

PARADOXOLOGY AND POLITICS: HOW ISOCRATES SELLS HIS SCHOOL AND HIS POLITICAL AGENDA IN THE *BUSIRIS*

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THE VERY EXISTENCE OF Isocrates' *Busiris* has given rise to some perplexity among scholars. When one considers the way Isocrates sometimes characterizes his authorial aims, the *Busiris* does not appear to be the sort of speech that he ought to have written. In the proemium of the *Encomium of Helen*, for example, Isocrates fiercely opposes what he regards as useless speeches on paradoxical subjects and argues that writers of such speeches ought instead to compose useful speeches about important political matters (10.4–5, 9; see also 4.1–10). Moreover, the *Busiris* itself contains an implicit criticism of paradoxography since it is an open letter that takes to task the rhetorical education of Polycrates, a writer of paradoxical speeches *par excellence* (11.1–8).¹ However, these criticisms of paradoxography do not sit so comfortably alongside the sample speeches that Isocrates includes as demonstrations of proper encomia in both the *Helen* and *Busiris* (10.16–69; 11.10–29), both of which appear to be instances of the very genre these two works criticize, namely, speeches that are paradoxical because they praise subjects that are thought to be unworthy of such exalted language.² This problem is especially pronounced in the case of the *Busiris* since the mythological figure who gives this work its name is—to a much greater extent than Helen—an unambiguously notorious villain for whom praise seems entirely inappropriate. Thus, among the few scholars who have treated this puzzling letter, there is very little agreement about what Isocrates—who claims to teach and to write useful and politically relevant discourses—hopes to accomplish by writing what appears to be, by his own standards, a useless and paradoxical encomium (11.10–29).

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1. Little is known about Polycrates apart from what we learn here in the *Busiris*, but testimonies about his writings suggest that he was most noteworthy for his paradoxography. For more on Polycrates, see section 1 below as well as Livingstone 2001, 28–40 and Blank 2014, 112–14.

2. Although both *Helen* and *Busiris* share this puzzling feature of adopting a paradoxical subject while emphatically denying the usefulness of paradoxical literature, I have chosen to treat *Busiris* in isolation because there is considerably less literature that deals with this problem in the *Busiris* and I think it merits an extended discussion. I will, however, occasionally refer to treatments of this problem in the *Helen* where they are relevant. For the most important discussions of this problem in connection with *Helen*, see Bons 1997; Blank 2013; 2014; Braun 1982; Eucken 1983; Heilbrunn 1977; Kennedy 1958; Papillon 1996; Poulakos 1986; Schwarze 1999; Tuszynska-Maciejewska 1987; Zajonz 2002.

Although earlier scholarship on the *Busiris* tended to dismiss the treatise as a mediocre rhetorical exercise,³ more recently a number of scholars have taken this neglected work more seriously and have proposed various ways of understanding Isocrates' complicated relationship with paradoxology. The fact that *Busiris* is a paradigm subject for a paradoxical encomium has led scholars such as Phiroze Vasunia and Niall Livingstone to interpret the speech as concerned primarily with pure rhetorical form. On such interpretations, the actual content of the speech is not what is most important to Isocrates. His concern is rather to show that Polycrates has missed the mark by not properly applying the correct forms of speech to the subject of *Busiris*. In 2001 Vasunia argued that the *Busiris* actually goes beyond typical paradoxical speeches in its overt lack of seriousness and that this self-reflexive parody intentionally pushes all of the emphasis onto the technical features of the speech, as opposed to its content.⁴ In the same year Livingstone likewise argued that Isocrates' primary concern lies in the technical features of the encomium rather than in its content. Livingstone, however, argues that the *Busiris* "illustrate[s] how a resolute adherence to pure encomium, as opposed to defense, will tend to nullify any paradoxical quality a subject may have."⁵

Most recently, Thomas Blank has written analyses of the *Busiris* and the *Encomium of Helen* in which he argues that, although both speeches criticize paradoxical literature and try to demonstrate how a moral epideictic speech should be constructed, only in the *Encomium of Helen* does Isocrates follow his own prescriptions. Blank argues that Isocrates intentionally deconstructs the impression that the encomium of *Busiris* (11.10–29) is a serious work in his defense of that encomium (11.30–43). For Blank, Isocrates' encomium has some of the very same problems that Isocrates criticizes Polycrates' encomium for having. Moreover, Isocrates' arguments—in his defense of the encomium (11.30–43)—that aim to remove this impression are not convincing. On Blank's reading, Isocrates' defense of his encomium of *Busiris* fails to remove the paradoxical quality of an encomium with *Busiris* as its subject, but he instead thinks that this defense suggests that Theseus would be a suitable topic for a successful encomium with the same content. Thus, although Blank does think that there is serious political and moral content in the background of the *Busiris* if we make the necessary substitution of subject, he thinks that the speech, as it stands, fails to abide by the standards of successful epideictic discourse that Isocrates himself formulates in the proemia of both the *Encomium of Helen* and the *Busiris*.⁶

In what follows I will defend the idea that Isocrates' aim in the *Busiris* is to demonstrate the superiority of his educational program over the education offered by a competing school, that of Polycrates. I hope to show that Isocrates

3. Among those who dismiss the speech as unimportant is Georges Mathieu, who has commented on the triviality of the speech, regarding it as an early and juvenile work that was designed merely to discredit Polycrates, and was, according to Mathieu, of no lasting importance for Isocrates as he moves on to write important political works (in Mathieu and Brémond 2003, 1: 184). Robert Flacelière (1961, 54) has likewise emphasized the triviality of the speech, claiming that the quality of the work is "rather mediocre" and, moreover, that the work is "on a subject that Isocrates himself [. . .] does not take very seriously" (my translation).

4. Vasunia 2001, 195–99.

5. Livingstone 2001, 13.

6. Blank 2013, 19–29; 2014, 108–47.

does so by composing the very sort of speech that he claims to teach, one that gives useful advice on important political matters. Thus, on my reading, the *Busiris* belongs to a genre of educational tracts that educators in fourth-century Greece used to advertise for their own educational programs and to turn prospective students away from the programs of rival educators.⁷ Isocrates' aim in this tract is to dissuade prospective students from Polycrates' educational program by demonstrating the superiority of his own signature curriculum: the education in persuasive speeches that offer advice on important matters of state. The encomium of Busiris (11.10–29) that forms the centerpiece of this tract ostensibly praises the Egyptian polity that Isocrates credits to Busiris, but, as I shall argue, Isocrates describes the Egyptian class system in a way that encourages his readers to identify the Egyptian military class with Sparta and the Egyptian priestly class with Athens. I argue that Isocrates uses this mythological narrative to indirectly demonstrate the possibility of Panhellenic unity by depicting the peaceful coexistence of a Spartan-like military class and an Athenian-like priestly class, united in a single state under a common religion. I will try to show that, when considered in light of Isocrates' larger political agenda (which his education in speeches is ultimately designed to promote), it becomes attractive to think that the *Busiris* is best understood as a work whose content Isocrates takes seriously, and that the aim of the work is to lead its readers to endorse not only Isocrates' rhetorical education, but also the political agenda that this education ultimately serves.

1. THE PROEMIUM, 11.1–9

Isocrates' *Busiris* begins as an open letter addressed to the sophist Polycrates, with whom Isocrates hopes to discuss Polycrates' educational program (11.1), to demonstrate how the writings in which he takes the most pride miss the mark (11.4–8) and to instruct him on how he ought to write both encomia and defense speeches (11.9). Little is known about Polycrates beyond what we learn in the *Busiris* but what little evidence survives tells of his reputation as a writer of paradoxical speeches.⁸ This genre for which Polycrates was so notorious—paradoxology—was quite popular among sophists of the late fifth and fourth centuries. Such speeches, which were used primarily to demonstrate the rhetorical prowess of their authors, were devoted to praising or blaming subjects that were thought to be unworthy of such praise or blame.⁹ Although no complete work of Polycrates survives, all of his compositions that are mentioned in the ancient sources appear to be pieces of paradoxology: in addition to the *Defense of Busiris* and the *Prosecution of Socrates*, which Isocrates mentions in the *Busiris*, Polycrates is credited with having written encomia on other notorious

7. For a useful discussion of the diverse genre of educational tracts that flourished in fourth-century Athens, see Collins 2015.

8. For a thorough discussion of sources on Polycrates, see Livingstone 2001, 28–40.

9. Apart from Isocrates' polemical treatments of paradoxical literature, Aristotle has brief discussions of particular pieces of paradoxical literature (*Soph. El.* 174^b32–33; *Rh.* 1401^a13–25, 1401^b20–23) and we also have brief ancient discussions of this genre from Polyb. 12.26, Men. Rhet. 2.1.346, and Gell. *NA* 17.12.1–2. For modern discussions of the genre, see Burgess 1902, 157–66; Pease 1926; Nightingale 1995, 100–102; Bons 1997, 169–71; Vasunia 2001, 193–95; Blank 2013, 2–3, 6–8; 2014, 84–90.

mythological figures, such as an *Encomium of Clytemnestra*, as well as encomia on insignificant things such as an *Encomium of Pebbles* and an *Encomium of Mice*.¹⁰ Our sources give us little indication of what Polycrates' educational program might have been like, but Quintilian mentions Polycrates as the author of a rhetoric handbook (3.1.11), which may indicate that he oversaw a more practical educational program for which he only advertized with paradoxical speeches. But even if Polycrates' educational program was of a more practical nature, Isocrates chooses to criticize Polycrates (with the objective of undermining his status as an educator—11.46–47) by attacking his work in the genre for which he was most notorious, and in particular, by criticizing what was perhaps his proudest (11.4) and most paradoxical show piece: *The Defense of Busiris*.

We learn from Philodemus that encomia of Busiris were paradigmatically paradoxical.¹¹ This is explained by the fact that mythological accounts of Busiris depict him as a king of Egypt who habitually offered his foreign guests as human sacrifices, until he was stopped by Heracles, who, just as he was about to be sacrificed, broke free from the altar and killed Busiris.¹² This myth was a popular subject in Athenian iconography and literature beginning in the middle of the fifth century and became especially popular in the fourth century, when it was the subject of at least five comedies and one satyr-play of Euripides.¹³ In defending Busiris, Polycrates is therefore defending one of the most infamous villains in Greek literature: a killer of foreign guests. But, as a paradoxical writer, Polycrates did not try to exculpate Busiris from this charge of sacrificing guests; he actually amplified the charges by praising Busiris' habit of eating the guests that he sacrificed (11.5, 31–32).

In light of this negative tradition about Busiris, it is surprising that Isocrates does not criticize Polycrates' choice of Busiris as a subject for a defense speech. The real substance of Isocrates' criticism is not that Polycrates should have chosen a better subject, but rather that he has not even written a defense (11.4–8). To clarify Polycrates' mistake, Isocrates resolves to demonstrate how proper praise and defense speeches should be written by composing his own encomium and defense of the same Busiris (11. 9):

ἴνα δὲ μὴ δοκῶ τὸ προχειρότατον ποιεῖν, ἐπιλαμβάνεσθαι τῶν εἰρημένων [μηδὲν ἐπιδεικνὺς τῶν ἐμαιοῦ], περάσομαι σοι διὰ βραχέων δηλῶσαι περὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ὑπόθεσιν, καίπερ οὐ σπουδαίαν οὖσαν οὐδὲ σεμνοῦς λόγους ἔχουσαν, ἐξ ὧν ἔδει καὶ τὸν ἔπαινον καὶ τὴν ἀπολογίαν ποιήσασθαι.

10. Quint. *Inst.* 2.17.4; Alexander, *περὶ ῥητορικῶν ἀφορμῶν* (in Spengel, *Rhet.* 1856, 3); Arist. *Rh.* 1401b15. See also Arist. *Rh.* 1401^a13. The works that I mention are those attributed to Polycrates by name. He may also be the author of other paradoxical encomia mentioned by Isocrates elsewhere: bumblebees (10.12), salt (10.12 and Pl. *Symp.* 117B), as well as beggars and exiles (10.8 and Arist. *Rh.* 1401^b24ff). See also Livingstone 2001, 28–29; Vasunia 2001, 194–95; Blank 2013, 14–15; 2014, 112–13.

11. *On Rhetoric* 1.216–17. See also Vasunia 2001, 193.

12. For further discussion of the Busiris myth, see Livingstone 2001, 73–90; Papillon 2001; Vasunia 2001, 185–93; Blank 2013, 13–14; 2014, 108–11.

13. Starting in the early fifth century, the myth was the subject of numerous Attic vase-paintings. There are also literary versions of the story from the historian Pherecydes of Athens and the epic poet Panyassis of Halicarnassus from the first half of the fifth century (Livingstone 2001, 77; Papillon 2001).

In order that I do not appear to be doing what is easiest—attacking what you have said without presenting anything of my own—I will briefly attempt to expound the same subject for you, even though it is not a serious one and does not have dignified language, for which reasons it is necessary to compose both praise and defense.¹⁴

The fact that Isocrates then goes on to praise a subject who is, according to mythological tradition, completely unworthy of praise, and the fact that this subject is apparently presented as one that is not serious, has led some commentators to think that the encomium that follows is blatantly paradoxical.¹⁵ Such a conclusion, taken together with Isocrates' criticisms of paradoxical literature, would entail that, by Isocrates' own standards, the content of the following speech, at least as it stands, is neither important nor useful.¹⁶ As is sometimes noticed in the literature, Isocrates' criticisms of paradoxical speeches concern the respects in which they fail to satisfy the criteria of a κοινὸς λόγος, the kind of speech that Isocrates teaches.¹⁷ This contrast is laid out most explicitly in the proemium of the *Helen*, where Isocrates explains that κοινοὶ λόγοι (10.11), unlike λόγοι παράδοξοι, are serious, useful, and beneficial because their content is politically (10.5, 9) and morally (10.8) relevant. Perhaps most importantly, κοινοὶ λόγοι contrast with paradoxical discourses in being persuasive (πιστοί, 10.11). In this respect, paradoxical speeches fall short of the primary objective of rhetorical argumentation.¹⁸ Thus, if 11.9 is read as a confession that the subject of this encomium is not serious, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the speech as a whole is paradoxical, and therefore, according to the above criteria, not a serious or useful speech. But by the end of his letter to Polycrates Isocrates does in fact take himself to have successfully demonstrated how encomia and defense speeches ought to be composed (11.44), which makes it attractive to find a charitable way of reading 11.9 that does not require us to conclude that the encomium will be a failure before it even gets off the ground.

Isocrates' claim in 11.9 that his subject is “not serious” and “has no dignified language” is sometimes read as a concession that interrupts the main clause of the sentence. On this construal, ἐξ ὧν picks up the unexpressed objects of δηλῶσαι, which are traditionally interpreted as the “elements” from which praise and defense speeches should be composed. I find this reading unsatisfactory both

14. The Greek text of the *Busiris* follows Mathieu and Brémond's (2003: 1) edition throughout. All translations from the *Busiris* are my own.

15. Mathieu (in Mathieu and Brémond 2003, 1: 184) and Flacelière (1961, 54) appear to take this remark at face value and therefore think that Isocrates is here admitting to the failure of his own speech. Livingstone (2001, 113) takes the claim that the subject of the speech is not serious to explain why he does not devote too much space to it (διὰ βραχέων). Vasunia takes this remark to be an especially clear case of Isocrates signaling to his readers to parodic nature of the *Busiris*. For Vasunia (2001, 195–99), self-reflexive remarks such as this one are meant to highlight the parodic nature of the encomium, and to focus our attention instead on the technical features of the speech such as “diction, style, rhythm, euphony, agility with words,” etc. Blank also takes the remark at face value: insofar as we read the content of the encomium as applying to *Busiris*, this remark, on Blank's view, is a confession of the failure of the encomium that follows by Isocrates' own standards of successful discourse (Blank 2013, 14–18; 2014, 117–20).

16. For Blank, it is only true that the encomium as it stands is paradoxical. If we think of the encomium as one about Theseus, the speech then satisfies all of the Isocratean criteria for useful and important discourse.

17. See, e.g., Blank 2013, 6–8; Bons 1997, 169–71.

18. See Bons 1997, 169–71; Blank 2013, 6–8. Bons (1997, 169) and Blank (2013, 7) also take truthfulness to be a criterion of serious discourse for Isocrates. I will challenge this assumption in section 2.4.

because it leaves it unclear what these necessary elements are, and because δηλῶσαι can be easily construed with what immediately follows it. δηλῶσαι with περὶ is a relatively common expression in Isocrates, which he employs as a complete phrase in contexts much like this one (1.1; 3.35; 4.63–64, 106; 14.3). An examination of these cases makes it clear that δηλῶσαι περὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ὑπόθεσιν is already a complete expression that means something like “expound the same subject.” On this reading, ἐξ ὧν should then be taken closely with the clause that precedes it: the antecedents of ὧν are the alleged concession of the former clause, and the phrase ἐξ ὧν presents these claims as the reason why Isocrates must compose both an encomium (11.10–29) and a defense speech (11.30–43). Isocrates is here claiming that he must compose (notice the middle ποιήσασθαι) both praise and defense because (ἐξ ὧν) Busiris is not a serious subject who has received dignified encomiastic treatment.¹⁹ Unlike the more standard reading according to which Isocrates interrupts his train of thought to draw special attention to the fact that Busiris is a subject unworthy of encomiastic treatment, the present construal puts more distance between Isocrates and the view that Busiris is not a serious subject. This view is presented as a challenge that Isocrates must overcome in this praise and defense of Busiris rather than an apologetic aside: Isocrates has to render Busiris a serious subject by presenting him in terms of the serious, dignified discourse he has not yet received.

In the proemium, Isocrates has criticized Polycrates for his failure to compose a proper defense of Busiris: for Isocrates, one who wishes to praise a person must “show that they have more good attributes than have so far been recognized” and Polycrates has only made the slander against Busiris worse (11.4).²⁰ Therefore, in order to demonstrate the superiority of his educational program, Isocrates will instruct Polycrates in proper speech-composition by composing an encomium of Busiris that follows this prescription. I will discuss this encomium at length in part 2 of this article and argue that Isocrates does not simply compose a show piece that is superior, *qua* paradoxology, to that of Polycrates’, but that Isocrates’ encomium of Busiris (11.10–29) is in fact an example of a serious speech on useful and important political matters (see 10.4–5). In this section I will argue that the encomium exhibits all of the features characteristic of a κοινὸς λόγος: it is politically relevant (10.5, 9), it appeals to significant moral values (10.8), and it is persuasive (10.11), although I shall argue (in section 2.4) that it is persuasive in a way that has not usually been recognized. However, the mythological and poetic

19. I think that οὐδὲ σεμνοῦς λόγους ἔχουσιν in 11.9 is often mistranslated. The Greek literally says that Busiris “does not have dignified language,” which is minimally just a claim about the fact that Busiris *has not received* encomiastic treatment, but translators often treat it as a judgment on Isocrates’ part that Busiris *does not merit* such treatment (Mathieu, in Mathieu and Brémond 2003, 1: 190: “n’appelle pas un style élevé”; Van Hook 1945, 109: “does not call for dignified style”; Mirhady 2000, 52: “calls for no exalted language”). Nothing about the Greek text requires us to take this stronger reading, so I think it better to understand this as a claim about the way Busiris has been treated in literature.

20. The rhetorical maxim that Isocrates cites here is ambiguous. πλεῖω τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἀγαθῶν αὐτοῖς προσόντ’ ἀποφαίνειν could mean either (a) “to make it seem that they have more good attributes than they do” or (b) “to show that they have more good attributes than have so far been recognized” (see Livingstone 2001, 106–7; see also Blank 2014, 153–54). Most commentators and translators have taken this phrase in the first sense (see Blank 2014, 153 n. 319). But I think that the second construal makes better sense of the argument that Isocrates goes on to make. He later tries to discredit that mythological traditions about Busiris by drawing out considerations about his divine genealogy that have not been properly appreciated (11.34–43).

traditions have depicted Busiris so negatively that an encomium about him will require some defense, so Isocrates defends the encomium that he has composed at 11.30–43. I will discuss this defense in part 3 of this article.

2. THE ENCOMIUM OF BUSIRIS' EGYPT, 11.10–29

Here I argue that Isocrates' encomium of Busiris (11.10–29)—which is ostensibly, in the context of the letter to Polycrates, a lesson in encomium composition to a rival educator (see 11.9, 44)—is best understood as an example, to prospective students, of the kind of speech that Isocrates teaches: a persuasive speech that presents paradigms of good political policy and important moral values.²¹

Isocrates' encomium of Busiris begins—as Isocrates' encomia typically do (see 10.16, 23; 9.12–21)—with a noble genealogy: Busiris is the son of Poseidon, and his mother, Libya, was a daughter of Zeus' son Epaphus. But Busiris did not want to be remembered only for his noble birth, rather, he “thought that he should leave behind a memorial of his own virtue for all time” (11.10). The memorial that testifies to Busiris' virtue is the kingdom of Egypt itself, and what follows in the encomium is a description of this Egyptian state, the founding of which Isocrates credits to Busiris.

The first virtue that Isocrates ascribes to Busiris is his selection of the land of Egypt as the most outstanding place to establish his kingdom. Polycrates apparently claimed that Busiris made the Nile flow around his land (11.31). Against Polycrates, Isocrates suggests a more plausible alternative: that Busiris wisely recognized the advantages of the land that were already there, advantages such as natural safety and abundance of resources (11.11–14).²² Having provided this account of Busiris' discovery of the land of Egypt, Isocrates begins his description of Busiris' kingdom, which falls into three stages: first, in 11.15–20 Isocrates describes the Egyptian class system, and explains how the Spartans have used (and misused) the Egyptian warrior class as a model; second, in 11.21–23, he describes the cultural achievements that arose among Busiris' priestly class, and that are reminiscent of the great Athenian cultural accomplishments; and finally, in 11.24–27, he describes the religion that Busiris instituted as that which accounts for the stability of this regime.

Beginning in 11.15, Isocrates tells us that Busiris divided his people up into three groups and gave these three groups different assignments: he put one group

21. For a discussion of the way Isocrates uses epideictic to offer political advice, see Pratt 2006.

22. Blank has suggested that this idealization of the land of Egypt might not be serious after all, because the land does not meet standard Athenian criteria for an ideal site for human settlement (Blank 2013, 18; 2014, 121–24). Blank suggests that, for Isocrates, an ideal land for settlement will not provide abundant resources and security, because this does not allow citizens to develop technical skills and self-restraint (see, e.g., 4.28–31, 7.74–75). On this reading, Egypt, in addition to the subject Busiris, would be an unserious subject and another element that renders the speech, as it stands, paradoxical. But the texts that Blank cites do not indicate that moderate scarcity is a *conditio sine qua non* for the development of arts and virtues. On the contrary, in both of the texts Blank cites, Isocrates praises the abundance of Athens for “provid[ing] that which our nature first needed” (4.28) and credits to the land around Athens the ability to “give birth to and nourish men who not only have natural gifts for crafts, for politics, or for speaking but also excel other in courage and virtue” (7.74). I see no indication in these texts that Isocrates sees abundance and security as an obstacle to their development of the arts and virtues. Isocrates' depiction of Egypt as an abundant country that provides its citizens with the occasion to develop the greatest arts and virtues in fact seems quite in line with what he says elsewhere about the relationship between land, arts, and virtue.

in charge of religious matters, another in charge of crafts, and another in charge of warfare. Busiris arranged these classes in such a way that each of the three groups should only practice its own occupation, because he knew that those who remain continuously engaged in a single occupation master their craft, whereas those who change occupations do not become experts in any task (11.16). Isocrates further claims that this division of occupations, wherein each class directs its attention to doing only its own work, is what accounts for the great success of the Egyptian state, which has been highly praised by the philosophers who discuss politics (11.17).

This reference to philosophers' approval of this principle of political organization is the first of a number of instances in the encomium of Busiris where Isocrates' own intellectual milieu makes an appearance. A strong case has been made by Christoph Eucken that Plato is the intended referent, but others have argued, based on Isocrates' later claim that Pythagoras learned "the rest of philosophy" from the Egyptians (11.28–29), that Isocrates has in mind Pythagoras or contemporary Pythagoreans.²³ There is linguistic evidence for associating the philosopher(s) mentioned here with Pythagoras (cp. μάλιστ' εὐδοκιμοῦντας [11.17] and μάλιστ' εὐδοκίμησεν [11.28]), but, if he in fact intends for us to associate these groups, nothing prevents us from thinking that Isocrates takes Plato to be a kind of Pythagorean, just as Plato's most famous student did.²⁴ As Eucken notices, the prevalence of the present tense in 11.17 strongly suggests contemporaries, and we simply do not know of any contemporary Pythagoreans with the appropriate kinds of interests or stature,²⁵ apart, that is, from Isocrates' chief rival educator, the would-be Pythagorean whom we know to have approved of this principle of political organization as well as the Egyptian constitution.²⁶ In the *Republic*, Plato organizes Callipolis on precisely this principle: that each person should do only that work for which she is naturally suited (369E2–370C6). Plato's estimation of this principle is in fact so high that the definition of justice is ultimately derived from it (432D–433A6). Moreover, commentators have often noticed that the polity that Isocrates goes on to attribute to Busiris has a striking resemblance to the polity of Plato's *Republic*. Our inability to put a precise date on the *Busiris* makes it difficult to determine precisely what the connection between the two works is.²⁷ But it is certainly possible that Isocrates here alludes to Plato's approval of this sort of constitution, whether or not Plato has actually written the *Republic* by the time Isocrates writes the *Busiris* (it may be, for example, that these ideas were already being widely discussed before the *Republic* was actually published). A full exploration of the connections between the two texts is beyond the scope of this present work, and these connections have already been given sufficient attention by

23. See Eucken 1983, 179–83. Teichmüller (1881, 107), Gomperz (1905, 196), and Pohlenz (1913, 216) have also argued for the identification with Plato. Willamowitz (1920, 116), Diès (1959, cxxxiii), and Froidefond (1971, 247) argue in favor of an identification with contemporary Pythagoreans. See also Livingstone 2001, 137–38 for an argument against precise identification.

24. See Arist. *Metaph.* 987^a29–31, where Aristotle explains that Plato's philosophy "in most respects followed the Italians [i.e., the Pythagoreans—see 985^b23–987^a28]."

25. Eucken 1983, 180; see also Livingstone 2001, 138.

26. See *Ti.* 24A2–B3, where Plato finds the same three-class system in Egypt, organized by the same principle that each class do only its own work and not meddle in the others.

27. On the various dates proposed for the *Busiris*, see Livingstone 2001, 40–47.

others.²⁸ Rather, I draw attention to this reference to Plato because it is the first of a number of passages in the encomium in which Isocrates indicates to the reader that his concern in this encomium is with contemporary political issues.

It is however worth noticing that, if the *Republic* and *Busiris* are connected, the differing treatments that this political organization receives by each author provides us with a nice way of contrasting their respective philosophical interests. Plato develops this polity and describes it as an ideal city apart from any considerations of its actual instantiation as a political organization: his concern in describing this polity is not to comment on contemporary political issues, but rather to understand what a just city (and a just soul) looks like as such (472A8–D3). On the other hand, immediately after he introduces this three-class Egyptian polity, Isocrates goes on to discuss these classes in such a way that makes it tempting for his readers to associate the military class with Sparta, and the priestly class with Athens, and to comment on these institutions in a way that makes it clear that he is offering the Egyptian state as a model for how the Greeks ought to organize themselves and cooperate. I will now turn to Isocrates' discussion of the warrior and priestly classes, and argue (in sections 2.1 and 2.2) that the encomium of *Busiris* presents a paradigm for what Isocrates regards as good political policy, thus giving the speech one of the necessary elements of a κοινὸς λόγος: political relevance (see 11.5, 9).

2.1. The Busiridean Warrior Class and the Spartans, 11.17–20

Once he has introduced *Busiris*' three-class system, Isocrates immediately connects his praise of this ancient polity with contemporary politics and digresses at length about the Spartans, explaining what is best and what is worst about the Spartans in terms of the extent to which they live up to the Egyptian ideal. In particular, Isocrates ascribes Sparta's great accomplishments to their imitation of the Egyptian warrior class in (1) their requirement that that no soldier can leave the country without the permission of the authorities, (2) their common meals, (3) their physical training, and especially (4) their singular devotion to weapons and military expeditions (11.17–18).²⁹

Although it may have initially looked as though Isocrates spoke favorably about the Spartans (insofar as he offers their imitation of the Egyptian military class as a testament to the success of this Egyptian polity—11.17), Isocrates is clearly not offering unqualified praise of Sparta. Isocrates tells us that Sparta has made poor use of these practices by making all of their citizens into soldiers and, because of this, they think that it is right for them to take the possessions of others by force (11.19–20). I agree here with Blank that we should not interpret 11.18 as full-throated praise of the Spartans. I however cannot agree that whatever praise was initially offered is “more than taken back” by the considerations

28. See Eucken 1983, 183–95; Livingstone 2001, 48–56.

29. I agree here with Blank (2014, 126) that Isocrates praises the Spartans for their imitation of the *military* class, which is explicit in his praise for the first and fourth of the institutions that Isocrates claims that they have borrowed, and implicit in the second and third.

of 11.19–20.³⁰ There is no suggestion here that Isocrates takes back his praise of Sparta for imitating the Egyptian military class' common meals, their physical training, and their singular devotion to the practice of warfare. Rather, the whole of Isocrates' criticism of Sparta consists in the fact that their state is entirely comprised of soldiers, and, for this reason, they deem it right to take others' goods by force (11.19). Isocrates sees this problem as a kind of meddling between classes, which he makes clear by contrasting this Spartan fault with the fact that the Egyptian warrior class only does its own work (11.19):

τοσοῦτω δὲ χεῖρον κέχρηται τούτους τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν, ὅσον οὔτοι μὲν ἅπαντες στρατιῶται καταστάντες βία τὰ τῶν ἄλλων λαμβάνειν ἄξιουσιν, ἐκεῖνοι δ' οὕτως οἰκοῦσιν ὥσπερ χρὴ τοὺς μήτε τῶν ἰδίων ἀμελοῦντας μήτε τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπιβουλεύοντας.

In this much [the Spartans] have used these practices in a worse way: since everyone is made into a soldier, they deem it worthy to take what belongs to others by force. But [the Egyptian warriors] live just as one should: they do not neglect their own affairs nor tamper with what belongs to others.

On the Busiridean model that Isocrates is praising, it is the role of the class of artisans to secure both the daily necessities and surpluses, and it is the role of the warriors to defend these goods (11.15). But because the Spartans made everyone into soldiers, they have to secure daily necessities by taking them by force, and in doing so, they are meddling in the work of the artisans. Isocrates thus explains the Spartan faults by explicit contrast with the military class it imitates, and the key difference that emerges between these two groups is that the latter is successfully incorporated into a functional tripartite society: the Egyptian military class “lacks none of the necessities of life” because these are provided by the working class; moreover, because the Egyptian warriors do not lack necessities, they “do not disregard the public ordinances” (i.e., the laws laid down by the priests); finally, the Egyptian soldiers “do not meddle in the other arts” (11.18). Thus, rather than completely overturning his praise for the Spartans' imitation of the Egyptian warrior class, Isocrates is drawing attention to the Spartans' one serious shortcoming, namely, that they are not successfully incorporated within a larger political organization, an organization that would mitigate their laziness (*ἀργία*) and greed (*πλεονεξία*) by providing them with daily necessities and political oversight.

To conclude his discussion of the Egyptian warrior class, Isocrates explicitly suggests that the Greeks should treat Busiris' Egypt as an ideal political paradigm (11.20):

εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἅπαντες μιμησάμεθα τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων ἀργίαν καὶ πλεονεξίαν, εὐθὺς ἂν ἀπολοίμεθα καὶ διὰ τὴν ἔνδραν τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν καὶ διὰ τὸν πόλεμον τὸν πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτοῦς. εἰ δὲ τοῖς Αἰγυπτίων νόμοις χρῆσθαι βουλευθῶμεν, καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἐργάζεσθαι, τοῖς δὲ τὰ τούτων σώζειν δόξειεν, ἕκαστοι τὴν αὐτῶν ἔχοντες εὐδαιμόνως ἂν τὸν βίον διατελοίμεν

If we all [sc. the Greeks] imitated the laziness and greed of the Spartans we would be immediately destroyed on account of a lack of daily necessities and civil war. But if we were willing

30. Blank 2014, 127: “Das Lob der spartanischen Ordnung wird hier [sc. 11.19–20] mehr als nur zurückgenommen.”

to adopt the Egyptians' customs and decided that some should work and the others should protect their goods, each group would be content with what they have and live a happy life.

It is clear that Isocrates is here recommending some kind of political reform, but the nature and scope of this reform is not immediately clear. One might think that Isocrates is just addressing an Athenian audience and therefore recommending political reform in his own city. This reading is perhaps suggested by Isocrates' opposition of "we all" with "the Spartan ἀργία": as Livingstone has pointed out, ἀργία was likely a contested term for the comparison of Athenian and Spartan systems.³¹ On this reading, Isocrates would recommend that the Athenians assign some of their citizens to the work of artisans, stop relying on mercenary soldiers and make another group of citizens devote themselves solely to warfare,³² and assign to another class the work of legislation, philosophy and religion (see 11.22).

By contrast, I think a reading according to which Isocrates addresses the Greeks as a whole and recommends inter- rather than intrastate political reform makes better sense of the argument of this passage (i.e., 11.17–20). However much Isocrates' counsel against the Spartans' ἀργία, which causes a lack of daily necessities, might suggest an Athenian audience for this advice, his warning against their πλεονεξία, which causes civil war, strongly suggests that he has interstate politics in mind. Spartan πλεονεξία usually has the connotation of aggression abroad in the work of Isocrates and his contemporaries.³³ That the word has such a connotation here is strongly suggested by the fact that Isocrates warns his audience against this πλεονεξία lest they "immediately be destroyed [...] by civil war" (εὐθὺς ἂν ἀπολοιπίμεθα [...] διὰ τὸν πόλεμον τὸν πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτούς, 11.20). The expression πόλεμος πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτούς in Isocrates signifies wars between Greeks states: in his more explicitly Panhellenic tracts Isocrates frequently calls for an end to wars and for peace, using this (πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτούς) and closely related expressions, in which contexts ἡμᾶς αὐτούς clearly signifies the Greeks generally and Athens and Sparta in particular (4.3, 6, 15, 19, 166, 174; 5.126; 6.61; 12.159; *Epist.* 9. 14).³⁴ Therefore, the fact that Isocrates warns his audience against following the Spartans' poor use of the ideal Egyptian institutions lest they find themselves in civil wars suggests that Isocrates is offering this advice to the Greeks as a whole.

If this is along the right lines, then Isocrates' advice in 11.20 is the following: if the Greeks as a whole were to follow the Spartans and model themselves on just one part (i.e., the military class) of what ought to be a three-class system, they would lack daily necessities (because there would be no class of workers to secure these goods for them), and they would find themselves in civil wars

31. See Livingstone 2001, 143; see also *Pl. Grg.* 515E, where we learn from Callicles that Laconizers claim that Pericles made the Athenians ἀργοί.

32. Froidefond (1971, 249) has suggested that Isocrates' praise of the Spartans' self-sufficiency in warfare is intended as an example to his fellow Athenians insofar as the Spartans, unlike the Athenians, are able to defend their own city (Λακεδαιμονίους . . . ἄριστα διοικεῖν τὴν αὐτῶν πόλιν—11.17), whereas the Athenians depend on mercenary soldiers.

33. See 12.46, 98, 228; *Pl. Leg.* 625E; *Arist. Pol.* 1271^b2–6; see also Livingstone 2001, 143.

34. Here I agree with Livingstone (2001, 143) that this phrase does not signify the "Spartiate relations with the helots" as Hodkinson has maintained it does (Powell and Hodkinson 1994, 196), but rather wars between Greek states.

(because they would need to take these necessary provisions from others, and there would be no higher legislative authority to discourage them from doing this—compare 11.18). However, if the Greeks as a whole followed the Egyptian laws and decided that some should work and that others (namely the Spartans) should defend the goods that the working class procures, each of these classes would be better off. As we saw above, Isocrates' criticism of Sparta was rather limited: *pace* Blank, Isocrates does not “more than take back” his praise for the Spartans' imitation of the Egyptian military class, he merely criticizes them for meddling in the work of the other classes, and traces all of their problems back to this meddling (11.19).³⁵ Isocrates' advice here is not that the Spartans abandon the singular devotion to warfare for which he praises them by reforming at the level of the polis, but rather that the Greeks as a whole should imitate the Egyptian laws and assign some as workers and others (namely the Spartans) as soldiers who protect these goods, so that the Spartans will no longer lack daily necessities and will therefore no longer have the need to cause civil wars by taking others' goods by force.

Thus, in 11.17–20 Isocrates has invited his readers to associate the warrior class of Egypt with the Spartans, and has criticized the Spartans for singularly devoting themselves to only one part of what ought to be a three-class system. However, Isocrates also suggests that the injustices of the Spartans might have been avoided if their society of warriors were somehow incorporated into a three-class system that mitigated their unbalanced devotion to warfare. In the following section I will argue that in 11.21–23 Isocrates continues to connect his praise of this ancient polity with contemporary politics by describing the cultural accomplishments of Busiris' priestly class in terms that encourage the readers to associate this class with the Athenians. The intended result, I shall argue, is to further detail the political advice he offers in 11.20: in modeling themselves on the Busiridean polity, the Greeks ought to assign the Athenians the work for which they are most naturally suited, that of the priests.

2.2. The Busiridean Priestly Class and the Athenians, 11.21–23

Isocrates credits Busiris with practical wisdom in his establishment of a priestly class that he equipped with a healthy endowment from sacrificial revenues, soundness of mind through purification set out under laws, and leisure through the exemption from war and work (11.21). He claims that these conditions were conducive to the priests' discovery of medicine,³⁶ with the result that the

35. Blank 2014, 127.

36. Isocrates' claim that the priestly class discovered medicine might seem problematic for the present interpretation, since medicine is perhaps most naturally associated, not with Athens, but either with Kos, the native island of Hippocrates, or with the Pythagoreans in Magna Graecia. But a few things might nevertheless be said in favor of associating the reference to medicine with Athens. First, during Hippocrates' life (460–370 BCE), Kos was an ally of Athens, had joined the Delian League, and hosted Athenian troops. Moreover, it is likely that Hippocrates made visits to Athens (see Pinault 1992). In addition, there does seem to have been an active community of doctors in fourth-century Athens, centered primarily around the figures Dieuches and Mnesitheos, and their families (Dow 1942). The famous Diokles of Karystos, also known as “the second Hippocrates,” also practiced in Athens and was possibly a contemporary of Isocrates, although its dates are controversial (see Jaeger and Highet 1943, 40; Van Der Eijk 2000, xxxi–xxxviii). An anonymous reviewer has also brought to my attention the close association between the development of medicine and the early Pythagoreans in Magna Graecia (on the early Pythagoreans and medicine, see Zhmud

Egyptians are the longest-living peoples, and to the development of philosophy, which Isocrates characterizes both as the ability to formulate laws and to investigate the nature of reality (11.22).

Isocrates tells us that Busiris put older men in charge of the “most important matters” (sc. making laws—see 11.22) and persuaded younger men to disregard pleasure and “pass their time in astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry” (11.23). Remarkably, these two groups of Egyptian philosophers represent what Isocrates sees as the most important philosophical programs in fourth-century Athens: the philosophy that the older Egyptian priests pursue can be readily identified with Isocrates’ own philosophy, which is concerned with influencing important political matters, and the philosophy of the younger priests reminds us of the topics pursued in the Academy, where Plato’s students, among other things, investigate the nature of reality through astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry (see, e.g., *Resp.* 524B–531C).³⁷

Here Isocrates again turns away from his mythological narrative and explicitly describes the subjects that the younger Egyptians pursue in terms of a contemporary Athenian debate about the importance of these subjects, claiming that “some praise the powers of these activities as useful for certain tasks, while others show that they contribute most to virtue” (11.23). We can see from Isocrates’ contributions to this debate that he makes elsewhere in his writings that, unlike philosophers such as Plato, Isocrates thinks that these “elementary” subjects are only “useful for certain tasks,” namely, to prepare the young for “true” (Isocratean) philosophy.³⁸ This idea is especially prominent in the *Antidosis*, where Isocrates characterizes the form of philosophy that pursues these elementary subjects as

2012, 347–65). That Isocrates might have this association in mind is suggested by his use of Pythagoras as a witness to the success of the Egyptian state, which Pythagoras is said to have visited and the intellectual culture of which he is said to have studied and brought back to Greece (11.28–29). Moreover, a number of scholars have argued that the intellectual culture Isocrates credits to the Egyptian priests (11.21–23) is Pythagorean (Delatte 1992, 45; Eucken 1983, 187–90). But even if the intellectual culture of the Egyptian priests is Pythagorean, in the context of this letter, it might be equally Athenian, since, as I have argued above, Isocrates in the *Busiris* is arguably envisioning Plato as a contemporary Pythagorean (see section 2 above and Teichmüller 1881, 107; Gomperz 1905, 196; Pohlenz 1913, 216; Eucken 1983, 179–83). Perhaps the most telling sign that medicine was an important part of Athenian culture is the enormous importance that it has for philosophers such as Plato (see Jaeger 1943, 3). The clearest example of the importance of medicine for Plato is his often-rehearsed analogy between medicine and philosophy, according to which they are complementary arts that govern the body and soul respectively (see in particular *Grg.* 466B–465D; *Resp.* 444C–E). Isocrates’ use of this same metaphor at 11.22 would likely remind his readers of similar discussions among other prominent Athenian intellectuals. Thus, even if it would not have been natural for Isocrates’ readers to associate medicine itself with Athens, Isocrates’ use of this familiar analogy may still put his audience in mind of contemporary discussions about the value and place of philosophy and medicine among Athenian intellectuals.

37. Isocrates frequently groups together various “opponents” when he contrasts his philosophical education with competing offerings. This usually involves grouping together the various Socratic schools under the heading of “eristic” (see esp. 10.1, 6). But I think that Isocrates has Plato in particular in mind here because there is no evidence that any Socratic school apart from Plato had a curriculum in the mathematical sciences. Although it is difficult to know exactly what was taught in Plato’s Academy, there are good reasons for thinking that Plato’s educational program resembled the one described in the *Republic*, where the same mathematical sciences attributed to the younger Egyptian priests feature prominently (for a careful discussion of what we can and cannot know about the early Academy, see Cherniss 1962). The view of some scholars (Delatte 1992, 45; Eucken 1983, 187–90; Livingstone 2001, 144) that the intellectual culture Isocrates describes in §§21–23 is Pythagorean is compatible with thinking that Isocrates has Plato in mind here, since, as Livingstone (2001, 144) has put it, “in this context ‘Pythagorean’ and ‘Platonic’ need not be mutually exclusive terms.”

38. I am here in agreement with Eucken (1983, 187), Froidefond (1971, 253), and Livingstone (2001, 149–50) that Isocrates here endorses the more modest view that the mathematical sciences are only useful for some purposes.

the “gymnastics of the soul” and a “preparation for [Isocratean] philosophy” (15.266). Moreover, in the *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates approves of the same educational regimentation that Busiris instituted, and praises it as having precisely the same value that Busiris attached to it (12.26–27):

τῆς μὲν οὖν παιδείας τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν προγόνων καταλειφθείσης τοσοῦτου δέω καταφρονεῖν ὥστε καὶ τὴν ἐφ’ ἡμῶν κατασταθεῖσαν ἐπαινῶ, λέγω δὲ τὴν τε γεωμετρίαν καὶ τὴν ἀστρολογίαν καὶ τοὺς διαλόγους τοὺς ἐριστικούς καλουμένους, οἷς οἱ μὲν νεώτεροι μᾶλλον χαίρουσι τοῦ δέοντος, τῶν δὲ πρεσβυτέρων οὐδεὶς ἔστιν ὅστις <ἀν> ἀνεκτοὺς αὐτοὺς εἶναι φήσειεν. ἀλλ’ ὅμως ἐγὼ τοῖς ὀρμημένοις ἐπὶ ταῦτα παρακελεύομαι πονεῖν καὶ προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν ἅπασιν τούτοις, λέγων ὥς, εἰ καὶ μηδὲν ἄλλο δύναται τὰ μαθήματα ταῦτα ποιεῖν ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ’ οὖν ἀποτρέπει γε τοὺς νεωτέρους πολλῶν ἄλλων ἀμαρτημάτων.

I am so far from disparaging the education handed down by our ancestors [sc. Μουσική, etc.] that I actually approve of the education we have established—I mean geometry, astronomy, and the so-called eristic dialogues—which the younger students enjoy more than they should, but among the older students there are none who would call them intolerable. Nevertheless, I advise those who are setting out on these studies to work hard and to apply their minds to all of them, for I would say that even if these studies are unable to accomplish anything good, they will at least turn the young away from many other harmful activities.³⁹

Here we see the same mathematical sciences that Busiris introduced recast as distinctly Athenian (ἐφ’ ἡμῶν κατασταθεῖσαν) and encouraged for the same reason: for their ability to keep the young out of trouble. The philosophy that the younger members of the Busiridean priestly class practice is therefore reminiscent of a conception of philosophy that is distinctly Athenian and which certain philosophers, such as Plato, took to be of paramount importance in an education. Isocrates, on the other hand, thinks of these traditional Athenian subjects as merely propaedeutic to his own philosophical education (15.261–69).⁴⁰

The philosophy that the older men in the Busiridean priestly class pursue calls to mind Isocrates’ own conception of philosophy: an educational program that is concerned with the public policy, a philosophy for which the elementary subjects that the young pursue are a mere “preparation” (15.266). Throughout his life, Isocrates consistently contrasts his own philosophical education with competing programs in quite similar terms: his program is an education in the writing and delivery of speeches that are concerned with important public issues (see 10.4–5; 15.276). Here a potential problem for the present interpretation arises: if the older Egyptian priests are meant to represent Isocratean philosophers, why is there no mention of λόγοι?⁴¹ After all, throughout his career Isocrates consistently describes his philosophical education as a training in the composition of speeches (see, e.g., 13.14–19; 15.183–96). However, when Isocrates contrasts his own program with competing philosophical educations, the language of λόγοι is also sometimes strikingly absent. For instance, in the *Helen*, Isocrates advises “eristics” (10.6) that it is better to “conjecture reasonably about useful

39. The Greek text of the *Panathenaicus* follows Mathieu and Brémond’s (2003: 4) edition. The translation is my own.

40. For more detailed discussions of the relationship between Isocratean philosophy and that of Plato (and Aristotle), see Eucken 1983; Balla 2004; Livingstone 2007; Wareh 2012.

41. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.

things” than to have precise knowledge about useless things, and goes on to contrast their interest in trivial things with his own concern with “important matters” (τοῖς μεγάλοις) which in this context clearly amounts to “the affairs in which we act as citizens” (τὰς πράξεις ἐν αἷς πολιτευόμεθα) (10.4–5). In the *Antidosis*, Isocrates also rather elliptically refers to the concerns of his own educational program as “the greater and more serious subjects” (τὰ μείζω καὶ σπουδαιότερα τῶν μαθημάτων) which he connects with “deliberating on public affairs” (βουλευέσασθαι περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων) in addition to the ability to speak well (15. 267). Thus, the fact that Isocrates describes the concerns of the older Egyptian priests as “the greatest matters” (τὰ μέγιστα τῶν πραγμάτων), which he connects with setting down political principles (νομοθετῆσαι, 22) is not so a great obstacle to the thesis that he describes the older priests in terms of his own educational program. Indeed, as Livingstone has noticed, νομοθετῆσαι in the broadest sense “can be used of setting down any political principles, and hence of Isocrates’ own φιλοσοφία,” which is the meaning the verb clearly has at *To Nicocles* 8, where he describes his practice as νομοθετεῖν ταῖς μοναρχίαις.⁴² The terms that Isocrates here employs are precisely those in which he opposes his philosophical enterprise with competing offerings. I take the absence of λόγοι in this opposition as it appears in the *Busiris* and *Helen* to be explained simply by the fact that, in these contexts, Isocrates’ concern is not to contrast the methods of these competing programs, but rather, the relative value of the subjects to which these programs are devoted.

Isocrates therefore describes the types of philosophy that he credits Busiris with having established in his priestly class in exactly the same terms he elsewhere uses to characterize philosophical education in fourth-century Athens, and, as we might expect, describes a philosophical program much like his own as the pinnacle of the Egyptians’ cultural achievements (cp. 4.47–50). So far, then, I have argued that Isocrates implicitly connects the intellectual culture of the Egyptian priests with the intellectual culture of the Athenians and that he explicitly connects the Egyptian warriors with the Spartans and recommends that the Greeks follow Busiris’ example and incorporate Spartan culture into a tripartite society in which some fight wars, some govern, and others work. If this is along the right lines, then far from being an obviously paradoxical speech, the encomium of Busiris satisfies one, and arguably the most important, criterion for a κοινὸς λόγος: political relevance (10.5, 9). Isocrates continues to draw political implications from the polity he attributes to Busiris in 11.24–29, which I will discuss in the following section. There I will also argue that the speech exhibits another important feature of a κοινὸς λόγος in its appeal to important moral values (10.8).

2.3. The Role of Religion in Busiris’ Egypt and Its Relevance for Greek Politics, 11.24–27

For the remainder of the encomium, Isocrates praises the religious practices that Busiris established for the Egyptians and, remarkably, commends these practices for the social stability that they create. Here too, Isocrates turns away from the

42. Livingstone 2001, 148.

Busiris narrative and notices the present relevance of Busiris' religious institutions (11.24–25):

ὅσοι δὲ τῶν θείων πραγμάτων οὕτω προέστησαν ὥστε καὶ τὰς ἐπιμελείας καὶ τὰς τιμωρίας δοκεῖν εἶναι μείζους τῶν συμβαινόντων, οἱ δὲ τοιοῦτοι πλείστα τὸν βίον τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὠφελοῦσιν. καὶ γὰρ τὴν ἀρχὴν οἱ τὸν φόβον ἡμῖν ἐνεργασάμενοι τοῦτον αἴτιοι γεγόνασιν τοῦ μὴ παντάπασι θηριωδῶς διακεῖσθαι πρὸς ἀλλήλους.

All those who have been such effective leaders in religious matters that the rewards and punishments of the gods appear to be greater than they really are benefit human life most. Indeed, those who instill in us a fear of the gods from the beginning are responsible for us not acting entirely like beasts toward one another.

Isocrates further claims that Egyptian reverence and fear of the gods makes their oaths especially credible, and that Busiris instituted animal worship because he knew that those who obeyed laws that proscribe reverence for animals would surely obey greater, more important laws (11.24–27).

Reasonable doubt can be raised about whether the praise Isocrates offers here can be serious.⁴³ The Egyptians' excessive religiosity and especially their animal worship were among the Greeks a subject of fascination and, as Isocrates himself admits (11.26), ridicule.⁴⁴ Despite this, there are features of this passage that indicate that Isocrates is engaging in serious political discourse in the tradition of some of his predecessors and contemporaries in political theory. First, the escape from a beast-like state is a *topos* in foundation narratives of Greek social and political institutions, especially in tragedy and sophistic literature.⁴⁵ Isocrates relies on the same *topos* in his foundation narratives of other important institutions, such as agriculture (4.8) and persuasive speech (III 6 [= 15. 254]).⁴⁶ Isocrates' claim in 11.25 that religious leaders cause us not to act like beasts by "from the beginning instilling a fear of the gods in us" as well as the etiology of animal worship may in fact be inspired by the Sisyphus fragment (attributed either to Critias or to Euripides), which argues that a wise man invented all-seeing and -hearing gods and instilled in people the fear of them in order to put an end to undetected wrongdoing.⁴⁷ Moreover, the motivation behind Busiris' institution of animal worship—that is, that he instituted these practices knowing that those who took even these instructions seriously would demonstrate steadfast piety toward invisible gods—in addition to bearing close similarity to the wise man's motivations for introducing the fear of the gods in the Sisyphus fragment recalls the "noble lie" of Plato's *Republic* (414D1–415C8).⁴⁸ In offering the religious practices of

43. Two anonymous reviewers have raised doubts about whether this part of the speech is serious.

44. We find a testament to the Greek fascination with Egyptian religion in the fact that Herodotus devotes so much space to discussing it (2.37–64).

45. See Aeschylus (?) *TrGF* 3 F 181^A; Eur. *Supp.* 201–15; Hippoc. *VM* 7.1; Gorg. *Pal.* 30 (DK11a); the Sisyphus Fragment (*TrGF* 1 (43) F 19 = B 25 DK); Pl. *Prt.* 322B–C; *Plt.* 274B–C. See also Kleingünther 1933; Davies 1989, 18–19; Livingstone 2001, 152–53.

46. See Livingstone 2001, 152–53.

47. See Diggle 1998, 177–79 for the text of the fragment. See also Davies 1989; Livingstone 2001, 152.

48. See Livingstone 2001, 150. As I mentioned above, the difficulty of dating the *Republic* and *Busiris* makes it impossible to identify exactly the relationship between the two works, but even if the *Republic* was published after the *Busiris*, the political ideas of the former may already have been widely discussed before its publication.

the Egyptian priests as a model for his contemporaries, Isocrates is drawing on many of the same ideas present in serious political theory and advice on which his predecessors (and possibly contemporaries) also relied.

The *Busiris* is not the only place where Isocrates expresses this idea that religion creates social stability. Isocrates in fact chooses Panhellenic religious festivals as the settings for his two most involved pleas for collaboration between opposed Greek states (the *Panegyricus* and the *Panathenaicus*). Especially noticeable in this connection are Isocrates' claims about common Greek religious practices in the *Panegyricus* (4.43):

τῶν τοίνυν τὰς πανηγύρεις καταστησάντων δικαίως ἐπαινουμένων ὅτι τοιοῦτον ἔθος ἡμῖν παρέδωκαν ὥστε σπεισάμενους πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ τὰς ἐχθρας τὰς ἐνεστηκίας διαλυσάμενους συνελθεῖν εἰς ταῦτόν, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτ' εὐχὰς καὶ θυσίας κοινὰς ποιησάμενους ἀναμνησθῆναι μὲν τῆς συγγενείας τῆς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὑπαρχούσης, εὐμενεστέρας δ' εἰς τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον διατεθῆναι πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτούς, καὶ τὰς τε παλαιὰς ξενίας ἀνανεώσασθαι καὶ καινὰς ἐτέρας ποιήσασθαι [. . .]

Those who established panegyric festivals are justly praised for handing down such a fine custom to us where we make a peace treaty, break off any existing hostilities, and come together in the same place; after this, as we make prayers and sacrifices, we recall the common heritage we have with each other, establish our goodwill toward each other for the future, and renew ancient ties of guest friendship and make new ones.⁴⁹

In light of Isocrates' recommendation that the Greeks look to Busiris' Egypt as a model for political reform (11.20) it seems reasonable to assume, given his claims, in other writings, about the power of common religious practices to quench hostilities, that with these remarks on Egyptian religion Isocrates is suggesting that just as Egyptian religious practices account for the social stability of that state, so the common religious practices of Sparta and Athens can be the unifying element that makes possible the peaceful coexistence of these two powers in a stable political organization.⁵⁰

In addition to modeling good policy, 11.24–27 provides the encomium of Busiris with an appeal to traditional moral values, another feature characteristic of an Isocratean κοινὸς λόγος. We learn in the *Helen* that one of the ways in which κοινοὶ λόγοι differ sharply from paradoxical speeches is in their appeal to moral values by praising subjects that are *kalos kagathos* (10.8).⁵¹ The piety on account of which Isocrates holds up the Egyptians as paragons of virtue is a moral value for which Isocrates never misses the chance to praise the subjects of his other, uncontroversially serious, encomia: Theseus in the *Helen* (10.31), Evagoras (9.25, 51) and the ancestral founders of Athens (12.124). Piety also holds pride of place in his exhortations: Isocrates' first piece of advice to Demonicus is that he first and foremost “venerate what relates to the gods, not only by performing sacrifices but also by fulfilling your oaths” (1.15), and also features prominently

49. The Greek text of the *Panegyricus* follows the edition of Mathieu and Brémond (2003: 2), although I read σπεισάμενους πρὸς ἀλλήλους with all manuscripts but Γ instead of of Mathieu and Brémond's σπεισάμενους with Γ. The translation is by Papillon (2004).

50. Isocrates does not spend any time discussing the Egyptian class of workers, but, presumably, on the present interpretation, the rest of Greece would fall into this class.

51. See Bons 1997, 171; Blank 2013, 7.

in his advice to Nicocles (2.20). The triumvirate of piety toward the gods, justice toward men, and moderation (σοφροσύνη) or good sense (φρονήσις) in action, are said by Isocrates to be the qualities that allow people and cities to flourish (8.63; 12.183, 204). These considerations lend further plausibility to the idea that Isocrates' encomium of Egypt is a serious encomium not only in its presentation of a serious political paradigm, but in its appeal to key moral values.

2.4. The Encomium of Busiris' Egypt as a κοινὸς λόγος

Isocrates has composed an encomium of Busiris' Egypt, and he has strictly adhered to his own precept that "it is necessary for those who wish to eulogize to show that [one's subjects] have more good attributes than have so far been recognized" (11.4). In doing so, Isocrates has attributed to Busiris a model political system which has political relevance and has praised the Egyptians in the same moral terms with which he praises the subjects of his uncontroversially serious encomia. But in addition to having political relevance and appeals to moral values, Isocrates requires that serious encomia be persuasive (πιστός, 10.11). Blank has argued that the encomium is not a κοινὸς λόγος because Isocrates' attribution of this polity to Busiris remains unconvincing even after Isocrates' arguments in support of this attribution (11.30–43).⁵² I will discuss these arguments in part 3, but here let us first evaluate these features of successful encomia and how they relate to one another.

On Blank's reading, whatever serious political and moral content Isocrates' encomium of Busiris' Egypt contains, the encomium still fails to be a κοινὸς λόγος because mythological and poetic traditions have almost unambiguously depicted Busiris as such a base villain that, in the absence of a strong argument against these traditions (which Blank finds wanting), Isocrates' attribution of these institutions to Busiris will remain unpersuasive. This argument assumes that, for Isocrates, the persuasiveness of a speech depends upon its truthfulness (which Blank supposes to be another criterion that κοινοὶ λόγοι must satisfy, citing 10.5) in addition to probability and factual possibility.⁵³ However, there is another conception of persuasiveness at work in Isocrates' writings, one that does not so much rely on the truth of arguments, but rather on the production of pleasure in audiences by means of mythological narratives. In *To Nicocles* Isocrates advises the young prince as follows (2.48–49):

ἐκεῖνο δ' οὖν φανερόν, ὅτι δεῖ τοὺς βουλομένους ἢ ποιεῖν ἢ γράφειν τι κεχαρισμένον τοῖς πολλοῖς μὴ τοὺς ὠφελιμωτάτους τῶν λόγων ζητεῖν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς μυθοδεστάτους· ἀκούοντες μὲν γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων χαίρουσιν, θεωροῦντες δὲ τοὺς ἀγῶνας καὶ τὰς ἀμίλλας. διὸ καὶ τὴν Ὀμήρου ποιήσιν καὶ τοὺς πρώτους εὐρόντας τραγωδίαν ἄξιον θαυμάζειν, ὅτι κατιδόντες τὴν φύσιν τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀμφοτέραις ταῖς ἰδέαις ταύταις κατεχρήσαντο πρὸς τὴν ποίησιν. ὁ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἀγῶνας καὶ τοὺς πολέμους τοὺς τῶν ἡμιθέων ἐμυθολόγησεν, οἱ δὲ τοὺς μύθους εἰς ἀγῶνας καὶ πράξεις κατέστησαν, ὥστε μὴ μόνον ἀκουστοὺς ἡμῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ θεατοὺς γενέσθαι. τοιούτων οὖν παραδειγμάτων ὑπαρχόντων δέδεικται τοῖς ἐπιθυμοῦσιν τοὺς ἀκροωμένους ψυχαγωγεῖν ὅτι τοῦ μὲν νουθετεῖν καὶ συμβουλευεῖν ἀφεκτέον, τὰ δὲ τοιαῦτα λεκτέον, οἷς ὁρῶσι τοὺς ὄχλους μάλιστα χαίροντας

52. Blank 2013, 19–29; 2014, 130–43.

53. Blank 2013, 7, 19–24; 2014, 130–38; see also Bons 1997, 168.

This much is clear: those who wish to produce or write something that is pleasing to the many must seek not the most beneficial speeches, but those most full of fictions; for people are happy when they hear such things and when they see contests and games. Wherefore it is worth marveling at the poetry of Homer and those who first discovered tragedy, since they saw human nature and used both of these forms in their poetry. For Homer told myths about contests and wars of heroes and the tragedians converted the myths into contests and actions, so that we not only hear but see them. With such examples before us, it is clear that those who wish to persuade their audience ought to avoid rebuking and advising and say such things as they see will be most delightful to crowds.⁵⁴

This pragmatic advice is surprising in light of Isocrates' low estimation of the mythic we find in passages like *Panathenaicus* 1, where he explains that he avoids the mythic because it is not beneficial. But Terry Papillon has convincingly shown that Isocrates observes a sharp terminological distinction between the mythic (μυθώδης), which always has a negative connotation and is often contrasted with useful and beneficial discourse, and myths (μῦθοι), which are in fact beneficial because they present useful paradigms that are linked to important Isocratean themes (often the unification of the Greeks in wars against the East).⁵⁵ Papillon notes of this passage in particular that:

The progress of the passage shows a move from μυθώδης to μῦθος and the shift is caused by a focus on usefulness. μυθώδης is contrasted with usefulness at the beginning. After pointing out the contrast of μυθώδης with ὠφέλιμος, the word διό marks a move from μυθώδης to μῦθος. Isocrates then goes on to show that μῦθοι, "stories that are useful lessons," can be used for a positive result. In contrast to Thucydides [for whom the mythic is always connected with the pleasant and contrasted with what is useful],⁵⁶ Isocrates may see pleasure as useful.⁵⁷

For Isocrates, myths, when treated in the appropriate way, are both persuasive in virtue of their pleasantness, and useful because they set examples Isocrates thinks should be followed.⁵⁸

Crucially, however, μῦθοι for Isocrates are not necessarily connected with the truth, as he makes clear at *Evagoras* 66, where he asks "who among the ancestors will we find to have accomplished such deeds, if we neglect the myths and look to the truth, or who has been responsible for such great changes in events?"⁵⁹ It is not a real criticism of a myth, for Isocrates, to say that it is not historical, or that it is not true; a myth only merits criticism if it fails to do what myths ought to do on Isocrates' view, that is, if it fails to present useful and beneficial patterns of behavior and policy. In his encomia of mythological figures—even those figures who might not merit unqualified praise according to conventional beliefs—Isocrates focuses exclusively on positive aspects of those figures, and sets them up as paradigms of policy and behavior of which he approves: he praises Paris for "wisely choosing what is best for those around him and for posterity" (10.42–44), and

54. The Greek text of *To Nicocles* follows the edition of Mathieu and Brémond (2003: 2). The translation is my own.

55. See Papillon 1996, 9–13.

56. See Flory 1990.

57. Papillon 1996, 17–18.

58. Papillon 1996, 12, 17–18.

59. See Papillon 1996, 15.

praises Heracles for unifying Greece in opposition to the barbarian East (5.111–13).⁶⁰ Isocrates does precisely the same with Busiris: he praises only his positive attributes, “show[ing] that he has more good attributes than have traditionally been recognized” (11.4), presents Busiris’ political regime as a paradigm for good policy (11.16–27) and presents Busiris and the Egyptian priests as paragons of moral behavior (11.10, 21, 24–27). I suggest that he chooses to do this in a mythological context precisely because Isocrates believes that myths such as Busiris’, treated in the appropriate (Isocratean) way, are especially persuasive in virtue of their pleasantness.

Thus, in addition to presenting paradigms of good policy and moral behavior, Isocrates’ encomium of Busiris’ Egypt is persuasive, by Isocrates’ own standards of persuasiveness, precisely because these paradigms are presented in the form of a pleasing myth. The encomium of Busiris’ Egypt therefore exhibits all of the features—as formulated in the proem of the *Helen*—in respect of which *κοινὸι λόγοι* contrast most sharply with paradoxical speeches: political (10.5–9) and moral (10.8) relevance and persuasiveness (10.11). Here the chief difference between the present interpretation and those of Livingstone and Vasunia also emerges: it is not so much the pure rhetorical form of the encomium of Busiris that renders the speech non-paradoxical; it is rather the serious political and moral content and, indeed, its status as a myth that renders it useful, beneficial, and persuasive.

In light of these reflections of myth in Isocrates, it is worth revisiting the truthfulness criterion that Blank and Jeroen Bons find formulated in the proemium of the *Helen*.⁶¹ On the one hand, Isocrates’ insistence that encomia of mythological figures are useful (see, e.g., 5.113) together with his claim that myths are not necessarily true (9.66) strongly suggests that truth is not a necessary feature of a *κοινὸς λόγος*. Moreover, the relevant text in the proemium of *Helen* itself does not seem to make this requirement either. Both Blank and Bons take truthfulness to be a feature of a *κοινὸς λόγος* on the basis of Isocrates’ claim in 10.4 that his opponents should “pursue the truth.” However, the truth appealed to in this context is not a feature of speeches, but rather a general precept that he thinks his opponents ought to keep in mind, namely, that it is better to provide students with reasonable opinions about political affairs than to pursue precise knowledge about trivial matters (10.5). The truth Isocrates appeals to in this context is therefore not a criterion for successful encomia, but an educational principle that itself places rather low value on getting things exactly right (the sort of thing we might be inclined to call “the truth”) and favors instead useful and reasonable opinions about important political matters. Let us keep this valuation of the truth in mind as we turn to Isocrates’ defense of his encomium of Busiris’ Egypt, where, as was promised in 11.9, he illustrates what he regards as a proper defense speech. On the surface, in 11.30–43 Isocrates argues that his own account of Busiris as founder of Egypt is a probable account and thereby demonstrates how defense speeches ought to be composed, but more importantly, he tries to show that his own encomium is more plausible than Polycrates’, and therefore,

60. Papillon 1996, 12–13.

61. See Bons 1997, 168; Blank 2013, 7, 19–24.

encourages prospective students to regard his own education in κοινοὶ λόγοι as superior to the writing of paradoxical speeches.

3. THE DEFENSE OF THE ENCOMIUM OF BUSIRIS, 11.30–43

Isocrates begins his defense by anticipating an objection from Polycrates: although he has praised the land, laws, piety, and philosophy of the Egyptians, he cannot prove that Busiris was their founder (11.30). With this claim, Isocrates correctly isolates the feature of his encomium that will strike his audience as controversial. The institutions and cultural practices that Isocrates has described in his encomium are not significantly different from those that other Greek writers have described when they have written about Egypt. Plato finds the same three-class system in Egypt (*Ti.* 24B), as does Herodotus, although he divides the class of workers into five parts (2.164); for both Homer and Herodotus, Egypt was a country of doctors (*Hom. Od.* 4.231; *Hdt.* 2.84; 3.1; 3.129); Herodotus credits the Egyptians with the invention of geometry (*Hdt.* 3.109.3); and the Greeks knew the Egyptians to be exceptionally religious (*Hdt.* 2.37.1).⁶² However, as I discussed in part 1, there is such a negative image of Busiris among the Greeks that his attribution of these excellent institutions to Busiris might seem unlikely (11.30).

Isocrates' initial response to this objection may appear unsatisfying: he claims that this objection would have been appropriate from anybody else, but not so for Polycrates, who is even less able to prove that Busiris did the unbelievable things with which he credits him, namely, the godlike power of splitting the Nile and his beast-like cannibalism (11.30–32). This response is representative of the shape that Isocrates' argumentation takes in his defense, and clearly demonstrates that Isocrates does not intend to establish the truth of his account. Isocrates' first aim in this defense is to demonstrate how defense speeches should be composed (see 11.9, 44) by discrediting the mythological and poetic traditions that cast Busiris in such a negative light. But his second, and related, aim is to prove his superiority over Polycrates in the composition of both encomium and defense.⁶³ To that end, Isocrates does not try to prove the truth of his story (which would be impossible and, moreover, beside the point, since mythological encomia need not be true for Isocrates), he only tries to defend the idea that his encomium is of better quality, namely, that it is more useful and persuasive than Polycrates'. This becomes especially apparent when Isocrates claims that even if both his and Polycrates' accounts of Busiris are false, at least nothing he himself claims about Busiris is impossible, and furthermore, at least he has employed the proper form⁶⁴ of argumentation for an encomium, that is, he has pointed out more good

62. For more detailed discussions of the *Busiris*' continuity with other Greek writers who wrote on Egypt, see Froidefond, 1971, 231–66; Vasunia, 2001, 183–207; Livingstone 2001, 73–76.

63. The *Busiris*' status as a polemical educational tract has also been emphasized by Eucken (1983, 195–207), Livingstone (2001, 1–5), and Papillon (2001, 74–75).

64. Livingstone (2001, 165) has drawn attention to the fact that Isocrates criticizes Polycrates for not employing the proper form (τῆς ἰδέας), rather than forms, of argumentation for an encomium, and suggests plausibly that the form here in question is the rhetorical precept formulated at 11.4 that it is necessary for those who wish to praise someone to point out more good attributes than have been so far recognized.

attributes than have hitherto been recognized in Busiris and has presented these features as a useful model for moral behavior and political action (11.4, 33).⁶⁵

At 11.34–35 Isocrates defends of his own account of Busiris by appealing to the lack of evidence contradicting his account and to Busiris' divine genealogy. The Greeks know of no stories that claim that anyone other than Busiris founded Egypt, so, much unlike Polycrates' account of Busiris, there is at least no contradiction in Isocrates' (11.34). Furthermore, if anyone should be the founder of such a great state, why not Busiris: the son of Poseidon and descendent of Zeus on his mother's side (11.35)? Having given these considerations in favor of his own account, Isocrates then tries to discredit the mythological and poetic tradition—which Polycrates hyperbolized—by appealing to chronology. The traditional stories about Busiris claim that he was killed by Heracles (11.36), but Heracles was actually four generations younger than Perseus, and Busiris was more than two hundred years older than Perseus (11.37). Isocrates claims that this fact was of no concern to Polycrates, but that he instead followed the poets, who have described the gods and their offspring as “doing and suffering more terrible things than the offspring of the most unholy humans” (11.38). In opposition to Polycrates and the poets, Isocrates believes that “neither the gods nor their offspring share in evil” and that they “have all the virtues by nature and have become leaders and teachers of the finest conduct for the rest of us” (11.41). By setting his own conception of the gods and their children against Polycrates' inhuman representation of Busiris, Isocrates pointedly accuses Polycrates of blasphemy.

Part of Blank's argument in favor of thinking that Isocrates' encomium of Busiris is actually meant to apply to Theseus as the founder of Athens involves showing the inconsistency of Isocrates' genealogy with the mythological tradition, namely with Apollodorus' genealogy, according to which Libye is Busiris' great-grandmother rather than his mother.⁶⁶ This would be problematic for Isocrates because this would mean he is guilty of the same fault for which he blames Polycrates: inconsistency with and disregard for the genealogical tradition (11.37–38). But it is worth noting that even if Apollodorus' account is the “correct” one, Isocrates' criticism of Polycrates' account still stands: if Libye is Busiris' great-grandmother, this still leaves four generations between Busiris and Perseus, Heracles' great-grandfather.⁶⁷ Moreover, although the precise details of Isocrates' account are not confirmed by any of the surviving genealogical sources, the features essential for Isocrates' argument are confirmed by the surviving tradition: Pherecydes, Apollodorus, and Theon agree on his divine heritage, and Theon's account (which he claims to derive from Hesiod) agrees with Apollodorus in placing Busiris hundreds of years before Heracles.⁶⁸ This is indeed all that Isocrates needs for his argument: divine heritage and plausibility for his own genealogy (over against the chronological impossibility of Polycrates'). As Blank himself admits, the mythological tradition presents no consistent account, and what is

65. I agree with Bons (1996, 31) that we should read this claim as a prescription about encomiastic form: “an encomium may contain arguments that are false or untrue, as long as they are appropriate to the genre.”

66. Blank 2013, 22–24; 2014, 131–38. See Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11.

67. See Rose 1933, 226 n. 90, 272, 284 n. 60; Livingstone 2001, 168–69.

68. See Pherecydes *FGH* 17; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11 (Hard 1997); Theon *Progymnasmata* 93.21–22 (=Hesiod frag. 222 Rzsch). See also Livingstone 2001, 86–87, 168–69; Papillon 2001, 76, 90.

important for Isocrates is only that his account be more likely than that of Polycrates.⁶⁹ Even if Isocrates does not get Busiris' genealogy precisely correct, we would do well to remember the concession that frames Isocrates' defense: even if what he and Polycrates both say is fictional, at least nothing Isocrates says is impossible (11.33).

I therefore do not think that Isocrates' arguments are guilty of the same faults that Polycrates' are. On the contrary, Isocrates successfully shows that his encomium is superior to Polycrates in all the relevant respects: it is credible in attributing nothing impossible to Busiris ("only laws and a constitution, which are the acts of good and noble men," 11.32) and employs the correct form of a successful encomium (i.e., as I argued above, it is politically relevant, upholds important moral values, and is persuasive). I therefore think that there is no need to substitute Theseus as a more plausible subject for the allegedly dysfunctional encomium of Busiris.

I conclude my discussion of Isocrates' defense by considering a few lingering questions. First, if, *pace* Blank, Isocrates does not want us to understand the speech in praise of Busiris' Egypt as a praise of Theseus' Athens, why does he offer a political model in Egypt? Secondly, why does he choose to do so in the context of a letter to a rival educator? Consideration of the use of Egypt in a number of Greek authors indicates that Isocrates' use of Egypt as a model polity is not so atypical. In Greek literature, Egypt is a place where many great Greeks go to learn. In Herodotus, Solon travels to Egypt to learn. Isocrates himself—following a long tradition—describes Pythagoras' visit to Egypt (where he learned philosophy and religious practices) in the final sections of his encomium of Busiris (11.28–29). These are just a few of the traditions in Greek literature that suggest that the Greeks thought of the Egyptians as a people from whom they have something to learn.⁷⁰ A second important consideration that may shed light on this apparent problem is that, as Vasunia and Christian Froidefond have shown, it was common in the literature of this period to use Egypt as a way of talking about Greece.⁷¹ To locate an institution or a practice in Egypt is to appeal to its antiquity and its stability.⁷² For a certain class of Athenians, the antiquity of Egypt and the heavily conservative nature of its culture make it an excellent setting for an ideal state.⁷³

We can of course only speculate about why Isocrates chooses a letter to a rival educator as the context for a plea for Panhellenism, but we can obtain one plausible answer to this question in Isocrates' remarks about the connection between competition and persuasion. In the quotation from *To Nicocles* I discussed in section 2.4, Isocrates praises Homer and the tragedians for producing poetry that was especially pleasing for the masses in virtue of their mythical quality and the contests that they depict (2.48–49). Perhaps Isocrates chose to write on the same mythological subject as Polycrates and to frame this myth in competition with a rival treatment because he thought doing so would not only make his educational

69. Blank 2013, 24 n. 65. On the various alterations of the Busiris myth, see Papillon 2001.

70. Livingstone 2001, 157–60.

71. Froidefond 1971, 231–66; Vasunia 2001, 207–15.

72. Froidefond 1971, 140–45, 169–73; Vasunia 2001, 211–12.

73. Vasunia 2001, 212.

program more attractive, but would also frame his political message in a more pleasing, and therefore more persuasive way.

Thus, in a number of respects, an open letter that criticizes Polycrates' paradoxical treatment of this mythological Egyptian king is an ideal setting for Isocrates to sell his political agenda in addition to his educational program. The competition between the two speeches and between the two schools of rhetoric, as well as the opportunity this competition presents for writing on an eminently popular myth, make for a pleasant, and therefore persuasive setting for beneficial political advice (2.48–49). Moreover, composing an encomium on the same subject as Polycrates presents Isocrates with the opportunity to situate this ideal state in Egypt, which imbues the political regime Isocrates describes with the same antiquity and stability that motivated numerous other Greek authors to trace their ideas and institutions back to Egypt.

4. THE CONCLUSION, 11.44–50

Isocrates concludes by reminding Polycrates of his intention in writing to him, and by stating what he thinks he has accomplished. Isocrates claims that he composed an encomium (11.10–29) and a defense (11.30–43) of Busiris in order to show Polycrates how each sort of speech ought to be handled, and, by having shown Polycrates what proper praise and defense speeches look like, Isocrates thinks that he has effectively shown that Polycrates has not in fact written a defense (11.44).

But the poor quality of Polycrates' speech is not Isocrates' primary worry. He takes the poor quality of Polycrates' speech to be indicative of the harmful nature of his entire educational enterprise (11.47):

σκέψαι δὲ κάκεῖνο καὶ δῖελθε πρὸς αὐτόν. εἴ τις τῶν σοι συνόντων ἐπαρθείη ποιεῖν ἂ σὺ τυγχάνεις εὐλογῶν, πῶς οὐκ ἂν ἀθλιώτατος εἴη καὶ τῶν <νῦν> ὄντων καὶ τῶν πώποτε γεγενημένων; ἄρ' οὖν χρή τοιούτους λόγους γράφειν, οἷς τοῦτο προσέσται μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, ἢν μηδένα πείσαι τῶν ἀκουσάντων δυνηθῶσιν;

Look at this also and review it in your own mind: if one of your students were led to do what you are in fact praising, wouldn't he be the most wretched of people living, or who ever lived? Is it right to write the sort of speeches whose greatest good would be to persuade no one who hears them?

Isocrates' problem with Polycrates' speech is not primarily that it is impossible, or false (because his own speech may very well also be false, as Isocrates himself admits—see §33). Rather, Isocrates is concerned with the influence that the speech has on its audience, and especially about the detrimental influence that the education in his kind of speech has on Polycrates' students (11.46–47). Isocrates has therefore tried to discredit Polycrates' educational enterprise by providing an example of the sort of speech that he thinks has the right kind of influence: a persuasive mythological encomium that models good policy and behavior. This final criticism of Polycrates' school therefore lends further credibility to the thesis that the *Busiris* advances two pieces of propaganda: Isocrates discredits the educational program of Polycrates so as to influence prospective students to choose

his own educational program instead (11.30–33), and he does this by giving an example of the very sort of rhetorical influence that he teaches, namely, rhetoric that persuasively motivates moral behavior and political action.

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