Challenging the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators: from kanôn to canon

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Challenging the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators: From *kanôn* to Canon

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1   Introduction

The so-called Canon of the Ten Attic Orators is a problematic concept. It
refers to an ancient selection of Greek orators who were – according to Greek
and Roman teachers of rhetoric – superior to others: Antiphon, Andocides,
Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Hyperides, Lycurgus, and
Dinarchus. Most of these men were Athenians; two of them – Dinarchus from
Corinth, Lysias' family from Syracuse – settled in Athens in order to work there as
speechwriters.[1] They were all active in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. These
orators and speechwriters were considered superior to others in the sense that
their speeches were held to be more useful material for reading, studying and
imitation by later generations, especially in Hellenistic and Roman schools.
By consequence, the speeches of the selected orators were copied more often
than those of their colleagues. This particular selection of ten orators thus had
a profound influence on the transmission of classical Greek speeches, from
classical Athens, via the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine ages, to the modern
world and the 21st century CE. Most of the ancient Greek speeches that we can
read today were indeed written by one of the Greek orators who were included
in the 'Canon'.[2]

Why is the Canon of Ten Attic Orators a problematic concept? There
are three problems that complicate the traditional narrative as briefly out-
lined above. First, the selection of ten Attic orators was in the ancient world
never called a 'canon'.[3] To be sure, 'canon' (κανών) is a Greek word, which

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1   Edwards 1994 offers a very short modern introduction to the lives and works of the ten Attic
     orators.

2   We do however possess extant speeches by some classical Greek orators who were not
     included in the Canon: Gorgias, Antisthenes and Alcidamas. Furthermore, we have some
     speeches by Apollodorus and Hegesippus, which were wrongly attributed to Demosthenes.
     See Kennedy 1994, 64; Pernot 2000, 59.

3   Cf. Pfeiffer 1968, 207. Ruhnken 1768 introduced the term canon for the list of Attic orators: see
     below.

frequently occurs in ancient rhetorical treatises. But the ancient word refers to a 'model' or 'standard' that could be imitated, like Polyclitus' statue with its perfect proportions, or, indeed, like Demosthenes with his forceful style.[4] In ancient terms, one orator could be called a canon, but a canon could not refer to a selection of orators. This may seem a superficial observation, but it is more than just a matter of terminology, as we will see below. Second, the selection of ten Attic orators was far from the only one that was proposed in antiquity. In fact, up to the 2nd century CE many different selections and lists of orators circulated in Hellenistic and Roman schools, with different names and different numbers: some of these lists had six, others had ten or twelve names. In other words, 'the' Canon of the Ten Attic Orators was only one of several competing ancient lists, which happened to be the most successful one after a very long process of negotiation and debate. Third, the origins of the list of ten Attic orators are rather obscure. What we can say with confidence is that it was compiled somewhere in the extensive period between the 3rd century BCE and the 2nd century CE. It is often assumed, partly because Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE) mentions their names, that the Alexandrian scholars Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus of Samothrace (second and first centuries BCE) were responsible for the selection of ten.[5] Hence, references to the 'Alexandrian Canon of Ten Attic Orators' are not uncommon in literature.[6] As we will see, however, we actually do not know who was responsible for establishing the selection; it will be argued below that the list of ten Attic orators did not gain general acceptance before the 2nd century CE.

Two opinions dominate current scholarship on the Canon of Ten Attic Orators. First, scholars have often suggested that the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators was from an early date closed and stable. Second, several scholars have argued that the Canon had a destructive effect: in the words of Ian Worthington, the Canon 'sentenced the speeches of other orators to probable extinction'.[7] This chapter will challenge this current opinion in two ways.

First, I will argue that for a very long period 'the Canon' did not actually exist. Up to the 2nd century CE there was in fact a great flexibility and variety in the number and selection of orators that were put forward, depending on the context in which such selections were presented. Rhetoricians like Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Caecilius of Caleacte, Dio of Prusa, Quintilian, Hermogenes

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4 For ancient (and modern) meanings of the term 'canon', see also Papadopoulos, this volume.

5 Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.54. This passage however concerns the Alexandrian lists of epic poets, not a list of orators.

6 E.g. Sarton 1959, 503; Waterfield 2016, 114. Smith 1995 argues that the Alexandrian scholars established the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators.

7 Worthington 1994, 259.

of Tarsus and Pseudo-Plutarch proposed very different lists of classical orators. Even one single rhetorician could present two different reading lists of Attic orators at different moments in his life, depending on the specific purpose and audience of the selection. These lists (or catalogues), based on clear principles, were perhaps intended to be closed by their adherents, but in practice they were open-ended, as they continuously provoked other rhetoricians to come up with competing, alternative lists. Analyzing processes of canonization in general Jonathan Smith has argued that a list can (in modern terms) be called a canon if it is fundamentally complete and closed.[8] While individual ancient rhetoricians may have presented their own list as closed, general agreement concerning the closure and completeness of the list of Attic orators was not reached before the 2nd century CE. If one wishes to use the term 'canon' (in Smith's sense of the word) for the ancient selection of orators, one should therefore not apply it to the competing lists and reading lists that circulated before the 2nd century CE, including the one with ten names. It might be even more prudent not to use the term at all: the fact that we possess some speeches by orators who were not included in the Canon of Ten Attic Orators means that it was never completely and universally closed (and thus never a 'canon' according to Smith's definition).[9]

Second, I will argue that selections and reading lists of orators were in many respects not destructive, as Worthington has argued, but rather productive. In educational contexts model authors guided students in writing new speeches, inspiring them not just to imitate but to emulate their Attic predecessors in innovative ways.[10] Furthermore, the constant competition between rhetoricians and their different reading lists indeed prevented the canon from being closed. The canon of Greek orators was thus "constantly in the making".[11] Rhetoricians distinguished themselves from their colleagues by presenting innovative lists, including the models of their own choice, thereby encouraging their students to keep reading (and preserving and copying) the speeches of many different orators, beyond the 'canonical' ones presented by others. The Canon of the Ten Attic Orators was, as I will argue, the late product of a long

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8   Smith 1982, 44–45. See also Versluys in the introduction to this volume: "For a canon there must be an element of closure. In terms of documentation, one of the most important steps in the process of canonization is the closing of the canon."

9   See n. 2 above on Gorgias, Antisthenes and Alcidamas.

10   Pernot 2000, 58 rightly observes that canons also had a positive impact: "ils ont rendu de grands services en assurant la préservation des oeuvres jugées les meilleures".

11   See Versluys in the introduction to this volume, p. 39: "Although it should look stable and immutable, therefore, in fact a canon is constantly in the making."

and intensive process of negotiation and compromise between many different parties with different interests.[12]

2 Canonization, Classicism and Cultural Formation

The ancient rhetoricians who proposed and defended their own preferred selections of orators (and poets, historians, and philosophers) played the role of 'exegete' or 'hermeneut': they cited, explained and evaluated the texts from the past, demonstrated their qualities, and thereby contributed to the preservation of these texts for the future.[13] Jonathan Smith has defined the hermeneut as "an interpreter whose task it is continually to extend the domain of the closed canon over everything that is known or everything that exists without altering the canon in the process". The history of the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators tells a slightly different story: each critic (hermeneut, exegete) proposes and defends his or her own list of orators as the perfect list; but soon another critic will raise his hand and respond by proposing his own list, with different names and numbers. It is only from the 2nd century onwards that something like a closed canon emerged. In other words: hermeneuts and exegetes play their role not only once 'the canon' has been established, but also in the long and complex process that precedes it and leads towards the moment of closure.

One of these exegetes was the rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus.[14] Active in Rome under emperor Augustus, he wrote several treatises on Greek rhetoric and literature, which he presented to his Roman students and patrons. Like many other Greek rhetoricians in Rome, Dionysius selected and evaluated what he thought was most valuable of the Greek past for the Roman present and future. Thus Dionysius, as we will see, included six Attic orators in his treatise *On the Ancient Orators*: Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Demosthenes, Hyperides, and Aeschines. Dionysius' rhetorical treatises were well known among Roman and Greek rhetoricians of later periods, like Quintilian and Hermogenes. Given his influence on later rhetoricians, Dionysius seems to have been one of the key figures who, through an annotated and critical selection of orators, contributed to the transmission and survival of classical Greek rhetoric.

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12   Cf. Versluys in the introduction to this volume, p. 39: "[C]anonisation is never merely a top-down process, but rather a form of negotiation and compromise between different societal groups and their interests. Moreover, these canonisations often stretched out over a long period of time, as a slow and in fact never finalized project."

13   See Smith 1982, 48. See also Versluys in the introduction to this volume, p. 43.

14   On Dionysius, see De Jonge 2008; Wiater 2011; Hunter and De Jonge 2019.

In studying Dionysius' treatises (and those of his colleagues, like Caecilius and Hermogenes) we can learn how canonization contributes to processes of cultural formation.[15] By presenting his own selection of Greek authors from the past, and citing and evaluating them in his didactic works, Dionysius makes it clear what Greek culture actually means to him, and what he thinks it should mean to his Roman students and patrons. For Dionysius and other rhetoricians of his age, 'Greece' was primarily classical Greece, that is, the Greek world of the fifth and the fourth centuries BCE: the age of Pericles, Polyclitus, Sophocles, Plato and Demosthenes. This construction of 'Greece' (1) neglects or ignores the orators – and other writers, artists, philosophers – of what we call the Hellenistic age (i.e. the period after 323 BCE) and (2) it adopts a strongly Athenocentric worldview.[16] Dionysius' selection (or 'canon', in modern terms) of six orators supports and confirms this construction of Greek culture: his six Attic orators (like the members of the Canon of Ten Attic Orators) were all active in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and they were all either Athenians or active in Athens. Were they considered superior for aesthetic reasons (as Dionysius and other critics claim), or were classical orators just preferred because they were from the right period and place, unlike their successors from Hellenistic and Imperial ages, or their colleagues from other towns?[17] Canonization and classicism go hand in hand.[18] Dionysius' selection and construct of 'classical' Greek culture (for which he was of course not responsible alone) was indeed extremely influential: the modern periodization of Greek history into a 'classical', a 'Hellenistic', and an 'Imperial' age ultimately goes back to Dionysius' *On the Ancient Orators*.[19]

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15   On canonization and cultural formation, see Versluys in the introduction to this volume, pp. 34–38.

16   This is where classicism meets Atticism. Dionysius (preface to *On the Ancient Orators* 1.2) presents the year 323 BCE as the end of classical Greece: ἐν γὰρ δὴ τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν χρόνοις ἡ μὲν ἀρχαία καὶ φιλόσοφος ῥητορικὴ προπηλακιζομένη καὶ δεινὰς ὕβρεις ὑπομένουσα κατελύετο, ἀρξαμένη μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνος τελευτῆς ἐκπνεῖν καὶ μαραίνεσθαι κατ' ὀλίγον, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἡλικίας μικροῦ δεήσασα εἰς τέλος ἠφανίσθαι. "In the epoch preceding our own, the old, philosophic rhetoric was so grossly abused that it fell into a decline. From the death of Alexander of Macedon it began to lose spirit and gradually wither away, and in our generation had reached a state of almost total extinction." (Translation Usher 1974). See Hidber 1996; De Jonge 2014, 393–398.

17   Dio of Prusa, *Discourse* 18 is exceptional in including orators from the Augustan Age in his reading list: see below.

18   On classicism, see Porter 2006a and Wiater 2011. On classicism and canonization, see Porter 2006b, 50–53 and Citroni 2006a. Dionysius' preface to *On the Ancient Orators* (edited by Aujac 1978) is also called his 'Manifesto of Classicism': see Hidber 1996.

19   See De Jonge 2014, 388–389.

By canonizing orators from one period and one place, Greek rhetoricians thus contributed to the construction of Greek culture, and, in a second instance, to processes of cultural formation in Rome: classical Greek culture was one dominant factor (apart from Egypt, Hellenistic kingdoms, etc.) that deeply shaped the cultural identity of Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome.[20] Here one can observe how canonization and classicism can be considered forms of 'anchoring innovation':[21] in Rome, lists (or canons) of Greek orators (and poets, historians, sculptors, architects) from the classical Greek past functioned as anchors that validated and supported the introduction of innovative rhetorical styles (like those of the so-called Attici), new speeches (like Cicero's *Philippicae*, which were inspired by Demosthenes' *Philippicae*) and, more generally, the cultural 'revolution' in Rome, which, if needed, could present itself as the natural successor of Greece.[22]

One reason why Dionysius is particularly interesting for the topic of this volume, is the fact that he frequently uses the Greek term κανών for an author or artist who is regarded as the model of a certain style, which could be imitated and emulated. In the works of Dionysius – and other ancient rhetoricians up to the 2nd century CE – there is no sign of what we call the 'Canon of the Ten Attic Orators', with its supposedly closed and destructive character. What we do find, however, is a wide variety of diverse 'canons' (i.e. models), which are presented in a context that we can characterize as open, flexible and productive.

3   The Canon of the Ten Attic Orators: The Ancient Evidence

There is much disagreement among scholars concerning the date at which the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators came into existence.[23] The ancient evidence is limited and in some cases rather difficult to interpret. The following table (Tab. 8.1) presents the ancient texts that have been understood to refer to the Canon:

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20   On the significance of classical Greece to the Augustan Age, see Bowersock 1965; Galinsky 1996, 332–363; Spawforth 2012.

21   See Sluiter 2016; Versluys in the introduction to this volume, pp. 50–52.

22   On Gaius Licinius Calvus and the Attici, who preferred the pure style of Lysias and Hyperides, see Wisse 1995. On the Augustan cultural revolution, see Wallace Hadrill 2008; Spawforth 2012.

23   See Brzoska 1883; Hartmann 1891; Douglas 1956; Kennedy 1972, 348–349; Edwards 1994, 8; Worthington 1994; Smith 1995; Pernot 2000, 57–59: cf. section 4 below.

TABLE 8.1   Ancient evidence for the "Canon of the Ten Attic Orators"

Caecilius of Caleacte	1st century BCE (Augustan Age)	Treatise *On the Style of the Ten Orators*; the treatise itself is lost; we know the title only from the Suda (10th cent. CE).
Quintilian	1st century CE	*Inst.* 10.1.76: *... ut cum decem simul Athenis aetas una tulerit.* "... that a single age produced ten at the same time in Athens"
Hermogenes of Tarsus	late 2nd century CE (under Marcus Aurelius)	*On Types of Style* 2.11: characterizations of twelve orators: "Thus *the other ten orators*, among whom I have included Critias, are inferior to Demosthenes"
Harpocration	2nd century CE (?)	*Lexicon of the Ten Orators*
Pseudo-Plutarch	3rd century CE (?)	*Lives of the Ten Orators*
Photius	9th century CE	*Bibliotheca* 259–268 (adapted version of Pseudo-Plutarch's treatise)
Suda	10th century CE	Encyclopedia

The two earliest texts that might seem to refer to the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators constitute in fact problematic evidence. According to the Byzantine encyclopedia Suda (10th century CE), the Greek rhetorician Caecilius of Caleacte, who was active in Rome under emperor Augustus, composed a treatise Περὶ τοῦ χαρακτῆρος τῶν δέκα ῥητόρων, *On the Style of the Ten Orators* (Suda K 1165: Caecilius T1 ed. Woerther 2015).[24] Nothing survives of the treatise, however, apart from the title, which we find nowhere else; the (rather late) report of the Suda is our only source. Some caution is in order, as titles mentioned in the Suda are not always reliable: the original title of Caecilius' work may have been different.[25] According to Kennedy, Caecilius' work was "perhaps responsible for the formation of the canon of ten Attic orators".[26] Woerther is even more cautious: "En tout état de cause, aucun témoignage conservé ici ne

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24   See O'Sullivan 1997; Kennedy 1972, 366–367; Woerther 2015, 45–46.

25   The singular Περὶ τοῦ χαρακτῆρος (*On the Style* or *On the Character*) in the title should make us a little suspicious: ancient rhetoricians tend to emphasize the differences between the styles (plural) of Lysias, Isocrates, Demosthenes, etc. rather than summarizing their qualities as 'the style'. See also Douglas 1956, 40 on the possibility that Suda gives us a 'late and anachronistic title for a collection of separate monographs'.

26   Kennedy 1972, 367. O'Sullivan 1997, 46 argues that Caecilius made "an important – perhaps *the* important – contribution" to the ideas behind the lists of writers recommended for imitation. The word "perhaps" is crucial in both citations.

permet de tirer de conclusion concrète sure le rôle que certains critiques ont voulu accorder à Caecilius dans l'élaboration du fameux Canon des orateurs attiques (…)".[27]

In *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.76 Quintilian (ca. 35–100 CE) presents an overview of the Greek and Latin authors of each literary genre whose texts and styles Roman students should imitate and emulate. When he comes to Greek oratory, he points out that "a single age (*aetas*) produced ten orators at the same time in Athens":

> *Sequitur oratorum ingens manus, ut cum decem simul Athenis aetas una tulerit. Quorum longe princeps Demosthenes ac paene lex orandi fuit: tanta vis in eo, tam densa omnia, ita quibusdam nervis intenta sunt, tam nihil otiosum, is dicendi modus, ut nec quod desit in eo nec quod redundet invenias.*

> Next comes the vast army of orators – so vast that a single age produced ten at the same time at Athens. Of these, Demosthenes was far the greatest, almost a law of oratory in himself: such is his force, the concentration of his thought, his muscular firmness, his economy, his control – one feels there is nothing lacking and nothing superfluous.
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> Translation: RUSSELL 2002

It is possible (as Worthington and Smith believe) that Quintilian here refers to the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators, but his statement is far from straightforward.[28] Quintilian does not go on to list the names of the ten orators; in fact he mentions only six orators as exemplary models in his reading list, and twelve in the final book of his work (see below on *Institutio* 10.1.76–80 and 12.10.20–24). Furthermore, if the word *aetas* here means a single "generation" (as it usually does), it could not really cover all of the orators of the Canon of Ten, since Antiphon (470–411 BCE) and Andocides (440–390) lived much earlier than Demosthenes (384–322) and Dinarchus (361–291 BCE).[29] Quintilian's reference to Demosthenes as almost "a law of oratory" (*lex orandi*) might be an

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27 Woerther 2015, xxxii.

28 Worthington 1994, 253. Smith 1995, 73. The important point however is that even if Quintilian is here referring to a (well-known) selection of ten, it is obviously not a closed 'canon', as he himself goes on to list twelve names in *Institutio* 12.10.20–24.

29 For discussion of *aetas* in this passage, see Douglas 1956, 32–24; Worthington 1994, 252–253; Smith 1995, 71–72.

allusion to the Greek tendency of presenting one single orator (and especially Demosthenes) as 'the canon' (κανών) of good style (see below, section 6).

It has been argued that we are on safer ground with Hermogenes of Tarsus (late 2nd century CE). Hermogenes twice mentions "the ten" when he is listing a group of Attic orators in one of the final chapters of his treatise *On Types of Style*. First, he points out that Antiphon of Rhamnous (ca. 480–411 BCE) was the earliest of the orators included in his list (2.11.21, p. 222 Patillon):

> καὶ γάρ ἐστι τοῖς χρόνοις τῶν δέκα ῥητόρων τούτων πρεσβύτατος ἁπάντων.

> Indeed, as far as chronology is concerned, Antiphon of Rhamnous is the eldest of all the ten orators.
>
> Translation: WOOTEN 1987

A moment later, Hermogenes concludes that all orators in his list are inferior to Demosthenes, who is the supreme model for all styles (*On Types of Style* 2.11.31, p. 224 Patillon):

> Τῷ μὲν οὖν Δημοσθένει οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν δέκα, μεθ' ὧν καὶ ὁ Κριτίας, ὑποτεταγμέ-νοι οὑτωσί πως τὰ δεύτερα καὶ τρίτα τοῦ δικανικοῦ τε καὶ συμβουλευτικοῦ τῶν λόγων εἴδους ἀποφέρονται.

> Thus the other ten orators, among whom I have included Critias, are infe-rior to Demosthenes. They carry off the second and third prizes in judi-cial and deliberative oratory.
>
> Translation: WOOTEN 1987

Again, the evidence is rather confusing. In the first instance, Hermogenes appears to have a list of ten Attic orators in mind, when he refers to "the ten orators" and "the other ten".[30] But if one reads carefully, one will find that Hermogenes himself in fact discusses twelve orators: he first lists Lysias, Isaeus, Hyperides, Isocrates, Dinarchus, Aeschines, Antiphon of Rhamnus, Antiphon the Sophist (Hermogenes explicitly claims that these two Antiphons must be distinguished – not all modern scholars agree with him),[31] Critias, Lycurgus

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30   A more precise translation of οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν δέκα would be "the rest of the ten orators". Wooten 1987, 124 translates "the other ten", presumably because Hermogenes does in fact list more than ten orators (eleven or twelve: see below). The confusing text suggests that Hermogenes is indeed playing games with the number ten (see below).

31   Hermogenes, *On Types of Style* 2.11.21–24, pp. 221–222 Patillon. Cf. Edwards 1994, 10.

and Andocides, before concluding (in the passage cited above) that all these orators were inferior to Demosthenes. Hermogenes' "the rest of the ten orators" thus turn out to be in fact eleven orators, including two Antiphons, but still excluding the superior champion Demosthenes. Eleven plus Demosthenes gives us a total of *twelve* orators. It seems that modern scholars have been misled by Hermogenes' reference to the number "ten" (*On Types of Style* 2.11.21; 2.11.31), so that they have presented Hermogenes' treatise as clear evidence for the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators in the 2nd century.[32] On closer inspection, Hermogenes appears to be playing games, extending the list first to eleven and then to twelve orators, thus showing that ten is not a sacred number for him.

What the two passages cited do suggest is that Hermogenes, like Quintilian, is familiar with the notion of "ten orators" and that he expects his readers to be familiar with a list of ten. It is thus plausible that a list of ten orators was proposed by other rhetoricians in the period before Hermogenes composed *On Types of Style*: his references to "the ten" and "the rest of the ten" must be understood as allusions to such a list. But Hermogenes himself does not give us a clear list of ten; he rather turns away from the notion of ten, playfully extending the number first to eleven, and then to twelve. This fact again demonstrates that even if a list of ten orators had been proposed, it was not a fixed and closed canon in Hermogenes' age.

Where, then, do we find an unproblematic version of the Canon of Ten? Harpocration's *Lexicon of the Ten Orators* probably belongs to the same period as Hermogenes' treatise (i.e. the reign of emperor Marcus Aurelius).[33] From roughly the same period we also have a revealing anecdote, which again confirms that 'the ten orators' was a familiar notion in the Second Sophistic (ca. 50–250 CE). When the famous sophist Herodes Atticus, who was the educator of Marcus Aurelius, had completed one of his speeches, the audience praised him, cheerfully calling him 'one of the Ten'. Herodes Atticus reportedly presented a witty answer: "I am surely better than Andocides!"[34] Like the passages in Hermogenes' *On Types of Style* mentioned above, Philostratus' story about Herodes Atticus suggests that 'the ten orators' was a common idea in the second half of the 2nd century CE; but it does not mean that the canon was closed: the anecdote rather suggests the opposite, as Herodes Atticus could jokingly challenge Andocides' position in the selection, thereby undermining

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32   Wooten 1987, 148; Pernot 2000, 57; Carey 2012, 203; Roisman and Worthington 2015.

33   See Keaney 1991. There were similar lexica by Julianus, Philostratus of Tyrus and Diodorus: see Photius, *Library* 150.

34   Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 564–565. Cf. Pernot 2000, 57–59. Herodes Atticus' reaction confirms that Andocides, while being one of the famous Attic orators, was not as deeply admired as Lysias, Isocrates or Demosthenes.

somehow the status and authority of the list. Pseudo-Plutarch's *Lives of the Ten Orators* should presumably be dated to the 3rd century CE. Photius (9th century) includes an adapted version of Pseudo-Plutarch's treatise, and the Suda (10th century) is also familiar with the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators, as we have seen above. These texts do indeed present a clear list of ten Attic orators.[35] It is important however to remember that these works are relatively late (they postdate the Alexandrian scholars, and important authors like Cicero, Dionysius and Quintilian) and that some of the earliest of these authors – including Harpocration and Pseudo-Plutarch – can themselves not be securely dated.

Let me make two general observations that follow from the facts stated so far. First, there is no evidence at all for the existence of the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators before the 1st century BCE, and no *secure* evidence before the second century CE. Even in the 2nd century CE, Hermogenes and Herodes Atticus are playfully departing from the "ten" that their audience is assumed to know. Second, the list of ancient rhetoricians, lexicographers and biographers referring to the Canon is in fact not impressively long, considering the large number of Greek and Latin grammarians and rhetoricians who are not included in Table 8.1: there is no trace of the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators in the works of major authors like Demetrius (the author of *On Style*), Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Longinus: these authors do of course discuss the styles of Attic orators, and some of them present lists or hierarchies of the best orators (as we will see below); but they either do not know or do not accept the list of Ten Attic Orators, or they do not find it interesting enough to mention it.

4   Dating the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators

In the previous section I have presented and examined the ancient evidence for the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators. Interpreting this evidence, modern scholars have proposed different dates for the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators. The four most recent scholarly discussions of the Canon are those of Douglas, Worthington, Smith, and Roisman and Worthington.[36]

Douglas (1956) has argued, rightly in my view, that there is "no positive evidence for the canon before the 2nd century AD".[37] Worthington (1994) believes

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35   For Pseudo-Plutarch and Photius, see Roisman and Worthington 2015.
36   Douglas 1956; Worthington 1994; Smith 1995; Roisman and Worthington 2015.
37   Douglas 1956, 30.

that Caecilius of Caleacte is the author of the Canon. He accepts the evidence in the Suda that Caecilius wrote a treatise *On the Style of the Ten Orators*; and he interprets Quintilian as saying that "in the time of the age of the orators Athens produced *the ten*".[38] He repeats this view in Roisman and Worthington (2015), dating the Canon to the Augustan Age, with Caecilius as its author. Smith (1995) on the other hand argues that the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators originated much earlier, already in the 3rd century BCE in Alexandria. He reminds us that the great grammarian Callimachus included the Attic orators in his *Pinaces* (a sort of library catalogue) and that the Alexandrian scholars wrote commentaries on the orators. According to Smith, the Canon did not belong to the schools of the rhetoricians, who were focusing on the imitation of models in the present and future, but rather to the field of philologists and lexicographers, who were interested in preserving the best literature from the past. This is all circumstantial evidence, of course: the fact that Callimachus produced scholarly works on the orators does not imply that he produced or used a Canon of Ten. The following table (Tab. 8.2) presents the different dates that have been proposed for the emergence of the Canon of Ten Attic Orators:

TABLE 8.2   Dating the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators

Smith 1995	3rd century BCE	Alexandrian scholars
Worthington 1994	1st century BCE	Caecilius of Caleacte
Roisman and Worthington 2015	1st century BCE	Caecilius of Caleacte
Douglas 1956	2nd century CE	Hermogenes of Tarsus (?)

As I have argued above, there is in fact no secure evidence for the Canon of Ten Attic Orators before the 2nd century CE. The existence of a list of ten orators seems to be implied by vague and playful references in Quintilian, Hermogenes, and Philostratus (on Herodes Atticus). But the same texts show that there is no clarity about the names on the list; that the list was not the only one; and that there was much room to disagree (seriously and jokingly) both with the number ten and with the names on the list. Before the 2nd century CE, therefore, there was no closure, hence no real canon.

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38   Worthington 1994, 253. My italics.

5   The Flexibility of Ancient Reading Lists

Modern scholars who have studied the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators have
concentrated on one question: when was the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators
first presented? A better question would actually be: when was the Canon of
the Ten Attic Orators closed and generally accepted? As we have seen, the
evidence suggests that the Canon was perhaps not that powerful after all, at
least not before the 2nd century CE; otherwise it might have been easier to
find its traces. A more important question, then, is the following: what role
did the Canon (and other reading lists or selections of authors) play in ancient
rhetoric and literary criticism? Worthington has argued that the Canon was a
"destructive" tool with negative impact:

> The selection of the ten orators has proved a disaster for the survival
> of the works by those who missed out. A disaster not only for the ora-
> tors affected but also for posterity in that we have no real knowledge of
> other orators and their talents. (...) Since we have no means to become
> acquainted with any of the other orators, the destructive nature of the
> canon is clear.[39]

I disagree with this statement for three reasons. First, we do actually have
knowledge of other orators and their talents: we possess speeches by Gorgias,
Antisthenes and Alcidamas, who were not included in the Canon of the Ten
Attic Orators.[40] Second, from one perspective we could regard a canon of *ten* (10)
Attic orators as rather generous, especially if we compare this canon with
other canons, for example that of the three tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles,
Euripides).[41] We still have three speeches by Dinarchus and three by Andocides,
but we have no singe tragedy by the important tragedian Agathon. I suppose
that many classicists would be very happy if the situation was reversed. Third,
the examinations above have suggested that at least for the period up to the
2nd century CE (i.e. for the first five hundred years after Demosthenes) one can
seriously doubt that there actually was something like 'the Canon of Ten Attic
Orators' at all. In reality a number of different lists of orators were proposed,
with varying numbers and varying names: these reading lists, which were to
guide future orators in their rhetorical education, were competing with each
other in a long process of negotiation – but it is hardly helpful to talk about

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39   Worthington 1994, 247–249.
40   See n. 2 above.
41   On the origins of the canon of tragedians, see Lardinois and Marx in this volume.

different 'canons' here, as they were clearly neither closed nor universally accepted. Douglas has rightly pointed out that we should be careful not to use the term canon with too much fluidity:

> We mean by 'canons', if we mean anything at all, that when someone referred e.g. to the Ten Orators, all educated people knew who were meant, and that they were the best, or the only, surviving models of that particular genre.[42]

There is very little evidence for such a clear and fixed canon until the second or 3rd century CE. As we have seen, even those authors who seem to refer to the Canon of Ten Attic Orators are not clear about the names; and someone like Hermogenes, as we have seen, while alluding to "the ten", himself presents eleven or twelve orators.

Let us compare, then, the different reading lists of Attic orators that were proposed by Greek and Roman rhetoricians between the 1st century BCE and the 3rd century CE (Tab. 8.3):

TABLE 8.3   Reading lists of Attic orators (1st century BCE to 3rd century CE)

Author	Work	Number of orators	Names of the orators listed
Dionysius	*On Imitation*	6	Lysias, Isocrates, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Hyperides
Dionysius	*On the Ancient Orators* 4	6 (3 + 3)	Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus; Demosthenes, Hyperides, Aeschines
Quintilian	*Institutio oratoria* 10.1.76–80	6	Demosthenes, Aeschines, Hyperides, Lysias, Isocrates, Demetrius of Phalerum
Quintilian	*Institutio oratoria* 12.10.20–24	12	Lysias, Coccus, Andocides, Isocrates, Hyperides, Lycurgus, Aristogeiton, Isaeus, Antiphon, Aeschines, Demosthenes, Pericles

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42   Douglas 1956, 31.

TABLE 8.3   Reading lists of Attic orators (1st century BCE to 3rd century CE) (*cont.*)

Author	Work	Number of orators	Names of the orators listed
Dio of Prusa	Discourse 18, *On Training*	5 (3 + 2)	Hyperides, Aeschines, Lycurgus, although Lysias and Demosthenes are the best
Hermogenes	*On Types of Style* 2.11	12 (11 + 1)	Lysias, Isaeus, Hyperides, Isocrates, Dinarchus, Aeschines, Antiphon the Rhamnusian, Antiphon the Sophist, Critias, Lycurgus, Andocides, Demosthenes
Pseudo-Plutarch	*Lives of the Ten Orators*	10	Antiphon, Andocides, Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Aeschines, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Hyperides, Dinarchus

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who came to Rome in 30 BCE, published a number of rhetorical works for Roman students.[43] His *On Imitation*, which survives in fragments and an epitome, includes a reading list of those poets, historians, philosophers and rhetoricians which should be read, imitated and emulated by students of rhetoric.[44] He presents a list of six orators and characterizes their style; they are Lysias, Isocrates, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Hyperides. This list of six differs not only from the Canon of Ten Attic Orators that the Suda attributes to Dionysius' friend and colleague Caecilius of Caleacte (see above, section 3), but it also intriguingly differs from the list of six that Dionysius himself presents in his work *On the Ancient Orators*: the latter work consists of two parts, each containing discussions of three orators: the early orators are Lysias, Isocrates and Isaeus; the later orators are Demosthenes, Hyperides and Aeschines.[45] Isaeus, in other words, has here taken the place of Lycurgus. We can only guess about the reasons for the change. One possibility is that

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43   See above, section 2.
44   Editions by Aujac 1992; Battisti 1997.
45   Edition by Aujac 1978. *On Imitation* was probably Dionysius' earliest work and written before *On the Ancient Orators*: see Bonner 1939, 37.

Dionysius needed Isaeus in his *On the Ancient Orators* because he could be presented as a bridging figure between the two sets of three orators, the early orators and their later successors. Dionysius reports that Isaeus was a pupil of Isocrates and a teacher of Demosthenes, who is in *On the Ancient Orators* portrayed as the very best orator of all times.[46] Although the precise motivations behind the inclusion of Lycurgus and Isaeus in the two lists is lost to us, the difference between the two selections of six shows that reading lists were flexible and dynamic tools, which could be adapted to the specific audience and the context in which they were presented.[47]

Quintilian's famous reading list of Greek literature in *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.76–80 also has a list of six Attic orators (despite his reference to the 'ten' produced in one age at Athens, see above: section 3).[48] But here Demetrius of Phalerum (ca. 350–283 BCE) has taken the position of Isaeus and Lycurgus. In preferring Demetrius to Isaeus and Lycurgus, Quintilian may be following Cicero, who admired Demetrius of Phalerum as a statesman and philosopher, who incorporated Plato's ideal of the philosopher-statesman.[49] Thus Demetrius enters the list of six orators. In the first centuries BCE and CE it would indeed be more suitable to refer to a 'Canon of Six Attic Orators' rather than a 'Canon of Ten Attic Orators', as we have three different lists of six orators, two in Dionysius, one in Quintilian.

In *Institutio oratoria* 12.10.20–24, a lively discussion of the superiority of Attic eloquence, Quintilian mentions the names of twelve Greek orators.[50] We are not surprised about Lysias, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Hyperides, nor about Lycurgus and Isaeus, the two orators who compete for inclusion in the list of six in Dionysius' works (see above). But Demetrius of Phalerum, whom Quintilian includes in the list of *Instituto oratoria* 10.1.80, is absent here; instead we get Antiphon, Andocides, Aristogeiton, Coccus, and Pericles.[51] The latter three, Aristogeiton (4th century BCE), Coccus and Pericles (5th century BCE) are quite unusual in ancient lists, although Pericles is of course universally regarded as one of the best orators of all times. Like Dionysius, Quintilian thus

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46   On Dionysius' discussion of Isaeus, see Edwards 2013.

47   Cf. Kennedy 1972, 349: "Different critics and even a single critic at different times apparently had different lists."

48   On Quintilian's reading lists of Greek and Latin literature, see Steinmetz 1964; Citroni 2006b; Schippers 2019.

49   Cicero, *Brutus* 37.

50   See Worthington 1994, 254. This is not so much a 'reading list', as it seems to include authors whose speeches were not accessible to Quintilian.

51   Carey 2012, 204 wrongly states that Quintilian mentions ten orators in *Institutio oratoria* 12.10.20–24: in reporting the orators mentioned by Quintilian Carey ignores Aristogeiton and Pericles.

presents two different lists; and it may be significant that apart from three list of six orators, we now have a list of twelve (two times six).

Dio of Prusa (40–115 AD) needs only three orators: in his 18th discourse, the *Letter on Training for Public Speaking*, he limits his pragmatic reading list to Hyperides, Aeschines and Lycurgus, although he admits that Lysias and Demosthenes are 'the best'. The explanation for this remarkable selection is that in this letter (which may in fact be an ironical pastiche) Dio is giving practical advice to a wealthy and influential politician (perhaps an emperor) who has no time to work hard or to read a lot of literature.[52] For this addressee, Dio (18.11) selects only the easiest and the simplest models of oratory:

> πλὴν οὐκ ἂν ἐγώ σοι συμβουλεύσαιμι τὰ πολλὰ τούτοις ἐντυγχάνειν, ἀλλ᾽ Ὑπερείδῃ τε μᾶλλον καὶ Αἰσχίνῃ. τούτων γὰρ ἁπλούστεραί τε αἱ δυνάμεις καὶ εὐληπτότεραι αἱ κατασκευαὶ καὶ τὸ κάλλος τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐδὲν ἐκείνων λειπόμενον. ἀλλὰ καὶ Λυκούργῳ συμβουλεύσαιμ᾽ ἂν ἐντυγχάνειν σοι, ἐλαφροτέρῳ τούτων ὄντι καὶ ἐμφαίνοντί τινα ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἁπλότητα καὶ γενναιότητα τοῦ τρόπου.

> However I should not advise you to read these two chiefly [i.e Demosthenes and Lysias], but Hyperides rather and Aeschines; for the faculties in which they excel are simpler, their rhetorical embellishments easier to grasp, and the beauty of their diction is no one whit inferior to that of the two who are ranked first [Demosthenes and Lysias]. But I should advise you to read Lycurgus as well, since he has a lighter touch than those others and reveals a certain simplicity and nobility of character in his speeches.
>
>   Translation: COHOON

Dio (18.12) goes on to praise several orators of later times: Antipater, Theodorus, Plution, and Conon, who were active in Augustan Age. This is quite a revolutionary addition, given that the traditional rhetorical handbooks limit their discussions to the classical Attic orators. Dio's unconventional approach again underlines the flexibility of ancient rhetorical reading lists. But his choice was not very influential: Antipater, Theodorus, Plution, and Conon were only briefly allowed to enjoy the status of canonical orators – they were excluded again in later lists.

We have already seen (section 3 above) that Hermogenes of Tarsus seems to be familiar with a list of ten, to which he twice appears to allude. But we have also seen that he himself consciously departs from that list of ten: he

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52   On Dio of Prusa 18, see Billault 2004; Bost-Pouderon 2008; De Jonge 2022.

distinguishes between two different orators called Antiphon, he adds the Athenian orator and politician Critias (460–403), one of the Thirty Tyrants, and concludes that Demosthenes is by far superior to all of the others. These playful departures from the list of ten thus lead to a list of twelve, which is actually a list of eleven plus the superior Demosthenes. Twelve is two times six – and six was, as we recall, the number embraced by both Dionysius and Quintilian; the latter likewise presents a list of twelve.

Pseudo-Plutarch's *Lives of the Attic Orators*, finally, has an unproblematic list of ten, but let us notice that the order in which he presents the orators differs from all the previous lists that we have seen so far. The order in these lists is usually determined by a combination of factors: chronology, importance and connections between orators who are somehow related (as teacher and student, for example).[53] In Pseudo-Plutarch, however, chronology determines the order: Antiphon, Andocides, Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Aeschines, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Hyperides, Dinarchus. We observe that Critias and Demetrius of Phalerum have been silently removed from the list.

The significant differences between the reading lists of Dionysius (twice), Quintilian (twice), Dio, Hermogenes and Pseudo-Plutarch show us a number of things. First, there was evidently no agreement among ancient rhetoricians (up to the 2nd century CE) as to which orators belonged to 'the Canon'. To be sure, the orators in the lists mentioned so far belong to a limited group of orators. With the exception of some of Dio's preferred models, the orators included in the readings lists were all active in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE: classicism is the enduring attempt to canonize 5th and 4th century Athens. If we ignore for a moment Dio's unconventional list (which includes a series of orators of the Augustan Age), we will find that ancient critics did agree concerning some of the members of the Canon: leaving aside Dio's practical reading guide, there is no list that does not include Lysias, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Hyperides and Aeschines. But beyond these five canonical "canons", each critic could select his own favorite models of rhetoric.

Second, rhetoricians competed with each other and proposed their own selections of orators, thus contributing to a long and complex process of negotiation. Third, until the 2nd century CE, the number six turns out to be more dominant than the number ten: lists of six and twelve orators are found in Dionysius (6, 6), Quintilian (6, 12) and Hermogenes (12). Finally, and most importantly, the reading lists were different depending on the audience for which they were compiled or the context in which they were presented: Dionysius at one place needs Lycurgus, at another place Isaeus; Quintilian first

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53 See Steinmetz 1964; Schippers 2019.

gives a list of six and later mentions twelve names. Dio of Prusa's selection differs from that of all his colleagues, because (as he claims) he is writing for a lazy politician, who has no patience to read Demosthenes or Isocrates. For the period that we have examined (3rd century BCE to 2nd century CE) there is no evidence for the view that the Canon of the Attic Orators had "a destructive nature".[54] What we do see is an open debate among various authors, who felt free to propose their independent lists and selections. In fact, these lists seem to have had a *productive* nature: they invited comparative criticism, and stimulated colleagues to come up with their own adaptations and versions of the lists in a spirit of healthy competition.

6   From κανών to Canon

Having observed the flexibility of the ancient reading lists, we can now return to the question whether the term 'canon' should be used at all for ancient lists of Attic orators. The modern term 'canon' was introduced for a fixed list of orators in 1768 by David Ruhnken in his *Historia critica oratorum Graecorum*:[55]

> *Exorti enim sunt duo summo ingenio et singulari doctrina critici, Aristarchus et Aristophanes Byzantus, qui, cum animadvertissent, ingentem scriptorum turbam plus obeisse bonis literis, quam prodesse, suum juidicium secuti, certum omnis generis scriptorum delectum haberent. Itaque ex magna oratorum copia tamquam **in canonem decem dumtaxat rettulerunt** (…).*

> For Aristarchus and Aristophanes of Byzantium, two critics of outstanding intellect and extraordinary learning, made their appearance, and, having realized that a great crowd of writers could harm rather than benefit good literature, they carried out a firm review of writers of all kinds, following their own judgement. Therefore, from a great abundance of orators **they brought only ten into the canon** (…).
>
>   Translation: MATIJAŠIĆ 2018, 14

Ruhnken argued, on the basis of two passages in Quintilian, that the Alexandrian scholars Aristophanes and Aristarchus were responsible for the canons of

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54   Worthington 1994, 259: see above, section 1.

55   Ruhnken 1768, xciv–xcv (edition of Publius Rutilius Lupus' *De Figuris*). See Pfeiffer 1968, 207. For Ruhnken's influence on the modern understanding of ancient canons, see Matijašić 2018, 23–31.

Greek literature, including that of the ten Attic orators.[56] In fact, however, Quintilian there only mentions Aristarchus and Aristophanes as the judges of poetry (*poetarum iudices*), and Aristarchus alone as the judge of iambic poetry. Quintilian does not state that the Alexandrian scholars were responsible for the list of Attic orators. Ruhnken claims that Aristarchus and Aristophanes "brought ten orators into the canon" (*in canonem decem dumtaxat rettulerunt*). The terminology that Ruhnken uses here sounds familiar to modern ears, but it departs from the terminology of Quintilian, who uses the words *numerus* (number, rank, class, category) and *ordo* (order, rank, class).

The Greek term κανών does occur in the rhetorical treatises that I have discussed. It there refers to the 'model' or 'standard' of a particular style or genre.[57] An ancient canon is thus not a list or a catalogue, but an author or artist whose particular style is presented as useful for imitation and emulation. It is important to conclude this chapter with a few examples of this usage, because the terminological difference between ancient rhetoricians (κανών) and modern scholars (canon) points to a more fundamental issue: it is precisely the multitude of 'canons' (plural) that makes the ancient reading lists so dynamic and productive.

The rhetorician who uses the term κανών most frequently is Dionysius of Halicarnassus: I have already referred to his works *On Imitation* and *On the Ancient Orators* (sections 2, 5). The latter work contains separate essays *On Lysias*, *On Isocrates*, *On Isaeus*, and *On Demosthenes*. We can now add his works *On Thucydides* and his *Letter to Pompeius*.[58] In these works, Dionysius states that the orator Lysias is the "best canon" (ἄριστος κανών) of Attic language (*On Lysias* 2.1); he portrays Thucydides as the best "standard and canon" (ὅρος καὶ κανών) of the grand style (*On Demosthenes* 1.3). He states that Homer is the "best canon" (κράτιστος … κανών) of the mixed composition style (*On Demosthenes* 41.2). In a systematic comparison (σύγκρισις) of the historians Herodotus and Thucydides, he claims that Thucydides is the best "canon" (κανών) of the Attic

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56   Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.54: *Apollonius in ordinem a grammaticis datum non venit, quia Aristarchus atque Aristophanes poetarum iudices neminem sui temporis in numerum redegerunt* (…). "Apollonius does not appear in the grammarians' list, because Aristarchus and Aristophanes, who evaluated the poets, included none of their own contemporaries (…)." *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.59: *Itaque ex tribus receptis Aristarchi iudicio scriptoribus iamborum ad hexin maxime pertinebit unus Archilochus.* "Thus of the three writers of iambics accepted by Aristarchus' ruling, Archilochus alone will be particularly relevant to the formation of *hexis*." Translation: Russell 2001.

57   Rutherford 1998 examines the functions of "canons of style" in the 2nd century CE (esp. in the works of Hermogenes and Pseudo-Aelius Aristides). On the ancient terminology, see also Papadopoulos, this volume.

58   See Bonner 1939; Hunter and De Jonge 2019.

dialect, and Herodotus the best "canon" (κανών) of the Ionic dialect (*Letter to Pompeius* 3.16). According to Dionysius (*On Thucydides* 2) many rhetoricians consider Thucydides the "canon" (κανών) of historiography and deliberative oratory. The writers whom Dionysius lists in his work *On Imitation* are called "good and approved canons" (καλοὶ καὶ δεδοκιμασμένοι κανόνες, *On Thucydides* 1). Plato is the "canon of correct language use" (κανὼν ὀρθοεπείας) (*On Demosthenes* 26.7). Finally, the term canon (κανών) can not only refer to an author, but also to a text. Thus, Dionysius tells us that many people regard one particular speech by Lysias (about the statue of Iphicrates) as the typical "canon" (κανών) of Lysias' talent (*On Lysias* 12.2).[59]

The many occurrences of the word 'canon' (κανών) in the works of Dionysius of Halicarnassus cast light on the nature of the ancient Canon of Attic Orators: Dionysius knows that there are numerous models of rhetoric and literature to be imitated and emulated; each model has its own values and qualities. Many of these models are called "the best" (ἄριστος, κράτιστος) canon of a certain style, language or genre, which implies that there are also other (less outstanding) models of the same phenomenon. Furthermore, we should take into account the didactic dimension of these 'canons': they are presented as classical Greek models for imitation and emulation by students training to be politicians and rhetoricians in Rome. While the modern terminology of the Canon of Ten Attic Orators focuses on the processes of selectivity and the elimination of models that should be forgotten, the ancient terminology of κανών draws attention to the standard, model, or paradigm that *encourages* artists or writers to produce *new* works, inspiring them to go beyond that which they have found in their books and reading lists.

7   Conclusion

Our survey of the ancient selections and lists of orators has established that, for a very long period, there was no Canon of Ten Attic Orators, but many different, competing selections and reading lists, each of which presented an independent view on what should be remembered from the past. To be sure, some orators were almost always included: Lysias, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Hyperides, and Aeschines. But any other orator could be invited to join these five – as long as he was an Athenian male from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. In his important analysis of classicism in ancient literary criticism, James Porter

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59   The word 'canon' does not occur in Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* book 10. Demetrius, *On Style* 87; 91 uses the term κανών in the sense of "rule" or "criterium".

has rightly drawn attention to the widely different positions that we find in ancient texts:[60]

> Instead of critics presenting a united front, what we find is each critic variously defining his own stance towards the past in a series of acts of self-positioning within a highly contested field. (…) Scanning the field, what we find is not some essential classicism that is everywhere alike but rather a variety of *classicisms*, each differently conceived and for the most part contesting contemporary and predecessor versions.

The variety of lists and selections of orators that we have encountered in this chapter represents indeed a variety of classicisms. Dionysius, Quintilian, Dio of Prusa, Hermogenes, Pseudo-Plutarch and their colleagues all present their own selections of authors from the classical past. What they agree on is that Greek rhetoric is the rhetoric of classical Athens (Dio is the exception here). In focusing on the fifth and fourth centuries BCE of Athens, the ancient critics contribute to the classicizing construction of Greece and Greek culture, which in its turn becomes an important factor in the formation of Roman culture in Imperial Rome. But their versions of Greek rhetoric are all slightly different, thus fueling the debate among critics on the true nature and identity of classical Greek rhetoric.

Scholars have dated the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators between the 3rd century BCE and the 2nd century CE, and this Canon has been characterized as "destructive". I have argued that there is no unproblematic evidence for the existence of the Canon of the Ten Attic Orators before the 2nd century CE. More importantly, I hope to have shown that many different competing reading lists were circulating at least until the 2nd century CE, showing different numbers (with a prominent role for the numbers six and twelve rather than ten) and varying names of orators. The lists differed from one author to the other, and even between two works of one rhetorician. The lists were extremely flexible and dynamic, inviting criticism, responses and reactions from other rhetoricians. This open debate on the quality of classical Athenian orators can indeed be characterized as productive rather than destructive. It is useful to remember how the ancient Greek rhetoricians themselves used the term 'canon' (κανών), because it makes clear that rhetorical imitation was a didactic tool, which stimulated students to read, to imitate and to emulate many different models, from which they could learn in order to develop their own, innovative style. Selections of authors and reading lists were indeed the anchors

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60   Porter 2006b, 50.

of innovation, as canonization always served the purpose of producing new speeches and new works of art.

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