

This Story is Believable: The Rhetoric of Truth in Strabo's *Geography*
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From the beginning of the *Geography*, Strabo draws a distinction between two types of narrative—*historia* and *muthos*. He frequently juxtaposes these two terms and indicates that while both refer to the past, *muthos* refers either to false narratives or to narratives that have had false elements added to make them more pleasing (e.g. 1.2.35). Strabo frequently uses the term to refer to stories that we commonly refer to as myths—such as those about Apollo, Typhon, and Circe—while also insisting that other stories that we refer to as myth—such as those about Heracles, Theseus, and Jason—are firmly grounded in reality. Strabo also frequently emphasizes the variable plausibility of different versions and interpretations of narratives (e.g. 10.2.17). It is clear from these two points that Strabo signifies different “genres of history” based in large part on their truth status.

This paper explores how this truth status is reflected in the various narratives about the past in Strabo’s *Geography* by looking at what Eliot Oring calls the “Rhetoric of Truth” (2008). In this rhetoric of truth, multiple elements, or tropes, contribute to the overall truth-value of a given narrative. Elements such as the authority of the source, the distance Strabo takes from the source, the level of detail, and the use of supporting evidence all serve to increase or decrease the level of belief Strabo intended his audience to understand. According to Paul Grice’s cooperative principle of communication (1975), the use of this rhetoric allows Strabo’s audience to make sense of the cognitive dissonance that arises when these false *muthoi* appear in the *Geography*—a work that aims at absolute veracity.

Although Oring examines the use of this rhetoric in reference specifically to the genre of legend, this paper demonstrates that the rhetorical tropes Oring identifies apply well beyond the genre of legend. More importantly, by looking at the rhetoric of truth this paper demonstrates that there is not a simple binary relationship between belief and disbelief but rather belief occupies a continuum between these two poles. In the same way, the terms myth and history are only the poles between which lies the continuum that contains all the narratives about the past.