

‘Palaephatus’, Strabo and the boundaries of myth*

Richard Hunter

One of the principal problems confronting anyone concerned with the ancient critical reception of Homer and/or the broader question of how the Greeks began to construct distinctions in what they heard and read between history, fiction and myth, or indeed between science and non-science, is that it is very difficult to get back to a ‘state of grace’: most of our ancient texts in these areas seem already contaminated by sophistications of one kind or another. That, however, may well be the point: there may never have been such a pure state, at least in the historical period covered by our extant texts? Rather, therefore, than trying, to distinguish between archaic texts, which come from a world which still understood, indeed functioned through, poetry and myth, and post-classical texts which had lost their intellectual virginity and for whom all this was play, I want to begin *in mediis rebus* with a text which is relatively early (late fourth century BC), but also – when viewed from another perspective – seems very late indeed. This is the extant Preface to the collection of mythical rationalisations that goes under the name of ‘Palaephatus’:¹

τάδε περὶ τῶν ἀπίστων συγγέγραφα. ἀνθρώπων γὰρ οἱ μὲν εὐπειθέστεροι πείθονται πᾶσι τοῖς λεγομένοις, ὡς ἀνομίλητοι σοφίας καὶ ἐπιστήμης, οἱ δὲ πυκνότεροι τὴν φύσιν καὶ πολυπράγματοι ἀπιστοῦσι τὸ παράπαν μηδὲ γενέσθαι τι τούτων. ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ γενέσθαι πάντα τὰ λεγόμενα. οὐ γὰρ ὀνόματα μόνον ἐγένοντο, λόγος δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν οὐδεὶς ὑπῆρξεν· ἀλλὰ πρότερον ἐγένετο τὸ ἔργον, εἶθ’ οὕτως ὁ λόγος ὁ περὶ αὐτῶν. ὅσα δὲ εἶδη καὶ μορφαὶ εἰσι λεγόμενα καὶ γενόμενα τότε, αἶ νῦν οὐκ εἰσὶ, τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ ἐγένοντο. εἰ γὰρ <τί> ποτε καὶ ἄλλοτε ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν τε γίνεται καὶ αὐθις ἔσται. αἰεὶ δὲ ἔγωγε ἐπαινῶ τοὺς συγγραφεῆς Μέλισσον καὶ Λαμίσκον τὸν Σάμιον ἐν ἀρχῇ λέγοντας ‘ἔστιν ἃ ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν ἔσται’. γενομένων δὲ τινα οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ λογογράφοι παρέτρεψαν εἰς τὸ ἀπιστότερον καὶ θαυμασιώτερον, τοῦ θαυμάζειν ἕνεκα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. ἐγὼ δὲ γινώσκω ὅτι οὐ δύναται τὰ τοιαῦτα εἶναι οἷα καὶ λέγεται· τοῦτο δὲ καὶ διείληφα, ὅτι, εἰ μὴ ἐγένετο, οὐκ ἂν ἐλέγετο. ἐπελθὼν δὲ καὶ πλείστας χώρας ἐπυθάνομην τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ὡς ἀκούοιεν περὶ ἐκάστου αὐτῶν, συγγράφω δὲ ἃ ἐπυθόμην παρ’ αὐτῶν. καὶ τὰ χωρία αὐτὸς εἶδον ὡς ἔστιν

* A version of this essay was delivered as the Walsh Memorial Lecture at the University of Chicago in March 2015; I have not sought to remove every vestige of oral presentation. I would like to express my very warm thanks to the Department of Classics at Chicago for the invitation and to the audience there for much stimulating discussion and criticism. This paper has also benefitted from the reactions of audiences at Princeton University and the University of Texas at Austin.

¹ For the sake of simplicity I will henceforth omit the inverted commas around the name. For Palaephatus and the relevant bibliography see esp. Hawes 2014a and 2014b; I have not thought it necessary to record every place where I agree with or differ from Hawes’ helpful accounts. The translation of the Preface offered here is awkwardly literal, but that seems necessary in the circumstances.

ἕκαστον ἔχον, καὶ γέγραφα ταῦτα οὐχ οἷα ἦν λεγόμενα, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν καὶ ἱστορήσας.

I have recorded these things concerning unbelievable matters. Some men are gullible and believe everything which is reported, as they have no familiarity with wisdom and knowledge, whereas others who are more subtle by nature and questioning completely disbelieve that any of these things ever happened. My view is that everything which is reported happened [in some form], for they were not merely names without any stories about them;² first came the fact and then the story about the facts. As for the shapes and forms which are reported and [allegedly] occurred then, and which do not exist now, these did not exist; for if <anything> ever existed in another time, it both exists now and will do so in the future. I have always approved the prose-writers Melissos and Lamiskos the Samian³ who say, at the beginning of their work,⁴ ‘there are things which were and which will be again’. Poets and chroniclers have turned some of the things which have happened in the direction of the unbelievable and wonderful in order to amaze men. But I know that things are not possible such as they are reported, but I have also understood that, if they had not happened [in some form], there would not have been reports. I travelled to very many countries and made enquiries of the older people as to what they had heard about each of these things, and I record what I learned from them. I myself saw the condition of each place, and I have written these things not as they have been reported, but after myself going and making investigations.

‘Palaephatus’, *On incredible things* Preface⁵

Uncertainties of text and interpretation do not dampen the interest of the *Preface*, which has indeed often been regarded of course as much more interesting than the rationalisations which follow in the Palaephatan collection. The possibility, some would say very strong likelihood, that this text dates from peripatetic circles in the late fourth century, i.e. at a crucial time for the development of collecting and thinking about the nature of myths and myth, merely adds to its interest.⁶ For all that Palaephatus’ denial of

² The text here is almost certainly corrupt; the translation and supplement are not intended to offer a solution to the textual problem.

³ τὸν Σάμιον is often regarded as an intrusive marginal gloss, originally referring to Melissus, who was from Samos. This is no doubt possible, but hardly certain, given the games with authority that Palaephatus is playing here; the only relevant Lamiskos of whom we know is a character from the circle of Archytas who was known to Plato (cf. *Epist.* 7.305b, *Diog. Laert.* 3.22). For the use Palaephatus makes of Eleatic ‘Being’ cf. Hawes 2014a, 44.

⁴ It is not certain that this is what the transmitted text means; corruption can (again) not be ruled out.

⁵ Except for punctuation, this is the text given by Festa 1902 and Santoni 2000.

⁶ Cf. Hawes 2014a, 227-38 (a full collection of the evidence), Trachsel 2005, 551-4. Theon, *Progymn.* 96 Sp. refers to ‘Palaephatus the Peripatetic’, and the *Suda* π70 makes Palaephatus a contemporary of Artaxerxes; the date of Athenion fr. 1 K-A, where a cook

the possibility of weird and hybrid forms seems to look forward to Lucretius' very similar and certainly serious denial (5.855-924, cf. 4.722-48), the most obvious thing about this text, one might think, is that it is a knowing bluff or rather po-faced joke, although this is not how it is normally regarded. Although some modern scholars have recognised that Palaephatus probably did not go on extensive research trips, the Preface is almost universally taken as a serious justification for the practice of myth rationalisation, even by those who recognise that Palaephatus is adopting a pose.⁷ The reasons for this attitude probably lie deep within the nature of Classics and classicists, but for the moment let us stay with the nature of this text itself.

Palaephatus' *Preface* is in places reminiscent of the tone, if not the arguments, of Lucian's *True Histories*, and the historiographical pose is in fact the single most prominent thread which runs through the rhetoric of this introduction.⁸ The opening *τάδε περὶ τῶν ἀπίστων συγγέγραφα*, with its witty tension between the historiographical verb and the subject-matter ('things you can't believe'), uses a version of the same kind of paradoxical clash between style and subject which we find at the head of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, *quid actum sit in caelo ... uolo memoriae tradere*, another preface which plays with issues of belief in the unbelievable, the authority of sources and a historiographical voice. If, however, the style, rather than the paradoxical subject, reminds us of Hecataeus' famous opening,⁹ it is in fact Herodotus whose presence, flagged by the closing *ἱστορήσας*, by the whole language of belief and the recording of reports, and by the self-representation of the writer as a travelling inquirer after truth, hangs over this whole passage.¹⁰ This is, however, a Herodotus mediated to us through the famous passage with which Thucydides concludes his account of how ignorant people can be of even relatively recent history:

οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἐτοῖμα

who explains how his art has been responsible for human progress is called 'a new Palaephatus', is unfortunately uncertain.

⁷ Whitmarsh 2013, 17-18 considers to what extent Palaephatus' rationalisations are laughable or ludic, but does not discuss the Preface; so too, Hawes 2014b, 126 observes that 'we might indeed wonder about how seriously we should actually take this text', but she too is there discussing the 'irredeemably banal' and repetitive mythic explanations, not the Preface.

⁸ On 'Palaephatus' and myth rationalisation in the historians cf., e.g., Nestle 1942, 131-52, Stern 1996, 10-16, id. 1999, 219-20, Santoni 2000, 19-21 (a good discussion of the Introduction), 30-2. Hawes 2014a, 13 rightly notes that 'rationalistic interpretation has a natural affinity with *historia*'.

⁹ Cf. Santoni 2000, 19. Santoni also rightly cites Antiochus of Syracuse fr. 2 Jacoby, *Ἀντίοχος Ξενοφάνεος τάδε συνέγραψε περὶ Ἰταλίας, ἐκ τῶν ἀρχαίων λόγων τὰ πιστότατα καὶ σαφέστατα*; this is the kind of historiographical rhetoric which Palaephatus turns on its head.

¹⁰ Lucian offers a related parody of such enquiry when he notes that he made serious enquiries (*ἀναζητοῦντος ... ἐμοῦ καὶ διαπυνθανομένου*) of the locals who lived by the Eridanos about the myth of Phaethon and his sisters, though he happened to be in the vicinity by chance on another errand (*Elec.* 2).

μᾶλλον τρέπονται. ἐκ δὲ τῶν εἰρημένων τεκμηρίων ὅμως τοιαῦτα ἂν τις νομίζων μάλιστα ἂ διήλθον οὐχ ἄμαρτάνοι, καὶ οὔτε ὡς ποιηταὶ ὑμνήκασι περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμοῦντες μᾶλλον πιστεύων, οὔτε ὡς λογογράφοι ξυνέθεσαν ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῆ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον, ὄντα ἀνεξέλεγκτα καὶ τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ χρόνου αὐτῶν ἀπίστως ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες ἐκνενηκικότα, ἠρῆσθαι δὲ ἠγησάμενος ἐκ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων σημείων ὡς παλαιὰ εἶναι ἀποχρόντως.

So little trouble do people take to search out the truth, and so readily do they accept what first comes to hand. From the evidence I have presented, however, one would not go wrong in supposing that events were very much as I have set them out; and no one should prefer rather to believe the songs of the poets, who exaggerate things for artistic purposes, or the writings of the chroniclers, which are composed more to make good listening than to represent the truth, being impossible to check and having most of them won a place over time in the imaginary realm of fable. My findings, however, you can regard as derived from the clearest evidence available for material of this antiquity.

Thucydides 1.20.3-21.1 (trans. J. Mynott)

Palaephatus repeats Thucydides' charge against the unreliability of 'poets and chroniclers' and the reasons for it (to make what is told more impressive, more effective as ἔκπληξις, to use the language of later criticism), but he does not accept that such things are ἀνεξέλεγκτα 'beyond investigation'. What matters, in fact, is what you are seeking to investigate, i.e. what questions one might reasonably ask of mythic material. Much of the rich tradition of mythographical writing in the post-classical period may indeed be seen as a series of attempts to meet Thucydides' pessimistic claim, and this applies not just to texts which are normally thought of as 'mythographic'. In a famous passage which opens his *Life of Theseus*, Plutarch compares himself to 'researchers in geography' (ἐν ταῖς γεωγραφίαις ... οἱ ἱστορικοί) and historical time to a map where 'the parts which escape their [i.e. geographers'] knowledge' are put around the edge with labels which amount (as would say) to 'here be dragons'. The equivalent distinction for the historian is between periods of time 'which may be reached by probable reasoning and offer territory for history which stays close to real events' (τὸν ἐφικτὸν εἰκότι λόγῳ καὶ βάσιμον ἱστορία πραγμάτων ἐχομένη χρόνον) and those which are 'the stuff of marvel and tragedy, inhabited by poets and mythographers, where there can be no confidence or certainty' (τὰ ... τερατώδη καὶ τραγικὰ ποιητὰ καὶ μυθογράφοι νέμονται, καὶ οὐκέτ' ἔχει πίστιν οὐδὲ σαφήνειαν). The Thucydidean heritage which gives primacy to the process of investigation, to the drawing of inference from evidence, the *how* rather than the *what*, if you will, is very clearly on show here.¹¹ Plutarch will not give up on the remote edges of time, but rather will do what he can to bring them under a familiar umbrella:

εἴη μὲν οὖν ἡμῖν ἐκκαθαίρομενον λόγῳ τὸ μυθῶδες ὑπακοῦσαι καὶ λαβεῖν ἱστορίας ὅψιν· ὅπου δ' ἂν αὐθαδῶς τοῦ πιθανοῦ περιφρονῆ καὶ μὴ δέχεται τὴν πρὸς τὸ εἰκὸς μεῖξιν, εὐγνωμόνων ἀκροατῶν δεησόμεθα καὶ πρῶως τὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν προσδεχομένων.

¹¹ Cf., e.g., Hawes 2014a: 150-1.

May I succeed in cleaning out¹² the mythical element and making it obedient to reason and giving it the appearance of history. Where, however, it wantonly scorns credibility and will not accept an admixture of the probable, I ask for an audience which is well-disposed and which receives this account of the distant past with indulgence.

Plutarch, *Theseus* 1.3

Plutarch accepts that there are some *mythika* which are beyond the exercise of *logos*. Palaephatus was not so faint-hearted.

With a nod and a wink, Palaephatus sets out to show that even ‘those things which have won their way to mythic status contrary to believability (ἀπίστως)’ will yield before the march of σοφία and ἐπιστήμη. The mixed signals which Palaephatus gives out are perhaps part of the point. Thucydides had claimed that men uncritically (ἀβασανίστως) receive reports (ἀκοαί) about events in the past, ‘even if they occurred in their own country’ (1.20.1);¹³ Palaephatus, having distanced himself from the tall tales of the ‘poets and chroniclers’, now tells us that what he is writing is what, in response to his enquiries (πυνθάνεσθαι), the older people in any locality ‘had heard’ about their past. There is, admittedly, some unclarity here. The final sentence might be taken to be relevant merely to its immediate context, so that Palaephatus is simply here denying that he has ‘uncritically’ written down what he has been told in each place he visited, but it seems more natural to understand it as picking up the opening of the Preface in a kind of ring composition. Some people, thus, simply believe τὰ λεγόμενα and some deny their truth entirely, but Palaephatus positions himself between these two extremes, by stressing both the fact that the *legomena* preserve significant traces, an idea which is in fact crucial for Palaephatus’ own *logos*,¹⁴ and also the ‘on the spot’ research he has actually done; he has

¹² The image is perhaps that of a land cleared of beasts (by a Heracles, for example), i.e. a continuation of the ‘map’ image with which the work opens, rather than of the pruning of luxuriant vegetation, as Hawes 2014a: 151 translates, despite the interesting parallel at *How to study poetry* 15e-f.

¹³ Thucydides’ rhetoric may find another echo in a similar context at ‘Heraclitus’, *Hom. Probl.* 3.2 where the author is dismissing those who take Homer’s poetry at face value and therefore regard him as impious: ἀβασάνιστος αὐτοῖς ἢ τῆς ἀληθείας κρίσις ἔρριπται, cf. esp. Thucyd. 1.20.3 (cited above), οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἢ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας. Thucydides would perhaps not have been amused to learn that his defence of the painstaking pursuit of ‘historical truth’ was repeatedly echoed in support of the proper understanding of, and hence the usefulness of, the mythical. More in the Thucydidean tradition is Philostratus, *Heroicus* 7.10 where the Phoenician notes that when he was a child he believed the μῦθοι which his nurse told him, but when he became a young man (μευράκιον) ‘I thought that these things should not be accepted ἀβασανίστως’, cf. Kim 2010, 184.

¹⁴ For a related, but very different, privileging of *logos* in a similar context of rhetorical self-advertisement we may compare Libanius’ introduction to his *ekphrasis* of the Chimaera (VIII 518 Foerster): ‘Unexpected/irrational (παράλογοι) forms emerged randomly (ἐκ τύχης) in the beginning, but having come into existence did not succeed in

gone to do his own investigations, which consist in part of listening to the stories of old men, a practice familiar from such serious later researchers as Pausanias (cf. 6.24.9). It has been argued that such an appeal to oral sources for myth lends ‘credibility’ to the mythic analyses which follow,¹⁵ but it seems more likely that the effect of Palaephatus’ claim is just the opposite: Palaephatus knows that this claim will undermine any residual faith in his earnestness to which we may still be clinging. Commentators solemnly point out that asking even a very old man you might meet on a Colchian street about, for example, the Golden Fleece is unlikely (to say no more) to take you as far back as Palaephatus’ rationalisations apparently go, but it should by now be clear that solemnity is perhaps not the right mood in which to approach this text.

Blanket scepticism, then, is in fact anti-intellectual (it resists the impulse to investigate and ask questions) and self-defeating. It would be easy to respond that this claim too is at best a ludic trope: we are all now (this probably being the late fourth century BC) πεπαιδευμένοι *avant la lettre*, we know that myths as simple narrative material are being systematically collected and collated, the very idea of ‘myth’ is being interrogated, and Callimachus’ *Aitia* is not so many years away. This is, it must be noted, no longer the ‘there was once a time’ world of the early poets; ‘mythography’, which has clear fifth-century roots but of which from some perspectives Palaephatus may be considered the first extant example,¹⁶ changes everything. There is clearly truth in these objections, but Palaephatus’ claimed approach to story-telling is in fact not all that different from that of a Hecataeus or even a Herodotus. From one perspective, Thucydidean strictures allowed the explicit written formulation of what was, and continued to be, inherent in Greek mythic narrative: Hesiod, and it may be argued Homer also, knew that ‘mythic’ discourse was different from other modes, not worse or better, but certainly different; we exaggerate that difference, or rather exaggerate its importance, because so much of our evidence comes from those who were precisely interested in collecting this particular mode of discourse (an Apollodorus, for example), but Thucydides’ formulation in fact merely allowed people to say more clearly what they had always wanted to say.¹⁷

One of the most enduring features of the literary recording and elaboration (διασκευή) of myth (broadly conceived) in antiquity was its capacity for embracing,

remaining; *logos* however preserved the forms which time concealed’. Here we should sense the distant echo of Empedoclean cosmogony.

¹⁵ Cf. Hawes 2014a, 45-7, 2014b, 137-8.

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Trzaskoma 2013, xvii-xviii. The earliest occurrence of μυθογράφος/μυθογραφία seems to be in a pseudo-Aristotelian text of (probably) the late fourth century, cf. Fowler 2000a, 2000b, xxvii-xxviii, 2013b, xiv, unless the concluding tag of Palaephatus 26, ἀφ’ οὗ οἱ μυθογράφοι τὸν μῦθον ἐπλασαν, is in fact earlier than that text. On the rise of a genre of mythography cf. Fowler 2000b, xxvii-xxxvi, 2006, 2013a, 2013b, xiv-xv.

¹⁷ This is clearly not the place to revisit the whole *mythos* – *logos* debate, or even the emergence of mythography (see previous note) as something distinct from historiography, though of course these form crucial parts of the background to any consideration of Palaephatus; Fowler 2011 offers important guidance and a rich bibliography.

indeed appearing to invite, the ludic. Comic poets, for example, found little difficulty in writing plays on the ‘Oedipus’ theme, and the most significant mythological poems of antiquity, Callimachus’ *Aitia* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, give a very prominent place to humour and irony of all kinds. Palaephatus has usually just been a footnote in this history, and yet he has more than a few notions in common with some of the most splendid examples of such literary elaboration. Consider, for example, the famous opening (rather than the Preface) of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. Lucius joins two other travellers on the road to Thessaly (land of wonders, a place where ‘traces’ of another order, buried elsewhere by change and progress, might well (be believed to) survive) and the first thing he hears is an imprecation against ‘absurd and monstrous lies’ (1.2); he asks to be allowed to listen in, ‘as someone who, though not *curiosus* [we think perhaps of Palaephatus’ πολυπράγματοι], wishes to know everything, or at least nearly everything’ (1.2). To the complete scepticism of one of his fellow-travellers he feels compelled to oppose the fact that things which seem novel or difficult often prove not to be so, *si paulo accuratius exploraris* (1.3); here the Thucydidean (and then Palaephatan) tradition of ‘investigation’ is to be put (paradoxically) to the defence of the marvellous. After Aristomenes has told his story of the death of Socrates, Lucius again defends what we might call ‘an open mind’ – *nihil impossibile arbitror*; there are many *mira et paene infecta* which happen, but which people simply do not believe when they are related (1.20). It is not just that Palaephatus shares with Apuleius’ narrator an interest in εἶδη καὶ μορφαί, but that both sketch out the territory of response to myth in a shared language, even though one put to utterly different uses. What we might think of as Lucius’ plea on behalf of gullibility is in fact a pointed reminder that the Thucydidean tradition can go too far; for his part, Palaephatus pleads for a middle way which seeks to go beyond simple scepticism in explaining how myth arises. The origin of the *legomena* has itself now become an appropriate object of research.

Apuleius’ opening consideration of the credible and the impossible finds a close parallel in the (roughly contemporary?) Φιλοψευδεῖς ἢ ἀπιστῶν of Lucian, in which ‘Tychiades’ plays the role of the cynical sceptic confronted, as was Apuleius’ sceptic, with πολλὰ τὰ ἄπιστα καὶ μυθώδη (5);¹⁸ to the more credulous, however, his blanket scepticism is laughable (16). Tychiades knows, moreover, that he is in the minority:

καίτοι τὰ μὲν τῶν ποιητῶν ἴσως μέτρια, τὸ δὲ καὶ πόλεις ἤδη καὶ ἔθνη ὅλα κοινῇ καὶ δημοσίᾳ ψεύδεσθαι πῶς οὐ γελοῖον; εἰ Κρηῖτες μὲν τὸν Διὸς τάφον δεικνύντες οὐκ αἰσχύνονται, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ τὸν Ἐριχθόνιον ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἀναδοθῆναι φασιν καὶ τοὺς πρώτους ἀνθρώπους ἐκ τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἀναφῶναι καθάπερ τὰ λάχανα, πολὺ σεμνότερον οὐτοί γε τῶν Θηβαίων, οἱ ἐξ ὄφεως ὀδόντων Σπαρτούς τινὰς ἀναβεβλαστηκένα διηγοῦνται. ὃς δ’ ἂν οὖν ταῦτα καταγέλαστα ὄντα μὴ οἴηται ἀληθῆ εἶναι, ἀλλ’ ἐμφρόνως ἐξετάζων αὐτὰ Κοροΐβου τινὸς ἢ Μαργίτου νομίζῃ τὸ πείθεσθαι ἢ Τριπτόλεμον ἐλάσαι διὰ τοῦ ἀέρος ἐπὶ δρακόντων ὑποπτέρων ἢ

¹⁸ Cf., e.g., Kim 2010, 200-1. It is perhaps noteworthy that Lucian’s essay includes a narrative of ‘magic gone wrong’ (35-7), just as Lucius’ failure to reverse his transformation is what sets the narrative of the *Metamorphoses* going. On the question of whether the title should be Φιλοψευδής or the now conventional Φιλοψευδεῖς cf. Ogden 2007, 3.

Πᾶνα ἤκειν ἐξ Ἀρκαδίας σύμμαχον εἰς Μαραθῶνα ἢ Ὠρείθυιαν ὑπὸ τοῦ Βορέου ἀρπασθῆναι, ἀσεβῆς οὗτός γε καὶ ἀνόητος αὐτοῖς ἔδοξεν οὕτω προδήλοις καὶ ἀληθέσι πράγμασιν ἀπιστῶν· εἰς τοσοῦτον ἐπικρατεῖ τὸ ψεῦδος.

The stories of the poets are perhaps not so bad, but how can it not be laughable that cities and whole peoples tell lies in unison and in public? The Cretans feel no shame in exhibiting Zeus's tomb, the Athenians claim that Erichthonius rose up from the earth and that the first men sprang up from Attic soil like vegetables. Their story, however, is much more serious than that of the Thebans who relate that Sown Men sprouted from a snake's teeth. If anyone considers that these absurd stories are untrue, and through rational examination thinks that only a Koroibos or a Margites would believe that Triptolemus drove through the air with winged serpents or that Pan came from Arcadia to help at the battle of Marathon or that Oreithyia was snatched away by Boreas, they think that this man is an impious fool for refusing to believe such obviously true facts. So great is the sway of falsehood.

Lucian, *Philopseudeis* 3

The final myth which Tychiades cites is also a source reference. Lucian is here reworking the famous passage of Plato's *Phaedrus* in which Plato seems to make Socrates reject myth rationalisation (and perhaps Palaephatus' forerunners also):

ἐγὼ δέ, ὦ Φαῖδρε, ἄλλως μὲν τὰ τοιαῦτα χαρίεντα ἡγοῦμαι, λίαν δὲ δεινοῦ καὶ ἐπιπόνου καὶ οὐ πάνυ εὐτυχοῦς ἀνδρός, κατ' ἄλλο μὲν οὐδέν, ὅτι δ' αὐτῷ ἀνάγκη μετὰ τοῦτο τὸ τῶν Ἴπποκενταύρων εἶδος ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, καὶ αὖθις τὸ τῆς Χιμαίρας, καὶ ἐπιρρεῖ δὲ ὄχλος τοιούτων Γοργόνων καὶ Πηγάσων καὶ ἄλλων ἀμηχάνων πλήθη τε καὶ ἀτοπία τερατολόγων τινῶν φύσεων· αἷς εἴ τις ἀπιστῶν προσβιβᾷ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἕκαστον, ἅτε ἀγροίκῳ τινὶ σοφία χρώμενος, πολλῆς αὐτῷ σχολῆς δεήσει. ἐμοὶ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὰ οὐδαμῶς ἐστι σχολή· τὸ δὲ αἴτιον, ὦ φίλε, τούτου τόδε. οὐ δύναμαί πω κατὰ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα γνῶναι ἑμαυτόν· γελοῖον δὴ μοι φαίνεται τοῦτο ἔτι ἀγνοοῦντα τὰ ἀλλότρια σκοπεῖν. ὅθεν δὴ χαίρειν ἐάσας ταῦτα, πειθόμενος δὲ τῷ νομιζομένῳ περὶ αὐτῶν, ὃ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ' ἑμαυτόν, εἴτε τι θηρίον ὄν τυγχάνω Τυφῶνος πολυπλοκώτερον καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπιτεθυμμένον, εἴτε ἡμερώτερόν τε καὶ ἀπλούστερον ζῶον, θείας τινὸς καὶ ἀτύφου μοίρας φύσει μετέχον.

But I, Phaedrus, think such [rationalizing] explanations are very pretty in general, but are the inventions of a very clever and laborious and not altogether enviable man, for no other reason than because after this he must explain the forms of the Centaurs, and then that of the Chimaera, and there presses in upon him a whole crowd of such creatures, Gorgons and Pegasuses, and multitudes of strange, inconceivable, portentous natures. If anyone disbelieves in these, and with a rustic sort of wisdom, undertakes to explain each in accordance with probability, he will need a great deal of leisure. But I have no leisure for them at all; and the reason, my friend, is this: I am not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself; so it seems to me ridiculous, when I do not yet know that, to investigate

irrelevant things. And so I dismiss these matters and accepting the customary belief about them, as I was saying just now, I investigate not these things, but myself, to know whether I am a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 229d2-30a6

Whereas Socrates, for his own reasons, rejects simple ἀπιστία and notes that anyone who wished seriously to apply σοφία to some myths and outlandish mythic hybrids would be an unhappy and very busy man, Lucian's Tychiades presents such an exercise of rationality as ἐμφορόνως ἐξετάζων, but one which incurs a reputation for being 'impious and foolish'. For Tychiades the matter is one of 'truth' or 'falsehood', which also stand, for example, at the centre of the discussion on fabulous myths in Philostratus' *Heroicus*; for the Platonic Socrates, however, there is another way forward, one that deals with more interesting monsters such as Typhon and which does not seek to reduce stories to the banally 'probable', one whose aim, moreover, is not the explanation of myth, but rather the employment of myth in the investigation of human psychology, rationality and passion. We might as well call that way forward 'allegory',¹⁹ and it is worth reminding ourselves that when perhaps some five centuries later 'Heraclitus', who also appeals to ἐπιστήμη (*Hom. Probl.* 6.2), notes that 'the ignorant' take as 'mythical inventions/fictions' what Homer spoke 'philosophically' (*Hom. Probl.* 3.2), he too in fact stands within the Platonic path, for all that he then vents his spite against the philosopher in the following chapter. 'Rationalisation', particularly in its simpler forms, is itself a form of allegorisation;²⁰ one thinks of the the very opening of the *Iliad* – this is not Apollo shooting his arrows, this is a plague ('Heraclitus', *Hom. Probl.* 6.5).²¹ It is in fact Plato who shows us how productive Palaephatus' rejection of 'blanket scepticism' could actually be.

Before leaving 'Palaephatus' we may note that his (alleged) attempt to steer a middle way in the interpretation of myth is one of a number which survive from antiquity and beyond and which testify to the very vigour of the debate which the nature of Homeric poetry, in particular, provoked. No mode of interpretation was of course more fiercely contested than allegorical interpretation. When 'Heraclitus' begins his allegorizing treatise with the observation that 'if Homer used no allegory, all his poetry is impious' (*Hom. Probl.* 1.1), he makes clear that this was indeed a view that some held. Such ignorant people (cf. *Hom. Probl.* 3.2)²² occupy the same structural role for

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., Hunter 2012: 84-5. I therefore differ from those, such as Werner 2012, 27-43, who see Socrates in the *Phaedrus* as rejecting all philosophical utility in myth and forms of mythic interpretation; for an approach closer to mine cf. Ferrari 1987, 11-12, Brouwer 2014, 149-63. This passage of the *Phaedrus* is also central to Dio's discussion of mythic interpretation in *Oration* 5, cf. Hunter forthcoming.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., Hopman 2012, 181, with the bibliography cited there, Hawes 2014a, 28-36.

²¹ On 'rationalisation' in 'Heraclitus' cf., e.g., Ramelli 2003, 45.

²² Russell and Konstan adopt Heyne's ἀμαθεις for the transmitted ἀμαθῶς at 3.2, but the reading does not of course affect the point being made.

‘Heraclitus’ as do those ‘who believe all the *legomena*’ for Palaephatus; both groups know nothing of σοφία and/or φιλοσοφία. The debate is set out for us at rather fuller length in Eustathius’ introduction to his commentary on the *Iliad* (*Hom.* 3.13-34), and here – as elsewhere – Eustathius will be drawing on earlier sources, as well as upon the fruits of his own reflections and learning.²³ For Eustathius, the two extremes are represented by those who ‘turn everything into allegory’, even events and characters which are rooted in reality, what Eustathius terms τὰ ὁμολογουμένως ιστορούμενα, ‘so that the poet seems to speak to us in dreams’.²⁴ On the other side are those ‘who have torn off Homer’s wings and never allow him to soar aloft’, by refusing to allow any allegorical interpretation; for these people, whose ‘lawgiver’ was Aristarchus,²⁵ myths are just that – myths. For Eustathius, the third way, and the way he will follow, is, like Palaephatus’ middle way, the way of careful examination and discrimination, rather than the imposition of totalising and indiscriminating systems; he will not be the last scholar to use such a rhetoric about the difference between his work and that of others, nor will he be the last whose practice is much less clearcut, and much more of a compromise, than his proclaimed methodology.²⁶ Eustathius lines himself up alongside οἱ ἀκριβέστεροι, who take the trouble to investigate the material properly: that which is historical is accepted as it is, but with myths, they first consider their origin, nature and plausibility and then the nature of the truth which lies within them, which must be revealed through allegorical interpretation, θεραπεία - whether that be φυσικῶς (‘pertaining to the nature of the world’) or κατὰ ἦθος (‘ethical’, ‘moralising’) or ιστορικῶς. This last method refers to the fact that many myths contain a central core of reality, an event or events which really did happen, but that reality has been distorted by mythical material to make it more marvellous (τοῦ δὲ μύθου τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐκβιαζομένου πρὸς τὸ τερατωδέστερον) and must therefore be recovered by the interpreter.²⁷ Here Eustathius, like Palaephatus before him,

²³ On Eustathius’ allegorizing sources cf. Van der Valk 1971-1987, I: cxi-ii, II: lxxvi-ii, Reinhardt 1910, 36-58. Browning 1992: 143 helpfully discusses Eustathius on allegory.

²⁴ Cesaretti 1991, 241 n.13 suggests that Eustathius here recalls Dio’s criticisms of Homer at 11.129; Eustathius certainly knew the *Trojan Oration*, cf. *Hom.* 460.6-7. As for Eustathius’ target, Cesaretti 1991: 231 suggests allegorists such as Metrodorus of Lampsacus from the fifth century BC (cf. Hunter 2012, 92, citing earlier bibliography); it is tempting, however, to think that Eustathius is thinking of allegorists nearer in time than Metrodorus.

²⁵ Eustathius is of course referring to Aristarchus’ famous view (D-scholium on *Il.* 5.385, cf. *Hom.* 40.28-34, 561.29-30) that ‘what is said by the poet should be accepted mythically, in accordance with poetic licence, and readers should not busy themselves (περιεργαζομένους) with anything beyond what the poet said’; For differing assessments of what Aristarchus actually meant by this cf., e.g., Porter 1992, 70-4, Nünlist 2009, 180-1. Eustathius’ description of his own work – περιεργάζεται που [τοὺς μύθους] ἀκολούθως τοῖς παλαιοῖς – may indeed scornfully pick up Aristarchus’ verb.

²⁶ For a helpful survey cf. Cesaretti 1991, 222-74.

²⁷ Eustathius makes very similar points at the head of the *Odyssey*-commentary, where the purpose of τὸ τερατεύεσθαι is the creation of ἡδονή and ἔκπληξις for the audience (*Hom.* 1379.13-14).

is the heir of Thucydides,²⁸ as well also of Strabo, a text which he knew very well indeed. The appeal to ἀκρίβεια, coupled with the necessity for close investigation, may itself descend (at an unknown number of removes) from the same programmatic chapters of Thucydides: at 1.22.2 the historian claims his account of what actually happened in the war was not based on that of any chance source, but on careful examination and weighing of the evidence (ὄσον δυνατόν ἀκρίβεια περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξεληθών).

Palaephatus had introduced his collection by noting that a readiness to believe all the stories which one is told was a sign of being unacquainted with σοφία and ἐπιστήμη; if, as we have seen, he also notes the dangers of being ‘too clever’, he nevertheless flags up ‘science’ (to use a loose approximation to σοφία καὶ ἐπιστήμη) as a sphere of both activity and discourse which stands in opposition to that of myth. This is not of course the place for anything like a full account of the history of these oppositions – the ‘*mythos-logos* debate’ – but Palaephatus does invite us to consider something of the various ways in which Hellenistic and later scholars sought to make sense of the stories with which they were confronted. For Palaephatus, stories are distorted traces of real events – they do not arise *ex nihilo* – and as such we might naturally be tempted to associate Palaephatus with the first book of Strabo’s *Geography*, which discusses Homer and Homer’s geography in the light of Eratosthenes’ criticisms that (i) poetry was concerned with entertainment, not instruction and (ii) the accuracy of Homer’s geography made no contribution to his skill as a poet anyway. Strabo takes a view of poetic historicity not entirely unlike Palaephatus;²⁹ for Strabo too legends, even apparently outlandish ones, are not ‘inventions (πλάσματα) of poets and prose-writers’ but rather ‘traces (ἵχνια) of people and events of the real past’ (1.2.14). For Strabo it is almost axiomatic that Homer would not simply create from nothing; I say ‘almost axiomatic’, because, although Strabo does in fact just assert this (to him self-evident) truth, proof, which we at least would label circumstantial, exists for him in Homer’s whole character and that of his poetry. As for the former, the opening paragraphs of Book 1 precisely depict Homer as a man of, in Palaephatus’ phrase, σοφία καὶ ἐπιστήμη, a φιλόσοφος in fact, and also a πολυπράγματος in the best sense of that term; Apuleius’ Lucius, we recall, ‘wished to know everything, or at least nearly everything’, whereas Strabo’s Homer ‘took pains (ἐσπούδασεν) to know as many πράξεις as possible and to hand them down to those who came after him’ (1.1.2). It is easy enough here to see that Strabo’s Homer is, in part, fashioned from the poet’s own Odysseus, the man who ‘knew the cities and minds of many [rather than ‘very many’] men’ and who did indeed record these for posterity, and in part on Strabo’s own sense of himself as a serious man of education in a culture where the βίος πολιτικός was indeed at the centre of the interests of the real or imagined audience. Like Palaephatus, at least in his self-presentation, Strabo too was a great traveller (2.5.11) and enquirer, standing in a line of descent which goes back to Odysseus and Homer himself.³⁰

We have seen that ‘Palaephatus’ placed himself in the Herodotean tradition of the

²⁸ According to Van der Valk 1971-1987, I: ci Thucydides is only cited directly on a couple of occasions by Eustathius (395.34-5, 795.37).

²⁹ Cf. Kim 2010, 71-7. On Strabo’s attitude to ‘myth’ cf. also Patterson 2013.

³⁰ For an excellent recent account (and bibliography) of Strabo’s discussion of Homer cf. Kim 2010, Chapter 3. Patterson 2013, 219-221 calls attention to similarities between Strabo and Hecataeus.

travelling enquirer, and it is of course familiar that Homer is regularly depicted in the *Lives* as a traveller, so it was not difficult to bring these two traditions together in making Homer a kind of proto-Herodotus (as Herodotus himself may to some extent have already done), and this is precisely what we see Strabo, who in fact appeals to the Homeric *Lives* (1.2.29), doing in the course of his rebuttal of Eratosthenes; for Strabo prominent characteristics of Homer are τὸ φιλείδημον and τὸ φιλέκδημον (1.2.29), which may be seen as a transcription of the opening verses of the *Odyssey* into the language of scholarship. Strabo's Homer indeed will have travelled in Egypt, just like his successor. We must remember that when 'Longinus' famously describes Herodotus as Ὀμηρικώτατος (*De subl.* 13.3), the poet had in part long been fashioned in the image of the historian; Ὀμηρος Ἡροδοτικώτατος had just as good a claim to reality for part of the critical tradition. In introducing Homer as a man of consummate knowledge both of public life and of the geography of the whole world, Strabo notes:

οὐ γὰρ ἂν μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων αὐτῆς περάτων ἀφίκετο τῇ μνήμῃ κύκλῳ περιούων

For [if this were not the case] he would never have reached as far as the furthest bounds of the inhabited world as he travelled around it in a circle in his description.

Strabo 1.1.2

'Travelling' for an enquirer can take more than one form, and Strabo here (surely deliberately) runs the language of description and the language of travelling together;³¹ modern editors and translators differ as to whether τῇ μνήμῃ should be taken with ἀφίκετο (so, e.g., Radt, Aujac) or with περιούων (so, e.g., H.L. Jones in the Loeb), but it is rather the richly significant language which is to be noted. Poets, Homer above all, travel around the world and thus 'map' it for us. μνήμη itself need not be ambivalent, but a glance at *LSJ* will remind us that this word for 'memorial, record' also has a marked intellectual sense as 'memory', and Strabo's language here hovers between placing Homer as an actual traveller and the picture of the poet offered some two centuries later by Maximus of Tyre of a Homer whose soul, like that of Aristeas of Proconessus or of the philosopher as Socrates describes him in the *Theaetetus*, travels all over the world gathering information.³²

If we turn from the poet to his poems, we may infer, so Strabo implies, from the fact that the vast bulk of what Homer describes is either factual or has a factual basis that this applies to the poems as a whole; moreover, as Homer's poetry is universally acknowledged as a suitable subject for philosophical investigation (a φιλοσόφημα), this could not be the case if it was simply invented *ex nihilo* (1.2.17). Whereas for Palaephatus myth arose as a kind of sideways leap into error arising from misunderstanding, a misunderstanding that fundamentally changed the nature of what was being described, for Strabo the mythical and the fantastic are rather additions which may to some extent distort but do not fundamentally alter the truths which remain visible

³¹ The same language recurs, but at greater expansiveness and therefore with less complex resonance, at 1.1.10.

³² Max. Tyr. 26.1, cf. Hunter 2012, 52-4.

below the accretions. Homer takes his ἀρχαί, his starting-points, from ἱστορία (1.2.9). What does Strabo mean by the ἱστορία from which Homer took his starting-points?; according to Radt it is ‘die historische Überlieferung’, for Aujac ‘sa vaste information’, for Jones simply ‘history’. The remainder of the chapter and the following one on the Argonautic expedition (1.2.10), however, make plain that Strabo understands Homer to have drawn on his own knowledge (the verb εἰδέναι is repeatedly used) in building his mixture of the true and the false, and so the question becomes one of the source of that knowledge. Strabo’s first set of examples perhaps poses more questions than it answers:

ἔλαβεν οὖν παρὰ τῆς ἱστορίας τὰς ἀρχάς. καὶ γὰρ τὸν Αἰόλον δυναστεῦσαί φασι τῶν περὶ τὴν Λιπάραν νήσων καὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν Αἴτην καὶ Λεοντίνην Κύκλωπας καὶ Λαιστρυγόνας ἀξένους τινάς· διὸ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸν πορθμὸν ἀπροσπέλαστα εἶναι τοῖς τότε καὶ τὴν Χάρυβδιν καὶ τὸ Σκύλλαιον ὑπὸ ληστῶν κατέχεσθαι.

Homer took his starting-points from *historia*. For they say³³ that Aeolus ruled over the islands around Lipari, and the inhospitable Cyclopes and Laistrygonians over the regions around Aetna and Leontine; the result was the area around the Strait was unapproachable for men of that time and Charybdis and the Skyllaion were the haunt of pirates.

Strabo 1.2.9

Whereas we would be tempted to say that these ‘historical facts’, what Strabo elsewhere (e.g. 3.4.4) calls τὰ ἱστορούμενα, were in fact post-Homeric interpretations of Homeric geography, and in one case at least a rationalising interpretation of Homeric myth (cf. Palaephatus 20 on Skylla as a Tyrrhenian pirate ship), Strabo seems to take these ‘reports’ as evidence for the historical core of Homer’s account of Odysseus’ wanderings, or perhaps even as themselves the source of Homer’s knowledge: through ἱστορία, then, Homer learned things for which, though of course Strabo does not say this, Homer is himself the principal authority. Another way of putting this is to say that, in searching for the historical core upon which Homer has elaborated, Strabo seizes upon the results achieved by various post-Homeric traditions which had sought precisely to demythologize Homer and to find ways of accommodating him both to contemporary geography and to a sense of what is possible in nature; Strabo has done no more than accept, and make use of (in a rather eclectic way), the work of those who had gone before him. The very vagueness of ἱστορία and (probably) φασί masks Strabo’s operation and casts back into an indeterminate past a popular knowledge which may, so we are led to believe, have been available to Homer himself.

In an important methodological statement Strabo considers the task of the critic:

³³ Casaubon’s φασί for the transmitted φησί seems hard to resist, for Homer manifestly does not ‘say’, e.g., that Aeolus ruled over the Lipari islands. Biraschi 2005, 78 sees here an example of Strabo failing to differentiate between what is explicitly in Homer and what is in the exegetical tradition about Homer, but – apart from other considerations – this does not suit the rhetoric of Strabo’s chapter (cf. further Kim 2010, 69 n.55). Jones retains φησί with ἱστορία as the subject, which is hard to believe.

ἔτι δὲ ἐπεὶ οὐ πάντα μυθεύουσιν, ἀλλὰ πλείω προσμυθεύουσι, καὶ μάλιστα Ὅμηρος, ὁ ζητῶν τί οἱ παλαιοὶ προσμυθεύουσιν οὐ ζητεῖ, εἰ τὰ προσμυθευόμενα ὑπῆρξεν ἢ ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον οἷς προσμυθεύεται τόποις ἢ προσώποις, περὶ ἐκείνων ζητεῖ τὰληθές, οἷον τὴν Ὀδυσσέως πλάνην, εἰ γέγονε καὶ ποῦ.

Since the tellers of myth, and most of all Homer, do not tell myths in all they say, but for the most part add myth (, the person who investigates what mythical element the ancients added does not investigate whether the added mythical elements existed or exist, but rather investigates the truth concerning the places or the people to which the mythical elements were added; for example, whether the wanderings of Odysseus happened and where.

Strabo 1.2.19

Strabo indeed finds proof of this ‘additive theory’ of myth, one not of course all that far in fact from what Thucydides had said about the activities of poets and logographers, not just in what Homer describes, but in the language in which he describes processes of artistic and verbal creation. In 1.2.9, in very quick succession, Homer’s process of προσμυθεύειν is compared to Hephaestus’ making of the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18, Athena’s beautification of Odysseus in *Odyssey* 6 (which Homer had compared to another piece of skilful metalwork), and finally to Odysseus’ false tale ‘like truth’ to Penelope in *Odyssey* 19. This final example takes us, as is well known, not just sideways to what the Muses say to Hesiod at the opening of the *Theogony*, but also forward – via Plato³⁴ – to the development of what we might call a ‘theory of fiction’ in the Hellenistic and later periods. Basic to any such theory, ancient or modern, is a distinction between types of narrative; the most famous such ancient distinction, was that between ‘history’, ‘fictional narrative’ or πλάσμα, and myth,³⁵ and Strabo’s discussion should be seen as a contribution to emerging ideas of the fictional and the mythical.

Strabo returns repeatedly to these themes in the course of the *Geography*. When discussing the Iberian peninsula, for example, Strabo considers the evidence that Homer, ‘a many of many voices and much learning’ (πολύφωνός τις ὄν και πολύιστωρ),³⁶ knew something of these areas (3.2.12-13). Thus, for example, ‘one might conjecture’ that Homer named Tartaros from Tartessos, of which he had heard something, ‘adding also a myth, thus preserving the poetical element’. It was Homer’s habit always ‘to derive his myths from historical facts (τοὺς μύθους ἀπὸ τινῶν ἱστοριῶν ἐνάγων)’, and this in fact accounts for the genesis of the two great poems:

καὶ ἡ τοῦ Ὀδυσσέως δὲ στρατεία δοκεῖ μοι δεῦρο γενηθεῖσα καὶ ἱστορηθεῖσα ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ παραδοῦναι πρόφασιν, ὥστε τὴν Ὀδύσειαν καθάπερ καὶ τὴν Ἰλιάδα ἀπὸ τῶν συμβάντων μεταγαγεῖν εἰς ποίησιν καὶ τὴν συνήθη τοῖς ποιηταῖς μυθοποιίαν.

³⁴ Cf. esp. *Republic* 2.382c10-d4, with the discussion of Gill 1993.

³⁵ For discussion and bibliography cf., e.g., Rispoli 1988.

³⁶ The latter adjective is also apparently applied to Homer in a (probably Chian) inscription of Augustan date, cf. Jones forthcoming; Strabo uses it also of Callimachus (9.5.17).

I think that the expedition of Odysseus took place here and the fact that he had gathered information about it gave him an opportunity (πρόφασις). The result was that, just as he had done with the *Iliad*, he transferred the *Odyssey* from events which had happened into poetry and the inventive myth which is customary for poets.

Strabo 3.2.13

Strabo then goes on to detail the traces of the *nostoi* of the Greeks and the wanderings of the Trojans which exist in the West:

ἢ τε τοῦ Αἰνείου παραδέδοται πλάνη καὶ Ἀντήνορος καὶ ἡ τῶν Ἐνετῶν· ὡσαύτως καὶ ἡ Διομήδους τε καὶ Μενελάου καὶ ἄλλων πλειόνων. ὁ τοίνυν ποιητὴς τὰς τοσαύτας στρατείας ἐπὶ τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς Ἰβηρίας ἱστορηκῶς, πυνθανόμενος δὲ καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἀρετὰς (οἱ γὰρ Φοίνικες ἐδήλουν τοῦτο) ἐνταῦθα τὸν τῶν εὐσεβῶν ἔπλασε χῶρον καὶ τὸ Ἥλύσιον πεδῖον ...

The wanderings of Aeneas are transmitted, as are those of Antenor and the Henetoi, and also of Diomedes and Menelaos and Odysseus and many others. The poet, therefore, having gathered information about so many expeditions to the furthest parts of Iberia and having heard about the wealth and the other advantages [of the area] (for the Phoenicians were making this clear) fictionally placed the place of the blessed and the Elysian plain here ...

Strabo 3.2.13

What should be most striking here, as before, is Strabo's language of historical process, which both seems confidently to carry an argument forward, but is also extraordinarily vague and short on detail. Homer has Phoenician informants (μηνυταί, 3.2.14), but the actual nature of his *ιστορίαί*, to say nothing of the process of transmission (παράδοσις) of 'historical information', is left entirely impressionistic. The vagueness works, of course, in Strabo's favour: we are so used, above all from Herodotus, to such language, and to the distinctions between history and myth, that Strabo appears to be describing the most natural process in the world, whereas in fact he is creating a historical and historicizing Homer before our eyes. The very audacity of the undertaking is too often overlooked in our understandable concern with Strabo's sources, a concern not infrequently reinforced by a sense that Strabo is not the intellectual equal of those sources.

Strabo's discussion of Homer is, in part, a contribution to emerging ideas of the fictional and the mythical, and it opens a window not merely on to ancient Homeric criticism, but also, as does Palaephatus' *Preface*, on to ancient attempts to delineate the boundaries of the mythical. In conclusion, however, it must be stressed that so many of these critical and interpretative issues were not merely sharpened in the discussion of Homer, but could be seen to have always been already there in Homer. One Homeric episode, in particular, raises these questions in a particularly sharp way.

Menelaus' account to Telemachus of his *nostos* in *Odyssey* 4 foreshadows Odysseus' account of his own return in various ways,³⁷ but does so, not just at greatly reduced length, but also in a 'lower', more realistic key. Not of course that there is anything strictly realistic about sea-goddesses, disguising oneself as a seal, and the metamorphoses of Proteus; indeed the figure of Proteus was subject to some of the most richly allegorical readings of any Homeric character. Nevertheless, whether we consider the geography of Menelaus' travels which, whatever view one takes of them (cf. Strabo 1.2.31), stands in sharp contrast to those of Odysseus (cf. vv. 83-5), or motifs such as that of the companions' hunger, for which the attempted cure is fishing rather than killing the Cattle of the Sun (vv. 368-9), it is clear that Menelaus' *nostos* is (in many, though not all, respects) 'ordinary' in comparison to that of Odysseus; Menelaus, *πολλὰ παθῶν καὶ πόλλ' ἐπαληθείς* (4.81), is clearly in fact set up by Homer as an 'Odysseus-light'. When Menelaus is, like Odysseus, driven off course while rounding Cape Malea (3.287), he ends in Egypt where (so Nestor reports and Menelaus confirms) 'he travelled around collecting rich resources and gold' (3.301, cf. 4.81-91), a detail that reminds us perhaps of Odysseus' Cretan tales (cf. esp. *Odyssey* 14.285-6); Odysseus, on the other hand, was swept for nine days from Cape Malea to the land of the Lotus-eaters. The reason for Menelaus being detained in Egypt, his failure to offer sufficient sacrifices to the gods before setting out (vv. 351-2, 472-80), reads in fact very like the kind of *post factum* explanation for problems that any one could make in antiquity: no inference from trouble is more common in ancient texts than that some god or gods must have been offended, an inference which also suggests a cure. This is not of course (or not necessarily) to suggest that we are to suspect that the whole episode of Eidothea, the seals and the metamorphoses of Proteus are to be understood as figments of Menelaus' imagination, dressing up a very ordinary explanation for lack of forward progress in exotic mythological clothing, especially of course as modern scholarship has repeatedly speculated that Menelaus' adventures were, in an earlier version of the *Odyssey*, precisely Odysseus' adventures.³⁸ Be that as it may, however, once Menelaus has made his sacrifice it is all (apparently) smooth sailing, but once Odysseus eventually gets home, he not only has the suitors to deal with, but he also has the famous journey carrying an oar to the ends of the earth to look forward to, an elaborate sacrifice to Poseidon, and then, when he gets home again, further sacrifices 'to all the immortals in succession' (11.119-34). We might sense here, not just the way in which Homer arranges Menelaus' *nostos* to the greater glory of Odysseus (observe in particular Menelaus' total dependence upon Eidothea, whereas in the Cyclops-adventure, for example, the bringing of the wine, the blinding, and the trick of the sheep are all the products of Odysseus' intelligence, 9. 213-15, 316-18, 420-4), but the beginnings of a difference between what later critics would

³⁷ Cf., e.g., De Jong 2001, 105-6; on some of the narrative problems raised by Menelaus' account cf. Danek 1998, 113-20.

³⁸ For this argument and bibliography cf. West 2005, 60-1, 2014, 117-18. The effect would be not unlike that produced if we take, as a number of scholars have suggested, the Cretan tales either as 'realistic fiction' (*uel sim*) or as remnants of earlier versions of the *Odyssey*, now surpassed in their poetic extravagance (and artfulness) by Books 9-12, cf., e.g., Woodhouse 1930, 132, Reece 1994. For Cretan traditions and the *Odyssey* more generally cf. Martin n.d., Levaniouk 2012.

call *plasma* and *mythos*. If certain aspects of Menelaus' *nostos* do indeed recall the Cretan tales, then we will also be reminded that those tales, as 'false things like true ...', occupy a very special place in the history of, and theorising about, fictional narrative. Palaephatus and Strabo are important stages on a journey which began with Homer himself.

University of Cambridge

LITERATURE CITED

- Biraschi, A.M. 2005. Strabo and Homer: a chapter in cultural history. In *Strabo's Cultural Geography*, eds. D. Dueck, H. Lindsay, and S. Pothecary, 73-85. Cambridge
- Browning, R. 1992. The Byzantines and Homer. In *Homer's Ancient Readers*, eds. R. Lamberton and J.J. Keaney, 134-47. Princeton
- Brouwer, R. 2014. *The Stoic Sage*. Cambridge
- Cesaretti, P. 1991. *Allegoristi di Omero a Bisanzio*. Milan
- Danek, G. 1998. *Epos und Zitat*. Vienna
- De Jong, I. 2001. *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*. Cambridge
- Ferrari, G.R.F. 1987. *Listening to the Cicadas*. Cambridge
- Festa, N. 1902. *Palaephati περι ἀπίστων, Heracliti qui fertur libellus περι ἀπίστων. Excerpta Vaticana (vulgo Anonymus De incredibilibus)*. Leipzig
- Fowler, R.L. 2000a. *P.Oxy.* 4458: Poseidonios. *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 132: 133-142
- 2000b. *Early Greek Mythography*. Vol. 1. Oxford.
2006. How to tell a myth: genealogy, mythology, mythography. *Kernos* 19: 35-46
2011. *Mythos and logos*. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 131: 45-66
- 2013a. Herodotos and the early mythographers: the case of the Kabeiroi. In *Writing Myth: Mythography in the Ancient World*, eds. S.M. Trzaskoma and R. Scott Smith, 1-19. Leuven
- 2013b. 2000b. *Early Greek Mythography*. Vol. 2. Oxford
- Gill, C. 1993. Plato on falsehood – not fiction. In *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, eds. C. Gill and T.P. Wiseman 38-87. Exeter
- Hawes, G. 2014a. *Rationalising Myth in Antiquity*. Oxford
- 2014b. Story time at the library: Palaephatus and the emergence of highly literate mythology. In *Between Orality and Literacy: Communication and Adaptation in Antiquity*, ed. R. Scodel, 125-47. Leiden
- Hopman, M.G. 2012. *Scylla: Myth, Metaphor, Paradox*. Cambridge
- Hunter, R. 2012. *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature: the silent stream*. Cambridge
- forthcoming. Serpents in the soul: the "Libyan Myth" of Dio Chrysostom. In *Myths on the Map*, ed. G. Hawes, Oxford
- Jones, C.P. forthcoming. The Earthquake of 26 BCE in Decrees of Mytilene and Chios. *Chiron*

- Kim, L. 2010. *Homer between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature*. Cambridge
- Levaniouk, O. 2012. οὐ χρώμεθα τοῖς ξενικοῖς ποιήμασιν: questions about evolution and fluidity of the *Odyssey*. In *Homeric Contexts*, eds. F. Montanari, A. Rengakos, and C. Tsagalis, 369-409. Berlin/Boston
- Ogden, D. 2007. *In Search of the Sorcerer's Apprentice. The Traditional Tales of Lucian's Lover of Lies*. Swansea
- Martin, R. n.d. Cretan Homers: tradition, politics, fieldwork. *Classics@3* (available through <http://chs.harvard.edu>)
- Nestle, W. 1942. *Vom Mythos zum Logos*, 2nd ed.. Stuttgart
- Nünlist, R. 2009. *The Ancient Critic at Work*. Cambridge
- Patterson, L. E. 2013. Geographers as mythographers: the case of Strabo. In *Writing Myth: Mythography in the Ancient World*, eds. S.M. Trzaskoma and R. Scott Smith, 201-221. Leuven
- Porter, J.I. 1992. Hermeneutic lines and circles: Aristarchus and Crates on the exegesis of Homer. In *Homer's Ancient Readers*, eds. R. Lamberton and J.J. Keaney, 67-114. Princeton
- Ramelli, I. 2003. *Anneo Cornuto. Compendia di teologia greca*. Milan
- Reece, S. 1994. The Cretan Odyssey: a lie truer than truth. *American Journal of Philology* 115: 157-73
- Reinhardt, K. 1910. *De Graecorum theologia capita duo*. Dissertation Berlin
- Rispoli, G. 1988. *Lo spazio del verisimile*. Naples
- Santoni, A. 2000. *Palefato. Storie incredibili*. Pisa
- Stern, J. 1996. *Palaephatus, Περὶ ἀπίστων. On Unbelievable Tales*. Wauconda IL
- Trachsel, A. 2005. L'explication mythologique de Palaiphatos: une stratégie particulière. *Maia* 57: 543-56
- Trzaskoma, S.M. 2013. Introduction. In *Writing Myth: Mythography in the Ancient World*, eds. S.M. Trzaskoma and R. Scott Smith, xv-xxiv. Leuven
- Van der Valk, M. 1971-1987. *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes ad fidem codicis Laurentiani*. Leiden
- Werner, D.S. 2012. *Myth and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus*. New York
- West, M.L. 2005. *Odyssey and Argonautica*. *Classical Quarterly* 55: 39-64
2014. *The Making of the Odyssey*. Oxford
- Whitmarsh, T. 2013. *Beyond the Second Sophistic*. Berkeley
- Woodhouse, W.J. 1930. *The Composition of Homer's Odyssey*. Oxford