

Chapter 7

Demosthenes

Life

Demosthenes (384-322) was the son of a wealthy Athenian of the same name, who manufactured swords and cutlery. His mother Cleobule was the daughter of an Athenian named Gylon, who fled to the Cimmerian Bosphorus after being charged with treason and married a rich Scythian. Demosthenes senior died when his son was seven, leaving his two nephews (Aphobus and Demophon) and a friend (Therippides) as trustees of the estate and guardians of Cleobule, Demosthenes and his younger sister. They proceeded to embezzle most of Demosthenes' inheritance, supposedly to such an extent that on reaching maturity he was unable to afford the fees of Isocrates' school. Instead he studied rhetoric with Isaeus, whose influence is clearly visible in Demosthenes' early private speeches, and in 364 he began a series of prosecutions against his former guardians. He thereby recovered some of the lost money, but more importantly gained a reputation as a speech-writer, which in turn led to a lucrative career as a logographer. Demosthenes also taught rhetoric for a time, but he had far loftier ambitions, conceived as a boy when he heard Callistratus addressing the assembly. A speech impediment might, indeed, have precluded a public career, but unlike Isocrates, Demosthenes was determined to overcome his natural defects and subjected himself to a rigorous training programme. Among the stories are how he practised declamation with pebbles in his mouth and stood on the shore at Phalerum, trying to make his voice heard above the waves. In addition, he made an extensive study of prose literature, including Thucydides, Plato and the orators. This training and his success as a logographer began to reap their rewards in 355 when Demosthenes received his first commission from Diodorus to write a speech for a political trial (*Against Androtion*), and in 354 when Demosthenes himself (it seems) delivered the *Against Leptines*. This was also the year of his earliest extant deliberative speech, *On the Symmories*, which was soon followed by further speeches on public policy (*For the*

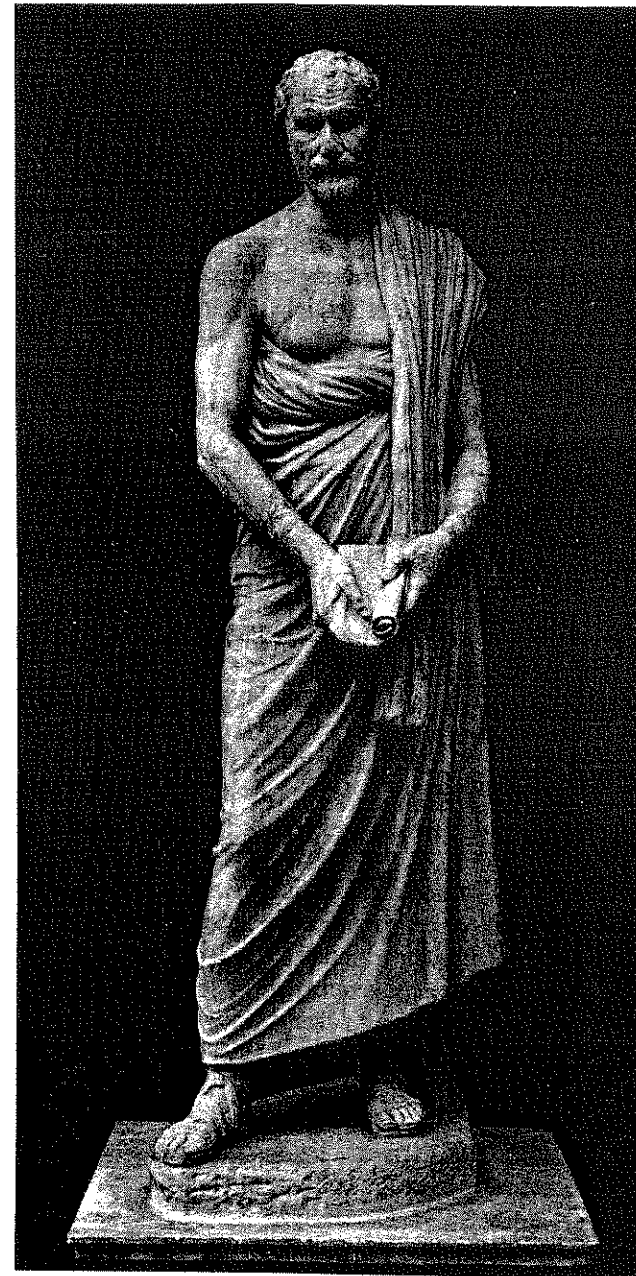


Fig. 4 Demosthenes.

Megalopolitans [353]; *For the Liberty of the Rhodians* [351]) and in political trials (*Against Timocrates* [353]; *Against Aristocrates* [352]).

These early political speeches reveal Demosthenes as broadly in agreement with the policies of the conservative statesman Eubulus. He subsequently, however, became prominent in his own right as the leader of those advocating resistance to the growing threat of Philip II of Macedon. The *First Philippic* was followed by the three *Olynthiacs*, but Demosthenes failed to persuade the Athenians to take sufficiently vigorous action, and Olynthus (an important member of the Chalcidic League) was lost in 348. This effectively ended Athenian ambitions in the north Aegean (especially with regard to Amphipolis), and Demosthenes recognised the need for peace. He was a member of the embassy which negotiated the Peace of Philocrates (346), and one of the other envoys was Aeschines, who championed the alliance at Athens. He and Demosthenes conceived an implacable hostility towards each other, and afterwards Demosthenes constantly alleged that Aeschines had been bribed, perhaps to deflect blame for the Peace from himself. A leading supporter of Philip at this time was Isocrates, but Demosthenes was not fooled by Philip's courteous treatment of Athens. Although he urged the Athenians not to break the treaty in *On the Peace*, knowing that to do so then would be to invite disaster, Demosthenes was gathering supporters to strengthen his anti-Macedonian position, including Hyperides and Lycurgus; and he tried unsuccessfully to prosecute Aeschines for his part in the peace negotiations through the agency of Timarchus. Then he struck: in 344, with Philip interfering in Thessaly and the Peloponnese, Demosthenes persuaded the assembly not to renew the Peace by his *Second Philippic*; and in 343 Hyperides impeached Philocrates (who went into exile), while Demosthenes himself prosecuted Aeschines with his *On the False Embassy*. Despite the weakness of Demosthenes' case, Aeschines was only narrowly acquitted.

In 342/1 Philip turned his attention to Thrace and reached the Chersonese, thereby threatening Athens' vital corn supply from the Black Sea; and his supporters in Athens demanded the recall of Diopieithes, who was raiding Thrace. Demosthenes supported Diopieithes in *On the Chersonese* and followed this up with his *Third Philippic*. This was one of Demosthenes' finest speeches, in which he spelled out Philip's designs on Greece as a whole and urged the Athenians to send a force to defend the Chersonese and Byzantium. The *Fourth Philippic*, if genuine, will have been delivered soon after; in it Demosthenes advocates making overtures for help to the Persians. When Philip was approaching Byzantium the help was finally sent, and his advance was

checked. Demosthenes was now supreme in the Athenian assembly, and he began drumming up support for a united Greek resistance to Philip. Then in 339 Aeschines, Athens' representative on the Amphictyonic Council (which controlled the affairs of Apollo's shrine at Delphi), managed to provoke a Sacred War, which Philip was invited to bring to a conclusion. He marched into Phocis, from where he could attack Boeotia and Attica, and Demosthenes persuaded the Athenians to make an alliance with their old enemies the Thebans. The Greeks met Philip at Chaeronea in 338: the result was a crushing victory for the Macedonian.

Demosthenes' policy had failed, but in 336 Ctesiphon proposed that he be honoured with a gold crown at the Great Dionysia for his services to Athens. Aeschines immediately prosecuted Ctesiphon for making an illegal proposal, although the case was not heard until 330. In his *Against Ctesiphon* Aeschines blamed Athens' troubles on Demosthenes, but Demosthenes' masterpiece, *On the Crown*, easily won the day. Aeschines was forced to retire to Rhodes. Demosthenes all the while maintained his opposition to Philip and, after his murder in 336, to Alexander, and he remained a prominent figure in public affairs. The end of his career, however, was sullied by the obscure Harpalus affair. Alexander's fugitive treasurer arrived off Attica in 324 with an enormous sum of money. Alexander demanded Harpalus' surrender, but Demosthenes proposed that he be imprisoned and the money stored on the Acropolis. Harpalus then escaped, and it was discovered that some of the money was missing. Demosthenes made the further proposal that the Areopagus Council investigate the money's disappearance, but in its report he himself was named as having received twenty talents. Prosecuted by Dinarchus and Hyperides, he was fined fifty talents, and being unable to pay this huge sum he was imprisoned, before managing to escape into exile.

Demosthenes, however, was not quite finished and returned to Athens after the death of Alexander in 323, advocating renewed resistance to Macedon. The Lamian War followed, but the Greeks were defeated at Crannon in 322 by Antipater. When Athens refused to surrender the anti-Macedonian agitators, Antipater marched on the city, and Demosthenes, Hyperides and their supporters fled. Demades proposed that they be sentenced to death, and Demosthenes, who had taken refuge in the temple of Poseidon on the island of Calauria, took poison concealed in his pen.

Style

Demosthenes was recognised by both Greek and Roman critics as the greatest of the orators, and this opinion is widely shared today. One of his outstanding literary qualities was the ability to vary his style to suit the occasion of the speech, whether it were in a private lawsuit or at a public meeting, but some general characteristics may be observed.

Demosthenes always prepared his speeches carefully (in the well-known gibe, they smelt of the lamp), and there is some evidence that he revised them before publication, but an impression of spontaneity is created by the way in which he mixes long periods with shorter and simpler sentences. These act as a summary or introduce a new argument, while rhetorical questions, either singly or in a series, also help to prevent monotonous periodicity. Not that the periods themselves are without variety: Demosthenes, like Isocrates, varies the position of the main verb in relation to participial clauses, though relative and infinitive clauses usually precede the verb (the latter is a favourite form of sentence in Demosthenes). He also tended to avoid hiatus, but not as strictly as Isocrates: the pauses occasioned by hiatus might give the speaker time for breath. Indeed, in this respect Demosthenes' periods are less polished than Isocrates', and he gave persuasion a higher priority than literary form. His speeches, in general terms, are practical, not the products of art for art's sake.

One rule of composition observed by Demosthenes was the avoidance of a run of more than two short syllables. There are few tribrachs (three shorts), and successions of more than three short syllables are extremely rare, occurring where no other word-order is possible. Scholars have disagreed over the extent to which this was a conscious rather than instinctive practice, but the effect is one of solemnity and dignity.

Demosthenes wrote in pure Attic Greek, but in an Attic that was closer to the language of ordinary life than that of Lysias or Isocrates. He frequently uses familiar expressions and expletives, as well as bold metaphors and colloquialisms (such as 'an Iliad of woes', and 'stale and cold' of offences). His tone can be angry, ironical or sarcastic, more rarely pathetic or humorous; and he indulges in forceful invective and the vulgar personal abuse that had become popular in his day (notably of Aeschines at 18, *On the Crown* 129-30). There are also some striking personifications of abstract nouns ('Peace, which has destroyed the walls of your allies and is now building houses for your ambassadors', 19, *On the False Embassy* 275). In narrative passages, however, Demosthenes

reverts to a Lysianic plainness of language, as in his memorable description of the advance of Philip:

Evening had already fallen when a messenger arrived bringing to the presidents the news that Elatea had been taken. They were sitting at supper, but they instantly rose from table, some cleared the booths in the agora of their occupants, and unfolded the hurdles, while others summoned the generals and ordered the attendance of the trumpeter. The commotion spread through the whole city. At dawn the next day the presidents summoned the Council to the Council House, while you flocked to the assembly, and before the Council could introduce the business and prepare the agenda, the whole body of citizens had taken their places on the hill. The Council arrived, the presidents formally reported the intelligence they had received, and introduced the courier. As soon as he had spoken, the herald asked, 'Who wishes to speak?' No one came forward. The herald repeated his question again and again, but still no one rose to speak, although all the generals were there, and all the orators, and although the country with her civic voice was calling for the man who should speak for her salvation; for we may justly regard the voice, which the herald raises as the laws direct, as the civic voice of our country.

(18, *On the Crown* 169-70)

The passage also illustrates the effective use of repetition, as later in the same speech does 'you cannot, men of Athens, you cannot have been in the wrong' (208).

Some passages in Demosthenes, on the other hand, are very complex in their order of words and sequence of thought. Dionysius (*Thucydides* 53-4) compared these to passages in Thucydides, quoting the opening of the *Third Philippic* as an example:

Although many speeches have been made, men of Athens, at almost every meeting of the assembly about the offences which Philip has committed since he signed the peace treaty, not only against you but against the other states; and although everyone, I am sure, would say, if they do not actually put it into practice, that our counsels and our actions should be directed to curbing his insolence and bringing him to book, nevertheless I observe that all our affairs have reached such a pass through negligence

that – I am afraid that this, though offensive to say, is true – if all the orators had wanted to come forward with proposals, and you to vote for those which would be most disastrous for your interests, I do not think they could have been reduced to a worse state than they are in today.

(9, *Third Philippic* 1)

It was the combination of Lysianic simplicity and Thucydidean complexity into a 'middle' style, so that a speech satisfied both 'the vulgar and ignorant masses' and 'the well-educated few', that Dionysius regarded as producing the most effective oratory. Isocrates and Plato were highly accomplished practitioners of the middle style, but both fell short of perfection (*Demosthenes* 15-16). That was reserved for Demosthenes.

Works

In antiquity sixty-five speeches attributed to Demosthenes were considered genuine, including some important speeches now lost. The preserved corpus consists of sixty speeches, an *Erotic Essay*, a collection of fifty-six proems and six letters; but a number of the private orations in particular, and also the *Funeral Speech* (60) and the *Erotic Essay* (61) are spurious. Up to nine speeches were delivered by Apollodorus; of these, statistical evidence suggests that six were the work of a single author other than Demosthenes (46, 49, 50, 52, 53, 59) and a seventh may belong to this group (47), one (51) was by a third author, and one (45) was a genuine speech of Demosthenes. The authenticity of the following is more or less questionable: 7 (?by Hegesippus), 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 25, 26, 40, 42, 43, 44, 48, 56, 58 (?by Dinarchus), letters 5 and 6. Demosthenes himself was responsible for publishing many of the speeches, but some (including the doubtful *Fourth Philippic* and, it is often thought, *Against Meidias*) were part of a collection circulated after his death, and the spurious speeches were included in this and similar collections. The proems will have been written as models for imitation by his pupils, who included Cineas, an ambassador of King Pyrrhus of Epirus (Plutarch, *Pyrrhus* 14).

As we saw above, Demosthenes launched his legal career by prosecuting his former guardians, beginning with (in the now regular ordering) speech 27, *Against Aphobus I*. This speech already displays the hallmarks of Demosthenic oratory, with its forcefulness and variety, and a serious, somewhat imperious ethos; and it reveals even in the young Demosthenes a firm grasp of rhetorical techniques (though he no

doubt received some help from Isaeus). The brief proem (1-3) contains the standard elements of attacking the opponent's intransigence, profession of inexperience and a request for a fair hearing. This is followed by a short narrative (4-6) and the proofs (7-48, ending with a recapitulation), which consist mainly of statements supported by the direct evidence (*pistis atechnos*) of depositions, rather than argument from probability. After the proofs comes a refutation of his opponent's arguments (48-59), which may be considered part of the proofs section; and the speech closes with an epilogue (60-9), containing indirect recapitulation and a direct appeal to the jurors which is full of pathos ('I beg you, therefore, gentlemen of the jury, I entreat, I implore you...'). Elsewhere Demosthenes displays great versatility in his composition, adapting the format of a speech to the specific demands of the occasion.

Demosthenes' clients were wealthy, and his main purpose as a logographer was clearly the practical one of making money. Even in private cases, however, there might be a political side to his acceptance of a commission, as is shown by speech 45, *Against Stephanus I*. Demosthenes composed this speech for Apollodorus, when he was prosecuting Stephanus in 349 for bearing false witness on behalf of Apollodorus' stepfather, the famous banker Phormio. Demosthenes indulges in a bitter attack on Phormio, yet at the original trial in 350 he had written the brilliant speech 36, *For Phormio*, which not only led to Apollodorus being fined, but also contained a bitter attack on *him*. Demosthenes has very rapidly changed sides, and the reason seems to be that around the time of the second trial Apollodorus began advocating the use of the Theoric Fund to finance the struggle against Philip, as Demosthenes himself was doing in the *Olynthiacs* against the law of Eubulus. Demosthenes' action laid him open to attack (Aeschines accused him of showing the speech for Phormio to Apollodorus before the trial and, much later, Plutarch criticised his morality), but for Demosthenes the public interest will have taken priority over codes of conduct.

Demosthenes' forensic speeches cover a wide range of subjects in both private and public cases, and amply illustrate his great talent for character portrayal and logical argument. Among the private speeches 39, *Against Boeotus I*, concerns a dispute between a legitimate son, Mantitheus, and his allegedly illegitimate half-brother, Boeotus, over the latter's right to use the name Mantitheus. This is one of the rare cases in which we know the jury's verdict: it is clear from Mantitheus' speech in a subsequent lawsuit (40, *Against Boeotus II*) that Demosthenes' client had lost. The task of detecting the weaknesses and misrepresentations in his arguments is therefore made slightly easier than normal, but is no

less intriguing for that. One of Demosthenes' finest private orations is 54, *Against Conon*, an action for battery (*dikê aikeias*) brought by Ariston against Conon. Character portrayal is at its finest here, and in a vivid narrative Ariston tells of his first encounter with Conon's permanently drunk sons and the later fight in which he was nearly beaten to death: the simple, decent youth shrinks from repeating the floods of abominable language used by his brutal attackers. Finally, speech 55, *Against Callicles*, in which Callicles has sued the defendant for flood-damage to his land caused by a wall blocking a water-course, contains not only the characterisation of an exasperated young farmer, but also some rare touches of humour. Demosthenes went on composing speeches for clients throughout his career, although he did not appear in person in private cases after entering public life in the late 350s.

Many lawsuits involving offences against the state (*graphai*) had a hidden political agenda. In effect, Demosthenes' earliest public speeches are all protests against the heavy taxation burden placed on the wealthy, and are consistent with the conservative policy of Eubulus. For example, in his first public speech (22, *Against Androtion*) the well-known politician Androtion, who had made himself unpopular by presiding over a commission for collecting tax arrears, is attacked on the technical charge of making an illegal proposal; and that the trial forms part of a political programme is further suggested by the fact that a long passage from this speech is repeated in speech 24, *Against Timocrates*. Demosthenes' special method, however, is to take things to a still higher level: the charge against Androtion is systematically generalised and elevated until his condemnation seems essential for the well-being of the entire state. Another illustration is 20, *Against Leptines*, the first public speech delivered by Demosthenes in person, and unique for being directed against Leptines' law rather than the proposer himself (because a year had elapsed since its passing, and so he was no longer personally liable). Here Demosthenes argues for the repeal of the law, which invalidated grants of immunity from performing liturgies (expensive public services), and has to show that the benefits immediately accruing from it are outweighed by a return to the old system. This clearly was a matter that directly affected members of Demosthenes' own class – one of the losers by the law was Eubulus – but again Demosthenes broadens the discussion into one concerning the national interest and the dangers of change. The fourth speech in this group (23, *Against Aristocrates*) is our main source of evidence for Thracian affairs of the period, and also for the Athenian homicide law.

Nevertheless, not all of Demosthenes' public speeches were

necessarily politically motivated. Speech 21, *Against Meidias*, is another prosecution brought by Demosthenes himself, this time against a long-standing enemy who had punched him in the face at the theatre. It contains important evidence for the concept of insolent behaviour (*hybris*), and is interesting for the question as to whether the speech was ever actually delivered. It has further been suggested that there was a political motive behind the prosecution (i.e. Meidias was connected with Eubulus, whom Demosthenes was for some reason attacking in 347/6), but in this particular instance deep hatred was the more likely cause of Demosthenes' action.

Demosthenes' overriding concern with the welfare of the state as a whole naturally manifests itself most clearly in his deliberative speeches. As might be expected, the early Demosthenic examples of this type of oratory (beginning with 14, *On the Symmories*) contain the regular topics recommended by the handbooks, of expediency, honour, justice and practicability:

Other points I will, with your permission, discuss later, but now, starting from principles admitted by all, I will try to explain what I consider the best policy.

(16, *For the Megalopolitans* 3)

The speeches are compact and to the point, and the antithetical style of the *Symmories* reflects the influence of Thucydides. It is also typically symmetrical in its arrangement, with Demosthenes' main theme (his proposal for taxation reform) in the centre. When, however, Demosthenes began his crusade of opposition to Philip in the *Philippics* (the term is usually extended to cover the three *Olynthiacs*, *On the Peace* and *On the Chersonese*), he dispensed with notions of honour and justice, and responded to Philip's aggression by advocating opposition to him as the only possible course of action. To underscore this he developed the concept of a national character. Expediency and self-interest meant the preservation of Athenian traditions, an argument that reached one of its peaks in the *Third Philippic*:

I do not, however, suggest that you should invite the rest, unless you are ready to do for yourselves what is necessary; for it would be futile to abandon our own interests and pretend that we are protecting those of others, or to overlook the present dangers and alarm our neighbours with dangers to come. I do not suggest this, but I do contend that we must send supplies to

the forces in the Chersonese and satisfy all their demands, and while we make preparations ourselves, we must summon, collect, instruct and exhort the rest of the Greeks. That is the duty of a city with a reputation such as yours enjoys. But if you imagine that Greece will be saved by Chalcidians or Megarians, while you run away from the task, you imagine wrongly. For they may think themselves lucky if they can save themselves separately. But this is a task for you; it was for you that your ancestors won this privilege and bequeathed it to you at great and manifold risk.

(9, *Third Philippic* 73-4)

Demosthenes is unashamedly patriotic and conservative, and national character is again the underlying theme of two of his most famous forensic speeches. In the first (19, *On the False Embassy*) Demosthenes attempts by vivid narrative rather than cogent argument (and without witnesses) to convince the jurors that Aeschines had been bribed by Philip during the negotiations leading to the Peace of Philocrates. Two features are particularly worthy of note. As often in his public speeches, Demosthenes keeps the attention of the jurors by involving them in his own thoughts – he conducts a dialogue with himself, employing questions and answers and regularly beginning new topics with the particle *toinun* ('again' or 'well then'). In addition, he indulges in the by now *de rigueur* personal attack on his opponent's life and character.

The second of these (18, *On the Crown*; often called by its Latin title, *De Corona*) is Demosthenes' finest speech, which has been acclaimed since antiquity as amongst the greatest orations of all. Demosthenes appeared as an advocate (*synēgoros*) on behalf of Ctesiphon, who had been prosecuted by Aeschines on a charge of making an illegal proposal (*graphē paranomōn*), but the trial was in reality a contest over the opposing policies of Demosthenes and Aeschines. It is clear that, technically, Ctesiphon had not followed the correct procedure when proposing a crown for Demosthenes, and Demosthenes is faced with the problem of where to address this weak point without undermining his whole case. His solution is to sandwich it between two stronger arguments, in the hope that he will thereby induce the jurors to overlook the legal technicalities on which Aeschines had insisted. He divides his account of his public services into three, cleverly beginning with the charges which he claims are 'foreign to the indictment' (34, *exō tēs graphês*). This serves as the narrative of the speech (18-52) and involves a discussion of the charges Aeschines has made against him over the

Peace of Philocrates; Demosthenes turns the tables on his opponent, with feigned indignation that he had dared to mention this episode. Having thus won the goodwill of the jurors, Demosthenes finally, it seems, turns to the actual indictment in section 53, but in fact he precedes his reply with the second part of the defence of his policy, concerning events between 346 and 340, and his own trierarchic law. This does not end until section 110:

My remaining task, I think, is to speak of the proclamation and of the audit; for I hope that what I have already said has been sufficient to satisfy you that my policy was the best, and that I have been the people's friend and zealous in your service. Yet I pass by the most important of my public actions, first, because I conceive that my next duty is to submit my explanations in respect of the actual charge of illegality, secondly, because, even if I say nothing about the rest of my policy, your own knowledge will serve my purpose equally well.

(18, *On the Crown* 110)

This is a classic example of the figure *paraleipsis* (Lat. *praeteritio*) – Demosthenes has no intention of passing over his most important public acts. Indeed, they are to form the core of the third part of the defence of his policy, which is the most eloquent section of the entire speech (160-226). More importantly still, Demosthenes has broken up his long narrative into three far more effective shorter units, and between the second and third he can insert his brief reply (110-25) to the actual charge of illegal proposal, as well as a scurrilous attack on Aeschines (126-59). The jurors are then quickly immersed in the exciting build-up to Chaeronea (160-226), and legal technicalities pale into insignificance. Even the fact that Demosthenes' policy had ultimately failed at Chaeronea is hidden by his emphasis on national character:

Since he lays so much stress on results, let me venture on a paradox. And by Zeus and the gods, if it seems extravagant, let none of you be surprised, but still give sympathetic consideration to what I am saying. Suppose that the future had been revealed to all of us, that everyone had known what would happen, and that you, Aeschines, had predicted and protested, shouting and storming – though in fact you never opened your mouth – even then the city could not have departed from that policy, if she had any regard for honour, or for our ancestors,

or for the days that are to come. As it is, we seem to have failed, which is the common lot of humanity, whenever God so wills. But then, if Athens, after claiming primacy over the others, had run away from her claims, she would have been held guilty of betraying everybody to Philip. If, without striking a blow, she had abandoned the cause for which our forefathers flinched from no peril, is there a man who would not have spat at you? At you, not at Athens, not at me.

(*id.* 199-200)

Demosthenes goes on to recall the Athenians' valiant actions in the Persian Wars, employing striking pathos, and once again he has widened the scope of his argument far beyond the limits of the charge:

But you cannot, men of Athens, you cannot have done wrongly when you undertook danger for the freedom and safety of all; I swear it by our forefathers who bore the brunt of battle at Marathon, who stood in order of battle at Plataea, who fought in the sea-battles of Salamis and Artemisium; and by many other brave men lying in our public tombs, whom the city buried accounting them all equally worthy of the same honour, Aeschines, not the successful or the victorious among them alone. Rightly so. For what was the duty of brave men was accomplished by all, and their fortune was such as the Divine allotted to each of them.

(*id.* 208)

Not all of what Demosthenes says is true, but he steam-rollers his opponent. The facts of the case itself seem of little relevance, what really matters is Athens' greatness – and Demosthenes himself is her greatest champion:

When the city was at liberty to choose the best policy, when there was a competition of patriotism open to all, I manifestly made the best speeches, and all business was conducted by my resolutions, my statutes, my diplomacy, but not one of you ever put in an appearance – except when you must needs insolently oppose my measures. But when certain deplorable events had taken place, and there was a call, not for counsellors, but for men who would obey orders, who were ready to injure their country for pay, and willing to flatter strangers, then you and

your party were at your post, great men with shining equipages. I was powerless, I admit, but I was still a better patriot than you.
(*id.* 320)

The jurors agreed.