

Readers writing Readers, and Writers reading Writers: Reflections of Antonius Diogenes

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In a volume dedicated to readers and writers in the ancient novel, the lost novel of Antonius Diogenes, *Τὰ ὑπὲρ Θεούλην ἄπιστα*, must hold some sort of pride of place. Not only do the acts of reading and writing, and of telling and listening to stories more generally, form a vital element of the text's themes and structures, but, with the exception of few papyrus fragments,¹ the work is known to us only through the prism of its readers, whose responses to it are inseparable from our own understanding of it. We have the strange experience of reading a text which is simultaneously a commentary on itself, and the processes and effects of reading are fore-grounded in a way that cannot apply when we confront a text directly. Insofar as we can glimpse the original through the distorting and opaque lens of its readers' reactions, it appears to have been thematically concerned with the issues of truth, fiction, plausibility and incredibility in narrative: in other words it was a reflection on what it means to write and read a novel.

Let me begin by enumerating:

A) Foremost among the reports from which we know the work of Antonius is of course the summary in Photios' *Bibliothēke*.² Like many of Photios' entries this is introduced by the word ἀνεγνώσθη ('was read'), an emblematic reminder of the reader between the lost text and ourselves, and

¹ These are i) PSI 1177, on which see Gallavotti 1930, Zimmermann 1935, Zimmermann 1936; ii) P.Oxy. 3012, on which see Borgogno 1979, Gronewald 1976; iii) P.Oxy. 4760-61.

² Cod. 166, 109a5-112a12; Greek text in Henry 1960, conveniently reprinted in Fusillo 1990; Stephens and Winkler 1995 categorise Photios' summary as a *testimonium*, and print only an English translation, which is used in this paper unless otherwise indicated; translation also in Sandy 1989.

of the necessity to be aware of the mode of reading through which the text is refracted. Other citations are found in Porphyrios' *Life of Pythagoras* and John of Lydia's *De mensibus*, and here too the mode of reading through which these extracts come to us is of interest.³

- B) Photios tells us of a double dedication inscribed in the work, first to Faustinus and secondly to Antonius' sister Isidora.⁴ We are thus confronted with two named real readers of the text. As will become apparent, the two dedications say rather different things about the work, and thus inscribe two possible approaches to reading it.⁵ Antonius was clearly aware that reading is open and pluralistic.
- C) To Faustinus, Antonius claimed to have 'laboriously compiled' his book from 'a library of ancient testimonials'. He therefore represented himself as a reader and his reading as a part of his writing. The single source named by Photios (but in a different place⁶) is Antiphanes. What sort of reading was the self-represented author bringing to bear on this predecessor?
- D) The epistle to Isidora authenticated the fiction with an elaborate pseudo-documentary system: it purportedly transcribed a letter from a Macedonian soldier in Alexander's army, Balagros, to his wife Phila. Although Photios does not give details, we may imagine that Antonius presented himself as having discovered this letter, and thus as the reader and editor of a text from an archive.⁷
- E) Balagros' letter 'transcribed' (μεταγραφάμενος, 111b26) engraved cypress-wood tablets discovered in an ancient tomb during the siege of Tyre. So here is a second (or rather first) editor of a newly discovered text. The letter refers to the 'reading and writing' of the tablets (ἀνάγνωσιν καὶ γραφήν, 111b28): the reading is clearly that of Balagros

³ Relevant texts in Stephens and Winkler 1995, 130-147, who summarise the arguments over exactly how much can be taken as citation of Antonius.

⁴ Faustinus at 111a32-40, including the statement the work is addressed (προσφωνεῖ) to Isidora. The prefatory epistle to Isidora is reported at 111a41-b30.

⁵ It is tempting to differentiate these on gender lines, the Faustinus reading more ironic and reflexive, the Isidora one readier to engage with the fictional world as an imaginative reality. *Pace* Stephens and Winkler 1995, 103, the description of Isidora as 'learned' (φιλομαθῶς ἐχούση) is not an obstacle to this; as early as Gorgias, Greek literary theorists realised that the fictional contract depends on the intelligence and sophistication of the recipient.

⁶ 112a5, in a discussion of Antonius' dates; see further below.

⁷ Note that this appears to contradict the method of composition outlined to Faustinus; see Morgan 1985, 482. The two prefaces each rehearse a different canonical strategy for the authentication of narrative.

and his comrades, but the ‘writing’ could refer either to the original writing of the tablets, whose circumstances were recounted on the tablets themselves, or to Balagros’ re-writing of what he read on the tablets; the run of the text on balance suggests the latter.⁸ In any case, Balagros’ text, like Antonius’, is aimed directly at a named female reader.

- F) The tablets were engraved by Erasinides the Athenian, recording the narrative of a certain Deinias, as told to an Arkadian ambassador Kymbas, who had come to Tyre to persuade Deinias to return to Arkadia. Photios repeatedly reminds his reader of Deinias telling his story to Kymbas, suggesting that the original text also kept that frame in view.⁹ Although Balagros’ letter talks of the discovery of tablets in the plural, Erasinides apparently had just two, on which he wrote the same narrative twice: one copy for Kymbas to take back to Arkadia, the other to be buried with Deinias. It is the latter which Balagros is transcribing, and it must have concluded with an account of its provenance. The discrepancy as to the number of tablets buried and discovered in Tyre is puzzling, but if we take Photios’ text at face value here, the body of Antonius’ 24-book novel is envisaged as the contents of a single wooden tablet.
- G) Deinias’ narrative concerned his circumnavigation of the globe. In essence it is an amalgam of multiple inset narratives. Three travelling companions, Karmanes, Meniskos and Azoulis, are named near the beginning and may have contributed information on their own regions, not included in Photios’ summary. Azoulis is named as a narrator for the twenty-fourth book (110b24), for material which Deinias could not have known otherwise, and which he incorporates (συνέροντα) into his own narrative. The greater part of Deinias’ narrative, however, reported the embedded narration of the Tyrian woman Derkyllis whom he met and bedded on the island of Thoule. One of the papyrus fragments, in which Derkyllis appears as narrator, may have come from Bk.4 of the novel,¹⁰ while Photios comments that it is only in Bk.24 that Deinias moves on

⁸ ‘He presents Balagros writing this to his wife and saying that he transcribed the tablets and was sending the transcription to her. And then the story plunges into the reading and writing of the cypress tablets, and there is Deinias narrating to Kymbas...’ (Stephens and Winkler, modified).

⁹ 109b3, 110a40-41, 110b15, 111b29.

¹⁰ P.Oxy. 3012 is annotated by a Δ which seems to be the last digit of a book-number: 4 is a more likely candidate than 14 or 24. For the argumentation see Stephens and Winkler 1995, 154; Morgan 1998, 3306-3307.

from Derkyllis' narrative and returns to the frame story of his own wanderings.¹¹

- H) The spine of Derkyllis' narrative to Deinias was the story of the intrigues of the Egyptian magician Paapis against her family, particularly herself and her brother Mantinias. But her narrative also subsumed a number of sub-narratives by a variety of narrators, a few of which we can glimpse in Photios' epitome. Her maidservant Myrto returned from the dead to give an account of the afterlife (109b1). Mantinias recounted his experiences after being separated from Derkyllis (110a10-14). After Paapis caught up with the pair on Thoule, and cast a spell causing them to be dead by day and alive by night, her 'fiery' lover Throuskanos killed Paapis and then committed suicide over her apparently dead body: obviously another sub-narrator was needed to inform Derkyllis about what occurred while she was dead.
- I) Within the story itself, reading and writing played an important plot-function. Two of the papyrus fragments concern letter-writing as a narrative activity. In the first (PSI 1177), the maid Myrto, who has apparently been struck dumb by Paapis' magic, uses the implements of writing to inform her mistress of events. The situation forges an equivalence between the spoken and written word which is thematically important in a novel whose macro-structure depended on the transference of speech into writing. The second fragment (P.Oxy.3012) is too short to be very informative, but it is clear enough that a letter passes information from one character to another and thus motivates action. Finally, there is a metaliterary icon in the form of the magic books which are source of Paapis' power. At one point Mantinias and Derkyllis steal them in the hope of neutralising him, and later, after Paapis' death, Azoulis is able to remove the spell on Mantinias and Derkyllis by consulting the same books. Paapis' magic books inscribe the author's own power to control his fictional world and make 'unbelievable' things happen, so correlating the powers of magician and novelist to shift the paradigms of normality.

Having worked our way to the centre of this intricately packaged nest of narrative texts, we must now work our way back out. My contention will be

¹¹ 110b16-19: 'So comes to an end the twenty-third book of Antonius Diogenes' *The Incredible Things beyond Thoule*, although the narrative has revealed nothing about Thoule except a short section at the beginning' (the last part of this is omitted by error by Stephens and Winkler); Derkyllis leaves Deinias at 110b33, and Deinias then emerges as narrator of the subsequent journey beyond Thoule (τὰ ὑπερ τὴν Θούλην ἄπιστα 110b39, apparently confined to the last book of the novel).

that the pseudo-documentary façade is even more complex and devious than it seems. Although the surface function of the novel's elaborate packaging was to provide a fictive authority for its contents, it is increasingly recognised that its convolutions also function to emphasise its artificiality and textuality; it is self-deconstructing.¹² I will argue that there is not a straightforward sourcing of narrative from one level to another, but that each of the novel's multiple writers was represented as shaping and recreating the material as it came to him or her. The text's constant interest in the business of receiving stories (either through listening or reading) and transmitting them (either through telling or writing), and its recurrent stress on the written word are emblematic of a profound and intellectual self-referentiality.

Let us begin with Derkyllis. As she is only liberated from Paapis' spell by Azoulis, one of Deinias' travelling companions, she must still have been in the condition of being dead by day and alive by night when Deinias arrived in Thoule. Her storytelling to Deinias could only have taken place at night, in her intervals of life. Although the Arctic nights are conveniently long, a fact emphasised when Deinias voyages even further to the North,¹³ we must imagine a series of discontinuous narrative sessions, a Polar version of the 1001 Nights. Photios' repeated references to this level of the narrative structure (109b9, 109b17, 109b34, 110a13-14, 110a39, 110b15) suggest that in the original text Deinias kept his narratee informed of the breaks in the narrative he was reporting. The material reported to her by her brother Mantinias is described as 'ungrudging material for story-making to report later to Deinias' (ὕλην ἄφθονον μυθοποιίας ἀπαγγέλλειν ὕστερον τῷ Δεινίᾳ), which may also hint that it was not exhausted in a single session.¹⁴ The word *μυθοποιία* ('story-making' with the implication of obvious untruth) echoes compounds and cognates of *μῦθος* elsewhere in the epitome, which seem to be Photios' comment on the quality of the novel's invention, an aspect of his failure to enter fully into the fictional contract. Nevertheless, it does clearly imply that Derkyllis was not represented as passively transmitting what she had heard from others, but using it as the raw material of a narrative of her own, constructed for a specific narratee, in an erotic situation.

Deinias too was not a simple transmitter of received narrative. Photios repeatedly refers to him as a compiler. The sentence already quoted in part to document Derkyllis' 'story-making', reads in full: 'ungrudging material for

¹² On this theme in general see Morgan 1993.

¹³ 110-b42-111a3: 'the nights there (directly under the Pole Star) a month long, some shorter, some longer, and even six months long and ultimately a year long'.

¹⁴ 110a13-14, translation mine.

story-making for her to report later to Deinias, which he himself is brought on tying together (συνείρων) and narrating to the Arkadian Kymbas'.¹⁵ A little later we read: 'Deinias, having learned (various episodes) from Derkyllis' story-telling (μυθολογούσης) is now brought on weaving them together (συνσφαίνων) for the Arkadian Kymbas'.¹⁶ The verbs used here of Deinias' activities do not depict him as amalgamating the narratives of several narrators, but connecting material furnished to him by Derkyllis alone. This reinforces the sense that her narrative was fragmented, but also that Deinias' role was actively to shape that fragmented material into a single, if highly complex, narrative structure, which (like all the other narrative levels) was directed at a specific audience for a specific purpose: in this case, though the exact logic is lost in Photios' selective abbreviation, Deinias' narrative to Kymbas must have been a kind of apologia for his decision not to return to Arkadia as the ambassador had come to request.¹⁷

Deinias' performance is recorded by Erasinides, an Athenian. At one level, he may be introduced to make the existence of a text in Attic Greek plausible; and in a metaliterary sense he accentuates a programmatic separation of the functions of devising a narrative and committing it to writing, but again I think we can make the summary work harder. It is easy to make naive points about the time that would be required for an oral narrative of the Odyssean length represented by Antonius' novel, about the logistics of engraving a narrative on wood at the speed of speech, or about the number of tablets needed to accommodate a text equivalent to the greater part of twenty-four papyrus rolls, and their weight. The fun is that these observations are very much *à propos*. Just as Derkyllis and Deinias were responsible for actively reshaping material in a narrative for a specific function, even the engraver Erasinides was represented as leaving his own mark on the raw material.

Firstly, a strict reading suggests that Deinias completed his narrative before requesting that it be committed to writing:

Deinias completed this tale (διεμυθολόγησε) for Kymbas, and then brought out some tablets of cypress and bade Kymbas' companion,

¹⁵ 110a13-16, translation mine.

¹⁶ 110b14-16, translation mine.

¹⁷ Photios says nothing about the reasons of the Arkadians for wanting Deinias back home, but they cannot fail to have been presented somewhere in the original.

Erasinides of Athens, to inscribe (ἐγγράψαι) it on them – for he was a craftsman of words (τεχνίτης λόγων).¹⁸

If Photios means what he says, Erasinides was not taking the story down at Deinias' dictation, but recreating the narrative later from memory. This is to some extent borne out by the next point: 'Deinias further bade Kymbas¹⁹ to write up this completed narrative in two copies' (δίχα ταῦτα τὰ διαμυθολογηθέντα ἀναγράψασθαι).²⁰ Compounds of γράφω are used with some precision in this text, reflecting the meta-textual concern of the original with the processes of literary production. ἀναγράφω connotes a degree of independent literary presentation. Arrian, for instance, uses it in the preface of his *Anabasis* to describe what he does to the information he derives from his sources.²¹ The third point is that Erasinides is described as a τεχνίτης λόγων. This means that he is more than a competent scribe: he is a 'word-smith'. The same phrase is used in Xenophon of Ephesos of Aristomachos, a leading citizen of Byzantion, who persuades the father of Hippothoos' boyfriend Hyperanthes to entrust the boy to him for teaching; it denotes his professional qualification to teach rhetoric.²² Aischines (1,170) sneeringly applies the term to Demosthenes, with the implication that he manipulates the truth. The Life of Homer attributed to Plutarch even applies the phrase to the greatest poet of them all.²³ In this case, we have seen that only two tablets are at issue, one for each copy of the narrative.²⁴ Their dimensions are not specified, but they are carried by a woman (revealed to be Derkyllis herself at 111a24-25) and one of the copies is to be placed in a diminutive κιβώτιον ('a little box') and buried with Deinias. They were not massive. We should not imagine then that what Photios read presented Erasinides' tablet as a verbatim record of the narrative of Deinias.

However, that statement reverses the position. Since the bulk of the novel was formed by something representing a narrative of Deinias, it is

¹⁸ 111a20-23, Stephens and Winkler slightly adapted.

¹⁹ There is a puzzle here: is Kymbas named here as the person responsible for Erasinides, or is Deinias asking him to perform an entirely separate act of writing? The former seems the more plausible, since the text goes on to refer to the same tablets. It may even be that Photios has confused the names.

²⁰ 111a25-26, slightly adapted.

²¹ Arr. *Anab.* 1,1,1.

²² Xen. *Eph.* 2,3,8.

²³ Ps. -Plu. *Vit. Hom.* 2.

²⁴ Note the singulars at 111a26-29: θατέραν μὲν τῶν δέλτων αὐτὸν ἔχειν, τὴν ἑτέραν δέ, καθ' ὃν ἀποβίωη καιρόν, τὴν Δερκυλλίδα πλησίον τοῦ τάφου κιβωτίῳ ἐμβαλοῦσαν καθεῖναι.

more accurate to say that Deinias' narrative as read by a reader of the novel must have been presented as something more than a verbatim transcription of the tablet inscribed by Erasinides and discovered during Alexander's siege of Tyre. There are two stages at which the imagined expansion of Erasinides' skeletal (and of course non-existent) ur-text might be part of the fictional *mise en scène*.

First, there is Balagros' letter to his wife. It is striking that he is made to write of the discovery of tablets, in the plural, whereas the contents he transcribes specify the singular.²⁵ It is difficult to know what to make of this: on the one hand, it is perfectly possible that Photios has simply been careless in one of the two references,²⁶ but on the other there may be a hint that the text that Balagros sent to his wife was an expansion of what he read on the tablets. Even Photios' drastic summary stresses the small dimensions of the box housing the tablet(s) (κιβωτίῳ μικρῷ, 111b20); even if he is mistaken in reporting that only one cypress tablet was placed inside it, this is not an object capable of holding a 24-book text in wooden form, and the specific emphasis on its size means that the novel cannot plausibly have been presented as a straightforward second-hand copying of the text discovered at Tyre. In writing of Balagros 'transcribing' the tablet(s), Photios uses the verb μεταγράφωμαι.²⁷ As already noted, the precision with which compounds of γράφω are employed suggests that he is recycling important vocabulary from the original. This one allows some slippage: it can be a synonym of ἀπογράφω ('make a copy of'), but more commonly involves altering a text in some way: transferring it from one script to another, translating, correcting or editing it in some way. The first two are not at issue here, since Antonius carefully provided an Athenian scribe, whose work would account for the Attic of the text. It is more likely that Balagros was presented as 'rewriting' Erasinides' abbreviated version of Deinias' oral narrative for his wife's consumption. At this stage in the text's imagined trajectory, we are again confronted with a narrative produced for a specific audience, the writer's

²⁵ 'They found by the wall a small chest of cypress with the inscription, 'Stranger, whoever you are, open, so that you may learn marvellous things.' When Alexander's companions opened the chest, they found the cypress tablets (τὰς κυπαριττίνους δέλτους) that Derkylis apparently buried at Deinias' request'. (111b20-24).

²⁶ If this is the case, the mistake is perhaps a little more likely to lie in the mention of plural tablets discovered in the siege of Tyre. The earlier passage is very explicit about the singularity of the tablet to be buried with Deinias, and we may suppose that Photios remembered that two tablets had been produced for Erasinides to inscribe but forgot that one of the copies had gone back to Arkadia.

²⁷ τὰς κυπαριττίνους δέλτους μεταγραφάμενος, 111b26.

wife, with a parallel change in its function, from self-justifying commemoration to entertainment.

And so we are back to Antonius Diogenes himself and his double preface. On the one hand, in his epistle to Isidora, he introduced Balagros' letter to Phila, and thus presented his work as an ancient text rediscovered; but on the other, in his address to Faustinus, he drew attention to his own invention and use of named sources postdating the dramatic date of the story.²⁸ It is worth quoting this section at length:

Diogenes then, also called Antonius, having introduced Deinias telling all these tall tales to Kymbas, nevertheless writes to Faustinus that he is composing about the wonders beyond Thoule, and that he addresses the novel to his sister Isidora, who is a lover of learning. He says of himself that he is a poet of Old Comedy,²⁹ and that even if he is fabricating unbelievable and false things, he nonetheless has testimonies of earlier writers for most of the things about which he has written fiction, from which he has assembled this text with much labour. And before each book he lists the men who have revealed such things before, with the result that the incredible things do not appear to lack testimony.³⁰

ὁ γοῦν Διογένης, ὁ καὶ Ἀντώνιος, ταῦτα πάντα Δεινίαν εἰσαγαγὼν πρὸς Κύμβαν τερατευσάμενον, ὅμως γράφει Φαυστίνῳ ὅτι τε συντάττει περὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ Θούλην ἀπίστων, καὶ ὅτι τῇ ἀδελφῇ Ἰσιδώρᾳ φιλομαθῶς ἐχούσῃ τὰ δράματα προσφωνεῖ. λέγει δὲ ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ποιητῆς ἐστὶ

²⁸ The dramatic date is fixed to the early 5th century B.C. by the reference to Ainesidemus, tyrant of Leontinoi at 110a6. The only source whose name is transmitted by Photios is Antiphanes, on whom see below.

²⁹ The translation is disputed here: Antonius may be aligning himself with Aristophanic comedy (thinking of its fantasy rather than its obscenity), but the adjective usually employed in that context by literary critics is ἀρχαῖος not παλαιός. Alternatively, from Antonius' (or Photios' ?) perspective, all comedy might be ancient, so that the alignment could be with Menandros as much as with Aristophanes. Alternatively again, Antonius might be saying that he is the 'creator of an old story', a deliberate oxymoron that encapsulates the complexity and duplicity of his pose.

³⁰ This is what the Greek says, rather than Stephens and Winkler's 'he brings forward a list of authorities for the contents of each book'. The difficulty remains that P.Oxy. 3012, which seems to come from the beginning of a book, has no list of authorities preceding the text, as this section of Photios promises. The final sentence of this quotation, however, seems to be Photios' comment, whereas the preceding sentences in indirect speech apparently quote or paraphrase Antonius himself. It may be, therefore, that Photios had a copy of the novel which listed sources before each book, and, mistakenly or not, took this for the author's intention.

κωμωδίας παλαιᾶς, καὶ ὅτι εἰ καὶ ἄπιστα καὶ ψευδῆ πλάττει, ἀλλ' οὖν ἔχει περὶ τῶν πλείστων αὐτῶ μυθολογηθέντων ἀρχαιοτέρων μαρτυρίας, ἐξ ὧν σὺν καμάτῳ ταῦτα συναθροίσειε. προτάττει δὲ καὶ ἐκάστου βιβλίου τοὺς ἄνδρας οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα προαπεφάναντο, ὡς μὴ δοκεῖν μαρτυρίας χηρεῦεν τὰ ἄπιστα. (111a30-40)

These two modes of creating fictive belief appear to be contradictory: a text cannot simultaneously be an ancient text rediscovered, and the creation of its author from careful research. But perhaps it can. What if Antonius' pose was not simply that he was the mere publisher of an ancient text, but that he was the learned editor and elaborator of an ancient document? Isidora, the addressee of the archaeological *Beglaubigungsapparat*, is after all a lover of learning. The game is one of Nabokovian complexity. On this reading, the core narrative of Derkyllis will have been simultaneously a) an expansive performance occupying an untold number of Arctic nights filled with love-making and storytelling, knocked into shape by Deinias and compressed by Erasinides to be engraved on a single tablet; and b) the result of an imaginative expansion and retelling of that skeletal version by an imaginary modern scholar with all the resources of a library at his disposal; indeed the stress on the κάματος of its composition has a positively Alexandrian ring to it.³¹ Within its own fictional world, the work would have been presented as simultaneously fact and fiction, challenging its reader to distinguish invention from reality and indeed to stratify the levels of invention and elaboration, calling the very boundaries of reality and imagination into contestation, and thus exploring the nature of fiction itself. Something of this programmatic intent is visible in the phrasing of Photios' summary, at the very point where he seems to be quoting Antonius, who described his authorship as ἄπιστα καὶ ψευδῆ πλάττειν. Every word in this phrase is theoretically loaded.

The rhetorical classification of narrative categorised it according to its truth value.³² One category was true narrative, generally termed *historia*. Untrue narrative was divided into that which was incredible (*mythos*, or simply *pseudos*), and that which was credible, like the truth (*plasma*). This categorisation is asymmetrical: it omits narrative which is true but unlike the truth. This is not a fatuous point, because such narrative did exist, and formed the very point of the genre of paradoxography, commonly termed *apista*. So in the phrase under consideration, we have *apista*, which are implausible truths, *pseudē*, which are implausible untruths, and a verbal cog-

³¹ Compare the very Alexandrian poetics of Longus' prologue.

³² Morgan 1993, 187-190.

nate of *plasma*, denoting the creation of plausible untruths. Antonius seems to be claiming to make the implausible plausible but also the true untrue.

And now we are back with Antonius as a reader. Of all the sources that he claims to have used in fleshing out the fictional nucleus of his novel, Photios mentions only Antiphanes.³³ This comes at the end of a discussion of Antonius' date, and I take it that Photios is making the logical point that the composition of the work must at least postdate its sources. The question is why, when Antonius says he listed his sources at the beginning of each book, Photios has singled out Antiphanes. I can think of two possible explanations. The first is that Antiphanes is of particular relevance for the dating because he is the latest source named by Antonius, and therefore provides a *terminus post quem*. This would be well and good if we could believe that Photios knew who Antiphanes was, but his use of the word τινος suggests that the name meant nothing to him. The second explanation is that Antonius himself somehow attached more emphasis to Antiphanes than to other sources he may have cited; according to Photios he did not just name Antiphanes but characterised his work. If we adopt this as a working hypothesis, it gives us an important clue to the purpose and flavour of his work. By the time of Strabo, Antiphanes of Berge, the author of a work about the far north, and thus a natural source for Antonius, had become one of the ancient world's most notorious liars and fantasists, to such an extent that the verb βεργαίζω had more or less entered common currency.³⁴ If Antonius afforded him especial prominence among his sources, we can only conclude that he was deliberately undermining his own claims to authenticity and exposing their fictive nature. *The Wonders beyond Thoule* looks increasingly as if it is playing in the same ball-park as Lucian's *True Histories*, if not quite according to the same game-plan. The enterprise of assembling an acknowledged fiction out of the work of previous writers combined poking fun at their untruthfulness with exploring the mechanisms and limits of plausible fiction. This motive is inscribed in the ambiguity of the novel's title: not just *Wonders beyond Thoule* in the geographical sense, but also *Things Incredible beyond Thoule*, events outdoing the paradoxography of the far north in their incredibility. This reading gains credence from Photios' complaint that it was only in the

³³ 112a5: 'he mentions an older author named Antiphanes (ἀρχαιοτέρου τινὸς Ἀντιφάνους), who he says was involved with some such wonder-tales' (περὶ τοιαῦτά τινα τερατολογήματα κατεσχολακέναι).

³⁴ On Antiphanes of Berge see especially Weinreich 1942; Romm 1992, 196 ff.; Morgan 2007, 557-563.

last of its twenty-four books that the text finally took its reader cartographically beyond Thoule.

I have been arguing that Antonius' *Beglaubigungsapparat* was even more deviously spectacular than usually supposed. There is not a long but straightforward chain of transmission leading from the innermost layers of Derkyllis' oral narrative to the written text of the novel. On my reading each link in that fictional chain, retelling or elaborating the material for a specific audience and for a specific purpose, is imagined as making its special contribution to the shape of the final product. More precisely, we seem to have an imaginary process of condensation, followed by reconstitution, with the material passing through a bottleneck in the shape of Erasinides' tablet; it is not clear where we should read Balagros as the final condenser or the first expander. On the previous reading, Antonius presented himself as a mere editor of material, effacing his own role as author – the basic pseudo-documentary premise; if my suggestions are correct, however, on the contrary he emphasised his role as creator of the text confronting his reader, by rehearsing the strategies of elaboration and pseudo-scholarly expansion applied to a fictitious document. But while it revelled openly in these processes of historical fiction or fictional history, the final text nonetheless represented itself as a recreation of its innermost level of narration, presenting, through the medium of Deinias' synthesis, the original narrative acts of its ultimate sources as narrative acts once more.

And now we are back with Photios and Porphyrios, the real readers through whose eyes we must forever read Antonius Diogenes. Porphyrios quite simply uses Antonius as an 'accurate' source for the life of Pythagoras. It is clear enough that all the novel's ludic qualities simply passed him by. He does not mention the *Beglaubigungsapparat* at all, and we can only suppose that he took it as the literal truth; if he had seen it as a marker of fictionality or even understood its function within the fictional economy, he would inevitably have suspected the truth-value of the 'information' he derived from Antonius. This is an interesting example of an educated and intelligent ancient reader simply not grasping the conventions and protocols of literary fiction, and allowing fictional belief to collapse into literal belief. Photios is a more complicated case. He discusses the fictional contract quite acutely, identifying its particular pleasure as the telling of incredible things in a credible way.³⁵ At a certain point, however, he is deceived into responding to fiction as if it were either fact or lie. On the one hand, desperate to fix a date

³⁵ Discussion in Morgan 1993, 193-197.

on the work, he accepts the fictitious provenance at face value, concluding that Antonius was writing close to the time of Alexander (though he must postdate Antiphanes).³⁶ At other times, he loses patience with material which stretched his credulity to breaking point (thus violating the fictional contract).³⁷

As an epitomator, Photios reduces Heliodoros to a straightforward plot-line. Something of the same sort has clearly happened with his summary of Antonius Diogenes. After a brief paragraph on prose style, Photios takes us straight to Deinias and his frame story, and his travels up to the point when he reaches Thoule. After a couple of paragraphs he interrupts Deinias' narrative to explain the narrative situation with Kymbas (109b3). The production of the cypress tablets seems to come at the very end of Deinias' narration, at the end of the novel. Only now does Photios tell us about the prefatory letters, introducing the story of the discovery of the engraved wooden tablet(s), and the transition to the narrative of Deinias, which he has already summarised. The way he describes this transition is striking: 'Deinias is present, telling his story to Kymbas' (111b29 *πάρεστι Δεινίας Κύμβα διηγούμενος*). One senses the dramatic effect here, as if Photios can hear the narrating voice actually present behind the written word. When the novel as a whole played on the relation between the spoken and the written word, this reaction from a reader with the original text in front of him is a telling indication of its rhetorical protocols.

As is common, Photios introduces his summary with comments on prose style and structure, and in conclusion these too will bear some comment, especially as they are often mistranslated and misunderstood.

σαφῆς ἡ φράσις καὶ οὕτω καθαρὰ ὡς ἐπ' ἔλαττον εὐκρινείας δεῖσθαι, καὶ τότε κατὰ τὰς ἐκτροπὰς τῶν διηγημάτων (109a8-10).

³⁶ 112a1-6, discussed in Morgan 1985, 487-490.

³⁷ In fact, if we assume that he chose his words carefully and with an awareness of their rhetorical nuances, it is possible to see a progression in Photios' response to the text. In the earlier paragraphs his vocabulary is neutral, and narration is designated by *διηγῆσθαι* and its cognates. As the epitome proceeds, words from the *μῦθος* root become more frequent. The turning-point seems to come in the paragraph beginning at 110a39, which summarises material contained in Derkyllis' narration; she is introduced as *διηγούμενη*, but after a series of dramatic and supernatural adventures the same narrator becomes *μυθολογούσα*. Photios' negative vocabulary reaches its climax as Deinias' narrative goes off the map at 110b36: *τερατεύεται ... ἀπιστότατον ... ὑπερβολὴν πλασμάτων προαναπλάσαντα*.

Stephens and Winkler translate:

‘The style is clear and so pure as to want nothing in exactitude even in the digressions from the narratives.’

In fact what the Greek says is that ‘its *phrasis* (‘expression’ rather than ‘style’ in the narrow sense) is clear and so *kathara* that it has relatively little need of *eukrineia*’, and that the times when *eukrineia* is needed occur in the places where the narrative turns aside: perhaps ‘transitions’ rather than ‘digressions’. The terms that Photios uses are technical and quite specific. A text can be *katharos* when, in style or construction, it is so clear as to need no analysis or elucidation. *Eukrineia*, according to the lengthy discussion by Hermogenes,³⁸ is not in itself clarity, but the means by which clarity can be brought to material which is intrinsically and inevitably complex. This can work at the level of both style and structure; in the latter case examples given by Hermogenes involve what we would call prolepsis and analepsis: a potentially confusing presentation can be rendered clear if the reader is reminded of what has already taken place or told clearly what is coming next. There is no particular reason to think that Antonius’ prose style became more opaque in the digressions; Photios’ comment here makes more sense if we understand him to be saying that the narrative was easy enough to follow, and the reader only needed the apparatus of guidance covered by the term *eukrineia* at the points where the narrative turned aside, presumably when the various sub-narratives were spliced into the complex. The paragraph of aesthetic judgements is then arranged in a sort of ascending tricolon, moving from style pure and simple (*phrasis* in the narrow sense), through construction (running on under the heading of *phrasis*, but now in a wider sense, as his comments show) and finally to content (*dianoia*), where he comments on the nature of the invention and the pleasure which it can give.

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³⁸ Hermog. *Id.* 1,4 (Spengel II, 281 ff.).

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