
Atticism and Antagonism: How Remarkable Was It to Study the Sophists in Renaissance Venice?

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Abstract: This article briefly investigates the reasons for Aldus Manutius' inclusion of Alcidas in his printed edition of Isocratean orations in 1513. These reasons have not been properly studied by historiography, even though the importance of the collection has previously been described. By systematically exploring three different levels of book production — the epistemic, material, and social ones — it seeks to understand how the career of the sophist Alcidas in Renaissance Venice can be used as a useful case-study to represent Greek information management and printing in terms of network analysis.

Keywords: Aldus Manutius, antiquarianism, network theory, Alcidas, Sophists.

Introduction

The early decades of the Venetian book industry, it turns out, were more dangerous for historians than, say, the later Inquisition or Interdict periods, when many authors were forced to silence or clandestine dissemination and a storm of trials reflected the insecurity of a newly formed class of professionals that did not yet know where it stood in relation to the rest of elite society. One of my main goals here is to turn the tables on our rosy and inspiring view of Aldus Manutius' firm as a springboard of humanist critique, suggesting instead to navigate its output of Greek learning at once with greater flexibility and more discriminating ambiguity. Given his social prominence, Aldus Manutius did not need to shield himself through protective self-censorship. In some of his titles he was prepared to go further than others. There is little, however, in our evidence that sustains the idea that either he or his firm associates were interested in the 'situational' ethics of the Sophists. The argument for relativism therefore rebounds onto us, the readers of these beautifully printed books, since we must be more sensitive to how we attribute 'innovation' within a system of knowledge and to what printers chose *not* to say and *how* they said it. As I argue two sections below, the peril of attending to the dialogic imagination via the Sophists creates wider interpretive pitfalls with regards to the vernacular strategies of the book market. In essence, the Manutian engagement with the Sophists reveals a Janus-like figure—belated and pioneering, a fit in the local trade yet totally eccentric. The best way to describe this intellectual experience is to see the Aldine imprints as a vast cultural delta which,

largely by accretion,¹ collects the results of Greek networks of scribes or scholars located in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The present study is the last part of a triptych, whose other leaves present separately the impact of sophistic techniques on humanist thought from the vantage point of early modern drama,² and, finally, the Erasmian ethics of timing.³ Here we look at printers, and specifically prestigious Venetian printers. The first part lays out the basic mechanisms of the externalization of knowledge in its paratextual and sociopolitical context, and outlines the circumstances that made the work of the Sophists a profitable read for the patricians Manutius was addressing. The second part takes a step back from the printed material and discusses the historiographical conventions that have been applied to this field. I focus on prominent classical scholars because the study of *logos*, and the sophistic rubrics of *kairos* and timeliness, are not without broader significance to the way Italian philology has evaluated the impact of printing technology. The last two sections — which are related and respectively speak to the social and epistemic layers of the printing network, as it has been called⁴ — rehearse in detail how well the sophistic awareness of language and style translated into humanist practice, and examine why Attic and agonistic fabrications were attached to the figure of Alcidas. The history of the Aldine academy of Greek studies is still frequently figured in terms of an emerging, republican *libertas* that emancipates itself from the oppression of medieval bureaucracy (and theocracy), though this alleged freedom and vindication of liberal studies have never been investigated systematically in relation to the Greek diaspora of the late fifteenth century. How original were Aldus' interests against the background of the Byzantine transmission of knowledge? How remarkable and lasting his editorial solutions?

1. The paratextual framework: advertising the sophists

It is generally assumed, however incorrectly, that the primary interest of all Sophists—Plato's most formidable enemy in his struggle to control the content of the emerging discipline of 'philosophy'—was rhetoric.⁵ As a rule, it is further speculated that an unsafe political environment, while hindering the prospects of peace and stability, also works as a nurturing backdrop for the devel-

opment of eloquence and learning. It was not without suffering severe repercussions that the Venetians adopted the second of these axioms, or at least a blend of the two. Aldus Manutius' preface to Volume I of the *Greek Orators* (1513) is the poster-child for this impression.

Wars and hostilities (*bella et arma*), dear Egnazio [the dedicatee would become the chair of Latin after 1520], have always brought disaster and destruction to much else but especially to education and literature—that is so well established as not to need demonstration. But in our own time [. . .] the study of literature is so vigorous (*sic vigent studia*) during the wars that it is even flourishing (*ut etiam floreat*)—and more surprisingly in Venice in particular, although the city has been troubled by continuous warfare these many years.⁶

In terms of publicity, the existence of these geopolitical dangers led other city printers to stall or interrupt their business activity; the less timid ones might have investigated both personal circumstances and commercial reasons for the inherent shifts of a profession that appeared alternatively profitable or risky.⁷ But only few, among the colleagues of Aldus, would have mastered his exceptional defense of thematic coverage, which stands out for two reasons.

The first is not about their good state of conservation or the diligence of the editorial work, which, however, following the firm's standards, is explicitly remarked upon,⁸ but rather about the fact that the richness and quality of the Greek orations are mirrored by their official dedicatees as nodes in a network forwarding political debates and elocution across the spectrum of Venice's state diplomacy. Earlier in 1513, Manutius recommends his edition of Pindar (augmented by Callimachus, Dionysius Periegetes and Lycophron) to Andrea Navagero, whom he addresses less as a patrician and scholar than as a civic leader needing to familiarize himself with the great speeches of antiquity, and possibly to commit them to memory, as Demosthenes did. After the dedicatory epistle to Giovanni Battista Egnazio, Manutius offers Volume II of the *Greek Orators* to Francesco Fasolo, another prominent lawyer and chancellor of the Venetian senate: the letter in this case is unusually long and historically slippery, but insists vehemently on how a canon of Greek orators could benefit the Council of Ten. In short, the Aldine resurrection of Greek-speaking orators in 1513 would have been eagerly received in Venice as an emblematic collection to benefit the heart of the state, and should not be treated as an academic engagement with specifically philosophical themes. Likewise, it plausibly appears that the Sophists who ended up integrated within the printed anthology (I discuss the case of Alcidas below) had a very limited role to play: give advice to contemporary Venetian diplomats who were involved in legal or political disputes. In this, Manutius was simply following a Quattrocento search for the *orator perfectus*, and it is interesting to reflect on how adamant Aldus Manutius was about insisting on the talent of ancient Greek speakers to improve oral and vernacular performances within the closed walls of the city's Senate.⁹

The second, less frequently mentioned, reason has to do with the ideal 'bilingualism' and corresponding *divided* geography of the printed speeches themselves.¹⁰

The Aldine volumes of 1513, in the entire holding, cover a wide range of constitutional debates, from Alexandrian Greeks to Ottoman Turks, as Manutius is quick to point out in his letter to Fasolo. At least in their projected reception, the *Greek Orators* are divided in two parts: one in Greek, one in Italian—one written, one oral. Presumably, the Greek text appeals as an object of protracted study, intended to fortify and charm (as a powerful and weighty delivery did to the Athenians of the day). The Venetian reenactment, on the other hand, is predicated on the ability to move and rouse on the political battleground. In his expansive letter to Fasolo, Aldus Manutius convincingly postulates that the reciprocal integration of these practices would result into a process of transferring Greek distinction into Venetian public life, and that this transfer, in turn, would increase the awareness in worthy scholars and patricians of living in a two-sided timeframe where the glory of the present ("sunt et nostro tempore qui magni cognomento appellantur") feeds directly on the glory of the past ("apud veteres").¹¹ In other words, by printing the Sophists, Manutius understood himself primarily as someone filling a constitutional gap and better outsourcing an arena of vernacular diplomatic dispatches considered crucial for the life of his city. Already as of 1532, this situation changed. In the *Antisophista*, written by a former pupil of Niccolò Leonicensi and included as the last of the medical *opuscula* prepared by the master for the press (Basel, 1532), the discourse moves away from state assemblies, their transcripts, and the transformation of archival protocols for storing and retrieval, and is back to the method of humanists like Ermolao Barbaro and Pico della Mirandola. The anti-sophistic polemic then aims to confute erroneous practices of teaching and research by making full use of Greek commentaries to Aristotle, and, as in a striking passage of the *Antisophista*, by recasting Athenaeus' judgement on Galen.¹²

If, returning to Manutius, we accept the notion that the 1513 edition of the *Greek Orators* was an instance of record-keeping of dozens of classical speeches intended to inform future ambassadorial negotiations, the promotion of Alcidas as a participant in the collection emerges as an excellent choice. In the cluster of testimonies attributed to him, Alcidas is credited with a protracted reflection on the comparative advantages of oral and written style. In his treatise *On Those Who Write Written Speeches, or On the Sophists*, he suggests that if the goal is *ex tempore* delivery, one should avoid precision (*akribeia*).¹³ Precision was an important attribute of *logos* for the Sophists: it is promoted in Antiphon's *Tetralogies* (an author repeatedly sampled by Manutius in his prefaces)¹⁴ and in Thucydides, who writes of it as a historiographical ideal, while a more hairsplitting pursuit of *akribeia* is also parodied by Aristophanes (*Clouds* 740-42).¹⁵ Like Alcidas, Aldus, too, takes for granted the greater affinity to detail of written compositions, though his preferences and the reasons he gives for printing the Greek corpus as it is are different and quite original (here I am citing, again, from the preface to Volume I of the *Greek Orators*):

To these orations of Isocrates we have added, on the suggestion of our friend Marcus Musurus, Alcidas' speech against the teachers of rhetoric, Gorgias in praise of Helen, and Aristides in praise of Athens. This has been done since Isocrates also had

written on the same themes and it seemed worthwhile to give students the chance to read different but very expert authors on the same subject. We have appended in addition Aristides' oration in praise of Rome because of our affection for that city, so that where Athens is praised, Rome may be too, since the same author wrote with learning and accuracy about the merits of both cities (*de utriusque urbis laudibus*).¹⁶

Manutius' supplemental logic is firmly inscribed within the tenets of the Greek Sophists. Alcidamas' *Odysseus*, a speech which presents the prosecution's case, is a later response to Gorgias' work in defense of Palamedes.¹⁷ What if a printer sets up pairs of *logoi*, on a design inspired by one of his trusted collaborators (Musurus): the plan does increase the collection's potential for reading and studying, but it does not translate, as desired, into public performance, apart from enlarging a basis for intellectual communication. In sum, Alcidamas' own ambivalence for self-presentation in writing and alternative blueprint for debates and contests affects the printed edition of 1513 in surprising ways. This reduction of sophistic techniques as editorial aids for the printing atelier is impressive. In classical antiquity, many speeches were directly or indirectly paired to respond to one another (the characterization of Athens by the Corinthians in Thucydides 1.71, e.g., and by Pericles in 2.36-46, or the debate between Mardonius and Aristobanus in Herodotus 7.9-10). But the unquestionable influence of the larger Protagorean theory of opposed *logoi* to be used as an intellectual tool of information management is a significant innovation.¹⁸

Still, nothing in Manutius' phrasing suggests that he considered a weaker argument like something that could emerge as the just one, but only that thoughtful, if subjective, *pairing* has the constructive result of deepening the reader's understanding of important affairs of causation or responsibility. We might try to bring out details to support specific conclusions, but the details themselves would remain fuzzy. It is unclear, for example, if it was sufficient for the aspiring sophist working in contemporary Venice—a writer-for-money, say, or even higher profiles such as Bembo and Aretino—to follow the footsteps and rhetorical templates of their Hellenic predecessors or if one was explicitly required to write panegyrics;¹⁹ whether members of the "Second Sophistic" movement were ever seen as off-limits, mere successors, or, by contrast, as pivotal;²⁰ and if such rules were absolute or subject to exceptions. On the one hand, the Aldine preface to Egnazio of 1513 appears to be consistent with both the semantics and epistemology of sophistic ideas on the best reasoning: knowing how to construct arguments teaches how to plan and bind books. Yet, the underlying attention to Isocrates, on the other, flattens the Sophists as historical actors on their own right onto the profession of 'logographer', or speech-writer, confining them to the forensic business. In fact, we are meant to understand that the 1513 anthology in its entirety ultimately appealed to readers of the time as an Isocrates plus appendices and, by analogy, to perceive that adjacent printing projects worked as a Pindar with appendices or a Demosthenes' "best ten" as well.

Some among the earliest 'surviving fragments' of the Sophists in Greek to reappear in sixteenth-century Venice were associated with the—mainly commercial—activity

of the Aldine family. Anybody familiar with the transmission of a corpus in the early modern period knows that when talking about *canonization* we refer to the periodical assembling of handwritten manuscripts that circulated in several different versions across the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as across the Most Serene Republic's political boundaries, and that were gathered in the city's various *mouseia* for the benefit of state patrons or private collectors.²¹

In a relatively short time span several decisions were taken concerning the selection, preservation, and binding together of these fragments. The difficulty of teasing out all the implications of this process in the case of Aldus Manutius comes from our historiography which amounts to an almost full-scale narrative of celebration,²² and which is daring-to-heroic when it comes to assessing the printer's output in Greek. The present study argues that these (implicit) tones of admiration are not always reliable. Testing them against the extant sophistic evidence, we find that they need to be moderated. *Prima facie* evidence for caution is provided by none other than Manutius: he assembled the *Greek Orators* as archives of speech for the Venetian statesman, and his vivid description of the dangers facing the polity in his prefatory letters further testifies that his main preoccupation was republican management, not humanist revival. Navagero and Fasolo too might have done exactly what is alleged by the printer to have been their first civic duty. We should soften our rules: what printers felt that they could publish safely varied by circumstance, and often those who were willing to take greater risks were not them, but their staff, be them the Paduan professors who collaborated with the press, the agents who hunted for lesser-known manuscripts, or the copyists who transcribed them. We do not possess evidence that Manutius or members of his staff reacted one way or another to Plato's malevolent campaign against the Sophists; they saw no lack of continuity between Plato, Isocrates, and the promise to fulfill a competent edition of these works within a reasonable amount of time. As far as the rediscovery of a lost canon is concerned, the brave in this tale were dislocated brokers and translators fleeing from the collapse of their empire, old Byzantine scribes who turned to the West for help and employment—by sixteenth-century, Venetian standards, the *really* old.

2. The methodological framework: antiquarian studies, Italian philology, vernacular strategies

If we apply a "bottom up" approach to the elusive question of agency within the printing house, then the conception of the 1513 volume of *Greek Orators* is first and foremost the fruit of professor Musurus, although he did not necessarily serve as a traditional curator or editor of the final text. What gave him a special role was rather a sense of allegiance or familiarity with the antiquarians and collectors of his day. Musurus was a historical figure that could easily be constructed as the intellectual counterpart of those who assembled a great library of Greek texts—namely, Cardinal Bessarion, Domenico Grimani, and the aforementioned Niccolò Leonicensi.²³ How vast was the shadow of the Paduan, when he was

credited by Manutius for his editorial invention in 1513? And did Manutius intend to summarily evoke a whole underground of erudite commentary and antiquarian pursuits spreading alongside his printed editions? Beyond Momigliano's seminal research on the figure of the antiquarian,²⁴ the answer to these questions takes us a great deal deeper into the philological resources and strategies used in this field of studies.

In his 1976 study on early modern astrology, entitled *The Zodiac of Life*, Eugenio Garin recycled a famous dictum by Aby Warburg, whose passion for witty, aphoristic expressions was well-known in turn-of-the-century Hamburg. The saying states that it is not always easy to see where Athens ends and where Alexandria begins. Warburg's chiasmic, miniaturized tale of two cities was at once a symbol of his personal struggle with nervous exhaustion and a symptom of the perils of adapting ethnography, which he helped escorting to life, to the equally perilous standards of Weimar Germany.²⁵ In Garin's hands, all this turned into a commentary on the academic classification of knowledge in late fifteenth-century Italy. Warburg's Athens, in Garin's retelling, refers to *astrologia quadrivialis*, or the mathematical side of the astronomical lore, whereas the idea of Alexandria is stretched to subsume with the so-called *astrologia iudiciaria*, which has to do with divination.²⁶ What remains persistent in this transformation is the tone of elegiac farewell to a now-submerged, yet once-prominent world of antiquarian erudition that, in Warburg's case, can be profitably identified with the last generation of art dealers and connoisseurs from imperial Germany—a world of learned Jewish bankers that succumbs to a prophetic frenzy. For Garin, though, Alexandrian antiquarianism is simply embodied by Bessarion's collection. Is it right to say, then, that for Garin it was the *homo divinans* who would have been interested in the Sophists? Or that renewed consideration for their corpus was, in all effects, an Alexandrian tale—a story of antiquarians?

In sixteenth century Venice, Warburghian omen-mindedness happens to be one factor in a larger mobility of labor. The printer, “divining” as Aldus Manutius did in his double duty as artisan and philological *castigator*, is sharing his social space (and timeliness) with the oarsmen who shuttled across the eastern Mediterranean. This carries enormous consequences for everyone who should try to reconstruct the Aldine enterprise not as a wonder-making template of heroic scholarship, but instead to place it squarely within the Venetian culture of expertise. If, to paraphrase a receptive reader of Renaissance paradox, sophistic *doxa* is a powerful adversary, yielding only to an accomplished scholar,²⁷ the privileged position that the Italian school of history of philosophy achieved in exposing the timely and untimely nature of sophistic rhetoric should give us pause. Garin himself was one of the first to observe how a powerful vein of Quattrocento dialogues reshaped simple exercises in antithesis to a more comprehensive discourse in which the respective strength and weakness of one's argument are weighed against themselves. And while Garin's insights have been recently qualified,²⁸ the characterization of a central segment of dialogic theory in Renaissance Italy from the vantage point of sophistic antagonism still awaits a sustained treatment. Such treatment, I submit, should embrace the

timeliness of its own topic, maintaining that humanist interests in antilogic were influenced by the brokering function of Byzantine intellectuals who forcibly relocated in Venetian Crete or other locals within the Aegean system after the fall of Constantinople, and, more in general, by the Hellenism cultivated at Byzantium.²⁹ In the end, all these oppositions run in parallel: atticism and antagonism, Byzantium and Venice, Athens and Alexandria, or, to come back to Garin, *techne* and *taxis*. Such indistinction marks a profound, Braudelian *longue durée* in the reception of the Greek sophists in the Venetian republic.

A rivalry between Athenian vs. Alexandrian cultural spaces as a signpost for a ‘purist’ philology of the sophists was cultivated by two other Italian scholars: Augusto Rostagni and Mario Untersteiner. Rostagni made of *kairos* a big business,³⁰ and handed to scholars of the Renaissance his consideration of Gorgianic *apateia* from both a magic and medical point of view. Rostagni's interest is so striking that we may as well ask why later critics neglected to pay attention to the Aristotelian distinctions he applied to the sophists. In Aristotle's rhetoric Rostagni discovered a difference between speaking *πρὸς τὰ πράγματα* and *πρὸς τοὺς ἀκροάτας*, which is to say, that a *logos* may be considered in two ways—in relation to the audience, and in relation to its subject matter. Theophrastus was the first to articulate this distinction, but Aristotle himself had this in mind in passages such as *Rhetoric* III:1 (1404a11). Attending to Rostagni's strategy is important. He was reacting to the Hegelian tendencies of German historians of philosophy, which had already strengthened their hold on the pre-Socratics; within this tradition, the death of Socrates, quite arbitrarily, had been used as a convenient cut-off point in the case of the Sophists, which is detrimental to our understanding of the whole intellectual context of the movement. Rostagni instead looked at Aristotle to offer comments on the written/spoken tension, which has become the basis for a stylistic analysis of prose in both Gorgias and Alcidas— the two authors appended to the *Greek Orators* by Manutius in 1513.

It is important to recognize at least two points that benefited from Rostagni's analysis. First, the contribution of sources about the Sophists should be carried through—and beyond—Aristotle, and not treated as an exclusively fifth-century phenomenon; second, this extended framework can function as a neat counterpoint to an increasingly bookish view of the Hellenistic age. One of the advantages of bringing Peripatetic philosophy into our account of the First Sophistic is that it illustrates more clearly elements that in our scant evidence we are allowed to see through a murky glass in fifth-century controversies. Moreover, it is clear from the editorial plans and the prefatory materials surrounding it that Aldus Manutius organized his edition of the Aristotelian corpus with a keen eye not only to the scholia and lexicographical aids that came from Byzantium, but also to Greek commentaries; for example, he promoted Alexander of Aphrodisias' work (presumably on another suggestion made by Musurus) right besides what Aristotle himself had said on meteorology.³¹

As for Untersteiner, his novelty lies in the methodological approach to philosophical genre, rather than in the edition of sophistic fragments, appeared in Florence

throughout the 1960s.³² Untersteiner's selection respects more or less the inclusion criteria already defended by Diels and Kranz. Since the Diels-Kranz collection treats the Sophists essentially as a sort of prelude to Plato, this picture of intellectual life remains highly misleading.³³ Neither Untersteiner nor Rostagni, however, had an impact on studies of Aldus Manutius comparable to Carlo Dionisotti, whose account is nearly ubiquitous.³⁴ What deserves emphasis is how, in Dionisotti's treatment, the developments of literary trends or fashions are locked in conspicuously national variants, allegedly originating from the Venetian advocacy, through print, of the vernacular against Latin. To put it briefly, what we see here is the recasting of an older polemic in Norden's *Antike Kunstprosa*, which put the origins of Atticism ca. 200 BC in a wish to avoid crediting the Romans with the movement, and which exhibits a tendency to interpret the whole history of style as a righteous battle against bombastic Asianism. If Atticism had been originated only by Greeks, it is hard to imagine that Cicero would have missed an opportunity to ridicule it in *Brutus* or *Orator* as one of those fanciful and impractical Greek notions—just as fanciful and impractical, in fact, as our current devaluation of the term Byzantine as a short-hand for dull bureaucracy that ignores the creative role of fifteenth-century Greek intellectuals in the formation of a sophistic canon.

It remains to be seen how useful it really is to illustrate the Aldine academy in Venice through Dionisotti, since his almost exclusive interest in the propulsive role played by vernacular letters. In his 1513 letter to Fasolo, Manutius invokes the exemplum of Janus Lascaris, who was sent by Lorenzo de' Medici to the Peloponnesian archives with a list of rare *desiderata*.³⁵ This choice, it seems to me, illuminates two aspects of his approach. First, it points to a larger assimilation of Greek rhetoric and methodology (to which I return at the end of the next section). Second, it expresses the view that entrepreneurial agency within a printing network must be brought back to the 'minor' historical actors who worked before an *editio princeps* was assembled and not necessarily with printing in mind. It is to this level of concerns that I now turn.

3. The social framework: versions of Greek *paideia*

Two brief examples of scholarly engagement with the Sophists might help identifying the social response to them within the politics of knowledge of sixteenth-century Venice, and the chronology of such response. The first has to do with the short-lived experience of the so-called Venetian Academy, between 1557 and 1561. This academy was founded by the young patrician Federico Badoer in February 1557, after a three-year mission as ambassador at the imperial court of Spain and Germany. Primarily, it was a publishing venture that turned out to be unsuccessful. Its goal was to enhance the prestige of the Republic of Venice, following the blueprint of the Florentine Academy, which to some extent functioned as a cultural ministry for duke Cosimo I. Its fate became interwoven with that of the prestigious Aldine press, at the time run by Paolo Manuzio, the third son of Aldus's mar-

riage with Maria Torresano. Rather mysteriously, by 1559 Manuzio stopped printing for Badoer, and the idea of opening their own bookstore did not help either. The publishing program of the Academy, however, was presented to the public—namely, the international public of the great German book fairs of Leipzig and Frankfurt—through the *Somma delle opere*, a 32-leaved folio listing 631 works divided in their respective categories. It is impossible to tell to what extent the academy would have stuck to this program: there are only two octavos, 67% of the total are quartos, the rest are folios. The combination of book size and the beauty of the Aldine fonts suggest that, in Badoer's intentions, these were books meant to be noticed.

In terms of intellectual history, while canon and civil law alone represent almost half of the total, one finds a suggestive reference to the Sophists in no. 203 of the list, which planned a monograph on those authors condemned by Aristotle, which, as the academy felt, needed a comprehensive rehabilitation. It might seem surprising to find a dissertation on the pre-Socratics in the section on Physics. But precisely in that sector, Aristotelianism was at its most malleable.³⁶ In short, although the academy's projected commentary on the pre-Socratics was isolated, it puts pressure on Badoer's opinions, expressed in a letter to Andrea Lippomano, that Greek learning was not at all necessary to a statesman. And more pressure comes from the lending registers at San Marco, where Badoer is cited, in January 1545, for the borrowing of the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, a Greek manuscript bequeathed by cardinal Bessarion to the Marciana. The Venetian Academy has been characterized by Lina Bolzoni as an institution that simply failed to conform to the ideal promotion of Italian carried out by the lines of Bembo and Speroni, but it has also been described by Shanti Graheli as strongly aligned to Latin as the universal language.³⁷ The Sophists might indicate that, contrary to expectations, Aldus' overall attitude on Greek culture, as exemplified by the *Greek Orators* of 1513, had not faded entirely.

Admittedly, my first example presented here is only a late and tantalizing instance of Venetian attention to the Greek Sophists, but it is useful as part of a general argument concerning the hegemony of philosophical languages. With my second, much earlier and more documented example, I intend to pave the way for a discussion of how the renewed prestige of the Sophists is virtually indistinguishable from a celebratory argument about the ancestral primacy of Athens, and therefore from the prestige of Attic itself.

The circumstances of such unique lawsuit are offered by a passage of the treatise *Misopogon* by the emperor Julian. Writing in Antioch in 363 AD, before he engaged in the war with the Parthians in which he would be mortally wounded, Julian gives a long survey of the training which he received from his teacher, the eunuch Mardonius and highly praises the man's pedagogical method, seemingly enjoying the contrast between his maxims and the supercultivated *paideia* of Antioch, which inspired Peter Brown his nexus of power and persuasion.³⁸ One of the city residents wonders if it might be possible for the emperor to leave off his bad habits and learn better ways (μεταμαθεῖν). To this fictitious question Julian replies: No, that is impossible for Ἔθος, φασί, δευτέρη φύσις

(“habit, they say, is second nature”). What interests me in this response is, in part, its paremiographical success,³⁹ but especially the fact that, while Julian quotes the sentence in the Ionic dialect, the *Marcianus Graecus* 251—which belongs to the fifteenth century and was probably produced in the orbit of Bessarion—replaces the Ionic form of δευτέρη by the Attic one.

As we know, when working with Greek fragments, dialects give valuable hints to a possible source and often narrow the circle of its potential authors. Of the Greek philosophers, Democritus is most credible in mixing Julian’s ethical terms of discussions: his Fragment 33 (in the Diels-Kranz collection) comes very close in juxtaposing habit and training. Indeed, when Diels published the third edition of the fragments in 1912 he translated the last part of it in a very significant manner; the idea of changing one’s nature becomes “eine zweite Natur,” by which Diels introduced—quite involuntarily, perhaps—just what we read in Julian’s treatise. In conclusion, the attribute “zweite,” or “second” has no equivalent in Democritus’ Greek text, but it is a conjecture that gives ammunition to the cause of Attic purism.⁴⁰ If in the world of the Sophists awareness of language closely related to awareness of style itself, then a scholar might succeed in one historical reconstruction in the same way a speaker captured his audience, simply by sprinkling a few Attic *flosculi* in an otherwise indifferent literary texture.⁴¹

When Norden collected quotations of Sophists in Philostratus, his goal was to show that the florid euphuism cultivated by Gorgias and his followers could be simultaneously flaunted or concealed. It should be emphasized that Manutius’ own position as the editor of the *Greek Orators* is not very different: at one extreme, every sophistic revival is an induction to sheer fabrication. For instance, the fortunes of the flamboyant panegyrist (but hypochondriac intellectual) Aelius Aristides are better understood if we evaluate the task of writing the language he was so keen to praise; even in this most conspicuously purist writer—whom Philostratus hails as τεχνιζώτατος (‘most skillful’)—*koine* forms creep in syntax, affectation, and lexical preferences. Readers of the Manutian appendices might not have been easily swayed by the alleged fondness for Rome as a justification for Aristides’ praise. But they would have followed with interest an argument based on the prestige of a linguistically homogeneous region as a cultural tradition.⁴² For this, as Aldus maintains, is what the Venetian man of state should have been attuned to: discover by comparison, among the printed objects offered by the printers, what could improve the elegance and trustworthiness of a new generation of orators and public speakers.

Two consequences might be drawn here. First, the appreciation for the sophists went hand in hand with an industry for grammarians and lexicographers, and this explains why the Aldine press decided to tackle Gorgias and Alcidas in concurrence with a series of key instruments such as, in ascending order of strictness, the Byzantine *Souda*, Pollux’s *Onomasticon*, and Harpocration’s commentary to the Attic orators (which was already hunted for by Lascaris as a particularly prized possession in the 1490s). Second, not only did linguistic ability set the sophists above the throng of their admirers: the ability to think in language intelligible to Pericles, as Graham

Anderson has written, gave them a lifeline to their own past, as well.⁴³ The extent to which Renaissance humanists were able to see through this scheme could still be pressed to higher scholarly results. As a careful printer, Manutius fought against inaccuracies and errors, and alongside overwhelming pressure of business.⁴⁴ It must be taken into account that the ‘Atticism’ of the Sophists reassembled in 1513 was not coincidental, and that it provided an important approximation of what a school of thought and its linguistic conventions looked like. In the current work of classical philologists, who must assess the morphology and genealogy of individual manuscripts, Attic language can be taken as reproducing more or less accurately the style of a lost archetype. Yet, Manutius had reasons to proceed otherwise. While his entourage ensured him about the reliability of discrete emendations, it was his decision to defend a conflation of sophists and orators as something entirely different from a mere accident of textual transmission. In a manner of speaking, the social response to the *Greek Orators* was determined by a hypercorrection on behalf of the printer himself.

4. The epistemic framework: the controversial integrity of Alcidas

Readers of the Aldine collection knew that they possessed the genuine text of ‘real’ Attic orators, by way of serendipitous scribal discoveries detailed in the paratextual materials; failing that, they would have been content to enjoy a piece of ‘designer Attic’ prose based on them, which is exactly what Manutius is encouraging the young Venetian lawyers to do. Questions of authenticity are often unspectacular and almost certainly more familiar to historians of the fifth century BC or to scholars of the Second Sophistic than to those working on sixteenth-century Venice. Only by simultaneously accounting for the 1513 Alcidas as both a virtuoso display of humanist (and editorial) integrity and a piece of ersatz Attic recreation, one could properly see why being virtually indistinguishable from the genuine article was a positive feature. Lucian described the neighboring domains of fraud and philology in a passage of his *Pseudologist* which narrates the forging of a manual by Tisias, the alleged founder of Greek rhetoric, and then the gulling of a collector who is forced into buying it at an exorbitant price. Tisias was a Syracusan. Thus imperial collectors in Byzantium sought accounts and proofs in Doric dialect. In this way, Lucian’s accusation testifies to a demand for such a prized relic that would continue well into the Renaissance, and to the incentives of producing, at some juncture, a lucrative substitute for irretrievable titles. Sophistic inventiveness achieved a proverbial status, but hardly with more fitting results than in Aldus’ Venice.

Naturally, speaking of integrity, a first task for students of the Sophists is to determine the relation between printed and scribal copies. The Alcidas edited by Manutius has little independent value from the manuscripts it depends on—namely, copies of two identifiably older archetypes, the MS 88 in Heidelberg and Burney 95 in the British Library. Even though scholars disagree on the stemmatic autonomy of these Venetian copies, they all bear the name of Alcidas as the author of the surviving

fragments. Among these is a short speech called *Odysseus against the Treachery of Palamedes*, which recalls a very similar speech under the name of Gorgias in defense of Palamedes, but which is perhaps more directly comparable to the speeches attributed to Antisthenes for Ajax and Odysseus when claiming the armor of Achilles. Either way, elaborating a prosecution speech against an old enemy of Odysseus based on the plotting of Greek myth fits neatly with the cultural context of Alcidas' generation and the generation of his teachers. Incidentally, this chronological dimension is lost on the Aldine imprint, which banks on sophistic rhetoric as much as on mythological importance. There are no ancient allusions to the work, except Plato's reference, in *Phaedrus* 261, to an "Eleatic Palamedes," identified by Quintilian (or by an exegetical tradition reaching the Spaniard) with Alcidas.

Quintilian might have been right about the identification and wrong about the speech being a forgery; as for Plato, it is suggestive to think that by inventing a nickname for the sophist, he was also forced to imagine the speech that Alcidas could have written on Palamedes. In fact, paragraph 22 of Alcidas's *Odysseus* concerns the deceiving of the youth and institutes a clear parallel between Socrates before his death and Palamedes—a suggestion briefly reprised by Diogenes Laertius. In 2008, Neil O'Sullivan, the world's leading scholar on Alcidas, asked himself if the anonymous speech could have been attached at a later time to Gorgias's pupil, and moved his examination from historic to linguistic background. Basing his conclusions on the presence of post-classical clauses that have no business at all in a text of the classical era introduced by the particles ἵνα or ὅπως, but that are otherwise documented in papyri of the Ptolemaic era, O'Sullivan persuasively demonstrated that the speech could not have been written by Alcidas and cannot be earlier than the first century BC.⁴⁵

O'Sullivan's demonstration of forgery is important in itself, for the light it sheds on Manutius' intentions, and for displaying the overwhelming preference for prose by which the sophists were commonly understood. Before Aldus, the promotion of the book as the necessary medium for the permanent recording of their thought was crucial. On the one hand, at the heart of the First Sophistic lies a controversy between written and spoken performance, or, as Aristotle is prepared to acknowledge in the third book of his *Rhetoric*, between written and 'competitive' style—and Aristotle's case is remarkable, as I have mentioned earlier, because the sophists, having been rejected, now provide the cornerstone of the philosopher's analysis of rhetorical prose. In that way, along with Gorgias, Alcidas is dismissed in the early chapters of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, only to be reintroduced as an arbiter of Hellenistic fondness for books—against his better will as a great champion of extemporaneous speech, more concerned with emotional impact than with conveying the truth. On the other hand, the unambiguous self-presentation of writers in the larger sophistic orbit like Euripides as intensely bookish is contradicted by the criticism heaped upon him by Aristophanes: not only one of the very few certain sources for the critical language of Aristophanes' *Frogs* is Gorgias himself, but in the *Knights* (347-50) the grandiloquent Cleon abuses a rival

for having to stay up at night, drinking water and preparing his speech. Furthermore, Aristophanes' preoccupations resonate with a fragment of another discourse by Alcidas, *On the Sophists*, which was included in the Manutian volumes and in which Alcidas rejects Prodicus' reliance on the skills of the written word.

The Sophists flourished in cities littered with booksellers and stalls, while Alcidas remains a paradoxical witness of that larger trend. In the fragments attributed to him Alcidas defends the spoken word and insists that he was unhappy with ineffective or harmful persuasion (showing in this a strong affinity with Antisthenes), but every time he was anthologized, either in manuscript or in print, a decision was made to emphasize within the collection the forensic background of his work. Manutius is no exception: no matter how Alcidas wanted his *logoi* to be understood as tools for thinking, they were brought back to the courthouse to provide a feasible intellectual counterpart to Gorgias and increase the firm's tally of available Attic orators.

The talent of Marcus Musurus aside, by the 1510s the best traces of Alcidas' career in fifteenth-century manuscripts had already migrated from the Medicean court in the 1490s to the orbit of Venetian bibliophiles such as Grimani and Bessarion.⁴⁶ Still, the Manutian construction of the *Greek Orators* was not without frustration. The primary witness of Alcidas is the Marcianus gr. VIII.1, which also has a central role in the transmission of Lysias⁴⁷ and can be traced to the scriptorium of Cardinal Bessarion. Bessarion's copy put together Lysias, Gorgias in praise of Helen, the two speeches of Alcidas—that is, *Odysseus* and *On the Sophists*—followed by two orations of Antisthenes and a small anthology of Pythagorean writings. According to Lotte Labowsky, who worked on the inventories of Bessarion's library, the Cardinal considered this copy as part of his collection of history and rhetoric, and stored it between Libanius and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*.⁴⁸ There would be many considerations to offer at this juncture, ranging from the importance of genre to Bessarion's information management, but the following statements are a feasible, conclusive assessment of how the epistemic production of the *Greek Orators* differs from the scribal models it depends on.

Once again, the Medicean "Attic" tradition—to which the work of the sophists Alcidas and Antisthenes was appended—was no longer in Florence but in the Venetian bibliophile market (with or without the intervention of personnel with open Strozzi sympathies). If one compares these manuscript testimonies in their entirety—meaning, form and construction, but also the highly complementary nature of their content—with the 1513 edition of Manutius, the result is that only the Quattrocento set is unified, whereas the Aldine *Orators* are fractured in two volumes, first omitting Gorgias' *Helen* and Alcidas' *Odysseus*, despite their established scribal warranty, and then reinserting them in Volume II, forcibly laboring to justify this belated intervention in order to restore their original, parallel position besides the Palamedes. One might speculate that Musurus had some part in rectifying Alcidas' omission, but in any event details are inconclusive. By including *Odysseus* Manutius might have admitted an interloper (more or less like Diels with Critias),

although, to his credit, no evidence of its non-Sophistic status was available at the time. By the same token, his decision to treat the sophists as orators rather than philosophers was not only intensely practical but also sanctioned by the manuscript tradition of these works.

In fact, by trying to set up Gorgias and Alcidas as the two sides of an identical demonstration, Aldus Manutius was only responding—with some perplexing delay and anxiety on his part—to the advances of the Cretan copyists and the way they organized the topic. It was from Crete, then, that sophistic antagonism brought a “supplementary” logic to printing or library pursuits, effectively functioning as a meta-rhetorical tradition. If we see the concomitant revitalization of display oratory — instigated in equal measure by the First and the Second Sophistic — as a discipline of knowledge, rather than a recasting of the classical dichotomy between performative and text-centered practices, the rewards are both epistemological and spatial. Epistemological — because a significant portion of the intellectual persona is now taken by a public performance of its work. And spatial — because the cultural *backdrop* of the Eastern Mediterranean is now *forefronted* and demonstrated to be a crucial factor in the Venetian book trade. To the extent that commercial characters were more stable than the fickle political allegiances of the city, this segment of sophistic rediscovery (to say nothing of the Aldine academy as a whole) could be re-written as a sea-to-inland narrative. After all, if ships change the shore, to borrow a formulation from social network analysis, why not Greek books?

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Notes

¹ This approach takes the environmentalist view that for Venetian entrepreneurs the sea is normal and the land is the fringe. The ‘return’ of the Sophists was endemic to the books and ideas exchanged through coastal seafaring and the role of funnel played by locales such as Crete or Cyprus. In this way, my suggestion of grounding the study of Venetian book trading on a new ‘archaeology of the sea’ (see Malkin) responds to Politian’s desire for the humanist to ‘swim without support’ (Moss, 79).

² Gulizia 2015.

³ Gulizia 2017.

- ⁴ See Renn *et al.*
- ⁵ For the sophist as a teacher of rhetoric, see Ostwald and Lynch.
- ⁶ I cite from the recent translation of Wilson, 223.
- ⁷ Cf. Baten and van Zanden, and Buringh and van Zanden.
- ⁸ “[O]rationes diligentius recognitas” (Wilson, 222).
- ⁹ On the tradition of republican deliberative debates see Cox.
- ¹⁰ Here and in what immediately follows I profited from Moli-
no’s discussion of a separation of two media across a linguistic
divide—*avviso* and *Zeitung*.
- ¹¹ Wilson, 224.
- ¹² “Aut saltem scirent, quale sit de hoc medico Athenaei iudi-
cium, qui in quodam convivio ad quod multi viri docti conven-
erant, ait inter caeteros adfuisse Galenum Pergamenum medicum,
qui neminem habuerat usque ad suae aetatis tempora philoso-
phandi scientia, vel dicendi facultate superiorem” (Nicolai Leo-
niceni *Opuscula*, Basel 1532, c. 147r).
- ¹³ Gagarin, 19-21.
- ¹⁴ Cf., e.g., Manutius’ preface to the *Greek Rhetoricians* in 1508
(Wilson, 195-197).
- ¹⁵ *Lexicon Historiographicum*, vol. I, pp. 36-66.
- ¹⁶ Wilson, 225.
- ¹⁷ Incidentally, nothing in Gorgias’ exercise—which is based on
repeated *eikos* arguments—sustains Plato’s assertion that the
Sophists saw that “probabilities should be more honored than
truths” (*Phaedrus* 267a).
- ¹⁸ On Manutius’ promise of indexing (“Quibus est animus facere
indicem eorum omnium, quae scitu digna in iis ispsis habentur
commentariis,” Wilson, 220), see Cevolini.
- ¹⁹ As Cicero reports (*Brutus* 12.47), Gorgias thought an orator
should “amplify a subject with praise.”
- ²⁰ It is one thing to see the Second Sophistic as an intellectual
aftermath, quite another to construct a taste based on figures
such as Philostratus and Galen, and their propensity to adversa-
rial disputation; see Mattern.
- ²¹ Cf. the classic study of Irigoin.
- ²² It does not help that most volumes have been commissioned
for anniversary or with the purpose of working out catalogues of
printed titles; see, most recently, Plebani.
- ²³ See at least Mugnai Carrara and Jackson.
- ²⁴ Miller.
- ²⁵ Levine.
- ²⁶ Lehoux, 21-46.
- ²⁷ MacPhail.
- ²⁸ Bausi.
- ²⁹ Cf. Naser Eslami, Gaul, and Kaldellis.
- ³⁰ Rostagni.
- ³¹ Cf. Kotwick.
- ³² Untersteiner.
- ³³ Many scholars who followed Untersteiner’s legacy, however,
including Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, Andrea Capra, and Anna De
Pace, have embraced Renaissance humanists as the heirs and
successors of the sophists; see for all De Pace.
- ³⁴ See Dionisotti and Cambiano.
- ³⁵ Speake.
- ³⁶ Cf. Martin.
- ³⁷ See Bolzoni and Graheli.
- ³⁸ Brown.
- ³⁹ The editors of the 1964 Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon, induced
by the parenthetical $\phi\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}$, called it a proverb.
- ⁴⁰ Lenz.
- ⁴¹ In “A Professor of Public Speaking,” Lucian described this
situation, observing a sophist attaining great success by calling
sunbathing ‘insolation’, dawn ‘crepuscule’, and scraping down
‘destrigillation’.
- ⁴² Judging from the ‘best and purest’ (“candidissimum”) in Wil-
son, 220.
- ⁴³ Anderson, 100.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Wilson, 161.
- ⁴⁵ O’Sullivan.
- ⁴⁶ In this respect, Aldus’ strategy is similar to the one he used
for Galen with regards to the private collection of the humanist-
doctor Leoniceno, with the difference that Leoniceno was per-
sonally much more reluctant than Musurus to lend his services
and only marginally associated with the press; see Perilli.
- ⁴⁷ The MS is constructed in parchment, in regular quinions, and
its scribe has been identified with the Cretan copyist Aristobulus
Apostolius. Several apographs have been taken from this Cretan
antigraph, all containing an anthology of Lysias’ orations along
with Gorgias, Alcidas, and various other epistles.
- ⁴⁸ The exact same content has been described in Vat. lat. 3960, a
sixteenth-century inventory of Domenico Grimani’s library at
the time in which it was transferred, by deed, to the convent of
S. Anthony in Venice.