

HISTORY AND NOVEL IN ANTIQUITY: THE CHRONICLES OF DICTYS AND DARES

HISTÓRIA E ROMANCE NA ANTIGUIDADE: AS CRÔNICAS DE DÍCTIS E DARES

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Abstract: This article aims to discuss about the relationship between history and novel in the context of Antiquity. To do this, two prose narratives were chosen: *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* (*Journal of the Trojan War*), dating from the 4th century AD, and *De Excidio Troiae Historia* (*History of the Fall of Troy*), dating from the 5th century AD. *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* retell the Trojan War from a perspective of two soldiers and establish intertextuality with Homer and the entire classical collection of the Trojan myth. These two similar works develop a process of transforming what was considered myth into historical fact. They do it through demythologization and historicization, it is, making the divine presence and heroic power fading out and putting elements from historical discourse in the rhetoric of their narrative. This narrative structure has led some authors to assume the possibility of characterizing the two works as “historical fictions” or even “historical novels”. In this paper, this possibility will be analyzed in order to problematize the criteria of distinction between historical and fictional narratives and the issues about the crystallized model of the genres. In conclusion, the description of the two works reveals the approximation to the historical novel and, despite the distance in the time, could be both considered a type among the many specimens of this literary genre.

Keywords: History; Ancient Novel; Historical Novel; *Ephemeris Belli Troiani Dictys Cretensis*; *De Excidio Troiae Historia*.

Resumo: Este artigo objetiva discutir a relação entre história e romance no contexto da Antiguidade. Para isso, escolhem-se duas narrativas em prosa: *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* (“Diário da Guerra de Troia”), datado do século IV, e *De Excidio Troiae Historia* (“História da queda de Troia”), datado do século V. Ambas recontam a Guerra de Troia da perspectiva de dois soldados e estabelecem intertextualidade com Homero e toda a coleção clássica do mito troiano. As duas obras são semelhantes e desenvolvem um processo de transformação do que era considerado mito em fato histórico. Elas o fazem por meio da desmitologização e da historicização, ou seja, fazendo esmaecer a presença divina e o poder heróico e colocando elementos do discurso histórico na retórica de sua narrativa. Essa estrutura narrativa levou alguns estudiosos a assumirem a possibilidade de caracterizar as duas obras como “ficções históricas” ou mesmo “romances históricos”. Neste artigo, essa possibilidade será analisada a fim de problematizar os critérios de distinção entre narrativas históricas e ficcionais e as questões sobre o modelo cristalizado dos gêneros. Em conclusão, a descrição das duas obras revela a aproximação com o romance histórico e, apesar da distância no tempo, ambas podem ser consideradas um tipo entre os muitos exemplares desse gênero literário.

Palavras-chave: História; Romance Antigo; Romance Histórico; *Ephemeris Belli Troiani Dictys Cretensis*; *De Excidio Troiae Historia*.

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Introduction

This article aims to discuss about the relationship between history and novel in the context of Antiquity. To do this, two prose narratives were chosen: *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* (*Journal of the Trojan War*), a Latin text dating from the 4th century AD, the translation from a Greek text of the 2nd century AD, which today is known fragmentary; and *De Excidio Troiae Historia* (*History of the Fall of Troy*), also a Latin text, dating from the 5th century AD., which also claims to be a Latin translation of a Greek original text but this allegation has not yet found material evidence. On the contrary, there is consensus that this text is Roman and the mention of a Greek original is just a literary game. Both works deal with the Trojan legend. After Homer, many other ancient authors returned to this theme, in various ways and different genres. This list includes, for example, the Cyclic poems, the Greek tragedians Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus; the mythographers Apollodorus and Hyginus; and, finally, the great Roman poets Ovid and Virgil. Homer and his narratives were also the object of comments and studies by philosophers, such as Aristotle, and historians, such as Herodotus. In the field of fictional narrative, Homeric poems served not only as a model of language, style, and plot but also as a source of direct quotation and parody, as occurs in Petronius' *Satyricon*.

However, *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* establish intertextuality with Homer and the entire collection of the Trojan myth in a different way: they not only retell the **story** of the Trojan War, but they forge its **History**. Both *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* are narrated in the first person, under the voice of a soldier: in the first work, there is Dictys, a Greek officer from Knossos, city of Crete, who was enlisted in the Idomeneu's arms and has received the responsibility to write the annals of that war; in the second one, there is Dares, a Phrygian citizen, who assumes the same responsibility, on the Trojan side, however. Dictys begins his account by narrating the sharing of the Mycenaean king Atreus' goods after his death, tells about the escape of Helen with Paris Alexander, the preparation for war, the fighting, the fall of Troy and ends with the homecoming of the Greeks (*nostos*). The narrator Dares, on the other hand, unites temporally and consequently the episode of Jason and the Argonauts to the outbreak of the Trojan War by placing the abduction of Hesione, Trojan king Priam's sister, as a cause for Paris to respond the Greek affront with the kidnapping of Helen; he also narrates the

war but ends its chronicle with the fall of Troy, effected through the betrayal perpetrated by Antenor and Aeneas, as it also happens in *Ephemeris*.

The two works also contain paratexts (GENETTE, 1997) that, in addition to introducing the fictional accounts of Dictys and Dares, inform the circumstances in which they were written and their destination. The introductory text of *De Excidio* is a letter, signed by Sallustius and sent to Cornelius Nepos, both names of Roman historians. However, there is nothing to confirm its authenticity. On the contrary: one tends to believe that it is a fictional expedient. *Ephemeris*, in its turn, has a prologue and a letter, with similar contents. The prologue, written in the third person, is not signed and contains Dictys' identification, a very brief description of the annals, and a narrative about how the text was preserved after Dictys' death and how the document was later found and published during the Neronian period. The letter, however, is signed by Septimius and addressed to Aradius Rufinus. Little or nothing can be said with certainty about these men. The letter also brings the same content of the prologue and adds that Septimius translated and adapted the Greek text into Latin; he offers then the translation to his friend Rufinus.

Allied to this textual and paratextual structure, the narrative of these fictions emulates the historical discourse and promotes a process of purging the myth. Dictys and Dares report events chronologically, in a sober language, and with simple prose (MERKLE, 1999). The gods, frequently present and active in the Trojan cycle, are largely relegated to the background, intervening little and doubtfully in human acts. The wheel of history, therefore, is driven by the desires, virtues, and vices of men and women. According to Merkle (1999), this procedure can be considered a literary game for a public that is truly knowledgeable about Homer and the Trojan myth. For this very reason, this specific audience can take advantage of these changes in form, content, and essence regarding the Trojan narrative.

Therefore, these two works seem to be of particular interest because they develop a process of transforming what was considered myth into historical fact. They do it, at the same time, through **demythologization** and **historicization**. This double process has led some authors to assume the possibility of characterizing the two works as “historical fictions” or even “historical novels” *sui generis* (PEINADO, 2015). This article seeks to investigate this possibility.

Historical novel in antiquity

Characterizing historical novel in Antiquity is complicated and demands questions on what and how people have used to understand about novel and history. The two narrative genres must be taken separately and also how they could be intersectioned, as both would be under a large discursive group called “narrative”, distinguishing themselves by some special features. In order to do that, D'Ippolito (2010) has proposed the following criteria for the distinction between novel and historiography: i) choice of expressive means and external forms (poetry/prose; high/medium/low style; extension of text); ii) enunciative modes (monological/dialogical); iii) semantic modes (fictionality/veracity); iv) social functions (entertainment/cognitive-pedagogical). Applying these criteria, the novel and historiography would come out with very close results: i) they are in prose, they have a medium style and an extension between short and long; ii) they are predominantly narrative, even if they have inserted dialogues; iv) although it is a modern consensus that historiography excels for the cognitive-pedagogical function whereas the novel for entertainment, it does not seem to be a static determination, as both participate more or less in each point of the dichotomy; finally, the great distinction would fit the fictionality/veracity pair because iii) it is assumed that historiography would deal with the *real* while the novel with the *fictional*. This last aspect, however, seems to be difficult. This question can be taken from Plato, for whom the poet would not be able to reach the Truth, not even know the reality, because the artist would be the “artificer of images”, three degrees away from Nature, from the Reality. The illustrious follower of Plato, for his part, believed that the poet was able to organize a plausible story that, eventually, may even contain the Reality (GOBBI, 2004, p. 40). Aristotle, therefore, understands literary discourse, poetic *mimesis*, as the

“representation of the credible and the necessity, that is, of what could happen, regardless of its connection with an external 'truth', and subordinated only to a kind of coherence, that would be able to persuade the listener”² (GOBBI, 2004, p. 40).

² “representação do verossímil e do necessário, ou seja, daquilo que poderia acontecer, independentemente de sua vinculação com uma 'verdade' exterior, e subordinado apenas a uma espécie de coerência interna que fosse capaz de persuadir o ouvinte”. My translation.

Mythos, understood as fiction, “would constitute an elaborate set of elements chosen and managed according to a necessary order”³ (GOBBI, 2004, p. 40). History, on the other hand, would have to narrate the events that really happened and that did not necessarily comply with the criteria of necessity and verisimilitude.

Gobbi (2004, p.40) also points out that Aristotle's view regarding the distinction between fiction and history would lay not in the form (*verse* or *prose*) but in the content of the narration. The author interprets that Aristotle grants the “function” that Plato had stolen from fiction by giving it the possibility of unveiling appearances, leading man to know the essences, because, as she describes, while history is limited to reports of particular events, poetry presents itself as announcing more general truths - universal - precisely because of its paradoxical power to reveal the illusory of the world in which we live, thus reaching the universal through the mediation of the particular.

Even though the poet is an artificer of representations, he is not prohibited from referencing external content, whether present or past:

[...] It is clear then from these things, that the poet must be a maker of stories rather than of meters, insofar as he is a poet by virtue of imitation, and he imitates actions. And he is no less a poet should he happen to make what came to be, for nothing prevents some of the things that came to be from being the sort of things it is likely would come to be, and it is in light of this that he is a poet (ARISTOTLE, 2002, p. 27-28).

It is not, therefore, even the nature of the narrated contents (real or just credible) that encompasses the distinction between being a fiction writer and being a historian.

With the same attempt to discern history and fiction, Brandão (2005), a scholar of the ancient novel, proposes three distinctions that would separate the literary narrative from the historical narrative in terms of narration, which are reworked in the table below:

Literary narrative	Historical narrative
It refers to the universal and deals with what could happen.	It refers to the particular and aims at what happened.
It is organized according to the criteria of verisimilitude and necessity.	It is based on the conformity of the actions as they happened in a determined time,

³ “constituiria um conjunto elaborado de elementos escolhidos e agenciados segundo uma ordem necessária”. My translation.

	keeping with each other a purely casual connection.
It aims to produce pleasure.	On the other hand, its scope is education.

The specificity of the poetic (literary) narrative is linked to *poieîn*, as Brandão (2005, p. 53) explains: “from the point of view of production, it is the work of a *po(i)et*; from the point of view of the product [arguments and characters], it is *po(i)etized*; from the point of view of reception, it produces (*poieî*) pleasure in receiving”.⁴ Thus, the manufacture, the action of creating, is the basis of the poetic narrative, even though they consider particular facts, which would be primarily of interest to History. Once again, there is the dichotomy posed by D’Ippolito, in which the pleasure/fun aspects are strictly linked to the truth-fiction opposition. In Brandão’s opinion (2005), the question of truth that marked the dialogue between Philosophy and Historiography with Literature since the 6th century BC., reaches its peak in the 2nd century AD, due to the definitive imposition of the prose fiction narrative as a literary genre, confusing the frontier that, even in Aristotle’s time and at least in the subsequent three centuries, practically circumscribed Literature to the versified form. The prose fiction narrative, that is, the *novel*, by merging the fictional intention with the prose form, confuses the audience’s expectations. Momigliano (1978 *apud* D’IPPOLITO, 2010, p. 67), a scholar of Greek historiography, states that in Ancient Greece there would be no strict criterion for distinguishing a novelistic from a historical book. For him, neither Greeks nor Romans had terms to proceed with such distinction. It should be added, still, that the old theorizing passed on from touching the novel and considering it a literary genre. However, it is worth to remember, together with García Gual (2006, p. 118), the Emperor Julian’s letter, in which contained instructions for the position of the priests, in order to make them aware of such fictions:

It would seem good to us if they read historical accounts, of which they are made up of real events. But it is necessary to prohibit all the fictions (πλάσματα) spread by those of yesteryear in the form of historical account (ἐν ιστορίας εἶδει παρὰ τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν) love affairs (ἐρωτικὰς ὑποθέσεις), and, in one word, others with the same style. Well, just as any path is not suitable for priests, and they must also be proscribed, in the same way, any reading is

⁴ “do ponto de vista da produção, é obra de um *po(i)eta*; do ponto de vista do produto [seja argumentos, seja personagens], é *po(i)etizada*; do ponto de vista da recepção, produz (*poieî*) prazer no receber.” My translation.

not decent for a priest. For the readings produce in the soul a peculiar disposition, and in a short time they awaken the desires, and afterward, they enliven a tremendous flame, before which, I believe, one must remain on guard from afar.⁵

It should also be noted, according to the author, that “in the form of historical account” can allude to two characteristics: the first concerns the broad prose narration (formal character belonging to both the novel and historiography); and the second one, to the historical elements in the novel (facts, events, names of kings, etc.). They would be distinguished, once again, by the fact that the novel is a fiction (*plasmata*), adding to this a characteristic content: love story (*erotikas hypotesis*). In this same vein, Brandão (2005) reports from Hermogenes a triple division, consisting in mythic narrative (*diégema mythikón*), historical narrative (*diégema historikón*) and plasmatic or dramatic narrative (*diagema plasmatikón* or *dramatikón*), corresponding respectively to the Latin terms *fabula*, *historia*, and *argumentum*. According to this scholar, the novel can be placed in this last category. Brandão (2005) adds that the term is very relevant since the adjective form *plasmatikón* has the late meaning of “false, deceptive and, in the sphere of rhetoric, theatrical, dramatic”, and while the substantive form, *plasma*, designates “A modeled figure or thing, the modulation of the voice or sound of the flute; the character; the style, a simulated appearance”; he completes stating that “in a specialized sense, *plasma* indicates “fiction, the invention, that is, a modeled, modulated and simulated section in which the writer's activity finds its parallel in that of the sculptor who composes a figure or a scene from stone, clay or another material” (BRANDÃO, 2005, p.70). The word “fiction”, from the latin *factum*, “made”, is not far from this etymological explanation.

If, on the one hand, it is observed that fiction inserts, always molding, historical elements in the narrative, the opposite movement is also noted in historiography. According to Maxwell (1998), the idea that History is a pure form without any fictional element has its origins in a few centuries ago, considering that, for example, in many historians before the 18th century, fictional supplements can be found, such as

⁵ “Nos parecería bien que leyeran relatos históricos, de los que están compuestos sobre hechos reales. pero hay que prohibir todas las ficciones (πλάσματα) difundidas por los de antaño em forma de relato histórico (έν ιστορίας εἶδει παρὰ τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν), argumentos amorosos (έρωτικὰς ὑποθέσεις) y en una palabra todos los demás por el estilo. Pues como tampoco cualquier caminho es adecuado para los sacerdotes, y también hay que proscribirlos, del mismo modo tampoco cualquier lectura es decente para um sacerdote. Pues las lecturas producen em el alma una disposición peculiar, y em breve despiertan los deseos, y luego de probto avivan una tremenda llama, ante la que, creo, hay que mantenerse em guardia desde lejos.”. My translation.

speeches invented in Thucydides. Ricoeur (1984) assumes that “The relation between history and fiction is certainly more complex than we can ever say” (p. 34). According to this author, “To do history is produce something” (p. 21), it is, the historical discourse is a product of human creativeness, as novel as well. But, for some others, “the recourse to documents marks a dividing line between history and fiction” and “Unlike the novel, the constructions of the historians are intended to be reconstruction of the past” (RICOUER, 1984, p. 1). In this sense, the historian is an “insolvent debtor” to the past as it *really* was, and this past is set down in documents or reports. However, this statement become complex when dealing with historical novel, because the same recourse is used in this genre in order to make fiction.

In the context of the ancient novel, *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* highlight this difficulty of indistinguishable between novel and historical narrative when inserting techniques of historiography into their structure. Zimmermann (2009, p. 96) states that “The historical novel occupies the middle ground between fiction and history, which can result in the assimilation of literature into historiography”. For some authors, there is not a historical novel in Antiquity because Lukács (1989, p. 19) established the social and historical conditions for the rise of the historical novel in the nineteenth century. Although he claims that “novels with historical themes are to be found in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, too, and, should one feel inclined, one can treat medieval adaptations of classical history or myth as ‘precursors’ of the historical novel and indeed go back still further to China or India”, even citing Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the most famous of those, in his opinion, specimens before Scott's work lack the specifically historical element, which he defines as “derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age” (LUKÁCS, 1989, p. 19). Anyway, although Lukács has, on the one hand, opened a theoretical gap through which various examples would enter, which mix prose fiction narrative with historical themes and elements, on the other hand, he restricts the context, because of his materialist-historical approach, and chooses Scott as the model of this genre. Just as he established the novel as a bourgeois epic, he determined the historical novel as the becoming of the aesthetic and historical consciousness of bourgeois man.

However, some scholars of the ancient novel have considered the difficulty of establishing the relationship between history and fiction and the possibility of a historical novel in the ancient period, such as Hägg (1987), García Gual (2006), and Zimmermann (2009). Sano (2015, p. 74), for example, assumes that

in the period when the ancient novelists has written the truth-fiction relationship is still a two-way street: not only does fiction appropriates historiographical elements but historiography can used fictitious elements and rhetorical adornments, to a greater or lesser degree, with different purposes. Furthermore, more than Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius, a strand of Hellenistic historiography would have developed along the lines of an author such as Ctesias of Cnidus, a historian at the end of the 5th century BC who has been described as a liar since antiquity, whose Persian history and an account of travel to India are summarized by Photius (cod. 72). Hägg (1983, p. 14) describes the summary of the first work well by stating that in it “historical facts fight an inglorious battle with the desire to shock, move, excite and dazzle”. This extensive work, written in twenty-three books, would be inscribed on the border between historical and fictional narrative.⁶

The clearest evidence of this tenuous limit is certainly Xenophon, author of the narratives *Hellenica*, *Anabasis*, and *Cyropaedia*. These works are traditionally considered to belong to Greek historiography, but, as Cerdas (2016) demonstrates, this label can be used only for the first text, whereas the second one would be a narrative of adventure and return, and the last work, for having fictional elements, appears as proto-novel. Cerdas, in fact, characterizes *Cyropaedia* more specifically as a kind of historical novel.

Hägg (1987), for his part, traces his discussion of the ancient historical novel to understand to what extent this concept can be dealt with in antiquity. Having as object the Greek proto-novel Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, and the fragmentary and anonymous *Metiochus and Parthenope* (both 1st century BC), he establishes some parameters of analysis, which are: **time**, because there must be a period between the time of the narrated events and the composition of the novel; **characters**, who are fictional in a historical context, with a focus on personal experiences and individual private life; **setting**, which must be a background recognized as historical; and, finally, the "**truth**" or "**historical probability**", which in Lukács' words (*apud* Hägg, 1987, p. 189) consists of "an artistically faithful image of a concrete historical epoch". To sum up, the author considers a typical historical novel to be one that:

⁶ “No período da Antiguidade em que escrevem os romancistas, a relação verdade-ficção é ainda uma via de mão-dupla: não só a ficção se apropria de elementos historiográficos, mas a historiografia pode se valer, em maior ou menor grau, com intuitos diversos, de elementos fictícios e adornos retóricos. Além disso, mais do que de Heródoto, Tucídides e Políbio, uma vertente da historiografia helenística teria se desenvolvido nos moldes de um autor como Ctésias de Cnido, historiador do final do século V a.C. tachado de mentiroso desde a Antiguidade, cuja História Persa e um relato de viagem à Índia são resumidos por Fócio (cod. 72). Hägg (1983, p.14) descreve bem o resumo da primeira obra ao afirmar que nela “os fatos históricos lutam uma batalha inglória com o desejo de chocar, comover, excitar e deslumbrar”. Essa extensa obra, escrita em vinte e três livros, se inscreveria no limite entre narrativa histórica e narrativa fictícia.”. My translation.

is set in a period at least one or two generations anterior to that of the author, communicating a sense of the past as past; it is centered on fictitious characters, but puts on stage as well, mingling with these, one or several figures known from history; enacted in a realistic geographical setting, it describes the effects upon the fortunes of the characters of (a succession of) real historical events; it is – or gives the impression of being – true, as far as the historical framework is concerned. It may also aim at achieving an artistically true reconstruction of the historical period in question and its way of life, making the characters typical representatives of their age and social milieu. Such an aim, or success in achieving it, is not a prerequisite, however, for the classification; as Harry Shaw pertinently remarks, “it is more useful to discriminate between great and mediocre historical novels than to exclude imperfect works from the group”

Similarly, García Gual (2006, p. 115) summarizes what he means by historical novel:

[...] the action of the novel must take place in a time away from the present, its characters are fictitious individuals, whose life experience is shaken by the events of that time, and in the plot great characters of the same usually appear, well-defined historical silhouettes; the geography of the novel is also important and supposes an essential context to the story; the action is plausible and, since it is not true, since it is a fiction, it must fit well into the era sought, with references to particular events of this time (some great event or a major catastrophe, be it a war or an earthquake, for example, it comes very close to giving *pathos* to the fate of the protagonists, a fate immersed in historical events).

Zimmermann (2009, p. 97-98) establishes three elements that characterize the historical novel:

1. The title or the first pages of historical novels make clear references to history; these might be dates, names, events and cultural details which convey the temporal distance of the text from the present day of the reader and emphasise the difference between the text and the here and now.
2. Admittedly, this chronological distance and difference can be bypassed at important, climactic moments. With deliberately inserted anachronisms, the text is brought into the present time of the reader; this is a technique which English philologists describe in tragedy as the “zooming effect”. The text becomes a looking glass for the present day; it might discretely pass criticism on society and act subversively. In this case, one can speak of the parabolic historical novel.
3. Authors of historical novels tend to write forewords, in which they discuss in a serious, playful or ironic manner, the difficulties in acquiring material, the archival research, etc., or, as Walter Scott and recently Elisabeth Plessen have done, they evaluate the genre often in an apologetic manner.”

Although Hägg considers *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* as pseudo-documentary war chronicles, they seem to contain the requirements set out above by him and also by García Gual. On their way, the two texts report a historical event, with characters

who while are fictitious also carry a historical spirit due to tradition,⁷ their story takes place in a vast geographic field, and, as far as the truth is concerned, they elaborate an intricate rhetorical-literary game that evokes the discussion of the validity of the myth in the face of historical events. In Zimmermann's criteria, the works also find touchpoints, since, as they have become known, their titles bear marks of historiography in their formulation and present in their texts moments in which the methodological and material issues of historiographic making are highlighted. As for the distance of the author concerning the narrated time and the time of writing, it seems impertinent to apply this concept, given that the forge of a first-person narrator necessarily dismantles this time gap. It does so not without reason, because, in fact, in the historical line of Thucydides, the character of fidelity to the truth was given by the presence in the events (*autopsia*; *in loco*; witness), and, in this point, the narrators of *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* fit perfectly. These aspects will be briefly pointed out and discussed in the next section.

The Chronicles of Dictys and Dares: Myth Becomes History

The narratives of Dictys and Dares are heirs of Homeric revisionism and interpretive rationalism that can be observed, according to Elvira (1982, p. 14), since the 6th century BC. There was a tendency to see in myths a metaphorical way of expressing some hidden reality other than that present on the surface of the text (written or oral). For example, the allegorists has tended to examine the myths narrated as an ornate linguistic form to characterize in a special way natural phenomena (elemental deities such as Helium/Sun, solar god; Aeolus, guardian of the winds; Poseidon/Neptune, lord of the sea) and human moral qualities or faculties (Aphrodite/Venus, goddess of love; Hypnos/Somno, personification of sleep; Ares/Mars, divinity of war). Another trend that has gained wide acceptance was euhemerism, based on the Euhemerus of Messene's *Sacred History*. In this line of interpretation, roughly, myths have historical origins, such as the Zeus' case, who would have been a proud king who decreed a cult of himself, which has continued after his death (ELVIRA, 1982, p. 17). Differently, Thucydides is characterized as a "much more rational and humanist" historian and, consequently, "in his work, there is no place

⁷ In the paratexts, however, historical characters appear: Nero, Sallustius, and Cornelius Nepos (see bellow).

for divinity, only for the men” (SOARES, 2010, p. 409).⁸ In this sense, although the historian still has expressed respect for moral and religious norms, he doubts oracles, atmospheric phenomena, epidemics, etc. because they come from a supernatural factor. For instance, Plutarch believes it is possible to undo the fabulous elements through reason. During the Second Sophistic, around the 2nd century d. C., other works undertook Homeric revisionism in diverse ways, like Lucian, Philostratus, and Dio Chrysostom (MERKLE, 1999; MOVELLÁN LUIS, 2015; LENTANO, 2016; MOVELLAN, 2015). Participating in this revisionist desire, *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* tend to purge the myth by introducing elements of the historical narrative. This procedure takes place in order to make the chronicles of Dictys and Dares became reliable documents about the Trojan War. Therefore, the primary strategy of these narratives was to set a narrator in the first person who supposedly has lived the events that he narrates. The fact that they are *in loco* allows them to receive historical material first-hand, as war reporters. In the translators’ paratexts, there is a highlight on the participation of the event:

Lucius Septimius sends greetings to Quintus Aradius Rufinus. Dictys of Crete originally wrote his Journal of the Trojan War in the Phoenician alphabet, which Cadmus and Agenor¹ had spread throughout Greece. Dictys had served in the War with Idomeneus.

After many centuries the tomb of Dictys at Cnossos (formerly the seat of the Cretan king) collapsed with age. Then shepherds, wandering near the ruins, stumbled upon a little box skilfully enclosed in tin. Thinking it was treasure, they soon broke it open, but brought to light, instead of gold or some other kind of wealth, books written on linden tablets. Their hopes thus frustrated, they took their find to Praxis, the owner of that place. Praxis had the books transliterated into the Attic alphabet (the language was Greek) and presented them to the Roman Emperor Nero. Nero rewarded him richly.

When these little books had by chance come into my hands, I, as a student of true history, was seized with the desire of making a free translation into Latin; I felt I had no special talent but wanted only to occupy my leisure time. I have preserved without abridgment the first five volumes which deal with the happenings of the War, but have reduced into one volume the others which are concerned with the Return of the Greeks. Thus, my Rufinus, I have sent them to you. Favor my work as it deserves, and in reading Dictys...⁹ (FRAZER, 1966, p. 19)

Cornelius Nepos sends greetings to his Sallustius Crispus. While I was busily engaged in study at Athens, I found the history which Dares the Phrygian wrote about the Greeks and Trojans. As its title indicates, this history was written in Dares’ own hand. I was very delighted to obtain it and immediately made an exact translation into Latin, neither adding nor omitting anything, nor giving any personal touch. Following the straightforward and simple style of the Greek original, I translated word for word.

⁸ “muito mais racional e humanista”; “na sua obra não há lugar para a divindade, apenas para os homens.”. My translation.

⁹ The end of the letter has been lost.

Thus my readers can know exactly what happened according to this account and judge for themselves whether Dares the Phrygian or Homer wrote the more truthfully – Dares, who lived and fought at the time the Greeks stormed Troy, or Homer, who was born long after the War was over. When the Athenians judged this matter, they found Homer insane for describing gods battling with mortals. But so much for this. Let us now turn to what I have promised. (FRAZER, 1966, p. 113)

This privileged position allows them to make a reliable chronicle of the war. The Latin title of the works refers to the content: *Ephemeris* means "journal", the official note of a journey, and it is similar to Julius Caesar's *Comentarii*; *Historia*, in turn, it is a more common word, but specific to the historiographic genre. Dares' text is also known as "acta diurna", meaning "chronicle", similar to the meaning of *Ephemeris*.

Still observing the paratexts, there is a very recurrent topic of historical fiction, "truco del manuscrito reencontrado", as García Gual (1996) called it. Many historical fictions, such as Eco's novel "The Name of the Rose", usually present their main narrative as a text that had been randomly discovered, or rather, rediscovered by someone. The text could be compared to a treasure:¹⁰ until then it was hidden by luck, untouchable, and that, when it comes to light, reveals its importance and the need to be known. At this point, it is important to note the arguments of Septimius and Sallustius in the letters regarding the desire to preserve the texts: the first of them, after describing the trajectory of the text, explains that he translates it not because he has talent, but because he needs to scare away leisure, so that, taking advantage of this leisure, it makes available the truest document on the Trojan War. On the other hand, Sallustius directly questions Homer, pointing out that Dares lived the war and told it, and the Greek poet only poetized what he had heard. In addition to this chronological argument, the pseudo-Sallustius indicates that the widespread presence of the gods in Homeric poems is a cause for distrust among Athenians. In fact, in the chronicles, the classical face-to-face performances of the gods are abandoned or transformed into omens, premonitory dreams, or unusual events. Throughout the text, the narrators also attest to their sources of information and organize the textual structure, which demonstrates their awareness of historical and official activities.

Ephemeris: [1.13] Soon afterwards Idomeneus and Meriones came, who were the closest of friends. (I followed along with these. As to what happened earlier at Troy, I have tried to make my report as accurate as possible, Ulysses being

¹⁰ *Ephemeris, Prologue*: "Then shepherds, wandering near the ruins, stumbled upon a little box skilfully enclosed in tin. Thinking it was **treasure**, they soon broke it open, but brought to light, **instead of gold or some other kind of wealth**, books written on linden tablets."

my source. The account that follows, based as it is on my own observations, will meet, I hope, the highest critical standards.) (FRAZER, 1966, p. 30)

Ephemeris: [5.17.] I, Dictys of Cnossos, the companion of Idomeneus, have written this account in the language (how many there are!) I best understand, using the Phoenician alphabet bequeathed to us by Cadmus and Danaus. No one should marvel that many different languages are spoken on this one island of mine, for such is the case all over Greece. Everything I have written about the war between the Greeks and the barbarians, in which I took a very active part, is based on first-hand knowledge. What I have told about Antenor and his kingdom was learned on inquiry from others. Now it is time to relate the returns of our men. (FRAZER, 1966, p. 118)

De Excidio: [12] Dares the Phrygian, who wrote this history, says that he did military service until the capture of Troy and saw the people listed below either during times of truce or while he was fighting. (FRAZER, 1966, p. 142)

De Excidio: [44] So much and no more Dares the Phrygian put into writing, for, as a faithful follower of Antenor, he stayed on at Troy. The war against Troy lasted ten years, six months, and twelve days. The number of Greeks who fell, according to the Journal that Dares wrote, was 866,000; the number of the Trojans 676,000. (FRAZER, 1966, p. 168)

Given this brief characterization, it is clear that *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* mix historiography and myth, making these two aspects converge in a narrative that is neither mythological nor historical, but the middle of the road between both. This halfway is the path of the novel, a proper place for novelizing other genres (BAKHTIN, 2002). They can be characterized as pseudo-documentary, as it is the strategy used to falsify “the most reliable texts on the Trojan War”; they can also be characterized as *pseudohistories* in the sense that each one narrates his version of the events of the Trojan War, which are established as an alternative to the poetic and mythological narrative; they would still approach *historical fantasy*, considering its legendary characters and some unusual events, such as the episode of Iphigenia in *Ephemeris* (1.19-23) and the manes preventing the Greek departure in *De Excidio* (43). With due reservations, *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* can be characterized as *historical novels*. Its peculiarity is in the vector of transformation: instead of making what was historical into fiction, they transformed what was fiction into history.

Conclusions

The novels studied here do not solve the problem of the boundaries between history and literature; on the contrary, it accentuates this problem. Both works return to a mythological content and transform it, through *demythologization* and *historicization*, into pseudo-historical content. However, in a general sense, a historical novel in

Antiquity is not conceived due to the difficulty of accepting the thesis that ancient prose narratives are part of the novelistic genre. This difficulty is doubled when one tries to fit the two works in the historical novel. Even so, if *Ephemeris* and *De Excidio* are not historical novels, they are, at least, prose fiction that intentionally uses elements of historical discourse to formulate a fictional narrative. This description is, therefore, nothing but a possible definition of a historical novel.

It is also worth to mention that the two works reached the Middle Ages as real historical accounts and were responsible for the perpetuation of the Trojan narrative during this period. In this chain of transmission, they are the link that allows Homer to be known by Shakespeare. The Italian writer Guido de Columnis (13th century), in his *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, states that Dictys and Dares were *fidelissimi relatores*, “very reliable sources”. This characterization reveals that the intention of historicity and veracity as a historical document was successful for a long time. In 1819, fictional authors Dictys and Dares inaugurated a collection of ancient Greek historians vulgarized for the Italian language (*Collana degli Antichi Storici Greci Volgarizzati*). In that same series, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Strabo, Pausanias, among others, would be in sequence. However, this historical credibility was already revised in an edition of these works from 1702 by Ludovico Smids, in Jacob Perizonius' *Dissertatio*, reproduced again in the edition elaborated by Dederich in 1837, in which the scholar treats them as “late falsifications” (MOVELLÁN LUIS, 2015).

Finally, later studies result in total disbelief of the historiographical content of the Dictys' and Dares' chronicles. Nowadays they are clearly on the shelf of fiction literature, perhaps close to Eco, Manzoni, and Scott, lost in the section of historical novels.

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