

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Religion

College of Arts and Sciences

2004

Story-List-Sanction: A Cross-Cultural Strategy of Ancient Persuasion

James W. Watts

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/rel>



Part of the [Near Eastern Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Watts, James W. "Story, List, Sanction: A Cross-Cultural Strategy of Ancient Persuasion," in *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks*, ed. Carol Lipson and Roberta Binkley, Albany: SUNY Press, 2004, pp. 197-212.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts and Sciences at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religion by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Rhetoric before and beyond the Greeks

Edited by

Carol S. Lipson
Roberta A. Binkley

State University of New York Press

2004

Story–List–Sanction: A Cross-Cultural Strategy of Ancient Persuasion

James W. Watts

Persuasion has been a key topic in rhetorical theory from classical to modern times. Though the study of rhetoric has been largely confined to western culture and texts, persuasion is an overt feature of many oral practices and written texts worldwide. The persuasive intent behind speeches or texts is often obvious, despite cultural differences in form and genre. Persuasion can therefore provide a useful starting point for comparing the rhetorical practices of different cultures. For the purposes of comparative analysis of ancient Near Eastern rhetoric, I therefore define rhetoric as including any and all forms of persuasion (cf. Burke 1950, 49–55, 61–62).

Persuasion motivated the creation of many ancient Near Eastern texts. This is especially true of royal inscriptions, whose concerns range from preservation of the inscription itself to dynastic propaganda. Persuasive interests also appear in instructional and literary works that exhort their audience to conform to social norms or celebrate the glory of the national gods. Ancient texts display their persuasive intentions overtly in the militaristic boasts and threats of kings or the promises and warnings of sages or, most obviously, by invoking blessings and curses from the gods on their readers and hearers. Persuasion was not limited to particular genres of discourse and literature but was frequently a stimulus leading authors to combine genres to create more persuasive forms. In this process, the rhetorical capacities of many different kinds of literature were harnessed for overtly persuasive purposes. One such rhetorical strategy combined three kinds of materials—stories, lists and sanctions—to influence its audience's ideas and behaviors. It shaped the form and content of texts from a wide variety of periods and cultures in the ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean, including the foundational scriptures of

Judaism and Christianity. Through them it has influenced the subsequent course of western religious, legal, and academic rhetoric.

Juxtaposing Genres for Persuasion

A short example of the story–list–sanction strategy can be found in an inscription of Kurigalzu, one of several Kassite kings of Babylon by that name who ruled in the mid-second millennium B.C.E.. The complete text runs as follows:

(i 1) Kurigalzu, great king, mighty king, king of the universe, favorite of Anu and Enlil, nominated (for kingship) by the gods am I! King who has no equal among all kings his ancestors, son of [Kadash]man-Harbe, unrivalled king, who completed the fortifications of . . . who [fin]ished the Ekur, who [prov]ides for Ur and Uruk, who [guar]antees the rites of Eridu, who constructed the temples of Anu and Ishtar, who [guarantees] the regular offerings of the great gods,

(i 16) I caused Anu, father of the great gods, to dwell in his exalted sanctuary. To Ishtar, the most great lady, who goes at my side, who maintains my army, shepherds my people, subdues those disobedient to me:

(i 24) From the town Adatti, on the bank of the Euphrates, as far as the town Mangissi, bordering on the field Duranki, beloved of Enlil. From the town of my lady, Bit-Gashan-ama-kalla, as far as the border of the city Girsu, an area of 216,000 kor using a ratio per surface unit of 30 quarts of seed barley, measured by the large cubit, to Ishtar I granted.

(ii 5) 3 kor of bread, 3 kor of fine wine, 2 (large measures) of date cakes, 30 quarts of imported dates, 30 quarts of fine(?) oil, 3 sheep per day did I establish as the regular offering for all time.

(ii 11) I set up boundary stones in all directions and guaranteed the borders. The towns, fields, watercourses, and unirrigated land, and their rural settlements did I grant to Ishtar, my lady.

(ii 16) Whosoever shall arise afterward and shall alter my deeds and change the command which I spoke, shall take out my boundary stones, shift my boundary lines, take away the towns, fields, watercourses, and unirrigated lands, or the rural settlements in the neighborhood of Uruk, or cause (another) to take (them) away, or who shall attempt to convert them to state lands, may Ishtar, the most great lady, not go at his side in battle and combat, but inflict defeat

and heavy losses upon his army and scatter his forces! (Foster 1993, 278–79)

The structure of this text shows a clear progression. After Kurigalzu boasts about his status with humans and the gods, he presents a short narrative of his accomplishments in building or restoring city defenses, temples, and temple rites, and in securing income for those temples. Then follow lists of the king's donations to the Ishtar temple, consisting of specifically designated land grants (i 24ff.), regulations for the daily offerings (ii 5ff.), and further description of the temple's rights over the donated land, including the notice that the boundaries were clearly marked (ii 11ff.; this text was itself probably inscribed on these boundary stones, though only copies on clay tablets survive). The inscription concludes with curses on any future king who revokes Kurigalzu's donations and promises that the god Ishtar will avenge her losses herself (ii 16ff.).

Two purposes clearly motivated the writing of Kurigalzu's inscription: glorification of the king and preservation of the Ishtar Temple's legal prerogatives and religious rites. To achieve the first, the text characterizes Kurigalzu by describing his greatness and then by narrating his accomplishments. The building of temples ("finished the Ekur," "constructed the temples of Anu and Ishtar") receives prominent attention because it casts Kurigalzu as a cult founder who "guarantees the rites" and "the regular offerings." The narrative thus legitimates his right to mandate the donations and offerings contained in the following lists. These lists in turn specify the contents of his decrees and so make their application possible. The first list describes the boundaries of the land grant both by the towns on its borders and by its area (approximately 525 square kilometers). The second list mandates the quantities of daily offerings to the deity. After emphasizing Kurigalzu's attention to establishing the land boundaries by visible markers, the third list specifies the contents of the donated land. Thus the lists verify and illustrate Kurigalzu's claim that he "guaranteed the rites" and "the regular offerings of the great gods."

At the same time, these lists legitimize the temple's claim to this land and its produce on the basis of the royal cult founder's original donation. Defense of these prerogatives after Kurigalzu's death cannot, however, depend on royal patronage that might prove fickle, so the inscription concludes with curses on any later king who might appropriate the property for other uses. Thus the text defends the temple's claims by citing the royal land grant and by promising divine enforcement.

The inscription's rhetoric is clearly directed at future kings and their officials, for it explicitly aims to persuade them not to expropriate the lands and income of the Ishtar temple. Unlike the other lists, however, the list of daily offerings does not at first glance seem directed at the same audience. This list

could be interpreted as instructions for the temple priests, but the focus on quantities of offerings and the lack of any other ritual directions suggests that lay people are being addressed. Because the offerings list appears between descriptions of the donated land's boundaries and contents, it seems best to interpret the list as justifying the size and nature of the land grant by specifying why it was needed: substantial properties are required to support the temple's schedule of daily offerings. This also explains the deity's interest in defending the temple's lands, as promised in the curses: Ishtar receives the offerings that are produced on these lands. Future kings and their officials thus seem to be the target audience for these provisions as well.

To summarize: Kurigalzu's inscription aims to discourage expropriation of temple lands by justifying them as granted by the cult founder and as necessary to sustain the rites initiated by him and expected by the deity. The text mixes stories of the cult-founder's acts with lists of properties and offerings and divine sanctions against those who might infringe on the temple's prerogatives in order to make these claims persuasive for the later rulers at whom they are directed. It unites story, list, and sanction for the sake of persuasion.

Other examples of the complete pattern

Neither the literary structure nor the rhetorical purpose of Kurigalzu's inscription are particularly distinctive. I chose it for its brevity in order to present a complete example of the widespread tendency to bring together diverse kinds of material in a single inscription to enhance its persuasive effect. The pattern of story-list-sanction does not appear so consistently as to suggest a recognizable literary or rhetorical genre. Instead, these elements appear all three together or any two without the third in texts of such different genres, cultures, and time periods that their combination seems to represent a rhetorical strategy adopted irregularly to enhance the persuasiveness of a text.

The complete story-list-sanction pattern appears most commonly in inscriptions like Kurigalzu's that commemorate royal achievements. Thus Naram-Sin of Akkad (23rd cent. B.C.E.) recounts his conquest of two cities, then lists the measurements of (apparently) the two cities' fortifications, and concludes with curses by "all the great gods" on those who might appropriate his inscription as their own (Foster 1993, 52–53). The "Apology" of the Hittite king Hattusili III (13th cent. B.C.E.) concludes a long account of his rise to kingship with a description of properties donated to the deity Ishtar and curses against those who would claim those properties by diverting his successors from the worship of Ishtar or who would oppose them directly (Hallo and Younger 1997, 199–204). The Karatepe inscription of Azatiwada, the Phoenician governor of Adana (8th cent. B.C.E.), recounts his governmental,

architectural, and military accomplishments at length before presenting a short schedule of offerings: "a yearly sacrifice: an ox; and at the time (season) of plowing: a sheep; and at the time (season) of reaping/harvesting: a sheep." It then concludes with blessings on Azatiwada and the inhabitants of his city and curses on any future ruler who might obliterate this gate inscription (Hallo and Younger 2000, 149–50). A dedicatory inscription of Seti I (14th cent. B.C.E.) narrates this Egyptian king's achievement in digging a well and constructing a temple (and town?) on the desert road to some gold mines. Then Seti addresses the rulers of Egypt with commands setting aside a troop of gold-washers for the Abydos temple as a perpetual grant, and curses extensively any king or official who appropriates this troop for other purposes while blessing those who maintain his endowment (Lichtheim 1976, 52–57). The Famine Stela (3rd–2nd cent. B.C.E.) narrates how an Egyptian king ended a famine by making offerings to Khnum of Elephantine, then donated extensive lands and a tithe of their produce to the Elephantine temple. Concluding instructions for inscribing two copies of this donation end with the single sanction, "He who spits (on it) deceitfully shall be given over to punishment" (Lichtheim 1980, 94–103). From Asia Minor in the Persian period (4th cent. B.C.E.), a stela from the Leto Temple at Xanthos briefly records the community's decision to establish this temple, then follows with a list of exemptions for its lands and schedules of offerings as authorized by the Persian satrap and concludes with divine sanctions to encourage observance of these provisions (Metzger 1979).

The story-list-sanction pattern, however, is not restricted to dedicatory inscriptions. It structures some ancient law codes, such as Hammurabi's Code from Babylon (17th cent. B.C.E.) and the earlier Sumerian law code of Lipit-Ishtar (Roth 1995, 71–142, 23–35). Hittite treaties between imperial overlords and vassal rulers (late 2nd millennium B.C.E.) recount the history of relations between the states before listing the stipulations to which the vassal is obligated. Then after describing how the treaty document itself must be preserved and reread periodically, the gods of both states are listed and called upon to witness the agreement and enforce the curses and blessings that conclude the documents (Beckman 1996, 2–3). Legal texts from the Hebrew Bible (7th–5th cents. B.C.E.) were also shaped by the story-list-sanction structure. It is clearest in Deuteronomy, whose review of Israel's exodus from Egypt (chaps. 1–11) leads through the Deuteronomic law collection (chaps. 12–26) to extensive blessings and curses (chaps. 27–30; Watts 1999). Even the conclusion to an Akkadian epic uses this three-part rhetoric for religious persuasion: Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation epic (later 2nd millennium B.C.E.), supplements its narrative with a list of the god Marduk's fifty names that occupies the last one-and-a-half of its seven tablets. The concluding sanctions take the form not of blessings and curses but of exhortations promising prosperity to

those who study the names and warning of the god's anger and judgment (Foster 1993, 400–401).

Examples with two of the three elements

Many more texts combine any two of the story–list–sanction elements. Juxtaposition of narratives with lists appears fairly often. Though some inscriptions, like a donation stela of the Egyptian king Ay (14th cent. B.C.E.) from Giza, use narrative as little more than an introductory framework, many others use much longer stories to authorize the following lists. A boundary stela from El-Amarna in Egypt tells of Pharaoh Akhenaton (14th cent. B.C.E.) arriving in the city and issuing a declaration, which it quotes, that establishes the boundaries of the city. The Buhen Stela from the same period narrates the story of a military campaign, follows it with a list enumerating captives and enemy dead, and concludes by celebrating Akhenaton's power over foreign countries (Murnane 1995, 225, 81–86, 101–102). Several documents claiming to stem from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylon (12th cent. B.C.E.) narrate military campaigns or travels and then list exemptions granted for service in battle, or give orders to restore a temple, or list supplies being donated for offerings (Foster 1993, 297–98, 302, 304–306). In the legal sphere, Pharaoh Horemheb's edict from Karnak (Egyptian 14th cent. B.C.E.), after praising the king, gives a paragraph narrating the circumstances of the edict before listing a series of provisions reforming state taxation, appropriations, and the judicial system (Murnane 1995, 235–40). Several Hittite myths make clear that recitation of the story that they recount is one component of a ritual designed to prompt specific actions by one or more deities. Thus one text clearly describes how a (short) narrative of the sun-god's departure was used within a ritual to bring about the deity's return (Hoffner 1990, 22–23). Ritual texts that cite stories as part of magical incantations are known from other cultures besides the Hittites.¹ The persuasive force of these texts is directed towards the gods, not humans, so apparently deities were also thought to be influenced by the combination of story and list.

Ancient stories that do not introduce lists may nevertheless conclude with sanctions. The eighth century B.C.E. Akkadian *Erra* epic promises rewards and threatens punishments against gods and humans alike on the basis of the treatment the epic itself receives (Foster 1993, 804; Hallo and Younger 1997, 415–16). Commemorative inscriptions frequently curse anyone who might destroy the inscription or appropriate it as their own. This tendency also appears in religious texts from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The Letter of Aristeas (2nd–1st cents. B.C.E.) invokes sanctions against anyone who might alter the Septuagint Greek translation of the Jewish Bible (Charlesworth 1983, 2:33). The Jewish apocalyptic work of 1 Enoch

(104:10–13) from the late first millennium B.C.E. and the New Testament book of Revelation (22:18–19) from the late first century C.E. threaten divine sanctions against later editors. In a similar way, nonnarrative legal texts often conclude with sanctions (e.g. Assyrian treaties). New Greek laws were inscribed on monuments near temples to relate them to divine authority and emphasize that point with divine curses on those who fail to observe them (Thomas 1992, 72, 145–46).

One could object that some of these texts are not obviously structured in the manner in which I have suggested. In Azatiwada's inscription, for example, the sacrificial calendar has been considered part of the narrative of his accomplishments, and is in any case much shorter than the list of titles that introduce the text (cf. Younger 1998, 22; Greenstein 1995, 2428–32). In other cases, such as Ay's donation stela, the introductory titles overshadow the very brief narrative, which serves simply to introduce the quotation of the grant. Sanctions are frequently so brief that they seem merely to be one of several concluding formulae, as in the Famine Stela, rather than a crucial part of the main composition.

Such criticisms do weigh against any notion that the story–list–sanction pattern describes an essential feature of some ancient genre of literature; it does not.² More often than not, commemorative inscriptions, law codes, treaties, and epics lack one or more of the three elements in this pattern. Even when they occur together, any one of the three may be far more prominent than the others, as may other elements (such as introductory titles) that I have not included in this analysis. My point then is not to describe structural features of ancient literature so much as to point out the rhetorical effect of their combination. Wherever it occurs, the combination in various patterns and proportions of stories, lists, and sanctions serves the same recognizable purpose: persuasion.

Persuasion in Time

Each of the three components in the story–list–sanction pattern serves a distinct rhetorical purpose that shapes its use. Different literary genres may serve the same rhetorical role within the persuasive structure. The consistent function of the “story” is to ground each text's contents and origin in the past actions of some authority, which in the commemorative inscriptions is usually a king but sometimes a governor (e.g. Azatiwada) or a community (the Letoon inscription), and is a deity in the myths and epics, as well as the Torah.

The category I have labeled “list” contains far more diverse kinds of material. These range from numbers of enemy dead and captured (Akhenaton's Buhen Stela) through descriptions of land grants, exemptions, and endow-

ments (e.g. the inscriptions of Kurigalzu, Ay, and Seti I), lists of offerings (e.g. Kurigalzu, Azatiwada), direct commands (Seti I), casuistic rules and regulations (e.g. the Code of Hammurabi, Horemheb's rulings, Hittite treaties, the Torah) to catalogues of a deity's names (Enuma Elish, Anzu). They all fall under the broad category of lists that John O'Banion argued "underlies all modes of systematic expression."

Rendered as tallies, recordings of the movements of the stars, word lists, dictionaries, or codified laws, the list is a powerful tool for arranging and disseminating isolated pieces of information. It also comes to arrange and, to a considerable degree, dictate the nature of the lives of those who are affected by lists (O'Banion 1992, xiv, 12).

In literary form, lists are sometimes indistinguishable from the narratives that introduce them. The rhetoric of these lists aims, however, for a different persuasive effect than do the stories. While the stories ground the inscription's authority in the past, the lists describe obligations that are imposed on readers in the present. In other words, whereas the stories serve to memorialize the founders and legitimize past actions, the lists aim to dictate present behavior. The descriptions of land borders and contents, quantities of offerings, and tax exemptions aim to discourage infringement of these prerogatives by officials who read the inscriptions. The stipulations of vassal treaties, Horemheb's administrative reform, and the biblical laws aim to encourage acts in accord with their regulations and discourage prohibited behaviors. Surprisingly, the law codes of Mesopotamia seem to have functioned less as judicial directives than as portrayals of ideal justice to reflect positively on the character of their sponsor. They remind us that memorializing the founding king or deity is a major rhetorical goal motivating all of these texts. That is clearly the case in the lists of the deity's names in certain epics that aim to shape not only opinion but also religious practice. The names, according to Enuma Elish, "must be grasped: the 'first one' should reveal (them), the wise and knowledgeable should ponder (them) together, the master should repeat, and make the pupil understand. The 'shepherd,' the 'herdsman' should pay attention" (Foster 1993, 400). In all these cases, the lists direct attention to the present in contrast to the stories' focus on the past, while reinforcing the stories' (and opening titles') celebration of the king or deity.³

The sanctions that conclude many of these texts address a wide assortment of behaviors, from preservation of the text itself through reversals of the founder's donations/exemptions, to adherence to and promulgation of the text's political, legal, or religious instructions. Texts from every period and region frequently limit their sanctions to inveighing against destroying or ignoring the text itself. At stake are the reputation and interests of kings, empires,

temple priesthods, and property owners, each of whom has a considerable stake in the text's preservation because of the implications of its contents. Therefore, concluding sanctions encourage preservation of the unaltered texts as a central and sometimes sole emphasis.

Some texts' claims extend beyond exhortations against plagiarism or vandalism to exhortations in favor of certain kinds of behavior and against others. They claim influence over the reader's future for good or for ill, depending on the response. By describing the possible futures that depend on the readers' behavior, the sanctions complete the persuasive rhetoric begun by stories of the past that authorize the text and continued in lists describing conditions or applying obligations to the present. Thus the rhetoric of story, list, and sanction invokes the past, present, and future for purposes of persuasion.

The overtly persuasive goals of most of the texts mentioned above allow description of their rhetorical intentions and methods with some precision. It is much more difficult to judge their effectiveness at encouraging and discouraging certain behaviors in their readers. However, the extant record contains indications that this rhetoric was taken seriously by at least some people. Lichtheim provided one indication of its effectiveness by noting that Seti's son, Ramses II, completed the Abydos temple and established its endowment as specified in Seti's inscription (1976, 52). The grants and endowments of previous kings provided effective legal standing for temples long into the future: the Roman historian Tacitus reported that the people of Miles in the reign of the emperor Tiberius successfully defended the asylum rights of their temple on the basis of a five-hundred-year-old grant by the Persian emperor Darius (Tacitus, *Annals* 3.63). Of course, we cannot know whether the original inscription at Miles took the story-list-sanction form or any part of it, nor whether Ramses was influenced to fulfill his father's endowments by Seti's inscriptions or by other factors. Nevertheless, such references suggest that ancient sponsors and scribes could reasonably expect the rhetoric of their texts to wield influence over at least some readers.

Persuasion Across Cultures

The preceding survey shows that texts of various genres from diverse cultures, periods, and areas of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean societies employ the persuasive strategy of story-list-sanction. They include texts from third millennium B.C.E. Mesopotamia (Sumer and Akkad), second millennium Mesopotamia (Babylon, Assyria), Anatolia (Hittites), and Egypt, first millennium Mesopotamia (Babylon and Assyria), Egypt, Syro-Palestine (Phoenicia, Judea), and Anatolia (Greek/Lycian Xanthos under Persian rule). Yet the strategy is not typical of any particular textual genre in any of these

cultures, but seems rather to have been adopted ad hoc to enhance the persuasiveness of particular texts.

How should the cross-cultural use of this strategy be explained? One can observe two common features of most, but not all, of the texts employing the complete pattern: most are inscriptions or copies of inscriptions, and most stem from royal circles. Those texts that do not presuppose public display in inscriptional form notably emphasize their public performance at regular intervals: treaties usually include among their stipulations regular readings of the treaty documents, epics emphasize the study and performance of their poetic texts (see the lines from *Enuma Elish* quoted above; similarly *Erra*), and biblical Torah explicitly requires public readings and private study. Since almost all reading in the ancient world took place aloud, and usually to an audience, setting up an inscription presupposed its performance as well (cf. Judge 1997, 808). Thus all these texts presuppose the public presentation of their contents. Conversely, magical instructions that may have been intended for more private use employ only part of the story–list–sanction pattern. Neither do private letters use the strategy much, despite the fact that many letters have persuasion as their obvious motivation. The concluding sanctions in the public texts specify their audience more specifically as kings and state officials, though some expand it to include various other categories of people up to the general level of “anyone who” The prominence of state functionaries in the intended audience does not contradict the public orientation of this rhetoric. The sponsors of these texts aimed to persuade future rulers and their underlings to particular courses of action or nonaction precisely by making their arguments publicly, so that their stories, lists, and sanctions would bring pressure to bear on those in power to accede to their demands.

That point brings us to the other common characteristic of the texts using the story–list–sanction strategy: their origins in royal circles. The state interests expressed explicitly in the treaties, laws, and commemorative inscriptions also motivate the epic *Enuma Elish* that celebrates the ascendancy of Babylon’s patron deity to “kingship” over the other deities. The notable exception to such royal patronage is biblical Torah that claims in its story of origins to be, not the consequence of, but rather the prior condition for Israel’s constitution as a people. Nevertheless, the effect of crediting biblical law to divine rather than royal origins is to cast God as Israel’s king (Watts 1999, 91–109).

The story–list–sanction pattern thus represents a state rhetoric evoking past acts, present obligations, and future possibilities to persuade a public audience to conform to the ruler’s wishes. I think the desire for a comprehensive rhetoric of persuasion best explains the sporadic appearance of the strategy in works of diverse genres, cultures, and time-periods. The attempt to cover past, present and future naturally leads to juxtaposing genres in some variant of the story–list–sanction form. This explanation need not rule out some role for

cultural diffusion: the scribes that staffed royal bureaucracies often worked in multiple languages and scripts and were therefore familiar with the inscriptional and literary forms of cultures across the region. The possibility of the diffusion of literary forms between Mesopotamian, Hittite, Egyptian, Levantine, and Greek cultures increases the more such texts derive from scribal circles in royal courts.

Because the strategy employs a temporal structure that prefers, but does not require, particular genres to play particular roles (e.g. narratives of the past, curses for the future), it easily accommodates the various expressions demanded by a particular culture or situation. The wide diversity of materials labeled “list” in the above survey demonstrates this flexibility. Some of these texts hint at culturally distinct developments of the form. The most elaborate cultural adaptation of the story–list–sanction strategy appears in the Hebrew Bible, where the pattern welds together the Pentateuch’s vast array of genres and materials into a single rhetoric encouraging loyalty to divine law and the Jerusalem priesthood (Watts 1999, 131–61). Since the Pentateuch was the first scripture of Judaism and remains its most important part, it became the model for the two parts of Christian scripture as well: an Old Testament of histories (story), anthologies (list), and prophecies (sanction), and a New Testament of Gospels (story), didactic letters (list), and an apocalypse (sanction). Christian emulation of the pattern was probably less the result of conscious analysis of its Pentateuchal form than of the desire to reproduce the Torah’s persuasive force based in past divine acts, present obligations, and possible futures in the form of a larger structure that displaced the Torah’s centrality as scripture. Thus the rhetoric of story–list–sanction shaped key collections of western scriptures (Torah, Christian Bible) and through them entered subsequent western rhetoric.

Story–List–Sanction in Western Rhetoric

The persuasive strategy behind the story–list–sanction pattern does not correspond to the rhetorical forms recommended by early Greek theorists. In fact, they deplored the persuasive use of stories and sanctions. Aristotle considered narration introductory and superfluous, necessary only for “weak” audiences incapable of grasping the logic of enthymemic proof (*Rhetoric* 3.13–14). O’Banion noted that for Aristotle, “Such concerns were unfortunate tasks preliminary to proceeding with what, at least to him, really mattered—the reasons and the evidence” (1992, 52). Though the Roman theorists Cicero and Quintilian later emphasized the importance of narrative, O’Banion argued that Aristotle’s influence persisted in western academic tradition, so that narrative methods of argumentation became disassociated from the analytical

methods of reason and proof, and isolated within the separate discipline of literary studies. Divine sanctions found even less place in the Greek theorist's repertoire of acceptable means of persuasion. They classified blessings and curses as "magic," with all the pejorative connotations that the term still evokes, and viewed them as techniques for manipulating an audience's emotions (Romilly 1975, 4–6, 16, 25–43, 82–85). Plato called for punishment of those who use such tactics: let "there be among us no working on the terrors of mankind—the most part of whom are as timorous as babes" (*Laws* XI 933a; cf. *Republic* II 364b–c). Thus they denounced persuasive uses of stories and sanctions as unethical manipulations of an audience that diverted rhetoric from its proper goal, namely the rational demonstration of truth.

These normative claims by the Greek theorists show the prevalence of components of the story–list–sanction strategy in the Greek culture familiar to them. The full pattern is suggested by Plato's sarcastic description of the religious literature of his day:

They produce a bushel of books of Musaeus and Orpheus, the offspring of the Moon and of the Muses, as they affirm, and these books they use in their ritual, and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice, by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport for the living, and that there are also special rites for the defunct, which they call functions, that deliver us from evils in that other world, while terrible things await those who have neglected to sacrifice (*Republic* II 364e–365a, trans. P. Shorey).

Here the reference to divine origins suggests a story that authorizes the contents of the books, their use in ritual indicates that their contents include didactic lists, and the enumeration of their various consequences points to divine sanctions, though without the texts themselves we cannot be sure that the strategy structured this literature. Be that as it may, the Greek theorists' misgivings about the rhetorical uses of stories and sanctions point out the use of these means of persuasion in ancient Greek society, as in the other cultures of the Near East and Mediterranean.

Their reaction against such practices also explains the negative evaluations of such methods common in much rhetorical theory in later periods. Broadly speaking, Aristotle's elevation of reason over narration, to say nothing of threats and promises, emphasized an elitist ideal of rational education over a populist strategy for mass persuasion. While rational method became increasingly paramount in medieval and modern academic institutions, mass persuasion has remained a major emphasis of western religious and political discourse. Thus the Greek philosopher's attack on the Sophists laid the basis

for the institutional separation of philosophy from religion in western cultures, as well as distinguishing more generally between academic and popular discourse.

Space does not permit a full demonstration of the use of the story–list–sanction strategy in later periods, so I will simply point out some examples of the ongoing influence of this strategy. The relationship between narratives and lists of laws has been and remains a concern in legal studies. Medieval European collections of law appeared in manuscripts surrounded by historical narratives, genealogies and episcopal lists, a combination motivated by their intended use for public presentation (Richards 1986, 187). Explicit narrative contexts have faded from more recent western legal collections along with the expectation of religious promulgation. Yet Robert Cover has argued that law necessarily still invokes an implicit narrative for its justification (1983, 4). As the stories change that are applied to laws, legal interpretation changes to match. Cover's argument suggests that the persuasive strategy of combining story with list remains a potent part of contemporary legal and political discourse.

Divine sanctions found a reflection in some medieval manuscripts of laws and historical narratives that include rites of exorcism and excommunication near their end (Richards 1986, 196). On the other hand, they seem to have disappeared from modern legal contexts, now fully replaced by the judicial sanctions warranted in the laws themselves. Divine sanctions do remain a staple of much modern religious commentary on political and social affairs, but like threats of judicial penalties, these discourses tend to inhabit their own distinct texts and institutions. However, a secular language of threat and promise does still appear in political discourse.

Political speeches often preserve the full story–list–sanction form through their evocation of the past and their use of promises and warnings to motivate particular courses of action in the present. To cite only a single famous example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech in 1963 to the crowds assembled for the March on Washington cited the Emancipation Proclamation of a century earlier to introduce a description of African-Americans' circumstances in the more recent past and present (story), then called for change with a series of phrases beginning "Now is the time to . . ." (list), before warning of social turmoil if change is not forthcoming (sanction). More exhortations and narratives intervened before the speech reaches its memorable climax in the positive sanctions of "I have a dream . . .," followed by the repeated exhortation to "Let freedom ring" and the final promise of freedom for all. Modern political discourse frequently weaves together these formal components, if rarely so skillfully.

These few indications of the effects on western rhetorical practice of the story–list–sanction strategy suggest that the distinction between modern aca-

demic, religious, political, and legal discourse was not just produced by the dictates of the classical theorists, but also by the ancient modes of persuasion against which they reacted. Some ancient rhetorical forms have survived alongside the arguments of theorists who rejected them, thereby institutionalizing that conflict in the social structures that shape contemporary public discourse.

Notes

1. From Egypt, e.g. the Book of the Dead 175 (Hallo and Younger 1997, 27–30) and the Legend of Isis and the Name of Re (Hallo and Younger 1997, 33–34); from Ugarit, e.g. “El’s Banquet” and other texts cited and translated by N. Wyatt (1998, 404–413); from the Hittites, see also Telipinu and the Daughter of the Sea (Hoffner 1990, 25–26, though a break between the myth and the ritual provisions obscures the nature of their connection) and the Disappearance of the Sun God which, according to its last lines, when it is used as a successful incantation requires specific thank offerings: “. . . may he give you nine (sacrificial animals). And may the poor man give you one sheep” (1990, 26–28).

2. George Mendenhall’s discovery of this pattern in both biblical law and Hittite treaties advanced the analysis of the Pentateuch’s rhetorical impact, but failed to equate convincingly the biblical genre only with treaties (cf. McCarthy 1981). Modifications of the pattern’s elements and contents, rather than being simply internal developments of Israel’s covenant traditions, are in fact characteristic of the pattern’s appearance in ancient literatures.

3. A possible exception to this analysis appears in the Buhen stela, where the list simply enumerates the human “plunder” (dead and alive) gained in the campaign. The stela, however, was found not in the royal court but in the region where the war took place, and therefore was probably intended to dissuade further attacks on Egyptian territory.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. Tr. W. Rhys Roberts. 1954. In *The Rhetorics and Poetics of Aristotle*. New York: Random House.
- Beckman, Gary. 1996. *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*. Atlanta: Scholars Press/Society of Biblical Literature.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1950. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Charlesworth, James H., ed. 1983. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

- Cover, Robert M. 1983. “Forward: *Nomos* and Narrative.” *Harvard Law Review* 97/1:4–68.
- Foster, Benjamin. 1993. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. 2 vols. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.
- Greenstein, E. L. 1995. “Autobiographies in Ancient Western Asia.” In vol. 4 of *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Ed. J. L. Sasson. New York: Scribners.
- Hallo, W. W., and K. L. Younger Jr., eds. 1997, 2000, 2002. *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World*. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill.
- Hoffner, Harry A. Jr. 1990. *Hittite Myths*. Atlanta: Scholars Press/SBL.
- Judge, Edwin A. 1997. “The Rhetoric of Inscriptions.” *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.–A.D. 400*. Ed. S. E. Porter. Leiden: Brill.
- Lichtheim, Miriam. 1973, 1976, 1980. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McCarthy, D. J. 1981. *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*. 2nd rev. ed. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- Mendenhall, G. E. 1970. “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition.” *Biblical Archeologist Review* 3. Ed. E. F. Campbell Jr. & D. N. Freedman. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Metzger, Henri. 1979. *Fouilles de Xanthos, Tome VI: La stèle trilingue du Létôon*. Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck.
- Murnane, William J. 1995. *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt*. Atlanta: Scholars Press/Society of Biblical Literature.
- O’Banion, John D. 1992. *Reorienting Rhetoric: the Dialectic of List and Story*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Plato. *Laws*. Trans. P. Shorey. 1961. In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Plato. *Republic*. Trans. P. Shorey. 1961. In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Richards, Mary P. 1986. “The Manuscript Contexts of the Old English Laws: Tradition and Innovation.” In *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*. Ed. P. E. Szarmach. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Romilly, J. de. 1975. *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Roth, Martha. 1995. *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. Atlanta: Scholars Press/SBL.
- Tacitus. *Annals*. In *Tacitus: The Annals of Imperial Rome*. T. M. Grant. Rev. ed. London: Viking Penguin, 1956.
- Thomas, Rosalind. 1992. *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watts, James W. 1999. *Reading Law: the Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch*. The Biblical Seminar 59. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/London: Continuum.
- Wyatt, N. 1998. *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilimilku and his Colleagues*. The Biblical Seminar 53. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/London: Continuum.
- Younger, K. Lawson. 1998. "The Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada: An Integrated Reading," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 43:11-47.

