A NEW LOOK AT THE CANON OF THE
TEN ATTIC ORATORS*)

BY

R M SMITH

There has existed recently a tendency to treat the canon of the
ten Attic orators differently from the canons of poets established by
the great Alexandrian editors, whose editing of the poets over-
shadows their (often forgotten) work on prose Partly for this reason
the canon of orators is often now considered a later compilation
than those of the poets In addition, the idea persists that the canon
of orators may have been the product of rhetorical schools in
Pergamum in the late second century BC This theory, which has
never been closely criticized, was argued by only one scholar, J.
Brzoska, but is widely listed among the possible origins for the
canon Not surprisingly, A E Douglas has recently challenged all
evidence for the existence of the canon before Hermogenes and sug-
gested that the 10 orators were not known as a set until the second
century AD 1)

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gestions

1) Since D Ruhnken, Historia Critica Oratorum Graecorum, (1768, repr Opuscula
II, 2nd ed Leipzig 1841), the theories of origin have been mainly three—
Alexandrian editors, the rhetors of Pergamum, and Caecilius of Caleacte R.
Pfeiffer, History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic
Age, II (Oxford 1968), 206-207, in his treatment of Alexandrian scholarship sug-
gested that the orators came later and that Rome, Pergamum, Athens and Rhodes
began to play their part in the process He cited J Cousin, Études sur Quintilien I
Contribution à la recherche des sources de l'Institution Oratoire (Paris 1936), who “stresses
the activity of Pergamum in the second century BC ” Cousin is only agreeing
with Brzoska, De Canone Decem Oratorum Atticorum Quaestiones (Breslau 1883), who
in turn is apparently the single source for every suggestion that the canon originated
in Pergamum, and while Brzoska is not everywhere believed, the thesis he and his
mentor once put forward (A Reifferscheid, Breslau 1881) is too often given
weight—L Radermacher’s RE article for example (vol 10, 1873-1878, s v

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It is my purpose here to look again at the evidence for the canon of 10 Attic orators. Early suggestions that the canon was Alexandrian were correct, and Brzoska's subsequent work and influence need to be weighed and questioned. Douglas challenges the evidence for the existence of the canon before the second century mainly on two points: a reading of Quintilian 10.1.76-79 and an assumption about what influence the canon ought, by definition, to have had. Answering his challenge raises the question of how the canon was regarded in the tradition of ancient rhetoric; if we judge by what the tradition shows rather than by an assumption of what the canon was supposed to be, we may find that it is indeed close both in time and by nature to the school of Alexandria.

First, Brzoska. His argument amassed circumstantial evidence but rests on a single premise: that only rhetorical activity produces a canon of orators. Brzoska is more convincing than the best of the old arguments on behalf of Caecilius, even the facts of which do not hold firm. Still, he depended, as Radermacher put it, "auf Grund eines scharfsinnigen Indizienbeweises" (op cit, col 1873). Brzoska's 80 pages include extensive treatment of rhetorical activity in Pergamum and its influence. As Hartmann pointed out, however, this is evidence of the rhetorical activity in Pergamum and not proof for the place of origin of the canon (op cit 17).

Kanon. Pfeiffer notes that A. E. Douglas, Cicero, Quintilian, and the Canon of Ten Attic Orators, Mnemosyne 9 (1956), 30-40, must be considered also, but see also Cousin, Quintilien 1933-1959, Lustrum 7 (1962), 289-331, who replies to an argument made by Douglas but does not challenge his conclusions.

Prior to Douglas and Brzoska, the earliest judgments were in favor of Alexandria. Except for Ruhnken, whose work introduced the concept of the literary canons, scholars stated their opinions without much argument, e.g., C. G. Heyne (1812), F. A. Wolf (1833), F. G. Kiessling (1847), R. Jebb, The Attic Orators from Antiphon to Isaeus (1893, repr. New York 1962) and G. A. Kennedy, The Art of Persuasion in Ancient Greece (Princeton 1963), 125, think that the canon is probably Alexandrian.

2) On Caecilius as the author of the canon of orators, see M. H. E. Meier, De Andocidis Quae Vulgo Fertur Oratione Contra Alcibiadem Commentatio IV (Halle 1837), G. Steffen, De Canone Qui Dicitur Aristophanis et Aristarchi (Diss. Leipzig 1876), and P. Hartmann, De Canone Decem Oratorum (Göttingen 1891). The title of Caecilius' treatise is the earliest sign of the canon that we have (if attribution by the Suda is to be trusted), but Hartmann and Meier tried to prove that signs of the canon's existence appear immediately after, but not before, the publication of Caecilius' work. This is simply not true.