PART TWO

ARISTIDES’ SELF-PRESENTATION
CHAPTER FIVE

AELIUS ARISTIDES’ ILLEGIBLE BODY

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Many modern readers have found it improbable that the *Hieroi Logoi* are the product of literary ambition. Their author, however, who trafficked professionally in the great Greek writers of the past, leaves little room for ambiguity about his aspirations, declaring in the first sentence: ‘I see myself creating an account in the manner of Homer’s Helen’ (*Or.* XLVII.1). Aristides’ framework, then, is epic, and more specifically that of the *Odyssey*—that much is clear.¹

Yet in what respects is the *Odyssey* a model for Aristides’ undertaking? The most obvious point of contact is the resemblance of Aristides’ sufferings to those of Odysseus, long buffeted on stormy seas. In both cases, moreover, those countless evasions of death attest the presence of a tutelary deity—Athena and Asclepius respectively.² But why Helen? In *Odyssey* IV, we can recall, it is Helen who selects a tale from ‘all the toils of stout-hearted Odysseus’ to tell his son Telemachus. She is thus like an epic narrator faced with a vast archive of stories.³ Yet Helen,

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¹ δο&omicron;&omicron; μοι κατ&aelig; την Ἐλέ&omicron;&omicron; την Ὄμη&omicron;&omicron; τῶν λόγων ποιήσα&omicron;σθαί. I have used Keil’s edition, in which the six books of the *Hieroi Logoi* are *Orations* XLVII–LII. Translations from Aristides are my own unless noted. Numbers preceded by a ‘T’ correspond to the testimonia in Edelstein and Edelstein 1945, whose translations I have used.

² On the Odysseus theme, see Schroder 1987. For the importance of Aristides’ travels to his understanding of the body, see the contribution of Petsalis-Diomidis in this volume.

³ ἔκαστη γὰς τῶν ἡμετέρων ἡμερῶν, δοκε&omicron;&omicron; τό καὶ νυκτῶν, ἦχει συγγραφ&eta;&omicron;ν, εἰ τὰς παρά&omicron;ν ἢ τά συμπλέτονται ἀπογρά&omicron;φεν ἡβο&omicron;λετο ἢ τήν τοῦ θεοῦ πρό&omicron;νοιν δι&mu&eta;&omicron;θαι. (‘for each of our days, just as each of our nights, had a story if someone who was there wished either to record what happened or recount the providence of the god’, *Or.* XLVII.3). I follow Wilamowitz, F&aelig;stugier&aelig;, Behr, and Schroder in retaining the παρά&omicron;ν of the manuscripts. Keil proposed emending to παρ’ ἐ&omicron;ν, arguing that the line was corrupted under the influence of the παρά&omicron;ν in the following line. Wilamowitz ably defended the manuscript reading by citing *Or.* XLVIII.56 and *Or.* L.20, cases where Aristides uses the plural (οἱ παρά&omicron;νες) to refer to those who were present at an event in question (the onset of an attack and an oratorical performance) and can corroborate Aristides’ account.

⁴ Aristides in fact cues the *locus classicus* of unspeakable epic magnitude, *Il.* 2.489, in the first lines (οὐδ’ ἐ&omicron; μοι δέκα μὲν γλώ&omicron;σσαι, δέκα δὲ στό&omicron;ματ’ ἔ&omicron;ν, *Or.* XLVII.1).