

Confessions of a Literary Forger: Reading the Letters of Mithridates to Brutus

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Introduction: A Unique Collection

The collection of Greek letters attributed to Marcus Iunius Brutus, Caesar's famous assassin, consists of seventy short epistles in total, thirty-five of which were allegedly written by Brutus as he made his preparations for war in 43–42 BC. In this half of the collection, once a standalone item,¹ Brutus makes repeated requests for money, men, and military supplies from cities in the province of Asia and within Lycia. Although they were valued in antiquity as models of letter writing for military generals,² their authenticity has been hotly debated in the modern age.³ Erasmus was the first to express his doubts about their authorship in 1520, when he dismissed them as little more than “declamatiunculae.”⁴ This speculation was further fuelled by Richard Bentley's celebrated dissertation, which exposed the letters of Phalaris and other ancient worthies as forgeries.⁵ Ever since, the

¹ The Letter of Mithridates, *praef.* 1 (quoted below) suggests the collection of Brutus' letters predated his own edition. This is probably the same collection which was known to Plutarch, who quotes three of the letters (*Ep.* 1, 25, 69) at *Plut. Vit. Brut.* 2.3–5, although this assumption has recently been challenged by Marquis 2020. In this paper, I follow the sequence and Greek text of Torraca 1959; translations are part of a larger project I am working on with Anastasios Aidonis to produce the first English volume of the letters.

² Ancient testimonials at: Philostr. II, 258 K = Hercher, *Epistol. Gr.*, n. IV, 14 (translated by Malherbe 1988, 43); Photii *ep.* n. VI, 16 Hercher.

³ It is perhaps important to add here that Plutarch refers to a problem of authenticity surrounding some of the letters circulating under the name of Brutus (see *Plut. Vit. Brut.* 53.5–7). However, he seems to be referring to letters concerning the death of his wife Porcia, while he appears to accept the Greek letters of Brutus as genuine examples of Brutus' style; for a different opinion, see Moles 1997, esp. 141–48, who argues that Plutarch believed that the Greek letters too were spurious.

⁴ On Erasmus, see Achelis 1917/18.

⁵ Bentley 1697 and 1699.

letters of Brutus have been subjected to the same level of scrutiny and suspicion as other works of contested authorship; while some scholars have defended the attribution to Brutus,⁶ historical errors and inconsistencies have led many others to dismiss the collection as a fake, either in full⁷ or in part.⁸

It is perhaps unfortunate, however, that modern scholarly discussions have focused almost exclusively on the authenticity of Brutus' letters; that is, on one half of the larger edited collection.⁹ For an introductory cover letter written by its compiler, a certain Mithridates, explains that he personally composed thirty-five more letters because his nephew¹⁰ wanted to know how the communities to whom Brutus had written might have responded to his insistent demands. In other words: whatever the status of Brutus' letters, the edited collection self-consciously posits itself within the tradition of fictional letter writing. In this regard it is unique, and the survival of both cover letter and imaginary responses provides us with perhaps our clearest window into the practice of pseudepigraphy.

This chapter consequently takes as its starting point the recent renaissance of scholarly interest in pseudepigraphic writings, that is, works that have been wrongly or falsely ascribed to an author who is not the real author.¹¹ As scholars working in this field readily admit, one problem of methodology is that such compositions belong to a diverse group of texts: they do not share formal characteris-

⁶ E.g. Rühl 1915; Gelzer, *RE* 10.1, 1917, 1004–1011; Bengston 1970, 37–39; Goukowsky 2011; Jones 2015.

⁷ Marcks 1883; Rawson 1986; Moles 1997.

⁸ Westermann 1851; Smith 1936; Torraca 1959.

⁹ An important exception is Calhoun 2009. My own chapter was about to go to press when I learned that the same subject had been treated by Marquis 2020. Although her observations about Mithridates' prefatory cover letter are similar to mine in several respects, our arguments and approaches differ. Thus, Marquis focuses on the letter of Mithridates to argue that it may itself be part of the fiction; conversely, I limit myself to a discussion of how Mithridates presents his work, but I do so by comparing his methodological reflections in the cover letter to the techniques he uses in his imaginary replies.

¹⁰ I take ἀνεψιός to mean “nephew,” following a long tradition of other scholars, including: Cichorius 1922, 434; Smith 1936, 194; Torraca 1959, xxxi; Jones 2015, 196; *contra* Calhoun 2009, 299 who prefers “cousin.” While Calhoun is right to point to the meaning provided by *LSJ* s.v., Jones notes that Demochares, the nephew of Demosthenes, is referred to as ἀνεψιός by Athenaeus *Deipnosoph.* 252F (*FGrHist* 75 F 1).

¹¹ Definitions of pseudepigrapha are notoriously broad and cover a wide range of texts. For a book-length study, see Speyer 1971; cf. Metzger 1972 with a note on further bibliography at p. 23. The issue is well summarized by Peirano 2012, 1–7; for a full overview, see Martínez 2018. The problem of what to call the letters of Mithridates is compounded by the uncertainty surrounding the author's identity, see n. 13, below. However, following the typology of Baum 2001, 11 we may be dealing with a work of <Pseudonyme> Schrift (or “fictitious pseudepigraph”), since deception does not appear to have been a primary goal of the author.

tics or clear generic expectations. Instead, as Wolfgang Speyer has pointed out, a first key step is to recognise motivation as a fundamental aspect of the broader phenomenon: “Failing to develop the intentions of the forgers,” he suggests “would be equivalent to failing to understand their forgeries.”¹² With that in mind, this chapter argues that an understanding of Mithridates’ goal enables us to develop a response to the texts that goes beyond the question of authenticity. In particular, as I shall demonstrate, the author’s reflections on the art of composing his replies, coupled with a close examination of the contents of the letters, take the reader into the world of the fake letter writer, whereby he presents his work as a rhetorician, scholar, and a creative artist.

Forger as Rhetorician

When Mithridates sat down to compose his letters—his identity and the date of composition are both uncertain¹³—he prefaced the collection with a cover letter that does much to establish its didactic function (*prae*f. 1–4):¹⁴

Μιθριδάτης βασιλεῖ Μιθριδάτη τῷ ἀνεψιῷ χαίρειν.
 Τὰς Βρούτου ἐθαύμασα πολλάκις ἐπιστολάς οὐ μόνον δεινότητος καὶ συντομίας χάριν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς ἡγεμονικοῦ φρονήματος ἐχούσας χαρακτηῖρα· εἰκόσασιν γὰρ οὐδὲν νομίζουσιν καλόν, εἰ μὴ καὶ μεγαλοψυχίας ἔχοιτο. ἐγὼ δ’ ἂ μὲν περὶ τῶν τοιούτων φρονῶ λόγων οὐδ’ ἐν τῷδε ἀξιώ διαμφοισβητεῖν· ἀποφαίνοντος δὲ σοῦ δυσσαποκρίτως αὐτὰς ἔχειν, φήθηθιν δεῖν πεῖραν ποιήσασθαι τῆς ἀντιγραγῆς καὶ πορίσασθαι λόγους, οἷους εἰκόσ ἦν ἕκαστον ἀποκρίνασθαι τῶν ἐπεσταλκότων.

Mithridates to his nephew King Mithridates, greetings.

I have often admired the letters of Brutus not only because of their forcefulness and brevity, but also because they possess the stamp of a leader’s mind; for they seem to regard nothing [i.e. no expression] as elegant unless it also possesses magnanimity. Yet I do not think it worth disputing what I think of such texts here. However, because you declare they are difficult to respond to, I supposed I must attempt replying in writing, and to imagine the words

¹² Speyer 1971, 9: “Der Verzicht auf ein Herausarbeiten der Absichten der Fälscher wäre gleichbedeutend mit dem Verzicht, die Fälschungen zu verstehen.”

¹³ Overviews in Torraca 1959, xxvii; Jones 2015, 197.

¹⁴ I follow the example of Calhoun 2009 in numbering the individual sentences of the cover letter for ease of reference and orientation.

which each of the communities who sent letters would be likely to use in reply.

As is typical of such works, the author presents his addressee as a younger relative in need of instruction.¹⁵ As Luigi Torraca has pointed out, “the whole letter is a mosaic of words, phrases, and formulas belonging to the technical and specific language of the school” (“*tutta la lettera è un mosaico di termini, locuzioni, formule appartenenti al linguaggio tecnico e specifico della scuola*”).¹⁶ Thus, Brutus is praised for his possession of δεινότης; a quality which was closely associated with Demosthenes in antiquity.¹⁷ This forcefulness of speech is connected to Brutus’ συντομία (conciseness), another key term in ancient stylistic theory, and a particular requirement in epistolary writings according to Demetrius, Philostratus, and others.¹⁸ That there was a close connection between the work of the pseudepigrapher and the rhetorician should come as no surprise: written exercises in the rhetorical schools had long included an element of impersonation, whereby words were put into the mouths of known or historical persons (*ethopoeia* or *prosopopoeia*).¹⁹ Yet, what is particularly striking here is the author’s comment that his addressee had found the texts of Brutus “difficult to respond to” (δυσασποκρίτως), for it is their perceived unanswerability which provides the nod to what is unequivocally the most defining feature of the collection: the author’s interest in persuasive forms of argumentation, and especially the dilemma form.

This feature of the letters is clear enough in the opening letter of the collection (*Ep.* 1):

Ἀκούω ὑμᾶς Δολοβέλλα δεδωκέναι χρήματα. ἂ εἰ μὲν ἐκόντες ἔδοτε, ὁμολογεῖτε ἀδικεῖν· εἰ δὲ ἄκοντες, ἀποδείξατε τῷ ἐμοὶ ἐκόντες δοῦναι.

I hear that you have given money to Dolabella; if you gave it willingly confess that you have wronged me; if unwillingly, prove it by giving willingly to me.

¹⁵ Often such works are dedicated to a son or sons (e.g. Cicero’s *Partitiones Oratoriae* and *De Officiis*, or Asconius’ *Commentarii* on the speeches of Cicero), but they are not exclusively father-son: Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* is prefaced with a letter to his friend Trypho.

¹⁶ Torraca 1959, xxix.

¹⁷ On δεινός and δεινότης in the Greek rhetorical tradition, see Edwards 2013.

¹⁸ Calhoun 2009, 300n.13 provides the sources for the rhetorical theorists on brevity and forcefulness.

¹⁹ On *ethopoeia* in the *progymnasmata*, see Kennedy 2003 which includes translations of the extant works of Theon, Pseudo-Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus; see Gibson 2008 esp. 355–426 for the texts of Libanius dealing with exercises in character.

The form is a simple dilemma: that is, the presentation of two equally undesirable outcomes by which the speaker forces his opponent into an impossible situation (“if A, then B; if C, then B”). In this instance, the Pergamenes are forced to admit one of two premises: either they have acted unjustly, which carries the implied threat of punishment, or unwittingly, in which case they need to make amends. Either way, the Pergamenes are at a disadvantage, providing Brutus with the means to obtain his desired result. Writing over a century later, Plutarch cited this letter as an example of Brutus’ “remarkable and laconic” style (Plut. *Vit. Brut.* 2.3), a sentiment with which Mithridates was clearly in agreement. So how ought a community respond to such a demand?

This opening gambit provides a typical scenario played out over a sequence of ten letters: at first the Pergamenes plead poverty (*Ep.* 2), then they complain that Brutus’ demands are unfair (*Ep.* 4). It becomes clear mid-cycle that the Pergamenes have sent Brutus money, although not as much as he would have liked (*Ep.* 5 and 6). Yet, by the end of the exchange, the financial drain has been completed:²⁰ the Pergamenes have paid their due, and made up for the error of their judgement, a point which proves they conceded to the second premise of Brutus’ initial argument after all (*Ep.* 9). The result, real or imagined, was that the Pergamenes provided Brutus with the sum of two hundred talents, four times the amount they had given to Dolabella (*Ep.* 10).²¹ In this opening cycle, we hence see a prolonged exchange which has the simple dilemma form come to its logical conclusion. As the rest of the collection unfolds, however, we see alternative endings for the different communities, as Mithridates exploits the rich possibilities of rhetorical variation to compose his replies.

Take the exchange of letters between Brutus and the Rhodians for example. Brutus writes (*Ep.* 11):

Ξανθίους ἀποστάντας ἡμῶν χειρωσάμενοι ἠβηδὸν ἀπεσφάζαμεν, τὴν τε πόλιν αὐτῶν κατεπρήσαμεν· Παταρεῦσι δὲ προσθεμένοις ἡμῖν τῶν τε φόρων ἄφεσιν ἐδώκαμεν, ἐλευθέρους αὐτοὺς καὶ αὐτονόμους συγχωρήσαντες εἶναι, εἰς ἐπισκευὴν τε τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου καταλελυμένων παρ’ αὐτοῖς πενήκοντα τάλαντα ἐχαρισάμεθα. ὑμῖν οὖν βουλευομένοις περὶ ἑαυτῶν πάρεστιν ὄραν ὄψει εἶτε χρὴ πολεμίους ἡμᾶς ὥσπερ Ξάνθιοι, εἶτε φίλους καὶ εὐεργέτας ὄνπερ τρόπον Παταρεῖς αἰρεῖσθαι.

²⁰ Letters 7 and 8 do not fit into the sequence here because they imply a time when the Pergamenes were still supporting Brutus; cf. Jones 2015, 204.

²¹ For an analysis of the evidence which treats these sums as real, see Kirbihler 2013.

When the Xanthians revolted from us we subdued and slaughtered them, from the youth upwards, and burnt down their city. When the Patarans joined us, we exempted them from taxation, allowed them to be free and autonomous, and donated fifty talents towards the repair of any buildings which had been neglected for a long time. So, now that you are deciding your fate, you can see with your own eyes whether you should choose us to be your enemies, as the Xanthians did, or your friends and benefactors as the Patarans did.

This time, Brutus' letter takes the form of a more complex dilemma—a logical pattern which we might delineate as “If A, then B; If C, then D. But A or C. Therefore, B or D.” In other words: the Rhodians can either resist and eventually be forced to succumb (like the Xanthians), or they can succumb voluntarily (like the Patarans). Either way, Brutus' letter still presents the idea that the Rhodians will succumb, but it is framed by the contrasting fates and the decision which now awaits them: either to become the enemies or the friends of Brutus.

In their response, Mithridates makes the Rhodians refuse both options (*Ep.* 12):

Οὐκ εἰ σὺ βαρέως τοῖς ἐλευθεριάσασι Ξανθίων προσηνέχθης, ἤδη καὶ ἡμεῖς τοὺς ἐπὶ δουλείᾳ δεκασθέντας μιμησόμεθα Παταρεῖς, ἀλλ' ἐκείνων μὲν ἀπειξάμενοι τὴν τύχην πειρασόμεθα τῆς εὐγενείας ἔχεσθαι, τούτους δὲ μεμψάμενοι τῆς γνώμης οὐ δεησόμεθα τῶν ἀπὸ σοῦ λημμάτων, ἐνδοξότεραν ἡγούμενοι τὴν μετὰ κινδύνων ἐλευθερίαν τῆς ἐπὶ τῷ κερδαίνειν αὐτομολίας.

Even though you dealt severely with the Xanthians when they toyed with their liberty, still we will not imitate the Patarans who have been bribed into slavery. But, wishing away the Xanthians' fate, we will strive to maintain their nobility, and having found fault with the Patarans' decision, we will not take anything from you, since we believe it is more glorious to take freedom with risks than commit treason for a profit.

In so doing, however, the imaginary reply illustrates the strength of the dilemma posed by Brutus in Letter 11; as we shall see further below, the Rhodian's refusal to negotiate resulted in their annihilation. Even though they hoped to prevail, the Rhodians ultimately chose to become the enemies of the Liberators, and they paid heavily for it.²²

²² For the suffering of the Rhodians, see Vell. 2.69.6; Val. Max. 1.5.8; Plut. *Vit. Brut.* 30.3, 32.4; App. *B.Civ.* 4.65–74; Cass. Dio 47.33.1–4; Oros. 6.18.13.

The letters exchanged between Brutus and Lycians, on the other hand, show that another response is possible. Again, Brutus contrasts the fates of the Xanthians and Patarans in a complex dilemma, and once more he asks his addressees to choose between them (*Ep.* 25):

Ξάνθιοι τὴν ἐμὴν εὐεργεσίαν ὑπεριδόντες τάφον ἀπονοίας ἐσχίκασι τὴν πατρίδα, Παταρεῖς δὲ πιστεύσαντες ἑαυτοὺς ἐμοὶ οὐδὲν ἐλλείπουσι διοικούντες τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα τῆς ἐλευθερίας. ἐξὸν οὖν καὶ ὑμῖν ἢ τὴν Παταρέων κρίσιν ἢ τὴν Ξανθίων τύχην ἐλέσθαι.

The Xanthians ignored my kindness and now have their fatherland as a tomb for their madness. The Patarans on the other hand entrusted themselves to me and they are no less competent at administering each and every aspect of their freedom. It is therefore possible for you to choose either the judgement of the Patarans or the fate of the Xanthians.

In this case, however, Mithridates has the Lycians succumb immediately, as other sources tell us they did,²³ by accepting the dilemma as valid (*Ep.* 26):

Ξανθίοις μὲν συναχθόμεθα τῆς συμφορᾶς, ἣν πρόστιμον ἀνοίας ἔχουσι τῷ μηδὲ μετανοῆσαι δύνασθαι, Παταρεῦσι δὲ συνήσθημεν σωφρόνως ἅμα καὶ εὐτυχῶς ἐλομένοις ἃ ἔμελλε συνοίσειν. αὐτοὶ δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἡλιθία φρονοῦμεν ὥστε, παρὸν ἐν φίλοις ἀριθμουμένοις εὐτυχεῖν, τὴν τῶν δι' ἔχθραν κεκολλασμένων ἀτυχίαν ἐλέσθαι.

While we condole with the Xanthians for their disaster, which they bear as the penalty for their madness, not being able to change their mind; we are rejoicing alongside the Patarans who both wisely and fortunately chose what would be in their interest. We are not so foolish as to choose the fate of those punished for their enmity when we can flourish as one of your friends.

But a third example on the same theme can be seen in the letters between Brutus and the Coans, only this time Brutus frames his threat around the examples of Rhodes and the Lycian league (*Ep.* 13):

²³ Plutarch (*Vit. Brut.* 33.3) and Cassius Dio (47.34.6) both end their narratives of this period with the rest of the Lycian communities surrendering to Brutus' demands after the sack of Xanthus.

Ῥόδος μὲν ἤδη δεδούλωται Κασσίω, πόλις αὐθαδέστερον αἰσθομένη τῆς οἰκείας ἰσχύος μᾶλλον ἢ βεβαιότερον, Λυκία δ' ἡμῖν ὑπήκοος πᾶσα, ἡ μὲν πολέμῳ καμιούσα, ἡ δ' ἐκ τῆς ἀνάγκης ὠφελιμένη τὸ ἀβίαστον· ἐκόντες γὰρ εἴλοντο ἅ μετ' οὐ πολὺ ἐμελλον μὴ βουλόμενοι. καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν ἔλεσθε ἢ πολέμῳ βιασθέντες δοῦλοι ἢ ἐκουσίως ἡμᾶς δεξάμενοι φίλοι γενέσθαι.

Rhodes has already been reduced to servitude by Cassius, a city which rather arrogantly over-estimated its own strength rather than assessing it with more precision, all of Lycia is now our subject, one part was exhausted by the war, the other gained peace out of necessity; willingly they chose the terms which soon they would have accepted against their will. You too, then, choose either to become slaves, under the necessity of war, or our friends, by welcoming us into your city willingly.

Again, then, Mithridates' imaginary responses play on the perceived invincibility of this form of argument. However, the Coans' way of getting out of the dilemma is to deny its validity and to expose the dichotomy as false. Thus, they state that neither the capture of the Rhodians nor the submission of the Lycians are appropriate paradigms, and instead introduce a third alternative into the negotiations. The Rhodians have been allied with the Republicans from the beginning, they are made to claim; there was no need for Brutus to threaten them (*Ep.* 14):

Οὔτε ἡ Ῥοδίων ἄλωσις ἐξέπληξεν ἂν τοὺς μὴ τὰ σὰ φρονούντας οὔτε ἡ Λυκίων εὐπραξία μετὰ κολακείας ἔπεισεν· ἐλπίς γὰρ καὶ φόβος ἐν φίλοις μὲν ἀξιοπίστα, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἠλλοτριωμένοις εὐκαταφρόνητα. ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς ἄνωθ' ἐν σοὶ προσχωροῦντες καθ' ἐν ἀχθόμεθα, εἴ γε δόξαιμεν ἢ ἀπειλῆς ἢ ὑποσχέσεως γεγονέναι κτῆμα. ἔχε οὖν ἡμᾶς ὑπόδειγμα φιλίας πρὸς ἄλλους μᾶλλον ἢ ἐτέρων ἐφ' ἡμᾶς προσδέου.

Neither the capture of the Rhodians would have surprised those who are not of the same mind as you, nor has the good conduct and submissive behaviour of the Lycians persuaded us; for hope and fear amongst friends are trustworthy, but amongst enemies they are easily despised. But we, who from the beginning allied ourselves with you, are disgruntled on one point, that we might appear to be a possession either because of threats or promises. Therefore, make us an example of friendship for the sake of others, rather than needing [to use the example of] others against us.

In sum: this selection of letters illustrates quite vividly how one rhetorical tool—the dilemma—is explored through the variety of responses it could elicit. In so doing, it helps us understand how the author expected his reader to engage with the texts as model answers to the seemingly unanswerable letters of Brutus; moreover, when we consider the interplay between the cover letter and the contents of Mithridates' letters, we can also start to see identifiable features of the pseudepigraphic enterprise coming into focus.

Forger as Scholar and Creative Artist

If the author's task in composing replies was made simpler by his confidence in manipulating rhetorical forms, a more difficult challenge was presented by the nature of the material. As Mithridates goes on to explain in the next line of the cover letter (*praef.* 5–6):

ἦν δὲ δυσεύρετος ἡ ἐπιβολὴ κατ' ἄγνοιαν τῆς τότε περὶ τὰς πόλεις τύχης τε καὶ γνώμης· οὐ μὴν ταύτη γε ἀνῆκα τὴν ὀρμὴν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἐξ ἱστοριῶν ἐπιλεξάμενος, τὰ δὲ ταῖς δευτέραις καὶ τρίταις ἐπιστολαῖς ὑποσημαίνεσθαι περὶ τῶν προτέρων συνεῖς οὐχ ἥκιστα παρέξευξα καὶ τὸν ἐξ ἐπινοίας κατάλογον.

The enterprise was difficult because I did not know either the historical circumstances or what people thought at the time; still I did not hold back my enthusiasm for the project, but first selecting material from the historical sources, and then having gathered material from the second and third letters I drew assumptions about the previous ones; above all I put together the collection using my own imagination.

Thus, Mithridates points to the background research he performed in order to compose plausible replies: he consulted the historical sources. And here the tradition surrounding Brutus' exploitations in the East was rich.²⁴ In his introduction to this period of the civil war, Appian makes the point that “all the overseas territories were convulsed by the military conflicts caused by this civil war,” and that “cities endured many horrors when they were taken by force.” It is of particular significance that, among the territories most severely afflicted, Appian lists Rhodes, Patara, and Xanthus, since these are the exact same victims which feature

²⁴ Major sources for studying Brutus' exploitations in the Greek East, include Plut. *Vit. Brut.* 30.6–33.4, App. *B. Civ.* 4.76–82, Cass. Dio 47.34; cf. Tempest 2017, esp. 241–46.

prominently in the letters.²⁵ As we have already seen, Mithridates has the rest of Lycia surrender after the destruction of Xanthus, following the example of the Patarans. But a more interesting response for illuminating Mithridates' research in action is the letter of the Rhodians (*Ep.* 12, cited in full above), for it demonstrates exactly the three-stage method he describes in his cover letter.

First, Mithridates makes the Rhodians reject the definition of freedom provided by Brutus: far from being free and autonomous, the Patarans have been "bribed into slavery." They do not wish such a future for themselves; rather they believe "it is more glorious to take freedom with risks than commit treason for a profit." The Rhodians' reputations as zealous champions of liberty had, of course, a long tradition. It had been their resentment at the domination of Athens that had caused them to revolt from the Second Athenian League, an act which forms a large part of the background to Demosthenes' later speech *On the Freedom of the Rhodians* (Dem. 15). In that speech, we see some reflections of the stereotypes surrounding them: the worst kind are disloyal, even amongst themselves (Dem. 15.13); at best, the Rhodians "being Rhodians" (ὄντες Ῥόδιοι, Dem. 15.16) act with characteristic folly and naivety. They deserved what they got (Dem. 15. 15); Demosthenes can only hope that, in time, they might become more sensible (σωφρονέστεροι, Dem. 15.16.).²⁶

Similar expressions of Rhodian untrustworthiness abound in later historiographical sources, too.²⁷ Yet it is the speech of the elder Cato *On Behalf of the Rhodians* that warrants further attention here. Gellius, who records the speech, precedes it with the explanation that many senators were in favour of declaring war against the Rhodians because they had been disloyal in helping Perseus during the Third Macedonian conflict (Gell. 6.3.5). Another of the charges against them was that they had been arrogant: "Suppose they are arrogant," Cato is said to have asked, "what does that matter to us? Are you to be angry because someone is more arrogant than we are?" (*Sint sane superbi. Quid id ad nos attinet? Idne irascimini, si quis superbior est quam nos?* Gell. 6.3.50). All of this meant that when Mithridates came to compose his reply, there was an established pattern of Rhodian behaviour—material from which he could select—into which he could fit the response.

²⁵ The full text is at App. *B. Civ.* 4.52 καὶ τὰ ὑπερόρια πάντα πολέμοις διὰ τήνδε τὴν στάσιν ἐδονεῖτο ... πάθη τε πολλὰ συνηνέχθη πόλεσιν ἐκ δοριαλωσίας, ὑπεριδόντι δὲ τῶν ἔλασσόνων τὰ μέγιστα δὴ καὶ δι' ἀξίωσιν τῶν ἄλλων περιφανέστατα Λαοδικεῦσι καὶ Ταρσεῦσι καὶ Ῥοδίοις καὶ Παταρεῦσι καὶ Ξανθίοις.

²⁶ For a fuller introduction and analysis of the speech, see MacDowell 2009, 218–23; the distinction between the types of Rhodians here is a reference to the two parties, whom Demosthenes labels the "oligarchs" (the disloyal type) and the (naive) "democrats."

²⁷ For discussion and overview, see Gruen 1975.

A second source of help, however, was the evidence contained in other letters of Brutus, which Mithridates tells us he used to reconstruct the sequence of events. As we saw above, for example, when Brutus urged the Coans to choose between the fate of the Rhodians or the Lycians, he reminded them that Rhodes had already been reduced to servitude by Cassius—the city, he claimed, had “rather arrogantly over-estimated its own strength rather than assessing it with more precision” (πόλις αὐθαδέστερον αἰσθομένη τῆς οἰκείας ἰσχύος μᾶλλον ἢ βεβαιότερον, [Brut.] *Ep.* 13). Combined with the traditions that recorded the Rhodians as an arrogant, naive and freedom-loving people, then, this last clue provided the context for their final decision: that is, to paraphrase Mithridates, to fight for their liberty and hope (perhaps foolishly) to win glory.

Mithridates’ historical research even has a way of revealing aspects of Brutus’ relationships in the Greek East which are less well attested in other sources for his life. For instance, as we saw earlier, the Coans’ way of getting out of the dilemma impressed on them by Brutus was to deny its validity and to call upon him to recognise them as existing friends instead. Accordingly, the rest of the correspondence appears to indicate that Brutus and the Coans found a way to cooperate, and indeed Cos remained a free and independent polis until the Battle of Actium, over a decade later. This claim to friendship can be substantiated: a passing comment in Tacitus confirms that the Coans had protected the Roman community during the first Mithridatic war (89-85 BC);²⁸ what is more, epigraphic evidence appears to attest to a more personal relationship between Cos and the family of Brutus. For in two inscriptions dated to 46–44 BC, there is mention of Iunia, the daughter of Decimus Iunius Brutus and wife of Publius Servilius Isauricus, who was Brutus’ half sister (Iunia Prima).²⁹ The first, a dedication from Iunia, was found in the Asclepieion, which suggests she had accompanied her husband during his governorship of Asia (46-44 BC); the second was erected by the *demos* in her honour. In this instance, even though it is impossible to pinpoint the historical material upon which Mithridates was drawing, it seems that he built upon knowledge of a local or familial connection. Hence, he could make the Coans urge Brutus to “preserve [them] as an example of friendship for the sake of others, rather than using the example of others to throw at [them]” (*Ep.* 14, cited in full above).

Still, however, it is important to recognise the importance attached by Mithridates to imagination (ἐπινοία) as the third ingredient upon which he relies in the composition of his letters. As recent scholarship on pseudepigraphic works has

²⁸ For the claim, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.14.3.

²⁹ For the statues in the Asclepion and Kos, see Höghammer 1993, nos 8 and 52, respectively.

pointed out, part of the forger's job was to address and supplement lacunae.³⁰ The historical record left gaps: Mithridates' responses thus serve to fill in the unspoken perspective of the cities targeted by Brutus. But, as the cover letter continues to explain, this task too presented challenges: "somehow it is inherently difficult to contend with someone else's dexterity, considering that it is even difficult to keep up with one's own" (φύσει δέ πως δυσχερὲς ἀποβαίνει τὸ εἰς ἀλλοτρίαν συνδραμεῖν εὐστοχίαν, ὅποτε καὶ ἰδίαν χαλεπὸν ἀναλογῆσαι, *praef.* 7). Mithridates, then, had worried about writing letters that would prove a worthy match to those of Brutus. Part of the problem was that he simultaneously had "to imitate another person" and "do justice to his own intention" (ἐτέρῳ ἐξομοιωθῆναι ... τῇ κατὰ σφᾶς ὁμοτονῆσαι προθέσει, *praef.* 9). Moreover, he admits (*praef.* 11):

ἐπεὶ κάκεινό με οὐ λέληθεν, ὅτι ὁ μὲν πολλοῖς ἀνδράσι καὶ δήμοις γράφων εἰκότως ἐνὸς ἐξείχετο χαρακτήρος, ὁ δὲ ὑπὲρ πολλῶν διαλεγόμενος, ἐὰν μὲν ἀλλάσσει τὸν τύπον, ἀποπεπλανῆσθαι δόξει τοῦ σκοποῦ, τῇ δὲ αὐτῇ προσέχων ἰδέα, καὶ ἀπίθανος φανήσεται καὶ ἔωλος.

It has not escaped me that the man who writes to many men and communities plausibly sticks to one character, while the man who argues on behalf of many will seem to stray from his goal if he changes his "type;" yet by sticking to the same form, he will appear both unpersuasive and flat.

Notions of probability (εἰκότως) and finding the right speaking style (τύπος) thus engage the audience's understanding of what it takes to "get into" character. The term *χαρακτήρ*, used here by Mithridates, encompasses rather more than the modern English word "style" to include something akin to a type or *ιδέα*. There are numerous correspondents in the collection: in addition to those we have already mentioned, letters are exchanged between Brutus and the Caunians, Cyzicenes, Smyrnaeans, Myrans, Trallians, Bithynians, Samians, and one individual (Damas, in *Ep.* 33 and 34). If Mithridates was to adapt his style to reflect this diversity, he complains, he would sacrifice the consistency desired to match the letters of Brutus; on the other hand, to use the same voice throughout would render his compositions tiresome.

There is not the space here for a detailed analysis of Mithridates' style, but the cover letter establishes some basic principles: it is largely hypotactic and it avoids excessive Atticisms; main clauses are generally used at the beginnings of sentences (e.g. ἐπεὶ κάκεινό με οὐ λέληθεν, 11); finite verbs tend to appear near the start of their clauses (e.g. ἐθαύμασα in 1, εὐόικασι in 2 etc), while infinitives

³⁰ For this idea of forgeries as "creative supplements," see esp. Peirano 2012, 9–11.

come at the end (ἔχειν in 4, συνδραμεῖν and ἀναλογῆσαι in 7); occasionally he balances his clauses with *isocolon* (e.g. the first two clauses of sentence 1 contain 14 syllables each). These features, as Calhoun has pointed out, conform so closely to the canons of epistolary style that the whole letter becomes a “textbook” example of it.³¹ A comparison with one of his reply letters hence proves instructive for understanding Mithridates’ overall approach.

Brutus had written to the Cyzicenes (*Ep.* 37):

Ἐκομίσθη τὰ ὄπλα καὶ εἰς ὃν ἐβουλόμεθα καιρόν. τῆς οὖν λειτουργίας ταύτης ἐν δέοντι γενομένης, ἀντιδίδομεν ὑμῖν τὴν Προκόννησον σὺν ταῖς ἐν αὐτῇ λιθουργίας.

The military supplies arrived and by the time we wished. Since this service of yours was performed in good time, we give you as a reward Proconnesus along with its stone-quarries.

To which Mithridates wrote the following response (*Ep.* 38):

Οὔτε κέρδους ἐλπίδι ἐσπεύσαμεν ἀποστεῖλαι, οὔτε εἰς τὰ λοιπὰ ὀκνηρῶς ἐμέλλομεν ἔξειν, ἐπαινεθέντες ἀμισθί. ὅμως ἀξιούμενοι δωρεᾶς ἠδόμεθα τῇ σῆ μαρτυρία πλέον ἢ ταῖς Προκοννησίων λατομίαις.

We did not work hard at the tasks you set upon us with the hope of profit, nor would we be indifferent in our future obligations, having been praised without reward. Honoured as we are by your gift, we are delighted with your commendation rather than the quarries at Proconnesus.

Some elements of the epistolary style of the cover letter are clearly retained: the *isocolon* in the first two clauses (15 syllables each) creates a pleasing symmetrical balance, while the infinitives of these clauses again appear at the end (ἀποστεῖλαι ... ἔξειν). However, *parataxis* takes over as the preferred argumentative construction as the coordinating conjunctions (οὔτε ... οὔτε; ὅμως) serve to refute any suggestion that the Cyzicenes had acted for the hope of gain. Interesting, too, is that the syntax of the second sentence shows more deviation, still, as it adapts to mirror that of Brutus’ letter. Thus, the finite verb of the main clause in each (ἀντιδίδομεν; ἠδόμεθα) only comes after an opening clause (a genitive absolute

³¹ For fuller discussion and examples, see Calhoun 2009, 317–20; on the cover letter as a “textbook” example of epistolary style, see esp. 318.

in Brutus' letter and a participial construction in the response), leaving the respective offer and refusal of Proconnesus and the quarries until the end.

Other letters deviate in greater and lesser degrees, but the main point here is that the cover letter and the letters of Brutus provide both a stylistic template and a point of departure for Mithridates' replies. Thus, the didactic exposition of the epistolary craft gives way to the practice of it; in the process the form needs to be adapted to suit the circumstances and the addressee. As Mithridates comments in his cover letter, there was a need to consider the propriety of the responses. It is within a general's right "to send letters to his subjects that are full of arrogance" (τὰ γέμοντα ὑπεροψίας ἐπιστέλλειν τοῖς ὑπηκόοις, *praef.* 12). But a city needs to steer a more careful course through negotiations: "a high-handed response bears the charge of stupidity; but humility is no longer proportionate" (ἡμῖν δ' ἡ αὐθάδης ἀντιγραφὴ κατὰ γνώσιν ὡς ἡλιθίοις φέρει, τὸ δὲ ταπεινὸν οὐκέτ' ἀναλογεῖ πρὸς τὴν ὁμοίαν ἀπόκρισιν, *ibid.*). With the exception of Rhodes, which is specifically identified as an arrogant response, this is precisely the tone Mithridates chooses to adopt for the various *personae* of the cities' letter writers: assertive but mindful of Brutus' superiority.

Concluding Note: The Forger's Work

In the conclusion to his cover letter, Mithridates brings together a number of strands that establish his ultimate goal (*praef.* 13–14):

ὅμως δ' οὖν τὰ δυσχερῆ καίπερ τοσαῦτα ὄντα προεκλογισάμενος οὐδὲν ἤττον ὑπέστην τὸ ἔργον, βραχὺ μὲν ἑμαυτῷ γύμνασμα συντάξας, σοὶ δὲ οὐ μέγα κτῆμα, ἀλλὰ τοῖς πολλοῖς τάχα καὶ εὐκαταφρόνητον· φιλεῖ γὰρ τὰ πρὸ τῆς πείρας θαυμαστά μετὰ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ συντελέσματος γνῶσιν ῥάδια εἶναι παραθεωρεῖσθαι.

But although I counted on there being so many difficulties, I nonetheless undertook the labour, having composed a short exercise for myself, a very small possession for you, but for most readers perhaps even an unworthy one; for it is often the case that enterprises are admired before the attempt but later—once the results are known—are easy to be slighted.

As we have seen, the letters are rhetorical exercises, as is confirmed here by Mithridates' choice of the word γύμνασμα to describe his compositions; they present his labour (τὸ ἔργον). But the collection also presents more than that. In the way

that Mithridates has described the difficulties he faced in writing his responses to Brutus, the reader is encouraged to compare the task of the fake letter writer to that of the historian composing speeches, and in particular to the so-called methodological chapter in Thucydides (*Hist.* 1.122). In that passage, like Mithridates in the current work, Thucydides had reflected on the general principles he had followed in the research and composition of his speeches: “Therefore, my habit has been to make the various speakers express, on the subjects under consideration, what was in my opinion demanded of them, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said” (ὡς δ’ ἂν ἐδόκουν ἐμοὶ ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστα εἰπεῖν, ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων, οὕτως εἴρηται, *Thuc. Hist.* 1.22.1). The element of subjectivity carried by Thucydides’ ἐδόκουν ἐμοὶ finds a counterpart in Mithridates’ statement that it was necessary “to imagine the words which each of the communities who sent letters would be likely (εἰκὸς) to use in reply” (*praef.* 1). The term δέοντα in Thucydides alludes to the same rhetorical ideal as Mithridates’ use of the verb ἀναλογεῖ for describing the need for a proportionate and appropriate response (*praef.* 12). That we are meant to think specifically of Thucydides here might be suggested by Mithridates’ description of the results as “a small possession” for his nephew (οὐ μέγα κτῆμα), which is in all likelihood a pun on Thucydides’ famous hope that his work would be a “possession for eternity” (κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί, *Thuc. Hist.* 1.22.4).

It is on this final note that I wish to end: Mithridates here appears to invite the reader into the interpretative game, to enable them to judge his performance. Far from wanting to deceive the reader of the collection, the expression seems rather to testify to a certain self-consciousness: a desire that his compositions should stand up to the expectations of the pseudepigraphic enterprise. Mithridates voices his concern that his work may fail to impress (εὐκαταφρόνητον), yet it is still significant that he anticipates a wide readership among τοῖς πολλοῖς. It may not be a Thucydidean κτῆμα, but the repeated use of the verb θαυμάζω (ἐθαύμασα in line 1; θαυμαστὰ in line 11), appears to recall his earlier admiration of Brutus’ letters, and it may even suggest the response Mithridates would like his own compositions to inspire.³²

³² Versions of this paper have been delivered at the Universities of Birmingham, Exeter, Princeton, Roehampton and Yale. I am grateful to colleagues at all these institutions for inviting me to present my ideas, and to the participants who offered thoughtful comments and suggestions. I should also like to acknowledge the generosity of the Leverhulme Trust for funding provided towards this project under the Research Fellowship scheme.

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