

## THE PROEMS OF PLUTARCH'S *LIVES* AND HISTORIOGRAPHY\*

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*Abstract:* In this article I focus on Plutarch's prologues to the *Alexander–Caesar*, *Nicias–Crassus*, and *Theseus–Romulus* books, all of which discuss Plutarch's biographical method in relation to history. I suggest that in these prologues Plutarch follows a number of standard themes, ideas, and motifs that are common to the prologues of ancient historians in order to demarcate his generic affiliations with historiography, and bolster and advertise his unique and individual literary genre.

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*Keywords:* Plutarch, *Lives*, prologues, history, biography, genre

### Introduction

The relationship between Plutarch's biography and history has been the subject of numerous studies, which have thoroughly examined Plutarch's regard for history and historical truth as well as his methods of adapting his historical material in biographical form.<sup>1</sup> This article aims to add to the scholarly discussion on Plutarch's generic interaction with historiography by focusing on the prologues to the *Lives* (particularly the *Alexander–Caesar*, the *Nicias–Crassus*, and the *Theseus–Romulus* prologues) and exploring Plutarch's use of themes, ideas, and techniques that are common to the prefaces found among the ancient historians. The discussion will contribute not only to a better view of Plutarch's prefatory compositional methods and literary affinities but also to a fuller grasp of the way(s) in which Plutarch defines and justifies the specific features of his own unique biographical genre within the traditional generic expectations of historiography.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gomme (1945) 54–84; Theander (1951); Russell (1963); Stadter (1965); Hamilton (1969) xxxvii–xlix; Wardman (1974) 2–10, 154–61; de Romilly (1988); Stadter (1992); Desideri (1992); Buckler (1993); Hershbell (1997); Scardigli (1995); Frazier (1996) esp. 9–93; Nikolaidis (1997); Pelling (2002a); Cooper (2004); Pelling (2006); Frazier (2010); Pelling (2011) 13–25; Hägg (2012) 268–81; Muccioli (2012) 53–73; Geiger (2014); Schettino (2014). Helpful discussions of the relationship between biography and history in antiquity include Gentili and Cerri (1988) 61–85; Sonnabend (2002) 4–8; Kraus (2005); Schepens (2007); Stadter (2007).

<sup>2</sup> More generally on the structure and themes of Plutarch's biographical prologues, see Stadter (1988); Rosenmeyer (1992); Duff (1999) 13–51; Mossman (1999); Pelling (2002b); Duff (2011) 213–24; (2014); Beneker (2016); Chrysanthou (2018).

### I. Generic Hybridity in Plutarch's Prologues<sup>3</sup>

First some remarks on the generic relationships of Plutarch's biographical prologues to various branches of literature are helpful in order to distinguish more precisely Plutarch's generic affiliations with historical writing. Plutarch's versatility in many genres is well documented in the prologues to his biographical books, where Plutarch took the opportunity to employ a variety of approaches and techniques and to interweave multiple kinds of discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Particularly notable is that most of Plutarch's biographical books start as though they are moral and philosophical essays, or—in certain cases—encomia, or even rhetorical treatises.<sup>5</sup> Thus the general statements about glory in the opening chapters of the *Agis/Cleomenes–Gracchi* book (1–2) or about arts and virtue in the prologues to the *Pericles–Fabius* (1–2) and the *Demetrius–Antony* (1)<sup>6</sup> recall the generalisations which we find in the openings of some of Aristotle's treatises,<sup>7</sup> or Plutarch's own ethical essays.<sup>8</sup> The more explicit protreptic character of the opening of the *Aratus* (1) is reminiscent of that of the introduction to (the probably false) Isocrates' hortatory moral treatise *To Demonicus* (1–12). Both works are addressed to specific individuals (Plutarch addresses his *Aratus* to Polycrates), stressing the ethical value that arises from the representation of the virtuous examples found in the addressees' families (cf. *oikeia paradeigmata*). Besides, the themes of Plutarch's praise of Lucullus and his conception of the

<sup>3</sup> For the text of Plutarch's *Lives* I have consulted the Teubner editions of Konrat Ziegler (Leipzig, 1957–73; rev. edn. by H. Gärtner, 1994–2002). For the text of Plutarch's *Moralia* I follow the Loeb Classical Library editions (by various scholars, 1925–78). Translations of all ancient texts are based on or adopted from those of the Loeb Classical Library editions, unless I note otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> More generally, on Plutarch's use of different genres in the *Lives* and (especially) the *Moralia*, see the contributions in D' Ippolito and Gallo (1991); Gallo (1998); Gallo and Moreschini (2000).

<sup>5</sup> It is unclear whether Plutarch's original had a title at its start, containing (most likely) the names of the two subjects, the author, the work, and the number of the book: Duff (2011) 264 n. 232. If a title stood at the beginning, the effect becomes no less striking, for the first lines may interestingly reshape readers' expectations as to what they will read.

<sup>6</sup> Other examples of such introductory general reflections include *Sert.* 1; *Phoc.* 1–2; *Pel.* 1–2; *Galba* 1. Cf. the philosophical beginnings of Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* and *Bellum Jugurthinum*.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. *Pol.* 1.1; *EE.* 1.1; *EN.* 1.1; *APo.* 1.1; *PA* 1.1; *Metaph.* 1.1.

<sup>8</sup> e.g. *De am. mult.* 93a–c (reflections on virtue); *Quomodo adulat.* 48e–49b (reflections on self-love and flattery); *De Is. et Osir.* 351c–f (reflections on gods and the search for truth); *Animine an corp.* 500b–c (reflections on the wretchedness of human beings). Gomme (1945) 56 interestingly notes that 'when he [i.e. Plutarch] wrote the introduction to his *Perikles and Fabius*, he was thinking in the terms of one of his essays'. Santaniello (2000) 271–3 notes some close ties between the *Pericles–Fabius* prologue and the proem to the *De genio Socratis* (575b–576b).

narration of Lucullus' good deeds as the best way of honouring him—a position shared (as Plutarch says) by Lucullus himself—in the prologue to the *Cimon–Lucullus* book (1–2) find close parallels in the prologue to Isocrates' encomium of the king Evagoras (1–11). Isocrates' focus, nevertheless, rests on the praise and glory owed to the virtuous man, while Plutarch stresses the truth—that is, neither excessive praise nor excessive blame—which should lie at the core of his narrative. In the *Demosthenes–Cicero* prologue, in addition, we are confronted with themes and ideas that may bring to mind the introductory chapters of rhetorical treatises. A good example is provided by Cicero's *De oratore*. Cicero starts his work with a remark on the supremely happy individual. He then refers to his public service and private troubles which kept him away (as he says) from literary activity, and announces his current decision to dedicate to his brother Quintus a work on the art of oratory based on his own experience. In the rest of the introductory section he discusses the art of eloquence in relation to philosophy and other arts (e.g. statesmanship, poetry), laying stress upon its magnitude and difficulty, and contrasts his work with that of Greek teachers of rhetoric (1.1–23).<sup>9</sup> In the prologue to Plutarch's *Demosthenes–Cicero* book we have comparable themes, though modified and enriched to suit Plutarch's situation. The *Demosthenes–Cicero* book, addressed to Sosius Senecio, begins with Plutarch's view on real happiness, a comparison between arts (including rhetoric) and virtue, a reference to Plutarch's philosophical and political careers, and in connection with this his late and inadequate study of Latin language and rhetoric. Plutarch, just like Cicero, acknowledges the importance of studying oratory, but for him it is important to make clear that he is *not* writing a rhetorical work as his contemporary rhetorician Caecilius of Cale Acte had tried unsuccessfully to do, but a work which, based on his own experience as a politician, examines the character of Demosthenes and Cicero in view of their actions and policies as statesmen (1–2).

Whether these parallels in prefatory form and/or themes suggest a direct influence of all these authors on Plutarch or not—in my view not a wholly implausible suggestion given Plutarch's erudition—they are enough to reveal a cross-fertilisation between different literary traditions in which Plutarch might have been expected to write but did not—or at least *did not write completely*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the short preface to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (1). According to the author, his private affairs kept him so busy that he could not find enough time for literary occupations. He preferred to spend the little time he had, as he says, on philosophy. He goes on to mention, however, that as a response to the request of Gaius Herennius he now decides to write a work on the theory of public speaking. He dwells in particular on his omission of those topics which Greek writers treated for the sake of self-assertion and sets forth his idea that oratorical theory and practice should be combined.

A different technique is found in the opening of the *Aemilius–Timoleon* book (1) in which Plutarch includes an unusual praise of his own genre of biography. Although Plutarch mentions the moral benefits to be gained from the study of the *Lives* in other prologues too—for example, in the *Pericles–Fabius* (1–2) or the *Demetrius–Antony* (1–2) prologues<sup>10</sup>—in the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue he focuses exclusively on this. He starts with a succinct statement of his genre—‘I began the writing of my biographies’ (1.1: τῆς τῶν βίων ... γραφῆς)—and continues with an exposition of his personal views on the aims and the value of biography. Plutarch envisages that the ideal reader of his *Lives* uses *historia* (a term which has the double meaning of history and research)<sup>11</sup> as a mirror through which he models his life on the virtues of the great men from the past, exploring carefully (cf. ἀναθεωρῶμεν) what is most efficacious ‘for the improvement of character’ and concentrating his mind on the ‘finest examples’ (1.1–5).<sup>12</sup> Philip Stadter has justifiably pointed to the parallel between Plutarch’s praise of biography in the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue and the *topos* of the praise of history in historical prologues.<sup>13</sup> Historians regularly present their decision to embark upon writing history as motivated by the utility of history in general and of their subject in particular.<sup>14</sup> It is arguable that Plutarch employs in the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue a constant theme of historical prologues in order to define his own biographical enterprise as a peculiar *historia* that offers the readers good paradigms for emulation.<sup>15</sup> Crucial to that definition is Plutarch’s reference to the mirror image, which serves to situate Plutarch’s biography in the

<sup>10</sup> On the *Pericles–Fabius* prologue, see Van der Stockt (1992) 32–7; Duff (1999) 34–45; (2001); (2011) 220; (2014) 335; Nikolaidis (2014) 355. On the *Demetrius–Antony* prologue, see Duff (1999) 45–9; (2004); (2014) 335.

<sup>11</sup> On the ambiguities of the term *historia* in Plutarch, see Duff (1999) 18 n. 14, 33. Cf. Valgiglio (1987) 50–62; Hershbell (1997) 227–33; Gómez and Mestre (1997); Inglese (1997).

<sup>12</sup> On Plutarch’s moral programme in the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue, see Desideri (1989) 199–205; Duff (1999) 30–4; Whitmarsh (2001) 55–7 (on *mimēsis*); Hägg (2012) 272–3. On the structure of the prologue, see Duff (2011) 220–1; (2014) 341.

<sup>13</sup> Stadter (1988) 289.

<sup>14</sup> Praise of history in general is found in Pol. 1.1; Diod. 1.1–2; Liv. *Praef.* 10. Historians often stress the usefulness, often combined with pleasure, to be derived from their historical works (e.g. Thuc. 1.22.4; Pol. 1.2.8, 4.6–11; D. Hal. *AR* 1.5; 1.6.3–5; 1.8.3; Diod. 1.3.5–8) as well as the unique greatness of their specific subject matter (e.g. Hdt. *Praef.*; Thuc. 1.23; D. Hal. *AR* 1.1.2–3; 1.2–3; Liv. *Praef.* 3; 11–12; Sal. *Jug.* 5.1–3; Hdn. 1.1.4–6; Jos. *BJ* 1.1). See also Biese (1926); Janson (1964) 66–7; Herkommer (1968) 128–36, 164–74; Stadter (1981); Alexander (1993) 31–2; Marincola (1997) 34–43; Lachenaud (2004) 73–6. Further below, n. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Marincola (1997) 43 n. 28 notes that ‘although it is common for historians to praise the utility of their subject and of history in general, they do not, as a rule, present the reader’s benefit as a main reason why they took up history’. Cf. Hau (2016) 25–9 and 75–9, discussing the emphasis on moral didacticism in the prefaces of Polybius and Diodorus of Sicily.

branch of moralising didactic literature,<sup>16</sup> as well as Plutarch's focus on his own experience in reading and studying history—cf. *Aem.* 1.5: 'we [ἡμεῖς] through the study of history [τῆ περὶ τὴν ἱστορίαν διατριβῆ] and the familiarity with the writing [τῆς γραφῆς τῆ συνηθεία] prepare ourselves [παρασκευάζομεν ἑαυτούς]'—which recalls the historians again. The historians often assert in their prologues their practical experience in politics or wars, normally combined with comments on their methodology (Thuc. 1.22.2–3; Jos. *Bḡ* 1.3, 22; cf. Hdn. 1.2.5), or their active inquiry of the material related (D. Hal. *AR* 1.7; Diod. 1.4.1–5), thus stressing their qualifications for the writing of history.<sup>17</sup> Plutarch adopts this personal stance in the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue, but his own approach to the claim of experience is unique and unusual, presenting himself not only as a qualified biographer who can write for the moral benefits of his readers but, most importantly, as the exemplary reader of his own *Lives*, one whose approach to the study and reading of history can be paradigmatic for future readers of the *Lives*. The 'inclusive "we"s', embracing both Plutarch and his readers, which pervade the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue (especially from 1.2 onwards), add to this sort of complicity and congruence that Plutarch seeks with his readers.<sup>18</sup> The underpinning suggestion is that the study of the men of history, the *historia*, and the moral character-forming process that is implicated, are of interest not only to Plutarch himself but his readers as well. The striking apostrophe to the reader at the end of the prologue—'of which [i.e. the best and fairest examples] in the present [sc. book] we have made ready for you [προκεχειρίσμεθά σοι] the life of Timoleon the Corinthian and Aemilius Paulus' (1.6)<sup>19</sup>—is organic to the character of ethical exhortation of Plutarch's biographical work.

The *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue thus provides a useful starting point for exploring the closeness of Plutarch's prologues to those of the ancient historians. In this paper I will elaborate upon this closeness by focusing on the rest of Plutarch's biographical prologues that are wholly concerned with defining Plutarch's biographical method in connection with history: the prologues to the *Alexander–Caesar*, the *Nicias–Crassus*, and the *Theseus–Romulus* books.<sup>20</sup> In the *Alexander–Caesar* prologue (*Alex.* 1), Plutarch declares that he is writing biography

<sup>16</sup> See Duff (1999) 32–3; Zadorojnyi (2010); Frazier (2011).

<sup>17</sup> See Marincola (1997) 133–48.

<sup>18</sup> See Pelling (2002b) 273; Zadorojnyi (2010) 182–3; Duff (2014) 341 for the inclusive first-person plurals in the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue.

<sup>19</sup> Trans. Duff (2011) 221. For another direct second-person address see *Ag./Cleom.* 2.9: ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐπικρινεῖς αὐτὸς ἐκ τῆς διηγήσεως, noted also by Zadorojnyi (2006) 106 n. 24; Duff (2011) 219 n. 29; (2014) 345 n. 13.

<sup>20</sup> I say 'wholly' because some brief methodological considerations of the relation between Plutarch's biography and historiography are also found in *Dem.* 2.1–2 and *Galba* 2.5. In the first case, Plutarch says that despite the fact that a historian needs to live in a famous,

and not history, while in the *Nicias–Crassus* prologue (*Nic.* 1), he claims that he will not try to rival competent historians, like Thucydides and Philistus, but supplement their account by additional evidence that better illuminates Nicias' character.<sup>21</sup> In the *Theseus–Romulus* prologue (*Thes.* 1–2), Plutarch warns his readers of his decision to go beyond the frontier of history and enter the realm of myth. Given Plutarch's combination of the two genres in these three prologues, just as in the *Aemilius–Timoleon* prologue, it is not surprising if closer examination of them reveals the influence of historiography upon Plutarch's prefatory practice. In fact, I shall first show that Plutarch structures the prologues to the *Alexander–Caesar* and *Nicias–Crassus* books in a way that is reminiscent of the historiographical prefaces, and then that the *Theseus–Romulus* prologue bears striking resemblances to the prologues of historical works that deal with mythical historiography. I will argue throughout that Plutarch's recourse to the precedent of historical prologues constitutes a literary technique of considerable sophistication that Plutarch employs to demarcate his generic affiliations with history, and bolster and advertise his own unique and individual literary genre.

## **II. *Alexander–Caesar* and *Nicias–Crassus* Prologues: History and Biography**

Timothy Duff argued that the prologues to Plutarch's *Lives* are normally structured around two sections. They start with a set of generalised reflections (either on morality and/or the purpose of history in general or of the *Lives* in particular), which often include anecdotes and quotations, before moving on to the next section which names the two men and summarises their similarities. The two great exceptions, as Duff stresses, are the prologues to the *Lives of Alexander–Caesar* and the *Lives of Nicias–Crassus*.<sup>22</sup> Plutarch could have easily started the *Alexander–Caesar* with a set of reflections on the power of unrestrained ambition—a key feature of both Alexander and Caesar<sup>23</sup>—before leading the reader to the specifics of the following biographies. Equally, he

cultured, and populous city in order to have access to all sorts of information and write a complete work, he himself prefers to stay in his small native city of Chaeronea (cf. Diod. 1.4.2–4; see also Duff (1999) 23; Cooper (2004) 40–1; Zadorojnyi (2006) esp. 113–20; Muccioli (2012) 21–5). In the latter, Plutarch juxtaposes pragmatic history, which offers an accurate and detailed narration of political and military deeds, with biography dealing primarily with morality and character revelation (cf. Duff (1999) 28–9).

<sup>21</sup> See Duff (2014) 346 n. 36 for the most important bibliography on these two prologues, to which Desideri (1995), (2003), and Hägg (2012) 268–72 may be added. On the *Nicias–Crassus* prologue, see also Holden (1887) 49–55; Marasco (1976) 59–64.

<sup>22</sup> Duff (2011) 219–22; (2014) 334–40.

<sup>23</sup> See Buszard (2008).

might have begun the *Nicias–Crassus* book with a general discussion of cowardice in and ambitious love of military command—central themes in the *Lives of Nicias and Crassus* accordingly<sup>24</sup>—before he introduces the basic moral concerns and the two subjects of the book. Instead, he begins both prologues directly with mention of the two subjects of the *Lives*, continues by addressing the readers and begging their indulgence, goes on to discuss methodological issues, and omits any introductory comparison of the two men.<sup>25</sup> Plutarch’s exceptional construction of *Alexander–Caesar* and *Nicias–Crassus* prologues, I suggest, approximates to that of the historical prologues.

The nature and development of the prefaces of the ancient historians have been thoroughly discussed in ancient and modern literature, so it is unnecessary to go through them in any detail here.<sup>26</sup> It is important to say, however, that the historical prologues, in spite of all their individual differences in length, scope, lines of thought, and purpose, have the same basic arrangement which Donald Earl instructively sums up as follows:<sup>27</sup> (i) an increasingly clear statement of the general area of study, as in Polybius (cf. 1.1.1: τὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας ἔπαινον) or the specific subject matter, as in Thucydides (cf. 1.1: τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων, ὡς ἐπολέμησαν πρὸς ἀλλήλους) in the very first sentences, accompanied by the author’s name (e.g. Herodotus, Thucydides, Procopius) or not (e.g. Diodorus Siculus, Arrian in the *Anabasis*, Herodian, Livy, Tacitus)—in some authors the name comes later in the prologue (e.g. Josephus in the *Bellum Judaicum*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Appian); (ii) a discussion of the purposes and value of history in general and the usefulness and excellence of the theme chosen in particular;<sup>28</sup> (iii) an exposition of the historian’s attitude to his work, the plan and/or method of his work.<sup>29</sup> Commonly, the last two sections are combined and merged together, and they very often contain criticism of other historians and a number of references to the critical and uneasy reader of the work.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Braund (1993); Zadorojnyi (1997).

<sup>25</sup> Duff (2011) 221–2; (2014) 339–40.

<sup>26</sup> On the theory concerning historical prologues, see D. Hal. *AR* 1.1; cf. *De historia* (Halm, *Rhet. Lat. Min.* 588, 31–7); Lucian *Hist. Conscr.* 52–4. See also Avenarius (1956) 113–18; Janson (1964) 64–83; Herkommer (1968); Earl (1972); Fehling (1975); Alexander (1993) 23–41; Marincola (1997) esp. 5–6, 34–43, 63–117, 217–57; Lachenaud (2004) 63–88; Adams (2006). All these features of historical prologues follow basic rules of rhetorical theory: Janson (1964) 65–6; Martin (1974) 60–75; Lausberg (1998) 124–32.

<sup>27</sup> Earl (1972).

<sup>28</sup> Hdt. *Praef.*; Thuc. 1.1–2; 1.21.2, 23; Pol. 1.1–2; D. Hal. *AR* 2–6; Diod. 1.1–2; Liv. *Praef.* 2–5, 10–13; Jos. *Bj* 1.1–16; Tac. *Hist.* 1.1; App. *Praef.* 6–12. Cf. above, n. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Thuc. 1.20–2; Pol. 1.3–5; D. Hal. *AR* 7–8; Diod. 1.3–5; Liv. *Praef.* 5–9; Jos. *Bj* 1.17–30; Tac. *Hist.* 1.2–3; App. *Praef.* 13–15.

Notably, Plutarch, just like the historians, starts both the *Alexander–Caesar* and the *Nicias–Crassus* books with a clear statement of the specific subject matter: ‘My subject in this book is the life [βίος] of Alexander, the king, and of Julius Caesar, the conqueror of Pompey’ (*Alex.* 1.1);<sup>30</sup> ‘We think that it is not bad to compare Crassus with Nicias and the Parthian with the Sicilian disaster’ (*Nic.* 1.1). He then appeals to his readers’ sympathy, distinguishes his narrative from previous historical treatments of the same subjects, stresses its significance, and explains his own plan, purpose, and method of work. Thus in the prologue to the *Alexander–Caesar*, Plutarch says: ‘We shall, because of the number of deeds which are in prospect make no other preface than to beg our readers not to “quibble” [μὴ συκοφαντεῖν],<sup>31</sup> if we do not record all their [i.e. Alexander’s and Caesar’s] most celebrated achievements or do not describe any of them exhaustively [μηδὲ καθ’ ἕκαστον ἐξειργασμένως ... ἀπαγγέλλωμεν], but merely summarise for the most part what they accomplished’ (1.1). It is assumed that readers are familiar with the tendency of historical works (either on Alexander or Caesar, or even in general) to give a careful, detailed account of big historical events,<sup>32</sup> and Plutarch does his best to ensure that his audience will be ready to follow his lead. Unlike the historians, Plutarch claims that his own focus will rest not only on the outstanding deeds of his subjects for the ‘revelation of virtue and vice’, but also on their “off-duty” moments’, which ‘give an impression [ἐμφασιν]’ of character as well,<sup>33</sup> since he is writing *Lives* (βίους) and not *Histories* (ἱστορίας) (1.2). Plutarch goes on to parallel his method of revealing character, or more specifically ‘the signs of the soul [τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς σημεῖα]’, with that of a portrait painter who concentrates on the face and eyes in which character (as Plutarch says) is more clearly visible rather than on the rest of the body (1.3). It has already been suggested that the term ἐμφασις and the analogy of painting have been borrowed from Polybius’ criticism of Timaeus (12.25h), where they are associated with ‘pragmatic history’, and adapted by Plutarch to stress his writing of biography, and not of pragmatic history, which pays careful attention to smaller matters and aims at character revelation.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Scott-Kilvert and Duff (2012) throughout for the *Alexander–Caesar* prologue, slightly adapted at some points.

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Pelling (2002b) 276 for ‘quibble’.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Galba* 2.5: τὰ μὲν οὖν καθ’ ἕκαστα τῶν γενομένων ἀπαγγέλλειν ἀκριβῶς τῆς πραγματικῆς ἱστορίας ἐστίν. Cf. *Thuc.* 1.22.2; 2.1.1; 5.26.1. See also Aristotle’s definition of history in the *Poetics* (1451b6–7: ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἢ δ’ ἱστορία τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστον λέγει).

<sup>33</sup> I follow here the wording of Duff (1999) 15–16.

<sup>34</sup> See Sacks (1981) 41–2 with n. 49; Cooper (2007) 214; but contrast Van der Stockt (2005) 276–98. For the notion of *emphasis*, see Duff (1999) 16 n. 7. On Plutarch’s definition of his



The *Nicias–Crassus* prologue follows a similar pattern. Plutarch tells us: ‘it is time for me to ask from and entreat my readers, as I treat the events that Thucydides ... has already handled incomparably, not to assume that I am as vain as Timaeus, who thought that he would outdo Thucydides in brilliance and show Philistus to be totally vulgar and amateurish’ (1.1).<sup>35</sup> Plutarch marks out for his work and himself a place amidst other historians (Thucydides, Philistus, Timaeus),<sup>36</sup> and makes clear that he is not going to pass wholly over those great events that in Thucydides’ and Philistus’ narratives contain ‘indications of the man’s character and disposition [cf. ὑπὸ πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων παθῶν <ἀπο>καλυπτομένην]’ (*Nic.* 1.5).<sup>37</sup> Plutarch appears to care about persuading his audience that he is neither careless nor slothful but a serious inquirer. He will try to find additional literary and non-literary sources, as he says, in order to gather a useful narrative (cf. *Nic.* 1.5: οὐ τὴν ἄχρηστον ἀθροίζων ἱστορίαν) that contributes to deepening the understanding of an individual’s character and temper (*Nic.* 1.5). Thucydides’ criticism of those historians who do not take pains in the search for the truth (cf. ἀληθείας) but turn to what is ready at hand (1.20.3) may be echoed here,<sup>38</sup> although Plutarch’s concern is for character and morality rather than truth. Crucially, there is mention of the author’s name (something like, for example, ‘Plutarch of Chaeronea wrote this ...’) neither in the *Nicias–Crassus* prologue nor in the *Alexander–Caesar* prologue. Such self-reference, nevertheless, is unnecessary, for these two books are not the first in the series of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*<sup>39</sup>—it is often assumed that the *Epameinondas–Scipio* book (no longer extant) must have stood as Book 1 in the collection of *Parallel Lives* containing a general introduction which might have included Plutarch’s name<sup>40</sup>—and there is still a strong projection of what is

biographical method against arts, see Valgiglio (1987) 66–8; Duff (1999) 16–17; Geiger (2000); Kaesser (2004); Hägg (2012) 271–2; Grethlein (2013) 126–9; Geiger (2014) 293–4.

<sup>35</sup> Trans. Pelling (1992) 10 [= (2002a) 117], adapted.

<sup>36</sup> On Plutarch’s criticism of Philistus and Timaeus, see Muccioli (2000). On Timaeus, see also Candau Morón (2004/5); Van der Stockt (2005); Candau Morón (2009). Crucially, Duff (1999) 25 n. 36 relates Plutarch’s protestations here, especially his polemic against Timaeus, to the traditional feature of the establishment of authorial competence in historiographical prologues.

<sup>37</sup> Trans. Duff (1999) 25, who offers good explanation for preferring ἀποκαλυπτομένην (‘revealed’, the second hand of U) to καλυπτομένην (‘concealed’), which is prevalent in the manuscript tradition, or for emending to ἀνακαλυπτομένην (‘revealed’).

<sup>38</sup> See also Muccioli (2012) 52.

<sup>39</sup> See Jones (1966) 66–8 [= (1995) 106–11], who in the relative chronology of the *Lives* places the *Alexander–Caesar* book in the position thirteenth or fourteenth, while the *Nicias–Crassus* book between the positions sixteenth and twenty-third.

<sup>40</sup> See Duff (2011) 259 with n. 208 for detailed bibliography. On what is known about the lost *Epameinondas–Scipio*, see Georgiadou (1997) 6–8.

individual about Plutarch's project in these pairs of *Lives*. Besides this, it was not that all historians felt obliged (as we saw earlier) to mention their names in the opening chapters of their works.

It is unlikely to be coincidence that Plutarch employs the historians' preface-form in the two prologues where he most explicitly distinguishes his biographies from history. Indeed, his use of the proemial historiographical model works towards prompting reflection on the relation between biography and history. The tension between content and form in the two prologues, that is, between what Plutarch says and the means through which he chooses to say it, serves to draw the readers to observe, or at least problematise, how different from history biography will be; or equally, to explore how closely biography presses on its boundaries with historiography,<sup>41</sup> with the emphasis on character constituting a tool of historical interpretation.<sup>42</sup> Either way, readers are offered a lens through which they can look for meaning and think about how they can (and should) understand historical events and reality in Plutarch's biographical narratives.

This observation leads itself to further questions. How and to what extent is Plutarch's choice of prefatory structure related to the biographies that follow? And in which way(s) does it affect readers' approach to and understanding of the *Alexander–Caesar* and the *Nicias–Crassus* books?

Plutarch's generic blurring in the *Alexander–Caesar* prologue, I would suggest, is relevant to both the *Lives*.<sup>43</sup> It prepares for two narratives that vary a lot in their texture—the *Alexander* focuses more on the 'small things' (as the prologue led us to expect) that affect those big things in Alexander's life,<sup>44</sup> while the *Caesar* is closer to the large-scale military historical narratives<sup>45</sup>—and two men who, as Christopher Pelling puts it, came as close as anyone 'to turning the history of their countries into the history of themselves': Alexander and Caesar broke the geographic boundaries and now appear to similarly break the boundaries of the literary genre.<sup>46</sup> In the *Nicias–Crassus* book, Plutarch's proemial choice seems to be primarily related to the *Nicias* rather than the

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Marincola (1999) 318–20 on the similar effects of the wavering of the narrative voice between biography and history in Tacitus' *Agricola*. See also Pelling (1997) on Cassius Dio's technique of 'biostructuring'.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. D. Hal. *AR* 5.48.1; *Pomp.* 6.7 (on Theopompus' historiography). See Shrimpton (1991) 21; Flower (1994) 170; Duff (1999) 24.

<sup>43</sup> Pace Duff (1999) 20–1; (2014) 340.

<sup>44</sup> Pelling (2002c) 221; Beneker (2012) 103–39.

<sup>45</sup> Duff (1999) 20–1; Pelling (2002c) 221; Mossman (2006) 287.

<sup>46</sup> Pelling (2006); (2009) 507–10; (2011) 15 (from where the quotation is taken), 23. Cf. App. *BC* 2.149.619–154.649, with Pelling (2006) 265–9 for the reverse, namely a historical work including a comparative epilogue about Caesar and Alexander, which is reminiscent of Plutarch's biographical practice.

*Crassus*.<sup>47</sup> Plutarch devotes over half of the *Nicias* to the Sicilian expedition,<sup>48</sup> and he certainly expects that his audience will be familiar with Thucydides' narrative, to which he is highly indebted.<sup>49</sup> On the one hand, Plutarch must feel that he has to make clear how his own narrative will be different (primarily) from that of Thucydides (as he does in the prologue to the *Alexander–Caesar* in relation to the historians of Alexander and Caesar), but at the same time to ensure that his audience will be ready to join in his moral investigation of the past. Thus the prefatory historiographical mode, which lies behind both prologues, may be used to establish 'a shared world of discourse',<sup>50</sup> whereby Plutarch and his audience will assume a mutual understanding. They are encouraged to expect that Plutarch's biographical narrative will lay more emphasis on character (*Nic.* 1.5; *Alex.* 1), but also that it will not entirely free itself from the modes, concerns, and (accordingly) values of historical writing. An elaborate manifestation of this is found, as we shall see next, in the *Theseus–Romulus* prologue.

### III. *Theseus–Romulus* Prologue: Myth, History, and Biography

The *Theseus–Romulus* book, dedicated to Plutarch's friend Sosius Senecio,<sup>51</sup> opens with a comparison between Plutarch's own activity as a biographer and that of geographers who 'crowd on to the outer edges [τοις ἐσχάτοις μέρεσι] of their maps the parts of the earth which elude their knowledge [τὰ διαφεύγοντα τὴν γνώσιν]' (1.1). 'In the same way,' Plutarch says, 'in the writing of my *Parallel Lives*, now that I have traversed those periods of time which are accessible to

<sup>47</sup> Stadter (1988) 277; Duff (2014) 340 mentions that Plutarch's statements in the prologue to the *Nicias–Crassus* mainly concern the *Nicias* rather than the *Crassus*; but he rightly notes that the closing words at the *Nic.* 1.5 (οὐ τὴν ἄχρηστον ... παραδιδούς) are applicable to both *Lives*.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. the brief account of the Sicilian Expedition in *Alc.* 17–23.

<sup>49</sup> Pelling (1992) 12–13 [= (2002a) 119] observes that Plutarch bases most of chapters 12–29 straightforwardly on Thucydides' narrative.

<sup>50</sup> I am indebted to Alexander (1999) 23 for the expression.

<sup>51</sup> Elsewhere in the prologues Sosius is addressed at *Dion* 1.1 and *Thes.* 1.1. See Pelling (2002b) 270, 272; Zadorojnyi (2006) 107 ('The figure of Senecio is important in itself, but it also acts as a deputy for the wider readership') and 106–7 with nn. 24 and 26; Duff (2011) 219 with n. 29; (2014) 334, 345 n. 13. As Marincola (1997) 52–7 stresses, dedications and addresses to friends, although not being a common characteristic of large-scale or 'Great' historiography, are often present in the other historical genres, such as biography, memoirs, epitomes, and works of local or 'antiquarian' history. On dedications in historiography in general, see also Janson (1964) 116–24; Herkommer (1968) 22–34; Alexander (1993) 27–9; Lachenaud (2004) 68.

probable reasoning [εἰκότι λόγῳ] and which afford basis for a history dealing with facts [ἱστορία πραγμάτων ἐχομένη], I might well say of earlier periods: “what lies beyond is fables [τερατώδη] and tragic stories [τραγικά], the land in which poets [ποιηταί] and mythographers [μυθογράφοι] dwell, where everything lacks in credibility [πίστιν] or clarity [σαφήνειαν]” (1.2–3).

Plutarch's geographical analogy finds a close parallel in Polybius' digression on the place of geographical information in history (3.57–9).<sup>52</sup> While Polybius discusses the outer limits of the world, he draws a contrast between mythographers and historians.<sup>53</sup> Polybius notes that it was impossible for earlier writers to give a true account (ἀληθῆ ἱστορίαν) of the regions at the extremities (περὶ τὰς ἐσχατίας) of the world. It was practically difficult for them, as Polybius explains, to reach and inquire into these outlying parts of the world, but even if they did it was even more difficult for them to scorn all talk of marvels and monsters (τῆς παραδοξολογίας καὶ τερατείας) and prefer the truth (τὴν ἀλήθειαν). On the contrary, in his time, Polybius stresses, it was possible because of travel and inquiry to arrive at a better knowledge (cf. βέλτιον γινώσκειν) and something closer to the truth (ἀληθινώτερον) about lands that were previously little known (3.58–9). The implication is that historians in Polybius' time did not need to rely on poets and mythographers to describe the unknown world: ‘This is the characteristic of the present age’, Polybius says elsewhere in his *Histories*, ‘in which, all parts of the world being accessible by land or sea, it is no longer proper to cite the testimony of poets [cf. ποιηταῖς] and mythographers [cf. μυθογράφοις] regarding matters of which we are ignorant [περὶ τῶν ἀγνοουμένων], as my predecessors have done on most subjects, “offering”, as Heraclitus says, “untrustworthy sureties [ἀπίστους ... βεβαιωτάς] for disputed facts”, but we should aim at offering to our listeners proper proof [ἱκανὴν ... πίστιν] through history itself [δι' αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας]’ (4.40.2–3).

Plutarch's practice, as stated in the *Theseus–Romulus* prologue, is precisely the opposite of the historiographic attitude of Polybius<sup>54</sup> or other historians who prefer to focus their histories on what is known. Herodotus, for instance, after recounting the Persian and Phoenician mythical tales about the origins of the conflict between Asia and Europe (1.1.1–5.2), concludes: ‘I will not say that this or that story is true, but I will name him whom I myself know [οἶδα] to have done unprovoked wrong to the Greeks, and so go forward with my history [cf. λόγου]’ (1.5.3). Herodotus' preference is for recent characters and

<sup>52</sup> Cooper (2007) 226–7, to whom I am highly indebted in this paragraph, argues that Plutarch seems to be echoing Polybius' text here. On the relation between geography and history, see Marincola (1999); Clarke (1999); Engels (2007).

<sup>53</sup> Marincola (1997) 127.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Cooper (2007) 227.

events, beginning with Croesus, rather than the mythical world of the unknown.<sup>55</sup> Plutarch, on the contrary, decides to enter the world of poets and mythographers, a world that eludes knowledge (*τὴν γνῶσιν*), clarity (*σαφήνειαν*), and credibility (*πίστιν*)—to use Plutarch’s own words—and which goes beyond rational inquiry (cf. *εἰκότι λόγῳ*) and the history dealing with facts (cf. *ἱστορία πραγμάτων ἐχομένη*). Polybius’ ‘pragmatic history’ (*πραγματικὴ ἱστορία*) leaps immediately to mind here.<sup>56</sup> This is the kind of history which, in Polybius’ opinion, should exclude the tales of gods and their offspring (3.47.8) as well as the telling of myths, and focus instead on the actual doings of nations, cities, and rulers (9.1–2).<sup>57</sup> Plutarch does not keep exclusively to pragmatic history, but, as he himself declares, decides to move beyond the boundaries of it (*Theb.* 1.4–5):

[1.4] But after publishing my account of Lycurgus the lawgiver and Numa the king, we thought we might not unreasonably [*οὐκ ἂν ἀλόγως*] go back still farther to Romulus, now that my history/historical enquiry [*ἱστορία*]<sup>58</sup> had brought me near his times. And as I asked myself [*σκοποῦντι δέ μοι*], “With such a warrior” (as Aeschylus says) “who will dare to fight?” [*Sept.* 435] “Whom shall I set [*ἀντιτάξω*] against him? Who can bear out trust?” [*Sept.* 395–6] [1.5] it seemed to me that I must make the founder of the lovely and famous city of Athens the counterpart and parallel to the father of invincible and glorious Rome. Let us hope, then, that the mythical [*τὸ μυθῶδες*] may submit [*ὑπακοῦσαι*] to us, cleaned up through reason [*ἐκκαθαίρομενον λόγῳ*], and take on the appearance of history [*ἱστορίας ὄψιν*]. But when it obstinately defies credibility [*τοῦ πιθανοῦ περιφρονῆ*] and refuses to admit any commingling with plausibility [*τὴν πρὸς τὸ εἰκὸς μείξιν*], we shall ask our listeners to be indulgent [cf. *εὐγνωμόνων ἀκροατῶν δεησόμεθα*] and to accept ancient history [*τὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν*] in a gentle mood [*πράως*].<sup>59</sup>

It is notable that Plutarch adopts the persona of a tragic actor to introduce the two men of his mythical pair of *Lives*. He cites two lines from the dialogue between the messenger and Eteocles in Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* but turns

<sup>55</sup> Asheri (2007) 78.

<sup>56</sup> See also Valgiglio (1987) 57.

<sup>57</sup> On Polybius’ notion of ‘pragmatic history’, see Gelzer (1955); Pédech (1964) 21–32; Petzold (1969) 3–24; Sacks (1981) 178–86; Meissner (1986). Plutarch juxtaposes ‘pragmatic history’ with biography in the *Galba* 2.5 (cf. above, n. 32).

<sup>58</sup> See Wardman (1974) 5; Duff (1999) 18.

<sup>59</sup> Part of the translation is taken from Pelling (2002d) 171–2, slightly adapted.

the dialogue into a personal reflection on the subject matter of his book.<sup>60</sup> The atmosphere of tragedy, which is evoked, serves as a most suitable vehicle for bringing the world of the two mythological biographies into the foreground, a world of fables and tragic stories (cf. *Thes.* 1.3: *τραγικά*) as Plutarch mentioned a few lines earlier,<sup>61</sup> and attuning the readers with it.<sup>62</sup> More remarkable, though, is Plutarch's attempt at purifying this world and making it look like history. To that end, I suggest, Plutarch uses sequences of thought and modes of expressions that are reminiscent of those found in the prefaces of the ancient histories.

Methodological prefaces, discussing the appropriateness of myth in history as well as the difficulties in relying on and recounting poetic and legendary tradition, are found in the historians who treated mythical material in their histories.<sup>63</sup> Plutarch's prologue to the mythical pair *Theseus and Romulus* is written largely under the influence of the historiographical precedent. Not only the commonality of subject matter and statements of method but also several parallels in details of phraseology reinforce the presence of this influence.

The verb *σκοπέω* that Plutarch uses to express his search for a counterpart to Romulus—'as I asked myself [*σκοποῦντι δέ μοι*]' (1.4)—recalls Thucydides' self-conscious presentation of the methods of his intellectual enterprise in the prologue to his *History*: 'Indeed, as to the events of the period just preceding this [i.e. the Peloponnesian War], and those that are still more ancient [*παλαιτέρα*], it was impossible to get information with certainty owing to the lapse of time; but judging from the evidence which I am able to trust after most careful inquiry [cf. *σκοποῦντί μοι*], I think that there was nothing great either

<sup>60</sup> Notice Plutarch's shift of the second person *τίν' ἀντιτάξεις* (*Sept.* 395) into first person *τίν' ἀντιτάξω* (*Thes.* 1.4).

<sup>61</sup> The association of myth with the world of stage is very often present in ancient historians, e.g. *Pol.* 2.16.13–15; *Diod.* 4.8.4; *D. Hal. AR* 9.22.3; *Thuc.* 5; 7; *Liv.* 5.21.8–9. Cf. Marincola (1997) 120 n. 296.

<sup>62</sup> *Pace* Bowie (2008) 152: 'his [i.e. Plutarch's] self-comparison to Eteocles is merely decorative *αὔξησις*'. I agree with Stadter (1988) 284, who argues that 'both [i.e. the quotes from Aeschylus and the *Iliad*] ornament the passage and set the atmosphere for the heroic stories which will follow in the lives'. See also Pelling (2002d) 172.

<sup>63</sup> e.g. Antiochus of Syracuse (*FGrHist* 555 F 2 = *D. Hal. AR* 1.12.3); *Thuc.* 1.21–2; *Diod.* 1.1–5; *D. Hal. AR* 1.1–8; *Liv. Praef.* 6. Marincola (1997) 117–27 offers an excellent overview of the attitude of historians towards myth. More generally, on myth in ancient historiography, see Wardman (1960); Fornara (1983) 4–12; Piérart (1983); Veyne (1983); Brillante (1990); Gehrke (2001); Bettalli (2006) 87–97; Saïd (2007); Muccioli (2012) 91–9; Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012). On Plutarch's views on myth, see Hardie (1992); Hirsch-Luipold (2014) 171–5.

in war or in other matters' (1.1.3).<sup>64</sup> Plutarch's reference to the mythical (τὸ μυθῶδες), moreover, which he wants to cleanse out through reason (λόγῳ)<sup>65</sup> and make it accept the guise of history (ἱστορίας ὄψιν) (1.5), recalls Thucydides' dismissal of τὸ μυθῶδες in his introductory programmatic remarks (1.21.1, 22.4).<sup>66</sup> It is clear that Plutarch means by mythical what he stated in the first chapter of the prologue: the material of his biographies which lie in a period that cannot be reached by 'plausible reasoning' (εἰκότι λόγῳ) and factual history (ἱστορία πραγμάτων ἐχομένη), a land dwelled by 'fables' (τερατώδη) and 'tragic stories' (τραγικά), poets (ποιηταί), and mythographers (μυθογράφοι), having neither credibility (πίστιν) nor clarity (σαφήνειαν) (1.3). Plutarch's language has close parallels in Thucydides' prologue. In Thucydides, τὸ μυθῶδες ('the fabulous', whether this should be understood in terms of mode or content)<sup>67</sup> is bound up with the accounts of poets (cf. ποιηταί) and logographers (cf. λογογράφοι), which cannot be tested (ἀνεξέλεγκτα) and remain incredible (cf. ἀπίστως) (1.21.1), and which due to the great span of time cannot be discovered with certainty (σαφῶς) (1.1.3). Verbal echoes are so striking that Plutarch might expect his readers to recall the Thucydidean parallels and notice how he keeps closely to but at the same time departs from the Thucydidean model.

Thucydides proposes to exclude 'the mythical', which he finds pleasurable to the ears (ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν), from his history of the Peloponnesian War. He focuses on a purely intellectual investigation (cf. τὸ σαφές σκοπεῖν) of events

<sup>64</sup> Trans. Hornblower (1991) 7, adapted. Cf. 1.22.4 with Hornblower (1991) 61: 'Whoever wants to have a clear picture (τὸ σαφές σκοπεῖν) of the events that happened in the past or of similar events which may be expected to happen in the future.' Plutarch uses the same verb in the prologues to the historical pairs of *Lives*, e.g. *Cim.* 3.1: 'On looking about [σκοποῦσιν ἡμῶν] for some one to compare with Lucullus, we decided that it must be Cimon'; *Dem.* 3.1: 'Writing in this fifth book of our *Parallel Lives* about Demosthenes and Cicero, we shall examine [ἐπισκεψόμεθα] their actions and political careers.'

<sup>65</sup> See Lloyd (1990) 45: 'One well known and recurrent motif in a variety of writers from the fifth century B.C. onwards is to represent what their predecessors or contemporary rivals offer as *muthos*, while what they themselves provide is *logos*.' For general discussions of the 'mythical' (*muthos*)/'rational' (*logos*) polarity, see the useful studies of Nestle (1940); Kirk (1974) 276–303; Buxton (1999); Pelling (2002d) 172 with n. 4 on p. 190 (with reference to the *Theseus–Romulus* prologue); Fowler (2011); Hirsch-Luipold (2014) 174–5, focusing on Plutarch's own reflections in the *Moralia*.

<sup>66</sup> See also Ampolo (1988) xi; Pelling (2002d) 172 with n. 3 on pp. 189–90 (189 n. 3: 'This is one of the more plausible "quotations" [sc. of Thucydides]—or at least allusions').

<sup>67</sup> Gomme (1945) 149 considers that 'the mythic' refers to the 'story-telling element' of the narrative. Cf. Flory (1990), suggesting that it refers to patriotic stories. Hornblower (1991) 61 takes it to mean the 'romantic', 'story-like' character of a narrative. See also Marincola (1997) 117 with n. 283: 'Now there is a general consensus that by the mythic (τὸ μυθῶδες) Thucydides meant the fabulous or storytelling element of his predecessors.'

that happened or may be expected to happen in the future, and which can render (as he states) his history profitable (cf. *ὠφέλιμα*) to the readers, 'a possession for all time, rather than a prize which is heard for the moment [cf. *ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν*]' (1.22.4). Plutarch, unlike Thucydides, decides to include *τὸ μυθῶδες* in his biographical narrative, and he pleads his readers, notably listeners (cf. *ἀκροατῶν*) here, to be indulgent and accept his ancient history (*τὴν ἀρχαιολογίαν*) gently in case the mythical material defies credibility (*τὸ πιθανόν*) and refuses to admit any commingling with plausibility (*τὴν πρὸς τὸ εἰκὸς μείξιιν*) (1.5). Plutarch's language implies tentativeness—he uses a cupitive optative (*εἴη μὲν οὖν ἡμῖν*)—that is present neither in Thucydides nor in other historians, such as Diodorus of Sicily or Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the last two being ready to admit, like Plutarch, mythical material into their histories (Diod. 1.4.6, 5.1; D. Hal. *AR* 1.8.1).

In the prologue to his *Historical Library*, Diodorus shows himself aware of the difficulties (*τὴν δυσχέρειαν*) involved in the treatment of myths (1.3.2). For this reason, he says, he will not attempt at fixing strictly (*βεβαίως*) the limits of those ancient periods, since he has no trustworthy (*πιστευόμενον*) chronological table at his disposal (1.5.1). He asserts, however, that he has investigated (cf. *ἐξετάσαντες*) to the best of his ability the accounts that people record of their earlier times (*κατὰ τοὺς ἀρχαίους χρόνους*) (1.4.5; cf. 4.1.4: 'we have expended all the care [*τὴν πᾶσαν ἐπιμέλειαν*] within our power upon the ancient legends [cf. *τῆς ἀρχαιολογίας*]'). Dionysius, unlike other people who may censure him (as he mentions in the prologue to his *Roman Antiquities*) for his treatment of the ancient myths of Rome as being 'unworthy of historical record [*οὐκ ἀξίας ἱστορικῆς ἀναγραφῆς*]' (1.4.1), states that this is a noble period of history (cf. *καλὴν ἱστορίαν*) (1.6.3), the true (1.5.1–2, 6.5) and accurate (1.5.4, 6.1, 6.3) portrayal of which will prove the illustrious origins of Rome and offer justification for its current rule over the world (1.2–6). Dionysius acknowledges the existence of uneasy and resistant readers as well, but it is only Plutarch who shows himself uncertain about his undertaking and asks for gentle listeners (cf. *εὐγνωμόνων ακροατῶν*).<sup>68</sup>

The word 'listeners', befitting the oral character of the material about Theus and Romulus and the overall theatrical atmosphere of the prologue (cf. *Quomodo adul.* 17a, in connection with fabulous narrative (*μυθοποίημα*)) may contain a nuance of 'casual reader', if one recalls Polybius' tripartite classification of readers in Book 9 of his *Histories*. Polybius distinguishes between three groups of readers to whom a different kind of history appeals: the reader who is 'fond of hearing' (*τὸν φιλήκοον*), 'the curious and lover of recondite' (*τὸν δὲ*

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 52–4, with Avenarius (1956) 113–18, on the prologues in historiography: Historians should not appeal for a favourable hearing, but simply give the audience what will interest and instruct them.



πολυπράγμονα καὶ περιπτόν), and ‘the statesman’ (τὸν πολιτικόν). The ‘genealogical kind’ (ὁ γενεαλογικὸς τρόπος) of history corresponds to the first, the accounts of ‘colonies, foundations of cities, and ties of kindred’ to the second, and the history of the deeds of nations, cities, and rulers to the third (9.1.4–5).<sup>69</sup> Polybius declares that he keeps to the political and military history that serves a useful purpose (cf. τῆς ὠφελείας) and is not for the sake of pleasure (cf. τῆς τέρψεως) (9.2.6). Besides this, Plutarch’s ‘listeners’ may recall Thucydides’ prefatory programmatic remarks, especially Thucydides’ connection of τὸ μυθῶδες with ἀκρόασις (‘hearing’). Thucydides stresses that the mythical material purports to ‘please the ear rather than truth’ (ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῆ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον) (1.21.1) and that his own history, devoid of ‘the mythical’, may appear less delightful to the ear’ (ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν) (1.22.4). Unlike Thucydides’ (and Polybius’) history, Plutarch’s biography, encompassing ancient history and hoping for assuming the *semblance* of history only, appeals for a ‘kind hearing’ (cf. εὐγνωμόνων ἀκροατῶν).<sup>70</sup>

Plutarch’s dialogue with Thucydides continues in the second chapter of the prologue (as it does in the rest of the *Life of Theseus* in which Thucycidean echoes are especially obvious)<sup>71</sup> where Plutarch presents both Theseus and Romulus as ‘combining their sagacity (τὸ ξυνετόν) with their strength (μετὰ τοῦ δυνατοῦ)’ (2.2). Ziegler prints ξυνετόν instead of συνετόν, which the codices give, thinking that Plutarch evokes an intertextual link with Thucydides’ reference to Theseus, who ‘became’, according to Thucydides, ‘king, having combined power with his intelligence [μετὰ τοῦ ξυνετοῦ καὶ δυνατός]’ (2.15.2). It is worthwhile to note that the Thucydidean resonances come directly after a quotation from the *Iliad* (7.281: ‘Both were also warriors, that surely we all know’), thus throwing into sharp relief the contrast between the world of poetry and that of history as well as Plutarch’s constant concern to demythologise his material and make it look like history. Plutarch closes the prologue with the same tentativeness as before, still doubting ‘if there is any aid [ὄφελός ἐστι] to the truth [πρὸς ἀλήθειαν] in what seems [δοκούντων] to have been told with the least poetic exaggeration [ἥκιστα τραγικῶς]’ (2.3). Plutarch’s reference to the truth echoes not only Thucydides (1.21.1, 22.1)<sup>72</sup> but also Diodorus of Sicily and

<sup>69</sup> Walbank (1967) 116–17. Cf. Plutarch’s similar use of the word ἀκροατής in *Lys.* 12.8 and *Tim.* 15.11. On this term in the *Lives* and the *Moralia*, see Valgiglio (1987) 53 n. 5.

<sup>70</sup> On Plutarch’s uneasy reader in the *Theseus–Romulus* prologue, see Stadter (1988) 283–4, 289; Pelling (2002b) 277. Cf. the previous section on the uneasiness of the reader in the *Alexander–Caesar* and *Nicias–Crassus* prologues.

<sup>71</sup> See Pelling (2002d) esp. 179–85.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Lucian, *Hist. Conscr.* 42: ‘For Thucydides says that ... he does not welcome the mythical [τὸ μυθῶδες] but is leaving to posterity the true account of what happened [τῆν ἀλήθειαν τῶν γεγενημένων].’ On truth as the object of history, see Avenarius (1956) 40–6; Herkommer (1968) 137–51; Muccioli (2012) 57 with n. 184.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who, in spite of their inclusion of myths in their histories, place a prime value in their prologues on the importance of historical truth-telling (Diod. 1.2.2; D. Hal. *AR* 1.1.2, 5.1–3, 6.5). Plutarch, like the historians, claims truthfulness for his biographical narrative, but, unlike them, he is no more confident by the end of his prologue about the results achieved: This is an *if*-claim about ‘what *seems* to have been told’ rather than what *has* been told ‘with the least poetic exaggeration’. Plutarch’s biography gestures towards history and employs its method again, but at the end it only takes on the semblance (*ὄψιν*) of it.

### Conclusion

I have argued in this article that in the prologues to his *Alexander–Caesar*, *Nicias–Crassus*, and *Theseus–Romulus* books, Plutarch uses themes, ideas, and techniques that are common to historical prologues in order to assert his authorial presence and discuss important matters of his own genre of biography. This literary strategy is not unique to Plutarch, but is rather characteristic of several authors of the Imperial period, who resort to historiographical *topoi* in order to comment on various facets of their mode of writing. Lucian and Seneca the Younger use themes and motifs of historical prologues in the introductory chapters of *True History* (1.1–4) and *Apocolocyntosis* respectively for laughs, playing on the contrast between truth and lies, an essential feature of their works.<sup>73</sup> Chariton exploits prefatory historiographical commonplaces in the beginning and the end, as well as the closing of the proem to the final book, of his *Callirhoe* in order to set (as Richard Hunter proposed) the readers in the proper atmosphere of the tale of Syracusan ‘history’ and invite them to deal with the gap between ‘history’ and ‘fiction’.<sup>74</sup> More recently, Dylan Sailor has thoughtfully suggested that Tacitus’ evocation of Sallust’s monographs in the prologue to the *Agricola* and the rest of the work influences significantly the reception of the character and importance of Tacitus’ authorial self and his project.<sup>75</sup>

Plutarch’s prefatory dialogue with the historians serves similar purposes: it invites the question about the nature of his literary genre and provides important indications of his own task and competence as biographer. In the three prologues, as we saw, the subject matter played a role in Plutarch’s prefatory choice. Plutarch was fully conscious of the dangers lying in writing about Alexander and Caesar (there were too many histories, and Alexander and Caesar were too great to be treated satisfactorily—cf. Arrian’s statements in his prologue to the *Anabasis of Alexander*) or about Nicias (Thucydides’ treatment was

<sup>73</sup> See Georgiadou and Larmour (1998) 1–3, 51 on Lucian; Eden (1984) 62 on Seneca.

<sup>74</sup> Hunter (1994). See also Hägg (1987) 194–8, 201–4; Alvares (1997); Trzaskoma (2005).

<sup>75</sup> Sailor (2004).

prominent and incomparable in many respects), or about Theseus and Romulus (the material of their lives enters the realm of myth and goes beyond the frontier of history dealing with facts). My suggestion is that Plutarch's adoption of some genuine features of historiography sharpens awareness of exactly what is shared and what is not, and that this can vary according to the texture of his material, the *Alexander–Caesar* and *Nicias–Crassus* coming very close for different reasons, while the *Theseus–Romulus* running particular dangers of being far removed but coming closer than one might think.

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