

Isocrates includes in many of his orations the same historical exempla contained in contemporary Attic oratory, which are notoriously rife with inaccuracies (Perlman, *SH* 1961 and Nouhaud 1982). The historical inaccuracies in Attic oratory are due to the orators' service to a democratic agenda, as Plato's satire of contemporary politics and rhetoric in the *Menexenus* makes clear (Pownall 2004). Unlike the orators, however, Isocrates never delivered any of his purported political orations in any actual public forum. I propose to explore how Isocrates differs from the Attic orators in his use of the historical exemplum and why he includes them in his political orations.

An examination of the historical exempla in Isocrates reveals that he, to an even greater extent than the Attic orators, is willing to recast a historical allusion to suit the context (compare, e.g., 4.64 with 164; 4.90–92 and 12.187–88 with 6.99–100; 4.120–21, 175–80 and 12.105–7 with 8.67–68). In certain cases, Isocrates even appears intentionally to diverge from the tradition followed by the Attic orators. For example, he attributes the expulsion of the Pisistratids to Cleisthenes (7.16, 15.232 and 306, 16.26), whereas the orators generally follow the popular tradition that Harmodius and Aristogiton were responsible for the “liberation” of Athens. Similarly, the Attic orators do not mention the notorious Athenian atrocities of the Peloponnesian War, notably their treatment of Melos and Scione, in contrast to Isocrates, who offers defenses to these blots on the Athenian character (4.100–2 and 110, and 12.63–66, 70, and 89). These examples strongly suggest that Isocrates, unlike the orators, is not simply toeing the democratic “party line.”

Why, then, does Isocrates use historical exempla in many of his orations? In a passage in the *Panegyricus* (4.9), he notes that it is a particular ability of “right thinkers” to reflect fittingly on events from the past and to use them at the proper time. In the *Panathenaicus* (12.246), Isocrates puts into the mouth of an unnamed pupil, perhaps not coincidentally a Spartan panegyrist, the characterization of the work as “replete with history and philosophy, filled with every kind of embroidering and fiction.” The speaker then hastily describes what he means by fiction: “not the kind which normally harms one's fellow-citizens, when used incorrectly, but the kind which through proper education can benefit or give pleasure to one's audience.” This passage should be read in connection with Isocrates' statements elsewhere that he provides examples of virtue expressly so that his audience can take them as models for their own behavior (see, e.g., 5.113, 9.75–77, and 12.136–37). For Isocrates, manipulation of historical events is justified, provided that it is for the moral education of his audience. Furthermore, the education that he envisaged was explicitly *not* that of the democratic mainstream, given his desire to serve as an intellectual critic of popular rule (Ober 1998). Thus, Isocrates' use of historical exempla in his so-called political orations is more akin to Plato in the *Menexenus* than to the Attic orators.