clemens Alexandrinus around 200 AD, but also to Isocrates in the fourth century BC. Photius' information might go back to Caecilius of Calacte or Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Schamp 2000: 183). Unless it is indicated otherwise, all translations are my own.

[2] It is unclear whether Dion (PA 4490) ever gave a funeral speech and/or published a literary *epitaphios logos*, as could be inferred from Plato (*Menex.* 234b9–10) and Dionysius (*Dem.* 23); no more conclusive evidence exists. For her part, Loraux (1981: 351 n. 54) found it difficult to imagine a speech by Dion.

[3] So far, classical scholarship has largely neglected the fact that Archinus (*PA* 2526 + Add.; *PAA* 213880) published a written *epitaphios logos* and that he most likely also delivered an actual funeral oration. According to Loraux (1981: 8), the quotation in Clem. Al. (see n. 1 above) was a misreading of the *Menexenus*' proem (234b9–10; cf. Loraux 1981: 351 n. 53), but the quotation suggests a textual transmission, whether that be direct or indirect. Moreover, Lysias' *Epitaphios* can be read as a reaction to Archinus' 'funeral oration'. For an in-depth analysis into the historical significance of Archinus' *Epitaphios*, its role within the literary genre and its relation to Lysias' *Epitaphios* in particular, see now Wienand 2023: 212–22.

[4] Vollgraff 1952 remains the most comprehensive attempt at interpreting the *Epitaphios* (see n. 13). In more recent times, Prinz (1997: 191–213), Flower (2000: 92–3) and Scholten (2003: 107–28) are among those who have contextualised historically Gorgias' *Epitaphios*. The arguments presented in this chapter draw on Wienand 2023: 169–95.

overview of the text and the tradition of Gorgias' literary version of a funeral oration before exploring its content, date, audience and purpose as well as its impact on the later *epitaphioi logoi*. This chapter concludes that Gorgias' *Epitaphios* was most likely composed and disseminated at some point in the last quarter of the fifth century, that the text was intended to be received primarily by an elite literary audience, and that Gorgias' *Epitaphios* shed a critical light on Athenian power politics at the time.

8.2 The Text and the Tradition of Gorgias' *Epitaphios*

From the original text of Gorgias' *Epitaphios* we have two short catchphrases, one isolated sentence and one segment of continuous text of just over 200 words. In comparison, with less than 2,000 words, the Periclean funeral oration in Thucydides' *Histories* is the shortest entirely surviving classical *epitaphios logos* ('funeral speech'), the longest being Lysias with close to 4,100 words. This means that we probably have about five to ten per cent of Gorgias' *Epitaphios*. The fragments are collected in various easily accessible modern editions.[5] A brief overview of them will give us a better understanding of what survives. The first catchphrase has survived in three ancient texts, ranging in date from the first to the fourth centuries AD, which preserve variations of a formulation from Gorgias' *Epitaphios* describing vultures as animate (or living) graves.[6] The second catchphrase, preserved as a quotation of the *Epitaphios* in a work from the first century AD, calls Xerxes the Zeus of the Persians.[7] Philostratus, who wrote in the first half of the third century AD, quotes from Gorgias' *Epitaphios* the full sentence: 'Trophies erected over barbarians demand hymns, those over Greeks dirges.'[8] Isocrates followed Gorgias almost verbatim in his *Panegyricus*, which was published around 380 BC, when he wrote that 'for warfare against the barbarians hymns were written, for that among the Hellenes dirges were composed'.[9]

[5] The standard edition of Gorgias' fragments is Diels and Kranz, volume 2: 284–6. Other influential editions are Müller 1858: 218–19; Untersteiner 1949; Dumont 1969; Untersteiner 1961: 78–85; Buchheim 1986; Spatharas 2001; Schirren and Zinsmaier 2003: 74–7; Herrman 2004: 23–5; Binder, Korenjak and Noack 2007: 142–50; Buchheim 2012: 68–73; Giombini 2012; Ioli 2013; Laks and Most 2016.

[6] [Longin.] *De sublimitate* 3.2 (4.3–5 Russell): γῦπες ἔμψυχοι τάφοι; Hermog. *De ideis* 1 (248.26–249.7 Rabe): τάφους ἐμψύχους γῦπας; Athan. Alex. *in Hermog. De constitutionibus* 180.9–16 Rabe: γῦπας ζῶντας τάφους.

[7] [Longin.] *De sublimitate* 3.2 (4.3–5 Russell): Ξέρξης ὁ τῶν Περσῶν Ζεύς.

[8] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.5: τὰ μὲν κατὰ τῶν βαρβάρων τρόπαια ὕμνους ἀπαιτεῖ τὰ δὲ κατὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων θρήνους.

[9] Isoc. 4.158: ἐκ μὲν τοῦ πολέμου τοῦ πρὸς τοὺς βαρβάρους ὕμνους πεποιημένους, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας θρήνους ἡμῖν γεγενημένους.

Finally, in his commentary on Hermogenes' treatise, *Concerning Types of Style*, the Byzantine scholar, Maximus Planudes (*c.* 1255–1330 AD), preserves the original wording of a portion of continuous text from Gorgias.[10] The quotation stems from the consolation section towards the end of his *Epitaphios*. In this passage, the literary speaker praises at length the perfect *aretē* ('virtue') of the fallen, which, in terms of their *gnōmē* ('judgement') as well as their *rhōmē* ('strength'), was manifest in war and peace alike. The passage concludes by emphasising the status of the fallen as persistent role models for the living.

A small number of ancient texts provides additional information about Gorgias' *Epitaphios*. The passages in question are preserved in treatises written by literary scholars from the high empire and late antiquity who mainly criticised the stylistic characteristics of Gorgias' *Epitaphios*, which they viewed as an excessive and overblown display of rhetorical skill.[11] Only Philostratus in his *Lives of the Sophists* presented a historical context. He highlighted that both in the *Epitaphios* and in the *Olympic Oration*, Gorgias had intended to unite the Greeks and to encourage them jointly to fight the Persians.[12] Beyond the fragments and testimonies mentioned here, no direct references to Gorgias' *Epitaphios* can be securely identified in ancient literature.[13]

8.3 The Literary Logic of Gorgias' *Funeral Oration*

Gorgias' text was a free-standing literary publication known under the title of *Epitaphios*.[14] The text clearly circulated in written form, and Gorgias was recognised as its author.[15] The publication was known not

[10] Planud. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 549.1–51.1 Walz. Planudes took the quotation from the work of the fifth-century Neoplatonist philosopher, Syrianus, who also commented on the rhetorical work of second-century author Hermogenes of Tarsus; Syrianus had no direct knowledge of Gorgias' text, but copied from a lost section of the *Commentaries on Attic Orators* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, where he found the segment from the *Epitaphios*.

[11] Athan. Alex. *in Hermog. De constitutionibus* 180.9–16; [Longin.] *De sublimitate* 3.2 (4.3–5 Russell); Syrian. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 91.16–19; Planud. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 548.8–49.11, 551.1–5.

[12] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.4–5. The extant fragments of the *Olympic Oration* (Diels and Kranz no. 85 B7–8a) confirm a thematic connection between these two Gorgianic texts.

[13] In his extensive commentary on the Planudes fragment, the Dutch scholar, Carl Wilhelm Vollgraff (1952), discussed a wide number of passages in other literary works from the classical era that he saw as implicit references to Gorgias' *Epitaphios*. Loraux (1981: 437 n. 38) rightly described his approach as a series of imaginary rapprochements between the text of Gorgias and Greek literature. In large part, Loraux's reading of Gorgias was a reckoning with Vollgraff's questionable associative approach.

[14] This is what can be deduced from Athan. Alex. *in Hermog. De constitutionibus* 180.9–20; Philostr. *V S* 1.9.5.

[15] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.5; Athan. Alex. *in Hermog. De constitutionibus* 180.9–16.

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only to the literary elite of the fourth century BC,[16] but also to hellenistic and Roman rhetoricians.[17] It is unclear how long the text survived.[18] It corresponded in form and content *grosso modo* to what the readers could recognise as an Athenian funeral oration.[19] In adopting the form of a speech, the text is part of a phenomenon that has been called 'literary oratory': a written text published for literary reception but composed according to the formal conventions of an oral genre.[20] This does not exclude the possibility that the text was also presented orally, so the question of performance will also be treated below. But let us focus on what we know about the literary text first.

Gorgias' literary 'funeral oration' gave his readers the fictive setting of an oral funeral oration. A literary speaker assumes the role of an orator, referring to himself in the first person singular.[21] The surviving segments of Gorgias' *Epitaphios* do not provide an indication as to who is addressed in terms of an envisioned audience. Philostratus identifies 'the Athenians' as the addressees, and, since he seems to have known the whole text, somewhere in the lost segments the literary speaker presumably explicitly addressed them as such.[22] While other *epitaphioi logoi* distinguish between specific subgroups of the audience,[23] the literary speaker of the Gorgianic text does not seem to have recognised subgroups nor do we find references to conflicts within the envisioned audience.

It is noteworthy, however, that within the extant segments, the literary speaker does not identify himself as a member of the group of addressees.

[16] The text was doubtlessly known to Isocrates (who quoted it at 4.158), and, as the present analysis shows, Thucydides likely knew it as well.

[17] Dionysius and Philostratus apparently had first-hand knowledge of Gorgias' *Epitaphios*; see above at nn. 10 and 12.

[18] Except for Dionysius and Philostratus, the Roman-imperial and late-antique authors who referred to Gorgias' *Epitaphios* seem to have used excerpts (see nn. 6–11). Planudes is the last Byzantine author whom we know to have referred to Gorgias' *Epitaphios*.

[19] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.5 states that Gorgias' *Epitaphios* was delivered for those men who had fallen in the war and whom the Athenians buried at public expense.

[20] On the complex relationship between literacy, orality and rhetoric, see e.g. Thomas 1992; Calinescu 1993; Thomas and Webb 1994; Edwards 2000; Haskins 2001.

[21] First person singular is attested in the quotation preserved in Planud. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 549.3–4, where the speaker states: 'If only I could say what I wish.' The *Menexenus* shows that in the classical era it was not completely inconceivable to an Athenian that a woman might have authored a funeral speech, but Gorgias' *Epitaphios* does not seem to have been engaged in a comparable play with gender expectations. He obviously envisioned a male speaker.

[22] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.5.

[23] Lys. 2.66 hints at the distinction between Athenian citizens and foreigners, while Thucydides has Pericles attack the *apeiroi* ('ignorant') in the proem of his speech (2.35.2), referring twice here to *phthonos* ('envy' – Fantasia 2003: 368).

In the other *epitaphioi logoi*, the (literary) speaker addresses the audience in the first person plural, emphasising his membership of the Athenian citizen body.[24] In the extant fragments of the Gorgianic text, the speaker refers to himself in the first person singular, while referring to the fallen in the third person plural.[25] Even where he explicitly mentions the relationship between the fallen and their compatriots, he seems careful to avoid identifying himself with 'their fellow citizens'.[26] It might be a deliberate rhetorical strategy of Gorgias to dissociate the literary speaker from the addressed audience. As I will discuss below, the Gorgianic *Epitaphios* has clear critical overtones. He may well have chosen deliberately to dissociate the literary speaker grammatically from the addressed audience in order to develop a certain distance between the two and to gain the necessary leeway for the development of his political critique. We see in Philostratus that the readers of Gorgias' *Epitaphios* actually noticed the critical distance between the literary speaker and the addressed audience and that they did indeed understand this as part of Gorgias' polemic.[27]

In the extant fragments, there is no direct reference to a specific military conflict or a specific historical context. Since most of the text is lost and the testimonies do not indicate a particular historical moment, it is unclear whether the text originally referred to a specific funeral ceremony within a particular historical setting or whether Gorgias was interested instead only in the general characteristics of the genre of Athenian funeral speeches. Even if the fragments do not accentuate a particular historical context, a number of indications hint at the broader circumstances. To start with, the fragment about Xerxes as the Zeus of the Persians shows that the text referred to the Graeco-Persian relationship, and reflected on the power and the status of the Great King. It is quite certain that Xerxes I is meant here, so the text, likely at the beginning of the historical catalogue of exploits, dealt with the Second Persian War. Philostratus implies that Gorgias was not merely interested in historical retrospection, but, by referring to the successful repulsion of the Persians, called on the Greeks to unite again and jointly to fight the barbarians.[28] The phrase, 'trophies won from the barbarians demand hymns, those from the Greeks dirges', condenses the underlying idea into a powerful formula. Philostratus

[24] Thuc. 2.36; Lys. 2.6; Pl. *Menex.* 236d; Dem. 60.5; Hyp. 6.3.

[25] For use of first person singular, see n. 21 above. When the literary speaker refers to the fallen with the words, 'these men have acquired', he uses the third person plural (Planud. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 549.5–6).

[26] Planud. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 550.12.

[27] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.4–5.

[28] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.4–5.

elaborates further on the core thought by pointing out that Gorgias was concerned about the Athenians' audacious thirst for imperial power as well as the resultant state of discord among the Greeks. In a similar vein to Isocrates' *Panegyricus* (see below), Gorgias' *Epitaphios* elaborated on the idea – which was to become so prominent in the fourth century – that the Greeks thrived when they fought together against the barbarians, and that the Athenian thirst for empire led them to a dramatic decline in unity and stability.

When Gorgias evokes vultures as living graves, he seems to be aiming in the same direction. This formula in particular stirred up the emotions of the ancient literary scholars. Pseudo-Longinus, Hermogenes and Athanasius Alexandrinus cite the phrase as evidence of Gorgias' predilection for exaggerated tropes and misguided expressions.[29] As far as I can see, the modern interpretations presented so far do not fundamentally overcome the stylistic tunnel vision of such ancient grammarians. Importantly, however, the problem is not so much stylistic in nature, since there is something more substantial behind this metaphor. The phrase evokes vultures stripping meat from the bones of the unrecovered corpses of fallen soldiers. With this powerful image, Gorgias clearly echoed the *Iliad*. This epic poem's opening forcefully introduces its central theme, namely the wrath of Achilles that cost the lives of countless Greek fighters, whose carcasses were devoured by dogs and birds.[30] Homer's *Iliad* thereby links the problem of unburied war dead to dissension among the Greeks, and two parallel passages from books 11 and 22 clearly show that the metaphor of flying scavengers is construed as a diametric antithesis to the dignified burial of a fallen warrior.[31] In the form of *oiōnoi ōmēstai* ('carnivorous birds'), the Homeric epic introduces a forceful literary tool for highlighting the severe consequences of the disunity among Greeks and their resulting incapacity to reach their shared military goals.

In post-Homeric Greek literature, then, the unburied fallen soldier was an established *topos* ('commonplace'). The metaphor was open to variation; for example, in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, which was first staged in 467, Eteocles receives a dignified burial on account of his goodwill towards the city,[32] while the corpse of Polyneices is cast out for the dogs to devour.[33] In *Trojan Women*, dating to 415, Euripides uses the drastic image of unburied war dead in order to portray the total devastation of the Trojan community, when Andromache moans: 'There lie the gory corpses of the

[29] See n. 6 above. [30] Hom. *Il.* 1.1–7.
[31] Hom. *Il.* 11.450–5; 22.331–6. On the burial of elite warriors in Homer see pp. 60–2.
[32] Aesch. *Sept.* 1013–17. [33] *Ibid.* 1019–25.

slain by the shrine of Pallas for vultures to carry off and Troy has come to slavery's yoke.'[34] Gorgias appears to have further extended the meaning of the trope, for, in his *Epitaphios*, he evoked the image of decomposing corpses of unburied fallen soldiers that had been torn apart by wild animals in order to emphasise the drastic human costs of internal Greek conflicts.[35] Even if Gorgias did not explicitly refer to a specific event, the metaphor of vultures as graves might well have inspired his readers to think of particular incidences, such as the treatment of the Athenian soldiers who fell in the battle of Delium in 424, whose bodies were held back by the Boeotians for more than two weeks and were only released in a half-rotten condition.[36]

With similar intent, Thucydides repeatedly referred to unburied fallen Greek soldiers, showing how the inability to uphold proper burial customs went hand-in-hand with an increasing erosion of Greek morality.[37] Therefore, both Gorgias and Thucydides used references to unburied war dead as a way to demonstrate how military struggles among Greeks posed a much more severe threat to social cohesion and ethical bonds than wars between Greeks and so-called barbarians. In doing so, they were addressing a sensitive topic in Greek political discourse. It was not only the Athenians who went to extraordinary lengths to recover the corpses of fellow citizens who had been killed in battle and to provide the most solemn public burial ceremonies for them, the Greeks in general considered such rituals a divinely sanctioned *nomos* ('custom').[38]

So, by speaking of vultures as living graves, Gorgias hardly chose a metaphor for purely stylistic reasons or, for that matter, as a rhetorical misstep. On closer examination, this image proves to be an essential key to understanding Gorgias' *Epitaphios*. In this phrase, Gorgias captured the horrors of war in a manner as drastic as it could get. When Gorgias quite

[34] Eur. *Tr.* 599–600: αἱματόεντα δὲ θεᾷ παρὰ Παλλάδι σώματα νεκρῶν | γυψὶ φέρειν τέταται: ζυγὰ δ' ἤνυσε δούλια Τροίᾳ (tr. E. P. Coleridge). There is no scholarly consensus as to whether this tragedy referred to the military operation against Melos and/or the dangers that the Athenians themselves would soon be facing in the imminent Sicilian expedition.

[35] On war and civil war in the Greek world, see e.g. Lintott 1982; Gehrke 1985; Figueira 1991; Nippel 1997; Price 2001; Wolpert 2002; Gray 2015; Börm, Mattheis and Wienand 2016; Börm 2019.

[36] Thuc. 4.97–101. Depending on the date of Gorgias' *Epitaphios* (see below), other points of reference might also be possible: for instance, the disaster of the Sicilian expedition, when unprecedented numbers of Athenian casualties could not be recovered and buried (Thuc. 7.72). Pritchett 1985: 235–41 discusses further examples of unburied Greek war dead.

[37] Lateiner 1977.

[38] For more on Athenian burial honours for the war dead see pp. 9–17; Wienand 2023: 49–152. For such honours in other Greek states, see e.g. Low 2011; Stöhr 2020; Beck 2020: 121–206. Throughout the Greek world, there were widely accepted conventions concerning the recovery of the bodies of those killed in battle (e.g. Pritchett 1985).

vividly shows his readers – in a text that in its form pretends to be a public funeral oration – that the bodies of the killed citizens are rotting in the fields unrecovered, unburied and unhonoured, and that they have become carrion for birds of prey, this is certainly to be understood as a deliberate breach of a taboo and as a calculated affront. With this striking metaphor, Gorgias evoked dissension and conflict within the Greek world. The image was meant to challenge the devotional solemnity of a public funeral eulogy. In short, it was deliberately provocative.

Against the backdrop of this reading, it is possible to include the surviving longer segment of Gorgias' *Epitaphios* into my interpretive framework. At first sight, one might think that this passage's composition was typical for an Athenian public funeral oration. However, a close comparison with the other *epitaphioi logoi*, especially Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides, shows that Gorgias' portrayal of the fallen follows its own logic. Gorgias does not limit the discourse to celebrating the war-related achievements of the fallen, focussing equally on their civilian lives and non-military virtues. To this end, he not only praises the 'inborn martial valor' of the fallen, but also states that they showed 'piety toward the gods by their justice, reverence to their parents by their solicitude, justice to their fellow citizens by their equality, respect to their friends by their trustworthiness'.[39] He also highlights with great clarity the symmetrical balance between the paradigmatic roles the citizens played in war and peace.[40] The passage is instructive: Gorgias depicts the fallen as ideal citizens who, with respect to religion, family, the civic community, and friendships, maintained the bonds that united the Athenians. While the military achievements of the fallen secure the existence of the community against the outside world, their commitments within society consolidate the community from within. The consequence of this depiction of the fallen citizen-soldiers is that they are here presented as playing an indispensable role for the community as a whole. Thus, in Gorgias' *Epitaphios*, the death of a citizen in war implies a severe loss of social cohesion and order.

Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides attributes a different social role to the fallen. In this famous passage, it is solely the heroic death of the war dead that makes a difference for society. In the *Histories*, Pericles does not

[39] Planud. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 550.10–13 (tr. A. Laks and G. W. Most): σεμνοὶ μὲν πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς τῶι δικαίωι, ὅσιοι δὲ πρὸς τοὺς τοκέας τῆι θεραπείαι, δίκαιοι δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀστοὺς τῶι ἴσωι, εὐσεβεῖς δὲ πρὸς τοὺς φίλους τῆι πίστει.

[40] *Ibid*. 550.8–10: ἑαυτῶν δὲ ἀναθήματα, οὐκ ἄπειροι οὔτε ἐμφύτου ἄρεος οὔτε νομίμων ἐρώτων οὔτε ἐνοπλίου ἔριδος οὔτε φιλοκάλου εἰρήνης ('men who were not inexperienced either in inborn martial valor, or in lawful loves, or in armed conflict, or in beauty-loving peace').

mince his words when he addresses the demerits of the fallen in their civilian lives. He claims that by dying in battle the war dead 'undid their pernicious deeds (*kakon*) and thus benefitted the community more than they had harmed it (*eblapsan*) in their private lives'.[41] For our understanding of the Gorgianic text, this means that the particular way in which the fallen are depicted as ideal citizens in the *Epitaphios* implies that their deaths necessarily constitute a grave loss for the civic community. Losing ideal citizens – as opposed to losing inhabitants who harmed the community in their private lives – is a grave threat to any society. Gorgias seems to have intentionally presented the war dead as perfect citizens in order to accentuate further his claim that the Greeks should fear the devastating consequences of internal conflicts among Greeks – an idea that in turn supports his call for the unification of the Greek world.

8.4 The Question of Dating

The extant fragments contain no obvious indications as to the date of Gorgias' *Epitaphios*. Scholars have proposed a wide range of dates, ranging from the 420s to the 380s,[42] with others considering it impossible even to propose an approximate date.[43] Nevertheless, by taking a closer look at what survives, we can effectively narrow down the possible timeframes. The fragments and the testimonies provide a number of indications regarding the broader circumstances under which the text was written. At that time, Athenian foreign policy was characterised by a thirst for *arkhē*, or empire (Philostratus), the Athenians employed audacious means to pursue supremacy in the Greek world (Philostratus), and Greek disunity resulted from Athenian foreign policy (Philostratus). As a consequence, military conflicts among Greeks claimed victims (Athanasius, Pseudo-Longinus, Hermogenes and Philostratus), bodies of fallen Greek soldiers were left unrecovered (Athanasius, Pseudo-Longinus and Hermogenes), and victories were celebrated over Greeks, not barbarians (Philostratus). Furthermore, the text was also written when there was a realistic prospect of uniting the Greeks and mobilising them for a common war against the Persians

[41] Thuc. 2.42.3: ἀγαθῷ γὰρ κακὸν ἀφανίσαντες κοινῶς μᾶλλον ὠφέλησαν ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἔβλαψαν. Loraux drew on this passage when she wrote that all the dead had an equal share of praise, regardless of the quality of their past existence (Loraux 1982: 33; pp. 65–6).

[42] Blass 1887: 62, followed by Untersteiner 1961: 78: *c.* 420; Mathieu 1925: 24: after 382; Aly 1929: between 421 and 416; Loraux 1986b: 431 n. 32: second half of the 390s.

[43] E.g. Spatharas 2001: 272: 'the *Epitaphios* cannot be dated'.

(Philostratus). In addition, the text certainly does not predate Gorgias' first residence in Athens in 427,[44] as it directly relates to the public funeral for the war dead in its distinctly Athenian guise. Moreover, as Isocrates has clearly copied a phrase from Gorgias in his *Panegyricus*, which was published around 380, we also have a robust *terminus ante quem* for the *Epitaphios*.

All these conditions best fit the following three periods: 427 to 421 (option A), 416 to 404 (option B) and the mid-390s to 380 or thereabouts (option C). Option A goes from Gorgias' first arrival in Athens in 427 to the Peace of Nicias in 421. This period was characterised by Athens' persistent claim to supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean and the resultant wars among Greeks, which fits most of the requirements mentioned above. Option B begins with the siege of Melos and the Sicilian expedition, and covers the final and most violent phase of the Peloponnesian War, which caused a great deal of internal war among the Greeks. Option C begins with the Corinthian War and ends with the publication of Isocrates' *Panegyricus*. In the course of this new Greece-wide war, the revival of Athens' military prowess became apparent,[45] and the Athenian citizens re-activated the tradition of the public funeral for the fallen.[46] Around 380, Isocrates quoted from Gorgias in his *Panegyricus*. Our sources are inconsistent on the question of the date of Gorgias' death. It is possible that he lived until the first half of the 370s.[47]

With some certainty, option C can be ruled out, since this would mean that Gorgias wrote his *Epitaphios* only after Thucydides' *Histories* was published. This seems to me to be unlikely. In direct comparison with Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides, the Gorgianic *Epitaphios* has a decidedly simpler message: a call for Greek unity and for a joint fight against the Persians. In terms of the intended impact on his readership, Gorgias put much weight on stylistic effects, which is clearly evident in all the *Epitaphios*' metaphors, word jingles with assonance (*paranomasiai*) and alliteration as well as its rhyme (*homoioteleuton*), parallelisms and antitheses.[48] We know that Gorgias was

[44] On Gorgias' diplomatic mission as an envoy of his Sicilian hometown, Leontini: Diod. Sic. 12.53.1–3; Paus. 6.17.7, with the date of this mission inferred from Thuc. 3.86.

[45] Pritchard 2019a: 28–30.

[46] On the development of the Athenian public funeral ceremony after the end of the Peloponnesian War, see Wienand 2023: 131–52.

[47] Suda (s.v. Gorgias, quoting Porphyry) and Olympiodorus (*in Platonis Gorgiam commentaria prooem.* 9 [7.25–8.12 Westerink]) seem to have taken the dates from Apollodorus' *Chronicle*. On the inconsistencies between Porphyry and Olympiodorus regarding Gorgias' biographical data, see Buchheim 2012: VII–VIII and 201–3 nn. 2.1, 10.1.

[48] Untersteiner 1961: 79.

able initially to impress the Athenians by showcasing such rhetoric artistry,[49] but we also know that the effect wore off over the years.[50] At the time when, some years after the end of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides' *Histories* became known with its literary version of Pericles' funeral oration, Gorgias had had the opportunity to study closely Athenian politics for around three decades.[51] I find it hard to imagine that against this backdrop, he read the highly elaborate funeral oration in Thucydides and then composed his own *epitaphios logos* with its simpler message and focus on rhetorical effects. The opposite is far more plausible: if Gorgias' *Epitaphios* predates the publication of Thucydides' *Histories*, it is the Gorgianic text that was highly innovative, as it probably invented the funeral oration as a *literary* genre and showed what it could be good for. Thucydides might then have been inspired by Gorgias to explore further the possibilities of this newly created literary genre.

Option B, that is, a date of composition between 416 and 404, is, clearly, more likely. Within this period, a case could be made for a more precise date: 415/16 or thereabouts. This date is close to the destruction of Melos and the beginning of the Sicilian expedition when the Athenians again took aggressive measures against their real or perceived enemies and when tensions among Greeks were again high. Gorgias' *Helen*, which may be seen as a counterpart to the *Epitaphios*,[52] probably stems from this period as well.[53] Around 415/6, it was not yet fully inconceivable to reunite the Greeks. However, after their disastrous defeat in Syracuse, in 413, Gorgias could not argue, as he did in his *Epitaphios*, that the Athenians were striving to expand their *arkhē* at the expense of Greek unity, and there was no prospect any more of uniting the Greeks jointly to fight the Persians.[54]

Option A, that is, a date in the late 420s is even more likely. The historical parameters that our sources sketch out fit well the historical circumstances of these years. In particular, the *Epitaphios*' coupling of a political message with rhetorical display would have suited very well the

[49] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.3; Diod. Sic. 12.53.3. [50] Diod. Sic. 12.53.4 even says so explicitly.

[51] On the date of Thucydides' death, see e.g. Luschnat 1970: 1094.

[52] While the *Epitaphios* engages in a reflection of what encomia stand for and what impact they exert on a citizen body affected by war, death and thirst for power, the *Encomium of Helen* approaches the problem from the seemingly funny side of a *paignion* ('playful poem') in the guise of a speech of praise for a person who more than almost any other stands for the bitter consequences of war.

[53] The self-defence of Helen in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, which was put on stage in 415, also addresses the fault lines of uncompromising power politics (895–1059). Buchheim (2012: 159–60 n. 11.2) argues that Euripides follows Gorgias. The *Olympic Oration*, which is even more closely related to the *Epitaphios*, cannot be securely dated.

[54] Bleckmann 1998.

first years of Gorgias' presence in Athens, when his activities oscillated between his ambassadorial role and his personal agenda as a celebrated orator and teacher of rhetoric. An extensive display of his rhetorical skills, as he demonstrated them in his *Epitaphios*, must have particularly impressed his oral and literary audiences in his first years in Athens. Gorgias might well have been inspired to compose a literary *epitaphios logos* already shortly after his arrival in Athens, when he certainly had a chance to personally attend a public funeral for the war dead in the Ceramicus. Finally, the metaphor of vultures as living graves might well implicitly refer to the treatment of Athenian casualties after the battle of Delium in 424 – a particularly traumatic event that was also reflected in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* of 423/2 or thereabouts.[55]

8.5 The Purpose and the Audience of Gorgias' *Epitaphios*

One strand of scholarship reads Gorgias' *Epitaphios* as the manuscript of a public funeral speech delivered in Athens by Gorgias himself.[56] However, Gorgias was not an Athenian citizen, and, since in the Athenian public funeral ceremony for the war dead, citizenship was a category of the utmost importance, it is most implausible that Athenian citizens would have elected a non-citizen to deliver the official speech.[57] So, could Gorgias have been commissioned to write a funeral oration for an Athenian citizen? This is the fall-back option for all those scholars who try to maintain the idea that what has survived amounts to portions from a speech that was actually delivered in the Ceramicus. Yet, the Gorgias-as-ghostwriter hypothesis is equally unlikely. Athenians would hardly have elected a speaker who had to have a speech written for him. Thucydides claims (and this is quite plausible) that only highly respected leaders who commanded the necessary degree of *doxa* ('repute') and *gnōmē* ('judgement')

[55] On the date of Eur. *Supp.*, see e.g. Zuntz 1955: 55–94. On Euripides' approach to the battle of Delium, see also Eur. *Bacch.* 1280.

[56] Untersteiner 1961: 78: '*un discorso effettivamente tenuto*' ('a speech actually delivered'). Philostr. *V S* 1.9.5 speaks of 'the *Epitaphios* that he delivered in Athens and presented in honour of those who had fallen in the wars and whom the Athenians buried at public expense'.

[57] The assumption that non-citizens could deliver Athenian funeral orations (advocated, for instance, by Buchheim [2012: 190 n. 2] and Prinz [1997: 29, 193 n. 217] with reference to Thuc. 2.34.6 and Pl. *Menex.* 234b) has been used to account for the fact that *epitaphioi logoi* were written by Gorgias and Lysias, who were both non-citizens. As literary compositions, however, these texts are not based on proper funeral orations (as is also the case with Plato's *Menexenus* and Isocrates' *Panegyricus*). The standpoint that only citizens were eligible was taken already by Blass (1887: vol. 1: 61).

were chosen as speakers.[58] There is also no indication in our sources that Gorgias wrote commissioned speeches for other orators. Besides, I hope to have shown that although the text adopted the overall form of an Athenian funeral oration, it was not composed fully to comply with the formal requirements of the public funeral for the war dead. Therefore, we must assume that the Gorgianic *Epitaphios* was never intended for oral presentation in this particular ceremonial setting and was never delivered in a public burial for Athenian war dead. So, what options remain?

Gorgias' *Epitaphios* was brought into circulation as a free-standing literary text, which means that we have to arrive at an interpretation that takes into account its literary nature. Among classical scholars, the view is widely held that Gorgias' *Epitaphios* was a 'model speech' that gave his students insights into the compositional techniques and stylistics of an actual funeral oration.[59] We can trace this interpretation back to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who brings into play, with reference to *dēmēgorikoi logoi* ('assembly speeches'), the possibility of understanding Gorgias' written 'orations' as exemplary speeches.[60] This interpretation again presumes that the text was composed in a manner suitable to the ceremonial occasion, which, as I have shown above, is not the case: the Gorgianic *Epitaphios* deviates markedly in various respects from the blueprint of a standard funeral speech.

I have already hinted at another, more conclusive option that has not been seriously explored so far – not least because Plato's strawman version of Gorgias as a politically indifferent sophist only striving for acclaim and money had such a lasting effect.[61] Gorgias' text adopts the form of a prominent genre of Athenian public oratory, but, at the same time, intentionally deviates in certain respects from what the readers would expect such a speech to look like. These deviations create the necessary leeway that the author needs in order to include in the text, on the one hand, political messages that run counter to the official ideology of the Athenian public funeral ceremony, and, on the other hand, a rhetorical firework. As a piece of literary oratory with political overtones conveyed on a texture of rhetoric finesse, the *Epitaphios* falls into a category that has

[58] Thuc. 2.34.6; cf. Pl. *Menex.* 234a–6d.

[59] Spatharas 2001: 272; note also, for instance, Herrman (2004: 23, 27), who understands Gorgias' *Epitaphios* as 'a demonstration speech for [Gorgias'] students', and as 'a model for use in a school setting'.

[60] Preserved in Planud. *Comm. in Hermog. De ideis* 548.8 n. 2.

[61] Kerferd (1981) and Buchheim (1986), among others, have effectively debunked widely held misconceptions of what 'the sophists' did, and changed our view of the social, political, cultural and literary role of sophistic rhetoric.

been called elite–elite literature.[62] Therefore, it was tailored to be disseminated as a written text to a readership within the Athenian (and more broadly Greek) intellectual elite who shared a keen interest in rhetoric and who closely observed, and critically reflected on, the effects of international power politics. The audience that Gorgias intended to address certainly consisted in part of his elite students in Athens, but the *Epitaphios* was clearly also written for a broader readership transcending these Athenian circles.[63] Besides serving as proof of his rhetorical skills, the *Epitaphios* appears too to have been a piece of political exhortation.[64]

It is certainly possible (and even likely) that beyond disseminating a written version of his *Epitaphios*, Gorgias also recited his 'funeral speech' orally. But such an oral performance must have differed significantly from actual funeral orations. A funeral speech proper was delivered by an Athenian citizen of high repute who was elected to do so in the Athenian assembly. As part of the public funeral, he gave a public speech before a heterogeneous crowd of observers of all social classes and of Athenians and foreigners alike, who, for whatever motives, had gathered in the Ceramicus when the fallen were paid their last respects.[65] In contrast, when Gorgias orally delivered his 'funeral oration', he did so as a foreigner without a public mandate, but with a critical distance to the ideology of Athenian power politics, and with a view to his reputation as a celebrated orator and teacher of rhetoric. Gorgias delivered his speech in a setting and in a space different from that of the Athenian funeral ceremonies. We know that Gorgias gave speeches in a variety of different contexts: as part of public or private discussion events and major Panhellenic festivals as well as in theatres and even assemblies.[66] The most likely context for the oral delivery of his *Epitaphios* is probably such a discussion event.

As far as we can tell from what survives of the published version of his speech, Gorgias, in such an oral presentation of his *Epitaphios*, displayed

[62] Ober 1989: 48.

[63] Gorgias frequented the circles of political leaders and influential Greek intellectuals; during his residences in Athens, the sources attest connections to Pericles, Critias, Alcibiades and Thucydides, among others (Philostr. *V S* 1.9.3; Suda s.v. Gorgias). The circles around these figures certainly come into consideration as an intended readership. On the Greek intellectual literary culture, see e.g. Usener 1994; 2003; Too 1998; Pratt 2006.

[64] Philostr. *V S* 1.9.4 explicitly states that Gorgias intended that his *Olympic Oration* and *Epitaphios* would convey a political message (*epoliteuthē*). Syrianus (*Comm. in. Hermog.* 11.20–3 = Dion. Hal. *De imit.* 8 [31.13 Usener]) even talks of *logoi politikoi* ('political speeches'). For Moysey (1982), the *Epitaphios* might even be considered 'political advice'.

[65] Stupperich 1977; Clairmont 1983; Pritchett 1985; Arrington 2015.

[66] Philostr. *V S* 1 *proem*; 1.19.3–4; Paus. 6.17.8; Dion. Hal. *Lys.* 3.4–5; Pl. *Hp. mai.* 282b.

rhetorical skill to a degree that contrasted sharply with the regular funeral orations, which were typically much simpler creations.[67] He certainly also attracted an audience that was more homogeneous than the crowd that attended a proper funeral ceremony. On this, we should think mostly of students, companions, other intellectual interlocutors and further interested listeners.[68] Most importantly, Gorgias' audience will have understood that here a critical observer appropriated a genuinely Athenian genre that had as a goal something which Gorgias could never subscribe: the unconditional exaltation of Athenian culture, history and politics.

Gorgias composed his *Epitaphios* at a time when the public funeral for the Athenian war dead had become an increasingly important public platform for asserting Athens' claimed constitutional superiority and imperial hegemony.[69] It was also a time when the death of citizens in the Athenian quest for imperial power was a theme of growing explosiveness. In the last three decades of the fifth century, we can observe in Athenian public discourse an intensifying critique of civic ideology as it was articulated in the public funeral for the war dead: tragedy and old comedy, private treatises, such as Pseudo-Xenophon's *Constitution of the Athenians*, and historiography critically explored the interrelationships of civic ideology and power struggles in the Greek world. This critical literature increasingly focussed on the burial of the war dead.[70] Gorgias not only absorbed these tendencies, but he developed them and condensed them in his *Epitaphios*. The fact that in these broader contexts, Gorgias published critical reflections on the ramifications of the Athenian quest for imperial dominance in the eastern Mediterranean can thus be seen as another significant indication of the existence, in the late fifth century, of a broader intellectual trend – reinforced in the Athenian intellectual and political elite – to critically assess the Athenian ideology of power and democracy.[71]

[67] See Canfora 2011a for this important distinction between the oral speeches and their written counterparts. Loraux's interpretation proceeds from the opposite assumption that there was no significant distinction between the literary *epitaphioi logoi* and the orations proper (see pp. 27–8).

[68] On the audiences of the sophists, see e.g. Kerferd 1981; Buchheim 1986.

[69] See n. 38 above.

[70] In addition to Gorgias and Euripides, Herodotus reworked *topoi* ('commonplaces') from the Athenian funeral oration in books 7 and 9 of his *Histories*, which was published in the 420s. In doing so, he possibly referred implicitly to Pericles' funeral oration from 439 (Meyer 1899: 221–2; Weber 1922: 375; Walters 1980: 1 n. 3; Todd 2007: 152–2 with n. 19), which might have circulated, during the mid-420s, in the form of a literary imitation composed by an author unknown to us today. This possibility is suggested by the fact that Arist. *Rh.* 1.7 (1365a34) and 3.10 (1411a4) quote from this oration a passage that seems to have been known to Herodotus (7.162.1–2); cf. Eur. *Supp.* 447–9; Dem. 60.24.

[71] E.g. Hunt 2010b: 237–64.

8.6 Conclusion: Gorgias' Impact on the Genre

We seem to have identified in Gorgias the inventor of the literary genre of classical *epitaphioi logoi*.[72] The period in which he wrote his *Epitaphios*, that is, most likely the late 420s, saw a rising tendency to problematise the human cost of Athens' uncompromising quest for imperial power. Gorgias entered this discursive field with his own analysis of the links between power, war and death, and with his own critical appeal. The formal shape that he gave his intervention turned out to be the first free-standing literary composition adopting the form of an Athenian funeral oration.[73] Most importantly, Gorgias gave the newly invented literary genre a double twist that had a lasting effect on all later *epitaphioi logoi*: he proved that in their secondary (literary) lives, 'funeral speeches' could become highly elaborate literary compositions; and he showed that it was possible to infiltrate elements of a critical discourse into the otherwise hermetic ideology of the epitaphic genre.

Thucydides inherited these traits from the Gorgianic blueprint when he worked on the *Histories* and decided to integrate into his narrative his own literary reconstruction of an Athenian funeral oration.[74] In terms of structure and content, the Thucydidean reconstruction may come close to what Pericles had actually said. At the same time, the passage in the *Histories* was so innovative and impressive as a *literary* composition that it profoundly influenced all later literary *epitaphioi logoi*. Even if Thucydides in his version of Pericles' funeral oration did not engage in a direct literary dialogue with Gorgias – and as far as the fragmentary transmission of the *Epitaphios* allows us to see, there are no direct references – his readers will have noticed a number of apparent *antitheses* vis-à-vis the Gorgianic template. The literary antagonism is evident on various levels ranging from style over narrative context to the depiction of the fallen and even down to the specific application of certain terms.[75]

[72] To be sure, the tradition of oral funeral orations developed several decades earlier (pp. 17–21).

[73] The fact that it took a foreigner to invent the literary genre of Athenian *epitaphioi logoi* sheds a sharp light on the still underestimated differences between the oral and the literary versions of this genre.

[74] With his description of the epidemic at 2.47–55, Thucydides questions the idea reinforced in Pericles' funeral oration that an 'empire first' strategy would successfully bring together the Athenian community. The passage presents a directly opposing picture of the death and the burial of Athenian citizens and even includes a reference to human corpses devoured by birds with the dark twist of the birds themselves also dying (2.50).

[75] While Gorgias uses the funeral oration as a literary platform for showcasing the art of sophistic rhetoric, Thucydides avoids stylistic display. Also, Gorgias focusses on foreign relations, whereas Thucydides has Pericles focus on the internal constitution of the Athenians. A third

Even if both texts are markedly original literary endeavours within their individual contexts of creation, dissemination and reception, Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides relates to Gorgias' *Epitaphios* in a way that is probably best described as *Aufhebung*, or sublation, in the threefold Hegelian sense of negation, conservation and elevation. We do not know if Thucydides formed this dialectical relationship intentionally, but it certainly gave rise to an implicit rivalry between the two earliest literary versions of this vitally important genre of Athenian public speech. It also helped to demonstrate just how powerful and flexible the new literary genre was as a medium of elite discourse. Gorgias' *Epitaphios* could thus retain a certain relevance for the further development of the genre of literary *epitaphioi logoi* even after Thucydides' striking intervention. Roughly four decades after its publication – and after Thucydides, Archinus, Lysias and Plato had all published their own written versions of a funeral oration – Isocrates not only quoted an incisive phrase from Gorgias' *Epitaphios*, he even adopted its overall message in the *Panegyricus* when, in a vein quite similar to his precursor, he praised the joint success of the Greeks against Xerxes, laid the blame for conflict and decline on Athens' uncompromising quest for imperial power, and implored the Greeks again to unite and jointly to fight the Persians.[76]

difference is that Gorgias emphasises the cruelest aspects of warfare among Greeks, when Thucydides chooses to reconstruct a funeral oration that is in a relatively conflict-free context. Gorgias also refers to the historical success of the Greeks in fighting the Persians, while Thucydides omits historical background almost entirely and focusses nearly exclusively on the here and now. Another difference is that Gorgias presents the fallen as ideal citizens in war and peace, whereas Thucydides has Pericles stress that they might have shown demerits in their civil lives and that they revealed their civic value solely in their fighting and dying for Athens. Finally, Gorgias employs the notion of *phthonos* to characterise the relation between the envisioned audience and the fallen, while Thucydides uses the same notion to insinuate a field of tension between opposing subgroups within the audience. On Thucydides and Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, see pp. 115–39.

[76] On Isocrates' *Panegyricus*, see pp. 243–6.