

# Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse

## A Lesson in Patriotism: Lycurgus' *Against Leocrates* and the Ideology of the Ephebeia

Dr. Bernd Steinbock

Department of Classical Studies

### 1.) Problem: Lycurgus' Use of King Codrus as Historical Paradigm

In 330 BC, the leading Athenian statesman Lycurgus charged the Athenian blacksmith Leocrates with treason for fleeing his country after the crushing defeat at Chaeronea in 338 BC. Lycurgus' prosecution speech is unusual for its exuberant use of mythological and historical examples. He contrasts, for instance, Leocrates' cowardice with the patriotic self-sacrifice of the Athenian king Codrus (Lycurg. 83-87).

The 5<sup>th</sup>-century author Hellanicus wrote in his *Atthis* (*FGrHist* 323a F23) that the Dorians invaded Attica during Codrus' reign, trusting the Delphic oracle which assured their victory as long as they avoided killing the Athenian king. When King Codrus learned of this oracle, he disguised himself as a woodcutter and ventured outside the city-walls to seek death from enemy hands, thus foiling their invasion.

**Lycurgus'** treatment of this myth differs remarkably from Hellanicus' literary version. It reflects a decidedly civic and patriotic coloring of the story and, to the surprise of many commentators, enlists Codrus among the ancient Athenian kings who have become "eponymous of the land" (ἐπώνυμοι τῆς χώρας).



Aeneas and Codrus on the Attic red-figured cup by the Codrus Painter, c. 430 BC (Bologna, Mus. Civ. PU 273). Codrus is not shown, as one would expect, in his disguise as a woodcutter. His depiction as a departing hoplite, while not literally true, best captures the essence of his paradigmatic story: his willingness to defend Attica with total devotion, just as aspiring hoplites swore to do when they took the Ephebic Oath.

### 3.) Codrus as Eponymous Age-Set Hero

Taking all available 'carriers' of social memory into account, including oral traditions, rituals and festivals, public commemorations and monuments, I make the case that Codrus was one of the little-known forty-two eponymous age-set heroes (*Ath. Pol.* 53.4-7) who played an important role in the Athenian military and socio-political system (Davidson 2006). Devotion to the city's gods and heroes and knowledge of their mythology were essential parts of the religious and ideological instruction of Athenian *ephebes*. The eponymous heroes in particular served thereby as role models of civic virtue and as focal points of tribal and age-set identity. The patriotic version of **Codrus'** self-sacrifice, used by Lycurgus, was likely told to Athenian recruits in **Codrus'** sanctuary (*IG* I<sup>3</sup> 84) on their official tour of the city's shrines (*Ath. Pol.* 42.3).

### 4.) Lycurgus' Rhetorical Strategy

In light of this elucidation of the Athenian memorial framework, Lycurgus' citation of the Ephebic Oath, the self-sacrifices of King Codrus and the daughters of Erechtheus, as well as his repeated invocation of the city's gods and shrines, gain new relevance for the appraisal of this speech. They can no longer be interpreted as diversionary arguments *extra causam*, but must be seen as integral elements of Lycurgus' indictment of Leocrates for cowardice and treason – behavior that is diametrically opposed to the hoplite ethos and religious devotion instilled into young *ephebes* (cf. Allen 2000). In this way Lycurgus brings the **jurors'** memories of their own ephebate into the courtroom and taps into emotions and values that lie at the heart of Athenian collective identity.

### 2.) Method: How to Study the Orators' Historical Allusions

Previously, scholars have ascribed these differences to Lycurgus' rhetorical ability to manipulate a pre-existing literary version to suit his case (e.g. Vielberg 1991). Yet a reading which proceeds from the assumption that the orators drew their historical examples primarily from literary sources has considerable short-comings. First, it cannot account for every modification. Why, for instance, is Codrus enlisted among the eponymous heroes? Second, thanks to Thomas (1989), we now know that most Athenians did not draw their knowledge of the past from literary sources. Consequently, a purely intertextual interpretation tells us very little about the jurors' likely reactions to Lycurgus' use of this story. Third, since it was the orator's objective to persuade his listeners, there were constraints upon what an orator could and would say in front of a mass audience.

Using the concept of social memory as an analytical tool (Halbwachs 1980, Fentress & Wickham 1992, Misztal 2003), I propose to resituate the **orator's** historical paradigms within the socio-political realm and explore how and why **Lycurgus'** historical allusions might have resonated with his audience.

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For questions and comments, please contact [bsteinbo@uwo.ca](mailto:bsteinbo@uwo.ca)