CHAPTER II

ASPECTS AND TRENDS IN ARCHAIC ROMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historical writing, characterized by meticulous research on present and past episodes in Roman history, starts with the work of Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus in the second half of the 3rd century B.C. during the years of the second Punic war. Until then the memory of the past had been entrusted to the archives of the magistrates, the priestly colleges, and the patrician families, and was little more than a chronicle of facts which occurred from year to year. In these circumstances, the annals written by the Pontifex Maximum assumed the status of official public records.

But the direct confrontation with Carthage and the Greeks in Sicily after the first Punic war created a new situation in which Rome, by now a great power in the western world, naturally felt the need to provide its own interpretation of its legendary origins and its history which had already been the object of historical research by the Greeks[1]. The scarcity of testimonials

1. We do not propose to tackle the complex and debated problem of the multiple variants of the legend of the origins of Rome in the Greek tradition and in modern historical criticism. Besides the somewhat questionable work of J. Perret, *Les origines de la légende troyenne de Rome (281-31)*, Paris 1942, cf. the most recent studies: F.Bömer, *Rom und Troia: Untersuchungen zur Frühgeschichte Roms,* Baden Baden 1951; E.J.Bickerman, 'Origines gentium', *Class.Philol.* 47, 1952, p.65 ff.; E.Manni, 'Sulle più antiche relazioni fra Roma e il mondo ellenistico', *Parola d.passato* 11, 1956, p.183 ff.; A.Alföldi, *Die troianischen Urahnen der Römer*, Basel 1957; C.J.Classen, 'Zur Herkunft der Sage von Romulus und Remus', *Historia* 12, 1963, p.447 ff.; Mazzarino 1966, I p.191 ff.; II/1 p.67 f.; Gabba 1966, p.133 ff.; H.Strasburger, *Zur Sage von der Gründung Roms*, Heidelberg 1968; J.Heurgon, *Rome et la Méditerranée occidentale jusqu'aux guerres puniques*, Paris 1969, p.223 ff.; K.Galinski,

and documentation does not of course permit us to measure the profundity of this research; there is no doubt however that, beginning with Theophrastus in the 4th century B.C.[2], interest in Rome induced Greek culture to acquire an ever more complete and precise knowledge of it, until, with Hieronymus of Cardia and still more with Timaeus, the Greeks recognized the decisive importance of the presence of Rome, which, after the victory over Pyrrhus, had become a leading force in Mediterranean politics[3].

The work of the first two Roman historians, Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus, consciously placed itself in this tradition: their choice of Greek as the institutional language of historical writing, that is, a cultural language which guaranteed the accessibility of the work to the broader public of the Hellenized world,[4] was not fortuitous. This was a dialectical confrontation, in which Roman history undoubtedly adopted polemically independent views, but at the same time borrowed the institutional forms of historical narrative from Greek historiography. Moreover, a similar attitude in Hellenistic culture may be found in other non-Greek writers such as the Babylonian Berosus and the Egyptian Manetho (first half of the 3rd century B.C.) who wrote the history of their peoples in Greek, sometimes in open opposition to Greek historians[5].

Aeneas, Sicily and Rome, Princeton 1969; Musti 1970; Peruzzi 1970, p.26 ff.

2. See Pliny, *N.H.*3,57 = *F.Gr.Hist.*840 F 24a: *Theophrastus qui primus externorum aliqua de Romanis diligentius scripsit.*

3. Cf.Hanell 1956, p.150 and especially Momigliano 1966, p.44 ff., who attribute to Timaeus the merit of having first understood the new role of Rome in western history.

4. Cf. Cic.*Pro Arch.*23: *Graeca leguntur in omnibus fere gentibus, Latina suis finibus, exiguis sane, continentur.*

5. Manetho, for example, argues openly with Herodotus (*F.Gr.Hist.*609 F 13). For the parallel with Manetho and Berosus, cf. the acute observations of Momigliano 1966, p.61 and in *Histoire et historiens dans l'antiquité, Entret.Hardt* IV, Vandoeuvres-Genève 1956, p.172 f. Again, in the 1st cent.B.C. the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus declares (*Bell.Iud.* 1,1-3) that he is using Greek for the same purpose of making his own interpretation of the history of his people generally accessible, in contrast to those who had falsified the facts "either out of adulation of the Romans or out of hatred for the Jewish people".

It has been rightly noted[6] that, between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century B.C., Roman foreign policy had a concrete need to recall past events in propagandistic terms and above all to demonstrate to the Greek world the traditional good faith of the Romans in their relations with their allies as well as the purely defensive nature of the many wars they had fought. From a thorough analysis of the information we possess on the diplomatic activity undertaken in those decades it clearly emerges that one of the recurrent themes in the addresses of both Greek and Roman ambassadors was in fact the detailed discussion of the rights and wrongs of the policy of war or of alliance pursued by the Romans in a more or less recent past. When, for example, the propraetor M. Valerius Laevinus went to the Aetolians in 211 B.C. to persuade them to ally themselves with Rome, he felt the need to illustrate the juridical principles that had always regulated the relations between Rome and amicable national groups. To some of these the right of citizenship had been conceded, while others had preferred to maintain the status of allies (*socii*), so many and so great were the advantages connected with this qualification[7]. More than ten years later, at the outbreak of the second Macedonian war (199 B.C.), Macedonian and Roman ambassadors engaged before the Council of the Aetolian League in a proper rhetorical debate which was also historiographical. The Roman representative, L. Furius Purpurio, had to reply point by point to the accusation of the Macedonian orator who had conducted a close and impeccable analysis of the last half-century of history. His intention was to unmask the aggressive and imperialistic nature of Roman policy and to demonstrate how the Romans had always regarded the alliances and the defense of their allies as a mere pretext for military intervention in zones still outside their influence and thus as a means of subjecting them to their own dominion[8].

6. Gelzer 1969, p.79 ff.
7. Livy, 26,24,1-3
8. Livy, 31,29-31.

In this climate of distrust which threatened to spread over the whole Greek world and unite it against Rome while the latter was engaged first in the decisive struggle with Carthage, and later in a delicate policy of penetration toward the Eastern Mediterranean, it was natural that the Romans should feel the need for an organic reconstruction of their past history. This would permit them to present themselves to the other nations in a better light and to reply to the multiple and ever harsher accusations of which they were the object. Such diplomatic and propagandistic function of historiographical works also explains the use of Greek by the Roman historians at the time when Naevius and Ennius were celebrating the history of Rome in Latin verse, obviously addressing a very different public, the community of their fellow citizens.

Indeed, the history of the first Punic war was written in Greek by Philinus of Acragas who, according to the testimony of Polybius[9], presented the facts from a point of view completely opposed to that of Fabius and openly defended the Carthaginian policy:

> An equally powerful motive with me for paying particular attention to this war is that, to my mind, the truth has not been adequately stated by those historians who are reputed to be the best authorities on it, Philinus and Fabius. I do not indeed accuse them of intentional falsehood, in view of their character and principles, but they seem to me to have been much in the case of lovers; for owing to his convictions and constant partiality Philinus will have it that the Carthaginians in every case acted wisely, well, and bravely, and the Romans otherwise, whilst Fabius takes the precisely opposite view. [Translated by W.R.Paton].

Elsewhere Polybius[10], dealing with the causes of the second Punic war, shows up Fabius' aptitude still more clearly:

> Fabius, the Roman annalist, says that besides the outrage on the Saguntines, a cause of the war was Hasdrubal's ambition and love of power. He tells us how, having acquired a great dominion in Spain, he arrived in Africa and attempted to abolish the constitution of Carthage and change the form of government to monarchy. The leading statesmen, however, got wind of his project and united to oppose him, upon which Hasdrubal, suspicious of their intentions, left Africa and in future governed Iberia as he chose, without paying any attention to the Carthaginian Senate. Hannibal from boyhood had shared and admired Hasdrubal's principles; and on succeeding to the governor-generalship of Iberia, he had employed the same method as Hasdrubal. Consequently, he now began this war against Rome on his own initiative and defiance of Carthaginian opinion, not a single one of the notables in Carthage approving his conduct towards Saguntum. [Translated by W.R.Paton].

9. 1,14,1-3 = Fab.Pict.fr.21 Peter² = *F.Gr.Hist.*809 T 6a.
10. 3,8,1-7 = Fab.Pict.fr.25 Peter² = *F.Gr.Hist.* 809 F 21.

In open polemic with Fabius, Polybius denies that the cause of the second Punic war should be attributed to the initiative of Hasdrubal and the conduct of Hannibal: it should, rather, be considered as a complex convergence of various factors, among which the policy pursued by Hamilcar Barca, starting from the years of the war in Sicily, was decisive. If first Hasdrubal and then Hannibal had really acted in complete disagreement with the entire Carthaginian senate, we would be unable to understand why this latter body did not comply with the Romans' request, and surrender Hannibal, who was responsible for the acts of injustice committed[11].

Even without going any more deeply into the argument, it is evident that Fabius' simplification in his analysis should not be attributed to insufficient knowledge of the political facts, but to an evaluation of the events demonstrating beyond a shadow of doubt the injustice and the abuse of power perpetrated by Hannibal and the legitimacy of the ultimatum issued by the Romans. The bias given by Fabius to his argument effectively reflects that partiality towards the Roman point of view which Polybius had attributed to him when he placed him on a par with Philinus, a supporter of the Carthaginian cause. The charge of insuffi-

11. 3,8,8-11. On Polybius' quarrel with Fabius, about the cause of the second Punic War, and on the philo-Roman implication of Fabius' thesis, cf. the lucid and balanced analysis of D.Musti, 'Polibio e la storiografia romana arcaica', in *Polybe, Entret.Hardt* XX, Vandoeuvres-Genève 1974, p.120 f.

cient understanding of the historical facts formulated by Polybius with regard to Fabius should be considered in the general light of the controversy pursued by Polybius with his predecessors who had committed the error of not adhering to the methodological principles of his "apodeictic" historiography.

Even if he does not explicitly affirm it, Polybius' argument thus reveals a substantially propagandistic attitude in Fabius' narrative, an attitude that some scholars[12] have wrongly denied without providing arguments which invalidate the testimony of the Greek historian.

In fact, when we tackle the problem of archaic Roman historiography in the perspective of its institutional genesis and its methodological implications, we experience an unsettling disorientation with regard to the heterogeneity of modern criticism: that close-knit web of hypotheses and interpretations, in most cases undermined by a fundamental misunderstanding of what, already in Greek culture, were the real terms of a theoretical debate on the use of history.

For example, the search for "causes" in the Fabius fragment has led some modern scholars into error, inducing them to see in him a historian of a "pragmatic" or, rather, "apodeictic" tendency[13], a harbinger, in the field of Roman historiography, of the method that was later to be theorized by Polybius[14]. In Fabius we undoubtedly sense the desire to identify the genesis of

12. Bömer 1953, p.202; D.Timpe, 'Fabius Pictor und die Anfänge der römischen Historiographie', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der röm. Welt* 1/2, (J.Vogt gewid.), Berlin-New York 1972, p.931.

13. For the meaning of the terms 'pragmatic' and 'apodeictic', cf. Chapter 1, n.86.

14. The two essays of Gelzer (1969, pp.77-129; 130-153), which had the merit of making a clear distinction between the earliest Roman historical writing in Greek and the pontifical annals, take for granted some theoretical propositions which, far from being acceptable, are actually misleading to the extent that they start with the presupposition that historiography different from the pontifical annals must necessarily be 'pragmatic' and that a propagandistic historiography would be *simply* a 'pragmatic' historiography. Gelzer makes no attempt to define the notion of 'pragmatic' historiography, a notion which always remains extremely vague in his work.

the facts by returning to the political motives of their protagonists. But in this case the quest for cause has a propagandistic function and is not inspired by the principles of the apodeictic method. In other words, when Fabius Pictor was speaking of the expansionist policy recommended by Hasdrubal and Hannibal in opposition to the senatorial oligarchy he was also seeking to show that the Romans had been forced to take up arms to defend themselves from a war of aggression, favoured by the Barca dynasty with precise objectives of personal power, but disapproved of by the more responsible classes of the Carthaginian people. The search for "causes" was not an exclusive result of Polybius' "apodeictic" method.

Fabius' deliberately argumentative message achieves a clear and decisive increase in quality with respect to the tradition of the pontifical annals. To understand this is not enough to identify the political reasons for a historiography different from a pure and simple annalistic record, but we must also tackle the problem of this new form of historical writing on an institutional level. The literary annals must be judged according to the criterion of readability, unlike the pontifical annals which, because they were chronicles, intended for the archives, were not concerned with their relationship with proper reading public (see Appendix I).

Some modern critics[15] have wanted to deny a discontinuity between the tradition of the pontifical annals and the historiography of Fabius Pictor, Cincius Alimentus, and the others who followed in their footsteps, initially using Greek and, later, with Cato inaugurating Latin historical writing. Of course the lack of any proper fragments of the original pontifical chronicle makes it more difficult to reach any rigorously demonstrable or definite solutions. However, while the testimony of Cicero, Servius and Cato[16] suggests a type of extremely concise report, more like a list of brief propositions than an articulated and

15. Bömer 1953, p.202.

16. Cf. Appendix I.

organic narrative, a likely hypothesis[17] is that we can see a reflection of the narrative mode of the *commentarii pontificum* in some passages of the works of Livy, especially in linking passages in which the author limits himself to a succinct listing of the facts which he believes to be less relevant from the historical point of view.

This hiatus between the tradition of the pontifical annals and the historiography of the third and second century B.C. poses precise problems of a historical-cultural order, the solution of which is suggested by Leo[18]: "The style (in the pontifical chronicle) was undoubtedly brief and concise; there is no question of the diffuse and thorough narrative, which was only to arise under the influence of the Greek technique".

But we have seen how impossible it is to speak of a single univocal Greek historiographic technique and how several tendencies and methodologies coexisted which were not only distinct but controversially opposed to each other.

The problem of the earliest Roman historiography thus becomes identified with the need to determine which of the tendencies of Greek historiography had a preponderant influence on Fabius Pictor, Cincius Alimentus and the Roman historians of the second century B.C., before the teaching of Polybius made its innovating influence felt.

The Greek historian who first treated Roman history in more than a marginal way, and made it the principal subject of the narrative, was Timaeus of Tauromenium[19]. Significantly enough Polybius considered Timaeus his own immediate predecessor as historian of the Roman people: he refused to recount the facts already related by him and began in the year in which his work came to an end (264 B.C.). If Timaeus was the first to understand the part that Rome was setting out to perform in the political arena of the West, he presumably exercised

17. Peter 1914, p.XXV ff.

18. 1913, p.44.

19. The way in which Gellius,11,1,1 = *F.Gr.Hist.*566 T 9e, cites his work is relevant: *Timaeus in historiis quas oratione Graeca de rebus populi Romani composuit.*

a decisive influence on those first Roman writers who wrote the history of their people in Timaeus' own language. His was also a decisive contribution in that he offered the model of a historiographic structure different to the pontifical chronicle. We thus arrive at the hypothesis of a substantially "Isocratean" character of archaic Roman historiography, if Timaeus can really be placed in that same historiographic school which embraces the work of Ephorus and Theopompus[20]: a hypothesis which will naturally have to be confirmed by an analysis of the fragments, but which meanwhile tallies perfectly with the propagandistic tendency[21] of Fabius' narrative and with what has already been said about his search for causes in his pages on the second Punic war.

No one has emphasized with sufficient clarity that the identification of the reasons for historic events was also considered a characteristic of the historiography of the "Isocratean" school by ancient critics. The ultimate purpose of the etiological analysis, as in Fabius' passage on Hasdrubal and Hannibal, was the moral denunciation of a crime for which the protagonist of a political act is responsible. Dionysius of Halicarnassus[22] writes about the Isocratean Theopompus:

> The most characteristic element of his history, which is not developed with equal care and efficacy in any of the other historians, either past or present ... is the aptitude, while treating various political facts, not only to see and to say what is evident to everyone, but also to seek the hidden motives (*aitíai*) of the actions and of the man who accomplished them and the passions that agitate the mind, which are not easy to discern in the majority of men.

From Polybius' remarks on Fabius Pictor it clearly emerges that the causes of the war were attributed by the Roman

20. On the 'Isocratean' character of the narrative technique of Timaeus' work cf. p.27 ff.

21. On the propagandistic aim peculiar to Isocratean historiography and, in particular, on the tendentiousness of Timaeus, cf. the analysis of Levi 1963, p.195 ff.

22. *Epist.ad Pomp.* 6,7 (II p.246,6 Us.-Rad.).

historian to those very "passions that were agitating the mind" of Hasdrubal, to his arrogance (πλεονεξία), and to his boundless ambition for power (φιλαρχία) which Hannibal had profoundly admired and assimilated from his adolescence onwards. This analysis of the causes placed its stress more on the subjective and emotional components than on the objective reasons of a strictly political order with which Polybius was mainly concerned.

But if, from a narrative point of view, this early Roman historiography reflected the modes and the attitudes of Hellenistic historiography, the influence of the traditional chronicle material (besides the decisive contribution of the Greek historians who had concerned themselves with Rome) must not be underestimated. Moreover, though differing greatly from the bare listing of facts peculiar to the *Annales Pontificum,* the new historiography retained the annalistic form of the year by year report[23] and, like rhetoric, remained a literary phenomenon of the governing class which thus found an instrument suitable for asserting "its interpretation of history and political reality"[24] and for emphasizing the ethnographic aspects and religious values which it considered proper to Roman tradition.

Another feature that links Roman historical writing with its Greek model is that its object was essentially the origins of Rome and contemporary history. This relates historical writing to the epic of Naevius[25] and Ennius[26], as has often been pointed out. The events between the remotest origins and contemporary history received slight emphasis and were not developed proportionately to the rest of the work. The resulting polarization of

23. J.Vogt, *Gnomon* 12, 1936, pp.513-527 = *Römische Geschichtsschreibung*, herausg. von V. Pöschl, Darmstadt 1969, p.199, rightly observes, as against Gelzer, that the annalistic ordering of the material does not in itself exclude a historical narrative more complex and reasoned than that of the pontifical chronicle.

24. La Penna 1967, p.57.

25. See finally L.Ferrero, *Rerum scriptor. Saggi sulla storiografia romana*, Trieste, Università degli Studi, 1962, p.17.

26. Peter 1914, p.LXXIV n.2; Gabba 1966, p.133 ff.

historical interest[27] had already been noted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus[28] when he accused Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus of only narrating "succinctly" the events following the foundation of the city. Nor did Cato's technique differ, for Roman history of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. was given little to no space in the seven books of the *Origines*. The origins of Rome, the period of the monarchy, the origins of the Italic cities and contemporary history from the Punic war onwards were the almost exclusive subject of his narrative.

This historiographic scheme was variously justified either by the political vocation of the Roman historians, who were politicians and protagonists of the history they were writing[29] rather than writers, or by the hypothesis of an insufficient documentation for the intermediate period between the origins and contemporary history[30].

A different approach[31], but which only takes the cultural significance of the phenomenon into partial consideration, consists of comparing the practice of the Latin historians with that of some Greek historians and particularly of the atthidographers like Philochorus, the author of a history of Attica (*Atthís*).

27. Cf.Gabba 1966, p.135 ff.

28. 1,6. The same expression (κεφαλαιωδῶς) is used by Dionysius (*Opusc.*I, p.340,2 Us.-Rad.) with reference to the brief account that Thucydides gives of the *pentekontaetía*, that is, of the 50 years of Athenian history which elapsed between the Persian war and the Peloponnesian war; cf. Gelzer 1969, p.146.

29. La Penna 1967, p.58 ff.

30. Cf.Gabba 1966, pp.138 f.; 164 ff., who explains the lack of documentation on the first republican age up until the Samnite wars by the dependence of the Latin historians on Greek sources. According to Gabba, the main objective of Greek historical writing about Rome, which develops above all from the 4th cent.B.C. when Rome began to assume an unquestionable political importance, was to insert Rome 'into the framework of Greek history': for this reason it was almost exclusively concerned with the origins and the regal period at the expense of the 5th century and the first half of the 4th century. For the hypothesis of the lack of documentation, see also D.Timpe, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der röm.Welt cit.* p.949.

31. Peter 1914, p.LXXIV; Walbank 1945, p.17 ff.; M.Barchiesi, *Nevio epico,* Padova 1962, p.202 n.1051a; Hanell 1956, p.165.

In reality this polarization reflects, as we have seen[32], a mental scheme that permeates all Greek historical thought: a conception that establishes a direct and immediate relationship between the world of the origins and the present through the paradigmatic value of myth. The mythical personage becomes a model of ethical and civic behaviour who, even in a social structure different from the Greek one, functions as a constant reference to the integrity of behaviour, frugality and simplicity proper to primeval times. Typical is the manner in which Piso Frugi evokes the human and behavioural aspects in the private, everyday life of Romulus. Gellius writes[33]:

> Lucius Piso Frugi has shown an elegant simplicity of diction and thought in the first book of his *Annals,* when writing of the life and habits of King Romulus. His words are as follows: "They say also of Romulus, that being invited to dinner, he drank but little there, giving the reason that he had business for the following day. They answer: 'If all men were like you, Romulus, wine would be cheaper'. 'Nay, dear', answered Romulus, 'if each man drank as much as he wished; for I drank as much as I wished' ". [Translated by J.C. Rolfe].

The first king becomes a symbol of that parsimony and integrity on which the political rise of Rome is said to have been founded. This model life was deliberately contrasted with the new customs which had been introduced into Roman society after the direct contact with the Greek East, but which continued to be regarded as a cause of inevitable moral and civic decadence. In the work of Piso Frugi, no less than in that of Cato, we find a denunciation of the laxity of customs, of the spreading of luxury, immodesty and lasciviousness of the young[34]. The paradigmatic relationship between the mythical

32. See p.7 f.

33. 11,14 = fr.8 Peter².

34. Frr.34; 38 and 40 Peter². In fr.34 an explicit reference is made to luxurious furnishings imported from Asia in 187 B.C. by Gnaeus Manlius Vulso, on the occasion of his triumph. Livy too (39,6,7) places the beginning of the decadence of ancient morality in 187 B.C. A very precise allusion to this cultural panorama within which the new customs imported from Greece were

past and the present thus becomes coloured by a sense of mistrust of the present, through a direct awareness of a progressive and irreversible moral crisis. It then becomes the basis of a pessimistic conception of history due to remain one of the fundamental motifs of Roman culture[35]. This historiographical pessimism does not, however, exclude a faith in the destiny of Rome already present in the historical epic of Naevius[36] and in Fabius Pictor, judging at least from the meaning he attributed in his work to the very name of *Capitolium*[37]. It is an eschatological conception of history which does not clash with the genetic legend, but rather confers a value on it and sees in the act of foundation the beneficial roots of future events that will mark the progressive fulfilment of Rome's providential rôle[38].

From the outset, therefore, Roman historiography is characterized by a moralistic attitude, reflecting on the ethos of peoples and individuals, an attitude which brings us back to the "Isocratean" school of historiography. Quite apart from its moralistic and moralizing function, moreover, the insistence on

becoming the object of severe moral criticism is found in the oration delivered in 129 B.C. by Scipio Aemilianus who was nevertheless one of the most convinced champions of the Hellenization of Roman culture (fr.19 Malcovati). Cf.A.D.Leeman, *Orationis ratio. The Stylistic Theories and Practice of the Roman Historians and Philosophers* I, Amsterdam 1963, p.53.

35. On the fundamental pessimism of Roman historiography, see V.Pöschl, 'Die römische Auffassung der Geschichte', *Gymnasium* 63, 1956, p.190 ff.; M.Mazza, *Storia e ideologia in Tito Livio*, Catania 1965, p.78 ff.; La Penna 1967, p.187 ff.

36. B.Snell, *Antike u.Abendland* 13, 1967, p.160 ff.

37. From the narration of Arnobius 6,7 = fr.12 Peter² we learn that Fabius Pictor had already derived *Capitolium* from *caput Oli,* narrating the legend of the discovery of the head of Olus on the slopes of the Capitoline. Already in the work of Fabius, therefore, as in that of the later historians, this legend must have been regarded as a premonitory sign of the future destiny of Rome.

38. The categories of the beginning and the end are behind all ancient historical thought according to which that which has a beginning exists historically, while that which has no beginning is historically non-existent. On the model provided by these categories which also influence more recent cultural systems see the pages on 'cultural typology' by J.N.Lotman, *Il Verri* 2, 1973, p.25 ff. = J.N.Lotman-B.A.Uspenskij, *Tipologia della cultura*, It.trans.Milano 1975, p.135 ff.

the myth of the origins and the foundation of Rome is another element which can be traced back to the same school with its predilection for genealogies and for legends of the foundation of cities and their reciprocal relationships. This is an aspect which will later be accentuated in Roman historiography by Cato, who, following in this same tradition which had its most recent and authoritative interpreter in Timaeus, was to give an ethnographic slant to his historical work, placing alongside the narration of the origins of Rome an account of the origins of all the other Italic cities[39].

But also the other aspects of the polymorphic variety of "Isocratean" historiography have correspondences in the work of the first Roman historians. We see a search for narrative impulses capable of winning over the reader by means of a deliberate use of the fantastic or marvellous, for example in the recurrent and detailed description of miraculous and premonitory dreams. Some of these dreams are attributed to the legendary heroes, like the one which, according to Fabius Pictor[40], gave Aeneas a clear notion of his future exploits and of the vicissitudes he was to encounter. Others are attributed to great leaders of the more recent past, such as the dream of Hannibal narrated by Coelius Antipater[41], while yet others are ascribed to unknown and anonymous personages, entrusted by the divinity with an important message for their fellow citizens and the constitutional organs of the State[42].

The interest common to Theopompus and Timaeus in the customs of the peoples and ritual usages was undoubtedly already present in Fabius Pictor. We see this from the description of the first magnificent celebration of the Roman games[43],

39. On the influence the work of Timaeus had on Cato, enlightening remarks may be found in De Sanctis 1953, p.60 ff.; L.Moretti, 'Le *Origines* di Catone, Timeo ed Eratostene', *Riv.filol.class.* 30, 1952, p.289 ff.

40. Fr.3 Peter².

41. Fr.11 Peter².

42. Fab.Pic.fr.15 Peter². According to the testimony of Cicero, *De div.*1,26,55, the episode of the peasant's dream recalled by Fabius Pictor also appeared in the work of other historians such as Gellius and Coelius Antipater.

43. Fr.16 Peter².

a type of account representing the event in a spectacular visual form so as to revive it in all its "mimetic reality" according to a narrative procedure peculiar to the so-called tragic historiography of Duris and Phylarchus.

In presenting the earliest performance of the ceremony of the games Dionysius himself[44] feels the need to state that his purpose is not so much to make the account more attractive with "spectacular" narrative tones as to provide further confirmation of the thesis of the Greek origin of the Roman people. But when he recognizes these "theatrical" aspects (προσθήχας θεατρικάς) of the narrative he is about to begin, he implies that these same characteristics were also present in Fabius, from whom he claims to have taken the description of the ceremony[45]. Such a narrative element also permeated the account on the origins, if Plutarch[46] perceived in it a conspicuously "dramatic" character common to the analogous account of Diocles of Peparethos, which Plutarch himself indicated as Fabius' source[47].

After the decisive defeat of King Antiochus III of Syria (190 B.C.), the Romans, having virtually attained the hegemony of the Mediterranean in the East as well as in the West, felt less need of a political alliance with a part of the Greek world. Little by little, therefore, that diplomatic and propagandistic impulse from which the historical work of Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus had drawn its initial motivation diminished, as did the very reason which had made Greek the institutional language of Roman historiography. Cato's decision to adopt the Latin language was consequently timely: beyond the polemical context within which Cato himself undoubtedly set the innovation, making it a part of his tireless campaign in favour of Roman traditions and against the Hellenizing fashion, it responded to a truly new situation, which rendered nonsensical

44. 7,70,1.

45. 7,71,1.

46. *Rom.*8,9.

47. Aspects of tragic historiography in the work of Fabius Pictor, as well as in that of Philinus of Acragas, have been spotted by Walbank 1945, p.1 ff.

the use of Greek once the public at which historical writing was aimed had changed. The example of Cato was therefore followed unhesitantly by others, such as L. Cassius Hemina, L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi, C. Fannius and Gnaeus Gellius, who all narrated the history of Rome in Latin, beginning with the myth of the origins and ending with events they themselves had experienced.

This decline of the Greek language as the instrument of historical narrative is clearly documented by Cato's witty criticism[48] of his contemporary Aulus Postumius Albinus. The latter, faithful to the use of Greek, felt bound to display a gratuitous modesty in the proem of his work, and to excuse himself for eventual stylistic imperfections[49].

The most eloquent sign of the change of the times may be perceived in the fact that Aulus Postumius Albinus not only attracted the polemical darts of Cato, whose touchy anti-Hellenism was sometimes incompatible with an objective judgment, but was also derided for his snobbish and ingenuous Graecomania by Polybius himself[50] in an unusually humurous and vivid page of his *Histories*.

The linguistic substitution did not of course entail a different orientation in institutional principles and narrative techniques. The model of Timaeus remained in force; indeed with Cato, as we have seen, Timaeus' influence increased. At this point, rather, the need arose of applying to Latin the same principles which regulated the art of elocution in Greek historiography of the "Isocratean" school. It was certainly an arduous task which Cato was reluctant to undertake on account of his systematic rejection of stylistic research and the theory that the word should be a mere instrument of communication.

In a celebrated passage in *De oratore*[51], Cicero confirms that the first Roman historians in Latin, from Cato to L. Calpurnius

48. *Ap.*Gell.11,8,1.
49. Fr.1 Peter².
50. 39,1.
51. 2,12,53-54.

Piso Frugi, had no interest in the stylistic problem, maintaining that the only true value of the word was concision, the capacity of expressing concepts with the maximum clarity and the maximum brevity. By so doing, Cicero again observes, they were following the example of the pontifical annals. This latter affirmation has been misunderstood by those who have sought to interpret it as an unassailable proof of the substantial continuity in Roman culture between pontifical historiography and literary historiography[52]. Instead it refers exclusively to elocution, as is proved by Cicero's insistence on the lack of stylistic ornaments (*sine ullis ornamentis ... neque tenent quibus rebus ornetur oratio*).

Where the organization of historical writing is concerned, the full distance both of Piso and of Cato from the narrative technique of the Pontifices may be measured if we consider certain heavily mimetic and dramatic passages, such as Piso's description of Romulus' behaviour during the banquet, or Cato's famous passage on the voluntary sacrifice and military virtue of the tribune Q. Caedicius[53].

The first Roman author who felt the need of a formal elaboration in historical writing in Latin was Coelius Antipater, whose adherence to the historiography of the Isocratean school also emerges from the taste for the hyperbolic and the marvellous which characterizes some fragments of his monograph on the Hannibalic war[54]. He theorized about the problem of style in the proem of his work, underlining the difficulty of conciliating the rhythmic requirements of the sentence with those of a correct arrangement of the words from a linguistic point of view. Given the scantiness of the fragments we are certainly not able to formulate a judgment on the results of his stylistic commitment. In any case Cicero regarded them as significant in relation to the epoch in which Coelius Antipater had worked, but insufficient and clearly superseded by the later

52. Bömer 1953, p.195.
53. Fr.83 Peter².
54. Frr.11; 39 Peter².

historiographical production[55].

But the fundamentally Isocratean nature of the earliest Roman historiography was called in doubt by Polybius, both through the objective novelty of his work, and the harsh and violent polemic he conducted on several occasions against Timaeus and, besides Timaeus, against Ephorus and Theopompus, the two direct disciples of Isocrates. Polybius does not criticize the Roman historians directly but limits himself to demolishing the authority of the Greek masters from whom they had learned their art. Ultimately, Roman historical writing must have appeared to him as a marginal phenomenon which interested him more because of the concrete problems relating to the history of Rome than because of the methodological position.

The first to object to the method followed by the Roman historians from Fabius Pictor onwards was Sempronius Asellio, connected, like Polybius, with the cultural circle of the Scipio and who, together with Polybius, Panaetius and Lucilius, took part in Scipio Aemilianus' expedition to Numantia. Gellius[56] has transmitted some propositions of a methodological nature in the first book of his work which are the most explicit and coherent affirmation of the basic principles of the "apodeictic" method as opposed to the narrative techniques of the earlier Roman historiography:

> But between those who have desired to leave us annals, and those who have tried to write the history of the Roman people (*inter eos qui annales relinquere voluissent et eos qui res gestas a Romanis perscribere conati sunt*), there was this essential difference. The books of annals merely made known what happened and in what year it happened, which is like writing a diary, which the Greeks call ἐφημερίς. For my part, I realize that it is not enough to make known what had been done, but that one should also show with what purpose and for what reasons things were done (*etiam quo consilio quoque retione gesta essent demonstrare*) [...]. For annals cannot in any way make men more eager

55. *De or.*2,12,54; *Or.*69,229; *Brut.*26,102; *De leg.*1,2,6.
56. 5,18,7-9 = frr.1-2 Peter².

> to defend their country, or more reluctant to do wrong. Furthermore, to write over and over again in whose consulship a war was begun and ended, and who in consequence entered the city in a triumph, and in that book not to narrate what happened in the course of the war (*quae in eo bello gesta sint iterare*), without explaining what decrees the senate made during that time, or what law or bill was passed, and with what motives these things were done — that is to tell stories to children, not to write history[57] (*id fabulas pueris est narrare, non historias scribere*). [Translated by J.C. Rolfe, with some slight changes].

Two different ways of presenting a historical discourse are here contrasted; one is purely expository, orientated towards the simple statement of the facts. The other is analytic and demonstrative, intent on discovering the reasons and the intentions behind the events. The first way is defined as *annales relinquere,* the second as *res gestas perscribere.* But if the antithesis is extremely clear in itself, endless discussions have arisen about the type of historiography which Sempronius Asellio has in mind in his polemic. The difficulties spring from an interpretative hypothesis, which almost all scholars have unhesitantly adopted as obvious and unworthy of further verification, but which appears highly questionable in the light of a more attentive analysis. It was thought that the term *annales* and Sempronius' definitions of the corresponding way of writing history (*annales*

57. As we know the final part of the passage presents a textual problem to which various solutions have been given: *scribere autem, bellum initum quo consule et quo confectum sit et quis triumphans introierit ex eo libro quae in eo bello gesta sint, iterare id fabulas non praedicare aut interea quid senatus decreverit aut quae lex rogatiove lata sit neque quibus consiliis ea gesta sint iterare: id fabulas pueris est narrare, non historias scribere.* The solution here proposed is that of R.Till, which reads: *iterare,* [*id fabulas*] *non praedicare ... ea gesta sint,* [*iterare*] *id fabulas.* This textual choice was questioned by E.Pasoli in reviewing the first edition of the present volume (*Lingua e stile* 13, 1978, pp.323-325). Even if his arguments which had already appeared in critical publications do not lack substance and deserve attentive consideration, we nevertheless believe that the reasons which induced us to accept Till's hypothesis prevail. On the other hand we do not agree with him in regarding the expression *ex eo libro* (*et eo libro* Till), as an interpolation. We accept, rather, the point of view of Gabba, Timpanaro, Di Benedetto (cf.Momigliano 1966, p.59 n.9), and M.Mazza, in *Studi in memoria di C.Sgroi (1893-1952)*, Torino 1965, p.575 f.

libri tantummodo quod factum quoque anno gestum sit etc.) indicated the type of narrative represented by the pontifical annals. This interpretation was to generate a series of contradictions since Sempronius' theoretical formulation seems to involve the whole preceding historical tradition and not only the pontifical annals which had just found their definitive form in the volumes of the *Annales Maximi* published around 120 B.C.

The attempts to solve the problem have proceeded in three different directions:

1) It has been supposed that post-Catonian annalistic history written in Latin in the 2nd century B.C. returned, for its narrative technique and style, to the forms of the commentaries of the Pontifices[58]. The publication of the *Annales Maximi* would thus represent the final result of that historiographical tendency. This is a very feeble hypothesis which does not find sufficient confirmation in the texts.

2) According to a different hypothesis[59], Sempronius' polemic is exclusively directed against the pontifical chronicle, contrasting its arid record of the facts with the method of literary historiography. This interpretation would be defensible if one could demonstrate that all Roman historiography from Fabius onwards was of the pragmatic-apodeictic type, and thus satisfied the methodological requirements of Sempronius. But this hypothesis, as we have seen, does not have a solid foundation.

3) Others[60] maintain that the contrast delineated by Sempronius corresponds to the one that Polybius introduces between the "genealogical" genre and the "pragmatic" genre: a distinction between a historiography of the mythical age of the origins and the foundation of cities and the historiography of political facts. The division traced by Sempronius would be "vertical, not horizontal", in the sense that, by putting all the preceding historians on the same level, he would constrast

58. Gelzer 1969, p.130 ff.
59. Gelzer 1969, p.144 ff.; Till 1949/50, p.331.
60. Bömer 1953.

within their works the first part, normally devoted to the myth of the origins, with the second, relating instead to political history. In this perspective, Sempronius condemns the purely legendary nature of the genealogical narration, and expresses instead his appreciation of the second aspect of Roman historiography, seeing in it an attempt, however crude and empirical, at writing pragmatic history: the expression *conati essent* would then refer to an only partially successful experiment.

But in the passage by Sempronius there is not so much as an implicit allusion to this presumed distinction between the "genealogical" genre and the "pragmatical" genre within a single historical work. He only distinguishes between two opposed groups of historians, those who wrote annals and those who intended to write history. The first, ultimately, wrote no more than a diary, while the second dealt with the problem of the political causes of the historical facts. It is thus a contrast between two different types of historiography which manifests itself in the specific context of this formulation, in the semantic opposition between *annales* and *res gestae* or *historiae*.

If the second category alludes to historians of the Polybian type, the polemical reference to "those who have desired to leave us annals" probably involves not only the *Annales Maximi*, or the pontifical annals, but also all those earlier and coeval Roman historians who, from a strictly Polybian point of view, had limited themselves to narrating facts without a rigorous and objective exposition of the causes. A passage like Fabius' on the causes of the second Punic war is really not of the "Polybian type": Polybius himself, as we have seen, had rejected his analysis as destitute of any foundation.

An argument which has been much emphasized in order to deny the contrast between Sempronius Asellio and the first period of Roman literary historiography is derived from a sentence of Polybius[61] in which the work of Aulus Postumius Albinus is referred to with the expression *pragmatikè historía*. But also in this case we have an erroneous interpretation:

61. 39,1,4.

pragmatikós is an adjective that Polybius uses to indicate the object, not the method, of a historiographical work. The work of Postumius Albinus was indeed "pragmatic history" in as much as its object was primarily recent and contemporary history. But no methodological praise is implied by the words of Polybius, who also recognizes the presence of "pragmatic history" in the work of historians who were very far from his own method[62]. *Pragmatikè historía* denotes the history of political and military facts, in contrast to that of genealogies, the foundations of cities, colonizations, etc. It is only concerned with the contents, not the methodology, of the historical narrative. For history that conforms to the rigorous principles of demonstrative method Polybius uses, as we have seen, the expression *apodeiktikè historía*[63].

To return to the central problem of our discussion, the hypothesis that Sempronius' criticism was aimed not so much at the pontifical annals as at Roman historiography of the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C., finds a further confirmation in the semantic implications of the proposition: "that is to tell stories to children, not to write history". The idea of telling stories, as opposed to the notion of writing history, clearly alludes to a type of historical narrative which plays on the emotions of the listener or reader through the description of facts and situations apt to arouse marvel and astonishment; a type of historiography which must have used certain polymorphic narrative elements pertaining to usages, customs, legends, dreams, prodigies, etc., in other words those very elements which Dionysius of Halicarnassus later considered important in the historiography of the Isocratean Theopompus and which were of equal importance in Roman historiography before Sempronius.

Cicero, who dwells on several occasions on the theoretical problems of historical writing, implicitly and explicitly declares his predilection for the historiography of the Isocratean type, as

62. 9,1.
63. Cf. Chapter I, n.86.

A.D. Leeman[64] has rightly shown: in a letter to Lucceius[65] he introduces the term *fabula* to indicate a historical narrative which would involve the reader, awakening admiration, a sense of expectation, joy, sorrow, hope and fear, in other words a narrative of the monographic type, centred on the achievements and the changing fortunes of a highly significant historic personage rich in emotional tension. Cicero was referring, in this specific case, to the history of his consulate which Lucceius himself was supposed to write. The word *fabula* has a particular significance in Cicero's discussion, underlining the strictly *dramatic* character of a narrative which also involved elements of mimetic history. In this case, the word characterizes a type of narrative which is very different from that of the "annals"[66] because of the larger amount of emotionality inherent in its unitary and monographic dimension.

With the term "annals" Cicero clearly refers to the literary annals which narrated *year by year* the vicissitudes of Rome from the remotest antiquity up to the present time, a continuous structure which could only arouse the interest of the reader partly or to a small extent (*mediocriter*).

Cicero's page shows us how Sempronius' statement should be understood, for *fabula* seems to include that element of "drama" and "fiction" (δραματικὸν καὶ πλασματῶδες) that Plutarch found in Fabius' narrative[67]. But the views expressed by Cicero and Sempronius about the historiographical tradition differ in their content — a difference in the methodological positions of the two writers. Sempronius, like Polybius, perceived in his predecessors a kind of exposition and an accumulation of elements going back to that notion of narrative intended for an audience of children. Cicero, on the other hand, notes the inadequacy of annalistic writing when compared to the markedly

64. 'Le genre et le style historique à Rome: théorie et pratique', *Rev. ét.lat.*33, 1955, p.183 ff.
65. *Ad fam.*5,12,6.
66. *Ibid.*5,12,5.
67. *Rom.*8,9.

dramatic genre of history which he proposes in the letter to Lucceius.

But it is equally significant that Sempronius should use the word *iterare*, which in the theatrical language of archaic Latin has the specific meaning of "to narrate", with a sense of *suspense* or comicity, and in any case directly connected with the duration of the *fabula* (drama) and with the requirements peculiar to the performance[68].

If this is the value of the *fabulas pueris narrare*, the notion of usefulness in the expression of Sempronius Asellio assumes more cogency once it is inserted in the context of the by now traditional contrast between delight and utility which goes back to Thucydides and is more amply developed by Polybius. This notion was emphasized by C. Fannius who can also be considered a follower of the school of Polybius, probably one of those who, in the judgement of Sempronius, had already tried "to write history". It served an essentially political purpose, not to say a technical political purpose, very different to the moralization, dear to the "Isocratean" and to the earlier Roman historians. Recalling Polybius' principle that the historian himself must have a direct experience of political activity, Fannius observed in the first book of the *Annales*:

68. Cf., for example, Plaut.*Cas*.879; *Pseud*.387. For this meaning of the verb *iterare* in Plautus' comedy, see *Thes.ling.Lat*.VII/2, coll.547,75 ff.; 549,9 ff. Leo (1913, p.335 n.2), commenting on Sempronius' statement, called attention to the passage in Polybius (3,20,5) where the historian reprimands Chaereas and Sosylus for having narrated the events that immediately followed the taking of Saguntum in an inexact and contradictory manner: οὐ γὰρ ἱστορίας,ἀλλὰ κουρεακῆς καὶ πανδήμου λαλιᾶς ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσι τάξιν ἔχειν καὶ δύναμιν. While the comparison may apply to the contrast between 'historical' narrative and non-historical narrative, it does not affect the substance of the first term of the antithesis stated by Sempronius. The words κουρεακὴ καὶ πάνδημος λαλιά (gossip or fables worthy of barber shops and the common people) designate the baselessness and fallacy of unreliable news, a notion that appears in contradiction to the term *fabulae* in Sempronius' narrative. *Fabulae* refers not to inexact unfounded facts but to a type of narrative lacking a rational analysis of intentions and causes — an exposition which, from Sempronius' point of view, was only intended to entertain and delight a public of children.

When we are able to draw a lesson from the active life, many things that appear positive for the moment turn out to be negative, and many others turn out to be very different from what they seemed[69].

To identify the various currents of Roman historiography, we must return to the testimony of the ancients, but it is equally necessary to evaluate each testimony in the context of the theoretical attitude and the cultural orientation of each single author.

If some critics have been deceived by the judgement of Cicero, who places on the same level the pontifical annals and the Latin historians before Coelius Antipater, this was because they did not adequately consider the semantic context in which Cicero's affirmation occurs: here he refers only to the elocution, the "ornaments" of the style, not to the methodological groundwork of the writing. The best confirmation of the necessity of interpreting each testimony in relation to its context is offered by another verdict of Cicero's[70] concerning that same Sempronius who, as a follower of Polybius, must have displayed a lack of stylistic commitment not inferior to Cato's: Sempronius could in no way have profited from the teaching of Coelius Antipater, and fell back on the "insipid debility of the ancients" (*ad antiquorum languorem et inscitiam*). At first sight this is a surprising classification which, on the one hand, covers the Roman historiographical tradition up to Sempronius Asellio and, on the other, assesses the attempt at innovation by Coelius Antipater. But all becomes clear if we consider that Cicero is not an admirer of Polybius and that in this specific case he is concerned not with the structure of historical narrative, but with the problem of elocution in general.

So archaic Roman historiography concludes with the clear contrast between the tendency represented by Sempronius Asellio, the heir and polemical champion of the method of Polybius, and the direction pursued by Coelius Antipater who perfects the "Isocratism" of those who had preceded him, ap-

69. Fr.1 Peter².
70. *De leg*.1,2,6.

plying to Latin the technique elaborated by the rhetorical tradition of the Greeks. We have no explicit evidence that Coelius Antipater had adopted the doctrine of Tauriscus, according to which the object of historical investigation is a "forest without method"[71], a vast repertory of information and heterogeneous facts not susceptible to an analysis governed by rigid methodological norms. But it is certainly significant that his most illustrious disciple, the orator L. Licinius Crassus, transferred this theory from the field of historical criticism to that of rhetoric[72]. According to Cicero[73] he defended the view that, while a technique of elocution is possible for the orator since the language can be regulated by precise norms, the contents of the speech, in their inexhaustible variety and thematic diversity, cannot become the object of a schematic knowledge, but are a *silva magna*: the choice, the structure and the organization of the contents are exclusively entrusted to the discernment, the culture, and the good taste of whoever pronounces the speech.

71. Cf. p.23 n.50.

72. G.Cerri, 'Crasso, Taurisco e la selva senza metodo', *Parola d.passato* 146, 1972, pp.312-320.

73. *De or.*3,24,93.

CHAPTER III

THE IDEA OF BIOGRAPHY

At the beginning of his admirable work on the development of Greek biography, Arnaldo Momigliano (1974)[1] states peremptorily that the ancient Greeks clearly distinguished and separated biography from history. He writes (p.8 [6 of the English edition]):

> Nobody nowadays is likely to doubt that biography is some kind of history. We may well turn back to the inventors of biography, the ancient Greeks, to ask why they never recognized that biography is history.

Such a categorical affirmation immediately suggests to the reader that the present tendency to identify biography with history *tout court* is a phenomenon typical of our time and totally extraneous to Greek thought. In reality, however, as he goes on Momigliano does not always seem so convinced of what he explicitly announced as his point of departure and arrival, since he admits, with H. Homeyer[2], that Herodotus already devoted ample space within his history to biographical profiles in the fifth century (p.14 [12]). With regard to the *Philippica* of Theopompus he rightly observes "the interplay of biography and history" in a single tale (p.65 [62]). Similar observations

1. In view of the bibliographical supplements made by the author himself and the addition of a lecture not contained in the English edition (*The Development of Greek Biography*, Cambridge Mass.1971), the Italian version (by G.Donini, 1974) should be considered in every way a new edition. Gallo 1974 wrote a balanced and lucid review of the edition in English, with personal contributions of his own.

2. *Philologus* 106, 1962, p.75 ff.

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