Demosthenes


2) Sender(s): Demosthenes, the fourth-century B.C. Athenian orator, who urged Athens to resist Philip II of Macedon (cf. AESCHINES §2).¹ The authenticity of the letters, not doubted in antiquity (Worthington 2003, 585), has been the subject of vigorous debate in modern scholarship.² The broad modern consensus is that some, but not all, of the letters are authentic (López Eire 1976, 233-4, Klauck 2006, 114): letters 1-4 are now usually regarded as genuine but letter 5 as pseudepigraphic (e.g. Goldstein 1968, Clavaud 1987);³ while letter 6 is controversial (probably authentic for Worthington 2003, but viewed as pseudepigraphic by Goldstein 1968, 261-4).⁴ If some of the letters are indeed authentic, this would make them among the very earliest Greek letters to survive independently as part of a collection in the ms tradition (letters 1-4, 6 deal with events in the late 320s B.C.).⁵

3) Extent and range of length

There are six letters in the fullest version of the collection in the mss (see §5). The mean average length in García Ruiz-Hernández-Muñoz 2012 is 92.67 lines, but this conceals a wide divergence between letters 1-3 (average 150.67 lines) and 4-6 (average 34.67 lines). The longest letter is 3 (231 lines), the shortest 6 (13 lines).

4) Dating of the collection

The earliest evidence for a letter from the collection is a late-second/early-first century B.C. papyrus preserving a large part of letter 3 (P.Lit.Lond. 130; see Clavaud 1987, 71-2). The earliest reference to the letters as a group is by Cicero in the mid-first century B.C., who says (at Orator 4.15-16) that ‘from the letters’ (ex epistulis) of Demosthenes one learns of his dedication in studying with Plato, with apparent reference to letter 5.3 (where Demosthenes

¹ See OCD s.v. Demosthenes (2).
² The letters were condemned as pseudepigraphic in the influential treatment of Wilamowitz 1898. For the history of the debate see Clavaud 1987, 2-7.
³ Blass (e.g. 1875) thought 1-3 were authentic, but was doubtful about the rest, especially 4 and 5.
⁴ Goldstein would attribute letter 6 to an Atticising forger of the second century A.D.
⁵ Cf. ISOCRATES and contrast (e.g.) the extant letters of Epicurus (late 4th/early 3rd c. B.C.), which are, however, embedded in Diogenes Laertius; see Appendix 1 Excluded Collections. [X-REF]
refers to his addressee Heracleodorus’ education by Plato. Quintilian (late-first century A.D.) compares (in very general terms) the letters of Cicero and Demosthenes (10.1.107-8).

There are several further quotations and citations of most of the letters from the early second century A.D. onwards: letter 2 is referred to by Plutarch, *Dem.* 26.2, parts of letters 1 and 2 are preserved in second-century A.D. papyri (P.Oxy. 2549; P.Oslo. 1471 + P.Yale 1540), Harpocrateon (second century A.D.) cites letters 2 and 3. It seems likely, therefore, that the collection consisted of at least letters 1-3 (probably also letter 4, which Goldstein 1968 argues is very similar stylistically to 1-3; possibly also letter 5, which appears known to Cicero) by the third century B.C. (Goldstein 1968, 31-4, Worthington 2003, 585-6); the presence of letter 6 is less easy to confirm (it is missing from the oldest extant ms: see §5, although Worthington 2003 considers it probably authentic).

5) Arrangement of letters in mss

Unlike AESCHINES and ISOCRATES, the letters of Demosthenes are transmitted only with the main corpus of his works (see §9 below). There are two main orders visible in the mss. The order 1, 4, 2, 5, 3 is found in Parisinus graecus 2934 (9th c.; =S in Clavaud 1987), the oldest ms of the letters. A different order 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 is found in the other two principal mss: Marcianus graecus 416 (coll. 536, 10th c.; =F in Clavaud 1987) and Marcianus graecus 418 (coll. 312, 10th c.; =Q in Clavaud 1987); it is this order which is adopted in the Aldine (1499) and therefore subsequent editions. All the other mss are apographs or relatives of the three principal ones.

It is not clear which is the older or more authoritative order: see §8.

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6 Cf. the similar reference at Cic. *Brut.* 31.121 to Demosthenes’ admiration for Plato being mentioned ‘in one letter’ (*in quadam epistula*). Both *Orator* and *Brutus* date to 46-44 B.C. See in general on the influence of the Demosthenic letters on Cicero Bishop 2019, ch. 5.

7 The reference appears to be to letter 2.17, on the reasons for Demosthenes’ flight from Athens after the charge brought against him in the Harpalus affair of 324/3 B.C.

8 s.vv. Καλαύρεια (κ 13), Ἐρανίζοντες (ε 129), Φθόην (φ 14). See further Clavaud 1987, 69-70 on references to letters 1-4 in imperial and late antique grammarians.

9 It concerns the same period in Demosthenes’ life, viz. his exile from Athens following the Harpalus affair.

10 See also n. 3 above.


12 This order is also found in Matritensis 4637 (15th c.; =T in Clavaud 1987), with letter 6 appended (Clavaud 1987, 73).

13 Clavaud 1987 divides the mss into three families, based on their principal mss S, F, Q; Dilts 2002, i.viii-xii and Goldstein 1968, 8 divide the mss into two families, one headed by S, the other by FQ. See now García Ruiz-Hernández-Muñoz 2016, 109-13.
6) Publication history

The letters of Demosthenes were first published in the Aldine edition of the Greek epistolographers (1499); the letters were omitted from the Aldine edition of Demosthenes’ speeches (1504). In the Aldine the letters are ordered 1-6; subsequent editions continue this order (e.g. the ‘editio Wecheliana’ of 1550). The letters were first published as part of the Demostenic corpus by Lambinus (1570) and Wolf (1572); since then they have been included in the editions of Demosthenes by Reiske (1770-75), Bekker (1823-24), Schaefer (1823-26), Dobson (1828), Baiter and Sauppe (1841-43), Dindorf (1846-51), Voemel (1857), Blass (1885-89), Rennie (1931). The most recent editions of the letters are by Clavaud (1987) and García Ruiz-Hernández Muñoz (2016): see §10.

7) Addressees and summary of contents

Five of the six letters address the ‘Council and People of Athens’ (1-4, 6); one is addressed to a private individual, Heracleodorus (5). The division between public letters to the Athenian people and one to a private citizen resembles the distinct types of addressee in AESCHINES. All six letters carry titles (given below) in the mss: the title of letters 1-4 attempt to summarise their broad subject matter (in the form of περί plus genitive), those of 5 and 6 refer to the addressee of the letter. All six letters also contain the normal opening epistolary formula ὁ δεῖνα τῷ δεῖνι χαίρειν at the beginning of the letter (at the beginning of §2 in letter 1). The titles appear to be early, since versions of those for letters 2 and 3 are attested in Harpocration (second century A.D.).

Letters 1-4 purport to be written by Demosthenes during his self-imposed exile late in life on the island of Calauria (now Póros) in the Saronic Gulf, after his trial for the Harpalus affair (324/323 B.C.). Letter 5 appears to be from a much earlier period in Demosthenes’ life (around 355 B.C.), since it seems to refer to him as young man and yet to become a leading citizen (5.5). The dramatic date of letter 6 is also late in Demosthenes’ life, referring to the Athenian struggle with Antipater (323/322 B.C.) following the death of Alexander.19

14 Cf. AESCHINES §6.
16 Cf. AESCHINES 3, 7, 11, 12.
17 See AESCHINES §5: the letters of AESCHINES may be composed in response to and imitation of those of Demostenes.
18 See e.g. letters 2.14, 3.42. On Demosthenes and the Harpalus affair see Worthington 2012, ch. 14.
19 It is usually thought that this letter refers to the upcoming battle of Crannon (e.g. Goldstein 1968, Clavaud 1987), in which Antipater was victorious, ending Lamian war; but it may refer to the battle against Antipater at Thermopylae, where Antipater struggled and sought refuge in Lamia (Worthington 2003).
Letter 1 (Περὶ τῆς ὁμονοίας, ‘On political concord’) has a dramatic date between Alexander’s death (323 B.C.) and the Lamian war of 323/322 B.C.: it gives advice of a very general kind to the Athenians in the wake of the death of Alexander. Letter 2 (Περὶ τῆς ἰδίας καθόδου, ‘On his own return home’) is an apologia for Demosthenes’ career and loyalty to Athens; it bemoans the injustice of his current exile and his present troubles and cites his past behaviour in relation to Philip and on leaving Athens as evidence of his loyalty. Letter 3 (Περὶ τῶν Λυκούργος παίδων, ‘On the children of Lycurgus’) is a defence of the reputation of Lycurgus and an attack on Athens’ treatment of his sons, who are being punished for the alleged crimes of the father. Letter 4 (Περὶ τῆς Θηραμένους βλασφημίας (in S) ‘On the slanders of Theramenes’) replies to the accusations of Theramenes that Demosthenes is cursed and brings bad luck to Athens. Letter 5 (Πρὸς Ἡρακλεόδωρον, ‘To Heracleodorus’) complains about the addressee’s involvement in the arrest and prosecution of a certain Epitimus and urges him not to disappoint Demosthenes’ good opinion of him. Letter 6 (Πρὸς τὴν βουλὴν καὶ τὸν δήμον τῶν Αθηναίων, ‘To the council and people of the Athenians’), sends news in the form of the bearer of the letters about the progress of the struggle against Antipater.

8) Characteristics of the collection

There are two different orders preserved in the medieval mss. The first, represented by ms S (9th c.), contains the letters in the order 1, 4, 2, 5, 3 (omitting letter 6). The second, represented by mss F and Q (10th c.), contains the letters in the order 1-6 (see §5). It is not clear which order is older or more authoritative.

The 1-6 order groups the four letters from the period following the Harpalus affair (1-4) and then two shorter letters, one of earlier dramatic date (5), the other slightly later (6). The first three letters each increase in length, but letter 4 is of around the same length as letter 1. The letter to Heracleodorus (5) interrupts the letters to the Council and People of Athens (1-4, 6).

The 1, 4, 2, 5, 3 order groups three letters to the Council and People of Athens (1, 4, 2), the first two letters being of about the same length and the third substantially longer; then the much shorter letter to Heracleodorus (5); then the longest letter in the collection (3), which is again to the Council and People of Athens. This arrangement does not appear to be organised strictly by addressee, type of addressee or length.

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20 See OCD s.v. Lycurgus (3).
21 Cf. AESCHINES 12.4.
22 Πρὸς τὰς Θηραμένους βλασφημίας in QF.
Neither arrangement appears to arrange the letters in the order of their dramatic date. This appears to be 5, 3, 2, 4, 1, (6). The 1, 4, 2, 5, 3 of S would therefore arrange the four letters to the Council and People of Athens in reverse chronological order, with the interruption of letter 5. Nevertheless, the precise principles of arrangement for both orders (and their relative priority) remain unclear.

9) Associations in mss

The letters of Demosthenes have descended only in manuscripts that contain the Demosthenic corpus and have not been included in the medieval compendia of the Greek epistolographers (‘epistolaria’), such as those represented by Harleianus 5610 and its relatives (for which see CHION §9, EURIPIDES §9). The principal mss of the letters of Demosthenes (S, F, Q), are among the oldest medieval mss for the whole Demosthenic corpus.

S (Parisinus gr. 2934, 9th c.) contains fifty-nine speeches of Demosthenes (omitting speech 12), not in the standard order, but rather 1-4, 8, 7, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 22, 24, 23, 20, 21, 18, 19, 25, 26, 59, 36, 45, 46, 37, 38, 32-35, the exordia, letters 1, 4, 2, 5, 3, speeches 27-31, 54, 56, 48, 47, 55, 50, 51, 53, 49, 52, 39-44, 57, 58, 61, 60, 13, 14, 16, 15, 17.1-10.

F (Marcianus gr. 416, 10th c.) contains the life of Demosthenes by Libanius, the prolegomena to the speeches by Ulpian of Ascalon (the teacher of Libanius), then the complete corpus of speeches (sixty-one speeches, in the order 1-61 (though 16 precedes 15 and 22 precedes 19), the exordia, letters 1-6, Lysias’ Epitaphios.

Q (Marcianus gr. 418, 10th c.) contains only a part of the Demosthenic corpus: thirty-two speeches in the order 18, 19, 32-61, the exordia, letters 1-6.

10) Current text-critical and editorial work

The most recent critical edition is García Ruiz-Hernández-Muñoz 2016, which supplements and corrects Clavaud 1987, especially with reference to two mss located in Spain and the 1550 edition published by Wechel; Clavaud 1987’s detailed account of the transmission of the letters remains key. García Ruiz and Hernández Muñoz are engaged on producing a bilingual (Greek/Spanish) edition of the letters of Demosthenes and Aeschines (see AESCHINES §10).

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11) Modern critical editions and indicative bibliography of significant items

Editions


Other significant works

- Aldus, M. Δημοσθένους, λόγοι δύο και ἕξηκοντα. Λιβανίου σοφιστοῦ ὑποθέσεις εἰς τοὺς αὐτοὺς λόγους. Βίος Δημοσθένους κατ᾽αὐτὸν Λιβανίον. Βίος Δημοσθένους κατὰ Πλούταρχον (Venice, 1504).
- Baiter, J.G, Sauppe, H. Oratores Attici (Zurich, 1839-50).
- Blass, F. Demosthenis orationes (Leipzig, 1885-89).
- Blass, F., Die Attische Beredsamkeit (vol. 3.1 Demosthenes) (Leipzig, 1877).
- Canfora, L., Per la storia del testo di Demostene (Bari, 1968).
- Demosthenous kai Aischinou Epistolai (Paris, 1550) [editio Wecheliana in García Ruiz-Hernández Muñoz 2016]
• Dindorf, G., Demosthenes (vols. 1-4) (Oxford, 1846-51).
• Dobson, W.S. Demostenis et Aeschinis quae exstant omnia (vols. 1-10) (London, 1828).
• Lambinus, D. Δημοσθένους, λόγοι και προοίμια δημαγορικά, καὶ ἐπιστολαί (Paris, 1570).
• Reiske, I.I. Oratorum Graecorum, quorum princeps est Demosthenes monumeta ingenii, materia critica, comm. aliorum et suis instructa (vols. 1-12) (Leipzig, 1770-75).
• Rennie, W., Demosthenis orationes (vol. 3) (Oxford, 1931).
• Sachsenweger, H., De Demosthenis epistulis (Leipzig, 1935).
• Schaefer, G.H. Demosthenis quae supersunt e bonis libris a se emendate (vols. 1-9) (London, 1823-26).
• Wolf, H. Demosthenis et Aeschinis principum Graeciae Oratorum Opera (Frankfurt, 1694; first edition: Basel, 1572).
• Worthington, I. Speeches 60 and 61; Prologues; Letters (Austin, 2006).