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Raffaella Cribiore: The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch

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Introduction

THE SOPHIST LIBANIUS, who was an exponent of the revival of Greek literature that started with the Second Sophistic,¹ taught in Antioch in Syria in the fourth century C.E. In *Oration 55*, he extolled to a student the advantages of a career as a teacher of rhetoric:

How great it is to rule over wellborn young men and see them improve in rhetoric and proceed to the various paths of life! And what about the honors one receives from them and their fathers, from citizens and foreigners? Teachers of rhetoric are respected by all governors, small and great, and even by emperors. (23)

There are many similar statements in Libanius, as well as fervent commendations of good students. There are an equal number of negative assessments of the condition of rhetoric—a despised and silent discipline—and condemnations of youths indifferent to its charms. In general, Libanius's letters present a different view than the orations. In attempting to understand the reasons for the discrepancy and to unravel other puzzles that the vast corpus of the rhetor's surviving writings presents, this book delves into the workings of the most prominent school of rhetoric in Antioch (the modern Antakya, in south Turkey), where Libanius taught as "official sophist of the city."² The school served youths from all provinces of the Roman East. Its curriculum and teaching methods were common to other schools of the Roman Empire, so that the works of Libanius also provide a clear, welcome window on higher education in other times and places. We can apply to Libanius the words of the poet Meleager, who lived centuries before: "If I am a Syrian, what wonder? Stranger, we live in one country, the world."³

Libanius kept a vast correspondence to advertise the quality of his teaching and to maintain contacts with the families of his pupils, former students, and a few other teachers. I have included in an appendix translations of about 200 letters that concern his teaching activity.⁴ All of the

¹ The phrase, which comes from Philostratus (*VS* 481, 507), is commonly applied to Greek culture from mid-first to mid-third century, but much evidence comes from later times. Pernot (1993, 14 n. 9) proposed the term "Third Sophistic" for the fourth century.

² These words were uttered bitterly by a former student, John Chrysostom, *In Honor of the Blessed Babylas, Against the Hellenes* 18; Schatkin 1990.

³ Meleager lived in the first century B.C.E. This quotation comes from an epigram, *Anth. Pal.* 7.417.

⁴ See Appendix One. In 1738, J. C. Wolf produced an edition with translations of the 1544 letters, but naturally, he could not take advantage of the magisterial text established in

surviving correspondence of Libanius, which is more than double that of Cicero's, belongs to two separate periods, his first ten years of teaching in Antioch and the last five years of his life.⁵ This study, in any case, is based not only on the texts I have translated, but also on all of his correspondence with relevance to education, as well as several of his speeches that pertain to pedagogical issues.

There is more than one Libanius, and this book does not pretend to interpret them all or to solve all the puzzles. The questions I am asking depend on my specific interests and are only tangential to other fundamental questions. By the beginning of the third century, Christianity had gained a hold over the intellectual elite, but Libanius, a major representative of Hellenism when it was starting to break down, was an exponent of paganism, since his fervent belief in classical culture brought with it a religious allegiance.⁶ Issues such as Libanius's relationship with the emperor Julian go beyond the teacher-student rapport that I explore; they have been asked before and will continue to be asked.⁷ I will only touch upon Libanius's relations with two of his well-renowned students, John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, who followed paths of life different from him but continued to draw on the rhetorical skills they had acquired.⁸ In the same way, I will not linger on his interactions with emperors and pivotal figures of the age, with whom he sometimes had

1921 by Foerster. Festugière 1959 partly or wholly translated into French some 100 letters regarding education, but his translations are somewhat inadequate. Recent translations of Libanius's letters contain only a handful of letters concerned with education; see Norman 1992; Fatouros and Krischer 1980; Cabouret 2000; and Bradbury 2004a. A concordance of the letters' translations is in Wintjes 2005, 279–91. Gonzales Galvez (2005) has translated into Spanish the first part of the collection of letters, but this translation was not available to me before this book entered production.

⁵ About 80 percent of the letters fall in the period 355–65, and the rest mostly cover the years 388–93. In Appendix One, I have not followed a chronological order but have included separate dossiers for each student. I did not include a dossier for those students of Libanius who make only a brief appearance in a letter.

⁶ On Hellenism as consciousness of descent from the ancient Greeks and aspiration to linguistic purity, see, e.g., Swain 1996 and 2004; Whitmarsh 2001. On Hellenism and paganism, see Bowersock 1990. The nineteenth-century Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy, who was born and lived in Alexandria, aptly comments on the feelings of belonging to classical Greece: "Let us finally accept the truth; we too are Greeks—what else are we?—but with loves and emotions of Asia, but with loves and emotions that sometimes astound Hellenism." Dalven 1976, 272, "Return from Greece."

⁷ I use the name Julianus for the teachers and students by that name, but I will refer to the emperor as Julian.

⁸ I occasionally mention John Chrysostom; on him, see Kelly 1995; Liebeschuetz 1990, 157–227; and Festugière 1959 (pp. 412–14 on his disputed chronology); see also the useful summary of various issues in Wintjes 2005, 177–90. I will dedicate only a little more attention to Basil; see Chapter Three below.

tempestuous relationships, or on his influence on public affairs in Antioch, or on his concern (*philanthrōpia*) for the lower classes and protests about social injustice and against an oppressive system.⁹ Libanius (probably rightly) boasted to have written “more than any man alive” and revealed much of himself; much of what the Middle Ages preserved still awaits interpretation.¹⁰

But even though I concentrate on Libanius as an educator, and the factual claims I make are based on a process of inquiry and the examination of a large body of material, I am aware that I cannot pretend to have captured him fully. Letters manipulate reality no less than do speeches self-consciously composed for public consumption or autobiography. While one should read them (when possible) in conjunction with other writings of an author, it is not always easy to find overall coherence, if that is what one seeks. The farther a reader is from a text, the less competent he is to interpret it,¹¹ and this is particularly true with letters. Apart from the issue of influence from other texts and trends, letters need to be situated in context in order to reconstruct the meaning they had for their original readers (the recipients principally), the people to whom they showed them, the subsequent readers who had Libanius’s collection at their disposal after his death, up to the present readers. A letter not only is a veritable dialogue between two parties, as ancient literary critics maintained, but it also significantly involves the persona of the carrier, who brought it and supplemented its content, and the subsequent audience, which eavesdrops on a distant conversation and enriches its significance. Through a method of historical reception, one is more equipped to reach the original meaning of an epistolary text, but attempts to reconstruct what has been called a “horizon of expectations” may be only partially successful.¹² So, for example, while we can interpret and predict to some degree the impact of the literary and philosophical references of Libanius’s letters, something still escapes us with regard to various allusions. Does an obscure expression reproduce an ancient proverb, a colloquial utterance, or a private joke between writer and recipient? We are sometimes inescapably severed from the text’s meaning.¹³

⁹ Harries (1999, 118–34) argues that the evidence from his work cannot be discounted and needs to be reevaluated.

¹⁰ See *Or.* 11.1. In addition to the letters, Libanius’s corpus (Foerster 1903–27) includes sixty-four orations, fifty-one declamations, a great number of “preliminary exercises” (*progymnasmata*), and summaries of the *Arguments of Demosthenes*. The manuscript tradition has mostly preserved speeches that dealt with public affairs and school matters.

¹¹ See White 1971.

¹² See Jauss 1971.

¹³ See, e.g., letter 14 and the allusion to the wine vats.

A literary letter, which is simultaneously the product of both real life and literature, is a text that is far from transparent. As readers, we have to rediscover the subtle balance between letters as functional documents and letters as works of art, a balance that was operative when the writer composed his message, but that has insensibly changed upon reaching us. Libanius's letters lay between private and public and were intended to have a literary and lasting value, as indicated by the reactions of his recipients, who often publicized them or claimed inability to respond with similar art. Libanius kept duplicates of his letters, but it is unclear whether he published a limited collection during his lifetime.¹⁴ We may view a letter as an outpouring more spontaneous than an unquestionably literary text (his orations, for example), but in his correspondence, Libanius constructed a personal view of reality and of himself, just as he did in his other works.

Much distinguishes Libanius's letters from the straightforward correspondence of more-or-less educated people that survives from Roman Egypt and, to some degree, from many other sophisticated epistolary texts.¹⁵ Since they originate from a copybook, introductory and final expressions are not included. It is likely that Libanius dictated most of his letters to his secretary and did not pen them himself. A generally unnoticed remark from a contemporary writer, the Roman rhetor Julius Victor, is enlightening: "As a rule, the ancients wrote in their own hands to those closest to them, or at least frequently appended a subscription."¹⁶ In attributing to the *veteres* (Cicero, for example) the habit of penning their own correspondence to intimate people, Julius Victor appears to note a difference from contemporary writing habits and seems to refer to some change in epistolary etiquette.¹⁷ Libanius continued to subscribe his letters to friends, but it is not certain whether he did the same with all correspondents.¹⁸ His letters plunge *in medias res*, describing a unique moment, a request, a mood, and often include an elegantly crafted and clever ending. Some traditional epistolary topics are transformed in his correspondence. So the customary wish for health is there only when there are realistic questions about the recipient's condition, and this often mutates into an

¹⁴ On the question, see Seeck 1906; Silomon 1909; Norman 1992, 1:29–31; and Wintjes 2005, 24–27. The dates and order of all the letters would benefit from some fresh attention.

¹⁵ Cf. the collection in Trapp 2003.

¹⁶ *Ars rhetorica* 27.

¹⁷ Ammianus (15.1.3) says that Constantius subscribed his letters with the words *aeternitas mea* and called himself *orbis totius dominus* when writing in his hand, but it is unclear if the emperor added postscripts in his hand or penned whole letters.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ep.* 1223.1, where he appears to be adding the customary "farewell" to a letter of his friend Acacius 6. In *Ep.* 1456, he shows himself about to write with papyrus and pen in front of him, but it is impossible to tell if the description corresponded to reality.

excursus on Libanius's own welfare. In the same way, the common complaint about not receiving news often includes a reference to an addressee's reluctance to write lest his rhetorical skills not measure up to Libanius's stringent standards, and the lament about lost correspondence (a reality with ancient mail delivery) becomes a colorful description of a letter's vicissitudes.¹⁹

The letters that pertain to education present some uniformity as a group insofar as they throw into relief Libanius's persona as teacher, illuminate some pedagogic issues, and disclose a world of people connected with his profession. Yet one should not attempt to forcefully pigeonhole them into a well-defined epistolary category. Most often, letters do not serve only a single communicative function, but rather discharge a multiplicity of clear (or hidden) roles.²⁰ Many voices can be heard in them, in contrast to Byzantine letters, which revolve entirely around the relationship between writer and recipient.²¹ Most often, Libanius discusses a certain young man with a member of his family, but this trio of voices can be expanded by the mention of other relatives or friends who know the student or by a brief excursus on the letter carrier.

The letters, orations, and pedagogical works of Libanius reveal both continuity and change in education. I refer frequently (both in the main text and in the notes) to education in other periods and societies and to my previous work on this subject, but I did not think it necessary to write a separate account of the distinctiveness of Libanius's school vis-à-vis others.²² Libanius himself emphasizes continuity in teaching methods and in the curriculum, but we will see that only a few of his students were able to follow his ideal, taxing program. He was not inclined to acknowledge discontinuity and modifications of a proven system, yet the short attendance and defections of many of his students must have forced him to make some adjustments. It is also possible that, like all great teachers, he introduced some innovations, which are now hidden among the traditional features of his rhetoric. There is a continuous interplay between his role as a representative of the art of rhetoric and his function as a teacher devoted to instilling the same principles in others. Fidelity to tradition gives a recognizable density to his words, so that his work as rhetor and

¹⁹ See, e.g., *Ep.* 865.

²⁰ Even letters that I have identified as reports of progress or recommendation do not fully belong to only one category.

²¹ See Mullett 1981, 82, and 1997, 18–19.

²² In Criboire 2001, I treated rather exhaustively the comparison of Libanius's methods and curriculum to what we know of other schools. In this book (Chapter Five), I make the picture more complete and ask further questions. Moreover, what emerges from Libanius on school organization, didactic methods, and the relation between schooling and future professions is unique and detailed, and does not find an adequate comparison in antiquity.

sophist may appear to be only the result of sedimentation of things practiced, taught, and learned from the distant past. Yet the issues of his own times, his creativity, and everyday intercourse with his students must have had some impact on his production that we are not able to detect. Though one is tempted to find an uninterrupted discourse that links him to contemporary exponents of Attic oratory, to the Second Sophistic, and in turn to Hermogenes, Aristides, and Demosthenes (among many others), the differences and limitations in the functions of fourth-century rhetoric inevitably shaped his work.

But let us return to the question raised at the beginning concerning the numerous contradictory statements that one encounters in Libanius's work throughout his life and the differing picture that often emerges from his orations and letters. The Libanius most readers know is the old, embittered sophist of the *Autobiography* and his late speeches, the educator who ranted against rival studies and the indifference of his pupils in his old age.²³ The vast majority of the preserved letters, however, is from his early years of teaching in Antioch, when he was still immune from the criticism later leveled against his educational system. This question is intertwined with historical circumstances that valued some studies like shorthand, Roman law, or Latin more than traditional rhetoric, yet one must keep in view that from the first century C.E. to our time, there have been frequent lamentations about the decline of rhetoric as an indicator of the decline of political and societal health.²⁴ The state of Libanius's mental and physical health, which deteriorated insensibly with the passing of the years and the accumulation of loss and disappointment, also deserves consideration. What place (if any) are we supposed to give to Libanius's personal vicissitudes and temperament? The recourse to a biographical and psychological approach is valuable and sometimes inescapable. One may choose not to raise questions about subjective factors, but they are present in the construction of a text in concomitance with socio-cultural components and may help explain internal inconsistencies.²⁵

Psychological, biographical, and historical reasons, which are helpful in other respects, do not provide a full answer to the question at hand, since most of the late letters continue to project an image of Libanius's satisfied dedication to teaching and appreciation of his pupils. Audience and genre, however, may account for some of the unevenness. Most of the letters that refer to education (including the later ones) concern individual

²³ Most of the orations in Norman 2000 belong to the 380s and later.

²⁴ See, e.g., Edwards and Reid 2002. For a negative view of the culture of Late Antiquity, see MacMullen 1990.

²⁵ See Izenberg 1993.

students and usually good students.²⁶ The late orations, however, denounce a whole group of prevaricating, insolent pupils who cared for other disciplines and did not show a disinterested love for the ideal, consuming rhetoric that Libanius cultivated. Are these “bad” students (or at least the students collectively) completely absent from the correspondence? Very occasionally they do appear, but only as a foil to the young man who is the protagonist of the moment. Thus they may serve to throw into more prominent relief a peaceful student, who does not like to fight in spite of his bodily strength, or they are an ideal backdrop, with their “sleepiness,” to the “awakened” commitment of another, or their disinterest may underscore the diligence of a pupil who seeks academic supervision after his departure from Antioch.²⁷ But these are rare instances. As a rule, a letter is entirely dominated by the portrait of the student whose family Libanius is contacting. The restricted original audience of a private letter is enlarged in an oration, but no generalization is possible. A speech might address Antioch’s Council on internal issues or might be delivered in front of the whole school as a performance with a pedagogic aim. It might address the emperor and vividly refer to his actual presence at the delivery without being sent to or pronounced in front of him.²⁸ Controversial orations were restricted to a limited group of friends with whom Libanius could afford to give vent to his frustrations or might be transmitted to an equally select circle at court. He probably confined to his own file drawers some of the bitterest personal tirades against public figures still in power.²⁹

In pointing to the specific characteristics of epistolary versus oratorical texts, I have been relying on generic distinctions. Generic considerations can explain some inconsistencies, but they need to be applied with caution and elasticity. Genres are in a continuous state of mutation, so that adjustments are necessary in order not to create disparity between literature and generic descriptions.³⁰ We assign a work to a generic type, but not all the embodiments of a type share the same characteristics. Libanius’s letters

²⁶ Cf. below, Chapter Four.

²⁷ See 5, 82, and 27. In *Ep.* 444, such students appear as *hoi polloi*, the mass of the students who are worse in rhetoric than a certain boy. In 147, students (considered as a group) are the joyful friends of a popular young man; and in 75, they are impressed by the renown of the family of a newcomer.

²⁸ Cf. *Or.* 45.11 and its denunciation of public policy. This speech was certainly not delivered before Theodosius, in spite of the vivid, “You are weeping, Sire.” It is likely that none of the speeches addressed to this emperor were sent directly to him. On their resemblance to Dio’s *Kingship Orations*, see Swain 2004, 368.

²⁹ See Petit 1956b.

³⁰ On ancient misapprehensions about genres, see Fowler 1982, 20–36. The best genre criticism should be descriptive rather than prescriptive and far from dogmatic; see Hernadi 1972, 1–9.

vary considerably with regard to their practical aims and rhetorical coloring. Even though he was sensitive to his public image every time he wrote, letters touching on educational matters are generally more casual and shorter than the others and abound in references to everyday problems. Libanius's letters, in any case, distinguish themselves from early and late Byzantine epistolary texts, which on the whole are more rhetorical, convoluted, and decorated and appear crystallized into forms that were used for centuries.³¹ Libanius's orations also vary greatly in terms of occasion, subject matter, audience, and rhetorical density: a school speech, a panegyric, an invective, and an oration of reproach each have a physiognomy and a tradition of their own.

A generic characteristic of correspondence that contributes to smoothing out a letter's edges is the fact that a letter exists to establish or crown a relationship, most often a friendly one. This feature stands out already in the earliest discussion of epistolary theory in a work from the second century B.C.E., *On Style* by Ps.-Demetrius, who stated that Aristotle considered some topics inappropriate for a letter, and that epistolary writing should aim at communicating warm feelings of friendship.³² Theoretically, a letter could convey the whole gamut of moods and behaviors inherent in social intercourse and did so occasionally, but generally fourth-century letters are smooth vehicles of friendship.³³ Scholars have remarked with astonishment the apparently duplicitous behavior of Libanius toward some public figures with whom he corresponded with courteous and flattering letters, but to whom he addressed inflamed invectives in his speeches.³⁴ Psychological and biographical reasons are rightly invoked to explain the flagrant disparity, but generic considerations also need to come into play. As an instrument of meaning serving writers and readers, genre helps establish a system of communication that bridges distance.³⁵ The process of generic recognition and interpretation helps us to identify some of the limits within which Libanius worked. We will see that generic considerations provide another backdrop against which we can evaluate several problematic stances of this author.

³¹ See Mullett 1981; Gruenbart 2005.

³² Demetrius, an otherwise unknown writer, *On Style*, 230–32. The current consensus favors the second century B.C.E. as a date for this work (cf., e.g., Kennedy 1972, 285–90).

³³ See Thraede 1970, 125–46; White 1992; and Van Dam 2003a, 136–38. On Christian letters expressing the love of friends and reflecting the love of Christ, see Conybeare 2000, 60–90. See, however, in Libanius's correspondence, four hostile letters from the dossier of twenty-six letters he sent to Anatolius of Berytus, which are quite exceptional: Bradbury 2000, 173–74.

³⁴ Cf. below, Chapter One.

³⁵ See Fowler 1982, 256–76. Mullett (1992) gives a clear example of the usefulness of generic characteristics of letters versus those of biography.

I am committed to attempt a reconstruction of the world of Libanius's texts by taking into account not only the unique moment in which he operated, but also, in some measure, the collective, diachronic dimension of a period, the type of society in which he lived, the landscape common to that culture, and the set of traditions that affected him. Other texts that are outside that world, and are even separated from it by many centuries, may provide an additional understanding of patterns of human life, education, and growth. It is the continuity of human experience that justifies some venturing in other directions. With regard to this project, tempting *comparanda* are available with the letters of an anonymous professor who was the head of a school of secondary education in tenth-century Constantinople, a morose man who lived for his books and his students and did some writing of his own in his spare time.³⁶ The correspondence of Johann Amerbach, who had a successful publishing-printing firm in Basel in the upper Rhine area at the turn of the sixteenth century, can also be illuminating, since he exchanged letters with his children and their teachers.³⁷ Johann Amerbach had two sons who studied away from home, and I will sometimes refer to their vicissitudes as students abroad and to the frustrations of their father, who worried about their progress and did not want "to send young asses to Paris and get full-grown asses back."³⁸ Parents of Libanius's students had similar concerns.

In the course of this book, I often argue against aspects of the work of Paul Petit, a historian who produced an invaluable study of Antioch's society, of the complex prosopography of Libanius's writings, and of the identities of the young men who were part of his *chorus*, that is, his school.³⁹ My debts to his research are many. He provided a basis for my study, and my interpretation became more nuanced and comprehensive because it could rest on his findings.⁴⁰ My areas of disagreement are fundamentally two. First, Petit, who believed in isolating facts as irreducible entities, considered Libanius's letters documents that could be interpreted objectively, cobblestones still set in what was once a firmly built road. The framework he constructed and presented as objective (supported by

³⁶ *Anon. Lond.*; see Lemerle 1986, 286–96; and Markopoulos 2000. These 122 letters, 40 percent of which regard education, date to the first quarter of the tenth century. The school in question was a grammar school that probably also reached the rhetorical level.

³⁷ Johann Amerbach (ca. 1440–1513); see Halporn (2000, 137–206), who collected and studied the letters they sent home during the whole period of their schooling. I thank Therese de Vet for this reference.

³⁸ Halporn 2000, 152–53 no. 98.

³⁹ See especially Petit 1955, 1957, and 1956a. I am also very indebted to the accurate research of Otto Seeck (1906). Libanius often calls his school (including the teachers) a *chorus*.

⁴⁰ On the benefits of disagreement, see Heath 2002a, 9–11.

minute percentages) is, however, fragile at many points. Exclusive immersion in the “facts” does not lead to a perception of the past that can be said with any certainty to correspond to reality; quite the opposite. I am ultimately concerned with cultural history and, although my account of the past naturally aspires to be a logical reconstruction of it, I am aware that sometimes it may represent only my version of the “story,” as I am trying to capture the cultural sedimentation in Libanius’s work as well as the subtle shifts that make him unique.⁴¹ Second, Petit, influenced by nineteenth- and twentieth-century European (especially French) educational practice, presumed a rather rigid pattern of schooling, and his conviction strongly shaped the factual claims he made and sometimes blinded him to other realities.

Petit’s account, which is mostly not in narrative form, mainly consists of a reconstruction of the list of students, their years of attendance, and their provenance and recruitment, province by province. Compounded with the absence of a translation of the relevant letters, this continually fragments his description of Libanius’s school and makes it difficult to follow. My book applies techniques of historical research, but it is in narrative form. Unlike autobiography, letters look forward and recount a series of events in their chronological succession, but I found it more useful to divide the letter collection (in Appendix One) according to dossiers of the various students, to give a clearer idea of their identities, attendance, and subsequent paths in life.

The first chapter of this book gives a preliminary evaluation of the personality of Libanius as a man, rhetor, and sophist, and delineates the contours of the landscape: his school of rhetoric in the city of Antioch. Since several excellent archaeological descriptions of this city are available, I simply attempt to show the type of cultural and physical environment (distractions included) that it offered to visiting students. I focus then on the school, the specific functions of the other teachers who assisted Libanius, and the surviving information concerning the activities of other sophists in Antioch. In the second chapter, I attempt to view Libanius’s school against the vast landscape of the teaching of rhetoric in the Roman East.⁴² This sketch of rhetorical schools from Athens to Constantinople, to the Anatolian plateau and the Mediterranean coast, underlines the international character of Late Antique education and the conspicuous rivalry among schools. The reader will start encountering figures that resurface here and there throughout the book, such as the sophists Prohaeresius

⁴¹ Cf. De Vries-van der Velden 2003.

⁴² After Chapter One, I chose not to continue discussing the various issues of the school (which are treated from Chapter Three on) because I thought it more useful to present a comprehensive view of rhetoric in the East.

and Himerius, the philosopher Themistius, and Gregory of Nazianzus. With Chapter Three, the international component of the student body of Libanius's school emerges clearly. This chapter delves into the different methods on which he relied in order to recruit his students, that is, strengthening his professional position in Antioch by showing the worth of his oratory and by defeating competitors with all the means available; securing the favor of powerful officials; and creating an effective network of relationships. After he became the municipal sophist of the city, his recruiting efforts concentrated on this network, which consisted of former students and their families, as well as people with whom he had cultural bonds of friendship. Chapter Three begins a series of chapters that follow Libanius's students from the moment they enter the school to when they leave and move on to further studies or various careers.

Chapters Four through Seven allow the reader to enter into closer contact with the letters included in Appendix One. Chapter Four studies students' applications to the school, their initial encounters with the sophist, the diagnostic test he administered to them in order to place them at various levels, and the criteria of evaluation he followed in the reports sent to families. This section probes the issue of innate ability versus upbringing and education as it appears in several ancient authors besides Libanius. It also begins to investigate the question of what a letter writer chose to include (or chose to omit or obscure) in his correspondence. Chapter Five revolves around the curriculum in Libanius's school, but besides describing the various steps that the sophist followed to "sow" and "plant" rhetoric in his pupils, it poses a fundamental question. What were the reasons for the excitement young men who attended a school of rhetoric felt and remembered afterward with longing? Were there features of the curriculum that justified their enthusiasm? The topic of Chapter Six is the length of students' attendance, and especially the abbreviated attendance of most of them. Besides other issues, I investigate with close attention the cost of schooling and students' defections, subjects that the letters barely touch, but that the speeches denounce vehemently. But how crucial was a lengthy education in rhetoric at the hands of a prestigious teacher for a young man who was trying to secure a good career? This is the focus of Chapter Seven, which first considers questions of evaluation of competence and effectiveness (to see if these modern concepts find an application in ancient society), then moves to the choices available to Libanius's students. To measure the relevance of rhetoric in the ancient "résumé," I study here the recommendations that Libanius wrote to provide further assistance to former students. I also inquire about the cultural attainments of governors to verify the validity of the concept of rhetoric as a passport to power, which often occurs in the sources. Besides recapitulating some points, the concluding chapter briefly investigates the

presence of silence versus words in the work and life of Libanius. Appendix One contains the dossiers of letters, Appendix Two calculates, as far as this is possible, students' length of attendance, and Appendix Three has a concordance for the letter collection.

Finally, I should say a few words about my translation of the letters. A translation is a balancing act between fidelity and freedom, with translators spending "their lives tottering within this acrobatic space."⁴³ I have tried to remain fairly close to the Greek text, keeping in mind at the same time that it rarely happens that fidelity in translating individual words fully reproduces the meaning they have in the original.⁴⁴ I strictly maintained, however, the distinction between singular and plural first-person pronouns ("I" and "we"). To assume automatically that Libanius used them interchangeably and always pointing to himself is not necessarily correct, in my opinion.⁴⁵ The plural often appears to refer not only to Libanius but to his school, with its plurality of teachers.⁴⁶ On the whole, I am tempted to quote the words of Frank Cole Babbitt in the preface of his translation of Plutarch: "It is useless to apologize for the translation or to attempt to defend it; it is what it is, but at any rate it has not been done in haste."⁴⁷

⁴³ See Most 2003, 382.

⁴⁴ See Benjamin 1992.

⁴⁵ Both Norman (1992) and Bradbury (2004a) chose to use these pronouns interchangeably.

⁴⁶ The most common example is *par'ēmin* ("by us, in our school," better than "with me"). At times the plural might be humorous. It was, in any case, a conscious choice of the author; cf. Gallay 2003, 1:xliv.

⁴⁷ *Plutarch's Moralia*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1 (London, 1927), vii.