The Origins Of Rhetoric In Ancient Greece

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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 Greeks’ particular cultivation of rhetoric into a formal disputationary 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 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...