

Κατὰ τῶν σοφιστῶν·
RHETORIC, TRUTH, & THE PROBLEM OF ‘SOPHISTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY’

Summary

1. Cassius Dio took a dim view of sophists in his own time and of the role of ‘sophistic’ *poleis*;
2. His suspicion emerges from and is framed in terms of common critiques of sophists in Classical literature (especially Plato) and through extensive first-hand experience also;
3. Dio was acutely aware of the power & ambiguity of rhetoric, especially in the public realm;
4. His ‘anti sophism’ shaped his use of speeches in the *Roman History* and informed his marked interest in the consequences of specious and ill-informed speech.

1. Restricting the *Polis* (Cass. Dio 53.30.2-10, 37.9-10)

- Communities should never be allowed to assemble (οἱ δῆμοι μήτε κύριοι τινος ἔστωσαν μήτε ἐξ ἐκκλησίαν τὸ παράπαν φοιτάτωσαν)
- The cities ought not to have a large number of magnificent buildings (μήτ’ οἰκοδομημάτων πλήθεσιν ἢ καὶ μεγέθεσιν ὑπὲρ τὰναγκαῖα χρήσθωσαν)
- They should not squabble amongst themselves in foolish rivalries over public games (μήτ’ ἀγῶνων πολλῶν καὶ παντοδαπῶν ἀναλώμασι δαπανάσθωσαν, ἵνα μήτε...φιλοτιμίαις ἀλόγους πολεμῶνται)
- Life-long pensions for victors in the cities’ *agones* are to be banned (μὴ μέντοι ὥστε...καὶ σίτησιν ἀθάνατον πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς τοῖς ἀγῶνά τινα νικήσασσι δίδοσθαι)
- Foreign visitors must not be pressured into munificence, especially for such trivialities (μὴ μέντοι ὥστε καὶ...ξένον τέ τινα ἀναγκάζεσθαι παρ’ αὐτοῖς καὶ ὀτιοῦν ἀναλίσκειν)
- All systems of local coinage and weights and measures should be abolished (μήτε δὲ νομίσματα ἢ καὶ σταθμὰ ἢ μέτρα ἰδίᾳ τις αὐτῶν ἐχέτω)
- Embassies from the cities to the emperor should be stopped and the provincial governor consulted instead (μήτε πρεσβεῖαν τινὰ πρὸς σέ, πλὴν εἰ πρᾶγμα τι διαγνώσεως ἐχόμενον εἴη, πεμπέτωσαν)
- The emperor should not be induced by flattery to allow populations to spend or to force visitors to contribute (κἂν ἐπευχόμενοι τινα τῆ τε ἀρχῆ καὶ τῆ σωτηρίᾳ τῆ τε τύχῃ σου ἐκβιάζεσθαι τινας ἢ πρᾶξαι τι ἢ ἀναλῶσαι παρὰ δύναμιν ἐπιχειρῶσι, μὴ ἐπιτρέπειν)
- The stasiotic proclivities of the *poleis* must be stopped and they must cease their mutual rivalry (τάς τε ἐχθρας αὐτῶν καὶ τὰς φιλοτιμίας τὰς πρὸς ἀλλήλους παντάπασιν ἐκκόπτειν)
- Cities must not be allowed to assume honorific titles and so rival one another (καὶ μήτε ἐπωνυμίας τινὰς κενὰς μήτ’ ἄλλο τι ἐξ οὗ διενεχθήσονται τισιν ἐπιέναι σφίσι ποιεῖσθαι; cf. Cass. Dio. 54.23.8.)

2. Dio & Sophistic Centres

Cilicia: Cass. Dio 69.1.3, 73[72].7.2, *IGRR* 3.654. = VA 1.3, 1.12; VS 568-570, 570-576, 578-581
Pergamum: Cass. Dio. 80.7.4, *PIR* II C 492 = VS 511-521, 530-545, 613-615, 581-585
Smyrna: Cass. Dio. 80.7.4, *PIR* II C 492 = VS 567-568; Aristid. *Or.* 50.83

- Discussion of centres of ‘sophistic’ activity: Bowersock 1969, Anderson 1993, Whitmarsh 2005.
- Cassius Dio as “product of the Second Sophistic”: Reardon 1971, Reinhold 1988, Gowing 1992, Swain 1996, Swan 2004, Jones 2016; cf. Ameling 1984, who wrongly describes the historian as a sophist as such.

3. Rhetoric & ‘False Philosophy’

cf. Lauwers, J. *Philosophy, Rhetoric, & Sophistry in the Roman Empire* (2016)

- a) Self-professed philosophers criticising sophists: Apul. *Ap.* 80.3, *Flor.* 12; Aristid. *Or.* 33.29; Dio. *Or.* 3.27, 4.32-38, 6.21, 8.9, 10.32, 32.11, 35.8-10, 58.2; Luc. *Rhet. Praec.* 15-16; Max. *Dial.* 1.226.
- b) Dio and Plato: Gowing 1998, 385-386; Jones 2016 (also, compare 75.3.2 = Plat. *Rep.* 3.399C).
- c) **Imperial orators on ‘false philosophers’**: Apul. *Flor.* 4; Dio *Or.* 49.11; Epict. 1.7.11, 1.27.6, 2.16.3, 2.18.18, 3.8.1, 3.26.16, 4.5.3; Max. *Dial.* 1; Sen. *Contr.* 1.2.22, *Suas.* 1.6 (for the synonymy of ‘sophist’ and ‘false philosopher’ see Brunt 1994 & Sandy 1997)

Speech of Maecenas: “For men like this, who speak the occasional truth but really speak falsehoods for the greater part, often encourage many people to make trouble. And indeed, not a few of those who pretend to be philosophers do the very same thing (τὸ δ’ αὐτὸ τοῦτο καὶ τῶν φιλοσοφεῖν προσποιουμένων οὐκ ὀλίγοι δρῶσι). For this reason, then, I warn you be on your guard against these people. Do not believe, just because you have experienced Areius and Athenodorus and other good men, that all others who say they pursue philosophy (τοὺς φιλοσοφεῖν λέγοντας) are like these; for some using this profession as a screen (τοῦτο προβαλλόμενοι) wreak many ills (Cass. Dio 53.36.3-4).

Marcus Aurelius’ education: “In [rhetoric] he had Cornelius Fronto and Claudius Herodes for teachers, and, in [philosophy], Junius Rusticus and Apollonius of Nicomedeia. Both were advocates of Zeno. As a result, great numbers pretended to pursue philosophy (φιλοσοφεῖν ἐπλάττοντο), hoping that they might be enriched by the emperor. Most of all, however, Marcus owed his advancement to his own natural gifts; for even before (καὶ γὰρ πρὶν) he associated with those teachers he had a strong impulse towards virtue” (Cass. Dio 72[71].35.1-2; cf. Millar 1964: 13)

Antiochus the sophist (VS 568): “Antiochus was a Cilician who at first had pretended to be a Cynic philosopher (φιλοσοφεῖν κυνηδὸν τὰ πρῶτα ἐπλάττετο), and in this way had proved of the greatest help to the soldiers; for when the cold upset them, he would encourage them by throwing himself in the snow, rolling in it. Hence he obtained both money and honours from Severus as well as Antoninus, but became conceited (ἐπαρθεῖς) at this ...” (Cass. Dio 78.19.1-2; cf. Avotins 1971, 67-71)

Caesar to the Senate (Cary’s translation): “These statements that I have made are no mere sophistic (ταῦτα δὲ οὐκ ἄλλως ἐφιλοσόφησα), but are intended to convince you that what I think and say is not merely for effect/display (οὐκ ἐξ ἐπίδειξιν) nor yet thoughts that have just chanced to occur to me on the spur of the moment...” (Cass. Dio 43.17.1; on Caesar’s deceptiveness see Kemezis 2016 and Burden-Strevens 2015 for many other examples)

4. Sophistic Self-Presentation

- a) **Guise of poverty:**
 - Apuleius’ modest clothing, wooden staff (see Sandy 1997, 23-24)
 - The pretensions of Aristocles of Pergamum (Philost. *VS* 567)
 - “A purse and a staff do not constitute emulation of Diogenes” (Max. *Dial.* 1.265)
 - An impoverished ‘Socrates’ in the *Golden Ass* (Apul. *As.* 1.6)

Julia Domna & Caracalla: “Surely I do not need to say, too, that Julia hosted public gatherings for all the men of the first rank, just as the emperor did? But while she still preferred to engage in philosophy with these men (ἢ μὲν καὶ μετὰ τούτων ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐφιλοσόφει), he kept on saying that he needed nothing more than the necessities of life, and he preened and plumed over his ability to live on the cheapest sustenance (ὁ δὲ ἔλεγε μὲν μηδενὸς ἔξω τῶν ἀναγκαίων προσδεῖσθαι, καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ καὶ ἐσεμνύνετο ὡς ὅτι εὐτελεστάτῃ τῇ διαίτῃ χρῆσθαι δυνάμενος). But really, there was nothing on earth, sea, or air that we did not have to keep giving him, both in gifts and state grants” (Cass. Dio 78.18.2-3).

- b) *Femininity*:
- Feminine sophists: Philost. *VS* 536, 620, 623; Gell. *NA* 1.5.1; Lucian *Rhet. Praec.*
 - “Give no-one any excuse whatever for putting on indolence or effeminacy (μαλακίαν προσποιεῖσθαι) or any other fake behaviour” (Cass. Dio 52.26.3)
 - Philiscus of Thessaly (Philost. *VS* 622; cf. Millar 1964, 18-19, 50-51)

Philiscus & Caracalla (212–213 CE): “...when [the Emperor] heard that there was a suit brought against [Philiscus] and that he was to hear it tried, he ordered the official in charge of lawsuits to give notice to Philiscus that he must make his defence himself and not through another. When Philiscus appeared in court he gave offence by his bearing; by the way in which he stood; his attire seemed unsuitable; his voice effeminate...And since the replies of Philiscus were unsatisfactory, the Emperor exclaimed: "his hair shows what sort of man he is, his voice what sort of orator!" (Philost. *VS* 622)

- c) *Embassies*:
- Sophists as imperial ambassadors: Philost. *VS* 520, 521, 524, 531, 539, 570, 582, 600, 601 (Dio? Davenport 2012, 802)
 - For discussion, see Bowersock 1969, 17-29; Reardon 1971, 23-24; Anderson 1993, 25, 31; Whitmarsh 2005, 59-61.
 - Embassy from Ephesus to Caracalla in Nicomedia: *SIG* 3.489
 - Embassy from Prusias to Caracalla in Nicomedia: *IGRR* 3.1422

Maecenas on embassies: “The cities should send no embassy to you, unless its business is one that involves a judicial decision; they should rather make their representations to their governor and through him bring to your attention such of their petitions as he shall approve. Thus they will be spared expense and be prevented from resorting to crooked practices to gain their object; and the answers they receive will be uncontaminated by their agents and will involve no expense or red tape.” (Cass. Dio 52.30.9-10)

5. Religious Irregularity

See de Romilly, J. *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass. 1975) Ch. 1

- Hadrian of Tyre called a sorcerer (γόης) because of his brilliant oratory: Philost. *VS* 590.
- Dionysius of Miletus’ magical *memoria*: “what man who is recorded among the number of the wise would be so careless of his own reputation as to practice magic (ὡς γοητεύων) with his pupils?”: Philost. *VS* 523.
- Apollonius of Tyana’s defence against the charge of being a γόης: Philost. *VA* 7-8

Dio on Apollonius of Tyana: “Surely I do not need to say, too, that Julia hosted public gatherings for all the men of the first rank, just as the emperor did? But while she still preferred to engage in philosophy with these men, *he* kept on saying that he needed nothing more than the necessities of life, and he preened and plumed over his ability to live on the cheapest sustenance...His delight in magicians and tricksters was so great that he praised and honoured Apollonius of Cappadocia, who had flourished under Domitian and really was a magician and trickster (καὶ γόης καὶ μάγος ἀκριβῆς ἐγένετο). He even erected a shrine to him”. (Cass. Dio 78.18.3-4)

Dio on Sempronius Rufus: “And—what was in the last degree disgraceful and unworthy of both the senate and of the Roman people—we had a eunuch to domineer over us. He was a native of Spain, Sempronius Rufus by name, and his occupation was that of sorcerer and trickster (τὸν δὲ δὴ τρόπον φαρμακεύς καὶ γόης), for which he had been confined on an island by Severus” (Cass. Dio 78.17.2)

- Probably not the sophist ‘Rufus’ (*VS* 597-598), who lived to 61 and was educated by Atticus.

Maecenas on magic: Allow no one to reject the gods or to be a magician (ἄθέω τινὶ μήτε γόητι). Soothsaying is of course necessary, and you should always appoint some diviners and augurs that people who wish to consult with them can turn to. But there should be absolutely none who practice magic tricks (μαγευτὰς πάνυ οὐκ εἶναι προσήκει). For men like this, who speak the occasional truth but really speak falsehoods for the greater part, often encourage many people to make trouble. And indeed, not a few of those who pretend to be philosophers do the very same thing... (τὸ δ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο καὶ τῶν φιλοσοφεῖν προσποιουμένων οὐκ ὀλίγοι δρῶσι)...(Cass. Dio 52.36.2-4)

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