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## 4<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY ORATIONS ON FARMING: THE CASE OF THEMISTIUS AND LIBANIUS

**Abstract.** The paper analyses two rhetorical texts from the 4<sup>th</sup> century – one by Themistius, found in the corpus of his so-called private speeches, titled *Should one engage in agriculture* (Θέσις εἰ γεωργητέον), and another by Libanius included in his collection of progymnasmata *Praise of Agriculture* (Ἐγκώμιον γεωργίας). An analysis of the two encomia shows great convergence in terms of the motifs and topoi used, e.g., in reference to the deities who take care of agriculture, praise of those who cultivate the land, emphasising their physical and spiritual qualities, the usefulness of their work for others. The purpose of the creation of the two works was different. While the purpose of Libanius' encomium was didactic, Themistius' piece was addressed to a mature audience and was probably part of some ongoing public discourse.

**Keywords:** Themistius, Libanius, farming, agriculture

Orations (encomium/ἔγκωμιον) were an essential part of rhetoric culture in Late Antiquity, delivered, for instance, on the occasions of various celebrations and situations in public life, and were also an important element of school training. The latter element finds its fullest reflection in sets of didactic exercises known as *progymnasmata*, which would prepare students to create elaborate and more sophisticated rhetorical forms (*meletai*). The encomia were devoted to numerous topics, from people, objects, professions and localities to plants and animals<sup>1</sup>. The structure and composition of orations were also referred to in treatises

<sup>1</sup> On the topic of encomium see: M. VOLOZZA, *Enkomion*, [in:] *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. II, ed. G. UEDING, Tübingen 1994, p. 1152–1160; M. KOROLKO, *Sztuka retoryki*, Warszawa 1990, p. 144, 148; *Libanius's Progymnasmata. Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, trans. et ed. C.A. GIBSON, Atlanta 2008, p. 195–197; the issue of orations is most broadly presented in: L. PERNOT, *La Rhétorique de l'Éloge dans le monde gréco-romain*, vol. I–II, Paris 1993;

on the theory of rhetoric by their authors – such as Theon of Alexandria, Hermogenes and Aphthonius<sup>2</sup>.

In the rhetorical material from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD we find two texts of a laudatory nature devoted to farming and authored by outstanding intellectuals of the period. The first one, composed by Themistius and belonging to the core of his so-called private orations, entitled *Should one engage in farming?* (Θέσις εἰ γεωργητέον) and the second one, by Libanius, included in his collection of progymnasmata *Praise of agriculture* (Ἐγκώμιον γεωργίας)<sup>3</sup>. Both texts, although falling within the current of conventional, seemingly semi-scholarly rhetorical works, due to their similarities are worth comparing and analysing. Themistius' oration, stipulated in the title as *thesis*, is in reality a classical encomium and in the light of all of his works, Or. 30 is considered to be an early work, suffused with school-like, progymnastic spirit, composed probably in the early fifties of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, although it is only one of many dating possibilities<sup>4</sup>. Attempts to explain the genesis of this text have been made more than once in the literature on the subject, having taken into consideration the fact that there are no typical school texts among Themistius' works, as the sophist himself was not active didactically in the field of rhetoric, unlike with philosophy. They pointed to its autobiographical roots, referring to the figure of philosopher Eugene, the author's father, who in the last period of his life devoted himself to farming<sup>5</sup>. Themistius valued and respected his father greatly and perhaps wanted to commemorate him as well as

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for progymnasmata in general see: H. CICHOCKA, *Progymnasmata as a Literary Form*, SIFC, ser. 3, 10, 1992, p. 991–999; M. KRAUS, *Progymnasmata, Gymnasmata*, [in:] *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. VII, ed. G. UEDING, Tübingen 2005, p. 159–164; R. WEBB, *The Progymnasmata as Practice*, [in:] *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. L. TOO, Leiden 2001, p. 289–316; R.J. PENELLA, *The Progymnasmata in Imperial Greek Education*, CW 105, 2011, p. 77–90.

<sup>2</sup> THEON, *Prog.*, 109.19 – 112.21; PS.-HERMOGENES, *Prog.*, 7; APHTHONIUS, *Prog.*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> The text of both the encomia on the basis of: THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, [in:] *Themistii Orationes quae supersunt*, vol. II, ed. H. SCHENKL, A.F. NORMAN, Leipzig 1971 (cetera: THEMISTIUS), p. 181–186; LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, [in:] *Libanius's Progymnasmata...* (cetera: LIBANIUS), p. 250–255; on the topic Themistius Or. 30 see: *The Private Orations of Themistius*, trans. et ed. R.J. PENELLA, Berkeley 2000, p. 33–34; in detail on the subject of Libanius's progymnasmata see: B. SCHOULER, *La tradition hellénique chez Libanios*, vol. I, Paris 1984, p. 51–138; *Libanius's Progymnasmata...*, p. XX–XXII; C.A. GIBSON, *Libanius' Progymnasmata*, [in:] *Libanius. A Critical Introduction*, ed. L. VAN HOOFF, Cambridge 2014, p. 128–143; *Progymnasmata. Greckie ćwiczenia retoryczne i ich modelowe opracowanie*, trans. et ed. H. PODBIELSKI, Lublin 2013, p. 299–302.

<sup>4</sup> *The Private Orations...*, p. 33–34 (therein an explanation of the discussion over dating and genesis of the above text).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34; on the topic of Eugenius' work on the farm see: THEMISTIUS, Or. 20, 236d–237b; on the figure of Eugenius see: *PLRE*, vol. I, s.v. Eugenius 2, p. 291–291; see: J. VANDERSPOEL, *Themistius and the Imperial Court. Oratory, Civic Duty, and Paideia from Constantius to Theodosius*, Ann Arbor 1995, p. 84; M. KOSZNICKI, *Obraz ojca-filozofa w późnoantycznych mowach Temistiusza*, [in:] *Spółczesność i religia w świecie antycznym. Społeczeństwo i religia w świecie antycznym. Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji naukowej (Toruń, 20–22 września 2007)*, ed. S. OLSZANIEC, P. WOJCIECHOWSKI, Toruń 2010, p. 401–409.

his agricultural activities this way. The social/political dimension of the analysed encomium was raised as well. It was supposed to be an encouragement for greater productivity in farming and to honour the importance of agriculture in ensuring stability of the state, which according to R.J. Penella might have been an allusion to Visigoths settling in the area of northern Thrace as *foederati* after the treaty of 382 AD and spread hope for a settled farming life in this region<sup>6</sup>. The author was also credited with the intentions of publicly defending farming communities against fiscal oppression and abuse of authority by imperial administration<sup>7</sup>. In juxtaposition to the text by Themistius, Libanius' work does not lead to such far-fetched speculation. His encomium is an example of a model exercise used in teaching of speech composition, maintaining all characteristic features of the genre<sup>8</sup>. It is also worth mentioning that material which is partially similar to the analysed texts is found in the works of Maximus of Tyre (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), who devoted one of his declamations to farmers<sup>9</sup>.

For both authors the opening element of the texts is the reference to Hesiod and his works, yet that sequence in Themistius' oration is considerably more developed. Libanius only states laconically that for Hesiod farming was a good and important thing, worthy of poetic stanzas<sup>10</sup>. Themistius highlighted that Hesiod had permanently associated farming with virtue so that both elements became one and then added: *when learning one we at the same time learn the other as well*<sup>11</sup>. Themistius, while contemplating the ethical dimension of farming, also included a reference to the popular legendary account of poetic rivalry between Homer and Hesiod known as *Ἀγὼν Ομήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου*<sup>12</sup>. The rivalry would proceed over "wisdom and poetry" (*περὶ σοφίας καὶ μουσικῆς*) during the funeral of Amphidamas,

<sup>6</sup> *The Private Orations...*, p. 34; According to R.J. Penella references in the very text may provide for it Or. 30, 349c–d, 350c, 351c. This interpretation would indicate a later creation date of the encomium (i.e. the eighties of the fourth century). Another possible, earlier, dating of this work, is to the times of Valens' reign, who paid particular attention to agricultural matters and this could have been reflected in the works of Themistius, see: N. LENSKI, *Failure of Empire. Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century A.D.*, Berkeley 2002, p. 54, 308–309.

<sup>7</sup> R. POLLINA, *La trasparente allusioni nell'Elogio dell'agricoltura di Temistio*, SEIA N.S. 12–13, 2007–2008, p. 63–67.

<sup>8</sup> The appraisal of farming was referred to by the 9<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine commentator John of Sardes in his study of Antonius' progymnasmata (*Ioannis Sardiani Commentarium in Aphthonii Progymnasmata*, ed. H. RABE, Leipzig 1928, p. 126.10–12).

<sup>9</sup> MAXIMUS TYRIUS, Diss. XXIII, [in:] MAXIMUS TYRIUS, *Philosophumena – ΔΙΑΛΕΞΕΙΣ*, ed. G.L. KONIARIS, Berlin–New York 1995, p. 280–289; see also: MAXIMUS OF TYRE, *The Philosophical Orations*, ed. M.B. TRAPP, Oxford 1997, p. 194–205; The declamation of Maximus was structured in the *synkrisis* formula.

<sup>10</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 1 (... γὰρ ὅτι μέγα τε καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἡγούμενος τῆς αὐτοῦ μούσης ἤξιωσε); see: B. SCHOULER, *La tradition...*, p. 489.

<sup>11</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 348c (... γεωργίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν δι' ἀλλήλων καὶ ἅμα μαθόντας εἰδέναι).

<sup>12</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 348c–d; see: HESIODUS, Op. 654–657; on the topic of the aforementioned agon see: P. BASSINO, *The Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi. A Commentary*, Berlin 2019 (text p. 83–115).

king of Chalcis. The winner of this agon was to be Hesiod, who admired the beauty of all-year work on a farm, as opposed to Homeric stanzas praising wars, battles and heroes. According to the sophist, it was the wisdom of Hesiod, who valued peace and labour, which was decisive in reaching verdict in his favour by the judges. In this fragment of his oration Themistius used the contrasted comparison of Homer as a poet of war and Hesiod as a poet of farming, thus highlighting the positive and productive, not destructive one as Homer's, influence of the Boeotian author on the collective human life<sup>13</sup>.

Another element present in both encomia was the reference to deities, who were supposed to support men in their agricultural struggles. Libanius mentions three deities, i.e. Athena, Demeter and Dionysus, who bestowed upon humanity various blessings and conveniences related to farming, such as the yoke, plough or wheat:

For you have heard how Athena led the ox under the yoke a gave the plough to men, while Dionysus revealed the boon of the vine, and wheat and barley were the gift of Demeter. It was made clear in the contest with Poseidon over Attica that the olive was sacred to Athena and that this tree was the goddess's discovery<sup>14</sup>.

Themistius treated that issue more maturely, at the same time proving his undeniable erudition. First of all, he pointed out the fact that these are the gods, especially those connected with farming, who receive from people various forms of fruits of the land, such as offerings, libations or feasts, as an expression of thanksgiving for the support, care and favour given to the human community<sup>15</sup>. Here the sophist recalls Dionysus, Persephone the daughter of Demeter, Zeus "the rain bringer" (ὑέτιόν τε Δία), Poseidon "the feeding" (Ποσειδῶνα φυτάλιον) or even nymphs, but this was merely a rhetorical device, skilfully referring to religious associations of the audience and aiming at introducing a more convincing philosophical and religious argumentation. Themistius reaches for the views of Prodicus of Ceos (...τὴν Προδίκου σοφίαν)<sup>16</sup>. Invoking the opinions of the philosopher he stated that all the important manifestations of mankind's religious life, such as mysteries, festivals or rites are connected with the blessings of farming<sup>17</sup>. The very idea

<sup>13</sup> P. BASSINO, *The Certamen...*, p. 35–37; the motif of Hesiod's poetry praising the work of a farmer was also used by THEMISTIUS in Or. 15, 184c–d; for Hesiod in Themistius' works see: B. COLPI, *Die Paideia des Themistios. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Bildung im 4 Jh. nach Christus*, Bern 1987, p. 29–34.

<sup>14</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 2; H. PODBIELSKI, *Progymnasmata...*, p. 431.

<sup>15</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 349a (ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὰς ἐνιαυσίας [καὶ τὰς] ἀμοιβὰς οὐχ ὑπὲρ τούτου μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὧν ἐκ θεοῦ ἔχουσιν ἄνθρωποι παρὰ γεωργίας κομίζονται, σπονδὰς καὶ θυσίας καὶ δαΐτας, καὶ ὅσα φύουσιν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ὄνται).

<sup>16</sup> See: *The Private Orations...*, p. 185, n. 3 (therein a detailed explanation of the relation of the aforementioned gods with farming).

<sup>17</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 349b (ὅς ἱερουργίαν πᾶσαν ἀνθρώπων καὶ μυστήρια καὶ πανηγύρεις καὶ τελετὰς τῶν γεωργίας καλῶν ἐξάπτει...); Iss. Prodicus 77 B 5 (*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. II,

of gods, as well as all piety, if one were to follow Prodicus' thoughts, was supposed to have occurred as a result of the agricultural toil of people<sup>18</sup>. Unfortunately, Themistius neither explained Prodicus' concept more broadly nor commented on it, yet he would quickly link it with statements referring to Orphism and present his own interpretation of certain elements of the myth of Orpheus. He admitted that even though the Orphic rites and mysteries (Ὀρφείως τελετάς τε καὶ ὄργια) are not directly linked with farming, the figure of Orpheus might be associated with it in two ways. First of all, using a kind of wordplay the sophist marked that thanks to the fruit grown and provided by farming (τῶν ἡμέρων) Orpheus tamed (ἡμερῶσαι) not only all nature and behaviours of wild animals, but also uprooted and civilised (ἡμερῶσαι) that which is wild in human souls. Secondly, Orpheus was to use the fruit of the land in all religious rituals, which he conducted to honour gods<sup>19</sup>.

In both the encomia their authors highlight the civilisational role of farming, which fundamentally changes the lives of men. For Themistius farming, a common social experience (...πάντες ἐδέξαντο γεωργίαν), was a determinant of the welfare of a given community. As he argued – *the more [advanced] people are in farming, the happier they are*<sup>20</sup>. Those nations which do not lead a farming lifestyle are, according to the sophist, similar to wild animals, as they lead a homeless life just like vagrants do<sup>21</sup>. Farming did indeed trigger a whole cycle of changes in social life, releasing people from constant fight for meeting elementary food needs. According to Themistius, switching to the farming way of life resulted in urbanisation, creating a developed religious life, culture and, most of all, a system of laws regulating social relations. The sophist saw in farming one of the most important sources of law and a factor shaping the essence of humanity<sup>22</sup>. Then, he propos-

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ed. H. DIELS, Berlin 1922, p. 274–275); for views of Prodikos see: K. FRITZ, *Prodikos* (3), [in:] *RE*, vol. XXIII, Stuttgart 1957, col. 85–89; C. COOPER, *Prodicus*, [in:] *The Sophists. An Introduction*, ed. P. O'GRADY, London 2008, p. 71–83; R. MAYHEW, *Prodicus the Sophist. Text, Translation and Commentary*, Oxford 2011, *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 349b (...νομίζων καὶ θεῶν εὐνοίαν ἐντεῦθεν εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἐλθεῖν καὶ πᾶσαν εὐσέβειαν ἐγγυώμενος). See: explanations concerning the amendment θεῶν εὐνοίαν / θεῶν ἐννοίαν (the good will of the gods / the idea of gods) in: *The Private Orations...*, p. 185, n. 4; see also: B. COLPI, *Die Paideia...*, p. 120–121.

<sup>19</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 349c; See: *The Private Orations...*, p. 186, n. 5.

<sup>20</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 349d (...καὶ οἷς πλείω τὰ τῆς γεωργίας, οὗτοι μᾶλλον εὐδαίμονες).

<sup>21</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 350a; see: *The Private Orations...*, p. 186, n. 6; Themistius recalls the Scythians here (ἄξενος Σκυθῶν) as an example of a non-farming nomadic people and refers to the popular text by DIONYSIUS PERIEGETES, 186–194 (see: *Geographi Graeci Minores*, vol. II, ed. K. MÜLLER, Parisii 1861, p. 112) on the wildness of people living without farming.

<sup>22</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 350b (Οἷς δὲ ὁ βίος ἡμερος καὶ ὑπόστεγος, οὗτοι τῆς περὶ τροφὴν ἀνάγκης ἀπαλλαγέντες πρὸς οὐρανόν τε ἀνέβλεψαν θεοῦς τε ἐτίμησαν καὶ δίκη καὶ νόμοις ἐχρήσαντο πρῶτοι, οὐκ ἔτ' οὐσης ἀνάγκης τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις προσκαρτερεῖν, ἀλλ' εὐπορία βίου σοφίαν ἀσκοῦντες. οἱ δὲ πόλεις τε ἐδεῖμαντο καὶ νεῶς ἡγειραν καὶ δίκη χρῶνται καὶ νόμους ἔθεντο· ὥστε καὶ τῶν νόμων αὐτῇ περίεστι μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν . ἦδι καὶ εἶναι ἀνθρώπους...).

es a thesis that farming had always been under a special care of lawmakers, who protected it against disastrous results of wars and provided favourable conditions for trade in farm products<sup>23</sup>. Libanius repeated all of the above arguments, adding at the same time that as long as there was no agriculture, the law of force was the deciding factor<sup>24</sup>.

The pivotal coinciding element in both analysed texts is the moral dimension of farming, so deeply underlined by both authors, which affects the attitudes and behavioural patterns of people who are occupied with it. Libanius pointed to the nobility of farmers (...ἔστιν αὐτοὺς ἀγαθοὺς εἶναι), who are naturally far from the urban life full of disputes, wickedness and rivalry. Their religiousness is authentic and straightforward, stemming from the rhythm of farm work. The sophist also highlighted the self-control (σωφροσύνη) of farmers in the sphere of sexuality as well as their courage (ἀνδρεία), which was the consequence of difficult working conditions<sup>25</sup>. It also translates into the physical wellbeing of farmers, who are strong, hardened and fall ill less often, which was summed up by Libanius in the statement that *if health is in fact the most important thing among men, farming includes this, as well*<sup>26</sup>.

When praising farmers Themistius puts stress on the idea of justice (δικαιοσύνη) as particularly associated with this social group and one which through farming settled down in human society. According to the sophist, farmers cannot adhere to injustice (ἀδικία) in their actions, because they live in prosperity focussed entirely on that which is simple and noble, while at the same time avoiding interference into other people's lives. Only justice and following the law gives the possibility of making use of the results of farm work<sup>27</sup>.

Further in his encomium Libanius goes down a somewhat different than Themistius path of argumentation. He contemplates general benefits which farming brings to society and conducts a comparison of rural and urban life. Libanius is intrigued by the question – what would our lives be like if there was no agriculture. With no harvest, according to the sophist, human beings, deprived of natural produce essential to life, would not be capable of withstanding their enemies, whereas food would be gained in rivalry with wild animals<sup>28</sup>. When juxtaposing living in town to living in a village, Libanius sketches a bucolic image of rural existence:

<sup>23</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 350b–c.

<sup>24</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 3.

<sup>25</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 4–5; according to Libanius sexual relations in peasant marriages are of exclusively procreative character (...προσέχουσι δὲ τὸν νοῦν τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ τὰς δικαίας ἐπίστανται μόνον μίξεις τὰς ὑπὲρ παιδῶν γονῆς); see: C.A. GIBSON, *Libanius' Progymnasmata*..., p. 142.

<sup>26</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 8; H. PODBIELSKI, *Progymnasmata*..., p. 433.

<sup>27</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 351a.

<sup>28</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 10; Libanius invokes the authority of Homer here (HOMERUS, *Ilias*, 9.705–706; 19.16–172) claiming that the humans draw their strength from the produce of farmer's labour in the form of wine and bread.



But if someone thinks that life in the city is more delightful, let him contemplate for himself what it is like to see a vine and grapes hanging from it, what it is like to sit under a pine or plain tree at midday, what it is like to see crops stirred by the breezes of the west wind, what it is like to hear oxen lowing and sheep bleating, what it is like to see calves suckling and bounding about<sup>29</sup>.

In the words of the sophist even such urban life attractions as theatre plays do not outbalance the pleasures of countryside living<sup>30</sup>. Final conclusions of both author are very similar. For Libanius, farming is an indispensable factor for all, no matter the ethnic descent or social status. It upholds social life and enables the existence of townfolk. In the words of Libanius, a man fully committed to the art of rhetoric, its extraordinary meaning is expressed in the following manner – *whoever admires rhetoric, let him ponder for himself the fact that cities could exist without rhetoric but without farming they could not*<sup>31</sup>. Themistius similarly summarised his speech, placing stress on the fundamental importance of farming for functioning of all social and professional groups as well as for the rulers, who must place it even before the needs of the army. It is only through farming, as the sophist argues, that self-sufficiency and prosperity are secured<sup>32</sup>.

The analysis of both encomia shows considerable convergence of motifs and topoi used, for instance appealing to deities supporting farming, praising those who cultivate the land, highlighting their physical and spiritual virtues, the usefulness of their work to others. However, the reasons behind the creation of the texts differ. While the template of an encomium, developed by authors of theoretical rhetorical treatises in great detail, was most often directed towards praising of persons, Libanius adopted it in this case in order to praise farming, having been driven by didactic reasons and, as one may presume, his rich teaching experience<sup>33</sup>. In Themistius' case, as was mentioned at the beginning, the motivation for creating the analysed text is unclear, yet it cannot be simply narrowed down only to a progymnastic exercise. The sophist freely operates with the arguments, supporting himself with references to mythology, religion and philosophy. His praise of farming

<sup>29</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 11; H. PODBIELSKI, *Progymnasmata...*, p. 433; The appraisal of farming life is contrasted with the intensive urban life of Libanius himself see: J. WINTJES, *Das Leben des Libanius*, Rahden 2005, *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 12.

<sup>31</sup> LIBANIUS, *Encomium*, 7, 14; H. PODBIELSKI, *Progymnasmata...*, p. 433. Here a remark by Libanius' occurs, noting that while there is no mythical story on the subject of rhetoric, there are myths referring to farming. For example, the myth of Triptolemos, son of Keleos, the King of Eleusis is cited, upon whom Demeter bestowed the ability to cultivate land. See: OVIDIUS, *Metamorphoses*, 5.642–661.

<sup>32</sup> THEMISTIUS, Or. 30, 351.

<sup>33</sup> Theoretical clues concerning the structure of encomium praising particular works (πράγματα) are found in, for instance, Ps.-HERMOGENES, 7, 12 (hunting serves as an example – *Hermogenes Opera*, ed. H. RABE, *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. VI, Stuttgart 1985, p. 17).

has a more pragmatic tone, devoid of trivial idyllic images of rural life. We may only suspect that with his oration the sophist wanted to join an important current public discourse (e.g., related to the authorities' policy of improving agricultural productivity). Using modern terminology we could say that this way Themistius implemented a form of civic advocacy in the complex reality of late-Roman empire, faced with many, such as economic, problems. What seems essential is that in both works the authors present a unitary standpoint, indicating the civilisational role of farming, which made it possible for people to abandon the state of savagery. They also accentuate the indispensability of farming in society's existence. Farmers are for them the embodiments of positive values – nobility, justice, moderation.

It is impossible to treat both texts only in the category of testimony of the rhetorical culture of the time or the literary and erudite skills of the authors, although they can also be analysed in this way. In the case of Libanius' encomium we are dealing with a school text, which constituted a small element of the wider body of the literature of late Antiquity, and of a rhetoric "school" with its curriculum, objectives and methods of education. Achieving competence in rhetoric was associated not only with acquiring the technical skills of pronunciation, learning mythology, classical Greek literature and history but also with moral upbringing of students through transmission of values, norms and patterns of behaviour of the educated elite of society of the period<sup>34</sup>. Elements of this world of values are found in both orations, where σωφροσύνη by Libanius and δικαιοσύνη by Themistius were to be a determinant of actions and moral choices, whereas the topic of farming served as a good theme for their presentation. While in the case of Libanius' text the audience were young people studying rhetoric, Themistius' encomia may have had a wider and more mature audience that not only appreciated the author's rhetorical prowess, but was also able to read the subtly veiled subtext of the speech.

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<sup>34</sup> C.A. GIBSON, *Portraits of Paideia in Libanius Progymnasmata*, [in:] *Libanios, le premier humaniste. Études en hommage à Bernard Schouler. Actes du colloque de Montpellier, 18–20 mars 2010*, ed. O. LAGACHERIE, P.L. MALOSSE, Alessandria 2011, p. 69–78.



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