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Announcement: The Gildersleeve Prize Winner for 2017

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THE GILDERSLEEVE PRIZE
FOR THE BEST ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN
THE *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHILOLOGY*
IN 2017 HAS BEEN PRESENTED TO

MAX LEVENTHAL
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

for his contribution to scholarship in “Eratosthenes’ Letter to Ptolemy: The Literary Mechanics of Empire,” *AJP* 138.1: 43–84.

In this article, Max Leventhal discusses the literary form of a letter that Eratosthenes of Cyrene, head of the Alexandrian Library, sent to King Ptolemy. This letter outlines a solution for a longstanding geometric problem, namely how to double a cube while maintaining the proportionality of its dimensions. No standard mathematical text, Eratosthenes’ letter shows high generic diversity, making many literary allusions from a range of genres and remaining acutely conscious of both its immediate audience—its addressee, King Ptolemy—and a larger readership of educated Greeks. In this epistle, Eratosthenes brings together geometry, literature, politics, and empire, and ultimately “lays out the mechanics of the Ptolemaic empire for its readership.”

Leventhal demonstrates that Eratosthenes’ generic expertise places complex geometry in a larger cultural and political context. Further, Eratosthenes reaches outside the text and its mathematical subject to the economic realities and the public role of the library. This letter uses its generic and intellectual diversity to perform an early example of “academic ‘outreach’” by using the epistolary form to make its addressee, Ptolemy, into a fellow scientist and any reader into a fellow scholar. By narrating the history of the problem of the doubled cube—via the myth of King Minos (equated with Ptolemy) and the tomb he built for his son, Eratosthenes brings Athenian philosophical issues to Alexandria and shows the applicability of the doubled cube to architecture and to the military. Eratosthenes’ careful engagement with Platonic geometry looks to a larger context by figuring contemporary Egypt not only as Minos’ mythical Crete but also as classical Athens. Finally, the epigram addresses the public benefit, intellectual heritage, and relevance of the project to the Ptolemies.

Leventhal concludes that Eratosthenes gives the king not only a geometrical solution to the cube but an image of the potential offered by the research and intellectual resources of Alexandria, the capital city, along with “the potential of cultural capital,” particularly with relation to expansion both geometric and imperial. Eratosthenes’ geometrical mechanism and Ptolemy’s scepter cause expansion of the cube and of empire. This epistle, an itinerant text, uses geometry as an emblem of empire, for an audience of both one man, King Ptolemy, and any educated Greek.

Judges for the Johns Hopkins University Press

Sharon L. James (chair), Anthony Corbeill, Charles Platter

The Thirtieth Annual Gildersleeve Prize of \$1,000 will be awarded for the best article to appear in the Journal in 2018. The Press would like to thank the members of the committee for their time and effort.

William M. Breichner
Journals Publisher
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