The Origins Of Rhetoric In Ancient Greece

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Rhetoric As A Feature of Early Civilizations

Christian Myer (2006:1) says “The scholarly myth of origin has it that rhetoric developed in Ancient Greece... Why Meyer does not challenge what he acknowledges as myth is unclear, but this implication of the Greek provenance of rhetoric is demonstrably false. This is not to deny the Greek’s particular cultivation of rhetoric into a formal disputatious art suited to their emerging democracies, but there can be little doubt that the ancient Egyptians have a better claim to being the originators of rhetoric or what they called ‘good speech’. The Rhetoric first flourished in ancient Greece. The first mention of rhetoric as an art was in Homer’s Iliad. Cicero is widely considered the finest rhetorician of the Roman Republic, based on his collected speeches and treatises. His On Invention was one of the most widely used texts on the art of rhetoric in the Middle Ages. Treatises on ancient rhetoric were being written before Cicero’s time, however. The first treatise is recognized as that of Empedocles, in around 444 BC. He influenced the first actual texts dedicated to the subject that were compiled by Corax and Tisias. While a number of
The ancient Greeks wondered about language. And what caused their wonderment was the realization, coming from collective political arrangements, that language spoken or written at certain times and in certain circumstances had very real effects on the polis. Prior to Solon’s reforms circa 590 B.C.E., the Greeks had lived since about the ninth century B.C.E. in feudal-tribal units governed by aristocratic, land-holding families. The families cooperated economically and politically to a certain extent across the region. Greeks who could pay for it sought education to help them speak with authority. The first teachers of rhetoric in the Greek world were the itinerant lecturers of the fifth century known as the Sophists, or wise men. Sophists taught by example the skills of civic life.