

Among Greeks and Romans: history and literature in the classical world

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Abstract

The writing of history was also studied by the ancient authors. The relationship between history and literature, discussed in many contemporary researches, can be analyzed from different angles when you add the reflections of classical authors, Greek and Roman, who produced works in which we perceive the concern for the art of good writing. Persuasion, beauty, and verisimilitude were characteristics that defined the writing of prose and poetry in Classical Antiquity and remain important in the current discussion about the historical knowledge, as we seek to show in this article.

Keywords: history; literature; Antiquity.

Entre gregos e romanos: história e literatura no Mundo Clássico

Resumo

A escrita da história também foi pensada pelos autores antigos. A relação estabelecida entre história e literatura, discutida em muitos trabalhos contemporâneos, ganha novos prismas de análise quando se acrescentam as reflexões de autores clássicos, gregos e romanos, que produziram obras nas quais percebemos a preocupação com a arte do bem escrever. A persuasão, a beleza e a verossimilhança foram características que marcaram a produção em prosa e poesia na Antiguidade Clássica e continuam sendo importantes na discussão atual a respeito do saber histórico, como procuramos defender neste artigo.

Palavras-chave: história; literatura; Antiguidade.

Entre griegos y romanos: la historia y la literatura en el mundo clásico

Resumen

La escritura de la historia también fue estudiada por los autores antiguos. La relación entre la historia y la literatura, discutida en muchas obras contemporáneas, gana nuevas perspectivas de análisis cuando se agregan las reflexiones de los autores clásicos, griegos y romanos, que escribieron obras en las que percibimos la preocupación por el arte de la buena escritura. La persuasión, la belleza y la verosimilitud fueron características que marcaron la producción de prosa y poesía en la Antigüedad clásica y siguen siendo importantes en la discusión actual acerca del conocimiento histórico, lo que intentaremos exponer en este artículo.

Palabras clave: historia; literatura; Antigüedad.

Chez les Grecs et les Romains: l'histoire et la littérature dans le monde classique

Résumé

Les anciens auteurs ont aussi pensé à comment écrire l'histoire. La relation entre l'histoire et la littérature, abordée dans nombreuses études contemporains, ont gagné nouvelles perspectives avec des réflexions d'auteurs classiques, grecs et romains qui ont produit d'œuvres où on voit la préoccupation avec l'art de bien écrire. la persuasion, la beauté et de vraisemblance ont marqué la production en prose et en poésie dans l'antiquité classique, et restent importantes dans les discussions actuelles sur le savoir historique, idée que nous défendons dans cette article.

Mots clés: histoire; littérature; Antiquité.

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Seeking to communicate with their contemporaries and with posterity, men in the Antiquity produced several archaeological and textual traces that allow us to know some things about their way of life, their beliefs, their fears, their feelings, their sensitivities, their ways of reporting experiences, and their projections. Much of this information can be found in texts that we began to identify as integrated to the historical genre. In this article, we focus on the multiple ways in which the writing of history, which was both an art and a technique in the Ancient world and represented an eternal making and remaking of literary imprint, was studied by some classic authors and how this textual and rhetoric elaboration is being continually reviewed by current authors.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus¹ was an author who lived in Rome in the 1st century BC. He was part of a famous literary circle, which had developed around the families of Tuberão and Elio. He was also a rhetoric teacher in the capital city, where he taught Greek and wrote works that had a dual purpose: to show how the Romans once became the masters of the world, and to promote the achievements of these people among Greek readers. In the words of Julio Bonet Pallí, from these two premises comes the interest of Dionysius in:

Showing the Greek people that the development of the Roman power was achieved through virtue, and not luck, and suggesting that, in the glory of Rome, the Greek man could celebrate his own glory, because, as he describes in *Antiguidades Romanas* [I.89], Rome could consider itself a Greek city.²

To his role as historian of the great Roman conquests, Dionysius added the writing of works on the teaching of rhetoric and the so-called literary criticism, in other words, the formulation of manuals dedicated to the art of producing good literary works, which should be read as well as heard in public and/or private declamations.

Dionysius seems to be an ideal character to start with, because, in his work, he shows that history and literature were entirely amalgamated fields of knowledge in the classical ancient world. Recapturing the work of iconic Greek public speakers, such as Lysias, Demosthenes, and Isocrates, Dionysius says, in the treatise *Sobre a Composição Estilística*, dedicated to his disciple Rufus Metilio, that everything that is written and/or spoken shall be done by following the rules of *peithós*, of persuasion, and of exhortation. And, in order to achieve that, the speaker should worry primarily about the language, the arrangement of words, their different possible combinations, the sentence structure and rhythm, in what will be defined as the “music of language”.³ In Chapters 21–24 of the book, Dionysius even indicates a line of discourse that associates and distinguishes prose and poetry at the same time. Quoting Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Sappho, Pindar, Euripides, and Simonides, he assembles several styles to show

¹City located in the extreme south of Asia Minor.

²Julio Pallí Bonet, “Introducción”, In: Dionísio de Halicarnasso, *Sobre La Composición Estilística*, translated by Julio Pallí Bonet, Barcelona, PPU, 1991, p. 11.

³*Idem, Ibidem*, p. 14.

that the textual production is first a result of the application of an art (in Latin, *ars*; in Greek, *thechnè*), that is, a set of skills that must always be used and practiced.

Thus, a text writer would be the person who would, as a work obligation, frequently redo his work, looking for the best words, the most appropriate combination of terms, the most precise chain of arguments, in search of the persuasive discursive logic. To Dionysus, each author should concern himself with the genre chosen to exercise his art, but the beauty of literature is essentially supported by harmony and symmetry of the connection between words. According to him, three basic principles precede all genres: understanding the words one wants to use; knowing how they can be adjusted to highlight the harmony of what is said; and judging whether some modification is required, by addition, deletion, and/or variation, in the elements used in the composition. Thereby, any written work should have two basic purposes: beauty and delight. In Chapters 10 and 11 of the analyzed work, Dionysius stresses:⁴

It seems to me that the two fundamental goals that authors should pursue in verse or in prose are delight and beauty. The ear demands one and the other, and the same happens with the eyes [...] I do not think that anyone will consider it incoherent to propose two goals and distinguish beauty from delight, nor will be surprised if a passage is pleasantly composed, but has no beauty, or contains beauty, but no delight [...] Thucydides and Antiphon of Ramnunte⁵ have achieved, through Zeus, more than any other men, the beauty of stylistic composition [...], but they are not particularly delightful. The historian Ctesias of Cnidus⁶ and Xenophon, the Socratic⁷, put all the possible delight in their style, but not the necessary beauty [...] However, in Herodotus, the composition has these two qualities: delight and beauty. To achieve pleasure and beauty in style, the four most general and most powerful factors are: melody, rhythm, variety, and adequacy or convenience, which comes along with the other three. I place on pleasure the splendor, the grace, the euphony, the sweetness, the persuasion and other similar qualities; whereas the grandeur, the gravity, the nobility of speech, the dignity, the emotion and other similar qualities rely on beauty [...] These are, thus, the purposes that serious writers pursue, authors of epic poems, lyrical poetry or works in the so-called prose.⁸

⁴We have worked with the following translations of ancient works: Aristóteles, *A poética*, translated by Valentin García Yebra, Madrid, Gredos, 1974; *Idem. Retórica das paixões*, translated by Ísis Borges B. da Fonseca, São Paulo, Martins Fontes, 2000; Demétrio, *Sobre el estilo*, translated by José García López, Madrid, Gredos, 1996; Dionísio de Halicarnasso, *Sobre la composición estilística*, translated by Julio Pallí Bonet, Barcelona, PPU, 1991; Heródoto, *Histórias*, translated by Mário da Gama Kury, Brasília, Editora da UnB, 1988; Longino, *Sobre lo sublime*, translated by José García López, Madrid, Gredos, 1996; Paladas de Alexandria, *Epigramas*, translated by José Paulo Paes, São Paulo, Nova Alexandria, 1993; Tucídides, *História da Guerra do Peloponeso*, translated by Mário da Gama Kury, Brasília, Editora da UnB, 1987.

⁵Speaker from the 5th century BC, contemporary of Gorgias, who represented in his works an austere harmony.

⁶Historian and doctor at the service of the Persian king Artaxerxes, in the late 5th century BC, who wrote *História da Pérsia* in 23 books, *História da Índia* and *Geography*.

⁷This a very interesting reference to the fact that Xenophon was a disciple of Socrates, therefore, a follower of his literary and philosophical style.

⁸Dionísio de Halicarnasso, *Sobre la composición estilística*, 10. 2-4; 11.1-3.

Therefore, according to Dionysius, the writer who chooses to do historical accounts should submit to the same goals as any other author in Antiquity: the attempt to write a text that is pleasant to the eyes and the ears. The convenience of what is said is important, but linked to the three other factors governing the art of writing. One should look for the rhythm, the melody, and the variety to secure the attention of the listeners and/or readers. The search for what really happened, typical of the historical genre, as Aristotle stressed in *Poética*, would not only be the outcome of the narrative style chosen by the writer, but should also submit to the broader rules of rhetoric. Let us recall the famous Aristotelian passage on the different purposes of poetry and history:

By the previous considerations, it can be observed that it is not a poet's craft to narrate what has happened; it is rather to represent what could happen, that is, what is possible according to likelihood and necessity. Indeed, the historian and the poet do not differ for writing in verse or prose [because the works of Herodotus might as well be put into verse, and by no means would cease to be history, if they are in verse what they were in prose], but they differ in the fact that one tells some things that had happened, and the other says things that could happen. Hence, poetry is somewhat more philosophical [indications of applicable ways to live] and more serious than history, because the first one narrates primarily the universal and the latter tells the particular. By referring to the universal, I understand assigning to an individual of a specific nature certain thoughts and actions that, by the bond of necessity and likelihood, agree to such nature; and poetry, in that sense, tends to the universal, yet giving names to its characters; the particular, on the contrary, is what Alcibiades did or what happened to him.⁹

Thereby, the historical genre, like any other form of narrative that should meet the prerogatives of the art of writing, would have to seek beauty and delight in form and content. By sticking to the verisimilitude, to what could have possibly occurred, to what the imagination could capture, history would go from the particular to the general. It would report specific cases, aiming to shape *exempla*. It would bring together, in an atavistic way, the past, the present, and the future, in a causal chain that would guide the reader/listener through the interesting account of what happened in the past. Likewise, it would be up to the historian, as the master of language, to choose a good topic, to pick out the best words, and to resort to his image repertoire to create the most appropriate narrative.

The ancient man knew perfectly well that, when reading and/or listening to a text, of any genre, images would be created in his mind, allowing the read passages to form contours and meanings. That is why the processes of *aemulatio* or *imitatio* (in Greek, *mimesis*), that is, the inspiration in models of proven effectiveness, were always so dear to the artistic formation in Antiquity. As Donald A. Russell says, imitation was an essential element in the literary composition in Classical Antiquity. Yet, it was not about plagiarist emulation. Imitation was

⁹Aristóteles, *A poética*, IX.501.

a selective, adaptive and creative practice. One should follow the models and the tradition, since the imitation was not of an author, but of the good abstract qualities achieved by a work.¹⁰

The search for what really happened, typical of the historical genre, as Aristotle stressed in Poética, would not only be the outcome of the narrative style chosen by the writer, but should also submit to the broader rules of rhetoric

The authorship and citation were practices defined by canons very different from ours. As Claude Calame reminds us, to attribute a poetic product to an authority designated by a given name would depend on a declarative procedure,¹¹ in other words, the author would declare himself responsible for that speech and face the consequences arising from its enunciation. To include a particular passage by another author in a work was a demonstration of knowledge, respect for tradition, a tribute to the past, where the best canons to be followed came from, and a mnemonic retrieval, because the constant repetition was considered the main weapon of the memory.

This way, besides the concern with the narrative form, the ancient historian would focus on the object that was supposed to be described. Demetrius of Falero,¹² in the work *Sobre o Estilo*, emphasizes the importance of choosing the theme to be addressed:

The elevation of the style also depends on the themes addressed. For instance, if the topic is a great and famous battle by land or by sea, it is either about the sky or the ground. For he who hears an elevated theme thinks, mistakenly, that the speaker also speaks with elevation. It is necessary, thus, to consider not only the things that are said, but also how they are said. That is due to the fact that someone who narrates great themes in an inexpressive way can respond inappropriately to the importance of the subject. There are vehement writers, as Theopompus, who narrate very poorly admirable themes. The painter Nicias¹³ was fond of saying that a not so small part of the pictorial art relied on choosing to paint a very important topic and not cutting out your art in small pieces, like small birds or flowers, but in cavalry fights and naval battles, where one has the possibility to show images of horses, some running, others rearing, others falling to the ground, and

¹⁰Donald A. Russell, "De Imitatione", In: David West; Tony Woodman, *Creative imitation and Latin Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 116.

¹¹Claude Calame, "Identités d'auteur à l'exemple de la Grèce Classique: signatures, énonciations, citations", In: Claude Calame; Roger Chartier, *Identités d'auteur dans l'Antiquité et la tradition européenne*, Paris, Jérôme Millon, 2004, p. 12.

¹²Author that lived between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC.

¹³Nicias of Athens was a disciple of Antidote, who painted statues to Praxiteles in the 4th century BC.

innumerable archers and knights unhorsed from their mounts. He believed that the theme was itself part of the pictorial art, like the myths are part of the poetic art. Thus, it is no wonder that, in discourses, the elevation emerges from elevated themes.¹⁴

In this perspective of the ancient authors that study the art of writing in the Antiquity, choosing a good topic would allow the author to show all his stylistic potential and win over the audience. This conception has remained so constant in literary art that it reappears in the work *Sobre o sublime*, of Cassius Longinus, in the 1st century AC. However, this author adds essential information: after choosing the theme and the best words to report it, according to the chosen genre, it was up to the writer to present the arguments in order of importance, transforming the account into a superposition of interconnected elements presented in a safe, selective, linear, and chronological manner. Longinus says:

Since all things are by nature associated with certain elements that are inherent to the substance of each one, for us, the cause of the sublime power would necessarily be the ability of choosing the most important among the inherent elements and making them constitute, through successive juxtaposition, one body. This procedure allows the author to attract the listener with the choice of ideas, and then with the accumulation of those that have been selected. Thus, Sappho points out in every case the emotions that come with the love madness, starting from the symptoms and from the own truth of the passion. But how does she demonstrate her skill in writing? In her power to first elect the factors that stand out and the most important ones, in order to associate them with each other [...] Likewise, the poet, when describing the storms, chooses, among the phenomena that follow the storms, the most violent ones.¹⁵

Thereby, it would be up to the authors to choose the most important arguments, the images they aim to provoke in the public, the emotions they need to arouse from the disposition of topics. It would be more important to convince the public using the good performance of the speaker and the predisposition of the audience than to give credit to the material used in the preparation of the text. Again, Aristotle is the one who observes that in the work *Sobre a retórica*:

What was exposed was: with which arguments should someone, therefore, persuade and dissuade, praise and censure, accuse and defend himself, and what opinions and assumptions are useful to the respective evidence, because around these arguments and from them are formed the enthymemes, which specifically relate, so to speak, to every genre of discourse [...] It matters a lot for persuasion, especially in the deliberations, and then in the processes, that the speaker shows himself under a certain appearance and makes the audience assume that he

¹⁴Demétrio de Falero, *Sobre o estilo*, II, 75-76.

¹⁵Longino, *Sobre o sublime*, X,1-4.

finds himself in certain dispositions in respect to the listeners and, furthermore, that they find themselves in similar dispositions in respect to the author [...] In fact, for people who love, things do not seem the same as for those who hate, nor for the ones dominated by anger, nor for the serene ones; but they are either completely different or of different importance; he who loves is sure that the person on trial does not practice an unfair act or commits only minor offenses, and he who hates thinks the opposite [...] The passions are all those feelings that, causing change in people, make their judgments vary, and are followed by sorrow and pleasure, such as anger, pity, fear and all other similar passions, as well as their opposites.¹⁶

The use and creation of memories is a field of the imagination, in the sense of the eidolon, of the double, of the image formed in the mind and remembered at the moment of writing

Thus, every human being, when reading or hearing a story, would imagine it in a different way, depending on the passion that stirred them. In the Aristotelian view,¹⁷ rhetorical arguments of a good speaker must emerge from the passions of the public. The words provoke feelings and awaken emotions since the Antiquity. Therefore, the authors should carefully choose the terms that they wish to use in their writing, to generate a particular response among readers/listeners. As Paul Ricoeur recalls, from the analysis of the Platonic and Aristotelian works, every report should follow an order of understanding and, at the same time, use the recollection and allow the inclusion of what is narrated in the memory.¹⁸ The use and creation of memories is a field of the imagination, in the sense of the *eidolon*, of the double, of the image formed in the mind and remembered at the moment of writing. In most cases, the citations were made on the basis of memory, without resorting directly to a copy of the work cited. Similarly, the direct speeches included in the narrative, which supposedly have been uttered by the characters portrayed, were built as works of rhetorical peroration. That is, the author created the discourse from a theme, an idea-force that must have guided the speech of the character and, from it, created what the character must have said, without any loss of discursive objectivity within the ancient canons, since the beauty and delight continued to drive the narrative production.

¹⁶Aristóteles, *Sobre a retórica*, I.1-25

¹⁷*Idem*, *Ibidem*, XI.30.

¹⁸Paul Ricoeur, *La memória, la historia, el olvido*, Madrid, Trotta, 2003, p. 21-22.

Let us remember the insistence of Thucydides, in *História da Guerra do Peloponeso*, to state that he would not reproduce the spoken words, as the speeches were made in meetings without reporter or secretary. As Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin¹⁹ defines, Thucydides stresses this point because he wanted to emphasize a more essential impossibility: one could not fully rely in the memory to ensure the fidelity of the account to reality. In contrast to the previous tradition, the memory, in Thucydides' view, did not guarantee the authenticity of the narration. He demanded a critical reconstitution of the events, with the criteria being the likelihood of the situation and the relevance of the words spoken. Thucydides says:

Such speeches are, therefore, reproduced with the words that, in my understanding, are the ones that the different speakers must have used, considering the respective themes and sentiments that were more pertinent to the occasion in which they were pronounced.²⁰

Thereby, the creative imitation remained in action. In our view, this means that Thucydides wrote his numerous and famous speeches following the order of historical reasons, not as a chronicler relying on his memories. His text was built from the convenience, from the prior choice of a material that is not even mentioned, from the coherence and the interpretation. Thus, language has always been the main tool of a scholar, a writer, an author, and a historian. Plato already knew that; in *Crátilo*, he built the following dialogue:

Socrates: Let us see, Cratylus, if there is a way to understand each other. Do you not admit that the name is one thing, and that the object to which the name belongs is something else?

Cratylus: Yes.

Socrates: The correctness of a name, according to us, consists in exposing the nature of the thing. Do we find this definition sufficient?

Cratylus: In my opinion, it is perfectly so, Socrates.²¹

To Plato, all the words were, therefore, fair and would proceed solely from the mixture of letters, each one having a semantic value set by convention and culture.²² It would be up to the author to use them meaningfully, appropriately, respecting conventions, cultural practices, and social habits. In the ancient societies, writing had a very different purpose from that attributed to it by the modern world. Today, we write to forget; in the past, one would write to remember. It is sufficient to observe the Homeric works and their multiple mnemonic resources to make them easier for the bards and the rhapsodists to sing. One would write for constant reinterpretation, to withhold information until it could be reproduced without the aid of the rolls and the codices.²³

¹⁹Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin, *Sete aulas sobre linguagem, memória e história*, Rio de Janeiro, Imago, 1997, p. 32.

²⁰Tucídides, *História da Guerra do Peloponeso*, I.22.

²¹Platão, *Crátilo*, 428e; 430a.

²²Carl Herrenschmidt, "O todo, o enigma e a ilusão", *In: Jean Bottéro; Ken Morrison, Cultura, pensamento e escrita*, São Paulo, Ática, 1995, p. 133-134.

²³Roger Chartier, *Cultura escrita, literatura e história*, Porto Alegre, Artmed, 2001, p. 13.

As Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin also reminds us, in the book *Lembrar, Escrever, Esquecer*,²⁴ in the ancient world, people would write to remember, to insert an achievement in the social memory, whereas in the contemporary world writing is done to forget. The act of writing today enables us to switch to another subject so that we can save a thought for later. In Antiquity, the writing wished:

To perpetuate the living, keeping its memory for future generations, but could only save it in systematizing and retaining it, transforming its plasticity in stiffness, affirming and confirming its absence [...] The memory of men is formed between two poles: the living oral transmission, but fragile and ephemeral, and the conservation through writing, inscription which may last longer, but that draws the figure of absence [...] The appeal of the present, of life in the present, also requires that the thought learns to forget.²⁵

To Eric A. Havelock, the oral composition that came to us in literary media should not be thought of as matter of improvisation. It was, by definition, a rhythmic composition, therefore, poetic. The terms “poetic” and “poetry” are equivalent in Greek to “scholar” and “the art of writing”, respectively. One would write, memorize, and pronounce. Poetry would be the name of an ideal language use, superior in some respects to the expressive powers of prose, used as a language to disseminate information and instructions, typical of genres such as history and law.²⁶

Greg Woolf, in an article entitled “Literacy or Literacies in Rome?”, advocates the use of the plural to describe the act of producing written works due to its diversity, purpose, and various genres. The uses of writing were multiple. Considering only the Roman Empire, we realize the existence of various media featuring social literacy: papyrus, tablets of bronze and copper, ritual inscriptions on stone and wood, stamps, signatures and messages in ceramic pots, *ostraka*, graffiti, among other epigraphic shapes²⁷. In terms of stylistic genres, letters, panegyrics, historical works, philosophical works, apologetic works, treaties, homilies, seduction manuals, military manuals, agriculture manuals, autobiographies, several biographies, breviaries, and epigrams were left behind, among many other forms of communication.

Ruth Webb, in her work *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical: Theory and Practice*, shows how a very rich and diverse rhetorical culture emerged during the Roman period as a result of the growing interest in aesthetics and the constant practice of persuasion. The primacy of the visual would stimulate the necessity among the authors to create reports with plenty of images using, therefore, all feasible aspects of imagination and emotions. A good report should have *enargeia*, vibrancy, a quality of

²⁴Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin, *Lembrar, escrever, esquecer*, São Paulo, Editora 34, 2006, p. 45.

²⁵*Idem*, *Ibidem*, p. 11-12.

²⁶Eric A. Havelock, *A revolução da escrita na Grécia e suas consequências culturais*, São Paulo, Editora da Unesp, 1996, p. 13; Eric A. Havelock; José Trindade Santos; Maria Leonor Santa Bárbara, *A musa aprende a escrever: reflexões sobre a oralidade e a literacia da Antiguidade ao presente*, Lisboa, Gradiva, 1996, p. 96.

²⁷Greg Woolf, “Literacy or literacies in Rome?”, In: William A. Johnson; Holt N. Parker, *Ancient literacies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 46-68.

the adopted language that appealed primarily to the audience's imagination,²⁸ to attract and hold the attention and the interest of the public who consumed the ideas presented. The *diegesis*, description, had to inspire the listener/reader and produce effects in any chosen genre to mediate the development of the narrative.²⁹

Considering only the Roman Empire, we realize the existence of various media featuring social literacy

Thus, the rhetoric was an art, a set of techniques of content disposition and memory restructuring. The created discourse sought to invade and settle in the field of the understandable and memorable, including details and stimulating the viewer. It was up to the writer to mediate between material and factual reality and the language available. More than ornamental beauty, one should opt for the accuracy of what is said, in what could be retrieved by contemporaries and by posterity. Let us consider the works of Averil Cameron. In two different texts, in the chapter "*History and the individuality of the historian: the interpretation of late Antiquity*", of the book *The past before us: the challenge of historiographies of late Antiquity*, edited by Carole Straw and Richard Lim, and in the anthology *History as text: the writing of ancient history*, which she edited in 1990, Averil suggests the authorial intentions that model the genres from the relationship between history and rhetoric, questioning the application of the terms "literary works" and "historical works" in the study of ancient works. Relying on the concept of textuality, Cameron emphasizes the aspect of the religious belief as seminal to the understanding of the works, for example, of late Antiquity, but highlights that individual elements appear in the reports in a more constant way than established rules, which may be assured more indelibly in literary production. Ancient historians start from facts, but use their imagination and investigation to describe them. They mix imagination, emotion, and memory in their narratives.³⁰

George A. Kennedy bequeathed us a now classic work on the rearrangement and the reappropriation of the rules of ancient pagan rhetoric by Christian authors. This is *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and secular tradition from ancient to modern times*, from 1998. In this work, Kennedy talks about the *Progymnasmata*, that is, the preliminary exercises that were supposedly

²⁸Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, imagination and persuasion in ancient rhetorical: theory and practice*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2009, p. 88.

²⁹*Idem*, *Ibidem*, p. 37.

³⁰Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the rhetoric of empire: the development of Christian discourse*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994; *Idem*, "History and the individuality of the historian: the interpretation of late Antiquity", *In*: Carole Straw; Richard Lim, *The past before us: the challenge of historiographies of late Antiquity*, Belgium, Brepols, 2004, p. 69-77; Averil Cameron, *History as text: the writing of ancient history*, London, The University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

characteristic of the Greek and Roman education. Thus, the rhetoric was a daughter and a debtor of the *paideia*. The authors would apply the rhetorical rules from what they have learnt from their teachers and rhetors.³¹

As controversial as the ones in literature, culture, and identity, the concept of representation involves the conditions of possibility of the historical discourse as a discourse of a specific disciplinary practice, committed to the production of a knowledge denominated as historical.³² Etymologically, representation comes from the Latin form *repraesentare*, that is, to make present or present again. Or, to make someone present or something absent, even an idea, through the presence of an object.³³ It is in that same sense that representation appears in the work of Carlo Ginzburg, *Olhos de madeira: nove reflexões sobre a distância*: “The representation stands in for the represented reality and, therefore, evokes the absence; on the other hand, it makes the represented reality visible, and, therefore, suggests the presence.”³⁴ And also in Roger Chartier, *À beira da falésia: a história entre certezas e inquietudes*:

On the one hand, the representation expresses an absence, which implies a clear distinction between what represents and what is represented; at the other, representation is the display of a presence, the public presentation of a thing or a person.³⁵

The representations acquire meaning when composed within the same imagery. Today, we can have great difficulties to interpret the sight of winged women in the Roman triumph arches, but the inhabitants of the Empire, who shared the imagery of their time and knew the meanings of their representations, would not have great difficulty to realize that those women with wings, the *niké* or victories, symbolized the fact that the arch was built to celebrate a won battle, a significant military victory, which should always be remembered as a great achievement of that society. The imagery of a society is also a human construction and a reconstruction.

To Roger Chartier, men perceive themselves and this self-perception constitutes their identity. But the perception also occurs in the field of collective representations, of the imagery shared by a group, in a specific space and time. The notion of collective representation, adopted by the author, enables the analysis of the conflicts that arise within a given society, so that their representations are considered the most suitable for that community at that time. The societies are made up of different groups, which manifest different views of the world. These worldviews determine the representations:

³¹George A. Kennedy, *Classical rhetoric and its Christian and secular tradition from ancient to modern times*, London, e University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

³²*Idem*, “História e representação”, *Revista de História das Ideias*, vol.21, São Paulo, 2000, p. 87-126.

³³Francisco J. C. Falcon, *História cultural: uma nova visão sobre a sociedade e a cultura*, Rio de Janeiro, Campus, 2002, p. 91.

³⁴Carlo Ginzburg, *Olhos de madeira: nove reflexões sobre a distância*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2001, p. 85.

³⁵Roger Chartier, *À beira da falésia: a história entre certezas e inquietudes*, Porto Alegre, Editora da UFRGS, 2002, p. 74.

A double track is thereby open: one that conceives the construction of social identities as always resulting from a balance of power between the representations imposed by those who have the power to classify and name, and the definition, submitted or resistant, that each community produces of itself; the other that takes into account the social frame objectified as the translation of the credit granted to the representation that each group makes of itself, thus, to their ability to make their existence recognizable from a display of unit.³⁶

The representations are the result of struggles and consensus, and of conflicts and articulations within the communities. To Georges Balandier, the worldviews are now shuffled and the imagery is just another way of organizing the human experience.³⁷ In the chapter “As encruzilhadas do imaginário”, in *O Dédalo: para finalizar o século XX*, Balandier discusses how to apply the notion of imagery in a world where the real and the virtual are becoming more and more amalgamated. In Brazil, where virtual characters are sometimes used to host television programs, it is easy to understand the assumptions of the author. The boundaries between real and imagined become blurry in a book whose title refers to a Greek mythological character who built the labyrinth of Knossos, palace of the Crete Island, where the Minotaur was enclosed. To Balandier, we finished the 20th century in the midst of a large maze, as the one built by Daedalus: “The appearances compose the world as a kind of mirror labyrinth, where it is impossible to walk without errors or wandering.”³⁸

The identification process also permeates the issue of the creation of a memory, which, in the ancient world, was directly intertwined with the constitution of accounts. The way for the common man to avoid the physical death was to inscribe his name in the Roman political memory, and this was done by the account of his actions in the historical knowledge. In Ciceronian *topos*, history was the *magistra vitae*, narrative of great deeds, of examples, in the constancy that was identified in the transformations of humanity. Thus, the identity built on memory should contain great recollections and great omissions. Those who were nominated to high positions but proved unworthy of their honors could be erased from the official memory of the Roman people, which would be inscribed in the texts and material artifacts, per decision of the Senate. This practice was known as *damnatio memoriae* (“the erasing of the memory”), which was performed by deleting all references to the existence of that person in the face of the earth. This created a new memory, which reframed the identity that the Romans created of themselves. If the person no longer existed, the contemporaries and successors were excused from remembering someone that had contributed little or nothing to the strengthening of the Empire. To eliminate the images of a person, the references to

³⁶Roger Chartier, *À beira da falésia: a história entre certezas e inquietudes*, Porto Alegre, Editora da UFRGS, 2002, p. 73.

³⁷Georges Balandier, *O Dédalo: para finalizar o século XX*, Rio de Janeiro, Bertrand, 1999, p. 112-113.

³⁸*Idem, Ibidem*, p. 117.

his existence, was to exclude the possibility of remembering the original.³⁹ For this reason, granting *damnatio memoriae* was as fearful punishment in the Roman world, because erasing any reference to the dead was like leaving his corpse unburied, one of the worst things that could happen to the dead, because his soul would have no port, no direction.

*Those who were nominated to high positions but
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The literary production was and is responsible for forming opinions and meanings. Even if restricted to diminutive canons — as in epigrams, for example, whose main characteristics of formulation were brevity and synthesis, that is, to say something important that deserved to be pronounced in an almost pedagogical way, using few words —, the epigrammatic art encompassed in itself deep cultural significance. Much can be learned about the men of the past from all the pieces of evidence gathered. Paladas of Alexandria was one of the last Gentile poets, because he wrote his work in the late 4th century AC. In this work, he resumed the Greek epigrammatic tradition and, through the creative *imitation*, reorganized its reality, presenting late Antiquity through semi-proverbs, proposing an imagery that went far beyond conflicts between Christians and pagans. His attitude was humorous toward women: “Every woman arouses anger, except in two good moments: when in bed, and when in the grave”,⁴⁰ or “Who have unfortunately married an ugly woman, sees the dark of night when the lamps lit.”⁴¹

The uselessness of the man worrying about his own fate invades his words, as in, for example: “A lot can happen between the cup and the lip”⁴² or “You enrich, and so what? When you die, the wealth, by any chance, will follow when you are dragged into the grave? Accumulating it, you have spent your lifetime; you could not pay a more exorbitant price for it”,⁴³ or even: “Life is only this: a moment of pleasure. Hurts, go away. If the existence of men is so brief, let Bacchus come with his dances, wreaths, and women. Today I want to be happy; nobody knows anything of tomorrow”;⁴⁴ and also, “I came naked into the Earth and naked I will go underneath it. Why toil in vain if the end is only nakedness?”⁴⁵

³⁹Anthony P. Gregory, “Powerful images: responses to portraits and the political uses of images in Rome”, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, vol. 7, Ann Arbor, 1994, p. 80-99.

⁴⁰Paladas de Alexandria, *Epigramas*, XI.381.

⁴¹*Idem, Ibidem*, XI.287.

⁴²*Idem, Ibidem*, X.32.

⁴³*Idem, Ibidem*, X.60.

⁴⁴*Idem, Ibidem*, V.72.

⁴⁵*Idem, Ibidem*, X.58.

Likewise, it is worth noting the following passage, since, in a few lines, the author emphasizes the Roman displeasure with the crisis in the Western Empire, which characterized the 4th century AC:

I wondered to see, at the crossroads, the tanned son of Zeus, so invoked once, now to the ground, and angrily I cried:

Oh Trilunar that guards us from the evils and never was defeated, today you fell! But, at night, at the foot of the bed, Heracles told me smiling, "Although I am a god, I have learnt to submit to the times."⁴⁶

Even using few resources, the epigrams condensed the feelings and beliefs of Paladas. Multiple media and genres were used by the ancients to meditate about the role of man and of nature. The passage of time, the relationship between sacred and profane, the struggles of life, and the vicissitudes of death were themes that inspired several authors. Hannah Arendt emphasizes that Herodotus, in the *Histórias*, states that the purpose of his enterprise is to preserve the things that owe their existence to men, saving humans deeds from the futility that comes from oblivion.⁴⁷ The historian's task would consist of making something last in remembrance, through language, through the written word:

History welcomes in its memory those mortals who, through deeds and words, proved worthy of nature, and their eternal fame means that they, despite the mortality, may remain in the company of the things that last forever.⁴⁸

The literature that is available to us, in its multiple genres and sizes, with its many gaps and conflicts, allows us to realize that Greeks and Romans considered history and literature as belonging to the same source of knowledge: human life, with all its dilemmas, joys, disappointments, successes, and failures. Humans were, are, and will be the object and the subject of ancient historical and literary production. Composed of the narratives that sought to overcome death and oblivion, the historical genre emerged from the human need to interpret and understand the meaning of existence. The human-nature, human-gods, and man-man relationships incited the curiosity of the classics. To understand and/or accomplish them, men seized all communicative potential available to them at the time. And, in this process, they have imagined, represented, and dreamt far beyond of what the constitution of the historical science and the anxieties of the so-called post modernity allow us to do today.

⁴⁶Paladas de Alexandria, Epigramas, IX.441.

⁴⁷Hanna Arendt, *Entre o passado e o futuro*, São Paulo, Perspectiva, 2003. About the relationship between history and literature in the ancient and in the modern world, see Rainhard Koselleck; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Historia y hermenêutica*, Barcelona, Paidós, 2002; Walter Ong, *Oralidade e cultura escrita*, Campinas, Papirus, 1998; Paolo Rossi, *O passado, a memória, o esquecimento*, São Paulo, Editora da Unesp, 2010; Rosalind Thomas, *Letramento e oralidade na Grécia antiga*, São Paulo, Odysseus, 2005.

⁴⁸Hanna Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 78.