1

"The Sweat of Eloquence"

Epistolary Agōn *and Second Sophistic Origins*

In 382 Gregory of Nyssa composed an epistle for the Cappadocian sophist Stagirius, who had previously sent a letter asking Gregory, in his capacity as bishop, to order rafters for a house.[1] Stagirius had jested that bishops "are difficult to catch in a net (δυσγρίπισον);" shifty, that is, and difficult to obtain favors from.[2] Gregory replied with ridicule. He feigned applause for Stagirius, praising him for extracting the phrase of "catching in a net" (γριπίζω) from some "secret sanctuary of Plato."[3] Gregory was mocking him for applying such a fanciful and obscure term.[4] Gregory then quipped that the art of sophists "consists of levying a toll upon

[1] Stagirius' letter is found in the corpus of Gregory's epistles as Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 26; Stagirius: B. Storin, *Gregory of Nazianzus's Letter Collection: The Complete Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 39; A. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, VCS 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 202; *PLRE* 1:851; H-M, 57–8.

[2] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 26 (Silvas); for the meaning of this phrase, from the word δυσγρίπισον, see Silvas, *Gregory*, 202 n. 416 and P. Gallay, *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, SC 363 (1990), 301 n. 3. This letter appears either to have influenced, or been influenced by, a strikingly similar epistle (most likely falsely) represented as sent from Basil to Libanius (Basil, *Ep.* 348).

[3] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 27 (Silvas): ἐκ τῶν Πλάτωνος ἀδύτων.

[4] Similar improprieties had been specified by famous rhetoricians such as Lucian of Samosata (c. 120–80), who criticized the use of ambiguous words. See Lucian, *Lexiphanes* 24 and *Professor of Public Speaking* 17. E. Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 153–5, shows that Lucian considered such overwrought use of phrases an indication of effeminacy; S. Swain, "Sophists and Emperors: The Case of Libanius," in *Approaching Late Antiquity: The Transformation from Early to Late Empire*, eds. S. Swain and M. Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 378, points out that Eunapius criticized the use of obscure phrases even in the sophist Libanius (Eunapius, *Vit. Phil.*, 496); and see the emphasis on clarity in letters by Philostratus *On Letters* 2.257.29 and Pseudo-Libanius, *Epistolary Styles* 47–8.

words," and he indicted such teachers for "putting up their own wisdom as merchandise just as the harvesters of honey do with their honeycombs."[5] Gregory was insinuating that Stagirius pandered his craft. Such antics did not authorize him (according to Gregory) to stereotype bishops as shifty.

Gregory continued by accusing Stagirius of "making a parade (ἐμπομπεύων) of your Persian declamations."[6] The implication was that Stagirius was writing in an overly theatrical style that many literati associated with eastern decadence.[7] Gregory completed his response by stating that he had ordered rafters of equal number to the Spartans who fought at Thermopylae – an allusion to the number "300" as chronicled by Herodotus.[8] The rafters, he stated, were of good length and they "cast a long shadow" (δολιχόσκιος), a Homeric epithet drawn from the *Iliad* that referred to the powerful spears hurled in combat between Paris and Menelaus.[9] Thus he countered the sarcasm in Stagirius' petition by answering that he would fulfill the request with his patronage, which he likened to a weapon. Whereas Stagirius had approached him with flamboyance, Gregory was satisfying the entreaty with a supply of durable materials. And he was equating the provisions to the courage of hoplites at Thermopylae against a larger Persian force.[10] The metaphor issued a contrast to Stagirius' display of affectation and underscored Gregory's use of Atticism – a manner of writing that represented the antithesis to Asianism.[11] In this exchange, Gregory was one-upping his competitor.

[5] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 27 (Silvas). The phrases are reminiscent of an account in which a Cynic philosopher at Athens commented on a chair of rhetoric: "Lollianus does not sell bread but words." Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.*, 1.23 (Wright).

[6] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 27 (Silvas).

[7] T. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50–4. B. MacDougall, "Arianism, Asianism, and the Encomium of Athanasius by Gregory of Nazianzus," in *Rhetorical Strategies in Late Antique Literature: Images, Metatexts and Interpretation*, ed. A. Puertas (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 105, shows that, in other contexts, Nazianzen suggested a "connection between the allegedly effeminate rhetorical style of the Asianists and the theology, language, and mores" of heretics.

[8] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 27 (Silvas).

[9] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 27 (Silvas); Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.60 and 8.24–5; *Iliad* 3.346, 355; Silvas, *Gregory*, 204, on meaning of δολιχόσκιος.

[10] Gregory uses exempla from classical literature and biblical scriptures throughout his writings. A useful record of these cases, organized by genre, is K. Demoen, *Pagan and Biblical Exempla in Gregory Nazianzen: A Study in Rhetoric and Hermeneutics* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1996).

[11] Whitmarsh, *Second*, 50–4.

Gregory's epistle is representative of the performances that he, Basil, and Gregory of Nazianzus scripted in select correspondence. They often deployed allusions and witticisms that resonated within the community of eastern Romans who had been trained in *paideia* – a curriculum of Greek history, philosophy, and literature that young men were expected to master in order to develop into a cultivated civic leader.[12] Through passages from these readings, authors spoke to fellow *pepaideumenoi* in a dialogue that exalted their mutual *aretē* – the manly demeanor embodied by Greek protagonists as far back as the world of Homer.[13] In the letter above, initially it appears that Gregory is abusing Stagirius. In fact, he was engaging his colleague in a clever exhibition that only certain educated readers could fully comprehend. The transaction was an acknowledgment of their mutual eloquence, education, and status. Speaking through exempla from the heroic past, Gregory was signaling Stagirius' sophistication and that of other readers who were familiar with the conventions of letter exchange.[14] The premise of this camaraderie was facility in the culture of classical Greece, an arena that cultivated upright men (*agathoi*). "A noble deed, or a saying worthy of remembrance, or the polities of men who have surpassed (ὑπερπεφυκότων) all their fellows in natural endowments," as Basil said, "are a treasure house of the soul."[15] For Basil, the Greek past issued a repository of *agathoi* through whom he and other educated individuals could define their own deportment. Literary stratagems and references to the great deeds of ancient Greeks, that is, provided a means to uphold an affiliation with fellow *pepaideumenoi* and to show affinity with valiant Hellenes of other eras.[16]

[12] R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 225–44.

[13] Analogous to the literary culture described in C. Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 15–25; Chin shows that late antique Latin Christian authors such as Ausonius and Jerome marked "cultural competence" by creating an identity in the present rooted in venerated authors from the past. A. Spira, "Volkstümlichkeit und Kunst in der griechischen Väterpredigt des 4. Jahrhunderts," *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 35 (1985), 55–73, points out similar uses of the classical past in sermons of patristic writers.

[14] A. Schor, "Becoming Bishop in the Letters of Basil and Synesius: Tracing Patterns of Social Signaling across Two Full Epistolary Collections," *JLA* 7:2 (2014), 298–305.

[15] Basil, *Ep.* 74 (Deferrari).

[16] A literary strategy recommended in epistolary handbooks by fourth-century rhetorician Julius Victor, *Art of Rhetoric* 27 and Pseudo-Libanius, *Epistolary Styles* 50. Also M.-A. Calvet-Sebasti, "Comment écrire à païen: l'exemple de Gregoire de Nazianze et de Théodoret de Cyr," in *Les Apologists chrétiens et la culture grecque*, eds. B. Pouderon and J. Doré (Paris, Beauchesne 1998), 369–81, explains the benefit of Christian bishops aligning with classical traditions when possible.

The interchange between Gregory and Stagirius recalled the verbal sparring prevalent in the Second Sophistic (c. 100–250) – an intellectual movement in which public displays of erudition entertained audiences and garnered fame or dishonor depending on the merits of the performance.[17] The encounter thus reenacted the contests of the ancient Greek polis, where years of strenuous mental and physical training singularized civic leaders.[18] Here, athletes and soldiers from the past presented models of *aretē* for current *pepaideumenoi* such as Gregory and Stagirius – individuals who required an arena to emulate the courage of their forebears.[19] Epistolary exchange represented one such setting, where the Cappadocians recreated a discourse – with roots in Homeric society – that validated elite males.[20] This chapter thus examines epistolary exchange as a recontextualized form of agonism. The Cappadocians framed epistolary discourse, I argue, as an exercise in competition, thus identifying themselves and a select group of correspondents that circulated honor through reenactments of classical performance. In this endeavor, they vied with fellow *pepaideumenoi* to moderate masculinity. Consequently, these clergy reinforced the *habitus* – the values, dispositions, and

[17] S. Goldhill, "Rhetoric and the Second Sophistic" in *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. E. Gunderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 228–41; T. Schmitz, *Bildung und Macht: Zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1997), 50–63, following Bourdieu's emphasis on cultural currency, credits superior performance in *paideia* as a means of sociopolitical advancement.

[18] W. M. Bloomer, "Schooling in Persona: Imagination and Subordination in Roman Education," *Classical Antiquity* 16 (1997), 57–78, states that such exercises "with their projection of idealized social and family order are a kind of social comfort, a reassurance to and from the elite as well as linguistic training of that elite," 58; N. Nicholson, *Aristocracy and Athletics in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2, states that in addition to educating young men, athletics also delineated the best citizens and provided a context to exhibit superiority.

[19] R. Cribiore, "Vying with Aristides in the Fourth Century," in *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods*, eds. W. V. Harris and B. Holmes (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 263–78, maintains that elite audiences "found some comfort in commiserating with 'the best of the Greeks'," referring to the fifth-century B.C. rhetorician Aristides; K. Bassi, *Acting Like Men: Gender, Drama and Nostalgia in Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 4, describes a similar dynamic in her study of ancient Greek drama, which she characterizes as nostalgia for "a reunion with the normative masculine subject of antiquity."

[20] Bassi, *Acting*, 43–5; K. Eshleman, *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–20, on social formation through ancient referents.

expectations – of a provincial aristocracy that identified itself with cultural and political preeminence in eastern Roman communities.[21]

In encounters such as the one above, the Cappadocians accentuated their own pedagogical heritage – a program that associated eloquence with manhood and moral excellence. As this chapter will show, eloquence was a fortitude born out of late antique pedagogy. On several occasions, the Cappadocians crafted a masculine persona using similar strategies of self-fashioning as found in Second Sophistic orators. Unlike their predecessors, however, the Cappadocians tried to outdo their correspondents in rhetorical imagination, but they did not seek to emasculate them. In the culture of epistolary exhibition, showmanship was about group identity. Emphasis, in fact, was placed on acknowledging a sense of manhood in others; a kind of consensus of dignity that was notably lacking in Second Sophistic oratory, in which "winners" and "losers" were determined on how one individual bested the other in a performance. The Cappadocians, by way of comparison, championed exemplary manhood in their literary rivals. They issued repeated demonstrations of epistolary skill, for example, and they prompted other *pepaideumenoi* to join them. By excelling in these virtual bouts, which stimulated *aretē* through simulations of exertion, clergy proved their mettle and registered themselves as heirs of cultural authority in eastern Rome. In spurring authors to showcase their abilities, moreover, the Cappadocians established themselves as arbiters of *aretē* by praising, rebuking, and evaluating performances. Through each of these endeavors, the Cappadocians were aligning the identity of pro-Nicene clergy with that of the classical Greek male.

SECOND SOPHISTIC ORIGINS OF *AGŌN*

Through the lens of Second Sophistic writers, the Cappadocians observed the contested nature of manhood in ancient Greek literature. Indeed, such

[21] On the concept of *habitus*, P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. and intro. J. Thompson, trans. G. Raymond and M. Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 14–20, how *habitus* shaped interaction between imperial and provincial administrators; P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3–70; C. Vogler, "L'Administration impériale dans la correspondance de Saint Basile et Saint Grégoire de Naziance," in *Institutions, société et vie politique dans l'empire romain au IV siècle ap. J.-C., actes de la table ronde autour de l'oeuvre d'André Chastagnol* (Paris, 20–21 janvier 1989), eds. M. Christol, S. Demougin, Y. Duval, C. Lepelley, and L. Vogler (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1992), 447–64.

authors formed the conduit through which fourth-century literati learned and applied ancient texts to their own time. We cannot know for sure how much access the Cappadocians had to *complete* manuscripts of Homer, Herodotus, Euripides, Plato, or any other ancient authors.[22] Much of the reading of such authors came through teachers whose own intellectual pedigree had acquainted them with Second Sophistic literature and perhaps who had recommended acquiring portions of specific ancient texts. Knowing the reading lists of these writers remains a dubious task, although some resourceful studies have shed light on the collections of authors such as Plutarch, Lucian, Dio Chrysostom, and Aelius Aristides.[23] In a number of cases these writers probably possessed nearly complete texts from some authors, with fragments of others.[24] Even though these writers did not usually have complete works at their hands, they often held significant excerpts at their disposal in the form of abridged texts, compendia, and books of rhetorical exercises. As late as the fourth century, *pepaideumenoi* were still drawing allusions and references from the resources they acquired through traditional oral learning (instructor to pupil). Even Emperor Julian, who enjoyed a substantial library, relied on handbooks and anthologies for many of his

[22] We do, however, have an excellent idea of the wide range of classical and biblical sources they used. For example Demoen, *Pagan*, shows the expanse of Gregory's sources. Critical editors of the Cappadocians' works have identified similar scope in Nyssen and Basil. We also have a few snapshots of the Cappadocians' bibliographic collection. In Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 31 (Storin 126), Nazianzen sends a volume of Demosthenes' texts to a friend and he mentions that he does not have Homer's *Iliad*. Likewise, Gregory loans his collection of Aristotle's epistles to a friend, and ultimately lets him have it as a gift. (Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 234; Storin 191).

[23] For example, J. F. Kindstrand, *Homer in der Zweiten Sophistik. Studien zu der Homerlektüre und dem Homerbild bei Dion von Prusa, Maximos von Tyros und Ailios Aristeides* (Stockholm: University of Uppsala Press, 1973), shows that many of the writers of the Second Sophistic believed that Homer was divinely inspired and that the *Iliad* (more so than the *Odyssey*) was almost universally known and cited by scholars. Although most writers did not have full texts of Homer, because of the primacy of his epics they knew most of the narrative. G. Anderson, "Lucian's Classics: Some Short Cuts to Culture," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 23 (1976), 59–68, on the other hand, has argued that Lucian's reading knowledge of the ancients was much more minimal than often thought; that he primarily used clichés and popular tropes. If he had full texts available, that is, he did not use them.

[24] W. Helmbold and E. O'Neil, *Plutarch's Quotations* (Oxford: American Philological Association, 1959), viii, makes this case for Plutarch. He owned a prominent collection of Hesiod and Pindar, for instance, but likely used compendia for many of his other sources.

quotations.[25] In crafting rhetoric, habituation into the culture of *paideia* had required young men to memorize and use set phrases. Many likely owned abridged books and anthologies that contained these references, but few likely owned complete versions of the works that informed their rhetoric. When in need of help, a trusted friend or mentor would have provided a more probable source of recall.

That is not to say, however, that all collections were limited only to small selections, nor to rhetorical exempla. Erudition was learned through a variety of genres and esteemed authors. An accomplished student would learn eloquence from the orator Demosthenes, but also through Plato, one of the most widely acclaimed prose writers of late antiquity. Some fourth-century literati did have the means to amass significant personal libraries, although their writings might not include quotations or references from them. Libanius, for example, probably had an extensive library, even though his writings reflect only a selection of the texts.[26] Nevertheless, discovering a direct line from fourth-century *pepaideumenoi*, to Second Sophistic authors, to classical writers, is usually impossible. Even tracing the use of Second Sophistic authors in the Cappadocians can be difficult. It was a literary convention for *pepaideumenoi* often to cite authors without naming them.

Yet these authors played a much more pivotal role than merely passing on the actual written works of the classics. They transmitted passages, and sometimes entire texts, to their fourth-century heirs. But more importantly, fourth-century authors such as the Cappadocians learned from earlier generations of *pepaideumenoi* how to engage with the canonical ancient writers. In the Second Sophistic, imitation (μίμησις) of classical authors involved maintaining the vitality of a venerated past while also showing discrimination and creativity when applying ideals from its great minds.[27] An element of selectivity and innovation was expected rather than mindless repetition.[28] More important than knowing the exact texts transmitted from Second Sophistic authors is understanding that their

[25] J. Bouffartigue, *L'Empereur Julien et la culture de son temps* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1992), 111–25. Julian's library was especially noteworthy for its holdings on Homer and Plato.

[26] R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 159.

[27] T. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 55–60.

[28] Whitmarsh, *Greek*, 88, says that literary *mimēsis* provided "a fundamental means of constructing the cultural status of the present."

successors similarly applied the writings in order to create value and identity. Morwenna Ludlow's recent work on the craft of rhetoric is helpful for understanding how fourth-century literati adapted literary techniques from both Second Sophistic and contemporary authors. Ludlow observes that the Cappadocians viewed themselves as members of a community of literary craftsmen in much the same way that other skilled workers considered themselves as part of a group belonging to a workshop.[29] These writers learned pedagogical traditions to some extent by interacting with their counterparts, many of whom had studied under teachers from an alternate lineage of teachers, others having labored under the same instructors. Consequently, epistolary writers were introduced to models not only through direct study of the ancients but through collaboration and competition with fellow *pepaideumenoi*. A synergy based on emulation and adaptation from likeminded authors thus provided the Cappadocians a framework for building their own version of masculinity through the medium of the classics. Because Second Sophistic authors themselves had been ever vigilant about crafting identity in an *agōn* setting, the Cappadocians found their hermeneutics of the classics especially compelling.

Rhetoric as Weapon

Education in classical rhetoric, however, was not for the faint of heart. Various fourth-century authors recorded the violence associated with schools of grammar, where teachers disciplined young men with beatings and other forms of corporal punishment.[30] The militant nature of pedagogy continued into the advanced schools of rhetoric and philosophy, where aggression was manifested in brawls among students and between pupils of rival teachers.[31] Even when the discord did not erupt into physical blows, schools were pervaded by an underlying spirit of combat. Recounting Basil's and his own time at Athens, Gregory of Nazianzus described the students as "difficult to restrain" (δυσκάθεκτοι) because of the intense performances of rhetoricians and rivalries between instructors

[29] M. Ludlow, *Art, Craft, and Theology in Fourth-Century Christian Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 222–32.

[30] Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 65–73. Cribiore cites the example of Augustine, in *Confessions* 1.9, bemoaning the "racks, claws, and other torments. . .we schoolboys suffered from our masters," 68.

[31] Eunapius, *Vit. Phil.* 483–4; Himerius, *Or.* 4.9; Libanius, *Autobiography* 19–21.

and pupils of different schools.[32] Even within one's own learning community, young men were subjected to force and intimidation by the very classmates that recruited them to their teacher. Gregory relates the initiation of students at Athens – really a form of hazing – where newcomers were verbally assaulted and cowed into submission by more advanced disciples.[33] The student under duress was drawn into an argument and forced to defend himself against the ridicule of his besiegers. In a similar situation, fourth-century sophist and historian Eunapius writes that new arrivals faced "jokes and laughter at their expense" during their initiation into a school.[34] A young man's cleverness and ability to respond to scorn were immediately put to the test. His reaction served as a measure of how he could handle pressure. In such contexts, it is understandable that students would come to view oratory as a form of warfare.

In the andro-charged atmosphere of late-antique instruction, occurrences like this one socialized the youths into a world where erudition was linked to toughness and eloquence derived from conflict. Intellectual content was only one element of an experience that drew the young student out of adolescence. This combative setting was rooted in the conventions of the Second Sophistic, in which the overriding path to respect came through giving mesmerizing oratorical displays. Through public speeches, individual rhetoricians had vied with one another to outdo others in winning arguments, displaying creative wordplay, and otherwise showcasing their talents.[35] Extemporaneous speaking and delivering declamations (set speeches) served as two vehicles for advertising one's masculinity within civic space.[36] Consequently, many individuals within this movement conceived of their craft in terms redolent of athleticism and warfare, standard forums of ancient virility. Philostratus, for example, described the eloquence of sophist Polemon of Laodicea (c. 90–144) as "passionate and combative (θερμὴ καὶ ἐναγώνιος)...like the trumpet at the Olympic games."[37] Speaking with gusto was as much physical as it was mental. Polemon is depicted as thinking the same about his talents. He once encountered a gladiator, "dripping with sweat out of sheer terror," upon which he remarked "You are in as great an agony as

[32] Greg. Naz., *Or.* 43.15 (McCauley).
[33] Greg. Naz., *Or.* 43.16.
[34] Eunapius, *Vit. Phil.* 486 (Wright).
[35] Schmitz, *Bildung*, 97–135, considers such cases as representative of Greece's ubiquitous culture of competitive display.
[36] M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 103–21.
[37] Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* 542 (Wright).

though you were going to declaim."[38] Polemon considered the pressure of public discourse as tantamount to a life-and-death battle. Likewise, Philostratus relates how Herodes Atticus, a rhetorician contemporary with Polemon, scoffed at the struggles of boxers, runners, and wrestlers. "Let the athlete who is a runner receive a crown for running faster than a deer or horse," Herodes says, "and let him who trains for a weightier contest (μέγαν ἆθλον) be crowned for wrestling with a bull or bear, a thing which I do every day."[39] The gladiator and the runner face formidable challenges, Philostratus is showing, but the level of their difficulty pales in comparison to rhetorical combat. In these anecdotes, Philostratus elevates mastery of oratory to the severest form of duress. He issued such statements of hyperbole in order to liken his own skill to the daring of the greatest athletes and soldiers, males from the past who accrued highest honor because of great feats accomplished within both soul and body.

In this constellation of verbal warriors, sophists often likened eloquence to weapons. Polemon, for example, praised his teacher Scopelian's "power of persuasion as though it were the arms of Achilles."[40] On another occasion, when asked his opinion of Polemon's eloquence, Herodes responded, "The sound of swift-footed horses strikes upon my ears."[41] Such was his impression of the effect of Polemon's words that he envisioned the roar of running stallions. In an invective that Herodes launched against freedmen in Athens, moreover, Philostratus says that the sophist "shot forth at them every weapon (κέντρον) that his tongue could command."[42] And Aelius Aristides (117–81), one of the most celebrated orators of his day, analogized effective verbal skill to "strong, sound, and firm weapons."[43] These assertions indicated that an effective performer had to master the ability to persuade with words in order to excel and to win fame. Students thus were continually conditioned to think about elocution as a tool infused with masculinity, a means of besting others, meriting honor, and assuming an identity akin to the athletes and warriors of the past. The biographer Plutarch similarly ascribed human qualities to the orations of Demosthenes, calling them "bold" (παρρησία) and "noble" (εὐγένια).[44] By imbuing Demosthenes' speech with characterizations befitting a warrior, Plutarch was raising his oral skills to a level on par with the deeds of celebrated soldiers, runners, and wrestlers. In memorizing narratives such

[38] Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* 541 (Wright).
[39] Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* 554 (Wright).
[40] Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* 536 (Wright).
[41] Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* 539 (Wright).
[42] Philostratus, *Vit. Soph.* 549 (Wright).
[43] Aristides, *Or.* 34. 19 (Behr).
[44] Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes* 12.7 and 13.6 (Perrin).

as Homer's epics, moreover, aspiring sophists learned that the most striking speeches came out of the mouths of the most prominent heroes such as Achilles, whose potent words matched his exploits in war.[45] Under the cumulative militarization of rhetoric, literati came to consider powerful speech as synonymous with manhood.

The Cappadocians and the Second Sophistic

Writers of the Second Sophistic thus remained keenly aware of self-presentation and committed themselves to acquiring a manly persona through verbal performances. In Philostratus and concurrent authors, *agōnes* of combat and sport were recast as contests of words. About a century after Philostratus completed his *Lives of the Sophists*, *pepaideumenoi* continued to use eloquence as an index of status and social authority. In certain circles, that is, verbal performance revealed not only an individual's command of language, but also his character.[46] Speaking of his and Basil's days at Athens, Gregory of Nazianzus commented that young men were obsessed with rhetorical skill. He compared their fascination to the electric atmosphere of a horse race, where the students "leap up, they shout, raise clouds of dust, they drive in their seats, they beat the air."[47] The orators-in-training witnessed declamations with the zeal of spectators at the hippodrome. By the late fourth century, horse-racing had become the leading spectator event in athletics. The activity was full of danger and horses, as we saw in the Introduction, were synonymous with contest and warfare. Horse-racing thus served as a suitable metonym for rhetorical performances, where individuals strained for victory. Gregory sets himself and Basil, moreover, in the hysteria of the intellectual competition. "It was important to each of us," he says "to be the first to master our studies (πρὶν ἐπιστῆναι)."[48] The friends attempted to outdo each other and subsequently both excelled in study and performance of *paideia*. They contested not to express dominance over each other, but rather to push each other's scholarly limits.[49]

[45] J. Fredal, *Rhetorical Actions in Ancient Athens: Persuasive Artistry from Solon to Demosthenes* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 20.

[46] A. Puertas, *The Dynamics of Rhetorical Performances in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2018), 58–60.

[47] Greg. Naz., *Or.* 43.15 (McCauley).

[48] Greg. Naz., *Or.* 43.15 (my translation).

[49] A concept similar to Hebrews 10:24, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (NIV).

Describing such rivalries as physical in nature was useful since identity was tied to both corporeal and noetic superiority, a legacy from ancient Greece. The theme of contention thus formed a backdrop for the way the two future Cappadocian bishops pursued a curriculum that included bodily comportment. In this manner, they followed in the footsteps of Prohaeresius (276–c. 368), one of their teachers at Athens and a leading sophist of the early/mid fourth century.[50] Under instructors such as Prohaeresius, a Christian and probably a native Cappadocian, Gregory and Basil came to consider eloquence and manhood as outcomes of an *agōn*.

According to the biographer Eunapius – himself a student of Prohaeresius – his mentor had enjoyed the companionship of a devoted friend Hephaestion, who accompanied him to Athens during their studies in the early 300s. Here they were "rivals for the highest honors of rhetoric."[51] In an antecedent to Gregory's depiction of the friendship between Basil and himself, Prohaeresius and Hephaestion pushed each other to succeed in scholarship and performance. The rivalry played only one part in what became a series of agonistic and antagonistic encounters that earned Prohaeresius repute across eastern Rome. Eunapius recounts a contest in which Prohaeresius competed against other candidates to succeed his former teacher as chair of rhetoric in Athens.[52] The vitriol of the affair was magnified by the fact that the aspiring teachers were already engaged in a tendentious campaign to draw the best and highest number of students to their school.[53] Prohaeresius eventually won the position despite facing widespread opposition. Eunapius made reference to the *Iliad*, insinuating that Prohaeresius' victory in speaking correlated to the martial prowess of Greek heroes such as Achilles.[54] Eunapius thus narrated the affair as a military engagement, with Prohaeresius winning because of the superior weapon of his words. Prohaeresius prevails in other contests in the biography, and Eunapius repeatedly uses warlike

[50] Prohaeresius: E. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 48–78 and R. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists in the Fourth Century A.D.: Studies in Eunapius of Sardis* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1990), 79–94.

[51] Eunapius, *Vit. Phil.* 487: φιλονεικοῦντες δὲ ἀλλήλοις εἰς πενίαν καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν λόγοις πρωτείαν.

[52] The procedure was dependent on the selection by the town council and the proconsul. Similar accounts appear in Lucian's *The Eunuch* and Augustine's *Confessions*. See Watts, *City*, 54–6. For a different description of the contest see Penella, *Greek*, 85–6.

[53] This recruitment was especially important because transfers of students to other teachers was considered unacceptable at this time. Watts, *City*, 57.

[54] Eunapius, *Vit. Phil.* 488; *Iliad* 24.410–610.

terminology to denote his victorious declamations: the opposition "stricken by a thunderbolt (σκηπτοῦ πληγέντες);" his adversaries "defeated in a regular pitched battle (μάχη);" and Prohaeresius rising to speak, "like a war-horse summoned to the plain" (ὥσπερ ἵππος εἰς πεδίον κληθείς).[55] Eunapius elevates Prohaeresius – over his rivals – by characterizing his performance as forceful, as violent. Prohaeresius thus epitomizes the orator-as-warrior persona that informed Basil, Gregory, and through their influence, Gregory of Nyssa, during their rhetorical training. The young men were conditioned to think that verbal acumen was a definitive sign of strength and disposition. Gregory of Nazianzus could later look back at the end of his life and recognize the extremes of this culture, but as he matured into adulthood, he had come to revere the transformative power of words on which his teachers and fellow students had thrived. With Gregory and Basil immersed in an educational culture predominated by sophists such as Prohaeresius, they came to think of eloquence as an issue of war, and a key component of masculinity.

A Third Sophistic?

This absorption with performative masculinity from the first three centuries relates to current discussions about the concept of a "Third Sophistic."[56] A number of scholars have applied this term to a revival of classical rhetoric sometime during the fourth century, after many factors had mitigated the role of display oratory in the latter third century.[57] One school of thought holds that political and social factors – such as the Christianization of the Roman empire – diminished the significance of oral presentations that were based on classical Greek philosophy and erudition.[58] Enduring standards of elegance continued, this interpretation

[55] Eunapius, *Vit. Phil.* 490, 490, 492.

[56] L. Pernot, *La Rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 13–15, describes the fourth century as the period when the church developed into the primary social institution around which rhetoric was oriented. See the balanced introduction to the term "Third Sophistic" by Fowler and A. Puertas in R. Fowler, ed. *Plato and the Third Sophistic* (Boston: de Gruyter, 2014), 1–26.

[57] For a wide variety of understandings of the term, see the different impressions of "Third Sophistic" by authors in E. Amato ed., *Approches de la troisième sophistique, hommages à Jacques Schamp* (Brussels: Peeters, 2006) .

[58] P.-L. Malosse and B. Schouler, "Qu'est-ce la troisieme sophistique?" *Lalies* 29 (2009), 161–224; S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50–250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 6–13; 104–9.

suggests, in the schools and in the churches, with bishops supplanting the once-venerated sophists as the centerpiece of the civic spaces.[59] Ancient texts, then, were used as a literary model for the new civic (and sacred) elite, but they no longer dictated social norms. Such explanations, I believe, overstate change in the prevalence and context of rhetorical display in the fourth century.[60] I am sympathetic to the explanation that shifts occurred, thus changing the impetus for and sources of rhetoric. And the nuances of literary and oral exhibitions demand scrutiny according to chronological, cultural, and religious context. Nevertheless, *as a movement distinct from the Second Sophistic*, the designation of a Third Sophistic is not an ideal category of analysis for studying the Cappadocians. The main problem involves interpretations that fourth-century Christian *pepaideumenoi* applied ancient Greek conventions of rhetoric but eschewed the values of pre-Christian Hellenic sources. Such contentions represent too sharp a dichotomy between the textual traditions that informed the Cappadocians. Such renditions also isolate on the Cappadocians' identity as Christians, without adequately exploring the overlap and congruity between their faith and training in *paideia*. The correspondence of the Cappadocians demonstrates continuity with Second Sophistic authors both in the focus on self-representation and the thematic content applied to craft that image. These bishops engaged in forming a self-identity among fellow *pepaideumenoi* that was based on early Greek ideals of manhood. They appear preoccupied with promoting a very similar ideal of struggle that had been in place to validate civic and imperial elites for the better part of the preceding three centuries.

The proposition of a Third Sophistic makes the most sense, I believe, in that exhibitions of *aretē*, for example, were increasingly re-directed from the zero-sum contests of the first three centuries to a more deliberate preservation of manhood and a collective set of values that certain

[59] A. Puertas, "From Sophistopolis to Episcopolis: The Case for a Third Sophistic," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 1 (2007), 31–42, is representative of this position.

[60] Other criticisms of this view: L. Van Hoof and P. Nuffelen, "The Social Role and Place of Literature in the Fourth Century AD," in *Literature and Society in the Fourth Century AD: Performing Paideia, Constructing the Present, Presenting the Self*, eds. L. Van Hoof and P. Nuffelen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 8–12, argues for an uninterrupted continuation of a literary performative culture outside of school and church; R. Cribiore, *Libanius the Sophist: Rhetoric, Reality, and Religion in the Fourth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 35–8, finds the concept of the "Third Sophistic" problematic because it sets forth a break between two periods without explaining connections between the two; and Watts, *City*, 13–15.

Christians and non-Christians alike favored. The most significant difference between fourth-century *pepaideumenoi* and Second Sophistic orators may be in the arena in which classical manhood was primarily established. For the former, contests did not primarily take the form of oral delivery, but rather through participation in an epistolary *agōn*.[61] Displays of bombast in public gatherings may not have aligned with the overall image the Cappadocians wanted, one of humility and selflessness as expressed in the scriptures.[62] They relished the give-and-take bravado of manly rivalry, but they generally limited the most conspicuous cases of contention to written transactions with fellow cognoscenti. An epistolary *agōn* was suitable for a persona of self-assertion because it allowed for showmanship, but only among the select. The verbal duels of the Second Sophistic were less applicable to the image they projected to larger audiences. For these groups, the Cappadocians more often presented themselves as philosophers, chosen by God to guide others through spiritual and theological insight.[63] A widespread perception in late antiquity held that philosophers mastered discourse in pursuit of truth, while sophists concerned themselves foremost with reputation.[64] Composing and exchanging epistles provided a means to engage in an affair of honor among a limited coterie that included sophists, but without parading in a sense of self-involvement that might appear unbecoming for clergy. As they drew on *paideia* as a mechanism for promoting a certain image, moreover, the Cappadocians were also embracing an ethos of competitive merit upon which they themselves had been raised. Classical authors were not mere wordplay but rather a substantive part of the bishops' vision for Christian leaders.

EPISTOLARY PERFORMANCE AND *ARETĒ*

In a perspective inherited from their intellectual predecessors, fourth-century *pepaideumenoi* believed that *aretē* had to be earned and it had

[61] F. Gautier, "Le Carême de silence de Grégoire de Nazianze: une conversion à la littérature?" *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 47 (2001), 97–110, argues for a significant shift in performance milieu among fourth-century *pepaideumenoi* from oral delivery to one judged on the written word.

[62] For example II Chronicles 7:14; Proverbs 11:2; Philippians 2:3–4; I Peter 5:5; Romans 12:3.

[63] S. Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 418–22.

[64] R. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 61–4.

to be proven an indefinite number of times. And like declamatory speaking, writing epistles as an exercise in showmanship was a male-centered enterprise that resonated with power.[65] In letters to educated addressees, the Cappadocians appealed to two timeless truths: first, that great persons are made out of conflict. And second, that ancient Greece provided episodes of *agōnes* that illustrated authentic manhood. The courage evident in figures from the past, therefore, was to be celebrated and relived in the words and deeds of correspondents. Among company that recalled the Greek past as a crucible of masculinity, the Cappadocians depicted epistolary exchange as bodily duress, similar to how earlier savants had personified public speaking as corporeal labor. The ideal male of ancient Greece had accrued status not only through mental distinction, but also through physical feats. Epistolary composition was imagined, therefore, as a contest along the lines of warfare and athletics. Intellectual and somatic discipline, that is, went hand in hand.

Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, called to mind the "sweat of eloquence" (οἱ τῶν λόγων ἱδρῶτες) when he reminisced to childhood friend Philagrius about their studies in rhetoric at Athens.[66] Gregory responded to Basil in similar fashion after receiving a letter from him: "Eloquence! Athens! Virtues! The sweat produced by eloquence!"[67] Gregory was acknowledging their shared education and praising Basil for the epistle, a clear demonstration of Basil's power with words. The famous rhetorician Libanius similarly praised one of his students, who "on hearing Aeschylus' remark that in mortals virtues are born from toils. . .considered sweating over his books (τοὺς περὶ λόγους ἱδρῶτας) more pleasant than carousing."[68] For *pepaideumenoi*, the exacting nature of literary sophistication deemed the intelligentsia worthy of glory, thus reinforcing the social hierarchy. Sweat carried overtones of manhood as it represented the effects of struggle. For athletes, it was a badge of courage, like a warrior shedding blood. It was proof that an individual had been through a taxing experience. The trope of struggle had deep-seated roots in the Greek intellectual sphere, where in mythology certain gods and humans had originated from climactic conflicts.[69] In Greek consciousness, themes of discord and austerity were associated with monumental

[65] P. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26–7, describes the "naturalization" of letter writing by Greek authors. She writes that "it is Greek, male, and put to practical or artistic uses."

[66] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 30 (Storin 127). [67] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 46 (Storin 11).

[68] Libanius *Ep.* 175 (Bradbury 92); reference to Aeschylus, fragment 340.

[69] For example Hesiod, *Theogony* 170–210, and Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 610–740.

events and qualities. In *Gorgias* Plato indicated that the virtue of a thing – tool, body, soul, or animal – came about through structure and correctness.[70] The proper use of rhetoric, he insinuated, was attainable only through rigorous testing. Eloquence could be acquired only at much cost. The telos of an individual likewise was dependent on having risen to the challenges that confronted him. As Gregory repeated refrains about sweating and toiling, he was prompting readers to remember the sacrificial nature of their positions.

Illustrations of bodily strain, in particular, conveyed the severity that distinguished *agathoi* from others. In an epistle from the late 360s or early 370s, about the time of his ordination as bishop, Basil penned his thoughts about rulers and the benefits of education: "If a man has sweated much for eloquence (λόγων ἱδρώσαντος), if he has directed the government of nations and cities. . .I consider it right and proper that his life be placed before us as an example of virtue (ὑπόδειγμα ἀρετῆς)."[71] Eloquence acquired through toil was authentic, trustworthy. It was fitting to associate such speech with worthy leaders. We will see later, in castigations of theological rivals, that the Cappadocians portrayed another form of eloquence, which was earned at minimal cost, and therefore defective and fake.[72] For Basil, true fluency of speech involved hardships that qualified a man for the confrontations of public office. His notion of strict pedagogy, "sweating for eloquence" (λόγων ἱδρῶν), corresponded to the theme of severity in his *Address to Young Men*, a text in which Basil instructed young Christian men on the merits and challenges of studying ancient non-Christian literature.[73] Basil stated that the path to excellence was "rough at first and hard to travel, and full of abundant sweat and toil. . ."[74] Basil applied a concept from Hesiod, an eighth-century Greek poet, who had famously personified *Badness* as near to humanity, common, and within easy access. *Excellence*, he juxtaposed, had been established by the gods as attainable only through intensive labor.[75]

[70] Plato, *Gorgias* 506d. [71] Basil, *Ep.* 24 (slight alteration of Deferrari).

[72] Chapter 4.

[73] This text is notoriously difficult to date. See P. J. Fedwick, "A Chronology of the Life and Works of Basil of Caesarea," in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic: A Sixteen-Hundredth Anniversary Symposium*, ed. P. J. Fedwick. vol. 1. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 18–19.

[74] Basil, *Address to Young Men* 5.3–4 (Deferrari): ὅτι τραχεῖα μὲν πρῶτον καὶ δύσβατος, καὶ ἱδρῶτος συχνοῦ καὶ πόνου πλήρης.

[75] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 287–92.

Hesiod's portrayal of the Good and Bad suggested that moral rectitude comes through exertion. Basil replayed this sentiment as he reminded students of the story of Heracles. This Greek hero, at the same age as these young men now were, had to choose between two roads, one easy (leading to Vice) and one hard (Virtue). Heracles chose the latter, which was full of "countless sweating toils and labors," but by following it, he became a god.[76] Basil was recalling Lucian's elaboration on this notion, when he depicts the honest, masculine orator following a "path, narrow, briery, and rough, promising great thirstiness and sweat," with the effete sophist taking the road that is "level, flowery, and well-watered."[77] The former, that is, pays the price of an exacting regimen that created a person of substance, of authenticity. He earns respect. The latter, lacking resolve, emerges through a succession of luxury and pretension as a "delicate and charming platform-hero."[78] Lucian categorizes the unproven orator more or less as an actor. In the ancient world, theatrical performers garnered suspicion because recurrent stereotypes cast them as gender fluid or feminine, as well as deceitful.[79] They were not to be respected or trusted. Keying off Lucian, Basil deployed this metaphor to distinguish the virile, well-tried man from the womanish, untested figure. He was calling attention to the long-held dichotomy that linked manliness to harshness and femininity to softness. His world of *agathoi* belonged to individuals who had proven themselves by overcoming tribulations.

Scholarship in the past twenty-five years has emphasized similar correlations between gender and rhetorical training in the ancient world. For Maud Gleason, the regimen that went into succeeding as a speaker was a "calisthenics of manhood," while Rafaella Cribiore has described *paideia* as a mental versus physical *askēsis*. Cribiore cites several references to Libanius talking about pedagogues as "gymnasts of the mind" and "athletes of the *logoi*."[80] Such epithets reflect the literary and compositional exercises of epistolary writers. Years of preparation had earned literati the

[76] Basil, *Address to Young Men* 5.14 (Deferrari): ἱδρῶτας μυρίους καὶ πόνους καὶ κινδύνους διὰ πάσης ἠπείρου τε καὶ θαλάσσης; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21.

[77] Lucian, *Professor of Public Speaking* 7 (Harmon): "narrow road," στενὴ καὶ ἀκανθώδης καὶ τραχεῖα, πολὺ τὸ δίψος ἐμφαίνουσα καὶ ἱδρῶτα. See analysis on the trope of the hard road by Gunderson, *Staging*, 153–4.

[78] Lucian, *Professor of Public Speaking* 7 (Harmon): ἁβροῦ καὶ ἐρασμίου ῥήτορος.

[79] Gunderson, *Staging*, 112: "The orator is associated with truth and spirit; the actor with fiction and the body."

[80] Maud Gleason, *Making*, xxii and 159–68; Cribiore, *Gymnastics*, 128, 222. Cribiore cites references to this terminology in Libanius' *Eps.* 140 (Cribiore 8), 309, 548, and 1020; *Or.* 23.24, 11.187, 12.54.

honor of showing off their superior craft and establishing their inclusion in a community of similar intelligentsia.[81] If training for oral performances enabled Second Sophistic speakers to manifest virility, composing epistles offered occasions for clergy to assert their own literary expertise and to validate their credibility by celebrating epistles from well-versed writers. Sporting imagery underscored the contested setting in which the Cappadocians participated. "For who is such a coward and so unmanly, or so inexperienced in an athlete's labours, that he is not strengthened for the struggle," Basil wrote to a colleague. "For you were the first to strip for the noble course of piety."[82] In classical Greece, the gymnasium provided the setting for the strict regimen that cultivated athletes and soldiers.[83] The prominent place of the gymnasium in the polis testified to its importance to society. It was a place that was unequivocally male, the proving ground for future leaders and combatants. Fourth-century literati could not fight in the ancient battles like a Homeric warrior or pursue victory in an Olympian race.[84] But through writing and receiving epistles, *pepaideumenoi* proved their worthiness as successors to former heroes, thus linking themselves with paragons of manhood from a venerated past.[85] An epistolary *agōn*, that is, served as their gymnasium and stadium; a crucible of masculinity unsullied by gender fluidity attendant to sites such as the theatre. Textual fluency became a measure of individual excellence, simulating the corporeal splendor attributed to Greek athletes. The aesthetics of eloquence were mimetic and, according to Nazianzen, requiring constant fashioning by "good artists who train their students with lots of demonstrations."[86] *Pepaideumenoi* had to be challenged in order to exercise their manhood to full potential. Authors believed that physical resilience and mental facilities derived from similar

[81] Ludlow, *Art*, 8–10.

[82] Basil, *Ep*. 222 (Deferrari): "first to strip," προλαβόντες γὰρ ἐναπεδύσασθε τῷ τῆς εὐσεβείας σταδίῳ.

[83] D. Hawhee, *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 30–9, 110–3.

[84] On the warrior ideology and military measure, see J. Roisman, *The Rhetoric of Manhood: Masculinity in the Attic Orators* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 105–29.

[85] For examples of performative literature rooted in classical Greece, see R. Thomas, "Performance and Written Literature in Classical Greece: Envisaging Performance from Written Literature and Comparative Contexts," in *The Anthropology of Performance: A Reader*, ed. F. Korom (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 26–35.

[86] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 71 (Storin 150): τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς τῶν γραφέων μιμούμενος οἳ τῷ παραδεινύναι τὰ πολλὰ τοὺς μαθητὰς ἐκπαιδεύουσι.

regimens. The parallelism came in part from the fixation on athletics and *agōn* by authors such as Lucian. "The more one draws it [strength] out by exertions (πόνοι)," Lucian wrote, "the more it flows in."[87] Metaphors of exertion worked well because writing at the sophisticated level of these individuals presented a struggle both with others and within oneself. The conventions of the epistle made it a most personal form of writing, mimicking the face-to-face interaction of wrestlers and warriors. Like the *agōn* of warfare and sport, epistolary exchange depended on training, determination, and risk. Fellow literati shared, discussed, and evaluated the texts, thus holding letters up to scrutiny. Above all, composition called for an active role on the part of the writer and demanded that he respond to complex circumstances through a vast repertoire of models while using the encoded language of the elite.

Recurrent Epistolary Composition and Character Formation

An ongoing image of masculinity required diligence and it also depended on constant self-fashioning. The element of perpetual contest was a trope rooted in Second Sophistic emphasis on early Greek exhibitions of *aretē*. The nature of epistolary *agōn* among fourth-century *pepaideumenoi* likewise involved repeated demonstrations of ability. Orators of the preceding centuries had periodically declaimed, mediated, and otherwise delivered public speeches to nurture and prove their superior deportment. Sophists of the first three centuries called to mind the intellectual setting of the ancient polis, where the ritualized exchange of words formed a cornerstone of reciprocity between companions. Classical Athens, for example, was pervaded by images of men facing each other while engaging in combat, music, and sports.[88] The ubiquity of the theme of struggle prompted the citizen male to remember that he would reach his telos as an *agathos* – the brave and upright leader – only by challenging others. Authors such as Plutarch, moreover, correlated the "virtues of character" to the "virtues of habit."[89] Excellence of character, that is, was achieved through recurrent performance. And although silence could signify self-control in certain settings, within the traditional realm of civic life, vocal performance formed the core of leadership ability in a

[87] Lucian, *Athletics* 35 (Harmon). [88] Fredal, *Rhetorical*, 8–12.
[89] Plutarch, *Moralia* 2a–2b (Babbitt).

pepaideumenos.[90] With few exceptions, refusal to engage in verbal confrontations (or later, in written exchanges) was damning to anyone striving for *aretē*.[91] Such acts of evasion showed temerity, and perhaps most importantly, unwillingness to hone one's skill and advertise his own manhood. The Cappadocians framed epistolary exchange among literati in a similar way, as an ongoing exercise in fashioning self-identity. "Wells become better for being used," Basil told one correspondent. "At no time cease writing us and urging us to write."[92] The entreaty couched a medical theory, by famed physician Galen (130–210), that muscles ("wells") of the human body grow stronger when exerted regularly.[93] Basil's premise was consistent with Galen's view that exercising the human body contributed to an overall high level of health and rational conduct. Basil considered the symbiosis of body and intellect as relevant to his point here: that mental acumen improves when literati correspond often. Productions of eloquence, of manhood, would reinforce *aretē*, and consistently remind an *agathos* of his purpose.

The mutual performances of letter writing reminded correspondents that their lineage of masculinity stretched deep into the past. With the pressing business that many administrators faced, the Cappadocians sustained their own sense of *aretē* by inviting others to join the *agōn*. Basil once received a letter from a colleague who was "discontented with the care of public business."[94] Libanius similarly told a governor, "I assumed that you'd no longer be so reliable writing as a result of your office and the inundation of business."[95] In both cases, Basil and Libanius used opportunities to interact with the correspondents, thereby sustaining self-assurance among them and also attesting to their own *aretē*. Like Libanius, the Cappadocians networked with a wide array of literati, both Christian and non-Christian, to establish conventions for their idealized *agathos*. Such analogies alerted well-educated readers to the lessons to be drawn from studies that may have been neglected. Literati were

[90] M. Jones, *Playing the Man: Performing Masculinities in the Ancient Greek Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 52–3. On verbal stillness as a rhetorical strategy, B. Storin, "In a Silent Way: Asceticism and Literature in the Rehabilitation of Gregory of Nazianzus," *JECS* 19:2 (2011), 225–57.

[91] R. Van Dam, *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 136, on the breach of protocol and reputation when not responding to letters.

[92] Basil, *Ep*. 151 (Deferrari): "wells," τὰ φρέατά φασιν ἀντλούμενα βελτίω γίνεσθαι.

[93] Galen, *Hygiene* 1.3.2 (Johnston, 243).

[94] Basil, *Ep*. 299 (Deferrari).

[95] Libanius, *Ep*. 800 (Bradbury 134).

challenged to return to a nostalgic past from where they might draw on their cumulative wisdom and take up the pen.

Correspondence was verbal gamesmanship, moreover, a contest that stirred authors to engage their talents rooted in a lifetime of study and practice. It became a commonplace, in fact, to demand further letters from a fellow *pepaideumenos*. After receiving a letter from Libanius, Nyssen responded by insinuating that Libanius planned to stop corresponding: "Since even with farmers. . .approval of the labours they have already performed is a great incentive to further labours (τὴν προθυμίαν τὸ τῶν πονηθέντων). . .on this account write so that we may stir you to write back."[96] Gregory was pleading with Libanius to pick up the pen. The exchange of letters here is like a ritual dance, with Gregory imploring Libanius to keep up the competition. It was through opportunities like this, after all, that Gregory could hone his own *aretē* and signify his manhood. In this way letter writing provided an arena that was instrumental to socializing aristocratic men even while it allowed for self-presentation. Nazianzen once told his cousin Amphilochius that his letter "implanted in my soul a harmonious lyre. . .with your countless writings (μυριάκις γράφων)."[97] Amphilochius' recurring correspondence, Gregory says, exerted a cumulative effect on him. The lyre was an instrument mastered as part of *paideia*, and it was associated with Homeric Greek warriors, as for instance, in the god Apollo. Gregory was asserting that Amphilochius had tested him and reminded him of his own *aretē*. Gregory honored his cousin through encomiastic verse, thereby reciprocating Amphilochius' mental efforts and brandishing his own prowess. Interchanges such as this one allowed authors the opportunity of self-presentation. They provided a recipient an opportunity to project a self-directed identity by showing off his dexterity in a way that might otherwise appear as self-praise.

Oratorical performances of the Second Sophistic often have been characterized as a zero-sum game, with only winners and losers.[98] As such, they were antagonistic encounters. The Cappadocians and other fourth-century writers, by contrast, imagined correspondence as a continual working out of mutual *aretē*. For instance, Gregory of Nazianzus prodded Eudoxius,[99] a Christian teacher of rhetoric from Cappadocia, by boasting "Let me conquer (νικῶ) you with friendly

[96] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 14 (Silvas). [97] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 171 (Storin 190).
[98] Whitmarsh, *Second*, 38. [99] Introduction, n. 64.

letters."[100] Gregory seemingly evokes an encounter of contention and triumph over Eudoxius, and he imbues the exchange with overtones of opposition. He clarifies the spirit of his sparring, however, by saying "I wouldn't make a show of myself. . .if I didn't regard your friendship as a great thing."[101] His bravado, that is, constitutes an affirmation of his and Eudoxius' friendship (*philia*). Such expressions of friendship pervaded epistolary *agōnes*, thus providing a mechanism for cultivating *aretē* in participants. For Aristotle, demonstrations of *aretē* provided the cornerstone of *philia* – specifically as an association of *agathoi*. Repeated acts of *aretē*, applying this model, ushered a constant benefit to a friend and reminded him of the foundations of their camaraderie.[102] And like mutual bestowals of honor among friends in the Homeric epics, letter exchange confirmed the bond while also crediting the status of each party.[103] Gregory approached Eudoxius with a similar understanding of friendship. "It is necessary to prod you to write," Gregory says, "as one does a colt with a strap."[104] He likened Eudoxius to a stallion that had been prepared for battle, a subject of ancient manuals by historian Xenophon here used as an analogy of the power *pepaideumenoi* achieved through mutual rhetorical exercises.[105] Gregory was provoking Eudoxius as part of a joint quest for virtuosity, not as a castigator but as an ally.

The zeal for struggle was based on a distinction between two forms of strife, a notion established in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.[106] One kind of struggle caused enmity and warfare, a concept obtained in our modern sense of antagonism. The other made individuals efficient, hard-working, and led to prosperity, a notion embedded in agonistic practices. In the latter, the clash between participants made each stronger. This mutually beneficial gamesmanship had once formed the core of the athletic festivals that honored the gods. Approaches to rhetoric in ancient Greece, as Debra Hawhee argues, often were undergirded by such Greek athletic concepts of competition.[107] Individuals raised in *paideia* had been trained

[100] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 174 (Storin 111): Νικῶ σε τοῖς φιλικοῖς.
[101] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 174 (Storin 111).
[102] Aristotle, *N.E.* 1156b–1157a28: on ideal friendship rooted in *aretē*.
[103] W. Donlan, "Political Reciprocity in Dark Age Greece: Odysseus and his *hetairoi*," in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece*, eds. C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite, and R. Seaford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 51–2.
[104] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 174 (Storin 111): "prod to write," διεγεῖραί σε πρὸς τὸ γράφειν.
[105] Xenophon, *Horsemanship* and *Calvary Commander*.
[106] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 11–16. Later referenced as foundational to virtue by Plutarch. *Moralia* 77d.
[107] Hawhee, *Bodily*, 21–7.

in the art of eloquence: to recognize it; to compose it; and to prize it. Having participated in rigorous exercises, *pepaideumenoi* were equipped to write ornate epistles and to share with others the virtues of the ancients. But these skills were meant to be put on display and had to be practiced regularly. Thus, agonistic rhetoric often was adumbrated by metaphors of questing. Libanius, for example, explained to an imperial official, "I'm hunting (θηρεύω) for friendship through a letter. . .in order that a man who is a gentleman (καλὸς καγαθός) should not elude me."[108] Libanius' pursuit of *philia* called forth the reader's own chasing after *aretē*, the cornerstone of epistolary *agōn*. An image of hunting posed an activity consistent with the development of young men in *paideia*.[109] And here, the trophy achieved from the hunt included both virtue and noble companionship. Towards the end of his life, in the mid 380s, Nazianzen similarly signified camaraderie with Timothy, perhaps a young man he planned to ordain into the priesthood: "I've always been a noble hunter (τῶν καλῶν θηρευτής) of noble qualities," Gregory told him. "I discovered your eloquence," Gregory continued, "with my own eloquence."[110] Nazianzen affiliated himself with the young man through the language of combat, with the chase after eloquence representing the mutual disposition that he perceived in Timothy. On another occasion, Nazianzen staged martial-like behavior, inciting the aforementioned Eudoxius to "tame your great wrath, Achilles, and once again set your stylus, that ashen spear of yours, in motion for me."[111] Gregory deployed imagery and epithets from the *Iliad* that recalled heroic behavior: the discipline of a warrior to control his anger; and the incentive to take up arms at the appropriate occasion. Gregory exhorted Eudoxius to take up his own weapon, his pen, and to weather the contest of written exhibition.

AGŌN AND GROUP IDENTITY AMONG PRO-NICENES

As the Cappadocians generated epistolary contests, they were reinforcing an identity that cut across religious lines. These letter exchanges activated

[108] Libanius, *Ep.* 510 (Bradbury 36).

[109] Xenophon, *On Hunting* 1.2.6 ff.; Jones, *Playing*, 22–3, observes that Xenophon placed value on hunting as a means of producing a man who is temperate.

[110] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 164 (Storin 223); Timothy: Storin, *Gregory*, 41.

[111] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 176 (Storin 113): "stylus in motion," κίνησον αὖθις ἡμῖν τὴν γραφίδα, τὴν σὴν μελίαν; same Eudoxius as above; as Storin points out, allusions to "wrath" and "spear" come from *Iliad* 9.496 and 20.272.

a code of behavior that correlated the spirit of competition with the integrity and wisdom to guide; assets often emphasized in non-Christian sources. Thus, the Cappadocians are notable for activating their group identity as *pepaideumenoi* with many non-Christian correspondents. But the Cappadocians also expected fellow pro-Nicene Christians to excel in the *agōn*; as an indication that Trinitarian believers embodied the true, masculine version of Christianity. In a letter to native Cappadocian and Christian Philagrius (same as above), Basil called on him to send many letters, writing at every pretext, because he composed "from a pure tongue" (ἀπὸ γλῶττης κεκθαρμένης) and he was "one of those refined by his speech" (οἱ τὸν λόγον χαρίεντες).[112] Basil urged him to write because his letters exemplified his manhood. His style of composition, "pure" and "refined," showed that he was above the theatricality of those sophists who craved popular appeal.[113] In other words, he needed no validation. He was sure of himself and a speaker of truth. In one of his later letters, Basil likewise urged the Christian catechumen Nectarius "to maintain a continuous correspondence with us by letter."[114] Nectarius had emerged from the eastern Roman provincial aristocracy, and may already have been serving as Praetor of Constantinople.[115] Basil rejoiced that "from childhood [Nectarius] was known to us for his noble qualities" and had now gained fame for "practicing every manner of virtue (παντοίας ἀρετῆς)."[116] Acknowledgments of such literary skill and requests for more epistles advanced a dialogue among Christian *pepaideumenoi* to reinforce this element of manhood in thought and practice. These were oft-repeated literary tropes of praise, but the adulation served a purpose for clergy. The exercises forced Christian literati to think about continual engagement with fellow *agathoi* as a moral code to inform their manner as imperial, provincial, and civic church leaders. This dialogue imprinted on the minds of Christian *pepaideumenoi* patterns of self-assertion, boldness, and forceful speech.

While treating epistolary *agōn* as an expression of group membership, the Cappadocians included friends and family in these configurations of

[112] Basil, *Ep*. 323 (Deferrari).

[113] Puertas, *Dynamics*, 64–6, emphasizes that speech was most often the decisive element others used to determine an individual's identity as a philosopher as opposed to a rhetorician.

[114] Basil, *Ep*. 290 (Deferrari).

[115] Nectarius: Storin, *Gregory*, 33, the same Nectarius who later succeeded Gregory of Nazianzus as Bishop of Constantinople in 381 (See Chap. 4); H-M, 126–8; *PLRE* 621.

[116] Basil, *Ep*. 290 (Deferrari).

identity. Philagrius was one such person.[117] Philagrius had been a close friend of Nazianzen's younger brother Caesarius (c. 331–68) before the latter died unexpectedly. After Caesarius' death, Gregory of Nazianzus took a significant interest in Philagrius' development, perhaps as a way of honoring his deceased sibling. Gregory and Philagrius, who had studied together as youths, exchanged a series of epistles in the many years following Caesarius' passing. In one of these, Gregory recalled the delights of their student days in Athens: "the cities, the lectures, the table, the poverty, 'the things proper to the lovely time of life,' as Homer says, whether games or studies, the sweat of eloquence, the teachers we had in common. . ."[118] Gregory was recalling an experience when, as unproven pedagogues, the two had labored to acquire virtue. Although the training had been demanding, both could reflect on an experience that enabled them to discern truth and gave them the ability to defend their beliefs and actions. Gregory pressed Philagrius to keep alive the days of his studies in Greek literature and philosophy, directing him to "Do me the honor of composing a letter."[119] Gregory was calling him to action. Philagrius was enjoined to take up his instrument of writing and to apply it as an operation of his virtue. Gregory was activating the memory of their shared intellectual past because he wanted Philagrius to maintain the aptitudes that had made him prominent. In reviving this program from adolescence, Gregory was normalizing a rhetoric of competition for his fellow believer.

Arbiters of Eloquence

In spurring other authors to showcase their literary workmanship, the Cappadocians contributed to their own status by issuing judgments of style from a position of proven ability. They were attempting to confirm their place in a hierarchy of savants by challenging others to put forward their best work. They were showing judiciousness as they summoned others to compose, again and again excelling in the literary *agōn* even as they were enjoining others to participate. And they were resourceful, drawing on a litany of rhetorical devices and incorporating classical

[117] Philagrius: J. McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2001), 164–5; Storin, *Gregory*, 35 n.120; and Van Dam, *Families*, 145–6.

[118] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 30 (Storin 127); reference to *Iliad* 3.175.

[119] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 30 (my translation): κίνει τὴν γραφίδα καὶ χαρίζου τὸ ἐπιστέλλειν.

themes and references. They exhibited their own talents and then they praised others, directing them to compose while later commenting on the elements of their craft. This rhetoric of arbitrating among correspondents placed them in roles as cultural moderators.

A case in point appears in Nazianzen's correspondence with his grandnephew Nicobulus (the younger), grandson of Gregory's sister Gorgonia.[120] In the early 380s, retired after having now served two decades as a priest, Gregory sent Nicobulus a letter that offered guidelines for writing epistles.[121] Gregory advised him to use highly stylized language sparingly so that the words would not come across as unnatural. Gregory was discouraging him from adopting Asianic wordplay, a form associated with affectation and emotion.[122] Gregory prescribed use of more reserved verse and he advised Nicobulus to craft with "beauty, adornment, and polish"[123] through the use of "adages and proverbs and sayings, as well as of jokes and riddles."[124] These were elements that ancient theorists had advocated in order to make the author come across as erudite, yet conversational and at ease.[125] The ideal epistle would reflect a sense of apparent effortlessness of action, an indication that the author was a naturally gifted writer and speaker whose words came easily.[126] His eloquence, that is, should appear innate. It would also reflect an ability to draw on ancient authors and their wisdom in a demonstration of imaginative application.

[120] Nicobulus: McGuckin, *Gregory*, 6–7; B. Storin, *Self-Portrait in Three Colors: Gregory of Nazianzus's Epistolary Autobiography* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 1–4; Van Dam, *Friends*, 58–60; we have several extant letters by Gregory intervening on behalf of his grandnephew and another five addressed specifically to him: Greg. Naz., *Eps.* 127, 167, 174–7, 187, 188, 190, 191, 192, 195, 196; primarily related to Nicobulus' education and career: Greg. Naz., *Eps.* 51–5.

[121] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 51 (Storin 3).

[122] Swain, *Hellenism*, 22–4, points out that the charge of "Asianism" was first used by Roman orators as a source of stylistic criticism, but among Greeks, mainly as a geographic designation. Whitmarsh, *Second*, 49–51, says that Second Sophistic authors often used it as the antithesis of "manly" Attic oratory. In correspondence among *pepaideumenoi*, the term was used in this latter way, pejoratively. MacDougall, "Arianism," 105, shows that Gregory equated this style with effeminacy. It makes sense, then, that he was advising his grandnephew against this form of eloquence.

[123] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 51 (Storin 3).

[124] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 51 (Storin 3), trans. by B. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (London: Routledge, 2006), 177–8.

[125] See Demetrius, *On Style* 223; Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 75.

[126] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 51 (Storin 3); Gregory uses the metaphor of an eagle, whose grace comes so naturally that it does not know it is beautiful.

Gregory sent other letters to Nicobulus, including one in which he answered the young man's request for a collection of his epistles. Gregory complied by sending copies of his letters to his grandnephew. He stated that the missives were bound together by a sash, "designed not for love but for eloquence."[127] He shows his cleverness by differentiating the band holding together his assemblage of letters against a sash used by Aphrodite in the *Iliad* to seduce men through magical charms and sweet talk.[128] Here Gregory puts Nicobulus to the test, challenging him to interpret this allusion from the Homeric epic. Gregory was staking claim to a manly persona and passing it on to his protégé. He was teaching that speech was multivalent and indicative of a person's essence. He advised Nicobulus on the purpose of performance, defining it not as a matter of indulgence, but as an assertion of forcefulness.[129] The manly writer, in the same way as the manly orator, was expected to present himself in a manner that set him apart from those who were garrulous. Gregory characterized his own style as "instructive in maxims and precepts whenever possible," a feature apparent throughout his correspondence that showed his affinity for the ancients.[130] He augmented his collection of epistles by including in the gift his compilation of Basil's letters.[131] The two sets of letter collections – his own and Basil's – provided a model for the young Christian *pepaideumenos*.

Recent scholarship has shown that authors also sometimes gathered and organized their epistles in order to shape a personal identity.[132] As Brad Storin has shown, this is exactly what Nazianzen did when sending

[127] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 52 (Storin 1).

[128] *Iliad* 14.210–20. On sash reference, Storin, *Self-Portrait*, 115.

[129] See similar discussion by Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 33.2–7 and Plutarch, *Moralia* 2a–2b.

[130] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 52 (Storin 1). A trope among Second Sophistic authors. For example Lucian, *Athletics* 21–2.

[131] See Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 53 (Storin 2). P. J. Fedwick, *Bibliotheca Basiliana Universalis: A Study of the Manuscript Tradition, Translations and Editions of the Works of Basil of Caesarea*, vol. 1, *The Letters* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1993), xix–xxxi, on how Basil may have arranged his own collection. Further discussion on Basil's organizational strategy: A. Silvas, "The Letters of Basil of Caesarea and the Role of Letter-Collection in their Transmission," in *Collecting Early Christian Letters: From the Apostle Paul to Late Antiquity*, eds. B. Neil and P. Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 119–23. A. Radde-Gallwitz, "The Letter Collection of Basil of Caesarea," in *Late Antique Letter Collections*, eds. C. Sogno, B. Storin, and E. Watts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 69–80. Radde-Gallwitz expounds on Fedwick's proposal that Basil had a filing system that made a circulation of batches possible (e.g. for use by Nazianzen), 71–5.

[132] Storin, *Self-Portrait,* 1–4; for examples of Basil's social signaling, Schor, "Becoming," 307–16.

his and Basil's epistles to Nicobulus. In this case, Gregory intended to fashion himself as dynamic, eloquent, and closely allied to the now deceased Basil. The collection also created an epistolary biography for Basil and redounded to his literary merits.[133] As a recent recipient, Nicobulus could lay claim to distinction as a *literatus*; as could his associates, who would be helping him decode style and allusions within the texts.[134] All were participating in a contest to show off their scholarship. The cumulative outcome was that in addition to providing archetypes for letter writing, Gregory was also delivering to his grandnephew a mechanism of socialization. From this literary treasure, Nicobulus could follow his grand-uncle's career and discover the temperament that enabled him to thrive in a host of identities.

Neil McLynn contends, moreover, that Gregory sometimes paired letters from Basil with one or two of his own.[135] McLynn's point is that Gregory "answered" Basil's responses on a variety of issues with his own remedies, thus casting Gregory as favorable by comparison. Another purpose to this strategy, I would argue, is that by placing letters in apposition to each other, Gregory framed the dialogues specifically as *agōnes*, as competitions between two preeminent colleagues. It was a point not to be lost on the young student. Basil's demeanor as priest, patron, and litterateur, through his letters, worked alongside that of Gregory to model the *aretē* that Gregory was trying to make known to Nicobulus. Gregory used the two sets of missives to create a profile of a Christian *pepaideumenos*. He was showing how well-studied Christian authors write and act. Finally Gregory asked Nicobulus to compensate him by giving back "the very act of writing as well as the profit that you glean from what I write here."[136] Nicobulus was commanded to show reciprocity by contributing to the epistolary dialogue, where he could prove his own merits and carve out his own persona. Gregory was affording his nephew the opportunity to improve as a writer, and in so doing to advance as an author. He was acculturating him into a select social milieu by urging him to join the *agōn*.

[133] Basil, *Ep*. 231 (Deferrari), had once told Amphilochius, "there was nothing to prevent my letters from being as it were a daily record of my life, from recounting to your Charity the happenings of each day."

[134] Storin, *Self-Portrait*, 1–4.

[135] N. McLynn, "Gregory Nazianzen's Basil: The Literary Construction of a Christian Friendship," *SP* 34 (2001), 186.

[136] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 52 (Storin 1).

Gregory showed equal command as he corresponded with more seasoned *pepaideumenoi*, such as Nicobulus' teachers. In about 383 Gregory intervened in a dispute between the rhetorician Stagirius (see beginning of chapter) and Stagirius' rival, the Cappadocian teacher Eustochius. The two were competing to mentor Nicobulus.[137] Eustochius believed that Gregory had encouraged Nicobulus, who was studying with Eustochius at the time, to approach Stagirius about working under his tutelage. Acquiring promising students meant prestige and income for teachers, and so Eustochius may have been denouncing Gregory's alleged interference. Responding to Eustochius, Gregory first acknowledged the artistry and frankness of his letter: "O Odysseus, how fiercely you strike me down (με καθίκεο)...discharging your sophisms (κατασοφιστεύω) against me."[138] Eustochius is designated a Greek warrior, who has engaged Gregory in verbal display. The banter, as Gregory portrayed it, assumes the manner of a military affair. And Gregory ultimately one-ups his friend by assuming the role of Agamemnon, who in the *Iliad* served as a voice of reason and calm against the impetuous and bellicose Odysseus (here played by Eustochius).[139] After acknowledging Eustochius' skill, Gregory employed his own spirited address by trying to play peacemaker between Eustochius and himself and between Eustochius and Stagirius. He chastises Eustochius for abusing his talents as when calling Stagirius a "Telchine" – in Greek mythology, one of the original inhabitants of Rhodes who used magic for harmful purposes. "Engaging in the giving and taking of head butts (κυρίσσω)," Gregory scolded, "is totally contentious and inappropriate."[140] Here again, Gregory depicts the discourse as violent in order to highlight his colleague's disposition. In this chastisement, Gregory monitors and rectifies Eustochius for not carrying himself as an *agathos* should. He is demonstrating his acute discernment of elite demeanor. Gregory then cited an admonition from the *Iliad* to give great discretion to whatever word you speak.[141] Gregory took advantage of the dispute to play the role as instructor of an instructor. In the same letter, Gregory praised, rebuked, and educated Eustochius. The interplay was a

[137] On this rivalry see N. McLynn, "Among the Hellenists: Gregory and the Sophists," in *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, eds. J. Børtnes and T. Hägg (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), 215–9.

[138] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 190 (modification of trans. in Storin 105); Eustochius: Storin, *Gregory*, 27; H-M, 78–9.

[139] Storin, *Self-Portrait*, 114; *Iliad* 14.104.

[140] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 190 (Storin 105).

[141] Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 190 (Storin 105); *Iliad* 20.250.

form of gamesmanship, with Gregory speaking a code that Eustochius understood. The epistle was meant to ease the tensions between the three parties, and through it Gregory enhanced his own image as pedagogue.

Gregory took the same approach on a separate occasion in a letter to Stagirius. The rhetorician had incurred an unspecified misfortune that Gregory had addressed in another letter.[142] Stagirius had replied, presumably explaining his reaction to Gregory's letter. After examining the missive, Gregory composed yet another response, commending Stagirius for overcoming adverse circumstances.[143] "You valiantly (γενναίως) rose up to the altercation like quite the sophist."[144] Gregory then deployed a *synkrisis* (a rhetorical device), comparing Stagirius to Achilles' horses Balios and Xanthos in the *Iliad* following the death of Patroclus, Achilles' beloved companion.[145] After having been brought to tears by the demise of their master's comrade, the steeds were emboldened by Zeus, who breathed might into them so that they returned to battle. "You lifted up your head and shook off the dust," Gregory proclaimed.[146] He was crediting Stagirius for overcoming the hardship, a behavior befitting a nobleman. Gregory was also suggesting that his own counsel had contributed to Stagirius' gallantry. Subsequently Gregory urged Stagirius to "desire the plains, the weapons, and exhibitions;" that is to return to his career of teaching, writing, and speaking.[147] Gregory now comes across as counselor and exhorter. He has elevated himself to the place of mentor for the accomplished rhetorician. Gregory charges Stagirius to "act like a man (ἀνδρίζου), and practice philosophy against the suffering" and he emphasizes that "judging sailors from the shoreline is no great feat."[148] It was time for Stagirius to return to action, to play his

[142] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 164 (Storin 223).

[143] R. Gregg, *Consolation Philosophy: Greek and Christian Paideia in Basil and the Two Gregories* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1975). Gregg explores philosophical schools of thought about how a noble man should respond to grief. The genre of classical consolation stretched deep into the classical past and the conventions in the literary trope of consolation provided another means of exhibiting *paideia*.

[144] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 166 (Storin 226).

[145] *Iliad* 17.426–80: Balios and Xanthos; on *synkrisis*, G. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 25, 31, 234–36 and Libanius, *Progymnasmata*.

[146] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 166 (Storin 226).

[147] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 166 (Storin 226): αὖθις πεδίων ἐπιθυμεῖν καὶ ὅπλων καὶ ἐπιδείξεων.

[148] Greg. Naz., *Ep* .166 (Storin 226).

role as instructor of young men; not from the sidelines, but as a contender. Gregory cast himself as an experienced combatant who had endured hardship and could thus speak as a reliable source. Moreover, Gregory inserted himself into the narrative by playing the same role as Zeus in the *Iliad*. Whereas the latter had breathed resilience into Achilles' horses, now Gregory was doing the same to Stagirius. This parallelism was sure to have registered with Stagirius and to give a sense of Gregory's self-assurance.

On some occasions, the Cappadocians also solicited addressees to write by inscribing them into the Homeric or classical past. Late in the 380s, for instance, Nyssen crafted an epistle for Eupatrius, a *scholasticus* (a legal official in the imperial service) and a native of Pontus or Cappadocia. Gregory assumed the identity of Laertes (King of Ithaca in the *Odyssey*), as he compared Eupatrius and his father to Odysseus and Telemachus (the son and grandson of Laertes).[149] "You and your wholly admirable father honored me, as they did Laertes," Gregory wrote, "contending in friendly rivalry for the first prize (φιλοφροσύνη περὶ τῶν πρωτείων διαγωνίζεσθε) in showing us respect and kindness, pelting me with letters. . ."[150] Gregory respected Eupatrius and his father in this characterization of them as brave warriors. The pair had competed for a "prize" based on who had sent the most excellent and numerous epistles to Gregory. Gregory likened their missives to projectiles used in battle, here equating their correspondence to the victory that Odysseus (as Eupatrius' father) and Telemachus (as Eupatrius) won, using spears, over Penelope's suitors. The father-son duo had proven their mettle, and thus Gregory recasts them as earlier Greek heroes. Nyssen continued to heap praise: "I shall be a judge favourable to both of you, awarding to you the first prize (πρωτεῖα) against your father, and the same to your father against me."[151] Here Gregory assumes the position of critic, adjudicating the skills and labors of his correspondents, and acknowledging them both as victors. He finalizes his gratitude by admiring Eupatrius' writing style: "But you, by entertaining us in youthful fashion with your brisk and sprightly language shall restore youth to our old age."[152] Gregory declares his appreciation for the multiple epistles he received. Even as he extols Eupatrius and his father, he portrays them as attempting to outdo

[149] *Odyssey* 24.514–15; see Silvas, *Gregory*, 149 n. 189.
[150] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 11 (slight modification of Silvas). [151] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 11 (Silvas).
[152] Greg. Ny., *Ep.* 11 (Silvas).

each other, thus further acknowledging them as virtuous. And as Gregory recognizes the merits of his colleagues, his position as Laertes – great warrior and sire to Telemachus and Odysseus – reminds readers that he has right to make judgment. By creating an imaginative narrative, Gregory recognizes their mutual commitment to an economy of honor grounded in Homer's *Odyssey*. He signals that he shares in their knowledge of noble Greeks from antiquity. And by equating father and son with these paragons of manhood, he recognizes his addressees as descended from their pedigree. It is a lineage that he, too, can claim through his success in the *agōn*.

In the world of late antique *paideia*, the Cappadocians deemed eloquence an extension of manhood. So, by sustaining an image as judges of literary style, they cast themselves as arbiters of *aretē*. Similar tropes of authority informed the discourse on both epistolary *agōn* and elite male bearing. Nazianzen, for example, adopted the place of referee over provincial administrators and eminent intellectuals. In 382 he expressed his support of Olympius, a Christian governor of Cappadocia: "I have confidence in you..." Gregory stated. "For intelligence (σύνεσις) and manliness (ἀνδρεία) guide your office..."[153] Gregory appraised Olympius' rule and subsequently certified the comportment in his fellow Cappadocian. In correspondence among elites, social hierarchies were based partly on the execution of language. Gregory was sanctioned to assess a man of high rank because his elocution identified him as a man whose opinion counted. Gregory also praised the attributes of Eudoxius (same as above), who secured his standing, according to Nazianzen, by avoiding the unsavory features of vile wordsmiths who lack sophistication. Gregory approved that his colleague did not have the "repulsive voice" (φωνὴ μιαρά) or "vulgarity" (ἀγοραῖος) of social climbers who ultimately betray their baseness.[154] Gregory contrasted Eudoxius with Greek poet Aristophanes' parody of a sausage-seller who was made into a demagogue; a man lacking all the requisite qualities of a just political leader.[155] Here Gregory affirmed Eudoxius' high birth, a mark often associated with noblemen against the inadequacies of social climbers. Because of Eudoxius' background of financial and social security, he was not slave

[153] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 140 (Storin 210); Olympius: Storin, *Gregory*, 35; R. Van Dam, "Governors of Cappadocia during the Fourth Century," *Medieval Prosopography* 17 (1996), 64–6.

[154] Greg. Naz., *Ep*. 178 (Storin 116). [155] Aristophanes, *Knights* 5.140–229.

to fame, riches, and political power, obsessions that indicated an absence of discipline and pedigree.[156] In commendations such as this, Gregory garnered respect as an accomplished critic of noble demeanor. He recognized and articulated the qualities of Eudoxius that distinguished him from less admirable sophists. Thus, Gregory acquitted himself as a connoisseur of virtue.

Managing Masculinity: Exhortations to "Play the Man"

In the preceding letter, Gregory issued an injunction that moored *aretē* specifically to its masculine affiliation. He admonished Eudoxius "Let's become men (ἄνδρες γενώμεθα)."[157] All of the characteristics that dignified Eudoxius appear to be subsumed in this dictum. The maxim, which was probably taught in early pedagogy, also recurred in Basil's letters. For instance, Basil exhorted a Christian soldier, probably an officer "to play the man, and be strong."[158] The counsel held multiple meanings here: to fight valiantly; to serve as a model of discipline for those under him; and to remain faithful to God during the ugliness of combat. Basil used the same phrasing when writing to Amphilochius of Iconium after his consecration as bishop in 374, enjoining him to "play the man" (ἀνδρίζου) and to act as "a wise helmsman (κυβερνήτης) who has assumed the command of a ship."[159] Basil had supported his friend's election to the episcopacy and here he proffered the words of a mentor. The admonishment to "be men" came from the battle-charged atmosphere of the *Iliad*, where, for example, the Greek hero Ajax and King Nestor exhorted soldiers to stand their ground in battle.[160] "Be men, my friends," Ajax urged the Greeks, "and show some shame."[161] Ajax, in this account, shows intrepidity as he rouses the men to action. The Athenian commander Themistocles, likewise, exhorted the Spartan commander Eurybiades to "be a brave man" (ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός) by engaging the Persian fleet at Salamis during the Second

[156] Roisman, *Rhetoric*, 163–85. [157] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 178 (Storin 116).

[158] Basil, *Ep.* 106 (Deferrari): ἀνδρίζου τοίνυν, καὶ ἴσχυε; the phrase "play the man" appears in other classical epistles, notably in the context of exhortations to endure misfortune, e.g. Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 5.18.

[159] Basil, *Ep.* 161 (Deferrari).

[160] *Iliad* 15.561 and 15.661. See K. Bassi, "The Semantics of Manliness in Ancient Greece," in *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, eds. R. Rosen and I. Sluiter (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 33, on the significance of men putting their bodies to the test in view of their leaders.

[161] *Iliad* 15.560–1. (Lombardo): ἀνέρες ἔστε, καὶ αἰδῶ θέσθ' ἐνὶ θύμῷ.

Persian War.[162] To have avoided the conflict here would have proven the Spartans cowards. Basil also is using martial imagery when he correlates Amphilochius' responsibility to "assuming command of a ship." As overseer of the church at Iconium, Basil was stating, Amphilochius would be responsible for steering the congregation clear of the "winds of heresy" and "briny and bitter waves of error."[163] The spiritual and civic duties in the office of bishop demanded the same poise as the master of a seagoing vessel. Basil stressed the point to Amphilochius, while speaking with the latitude of a veteran warrior.

In late antique epistolography, authors reserved the phrases "play the man" or "be a man" specifically for exhorting fellow *men* to act according to the conventions of the elite male. In other literary and theological works, the Cappadocians accentuated *aretē* in female family members. But they did not urge women – even saintly figures – to "be a man." As we will see in later chapters, for example, Macrina was not expected to behave according to the conventions of noble manhood. It would have been unseemly to prompt her to act outside her physical nature. So, although Macrina does, in fact, demonstrate *aretē* through her actions, her behavior exceeds societal standards, thus making her even more noteworthy. The epistolary forum of *aretē*, however, was a predominantly male space, with less allowance for gender fluidity. In this context, Gregory and Basil issued the charge "be men" as a reminder of expectations for *agathoi*, both individual and collective.

Basil and Nazianzen also called to mind the ideal of Greek heroes as they reprised such analogies of fearless warriors. Their use of this trope issued especial weight because it resonated with two features most *pepaideumenoi* treasured: a sense of hypermasculinity; and harkening back to an age that, seemingly, witnessed manhood in its purest form. In her investigation of ancient Greek theatre, Karen Bassi makes a convincing case that such longings for an imagined ideal age colored the tastes of audiences in classical Athens. Bassi observed that depictions of collective masculinity were modeled after the individual actions of a hero or "best man" (ἄριστοζ ἀνήρ). Such evidence anticipated and informed later conceptions of manhood as an abstract ethical quality.[164] Fourth-century *pepaideumenoi* were following their predecessors in self-identifying with the past. Both looked back to classical Athens, where citizens valorized the warrior age of the Homeric epics. The elite masculine

[162] Herodotus, *Histories* 8.62 (my translation). [163] Basil, *Ep.* 161 (Deferrari).
[164] Bassi, "Semantics," 34.

ethos, "being men," was best captured in ancient scenes of heroism, episodes that stimulated self-awareness of the elevated place of a singular community.[165]

The Cappadocians impressed this expectation onto fourth-century pro-Nicene literati, thus underscoring a self-assurance resonant with nobility and courage. In a letter to Adamantius, a Christian priest, Gregory accentuated such martial-like valor by likening his correspondent to Cynegirus and Callimachus – Athenian generals at the Battle of Marathon.[166] Adamantius, we learn, had requested tablets that contained the text of Herodotus' *Histories*. Gregory told him that studying these courageous Greeks suited him because of his "longstanding intimacy" (παλαιά συνήθεια) with them.[167] Adamantius was perpetuating the excellence of the Greek commanders' fortitude by inspiring confidence in followers and providing stability for his church. Gregory cast him as an Athenian commander, emboldening congregants by standing up to Persia, the invading force at Marathon. Persia, the historical enemy of Greece, symbolized softness, laxity, and indulgence in the church and community. In other words, Gregory personified Adamantius as a source of surety and spiritual exactitude for his congregants. Employing the Herodotean binary between the hardened rigor of "western" Greece and the soft luxuriousness of feminized "eastern" Persia, Gregory applied this moral categorization to accentuate *aretē* in a fellow clergyman.

Nazianzen likewise emphasized mutual *aretē* in his correspondence with Ablabius, a teacher of rhetoric who converted to Christianity later in life. "You speak impressively (σοβαρός), hold a strong gaze (μέγα βλέπειν)," Gregory said, "and walk proudly and loftily (βαδίζειν ὑψηλὸν καὶ μετέωρον)."[168] These attributes, Gregory reminded him, befit the resolve of Miltiades, Cynegirus, Callimachus, and Lamachus, four Athenian generals, three of whom led troops at the Battle of Marathon.[169] Gregory was cueing readers to recall the ideal persona of manly orators based on Second Sophistic tropes. The picture of Ablabius was one of a virile speaker: projecting a strong voice; playing an active

[165] Bassi, *Acting*, 315. [166] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 235 (Storin 235).

[167] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 235 (Storin 235; my translation). On longstanding intimacy, see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.15,13–15.

[168] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 233 (Storin 141); Ablabius: Storin, *Gregory*, 18, and Silvas, *Gregory*, 187–8.

[169] Storin, *Gregory*, 215 n. 160: Herodotus, *Histories* 6.94–140; Lamachus served in the Peloponnesian War: Thucydides, *History* 4.75.1–2, 6.49–50, 6.101–3.

role through his gaze, rather than taking on a passive presence; and showing confidence through his gait and posture. Gregory also was associating Ablabius' verbal *aretē* (his rhetoric) with military heroics of a definitive period in Attic history, when Greece – as the civilized world – was battling the forces of tyranny and barbarism. The oblique juxtaposition between the commanders of Greece and their unnamed Persian counterparts reinforced the manly persona that Gregory was putting on display. It was an enduring practice in Greek rhetoric to delineate something by setting it against its antithesis. Gregory deploys this strategy as another part of the cumulative image he was constructing. In both references to Persia, moreover, Gregory was also alluding to heresy as a danger to the church. As we will see later in other genres, Gregory portrayed non-Nicene theologians as effeminate. It was incumbent on a Christian *agathos* to gain the confidence of fellow *pepaideumenoi* by taking on an unmistakably masculine posture. Gregory makes Ablabius out to be one such individual.

The Cappadocians also evaluated the elegance of their educated colleagues as a way of enhancing their own image as literati. Because sophistication was aligned with masculinity, arbitrating literary dexterity translated into measuring virility. They situated themselves as analysts of other *pepaideumenoi*, as experts at defining standards of *aretē*. An *agōn* was a contest to establish and affirm the credentials of elite males. At stake was justification to specify exactly how to act like a man. The Cappadocians attempted to certify themselves as paragons of *aretē* as they delineated elements of virtuous conduct among correspondents. By calibrating *paideia* as an aspect of episcopal office, the Cappadocians positioned pro-Nicene clergy to attain credibility among fellow provincial officials. Success also aligned one with a course of ideal maleness that stretched back indefinitely into the Greek past. They inherited this veneration for the historical male from preceding generations of eastern Romans and adopted it as part of their own identity.

The Cappadocians thus re-inscribed the heritage of *agōn*, subsequently integrating the ideals of classical manhood into the collective consciousness of the church and identifying them within the pro-Nicene episcopacy. Through epistolary exhibitions, the Cappadocians promoted a masculine persona that harked back to the heroes of an idealized Greek past. By compelling *pepaideumenoi* to compose letters, and by holding up certain values embedded in Greek lore, they were forging a convergence of

clerical authority and masculinity. The association of eloquence with manhood derived from their years of training in *paideia*: from the volatile atmosphere of studies in Athens; from the example of teachers such as Prohaeresius; from the curriculum and oratorical contests of the Second Sophistic that informed their conceptions of agonistic rivalry; to the exertions through which they composed letters. Unlike the antagonistic backdrop of oratory, however, the Cappadocians used correspondence with fellow *pepaideumenoi* to exalt mutual *aretē*. They prompted others to write, judged on style, and celebrated letters with the same spirit that characterized alliances between colleagues in ancient Greece. Having been prompted to exhibit ideals of manliness, correspondents were expected to uphold standards expected of noble men: sacrifice, courage, charity, patronage, justice, and clemency.

While refashioning *aretē* that was visible in figures from ancient Greek literature, the Cappadocians upheld attributes that complemented the character of bishops outlined in scriptures, such as the emphasis on temperance (νηφάλιος) and self-control (σώφρων) in I Timothy and Titus.[170] In doing so, they made it clear that the classical male ideal aligned with pro-Nicene visions of church guidance. When Nazianzen wrote to his cousin Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium, in 373, he commended him for his direction of the church there. "The command of Your Inimitable Virtue is not barbarian," Gregory says, "but Greek and even Christian."[171] Acknowledging the two cultural traditions that formed Amphilochius' intellectual and social makeup, Gregory converged the two as preconditions of an effective leader. Neither Gregory nor the other Cappadocians consistently publicized to laity so specific a vision of a church hierarchy that reoriented *aretē* as a condition of the pro-Nicene episcopacy. In communications to the larger church body, in fact, the Cappadocians ushered caution about values external to scriptural teachings. But here, for a restricted readership, Gregory prompts his cousin (and other readers) to understand the subtle message: that the qualities of the classical male applied to a Christian hierarch. Greek and Christian together contravene that which is barbaric, meaning that a civilized state is both Greek and orthodox (pro-Nicene). As bishops moderating epistolary contests, the Cappadocians established themselves as part of an "insider's game" among the intellectual elite.

[170] I Timothy 3:2; Titus 2:5.

[171] Greg. Naz., *Ep.* 62 (Storin 185): Οὐ βάρβαρον τὸ ἐπίταγμα τῆς ἀμιμήτου σου καλοκἀγαθίας, ἀλλ' ἑλληνικόν, μᾶλλον δὲ χριστιανικόν.

And in inciting other Christian *pepaideumenoi* to show off their literary skills as an *agōn*, the Cappadocians normalized *aretē* as a virtue of their episcopal office.

The Cappadocians used correspondence as the primary medium to cultivate a masculine identity because letter writing signified strength. While Second Sophistic *pepaideumenoi* had depended on oral performances to assert identity, many speakers had been accused of compromising their manhood by going too far with theatricality, pandering to crowds in order to curry favor. By the late fourth century, ambivalence about such sophists remained a commonplace; so much so that *pepaideumenoi* went to great lengths to justify their rhetoric as a medium for expressing philosophy.[172] They were not merely entertaining that is. Letter writing helped to maintain an image as a self-directed individual, not a crowd pleaser, because the primary audiences were also conversant in the standards of *aretē*. It was not a setting of the indiscriminate masses. It was a forum where no one could successfully masquerade as a man. The epistolary arena was a sacred space for virtuous men. No pretenders were allowed.

Composing epistles for fellow literati, the Cappadocians called to mind their own adolescence and young adult lives, where they had struggled to gain command of eloquence. They prompted addressees to do the same. These compositions kept alive a past that resonated with stability and power. Expertise in crafting these texts indicated superior discipline and knowledge of what made for effective leadership. For generations of eastern Roman leaders, Greek language, literature, history, and philosophy had informed and validated legitimate authorities. Imperial and civic leaders, teachers, aspiring young *pepaideumenoi*, and novice priests – the individuals who read these letters – would find in the Cappadocians an acute awareness of the masculine ethos that underpinned eastern Rome. The Cappadocians were attempting to conserve the culture of *paideia*, which had preserved symmetry between Roman and local rule for centuries. A limited class – defined by birth, education, and most importantly, competitive trials – provided the foundation for brokering relations across the empire. With their widespread correspondence among literati, the Cappadocians set themselves at the forefront of

[172] A. Puertas, *The Dynamics*, 65, gives an especially strong illustration about how the Christian philosopher-rhetorician Themistius negotiated these two categories of his intellectual make-up.

this social and political reality. Their correspondents could see in pro-Nicene episcopal leadership a comparable version of the archetypical *agathos*. The Cappadocians shared with fellow provincial aristocrats a sense of duty to develop and place *agathoi* into positions of civic authority. In doing so, they may have played a missional role by drawing non-Christians to the pro-Nicene fellowship. By playing the part of the classical male, the Cappadocians offered a version of Christian leadership that appealed to individuals who longed for continuity with the Greek heritage of eastern Rome. Because fellow *pepaideumenoi* had been trained in the same general curriculum, there was a confidence that they would uphold the values embedded in higher Greek culture. Participating in epistolary *agōnes* allowed the Cappadocians to interact seamlessly with *pepaideumenoi*, both non-Christian and Christian, and to correlate such conceptions of manhood with clerical office. They were cultivating provincial leaders and claiming the conventions of gender in *paideia* for the church.