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**Learning Historical Fiction in Sopater's *Division of Questions***

Imagine asking American high school students to turn U.S. history into fiction by composing and performing two kinds of speeches: those that could actually have taken place, say, just after the attack on Pearl Harbor or just before the Boston Tea Party, and (2) those that place famous historical characters in non-historical situations; e.g., George Washington asks Congress to allow him to commit suicide in London in order to secure independence for the colonies. As strange as it may seem, this is essentially the approach to history encountered in the imperial-era schools of Greek rhetoric. In order to be able to create and perform these two types of historical fiction, students would have to have learned something about history, to be willing to fictionalize that history, and to have absorbed the rules of historical declamation, i.e., the limits within which one was allowed to fictionalize historical figures and events.

How did students learn this? While progymnasmata (as illustrated by Libanius' examples) were used to teach students how to develop the component parts of a declamation and to help them review historical figures and events, they usually did little to prepare students for the idea that history could be fictionalized. At this point students would not have been able to compose full-blown declamations on historical themes like the ones in the Libanian corpus. Rather, as I argue, students were introduced to the idea of historical fiction at an intermediate point: when they had mastered the progymnasmata and had just begun their formal introduction to the multi-layered complexity of *stasis* theory, the practical application of which required considerable creativity on the part of teachers and students alike.

Sopater's *Division of Questions* (fourth century C.E.) shows how a teacher could help students make the difficult transition between progymnasmata and historical declamation, and introduce them to the world of historical fiction. In this textbook, the teacher-narrator proposes a series of eighty-one themes (twelve of which are historical) corresponding to his need to illustrate individual types of *stasis*. The parameters within which he can fictionalize history are never explicitly laid out, but the main rule seems to be that once the premises of the historical theme are granted, the declamation must be developed plausibly, with attention to *ethos* and firm reliance on known details from history and biography.

In my paper I focus specifically on late fourth century history as presented in Libanius and Sopater. Relevant exercises in Libanius include the "Comparison of Demosthenes and Aeschines" (Foerster 8.117-121), the "Encomium of Demosthenes" (8.121-125), the "Invective against Philip" (8.125-128), and the "Invective against Aeschines" (8.128-131). Analysis of these exercises shows that while the progymnasmata encouraged students to review closely their knowledge of oratory, history, and biography, they did not prepare students for the idea that the later fourth century could have an alternate history. In Sopater, on the other hand, we have five themes involving this period, none of whose premises is found in the historical record, and all of which in fact would have

contradicted what students would have learned from their reading of oratory, biography, and historiography (Walz 8.14-19, 19-21, 42-50, 129, 205-220).