Herodotus in Theon's Progymnasmata : the confutation of mythical accounts

Herodotus in Theon's *Progymnasmata*.
The Confutation of Mythical Accounts

By Lorenzo Miletti, Napoli

Abstract: The paper analyses a 'chapter' of Herodotus' rhetorical fortune, namely his treatment in Theon's *Progymnasmata*. Theon often quotes Herodotus' work, especially in the section dedicated to narration (διήγησις), in which he represents Herodotus – like Thucydides and Ephorus – as a model for the "factual account" (πραγματικὴ διήγησις). Herodotus is never compared to poets, nor is he labelled as a *mythopoios*; on the contrary he is praised, among others, for his skill in rationalizing mythical accounts. One example is his confutation of the foundation myth of the sanctuary of Dodona (Hdt. 2.54–57): this kind of rationalization is, in Theon's opinion, the best one, since it does not simply refute the myth, but also explains how it was created. Generally, Theon's consideration of Herodotus seems to be different from the ones we find in works such as Hermogenes' *On Types of Style* or Longinus' *On Sublimity*. While in these texts Herodotus is presented as a sort of myth-maker and is frequently compared to Homer, in Theon's book we find no hint of such a reputation, on the contrary he is considered a *pure* historian, similar to (and sometimes better than) Thucydides. The final section of the paper suggests several hypothetical *loci paralleli* to Theon's opinions about myth confutation.

1. Herodotus the Rhetorician

In their *inscriptiones* certain manuscripts of Herodotus' text bear a remarkable epithet for the 'Father of History', namely Ἡρόδοτος ῥήτωρ ἱστορικός, i.e. "Herodotus Rhetorician and Historian"[1]. It is a designation that could hardly please a historiographer, but is nevertheless in keeping with Herodotus' reception in late antiquity and in the Byzantine Middle Ages. Lucian's λαλιά *Herodotus or Aetion* represents our historian as a sort of harbinger of 2nd century A.D. neosophists, devoted to public declamations of his work[2]. Herodotus' fame as a rhetorician clearly is not only due to such biographical or pseudo-biographical

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1   I read this epithet in Angel. gr. 83, f. 1ʳ, **B** of Herodotus' edition by C. Hude (Oxford 1927). I found the same epithet also in ms. Vat. Pal. gr. 215, f. 4ʳ.

2   Luc. *Herod.* 1–2; 7–8.

anecdotes, but rather to his considerable reputation, that remained constant throughout the centuries, for his style and his narrative skill. Herodotus' prose style is widely known to have enjoyed great renown: the long list of detractors of Herodotus' historiographical method never dared either to deny or even question the qualities of his writing. Concluding his biting pamphlet on Herodotus' presumed *malignitas* (κακοήθεια), Plutarch had recourse to the topical image of the rose and the thorns, inviting readers to extract from Herodotus only the virtues of his language (the rose), and to avoid the vices of his historical bias (the thorns)[3]. On the other hand, apologists of Herodotus such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus praised both his stylistic as well as his historiographical qualities throughout their works[4].

Thus, the quality of Herodotus' art and narrative is the meeting point of both Herodotus' detractors and defenders, and is also the cause of Herodotus' well attested presence in rhetorical literature. In the texts of *progymnasmata*, the ancient school texts of rhetorical exercises, quotations from Herodotus are used as examples and models of προσωποποιία, ἔκφρασις and, more especially, διήγησις[5].

2. The treatment of Herodotus in Theon

In such a *mare magnum* of Herodotus' rhetorical fortune, I have limited my research to his treatment in Theon's *Progymnasmata*, a book whose dating is uncertain, but which is generally set in the 1st century A. D. and reputed to be the most ancient work of *progymnasmata* we possess[6], despite certain opinions to the contrary[7].

The author, too, remains obscure: Theon is the name attested by the manuscripts which is generally identified with Aelius Theon Alexandrinus, to whom the Suda dedicates an entry[8]. It is uncertain whether he is the same Theon named

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3   Plut. *Herod. mal.* 874 B–C.

4   *E.g.*: Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 5.5,50 Aujac-Lebel; *Pomp.* 3.1–21, 87–93 Aujac-Lebel (in these passages Herodotus is considered a better historian than Thucydides).

5   After C. Waltz, *Rhetores Graeci*, I–IX (Stuttgart 1832–1836; rpt. Osnabrück 1963), the Greek texts of *progymnasmata* (Theon, Ps. Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Nicolaus) are collected in L. Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* (Leipzig 1853–1856; rpt. Frankfurt am Main, 1966). Theon is edited by M. Patillon, *Aelius Théon. Progymnasmata* (Paris 1997). The *progymnasmata* once attributed to Hermogenes are edited by H. Rabe, *Hermogenis opera* (Leipzig 1913); Nicolaus by I. Felten, *Nicolai progymnasmata* (Leipzig 1913). The English translation by G.A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta 2003), contains a useful introduction, a bibliography and commentary notes.

6   Patillon, *Aelius Théon* (note 5) VII–XXIII; Kennedy, *Progymnasmata* (note 5) 1–3.

7   M. Heath, "Theon and the History of the *Progymnasmata*", GRBS 43 (2002–2003) 129–160, who proposes the 5th century A. D.

8   Suda, s.v. Θέων, θ 206 Adler.

twice in Quintilian[9]. Even if the previous order of the exercises has probably been modified and other corruptions seem to have occurred along the *iter* of the manuscript tradition, the main characteristics of the book suggest that the 'traditional' chronology is the most persuasive (Patillon, Kennedy, and Luzzatto)[10]. The pedagogical aim and the arguments of the preface, the prose style, the vocabulary, the moderate Atticisms and the analogies with Dionysius of Halicarnassus (quoted once by Theon and constituting an important *terminus post quem*)[11], the interest in historiography (Herodotus and Thucydides *in primis*, the latter criticized for the same reasons we find in Dionysius)[12] and generally in narration (διήγημα)[13] are all symptoms of an early chronology, to be set between the Augustan Age and the rise of the Second Sophistic[14]. As Kennedy emphasises, moreover, the didactic system of the exercises seems "still in a stage of experiment and development"[15]: each *progymnasma* is introduced and also 'justified' in its pedagogical meaning.

The purpose of this paper is not to solve the chronological question, but to outline Theon's rhetorical and historiographical 'portrait' of Herodotus. Whoever the Theon to whom the book is ascribed may be, he is a rhetorician who shows a deep understanding of his 'Herodotean' subjects. Theon seems to avoid the *querelle* on Herodotus mentioned above: on the contrary, his approach to the historian is one of the most attentive and thorough among the rhetorical works we have inherited from the past[16].

I shall concentrate on the passages about διήγησις in which Theon exposes Herodotus' way of confuting mythical accounts[17].

9   Quint. 3.6.48 and 9.3.76. It is not certain whether the two passages refer to the same person.

10   M. T. Luzzatto, "L'impiego della 'chreia' filosofica nell'educazione antica", in M. S. Funghi (ed.), *Aspetti di letteratura gnomica nel mondo antico*, II (Firenze 2004) 157–187. Luzzatto reconstructs the cultural context in which Theon's pedagogical method developed, analyzing the collocation of the χρεία in the texts of *progymnasmata*. Her conclusions are explicitly opposed to Heath's ("Theon", note 7).

11   Dionysius is quoted at 136 Sp. = 106 Pat. in the Armenian tradition. Another *terminus post quem* is the quotation of Theodorus of Gaza (1st century B.C.), 120,16 Sp. = 82,16 Pat.

12   Kennedy, *Progymnasmata* (note 5) 1, suggests that this could depend on the 'Thucydideanism' of Augustan Age. Theon frequently quotes Thucydides (see Patillon's index) and finds in him the same faults that are detected by Dionysius: e.g. Theon 80, 16–20 Sp. = 41, 10–14 Pat. and Dion., *Thuc.* 9, on the 'annalistic' structure of Thucydides' work.

13   Luzzatto, "L'impiego della 'chreia'" (note 10) 185.

14   Further persuasive arguments *contra* Heath "Theon" (note 7) in Luzzatto, "L'impiego della 'chreia'" (note 10) 177–187, exp. notes 34, 59, 63, 65.

15   Kennedy, *Progymnasmata* (note 5) 1.

16   On historiography in texts of *progymnasmata* see the synthetic work of Jacques Bompaire, "Les historiens classiques dans les exercices préparatoires de rhétorique (*progymnasmata*)", in *Recueil Plassart* (Paris 1976) 1–7, and R. Nicolai, *La storiografia nell'educazione antica* (Pisa 1992). Theon is also relevant for the fragmentary historians: see G. Vanotti, "Filisto in Elio Teone", in E. Lanzillotta (ed.), *Tradizione e trasmissione degli storici greci frammentari*, forthcoming.

17   Further discussion on Theon's interpretation of Herodotus in L. Miletti, "'Calamitosa cosa è

Unlike the other texts of *progymnasmata*, Theon's book does not begin *in mediis rebus*. In a rather long introductory section[18], which deals with pedagogical problems and offers advice to school teachers, Theon also anticipates the main issues about διήγησις, showing us the first, significant, characterisation of Herodotus as a narrator and historian. The rhetorician makes a distinction between μυθική and πραγματικὴ διήγησις[19] – "mythical and factual narrative" in Kennedy's translation, which we follow hereafter[20].

A recent article by Anne Gangloff sheds light on the use of the term μῦθος and its derivatives in the Imperial Age[21]: our rhetorician refers μῦθος to the Aesopic fable, which constitutes a typology of preparatory exercises in each text of *progymnasmata*[22], but he also uses words from the μυθ-root in the more traditional and less technical meaning, which refer to unreal and fictitious accounts, as opposed to historical ones[23]; Theon's use of μυθικός in the syntagm μυθικὴ διήγησις clearly refers to the latter meaning.

Examples of μυθικὴ διήγησις are drawn from Plato: the tales of Gyges' ring[24] and Eros' birth[25], and the description of Hades[26]; but also from Theopompus: the myth of Silenus, from the eighth book of his *Philippica*[27]. The best examples of πραγματικὴ διήγησις are Cylon in Herodotus[28] and Thucydides[29], Cleobis

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lo homo'. Interpretazioni antiche e moderne di Erodoto 1,32,4", *Appunti Romani di Filologia* 7 (2005) 9–23 (exp. 12–14).

18   59–72 Sp. = 1–18 Pat., namely an introduction *stricto sensu* (59–65 Sp. = 1–9 Pat.) and some pedagogical and methodological remarks (65–72 Sp. = 9–18 Pat.).

19   66–67 Sp. = 10–11 Pat. Here Theon touches the problem of the connection between narration and truth; the distinction between μυθική and πραγματικὴ διήγησις reminds us of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.13, in which the same question is posed: *Eius narrationis duo sunt genera: unum quod in negotiis, alterum quod in personis positum est. Id, quod in negotiorum expositione positum est, tres habet partes: fabulam, historiam, argumentum. Fabula est, quae neque veras neque veri similes continet res, ut eae sunt, quae tragoedis traditae sunt. Historia est gesta res, sed ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota. Argumentum est ficta res, quae tamen fieri potuit, velut argumenta comoediarum.* So the *fabula* is exemplified by tragedy, as in Quint. 2.4.2 and differently from Theon, for whom see below. See also Cic. *De inv.* 1.27: *Fabula est, in qua nec verae nec veri similes res continentur, cuiusmodi est: 'Angues ingentes alites, iuncti iugo ...'. Historia est gesta res, ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota; quod genus: 'Appius indixit Carthaginiensibus bellum'. Argumentum est ficta res, quae tamen fieri potuit. Huiusmodi apud Terentium: 'Nam is postquam excessit ex ephebis, [Sosia]'.*

20   Kennedy, *Progymnasmata* (note 5).

21   See A. Gangloff, "Mythes, fables et rhétorique à l'époque impériale", *Rhetorica* 20 (2002) 25–56.

22   Theon on μῦθος: 72–78 Sp. = 30–38 Pat. See C.L. Acosta González, "Los tres primeros ejercicios de los *Progymnasmata* de Elio Teón: mythos, diegema, chreia", *Habis* 25 (1994) 309–321.

23   Full discussion in Gangloff, "Mythes" (note 21) 26–32.

24   Plat. *Resp.* 2.359c–360b.

25   Plat. *Symp.* 203b.

26   Plat. *Phaed.* 107d–114c and *Resp.* 10.614a–621b.

27   *FGrHist* 115 F 74a. On Silenus' myth in Theopompus see also 115 F 74b and 75a–e.

28   Hdt. 5.71.

29   Thuc. 1.126.

and Biton in Herodotus[30], Daedalus and Cocalus in Ephorus and Philistus[31], and Philippus' celebration of the Olympic Games in Demosthenes[32]. The choice of the tale of Cleobis and Biton is surprising: this is a legendary story about two young brothers who are made by the gods to die in their sleep, after pulling their mother on a chariot to the temple of Hera; their death is presented as a divine gift for an act of *pietas*. Legendary heroes are also Daedalus and Cocalus, even if Ephorus' and Philistus' version may have been rationalized. We should infer that for Theon there is no "mythical" element in these accounts. It is also noteworthy that Herodotus is mentioned only among the authors of πραγματικαὶ διηγήσεις.

After a few lines, in the same introduction, Theon quotes Herodotus as a model for another kind of exercise, namely the confutation (ἀνασκευή). Confutation is a sort of transversal προγύμνασμα: a student is expected to apply it in every kind of exercise. In this case, Theon is speaking about the confutation applied to the διήγησις: following the same division previously adopted, our rhetorician makes a distinction between the confutation of mythical and factual accounts. Both of them are introduced by examples taken from Herodotus. So, for the first type of confutation[33] we find the passage in which the historian sarcastically argues against some Greek sources on Egypt, quoted generally as "the Greeks", who claim that Heracles was captured by the Egyptians, was about to be sacrificed by them yet, on arriving at the altar, massacred thousands of them and then fled[34]. Herodotus' criticism of such tales is quite peremptory, and his polemical argumentation is considered as exemplary by Theon. After this two examples from Ephorus follow[35].

The first example of confutation of factual accounts (πραγματικὴ διήγησις) is a passage from the fourth book of Herodotus' *Histories*. It is the famous polemic against those who divided the earth into three parts giving each of them female names[36]: Herodotus feels "astonished that men should ever have divided Libya, Asia, and Europe as they have, for they are exceedingly unequal" (2.45.1), and in more than one place he argues against this representation of the earth[37]. The quotation from Herodotus is followed by examples drawn from Thucydides[38], Ephorus[39] and Theopompus[40].

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30 Hdt. 1.31.
31 *FGrHist* 70 F 57 and 556 F 1.
32 Dem. *De fals. legat.* 192–195.
33 Theon *Prog.* 67, 5–9 Sp. = 10, 23–11, 4 Pat.
34 Hdt. 2.45
35 *FGrHist* 70 F 13 and 17.
36 Theon *Prog.* 67,13–17 Sp. = 11,8–12 Pat.: Τῶν δὲ πραγματικῶν διηγήσεων ἔστι μέν τινα καὶ παρὰ Ἡροδότου λαβεῖν, ὡς τὰ ἐκ τῆς τετάρτης περὶ τοῦ διαιρεῖσθαι τὴν ὅλην γῆν εἰς τρία μέρη, καὶ καλεῖσθαι τὸ μὲν Εὐρώπην, τὸ δὲ Λιβύην, τὸ δὲ Ἀσίαν.
37 Cfr. Hdt. 4.36 and 4.45.
38 Thuc. 1.20.
39 *FGrHist* 70 F 18a.
40 *FGrHist* 115 F 153.

In the light of Theon's statements, it seems clear that Herodotus is the first to be consulted by the students in order to refute a διήγησις, either about mythical matters, or about human deeds. It is indeed a chronological criterion that gives Herodotus pride of place, Herodotus being, after all, the first historian. The examples of διήγησις, in this preliminary section of the work, are all introduced by a Herodotean quotation, with the important exception of the μυθικὴ διήγησις: this 'lacuna' cannot be due to the 'genre' – historiographical and non-mythographical – of Herodotus' *Histories*, since we know that such a historian as Theopompus is quoted as example.

3. Doves in Dodona

Following the introduction, on considering each form of *progymnasma* and treating the exercises of χρεία and μῦθος, Theon dedicates a long discussion to διήγημα. Most of this section is devoted to the virtues of narration (ἀρεταὶ διηγήσεως)[41], and to the different forms of γυμνασία, i.e. the different ways one can "decline" a tale by giving it the form of a dialogue, an exhortation and so on[42]. In this section Herodotus is frequently quoted[43], and often in a manner which reveals a detailed knowledge of the formal characteristics of the *Histories*; at the end of this long dissertation Theon makes a noteworthy statement on Herodotus – the most important for our purposes – about the confutation of mythical διηγήματα.

Theon claims that very useful tools for the confutation of a piece of narrative (a διήγημα) are the topics of the false (ψεῦδος), the impossible (ἀδύνατον) and the incredible (ἀπίθανον)[44]. The incredible is also taken as an example in order to explain the confutation:

> These topics [*scil.* the incredible] are suitable against mythical tales narrated by the poets and historians about gods and heroes [...]. Not only to refute such mythologies, but also to show how such a distorted story originated, is a matter for a more mature skill than most have. Herodotus did it in the second book (2.54–57) in the account of the doves that flew from Egypt; one came to Dodona, the other to the shrine of Ammon. Criticizing the mythology (ἐξηγούμενός τε τὸ μυθολόγημα), he says that certain maidens from Egyptian Thebes were priestesses, one of whom was sold as a slave to Dodona, while the other to the shrine of Ammon, and since they spoke in a barbarous language and were incomprehensible to the local inhabitants, the story grew that they were birds[45].

41 Theon *Prog.* 79, 20–21 Sp. = 40, 4–5 Pat. These virtues are σαφήνεια, συντομία and πιθανότης.
42 85–96 Sp. = 48–61 Pat.
43 83,5–6 Sp. = 45,1–2 Pat.; 84,4–5 Sp. = 46,7–8 Pat.; 86,24–87,6 Sp. = 49,9–24 Pat.; 91,25–92,5 Sp. = 55,15–56, 6 Pat.; 93,11–12 Sp. = 57, 22–23 Pat.; 95,11–19 Sp. = 60,14–22 Pat.
44 Theon *Prog.* 93,5–94,11 Spengel = 57,16–59,5 Patillon.
45 Theon *Prog.* 95,11–19 Sp. = 60,14–22 Pat. The whole passage: οἱ δ᾽ αὐτοὶ οὗτοι ἁρμόττουσι

Other similar examples follow, taken from Plato's *Phaedrus*[46], from Ephorus[47] and from the Peripatetic Palaephatus, who dedicated a whole work to this subject, called Περὶ τῶν ἀπίστων[48].

If Herodotus is represented, in the introduction, as an exemplary historian on topics of confutation, of both mythical and factual accounts, here Theon adds that Herodotus' way of refuting mythical accounts shows "a more mature skill than most have".

Herodotus' famous passage on the doves of Dodona (2.54–57) is certainly extraordinary: his interpretation of the legend is only one ring in a chain of arguments which shed light on the Egyptian origins of Greek cults. During his journeys in Egypt and Greece the historian of Halicarnassus gathers different tales and compares them in order to find out the true version of the events. Comparing a story about the abduction of two priestesses of Ammon from Thebes and a myth from Dodona about a black dove that ordered the Epirotes to found a sanctuary, Herodotus realises that they should refer to the same event, and infers that the doves are none but the two priestesses abducted from Egypt, of whom one was sold in Epirus as a slave, and that the denomination of "black doves" was due to the dark skin of the priestesses and to their "barbarian" language, perceived by the naïve Epirotes as bird song.

In other passages of his *Histories* Herodotus proceeds in the same way; he maintains, for example, that the story about the legendary birth of Cyrus (suckled by a bitch after being exposed) is false. The structure of this story is topical and has all the features of this type of folktale: the ominous birth, the exposition, the rescue of the baby by a savage female beast, the reuniting with the family of origin, the kingship. The truth is – says Herodotus – that Cyrus was nursed by a Persian woman whose name was Spakò, called Kynò by the Greeks, since the Persians call the dog *spaka*, and Kynò is a Greek calque from Persian. So, it is easy to infer that the legend of a real dog suckling Cyrus simply derives from the name of the nurse, but Herodotus tells us something else; he also explains why and how the legend spread. After meeting their son again and hearing the name of the nurse, "his parents set about a story that Cyrus when exposed was suckled by a bitch, thinking thereby to make the story of his saving seem the

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καὶ πρὸς τὰς μυθικὰς διηγήσεις τάς τε ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν καὶ τὰς ὑπὸ τῶν ἱστορικῶν λεγομένας περί τε θεῶν καὶ ἡρώων, ἔτι τε καὶ τῶν ἐξηλλαγμένων κατὰ φύσιν, οἷά τινες ἱστοροῦσι περὶ Πηγάσου καὶ Ἐριχθονίου καὶ Χιμαίρας καὶ Ἱπποκενταύρων καὶ τῶν παραπλησίων. Τὸ δὲ μὴ μόνον ἀνασκευάζειν τὰς τοιαύτας μυθολογίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅθεν παρερρύηκεν ὁ τοιοῦτος λόγος ἀποφαίνειν τελεωτέρας ἐστὶν ἕξεως ἢ κατὰ τοὺς πολλούς, ὅπερ πεποίηκεν Ἡρόδοτος μὲν ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ περὶ τῶν πελειάδων διηγούμενος, ὡς ἐξέπτησαν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου, καὶ ἡ μὲν εἰς Δωδώνην, ἡ δὲ εἰς Ἄμμωνος ἀφίκετο, ἐξηγούμενός τε τὸ μυθολόγημά φησιν, ὅτι παρθένοι τινὲς ἐκ Θηβῶν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἦσαν ἱέρειαι, ὧν ἡ μὲν εἰς Δωδώνην ἐπράθη, ἡ δὲ εἰς Ἄμμωνος, καὶ ἐπειδὴ βαρβαριστὶ ἐφθέγγοντο καὶ ἀξυνέτως τοῖς ἐπιχωρίοις, λόγος κατέσχεν ὡς ὄρνιθες ἦσαν.

46 Plat. *Phaedr.* 229 c.
47 *FGrHist* 70 F 34.
48 *Mythographi Graeci* III 2, frr. 1;3; 4;44 Festa.

more marvellous to the Persians (ἵνα θειοτέρως δοκέῃ τοῖσι Πέρσῃσι περιεῖναί σφι ὁ παῖς)"[49].

While the inhabitants of Dodona produced a mythical account without any intention of falsifying anything or lying (we could say that in this case Herodotus reconstructs the real process of myth-making), in the case of the Persians the legend is a political affair, is a strategy to gain prestige among the people. In both cases, however, Herodotus shows his being aware of the fact that the deformation of reality into myth is a normal process in human behaviour, either unconsciously, or "artificially" so. The ability of the historiographer should consist in recognizing this process of myth-making, and showing it to his public.

Theon does not emphasise the presence of mythical accounts or legendary fiction in the *Histories*, but points out Herodotus' skill – the same skill one may find in Plato, Ephorus or Palaephatus – in deconstructing such a type of story showing how it is produced. In the other works of *progymnasmata* we do not find such a penetrating analysis of confutation in narrative and historiography. Moreover, in a long tradition of rhetorical studies, the connection between Herodotus and myth is generally considered from a different point of view.

4. Herodotus the Myth-Maker

We do not know whether Thucydides, in a famous passage of the first book of his *History*, arguing against the historians who indulge in the 'marvellous' (μυθῶδες) had Herodotus as his target[50]. We just know that the polemic was interpreted as being directed against the Father of History already in antiquity[51].

Among the authors of rhetorical treatises, we find a similar conception of Herodotus as a myth-teller in Hermogenes of Tarsus, in the late 2nd century A. D. In his Περὶ ἰδεῶν (*On Types of Style*, in Cecil W. Wooten's translation followed hereafter)[52] Herodotus is presented as a historian for whom myth plays an important role, and whose narrations are similar to myth. About one of the virtues of discourse, 'sweetness' (γλυκύτης), Hermogenes declares that the introduction of a myth is the most important element which creates such an effect; the second is telling stories "that are like myths", such as the story of Troy. Then he adds: "Third in order are those narrations that have some mythical quality

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49   Hdt. 1.122.3, in A. D. Godley's translation.
50   Thuc. 1.22.
51   Cfr. Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 42: Θουκυδίδης [...] ὁρῶν μάλιστα θαυμαζόμενον τὸν Ἡρόδοτον ἄχρι τοῦ καὶ Μούσας κληθῆναι αὐτοῦ τὰ βιβλία. Κτῆμά τε γάρ φησι μᾶλλον ἐς ἀεὶ συγγράφειν ἤπερ ἐς τὸ παρὸν ἀγώνισμα, καὶ μὴ τὸ μυθῶδες ἀσπάζεσθαι ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῶν γεγενημένων ἀπολείπειν τοῖς ὕστερον.
52   C. W. Wooten, *Hermogenes' On Types of Style* (Chapel Hill/London 1987).

but are more believable than myths, such as what one finds in Herodotus"[53]. Here Herodotus is considered very close to Homer, and a long tradition associated the two: in a famous passage of the Περὶ ὕψους Herodotus is called ὁμηρικώτατος: "Was Herodotus only 'the most Homeric'? So was Stesichorus before, and Archilochus [...]"[54]. The interrogative form seems to imply that the relation Homer-Herodotus is taken for granted and presented as a sort of *communis opinio*.

Continuing reading Hermogenes' Περὶ ἰδεῶν, we find another interesting statement on Herodotus. Discussing the 'Panegyric style', Hermogenes says that "the most panegyrical of those historians who engage in Panegyric is Herodotus. That is because his work is pure and distinct and very charming. Indeed he uses every sort of mythical thought and poetic language throughout his work"[55].

It is not by chance that here we find Herodotus as an example of a myth-telling author. It is true that these passages do not concern Herodotus as a historian, but just as a narrator – and Hermogenes is full of admiration for Herodotus' prose style –, nevertheless it is difficult not to notice in his words the echo of the representation of Herodotus as a μυθοποιός, a mythographer, rather than a historiographer. The Second Sophistic has changed the way to consider the historiography and its relations with rhetoric. Not differently from Lucian's λαλιά quoted above, Hermogenes tends to reduce Herodotus to an epideictic orator: "the most panegyrical" historian.

Theon's perspective is different: he does not emphasize the pure literary skills of Herodotus, his charming narrative style; this is not because he lived in a pre-neosophistic period – Herodotus' assumed indulgence to the μυθῶδες was stressed quite early[56] –, but because he conceives Herodotus as a historian *tout*

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53 Herm. *Id*. 330–331 Rabe: Τρίτην δὲ ἔχει τάξιν τὰ κατ' ὀλίγον μέν πως τοῦ μυθικοῦ κοινωνοῦντα διηγήματα, μᾶλλον δὲ ἢ κατὰ τοὺς μύθους πιστευόμενα, οἷά ἐστιν ἄπαντα τὰ Ἡροδότου· μυθώδη γὰρ ὀλίγα ἔχει, οἷον τὰ περὶ τοῦ Πανὸς ῥηθέντα καὶ τοῦ Ἰάκχου καὶ ἴσως ἄλλα τινὰ σφόδρα γε ὀλίγα· τὰ μέντοι ἄλλα καὶ πιστεύεται γεγονέναι καὶ ἀπήλλακται τοῦ μυθικοῦ, διόπερ οὐδὲ ὁμοίως τοῖς φύσει μυθικοῖς μετέχει τῆς γλυκύτητος. Herodotus' 'sweetness' was a sort of *communis opinio*: see Cic. *Hort*. fr. 15 Grilli: *quid enim aut dulcior Herodoto aut Thucydide gravius?* On this subject see J. A. S. Evans, "Father of History or Father of Lies. The Reputation of Herodotus", *CJ* 64 (1968) 1–7.

54 Longin. *De subl.* 13.3.

55 Herm. *Id*. 408 Rabe.

56 See *e.g.* Cic. *De Leg.* 1.5: QUINTUS: *Intellego te, frater, alias in historia leges observandas putare, alias in poemate.* MARCUS: *Quippe cum in illa ad veritatem, Quinte, ⟨quaeque⟩ referantur, in hoc ad delectationem pleraque; quamquam et apud Herodotum patrem historiae et apud Theopompum sunt innumerabiles fabulae.* See also Flavius Josephus' sarcastic comment in *Contra Apionem* 1,15, about Greek historians, who attack each other but agree in criticizing Herodotus: Περίεργος δ' ἂν εἴην ἐγὼ τοὺς ἐμοῦ μᾶλλον ἐπισταμένους διδάσκων ὅσα μὲν Ἑλλάνικος Ἀκουσιλάῳ περὶ τῶν γενεαλογιῶν διαπεφώνηκεν, ὅσα δὲ διορθοῦται τὸν Ἡσίοδον Ἀκουσίλαος, ἢ τίνα τρόπον Ἔφορος μὲν Ἑλλάνικον ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις ψευδόμενον ἐπιδείκνυσιν, Ἔφορον δὲ Τίμαιος καὶ Τίμαιον οἱ μετ' ἐκεῖνον γεγονότες, Ἡρόδοτον δὲ πάντες. Here there is no mention of categories such as μυθῶδες, but in other passages (1,25; 105; 229 etc.) it is clear that telling

court. It is to be stressed that Theon pays much attention to historiography in general: he deeply knows the 'canonical' historians[57] and willingly employs historiographical passages for his exercises[58]. In Theon's *Progymnasmata* Herodotus is also presented, of course, as an example of narrative style, but his virtues are above all historiographical and argumentative, and not related to the pleasure of readers or listeners.

5. Conclusions

I wondered whether Theon's position on the confutation of myth corresponded to someone else's approach to the same question. The confutation of myth, independently from its rhetorical approach, was a *vexata quaestio* for the Greeks since, at least, the 6th century B.C., if we think, for example, of Xenophanes.

In the centuries in which the Romans had become the rulers of the Mediterranean we find, in more than one author, explicit statements about the value of myth and about its connection with historical truth. Here I gather just few *specimina*, in order to underline that much of the rhetorical examples of the confutation of myth are connected with – or simply reflect – a historiographical problem.

Although we are not allowed to evaluate from the same point of view such different works as *progymnasmata* and historiography, Theon's perspective seems to be different from, for example, the one of Diodorus of Sicily, who affirms that it is not possible to transfer the archaic logic of myths to the present, and that it is necessary to take the narrative logic of the myth as it is, without trying to draw historical truths from it[59]. More problematic is the parallel with a statement of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who in his *Antiquitates Romanae* denies every moral and social utility of Greek myths, banishing them from the "ideal society". It seems a radically different approach from Theon's, but Dionysius adds: "Let no one imagine, however, that I am not sensible that some of the Greek myths are useful to mankind, part of them explaining, as they do, the works of Nature by allegories [etc. ...], nevertheless [...] I consider that the advantages from the Greek myths are slight and cannot be of profit to many, but only to those who have examined the end for which they are designed; and this philosophic attitude is shared by few (ἐνθυμούμενος ὅτι τὰ

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lies and indulging in mythology is, in Josephus' opinion, a common path of tendentious historians.

57   See J. Bompaire, "Les historiens" (note 16) 5–6, on the 'canon' of classical historians adopted by the authors of *progymnasmata*.

58   See the long 'declination' in different γυμνασίαι of the Thucydidean passage (2.2–6) about the failed Theban assault to Plataea: 84,27–85,28 Sp. = 47,3–48,8 Pat. and 87,22–90,15 Sp. = 50,10–53,26 Pat.

59   Diod., 1.3.2; 4.1.1–5.

μὲν ἐκ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μύθων ἀγαθὰ μικρά τέ ἐστι καὶ οὐ πολλοὺς δυνάμενα
ὠφελεῖν, ἀλλὰ μόνους τοὺς ἐξητακότας ὧν ἕνεκα γίνεται, σπάνιοι δ' εἰσὶν οἱ
μετειληφότες ταύτης τῆς φιλοσοφίας)"[60]. Here we find arguments about myth
confutation similar to those we find in Theon, even if in a more 'pessimistic'
mood. Myth is essentially something to be refuted: it is true that philosophers
can understand and explain its 'rational' origins and take benefit from it, but
this skill is shared by few[61].

Strabo's perspective is partially different. The geographer states several
times that a rigorous analysis of myths can shed light on historical and geographi-
cal facts. Strabo maintains that such poets as Homer are precious sources for
his studies, since the poet is forced to mix real with mythical elements, in order
to attract the attention of his public and give them pleasure with the marvellous
and the portentous[62]. This is not to say that there is a great distance between
Strabo and, for example, Dionysius. The perspective we find in Dionysius' and
Theon's words is shared by Strabo, since he presents this method as virtuous and
innovative, arguing against the *savants*, like Eratosthenes, who exclude ancient
poets from the sources of geographical research. In his *prooemium*, moreover,
Strabo states the philosophical nature of geography, considering himself – we
might say – as one of those philosophers mentioned by Dionysius in the passage
quoted above.

To sum up, Theon's treatment of the confutation of myth is based on a note-
worthy skill in analyzing the authors of the past and their attempts to rationalize
myth. In this respect, the treatment of Herodotus is exemplary, and constitutes
an interesting moment of his reception. Herodotus is praised by Theon more
for his argumentative and historiographical skill than for the charming narrative
style which other rhetoricians often underline, and he is not compared to Homer
or even considered anywhere near him.

Theon also shows his awareness of the problematic connection between
myth and history, and seems to have much in common with those authors who
consider the pure confutation of myth as unsatisfactory to those who aim to
distinguish themselves from the common man. Whether the profile and the

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60   Dion. Hal., *AR* 2.20.1–2. Here Dionysius speaks against theogonical (i.e. 'Hesiodean') myths
      and does not seem to criticize Homer. About Dionysius' use of myth in his historiographical
      work see L. Miletti, "Les remarques linguistiques de Denys d'Halicarnasse dans les *Antiquités
      Romaines*: un instrument pour l'argumentation du discours mythique", in M. Pfaff Reydellet
      (ed.), *La fabrique du mythe à l'époque impériale* (Turnhout) forthcoming.

61   The simple confutation of myth is considered a blameworthy goal in the words of Arrianus of
      Nicomedia, *Ind.* 31.9.

62   Strabo 1.2.8. For an up-to-date discussion of Strabo's 'Homerism' see A. M. Biraschi, "Strabo
      and Homer: A Chapter in Cultural History", in D. Dueck/H. Lindsay/S. Pothecary (eds.),
      Strabo's Cultural Geography (Cambridge 2005) 73–85; N. Wiater "Myth in Context: Knowl-
      edge, Power, and the Creation of Tradition in Diodorus and Strabo", in M. Pfaff Reydellet
      (ed.), *La fabrique* (note 60) forthcoming.

intertextual relations I suggest might contribute towards shedding light on the *quaestio* about Theon's chronology is a matter for further research.

Correspondence:
Lorenzo Miletti
Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Via F. Cifariello 16
IT-80129 Napoli
lorenzomiletti@hotmail.com