

Libanius of Antioch (314-393 A.D.) is our single most important witness in the fourth century to the thought world of the urban notables in the Greek East, still predominantly pagan and still admirers of the traditional *paideia* that a sophist like Libanius imparted. His letters comment constantly on the appropriate deportment of a Hellenic gentleman, the character of good governance, and the courtesies of the social life of the urban élites. In this paper, I propose to analyze what I call the 'Code of the Hellenic Gentleman', that is, a set of social and cultural values that recur over scores of letters of recommendation. When the meaning of his letters is 'unpacked' with care, they offer clear echoes of the discourse by which social relations were conducted and they can serve as a mirror of the social and political values in the Eastern cities at a time of momentous cultural change. For example, when Libanius commends one friend to another with the words, "You will marvel at his gentleness, his sincerity, his capacity for friendship, his ignorance of dishonest gain" (*ep.* 396), we need to ask to what extent these traits are merely traditional and to what extent they reflect particular preoccupations of contemporaries. Libanius was regarded in his own day as a master letter-writer, but in important respects he stands apart from the mainstream of Late Antique epistolography, in part due to his unrivalled Atticism, which affected not only his style, but the whole cast of his thought. Many features characteristic of Late Antique letters are less conspicuous or even absent in Libanius for the simple reason that his language and thought are so deeply rooted in Classical literature, especially the Attic orators. His evidence for contemporary social values is always mediated through the language of the Classical age.

Methodologically, we can compare Libanius' language with the language used to praise governors and civic benefactors in contemporary verse inscriptions. The pioneering work by Louis Robert (*Hellenica*, 4) on these inscriptions has been continued by Charlotte Rouché and Bernadette Cabouret has compared the language of praise for governors in Libanius with the inscriptions. Her conclusions suggest that Libanius' language frequently echoes the language found in contemporary verse inscriptions. This study can be carried further by comparing the virtues of governors with those of civic notables in general. Governors, for example, are routinely expected to depart office 'poor', whereas civic benefaction is rarely noted as a praiseworthy character trait in a civic notable prior to Julian's reign. Civic philanthropia has clearly shifted upward to become a governor's virtue. I will compare the virtues of the urban notables recommended by Libanius with the virtues of governors to see to what extent traits are specific to either group and to what extent we find a pattern of social and cultural values that belong to a Hellenic gentleman, whether he is in or out of political office.