

Between Narrative and Allusion: Mythography in Pomponius Mela's *Chorography*¹

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1. Introduction

Pomponius Mela's *Chorography* has been, until comparatively recently, a rather neglected text.² Yet even after the appearance of Parroni's Italian (1984) and Silberman's French editions (1988; 2003²), Brodersen's German translation (1994), and Romer's English version (1998), Mela's work remains relegated to second order status because, as a work of what we might loosely

¹ An early version of this paper was delivered in the panel "Oppositional Tendencies in Myth and Mythography" at the 9th Celtic Conference in Classics in Dublin, June 2016. I am indebted to that audience, as well as to the anonymous referees of *Polymnia*, for their helpful comments and suggestions, which have improved the paper substantially. All remaining infelicities and translations are my own.

² It has not always been so. See Brodersen 2003: 81–83 (for Mela in general 87–94).

call “geography,”³ it is deficient in technical knowledge, inconsistent in its methodology, reliant on outdated sources and thus filled with erroneous material. A useful index of how modern scholars view Mela—“un geografo da tavolino” according to Parroni (1984: 34)—is Romer’s speculation that the *Chorography* was “a young man’s project,” one whose “jejune style may reflect its author’s naïveté as well as his youthful ambition.”⁴ Since it is unoriginal and a product of uncritical compilation, Mela’s work simply does not hold up when compared to the works of more scholarly attempts to describe the world, such as those of Strabo or even Pliny, although the latter names Mela as a source for several books (3–6, 8, 12–13, 21–22).⁵ It is clear that Pliny thought that the *Chorography* was a serious work worth consulting.

An article by Roger Batty in 2000, however, approached Mela’s text from a non-technical point of view. Rather than focusing on Mela’s accuracy, Batty sought to explore the ways in which the *Chorography* was constructed to transmit a specifically provincial worldview. On his reading, Mela’s work should not be evaluated in comparison to other geographical texts, but as a representative of a distinct place, time and cultural context. In his view, Mela, who hailed from southern Spain, aimed to move the focus of the world away from the central cultures of Greece and Rome and to make Spain and its Phoenician roots central to the project. While Batty perhaps overstates the case that Mela effaces the presence of Greece and Rome in his work,⁶ his attention to Mela’s authorial choices independent of the Greek geographical tradition indicates an active intellect shaping a specific presentation of the

³ The broad conventional category of “geographical texts” has been subjected to revision into more precise categories, variously. See, e.g., Dueck’s (2012) distinction between “descriptive geography” and “mathematical geography,” which has been in turn rejected by Dan et al. 2014, who favor a more narrow spectrum of “intuitive,” “scholarly” and “fully reasoned” geography in place of genre-based categories (see esp. pp. 28–29). See further Geus and Thiering 2014. In the absence of another adequate term, I use the word “geographical” not in the technical sense of a mathematical attempt to show spatial relationships, but to refer to those ancient texts that somehow describe the world and the places found in it.

⁴ Romer 1998: 23, followed by Roller 2015: 188. Batty 2000: 71 with n. 12 rejects, rightfully I think, the notion that Mela was young at the time of composition.

⁵ In addition to Pliny’s direct consultation of Mela’s text, it is likely that Pliny and Mela drew from another common source: see Parroni 1984: 46, Silberman 2003: xxxvi–xliii; cf. Brodersen 1994: 5.

⁶ While Mela elevates the Phoenician presence in his text, there is also strong evidence that Mela’s intended audience were the Romans in the imperial city. At 2.58 Mela announces to the reader that he will say little about Italy since *nota sunt omnia*. Likewise, Mela’s brief treatment of Greece *assumes* the centrality of that world in his worldview. The brevity of the accounts of Rome and Greece are, in fact, the clearest signs of their dominant position in the wider Mediterranean world. It seems safer to say that Mela’s elevation of the Phoenician Mediterranean (with special attention to the western and southern regions) reflects a local pride that emphasizes provincial cultural importance to a Roman readership.

world. For all his deficiencies, Mela's presentation reflects his, and not merely a derivative, view of the world.

As has often been noted, myth plays a significant part in Mela's description of the *orbis situs*.⁷ For a work that is as slender as the *Chorography* and aims at brevity, myth features prominently; there are over 130 individual references to the world of gods and heroes in the text.⁸ As of yet, however, there has been no systematic study of the mythographical elements in the work.⁹ By "mythographical," I mean the ways in which the author chooses, organizes and presents myths as myths to his audience. We should not necessarily assume that Mela could only report what he found in his sources,¹⁰ and even if he borrowed information from another source, it was up to him how to present the myth and what aspects to emphasize. Mela does not attempt to be comprehensive but is selective, and his references are consistent neither in form nor in function. At times, he chooses to narrate a myth; at others, he refers to a myth briefly but explicitly; and at still others, he alludes to a myth as if the reader is expected to understand the reference and fill in the details. And yet, scholars have tended to treat the mythical references monolithically and assert that their inclusion was aimed solely or mainly at enlivening what was otherwise a dry list of names and places.¹¹ While I do not wish to deny this general position—the inclusion of myth doubtlessly results in a more engaging text—it is also important to acknowledge that Mela varies his presentation of myth in terms of tempo, form and purpose. As will become clear, Mela's deployment of myth is now informative, now

⁷ Brodersen 1994: 10–12 provides an incomplete list of myths by topic (e.g., Argonauts, Hercules' adventures) and assumes that Mela's audience would have been familiar with them. Romer 1998: 22–23, likewise suggests that the myths would have been familiar, ones that (22) "he and his audience had heard all their lives." Cf. Silberman 2003: xxii–xxiii.

⁸ As will become clear in the following pages, I do not concern myself here with the marvelous or fabulous peoples at the edges of the earth, such as the Blemmyes (headless men with faces in their chests, 1.48) or the Hippopodae ("Horse-Feet") mentioned at 3.56. My focus is entirely on the function that the mythical *past* has on Mela's presentation of his contemporary world.

⁹ Perhaps the best discussion of mythography in a similar geographical text at present is Lightfoot's comments on Dionysius Periegetes, frequently using Mela in comparison (Lightfoot 2014: 169–73).

¹⁰ Mela only infrequently names a source (cf. Parroni 1984: 43–46; Silberman 2003: xxx–xxxii), never for his mythical material, unless one counts the anonymous *indigenae* or *accolae*.

¹¹ See Casson's review of Romer 1998 (Casson 1999: 472) "to keep his narrative from turning into a monotonous catalogue, he spices it up with historical events and mythological legends that the various names evoke." Romer (1998: 23) for his part emphasizes the "pleasures" that *fabulae* offer the readers, but also notes that it provided an "intellectually multidimensional view of the world." Cf. Lightfoot 2014: 169, "[Mela] refers to myths in their appropriate geographical contexts and in doing so adds variety and colour to what might otherwise have been a dry summary."

ludic and poetic, but always engaging his readers from multiple perspectives and often inviting them to reenact the mythical stories of the past from the unique position from above the world.

In the essay that follows, I first offer an overview of the various types of mythological references in geographical texts, suggesting a framework for further study in Mela and other geographic texts. Next, I provide an overview of the mythographical elements in the *Chorography*, with special attention to Mela's skeptical attitude toward mythical stories and his attempts to rationalize fabulous elements or to firmly situate them in the past (and so casting doubt on them). Finally, I analyze the ways in which Mela presents his mythical material by examining his choices in narrating or alluding to the events of the distant past, as well as identifying those places where he engages in what I have called elsewhere "creative mythography," whereby a writer provides a sensible but erroneous and otherwise unattested version.

2. Categories of Mythical References

Before we embark on a study of Mela's mythography, it is necessary to point out that not all references to the world of gods and heroes are the same. On one end of the spectrum an author can refer to a place-name with a clear mythological connection without explicitly acknowledging that link (e.g., "Columns of Heracles"). On the other end, an author may fully narrate a myth for the benefit of his audience. Moreover, there may be a difference in the temporal focus; a reference to a god's temple or a hero's cult is not the same as a reference to a mythical event that is envisioned as having taken place in the mythical past. Employing examples primarily from the two earliest extant descriptions of the *oikoumene* in Greek (Ps.-Scylax)¹² and Latin (Mela), I identify six categories of mythological references. I have chosen these authors because they are comparable in form; each presents his description in prose, in brief compass, and in the form of a *periplus* (or in the case of Mela, multiple *peripli*). These categories are not meant to be mutually exclusive, and it is not clear whether any ancient writer would have thought in these terms, but this admittedly preliminary set of categories may allow us to move forward productively. For a full catalog of the mythical references in Mela by category, see the Appendix.

¹² For Ps.-Scylax see Shipley 2011 (for brief discussion of myth, p. 16).

2.1 Cultic Associations and Sacred Space (Category A)

Here, a monument, temple, tomb or sanctuary, dedicated to a god or a hero, is noted to exist in a place. Like places bearing mythological names (see category E below), these cults reflect sacred space or ritual *that has meaning for the present*. For example, Mela mentions the famous Heraeum in the Argolid (2.41), and both Ps.-Scylax and Mela mention the Temple of Poseidon at Taenarum (Ps.-Scylax 46.1, Mela 2.51). Natural space can also be sacred to gods or heroes. At 1.26, Mela identifies a cave sacred to Hercules at Ampelusia, surely because at one point Hercules, like George Washington, was said to have visited the spot during his western exploits—though Mela does not explicitly make that point. These cultic associations only infrequently involve an explicit reference to the mythical past, and usually then only in terms of a foundation myth (see category F).

2.2 Myth: Narration (B)

When referring to a mythical event set in the past, an author has a choice as to how much detail to include in an account. At one extreme, an author may choose to narrate a myth in detail for his audience. In Mela this is a relatively rare occurrence. In Ps.-Scylax it is non-existent. In Strabo and Pausanias it is frequent. Even when Mela does feel the need to narrate an episode, which he does only three times, he does so in brief compass. No account takes up more than five lines of Parroni's edition. To take one example (2.5), when explaining the name *Achilleos Dromos*, Mela feels compelled to give a brief but complete account: Achilles enters the Black Sea with a hostile force, conquers the area, and celebrates with games, which involve running (*cursu*)—an etymological explanation of the place-name (more on this myth below in section IV). In this example, narration is in service of an eponym (as with the Columns of Hercules at 1.26), thus this myth would also fall under category F.

2.3 Myth: Explicit Reference (C)

Without elaboration, the author explicitly refers to a figure or episode in a myth as occurring in a specific place. To take but two examples, at Mela 1.98 Cyzicus is said to have been accidentally killed by the Argonauts on their way to Colchis, which not only serves as an eponym (F) but is also an explicit reference to a specific episode. Moving to an example in Ps.-Scylax (98.2), at a place called *Achaiōn Limēn* the Greek forces were said to have deliberated

whether or not to march against Telephus or to return home.¹³ There are over thirty instances in which Mela explicitly mentions a mythical episode; the reader is left to fill in some gaps and to connect this episode with the larger body of myth.

2.4 Myth: Allusion (D)

An author may also reference a myth indirectly without explicit mention of the content of the episode. A mention of a name or place or other datum signals a myth relative to the place, but the reader is asked to recall the specific events from memory. For instance, at Mela 2.40 the mention of Cithaeron, “celebrated in our *fabulae* and poems” (*Cithaeron fabulis carminibusque celebratus*) is meant to evoke the myths of both Oedipus and Pentheus. At 2.45 Marathon is called the “witness to great and many acts of heroism ever since Theseus” (*Marathon, magnarum multarumque virtutum testis iam inde a Theseo*) which is meant to lead the reader to Theseus’ conquest of the Marathonian Bull without explicitly mentioning it. There are several clear instances of allusion in Mela’s *Chorography*, the majority of them clustered in the description of Greece (see discussion below, section IV). In Ps.-Scylax there is no allusion to myth, and to my knowledge neither Pausanias nor Strabo alludes to a myth but always explicitly refers to events. It is noteworthy, then, that Mela offers such a vast number of allusions to myth and deserves closer scrutiny.

It is not always clear where the line between explicit reference and allusion stands, nor are all allusions created equal. Consider the two allusions to the Hero-Leander myth set along the Hellespont. At 1.97 Abydos is noted as being famous for the “trafficking of a great love once upon a time” (*magni quondam amoris commercio*). No names are given, meaning that a reader would have to supply the whole episode from the place-name itself. At 2.26, however, Sestos is called “legendary because of Leander’s love” (*Leandri amore pernobile*); the nightly swim across the Hellespont is not narrated, but the name Leander offers the reader help on the way to recalling the myth. Similarly, at 2.112 one of the mythical events that makes Crete famous is the “arrival of Europa,” but there is no mention of Jupiter’s disguise as a bull, her abduction, or her bearing sons to the great god. There is, however, something

¹³ Ps.-Scylax is unique in placing this place on the border between Mysia and Lydia, not noted by Shipley 2011 *ad loc.* Strabo (13.1.31), Mela (1.93) and Pliny (4.49) place it next to Sigeum.

fundamentally different between these allusions and a complete statement such as that Venus emerged from the sea at Palaepaphos.

2.5 Places Bearing Mythological Names (E)

A current place-name itself contains a reference to a mythological figure or event, but no further details are given. The reader may make an inference, but the author makes no claim that a myth is “enacted” by a reference to a place-name. For example at Ps.-Scylax 1.1 we find the twin “Columns of Heracles” without any indication of the origin or story of either landmark.¹⁴ Similarly the place-names Tyndareoi Scopeloi and the town Menelaos in N. Africa receive no further discussion (108.1), nor does Ps.-Scylax elaborate on the Herakleioi Thines, “Heracleian Banks,” although the name must come from Heracles’ exploits in the south (109.3). For Mela, some place-names are left unelaborated. For instance, numerous references to the Thracian Bosphorus and Hellespont record no mention of Io or Helle. Similarly, Pliny (*NH* 4.17) simply names three Argive springs that have mythical connections (Niobe, Amymone, Psamathe) but does not call attention to any story associated with them. At the core, the present name has a formal tie to the past, but no claim to that past is made.

2.6 Eponyms/Foundation Myths (F)

A special class of mythical reference in geographical texts involves foundation myths, where a current place-name is described as having direct links to a mythical figure, almost always a hero, who founded the settlement or otherwise gave it his or her name. In Ps.-Scylax a single example of this occurs (22.2), where Hyllos son of Herakles is said to have settled a people called the “Hylloi, a barbarian race.” In Mela, there are more than thirty examples of these foundation myths, e.g., the foundation of Tingi by Antaeus (1.26) and the eponymous foundation of Lycia by Lycus son of Pandion (1.80). By appealing to the past, the author is purposefully forging a link between the present world and that of the past. These foundation myths, of course, may be narrated (category B), explicitly mentioned (category C), or alluded to (category D), but since they feature prominently in geographical texts, a separate category seems warranted.

¹⁴ Compare Mela’s account of the columns at Gibraltar (1.27): *addit fama nominis fabulam, Herculem ipsum iunctos olim perpetuo iugo diremisse colles, atque ita exclusum antea mole montium oceanum ad quae nunc inundat admissum.*

3. The *Chorography* and Mythography

Although we know almost nothing about the author, internal reference to an impending triumph over Britain (3.49) dates the work most likely to the early years of Claudius' reign. As for the author, Mela himself tells us that he hails from Tingentera in the province of Hispania Baetica (2.96); his cognomen and place of birth suggest a connection to Seneca's family, but about this we can say nothing more. The title *Chorography*, a term admitting of different meanings, is found in the earliest and only independent manuscript (Vat. Lat. 4929) but may not be the original title.¹⁵ Be that as it may, Mela's general purpose is clear, to offer readers a description of the world (*orbis situs*) based on the model of the *periplus*, in which the reader is led through the world on, as it were, a coastal voyage. Mela's three books take us through three circuits: one running counter-clockwise around the coast of the Mediterranean and Black Sea (1.25–2.96), a second one surveying the islands, starting from the Black Sea and moving through the Mediterranean (2.97–2.126), and finally a circuit of the outer sea (3.1–3.107). The slender dimensions and non-technical aspects of the work would have made it impractical for generals or statesmen; the likely audience, then, was either the general literate public or the classroom, although we should not think of these as mutually exclusive.¹⁶ The author assumes a fair knowledge of Greek,¹⁷ otherwise certain etymologies that rely on Greek would make no sense. Furthermore, because of the allusive nature of many mythological references the reader is expected to already have a command of the broad world of myth. Mela's ideal reader, then, would likely have had a substantial education already.

¹⁵ According to the definition of Ptolemy (1.1.1), chorography refers to the depiction, in graphic (or textual) form, of a region in the *oikoumene*. Strabo knew of chorographies of individual regions, including those of India, Ethiopia, Greece and Rome (1.1.16); Eusebius was credited with a *Chorography of Ancient Judea*. Even in Strabo, however, the term admits of a broader meaning and does not necessarily refer to limited depictions of regions, and can refer to the *oikoumene* as a whole, as seen in Polybius (*apud* Strabo), Vitruvius, and the anonymous *Divisio Orbis Terrarum*. On the various meanings of chorography see Prontera 2006; on the title of Mela's work Silberman 2003: xiv and *ad* 1.1.

¹⁶ Silberman 2003: xxvii n. 2 argues that school use was "moins probable" and that the work was aimed at a general literate public. Cf. Batty 2000: 89–90, who argues for a local audience in Spain, though see n. 6. It is unclear whether geography was taught as a separate subject or by a *grammaticus* in the process of *enarratio*; late commentaries and encyclopedic compilations (e.g. Vibius Sequester, Stephanus of Byzantium) often focused on eponyms to explain place-names; for the teaching of geography in late antiquity see Dalché 2014.

¹⁷ Mela also explicitly translates certain Greek phrases, for example 1.7 *angustias introitumque venientis nos fretum, Graeci porthmon appellant*. See also 1.17, 2.66, 3.66, 3.72, 3.94 (cf. 2.24, 2.64).

Unfortunately, Mela does not, like Strabo, give us a extensive introduction to his work or elaborate his criteria for inclusion or exclusion of myth. Strabo, who was writing for “practical people,” included myth primarily as “respectable entertainment for readers interested in the regions that produced the mythologization (*mythopoiia*)” (1.1.19). The educated statesman may be drawn to myths because of their fame and charm (*dia to endoxon kai hedu*), but it was important not to become too engrossed in these trifles.¹⁸ The sheer number of myths included in his work, however, indicates that despite his protests the heroic world was not tangential but a central part of Strabo’s project. As Patterson rightly concludes, “Mythography was vital to his endeavor, working seamlessly with history and geography to make his presentation of the *oikoumenē* meaningful to his audience” (2013: 202). Strabo himself later admits that someone engaged in describing the earth must sometimes speak of the past as well as the present (6.1.2).

In comparison to Strabo’s thorough methodological introduction, Mela offers us only the barest hint at the purpose of and his approach to writing his description of the *orbis situs*. His short introduction offers us but one helpful hint; in addition to providing a general description of the world, working from the largest areas (continents) to smaller regions, the geographer reports that he will “add those details about the nature of the places and peoples that deserve mention” (1.2, *additis quae in natura regionum incolarumque memoranda sunt*). Such a focus on places worth mentioning reminds the reader of a similar criterion found in other geographical writers, for example the later Pausanias, whose *Periegesis* aimed at reporting what was “most deserving of *μνήμη*” (3.11.1; cf. 1.1.3 [“worth seeing”], 2.10.4, 2.15.1 [“worth describing”], 2.25.4, 2.29.1, 3.19.6. etc.)—a word that implies both mentioning (that is, authorial intent) and remembering (the readers’ response). The inclusion of a place within a geographical text is in itself an act of memory, and places given further emphasis gain deeper symbolic meaning as *lieux de mémoire*, or “sites of memory,” or rather *nœuds de mémoire*, “knots of memory.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Quintilian similarly warns *grammatici* not to spend too much time on the intricacies of myth and other tales (1.8.18)—suggesting that some were engaging in *supervacuus labor*.

¹⁹ For further reading on *lieux de mémoire*, introduced by Pierre Nora in the 1970s in his influential study of the symbolism of French nationalism, and its place with the broader conceptual umbrella of cultural memory studies, see Erll and Nünning 2008, esp. ch. 2 (Pim den Boer), and Gangloff 2013 (applied to the Greek world under the Roman empire). For the ancient world, however, one is tempted to prefer the recent modification of the concept (Rothberg 2010), that is “*nœuds de mémoire*,” or “knots of memory,”

This basic criterion of “worthy of mention/remembering” can be achieved in various ways: a special monument (e.g. Mela 1.85, Mausoleum in Halicarnassus), a renowned denizen (2.29, Abdera gave us Democritus), a famous battle (2.105, Aegates Islands), an unusual natural phenomenon (3.82, small but especially venomous snakes), unusual ethnographies (1.106–133 *passim* on northern peoples) or some remarkable occurrence (1.71, stones breaking apart when they hit Aratus’ tomb).²⁰ Of course, myth too—and perhaps especially—can make a place deserving of mention. Typhon’s cave in Cilicia is deserving of mention both because of its nature (it kills people who descend into it) and the myth (*fabula*) associated with it (1.76). Mt. Ida is remembered (*memoratus*) because of the judgment of Paris (1.94). The Taurians are remembered because the Greeks Iphigenia and Orestes came to their barbaric region (2.11). Many more examples could be adduced.

Mela often expresses the importance of a place using the dyad *nobilis/ignobilis*, that is, famous enough to deserve naming or not. As above, both historical events and famous personages can make a place famous and thus worthy of inclusion: the battle between Alexander and the Persians makes Granicus *nobilis* (1.98), and off the coast of Troezen, sitting among unimportant islands (*ignobiles*) is Calauria, famous for Demosthenes’ death (2.109). The temple of Jupiter in Olympia is made famous by its athletic games and the work of Phidias (2.42). But mythical episodes and cult also add renown to a place. Thus, for example, the temple (*delubrum*) of Apollo makes Patara *nobilis* (1.82) and Mt. Latmus is rendered *nobilis* by the supposed love-affair between Luna and Endymion.²¹ Similarly, the words *inlustris*,²² *celebris/celebratus*,²³ *notus*,²⁴ *clarus*,²⁵ *inluminare*,²⁶ *inclutus*,

which emphasize not collective memory, but the heterogeneous networks of meaning and the interplay between individual memory and the collective memory of a variety of groups.

²⁰ On *mirabilia* see Brodersen 1994: 6–9, Silberman 2003: xxii–iii.

²¹ For other places where myth makes a place *nobilis* see 1.108 (Colchis, Golden Fleece), 2.26 (Sestos made *pernobile* because of Leander’s love),

²² 1.96 (Rhoetean shores made *inlustris* by Ajax’s tomb); 2.3 (Chersonesus by nymphaeum); 2.110 (Ithaca by Ulysses); 3.46 (Temple to Egyptian Hercules on Gades).

²³ 2.17 (Thracian mountains made famous by Liber, Maenads, and Orpheus), 2.40 (Cithaeron), 2.41 (Heraeum in Argolid is *percelebre*), 2.48 (sanctuary of Neptune on Isthmus), 3.57 (Thule).

²⁴ More commonly used for historical events, but see 2.109 (island Helene known because of Helen’s debauchery), and cf. 2.53, where Calydon is described as more well-known (*notior*) among other Aetolian cities, presumably because of Meleager’s famous boar hunt.

²⁵ 1.88 (temple of Diana in Ephesus); 1.93 (shores of Troy); 2.41 (Athens); 3.79 (Ogyris by monument to Erythras).

²⁶ 2.35 (Meliboea by Philoctetes).

*memorare/memorabilis*²⁷ and *insignis*,²⁸ are used to highlight a place's mythical fame and therefore elevate those places in Mela's text above other mere names. Thus, at the core, myth is not merely a curiosity, but a fundamental part of the identity of the world in the here and now.

Mela's overall concern, then, is to point out all that is worth remembering in the world—and to do so in brief compass. And it is undeniable that myth and cult are singled out more than anything else for making a place worthy of inclusion. Mela twice refers to places that are “celebrated in *fabulae* and poems” (*fabulis carminibusque celebratus*, 1.64, 2.40; cf. Thule at 3.57, only in *carmina*). *Carmen* clearly brings us to the world of poetry; the word *fabula*, a notoriously difficult word to pin down, here probably means “myth removed from poetic enactment,” or “tale,” but there is more. Although Romer (22) asserts that *fabula* in Mela can mean either a mythical or historical story, and so translates it “legend,” the term is used almost exclusively for the province of myth except for two occasions in book 3, where it is used to describe strange happenings on the edges of the earth.²⁹ Mela does not explicitly define *fabula* as a story “*contra naturam*,” that is “against the laws of science,” as Servius would do later,³⁰ but it is clear from usage that the stories marked with the word contain unbelievable elements. By contrast, stories that are *secundum naturam*—unobjectionable stories, whether from the mythical past or more recently, that do not violate the laws of science—are usually reported without criticism (“*historia*” in Servius' definition may denote real or unreal events, like Phaedra's love for her stepson).

As his use of *fabula* indicates, Mela views quite a few stories from the past as unworthy of belief even as he passes them on to his readers. His incredulity is further indicated by the insertion of parenthetical comments that offload the authority for such implausible stories onto unnamed others. With

²⁷ 2.26 (Sestos and Abydos); 2.44 (Pagasae, where Argonauts launched the Argo).

²⁸ 1.97 (Abydos, love affair of Leander and Hero); 2.52 (Cyllene, birth of Mercury); 3.48 (oracle of Gallic god at Sena).

²⁹ *fabula*-as-myth: 1.27 (Hercules creates Columns of Hercules); 1.36 (Minerva born at Palus Tritonis); 1.64 (Perseus and Andromeda); 1.76 (Typhon in Cilician cave); 1.86 (Endymion loved by Luna); 1.108 (Golden Fleece, “an ancient tale”); 2.29 (man-eating horses of Diomedes); 2.36 (Giants attack the gods); 2.40 (Cithaeron); 2.51 (Taenarum and Cerberus); 2.98 (arrow-flinging birds on the Island of Mars); 2.112 (numerous myths of Crete); 3.106 (Antaeus). At 3.56 and 3.70 *fabula* is used of fabulous peoples on the edges of the earth.

³⁰ *Ad Aen.* 1.235, following in the rhetorical tradition of Cicero (*Inv.* 1.27, *Rhet. Her.* 1.13) and Quintilian (2.4.2). For a full discussion of the differences between the terms *fabula* and *historia* in Servius and his predecessors see Dietz 1995, Cameron 2004: 187.

frequency, these parenthetical phases—especially *ut ferunt*, “as they say”—are inserted at important points in the text (frequently just before a key participle or adjective) to reveal Mela’s doubts about the truth of the claim. But a few examples of this common feature:

Tinge oppidum pervetus et ab Antaeo, ut ferunt, conditum (1.26)

est Iope ante diluvium, ut ferunt, condita (1.64)

Lycia...ut ferunt, infestata olim Chimaerae ignibus (1.80)

Latmium montem, Endymionis a Luna, ut ferunt, adamati fabula nobilem (1.86)

in eo [Euxino] primum Mariandyni urbem habitant ab Argivo, ut ferunt, Hercule conditam. Heraclea vocitatur, id famae fidem adicit. iuxta specus est Acherusia ad manes, ut aiunt, pervius, atque inde extractum Cerberum existimant (1.103).

As Silberman and Romer both note,³¹ such references indicate that the author himself does not necessarily believe the stories to which he refers.³² It is worth noting here that nowhere does Mela provide an exact source for his mythical material, although at certain points he claims to report a story specifically told by anonymous locals (*incolae, accolae*) or points to a corroborating piece of evidence from cult or the landscape.³³

Despite betraying his own doubts about fantastical myths, Mela reports them nonetheless. Occasionally, however, the geographer offers a rationalizing interpretation of a myth which reduces the fabulous aspects of

³¹ Romer 1998: 24; Silberman 2003: 150 n. 10 *ad* 1.103 on Heraclea. Lightfoot (2014: 172) calls Mela an interested but non-committal reporter, but the geographer’s skepticism is clearly revealed by his use of *fabula* and phrases such as those found in the next note.

³² *ut aiunt*: 1.58 (Apis born “*divinitus*”), 1.88 (Phygela), 1.103 (Acherusia), 3.99 (Island of the Gorgons); *arbitrantur*: 1.36 (Minerva at Palus Minervae), 2.52 (Mercury at Cyllene), 3.66 (Liber at Nysa); *tradere*: 1.26 (Antaeus’ shield), 1.76 (*ut experti tradidere*, depth of Typhon’s lair), 1.88 (Amazons found Temple of Diana at Ephesus), 2.26 (Hecuba turned into a dog), 2.98 (*ut fabulis traditur*, arrow-shooting birds on Aria; cf. 3.56); *accepimus*: 1.98 (Cyzicus), 2.113 (Jupiter raised on Ida), 3.47 (Geryon), cf. 3.88. *credere*: 2.3 (Chersonesus founded by Diana), 2.99 (Symplegades); cf. 1.23 (Blemmyes), 2.117 (Alpheus does not mix with sea). *Ut ferunt* at 2.115 is used in his report that Sicily was once connected to Italy—perhaps this is an allusion to the mythical explanation, according to which Neptune sunders Sicily from Italy (Dion. Per. 476 with scholia *ad loc.*; cf. Call. fr. 618 Pf.). See Lightfoot 2014: 172 n. 163.

³³ 1.26 Tingi was founded by Antaeus supported by shield made of elephant hide, which is too big for modern people to carry; 1.36 Athena was born in the Palus Tritonis backed by cult; maidens fight among themselves when celebrating Athena’s birthday (cf. Hdt. 4.180); 1.64 myth of Cepheus and Andromeda at Iope is proven by altars with inscription of Cepheus and Phineus; monstrous remains of sea-creature are also shown; 2.29 “Tower of Diomedes” supports myth of Thracian Diomedes; 2.112 Jupiter’s tomb with a name inscribed is found on Crete; 3.106 Antaeus in N. Africa supported by tomb. Cf. Lightfoot 2014: 172 n. 164.

myths to ordinary events or natural features.³⁴ A subtle version of this occurs at 2.115 in the description of the Straits of Messina: [*fretum*]...*atrox, saevum et Scyllae Charybdisque saevis nominibus inclutum. Scylla saxum est, Charybdis mare, utrumque noxium adpulsis* (“a violent, savage [sea], made famous by the savage names of Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla’s a rock, Charybdis a sea, both dangerous to ships that get too close”). Mela begins by calling the strait *atrox*, “harsh,” and *saevum*, “raging” and “famous because of the savage names of Scylla and Charybdis.” Up to this point, I think, Mela is alluding to the mythical memory of these places (and precisely Homer), and the reader would be inclined to follow this lead. But immediately following this, Mela bluntly rationalizes them: Scylla is a dangerous rock, Charybdis a dangerous sea, statements that are also found in other geographical writers and poets.³⁵ Likewise, Mela offers a rationalizing explanation for Atlas holding up the sky at 3.101; the peak rises so high in the sky that it/he was said (*dictus est*) not only to touch the sky, but to hold it up. Some fabulous stories, such as those from the *Odyssey*, are explicitly relegated to the world of the mythical past. For instance, at 2.119, *Aetna [memoratur] quod Cyclopes olim tulit, nunc adsiduis ignibus flagrat*, the scientific explanation trumps the mythical—or rather the rational explanation of today supplants the fantastical stories of yesteryear. Although Mela is not explicitly critical here, since he elsewhere seems to follow the Palaephatean principle of “what came into being still exists and will exist hereafter,” we can be quite sure that Mela is doubtful about the existence of the Cyclopes in the past.³⁶

Perhaps the most elaborate rationalizing interpretation of myth is found at 3.66, which could come straight out of the pages of Palaephatus:

Nysa est clarissima et maxima [sc. urbium], montium Meros Iovi sacer. Famam hinc praecipuam habent; in illa genitum, in huius specu Liberum arbitrantur esse nutritum, unde Graecis auctoribus ut femori Iovis insitum dicerent aut materia ingressit aut error.

Of the cities in the region, Nysa is the most famous and biggest, of the mountains, there is Meros, sacred to Jupiter. These places have a remarkable reputation: they think that Dionysus was born in the former

³⁴ On rationalization in antiquity see now Hawes 2014.

³⁵ Cf. Pliny *NH* 3.87 *in eo freto est scopulus Scylla, item Charybdis mare verticosum, ambae clarae saevitia*. Strabo 1.2.16 rationalizes Scylla as a reflection of specific fishing practices in the area (see 6.2.3 for a discussion of Charybdis); Ovid *Met.* 14.73–74.

³⁶ Similarly, Lycia was once—no more—infested by the Chimaera (1.80); the Sirenoussae were once inhabited by the Sirens (2.69, *habitarunt*); Circeia “once Circe’s home” (2.71). Cf. 1.76, where Mela may be implicitly rationalizing the *fabula* of Typhon.

[Nysa], and raised in a cave of the latter [Meros]. Because of this, Greek authors were led to saying Dionysus was implanted in Jupiter's thigh either because of the material or due to misjudgment.

The absurd idea that Dionysus was stitched into Jupiter's thigh, then, is nothing more than a mistaken interpretation of the name of the mountain, Meros, which in Greek means "thigh." That Dionysus was raised inside a cave of "Thigh Mountain" led to the incredible story that Dionysus was literally raised in Jupiter's thigh—corruption of an ordinary event based on the disease of language, a common explanation of rationalizers. The connections between Mt. Meros in India and Dionysus were a product of Alexander's eastern campaigns. Arrian, who reports the story in full (*Anabasis* 5.1.1–2.7; cf. *Ind.* 1.6–7), remains agnostic precisely because of the implausible elements of the story. Quintus Curtius, who may be indebted to Mela, is also aggressively dismissive of the Greeks' mythologizing of the place-name.³⁷

As one can see from the previous example, Mela assumes a fair knowledge of Greek on the part of his audience. In the story of Dionysus and Meros, Mela assumes that the Latin audience would easily make the equation between Greek *meros* and Latin *femur*; so too do Curtius and Pliny. In other places Mela takes it for granted that his readers would know the underlying Greek word of an etymology. For instance, at Mela 1.92 we are offered two alternative explanations for the name of the city Antandros, one mythological:³⁸

alii Ascanium, Aeneae filium, cum ibi regnaret, captum a Pelasgis, ea se redemisse commemorant, alii ab his putant conditam quos ex Andro insula vis et seditio exegerat. Hi Antandrum quasi "pro Andro," illi quasi "pro viro" accipi volunt.

Some relate that Ascanius, the son of Aeneas, was captured by the Pelasgians when he was king there, and that he bought his freedom in exchange for the city; other think that the city was founded by those men who had been driven from Andros by violence and sedition. The latter

³⁷ Quint. Curt. 8.10.11–12: *et vera haec origo erat. Sita est urbs sub radicibus montis, quem Meron incolae appellant: inde Graeci mentiendi traxere licentiam, Iovis femine Liberum Patrem esse celatum.* The date of Curtius is vexed; on the relationship between the two, see Parroni 1984 (46 and *ad loc.* 1.39), who favors a later date for Curtius. Cf. Pliny *NH* 6.79 (also probably derivative of Mela) *nec non et Nysam urbem plerique Indiae adscribunt montemque Merum, Libero Patri sacrum, unde origo fabulae, Iovis femine editum.*

³⁸ Cf. Conon 41, where the same two etymologies are offered with more detail, and Serv. *ad Aen.* 3.6, substituting Polydorus for Ascanius (cf. Parroni *ad loc.*).



propose that Antandros comes from “Andros,” while the former say it comes from “vir” (= Greek *andr-*).

A reader of Mela must make the leap from the Latin root *vir-* to Greek *andr-*, perhaps not overly difficult, but other examples require more depth of knowledge.³⁹

4. Between Narration and Allusion

The remainder of this essay will be concerned with Mela’s narrative choices and explore the spectrum between narrative and allusion, which will perhaps allow us to get closer to the purpose of Mela’s enterprise. First, narrative. Let us look at a passage already mentioned (2.5; cf. category B above):

Achilles infesta classe mare Ponticum ingressus, ibi ludicro certamine celebrasse se victoriam et cum ab armis quies erat, se et suos cursu exercitavisse memoratur—ideo dicta est Dromos Achilleos.

Achilles invaded the Black Sea with a hostile fleet, and there (the story goes) he celebrated his victory with athletic games, and, when there was repose from war, he and his men exercised by running—that is why it’s called the Racetrack of Achilles.

Here we have an explanation of the name of thin spit of land facing the mouth of the Borysthenes called the *Achilleōs Dromos*, or “Racetrack of Achilles.” For reasons that are not entirely clear, the cult of Achilles was stronger in the Black Sea, and particularly in the city of Olbia, than anywhere else in the Greek world.⁴⁰ The name *Achilleos Dromos* was known already to

³⁹ A similar example of twin etymologies occurs at 2.101, where the Islands called *Macaron*, “Blessed,” are explained either by the natural goodness of the soil and climate (*fortunati admodum caeli solique sunt*) or by an eponymous king (*regno Macar occupaverat*). Other examples of assumed knowledge of Greek: at 1.97 Mela offers a story about the name of Lampsacus that is nowhere else found but dependent on a Greek etymology: an oracle told the Phocaeans to found a city where “a place first shone forth” (*ubi primum fulsisset < λάμπει-*). At 2.5 (cited above, category B), the reader is left to make the connection between Latin *cursu-* and Greek *dromos*, as do Pliny (4.83) and Ammianus Marcellinus (22.8.4). At 1.116 Mela leaves *Gynaecocratumenoe* unexplained except for adding “regna Amazonum.” See 2.2 (*Hamaxobioe = plaustra*), 2.11 (*Basilidis...generis = mores regii*), 2.14 (*Anthropophagos = epulae visceribus humanis apparantur*; *Melanchlaenis = atra vestis*), 2.26 (*Cynos sema = ex figura canis*). See also our discussion of the Erythraean Sea below.

⁴⁰ If Proclus’ summary of the *Aethiopsis* can be trusted, Achilles was associated with the island of Leuce as early as perhaps the middle of the 7th c. BC, and Alcaeus fr. 354 (ca. 600 BC) reports that Achilles was known as the “lord of Scythia.” Despite recent synthetic studies that include less accessible Russian scholarship (in particular Hupe 2006a), we still are in the dark about the exact reasons why such a vigorous cult of Achilles emerged in the north Black Sea area. See Rusjaeva 2006: 47, “Nichts destoweniger konnte noch keine der diskutieren Fragen, wie die nach der Herkunft und dem ersten Aufkommen des Achilleus-



Herodotus (4.55, 76), but Mela preserves the first and fullest account of how the name came to be, and is likely the only independent witness of the story.⁴¹ Nowhere else is a foray into the Black Sea by Achilles reported, nor is it clear when the great Greek warrior would have had the chance to have campaigned in the Black Sea in the traditional tale of the myth.⁴² Instead Achilles' importance to the area was due to his presence there *after* his death, perhaps spreading from Leuce northward to Olbia (Ochotnikov 2006: 50). Hedreen (1991: 319) suggests that the name derives from the cult races that the Olbians held in Achilles' honor, perhaps as early as the 5th c. BC, though it is also possible that the name comes from the distinctive thin shape of the spit itself (see Tunkina 2006: 89).

By contrast, Mela offers an explanation from the world of myth. But a close reading of the passage reveals a contradiction. Mela, in fact, advances *two* explanations: 1) Achilles held games, presumably including races, *after* he had conquered the area, and 2) Achilles and his men kept in shape by running *during* the interstices of the campaign. The confusion here suggests that Mela is not reporting a tradition that he found in one of his sources,⁴³ but is creatively explaining the name of the area as best he can, appealing to the world of myth, though without any authority. It seems that Mela is attempting to explain both the place-name Achilleos Dromos and perhaps the cult title Pontarches⁴⁴ that may have been emerging in his day—an example of what I have called “creative mythography” elsewhere⁴⁵ to describe

Kultes, wirklich geklärt werden.” Ivantchik 2005: 71–2 with n. 32 plausibly argues that all Achilles-cult in the north Black Sea area derives from that on Leuce and is secondary to it. See further Hedreen 1991, esp. 318ff.

⁴¹ The accounts of both Pliny (4.83 *exercitatione eiusdem cognominata*) and Ammianus Marcellinus (22.8.4 *vocant indigenae...Achilleos dromos, exercitiis ducis quondam Thessali memorabilem*) are almost certainly taken from Mela's account. Another explanation is found in Eustathius ad Dion. Per. 306 (*GGM* 2.271), where “Greek” Achilles “went around” the Dromos Achilleos in pursuit of Iphigenia when she had been stolen away from Aulis—also clearly a creative explanation of the name.

⁴² Attempts to connect Achilles to the northern Black Sea *through myth* have been unsuccessful: Pinney's contention that a band of Scythian archers followed Achilles to Troy, thus explaining Alcaeus' line and Achilles' powerful presence in the region, is unsubstantiated in our ancient sources and remains unconvincing. It is conceivable, but highly unlikely, that an account existed in which Achilles campaigned in the Black Sea during the siege of Troy, for instance, during his “great foray.”

⁴³ The combination of similar but mutually exclusive explanations is, however, redolent of the scholastic tradition.

⁴⁴ Hupe 2006b: 212, who treats the cult of Achilles Pontarches extensively, sees a direct line “eine direkte Traditionslinie” from these mythological games to those of the imperial period in honor of Achilles Pontarches.

⁴⁵ Smith 2013: 187.

the act of creating a story to explain a name or detail that is otherwise not immediately understood.

Mela's desire to give a fuller account of the name Achilleos Dromos is surely prompted by the fact that it was unknown to his audience. A similar reason may lie behind Mela's full account of the Campi Lapidei, "Stony Fields," a prominent plain filled with fist-size stones that lies on the coast of France just northwest of Marseille (2.78):

Alioqui litus ignobile est, Lapideum ut vocant, in quo Herculem contra Alebiona et Dercynon, Neptuni liberos, dimicantem, cum tela deficcissent, ab invocato Iove adiutum imbre lapidum ferunt. Credas pluvisse, adeo multi passim et late iacent.

This strand, which they call "Stony," is unremarkable except that it is here that they say Hercules fought against Alebion and Dercynus, sons of Neptune. When he ran out of weapons, he prayed to Zeus for help, and the god responded with a shower of stones. So many stones lie in such a wide swath that one could believe that they had rained down.

Although the story in which Hercules, out of weapons, is aided by Jupiter with a hailstorm of stones to use against his enemies, goes back at least to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Unbound*, it may not have been immediately known to Mela's readers, and so more detail was necessary. But here we also encounter myth paired with a truly remarkable feature of the natural landscape, one that struck Mela personally, and perhaps this prompted him to add an additional bit of detail. In any case, this story concerning the Campi Lapidei were already part of the geographic tradition. Strabo (4.1.7), drawing on Poseidonius' criticism of Aristotle, offers scientific explanations for the phenomenon before moving on to a full account of Aeschylus' version of the myth (*Prometheus Unbound*), which runs several lines longer than Mela's. But even so, Strabo does not provide the names of Poseidon's sons (for that one must go to the mythographer Ps.-Apollodorus 2.109, who does not, however, report the shower of stones). Strabo even goes so far as to report Poseidonius' criticism of the myth: if Hercules was outnumbered by his enemy, why didn't Jupiter just send the storm of stones down upon them and destroy them directly? Strabo scoffs at such an attempt to reduce myth to logic, but it is noteworthy that Mela provides his reader only with the mythical explanation for the phenomenon and eschews any scientific explanation of the phenomena, though he provides scientific explanations elsewhere. The story in Mela is told efficiently, reminiscent of Hyginus' *Fabulae*, with a heavy reliance on subordinate clauses and participles (*dimicantem, invocato,*

adiutum), reducing the story to the fewest words possible. Even though his account is brief, Mela still provides the fullest version and includes details that are not found elsewhere, including in Pliny's allusive phrase, *Herculis proeliorum memoria* (NH 3.34).⁴⁶

More often, however, Mela provides simply a short but explicit reference to a myth, usually a line or so, frequently in subordinate clauses. To give two examples: *Cyllene quod Mercurium ibi natum arbitrantur insignis* (2.52, "Cyllene, notable because they think that Mercury was born there"); *quo primum ex mari Venerem egressam accolae adfirmant, Palaepaphos* (2.102, "and the place where the locals declare Venus first emerged from the sea, Palaepaphos"). Thus, Cyllene is briefly mentioned as the birthplace of Mercury, and the locals of Palaepaphos assert that their town is where Venus first emerged from the sea, though Mela does not mention the famous temple of Aphrodite founded by Agapenor there (Str. 14.6.3, Paus. 8.5.2). In the second example, Mela holds off on naming Palaepaphos until the final word. This could be merely stylistic variation, but one tempted to think that Mela wanted to give his readers a chance to figure out the place based on the mythological reference alone.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, the vast majority of these brief but explicit references are to the most well-known myths: those of Hesiod and Homer, the Perseus myth, the Argonaut adventure, Hercules, the Trojan War, and Aeneas.

Despite his early warning that geographical texts are dry, Mela occasionally resorts to using rhetorical and poetical language.⁴⁸ These instances usually occur in what I call "mythical clusters," which feature a thick collection of references to cult or myth in a small space. By way of example, I provide a passage that involves a cluster of foundation myths of cities and cults in Ionia (1.88):

Ibi a fugitivis, ut aiunt, condita—nomen famae adnuit—Phygela. Ibi Ephesus et Dianae clarissimum templum, quod Amazones, Asia potitae, consecrasset traduntur ... ibi Lebedos Clarii que Apollonis fanum, quod Manto, Tiresiae filia, fugiens victores Thebanorum Epigonos, et Colophon, quam Mopsus eiusdem Mantus filius statuit.

⁴⁶ Cf. Cameron 2004: 235.

⁴⁷ There are other examples of a possibly ludic delay in giving the place-name: 2.106, *et quam aliquando, omnibus qui mares erant caesis, tantum feminae tenuisse dicuntur, Atho monti Lemnos adversa*; 1.110 *inter non ignobiles Ulixis nomine Ithaca*; 2.113 *inter colles, quod ibi nutritum Iovem accepimus, fama Idaei montis excellit.*

⁴⁸ For an overview, see Parroni 1984: 51–53.

There is Phygela, founded, they say, by fugitives (the name confirms the story). There, Ephesus and the very famous temple of Diana, which the Amazons are recorded as having established after taking possession of Asia. There Lebedos and the sanctuary of Clarian Apollo, which Manto, the daughter of Tiresias, founded while fleeing from the Epigoni, the conquerors of Thebes, and Colophon, founded by Mopsus, the son of the very same Manto.

One notes the anaphora of the adverb *ibi*,⁴⁹ reinforcing the importance of this area, highlighted by the series of foundation stories attributed to the mythical past. Here we learn, or are reminded, that Phygela was founded by *fugitivi*, that the Amazons were responsible for the creation of the temple of Diana in Ephesus, a tradition that goes back to Pindar (fr. 147 S-M; cf. Paus. 7.2.7), that Manto daughter of Tiresias established the temple of Apollo in Claros, and that her son Mopsus was responsible for the founding of Colophon itself. Note that here, in addition to the rhetorical flourish, we also have mythographical elements (again reminiscent of Hyginus' *Fabulae*), namely the insistence on providing the genealogies of Manto and Mopsus as well as the reliance on participles.

Let us take a closer look at the mythological details of this passage, which offers some curiosities. The first line contains a rather obscure reference to the foundation of Phygela.⁵⁰ Mela attributes the name Phygela to the Greek root *phug-* and explains the etymology of the name as coming from the circumstances of foundation, that is “by fugitives,” as if from Greek ἀπὸ φυγάδων. But just who are these fugitives, and does Mela—the only independent source to provide this explanation—expect his audience to understand the reference? One clue to understanding the reference is, I think, the use of *ut aiunt*, which as we noted above is a signal that Mela is reporting a story from the world of myth. Mela seems to be pointing to the mythical explanation for the name reported by Strabo (14.1.20; cf. Theopompus fr. 59, Sud. and Et. Magn. s.v. Πύγελα), where the town—called Pygela until the early 4th century—was colonized by a fragment of Agamemnon's soldiers who suffered from *pygalgia*, or “buttock-pain,” and settled there because of

⁴⁹ Cf. anaphora of *hic* regarding places near Troy (1.93), Colchis (1.108) and Thessaly (2.36); see also Parroni 1984: 52.

⁵⁰ For an extensive discussion of this city, originally “Pygela” (prior to 394 BC), see Ragone 1984, esp. 212–229 for the etymological explanations of the name. Cf. Patterson 2013: 216–17.

their malady.⁵¹ By the early 4th c. BC, however, the name Phygela had become predominant, and thus the original etymology could be challenged. It seems, then, that Mela is attempting to rectify the contemporary name with the old mythical tale, that is, to give an etymological explanation of the contemporary name Phygela, while alluding to the etymology hidden in the allusion, one that explains the name Pygela. The shift from “those staying behind because of illness” to “deserters” is slight indeed, and there is no reason to suppose that the *fugitivi* in Mela’s text were anyone but Agamemnon’s men. In fact, since only Mela and the probably derivative Pliny⁵² report this etymology, the explanation that the town’s name comes from *phug-* may be entirely Mela’s own.

The next curious item is the detail that Manto founded the sanctuary of Apollo at Claros “while fleeing from the Epigoni, the conquerors of Thebes.” By all other accounts, Manto is captured in Thebes by the Epigoni and dedicated to Apollo at Delphi as the “finest of the plunder” (Apd. 3.85). There, she is ordered by Apollo to found a colony and, going eastward, settles in Ionia and founds the *hieron* of Apollo at Claros and, according to some versions, possibly Colophon itself.⁵³ It is true that Manto’s father, Tiresias, engineers a ploy to allow the majority of the Thebans to escape before the Epigoni sack Thebes, but by all accounts Manto seems to have been left in the city (Apd. 3.85, Diod. Sic. 4.66). Thus, Mela’s report is either a loose interpretation of the chronology of events, attempting to express the idea that Manto founds the sanctuary *after* the sack of Thebes, or a conflation of two separate events told in our mythographical sources—that is, that Mela mistakenly puts Manto in the party that flees from Thebes and does not himself understand the nuances of the story.

Finally, Mela is, as Silberman notes (p. 144), the only ancient authority to report that the famous seer Mopsus founded Colophon. Mopsus’ presence in the area is a mythical datum; his defeat of Calchas and the latter’s death is set in either Claros or Colophon, but ancient sources did not always take

⁵¹ Ragone 1984: 362 argues that the retention of the orthography “Pygela” by Theopompus, Strabo and the late Greek dictionaries is due to a “contesto retrospettivo,” and thus the original mythical explanation for the name is retained despite the change of the town’s name.

⁵² Ragone 1984: 229 presumes that Mela and Pliny are using the same Greek source, but in this case there is nothing to suggest that Pliny (5.114, *a fugitivis conditum, uti nomen indicio est, Phygela*) looked beyond Mela. In fact, the similarity of phrasing suggests that Pliny was using Mela directly.

⁵³ *Epigonoï* fr. 3 Bernabé (apud Schol. Ap. Rhod. 1.308 = Davies fr. 3), Paus. 7.3.1–2, 9.33.2, Apd. 3.85; Diod. Sic. 4.66 (where she is called Daphne). See Mac Sweeney 2013: 104–17 for a review of sources of the myths of Manto and Mopsus in Ionia.

great pains to differentiate between the two places (Mac Sweeney 2013: 116–17). The fact that Notium was also called “Colophon by the Sea” added to the confusion. But only Mela explicitly states that Mopsus founded Colophon. A passage of Pausanias, however, reports that Mopsus was responsible for driving the Carians out of the land completely, suggesting that the seer in fact pushed inland; Colophon is located some ten miles from the coast (7.3.2; Mac Sweeney 2013: 113–14). That Pausanias’ narrative transitions immediately to Colophon without naming a founder may imply that Mopsus was indeed the founder of inland Colophon. Mela’s claim, then, may not be invented whole cloth, but based on good authority.⁵⁴

To us, Mela’s control of myth, it seems, is at times shaky, but would his Roman readers have recognized the mistakes, and if they did, would they have objected? Not all readers would have been, like Ovid, Statius, and Tiberius, interested in the minutiae of Greek myth. Quintilian (1.8.18) reminds *grammatici* not to spend too much time explaining *historiae* (which include mythical references) in excessive detail; rather, once should expound only on familiar (*receptas*) stories, or at least those recounted by famous authors (*claris auctoribus memoratas*). It is perhaps noteworthy that Mela never offers competing mythical explanations for a place-name. If Mela presents alternative interpretations of a place-name, it is always a mythical explanation set aside another non-mythical one (see next example).

Next to full narration and explicit mention of a myth stands allusion. Indeed, the etymological derivation of Phygela from *fugitivi* seems based on an allusion to a mythical narrative. Another allusion based on an etymology occurs at 3.72, where Mela offers two possible explanations for the *Mare Rubrum*: *Rubrum mare Graeci, sive quia eius coloris est, sive quod ibi Erythras regnavit, Erythran thalassan appellant*. Mela offers alternative origins of the name, similar to those (more expansive ones) we find in Strabo: first, the Erythraean Sea could be named after the color *eryth-* (another place Greek knowledge is assumed), or it could be named after a certain Erythras, who ruled in the area. Just who this king is Mela does not tell us, although he refers to a monument to him on the island of Ogyris a few chapters later

⁵⁴At 1.79 Mela reports, again uniquely, that Mopsus founded Phaselis in Pamphylia. According to Theopompus (fr. 103, reporting a daughter of his named Pamphylia) and Callisthenes (apud Strabo 14.4.3; the name once was thought to be Callinus) Mopsus is connected with Pamphylia; cf. also Philostephanus apud Athenaeus (7.297f), who reports that one Lacijs was sent by Mopsus to found Phaselis. Pliny, *NH* 5.96 informs us that Mopsopia was the old name for Pamphylia. For Mopsus in Caria, see López-Ruiz 2009.

(3.79; cf. Dion. Per. 607). Pliny, whose account is almost certainly derived from Mela (Pliny *NH* 6.107 *a rege Erythra*), also does not tell us. It seems to me unlikely that the average elite Roman reader would know who this Erythras was, and to find out would have to look elsewhere—if he was inclined to go looking.

One could find the answer in other geographical texts. Strabo, citing Ctesias and Agatharchides of Cnidus, offers four explanations, two that have to do with the color, and two that feature a person named Erythras, one a Persian who constructed the first raft and sailed to an island in the middle of the sea, the other “Erythras son of Perseus who was king of this country” (16.4.20). Strabo does not make his preference known, but we are fortunate enough to have a fragment of Agatharchides himself on the subject, which does.⁵⁵ Citing the third century BC historian Deinias (*FGrHist* 306 F), Agatharchides reports that Perseus fathered, after Perses, one Erythras, who gave his name to the sea. This whole story Agatharchides calls an “Argive invention” (Ἀργολικὸς...σχεδιασμός), preferring the version where Erythras was Persian. One might charitably interpret Mela’s bare name as a refusal to commit to one version or the other, but it is just as likely that Mela was less concerned with supplying the specific story than ensuring that his readers know that the origin of the name was set in the mythical past.⁵⁶

Despite a few obscure references such as this, however, Mela’s allusions to the mythical past are usually clear and made through explicit connection of place and name. As it happens, the vast majority of pure allusions cluster in the sections on Greece (2.35–51). To cull a few from this section:

pares ad famam nisi quod Philoctetes alumnus Meliboean illuminat (2.35);

Cithaeron fabulis carminibusque celebratus (2.40)

quondam Pisa Oenomai (2.42)

Marathon magnarum multarumque virtutum testis iam inde a Theseo
(2.45)

Scironia saxa saevo quondam Scironis hospitio, etiam nunc infamia (2.47)

All of these references require the reader to supply the rest of the story through memory. The bare name of Philoctetes should evoke in their minds

⁵⁵ Agatharchides fr. 1–5 Müller (*GGM* I.111–3). See Burstein 1989: 42–44.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., the foundation of Myrina by one Myrinus (1.90). Elsewhere, a certain Amazon named Myrina founds the city: see Strab. 12.3.21, 13.3.6; cf. Steph. Byz. s.v., which gives both masculine and feminine forms.

the famed leader of the Trojan War, abandoned for years on Lemnos and the killer of Paris.⁵⁷ The name Cithaeron evokes but does not narrate the myths of Oedipus' exposure and Pentheus' gruesome death. Pisa prompts enactment of the myth in which Oenomaus is defeated by Pelops in a chariot race. And one must extrapolate from the place-names Theseus' conquest of the Marathonian Bull (and the Greeks' repulsion of the Persians) and his defeat of Sciron, the evil foot-washing brigand near Megara. As in 2.35 and 2.42 above, Mela is often content to simply associate a mythical name to a place, letting his reader connect it to a broader narrative. These names are usually the most well-known: Ithaca is particularly famous because of Ulysses' name (2.110); Aetna once was home to the Cyclopes (2.119); Aeaea was said to be home of Calypso (2.120); Erythia, we hear, is Geryon's home (3.47); the Gorgades Islands in the far southwest are home to the Gorgons (3.99).

Readers are thus presented with ludic references that test their memory on the basics of Greek mythology and encourages them to interact with the myth by (re-)enacting it in their minds. In so doing, implicit mental networks involving space and time are reinforced through the reenactment; and these mythical networks may help readers remember geographical networks.

An unusually rich series of allusions is found at 2.112:

Crete...multis famigerata fabulis, adventu Europae, Pasiphaae et Ariadnae amoribus, Minotauri feritate fatoque, Daedali operibus et fuga, Tali statione atque morte, maxime tamen eo quod ibi sepulti Iovis paene clarum vestigium, sepulcrum cui nomen eius insculptum est adcolae ostendunt.

Crete...celebrated for many *fabulae*: Europa's arrival, Pasiphae's and Ariadne's loves, the Minotaur's destructiveness and demise, Daedalus' inventions and flight, Talus' patrol and death. But most of all because of the fact that we have a pretty clear sign that Jupiter was buried there, and the locals show a tomb on which his name is inscribed.

Mela waxes poetic when he comes to Crete, "once the site of a hundred cities." Mela introduces his catalog with a rare and poetic word, *famigerata*, a word that is usually translated as "celebrated," but use of related words in Plautus connote "gossip" or "tall tales," which would fit in well with the use of *fabulis* here. The list of myths—all of which are, to various degrees, allusions—are presented elegantly, almost poetically, with balanced phrases,

⁵⁷ When Mela mentions Lemnos, however, the only detail given is another allusion (2.106): *et quam aliquando, omnibus qui mares erant caesis, tantum feminae tenuisse dicuntur...Lemnos.*

some of which are alliterative, *feritate fatoque, operibus et fuga, statione atque morte*. Nearly the entire mythical past of the island is told: Europa's arrival on the island, where we are to fill in the detail that she gives birth to Minos, who in turn marries Pasiphae, which leads to her love affair with the bull, the Minotaur and his death at the hands of Theseus, Daedalus' complicity in helping Pasiphae and his escape. Next comes the great bronze sentinel Talus, who walked three times around Crete each day and was killed by Medea or Poeas (Apd. 1.141). And finally, we encounter the famous tomb of Jupiter on Crete that the locals point to as proof of Jupiter's presence on the island, which goes back at least to Callimachus (*Hymn Zeus* 8) but becomes quite common soon thereafter.

It is here in this mythographical catalog of Cretan myth that we see Mela's poetic vision of the world shining through most obviously. The world is not just a register of places, but full of wondrous things that raise human senses above the ordinary—things that are worth mentioning and dwelling on even if they are ostensibly implausible or simply beyond belief. Gods in disguise, erotic interludes with bulls, Minotaurs, bronze giants, and the deaths of gods have no place in Mela's day—except for the fact that the places of his day are ineluctably connected to the stories from the mythical past. Crete occupies a central position in the Mediterranean, but it also occupies a central place in the mythical world, the hub of multiple highways that inevitably run through it. Jupiter, Europa, the Argonauts, and Theseus all have a connection to the island. The focus on myth and cult in the *Chorography* is, to a large extent, a function of Mela's implicit belief that his contemporary world is a result of evolutionary forces: events from the past, whether real or imagined, impacted the names, and more importantly the identities, of the places one might encounter in literature in first century Rome. Thus, Mela's enterprise, despite his claim that geography is an *opus...facundiae minime capax*, emerges as eminently literary and even borders on the poetic.

Mela's consistent and varied engagement with the world of Greek myth suggests that it was more than an incidental part of the *Chorography's* design. The reader is continually pulled away from the present to the mythical past, and the allusive nature of many of his mythical references suggests that Mela is not so much interested in instructing us in myth as he is in prompting us to re-enact stories mentally. The heavy emphasis on allusion differentiates this text from other prose texts—Ps.-Scylax, Strabo and Pausanias—which are instructive rather than ludic; in many ways the closest parallel to Mela's *Chorography* is the *Periegesis* of Dionysius Periegetes, which is likewise

allusive.⁵⁸ Mela asks *us* to forge the connections between the places he mentions and the vast network of Greek myth. At various points in the text we are asked to pause, to slow down, and focus our attention on a place through a reference to myth—to dwell in the space for but a moment longer. Thus Mela includes the stories not only as a source of entertainment, but also as a narrative tool to help the reader sort out and remember the complicated web of places and peoples in the world.⁵⁹ Mela's mythography, then, works in tandem with the geographical structure of the *periplus* to help the reader understand and recall the shape of the world. The mythical pathways of heroes—the Argonauts' expedition to Colchis, Hercules' travels all over the earth, Theseus' exploits, the Greeks' expedition to Troy, and Ulysses' far-reaching voyage after the sack of Troy—all serve to reinforce geographical knowledge. At the same time, the reader is also reminded that the earliest pioneers in geography were, in fact, the great travellers from the world of myth. The knowledge of the world in first-century AD Rome is owed, in large part, to those Greek heroes that first expanded the horizons of the inhabited world.

Appendix: Catalog of Myth in Pomponius Mela

Category A: Cultic Associations/Sacred Landscape

- 1.26 (Ampelusia) cave sacred to Hercules
- 1.39 (Cyrenaica) oracle of Hammon, *fidei inclutae*
- 1.55 (Chemmis) great Temple of Apollo
- 1.79 (Perga) temple of Diana Pergaea
- 1.82 (Patara) temple (*delubrum*) of Apollo, once rival to Delphi
- 1.86 (Didyma) oracle of Apollo, once called Branchides, now Didymaeus
- 1.88 (Ephesus) temple (*templum*) of Diana, founded by Amazons (see C, F)

⁵⁸ See now Lightfoot's magisterial edition, introduction and commentary to Dionysius (2014). At lines 12–13, for instance, Dionysius refers to the sacred sanctuary of "Amyclaeon Canopus" in Egypt; the adjective here refers to Sparta and thus to Menelaus, whose helmsman Canopus gave the place its name. Avienus in his Latin translation replaces the mythical allusion to Amyclae with a local geographical epithet *Pelusiaci...Canopi*.

⁵⁹ An anonymous reader of *Polymnia* rightly suggested that a narratological approach to Mela's work would be profitable, and I am indebted for this suggestion. Rather than attempt to apply such a theoretical approach in what is essentially a philological study, I hope to employ such tools in future studies of Mela and other geographical texts.

- 1.88 (Clarus) sanctuary (*fanum*) of Apollo, founded by Manto (see F)
- 1.96 (Rhoeteum) tomb of Ajax
- 1.100 (Mysia, Cape Poseideion) *fanum* of Neptune
- 1.101 (Bosporus, Chalcedon) temple to Jupiter (Ourios), founded by Jason⁶⁰
- 1.108 (Colchis) temple (*templum*) and Grove of Phrixus
- 2.3 (near Tauric Chersonesus) cave sacred to Nymphs
- 2.15 (Scythian and other northern peoples) worship Mars especially
- 2.17 (mountains of Thrace) sacred to Dionysus and Maenads
- 2.26 (Sestos) Bones of Protesilaus located here (*consecrata delubro*)
- 2.26 (Cynossema) tomb of Hecuba
- 2.40 (Delphi) sanctuary (*fanum*) and oracle of Apollo
- 2.41 (Eleusis) place is sacred to Ceres
- 2.41 (Heraeum near Argos) temple (*templum*) of Juno, *vetustate et religione percelebre*
- 2.42 (Elis) temple (*delubrum*) of Olympian Jupiter
- 2.43 (Epirus) temple of Jupiter Dodonaeus
- 2.46 (Rhamnus) oracle of Amphiaraus (misplaced)
- 2.48 (Isthmus) sanctuary (*fanum*) of Neptune
- 2.49 (Epidaurus) temple of Aesculapius
- 2.51 (Taenarum) temple of Neptune and sacred cave
- 2.118 (Henna) temple (*templum*) of Ceres
- 2.119 (Mt. Eryx) temple (*delubrum*) to Venus, founded by Aeneas
- 3.4 (near Hasta) altar and Temple (*templum*) of Juno
- 3.46 (Gades) temple of Egyptian Hercules (= Melkart)
- 3.48 (Sena) oracle of *numen Gallicum*

Category B: Narration

1.27 (Columns of Hercules) *addit fama nominis fabulam: Herculem ipsum iunctos olim perpetuo iugo diremisse colles, atque ita exclusum antea mole montium oceanum ad quae nunc inundat admissum.*

⁶⁰ The city Chalkedon is here conflated with the Hieron Chalkedonion, well north of the city.

2.5 (Achilleos Dromos) *Achilles infesta classe mare Ponticum ingressus, ibi ludicro certamine celebrasse victoriam et cum ab armis quies erat, se ac suos cursu exercitavisse memoratur. ideo dicta est Dromos Achilleos.*

2.78 (Campi Lapidei) *Alioqui litus ignobile est, Lapideum ut vocant, in quo Herculem contra Alebiona et Dercynon, Neptuni liberos, dimicantem, cum tela defecissent, ab invocato Iove adiutum imbre lapidum ferunt. Credas pluvisse, adeo multi passim et late iacent.*

Category C: Explicit Mythical Reference

1.26 (Tingi) founded by Antaeus (see also F)

1.36 (Palus Tritonis) Locals claim Minerva born here, explaining her epithet (*cognomen*)

1.64 (Iope) locals claim that Cepheus reigned there, pointing to ancient altars, and the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, pointing the bones of a giant sea-creature

1.76 (Cilicia) Typhon's lair

1.86 (Latmus) Luna's affair with Endymion

1.88 (Ephesus) Temple of Diana founded (*consecrasset*) by Amazons after taking possession of Asia (see also F)

1.88 (Claros) Temple of Apollo founded by Manto daughter of Tiresias while fleeing Epigoni

1.90 (Cyme) Pelops founds city on way back from defeating Oenomaus; Cyme, an Amazon, drives out inhabitants and gives her name to city (see F)

1.93 (Achaeōn limēn = *Achivorum statio*), where warring Greeks were stationed near Troy

1.94 (Ida) Contest of the Goddesses, Judgment of Paris

1.98 (Cyzicus) killed by Argonauts on way to Colchis

1.103 (Acherusia) Cerberus brought up from the underworld here

1.105 (Themiscyra) called Amazonium because Amazons camped here

1.108 (Colchis) famous for Golden Fleece

1.116 (Maeotis) Gynaecocratumenoe, *regna Amazonum*

2.11 (Taurians) Iphigenia and Orestes visit

2.24 (Bisanthe, mistake for Bisaltae?) where Rhesus ruled

2.28 (Zone) trees follow Orpheus

- 2.29 (Abdera) Diomedes killed by Hercules; city named after Diomedes' sister
- 2.36 (Pieria) home of the Muses
- 2.36 (Oeta) Hercules' last place on earth
- 2.44 (Pagasae) Argonauts' launching point
- 2.45 (Aulis) *statio* of Agamemnon and Greeks sworn against Troy
- 2.52 (Cyllene) Mercury born here
- 2.57 (Pola) inhabited by Colchians once
- 2.98 (Leuce) Achilles buried here
- 2.98 (Aria) island sacred to Mars with arrow-firing birds
- 2.99 (Symplegades, Cyaneae) rocks said to clash
- 2.102 (Palaepaphus) Venus emerges from sea here
- 2.106 (Lemnos) all males were killed, and the women rule
- 2.109 (Helene) notorious for Helen's debauchery
- 2.112 (Crete) Europa, Pasiphae and Ariadne, Minotaur, Daedalus, Talus, Jupiter's tomb (also D)
- 2.113 (Ida) Jupiter raised here
- 3.66 (Nysa, Meros) Dionysus
- 3.81 (Interior Egypt) Pygmies and Cranes
- 3.99 (Gorgades Islands) once the home of the Gorgons
- 3.101 (Atlas) sustains heaven
- 3.103 (western Africa) Pharusians, remnants of Hercules' comrades⁶¹
- 3.106 (Mauritania) Antaeus said to reign here; locals point to his tomb

Category D: Allusion

- 1.37 (Borion) Lotophagi
- 1.80 (Lycia) Chimaera
- 1.97 (Abydos) famed for *magni...amoris commercio*

⁶¹ Mela's text is obscure, *Pharusii aliquando tendente ad Hesperidas Hercules dītes, nunc inculti et...inopes* ("the Pharusians, once wealthy when Hercules was traveling to the Hesperides, but now uncivilized and poor"). Pliny (5.46) clarifies that the Pharusii were once Persians but accompanied (*comites*) Hercules on his journey the Hesperides. Cf. Str. 17.3.7.

- 2.26 (Sestos) famous because of Leander's love
- 2.35 (Meliboea) famed because Philoctetes is *alumnus*
- 2.36 (Olympus, Pelion, Ossa) famed for story (*fabula*) and war of the Giants
- 2.36 (Libethra), *fontes carminum* associated with Orpheus, not named
- 2.40 (Cithaeron) *fabulis carminibusque celebratus*
- 2.42 (Elis) there was once the Pisa of Oenomaus
- 2.45 (Marathon) witness to great virtues ever since Theseus
- 2.47 (Sciron's rocks) once notorious because of Sciron's hospitality
- 2.49 (Troezen) famous for its alliance with Athens⁶²
- 2.51 (Taenarum) named, similar in appearance (*specie*) and story (*fabula*) to the Acherusian cave mentioned earlier. Hercules' name is not explicitly given here.
- 2.53 (Calydon) more well known (*notior*) than other surrounding towns
- 2.60 (Rome) once founded by shepherds
- 2.69 (Palinurus) once a Phrygian ship-captain, now the name of a place (see F)
- 2.70 (Misenum) now a name of a place, but once the name of a Phrygian soldier (see F)
- 2.110 (Ithaca) Ulysses
- 2.112 (Crete) Europa, Pasiphae and Ariadne, Minotaur, Daedalus, Talus, Jupiter's tomb (possibly D)
- 2.115 (Strait of Messina) *Scyllae Charybdis nominibus inclutum* (followed by rationalization)
- 2.119 (Aetna) Cyclopes
- 2.120 (Aeaea) Calypso
- 3.47 (Erythia) Geryon

[Category E is omitted here since it is difficult to list all places with implicit mythological associations]

Category F: Foundation Myth/Eponym

⁶² Interpreted by Silberman and Romer as loyalty to Athens during Persian War (see Hdt. 8.41–43, book 9 *passim*), but perhaps also indicating the mythical connection as well (Pittheus, Aegeus, Theseus, Hippolytus).

- 1.26 (Tinge = Tingis) old town founded by Antaeus
- 1.27 (Columns of Hercules) created by Hercules when forced open channel between ocean and Mediterranean Sea (also B)
- 1.64 (Iope) founded before the flood (also C)
- 1.76 cave called *Typhoneum* was Typhon's lair
- 1.77 (Cape Sarpedon) limit of Sarpedon's kingdom
- 1.78 (Aspendos) founded "by Argives;" according to other sources (Hdt. 7.91, Str. 14.4.2–3) by Argives Amphilochus and Calchas
- 1.79 (Phaselis) founded by Mopsus
- 1.80 (Lycia) founded by Lycus son of Pandion
- 1.83 (Caria) Carians ethnically indigenous, Pelasgians, or Cretans
- 1.85 (Halicarnassus) "colony of Argos;" according to others (Str. 14.2.16, Paus. 2.30.5–10) specifically by Anthes.
- 1.88 (Phygela) founded by *fugitivi*, likely Agamemnon's men (see discussion above)
- 1.88 (Temple of Diana in Ephesus) founded by Amazons (also C)
- 1.88 (Temple of Apollo at Claros) founded by Manto daughter of Tiresias as she fled the Epigoni
- 1.88 (Colophon) founded by Mopsus son of Manto
- 1.90 (Myrina) founded by Myrinus
- 1.90 (Cyme) founded by Pelops founds city but later named after Amazon of the same name
- 1.92 (Antandros) according to one version, named for Ascanius (Greek *andr-* from "man," that is Ascanius); Conon 41 offers the same alternatives.
- 1.98 (Cyzicus) killed by Argonauts, gives name to city (implied: see C)
- 1.103 (Heraclea) founded by Argive Hercules
- 1.104 (Cytorus) founded by Cytisorus son of Phrixus (Strabo 12.3.10, citing Ephorus)
- 1.111 (Dioscorias) named after Castor and Pollux, who came with Jason to Pontus
- 2.3 (Chersonesus) city founded by Diana
- 2.11 (Race of the Basilides) origins go back to Hercules and Echidna
- 2.28 (Aenos) founded by Aeneas while in flight

- 2.29 (Abdera) named after Thracian Diomedes' sister
- 2.33 (Scione) founded by Achaeans after Troy was taken
- 2.69 (Palinurus) once a Phrygian ship-captain, now the name of a place (see D)
- 2.69 (Petrae) *quas Sirenes habitarunt*
- 2.70 (Misenum) now a name of a place, but once the name of a Phrygian soldier (see D)
- 2.71 (Circeum) once Circe's home
- 2.100 (Insulae Macaron) according to one version, named after Macar.
- 2.103 (Canopus) named after Menelaus' captain
- 2.109 (Helena) known, and presumably named, for Helen's *stuprum*
- 3.72 (Erythraean Sea) according to one version, named after Erythras

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