CHAPTER TWENTY

RHETORICAL GENRES AND PEDagogical practices

20.1 The Preparatory Exercises

From the start of the Imperial Age the program of the student(179,362),(985,756) of rhetoric involved two stages, the preparatory exercises (Gr. προγυμνάσματα, Lat. preexercitamina) and declamation (Gr. μελέτη, Lat. declamatio).

Preparatory exercises are the fruit of a pedagogical practice which in some respects dates back to the Classical period and developed in the Hellenistic Age.¹ Under the Empire a certain number of exercises were organized in a progressive series, known to us for the first three centuries thanks to both Latin sources (Quintilian and Suetonius)² and Greek sources (Aelius Theon and Hermogenes). Theon and Hermogenes, and later Aphthonius and Nicolaus, composed handbooks of progymnasmata for the use of teachers, providing a definition of the exercises, indications on how they were to be composed, and a series of examples.³

At the beginning of his handbook, Theon is careful to clarify the reason for teaching the exercises: they are necessary for anyone wishing to acquire the oratorical skill (ῥητορεύειν) and, more specifically, serve as preparation for the composition of judicial, deliberative, and epideictic hypotheses.⁴ Nicolaus describes this relationship between progymnasmata and hypotheses in terms of μέρος (“part”) and τέλειον (“complete”): the exercises constitute the parts (μέρη) of the τέλειαι ὑποθέσεις, i.e. complete speeches.⁵

² Quint. Inst. 1.9; 2.4; Suet. Rhet. 4.7; 25.8.
³ The fragments and evidence on the Greek Progymnasmata have been collected by Rabe in his edition of Aphthonius (1926) 52–70. See also Heath (2002) 129 ff.
⁴ Theon Prog. 59.9 ff. On the correspondence between rhetorical genres and hypotheses, cf. supra chap. 17.11.
⁵ Prog. 47.18–20 (T. 232). The term ὑπόθεσις designates here a “composition”, a complete “speech”, concerning a particular “subject” (i.e. judicial, deliberative, epideictic). Cf. Prolegomena to Aristides H2, 161.11–12. The conception of progymnasmata as part of a more complex composition is already expressed by Quintilian Inst. 2.10.1 (T. 150).
For each exercise the authors of the handbooks establish a specific relationship with one of the three genres. Aelius Theon and Hermogenes, for example, relate the narration to the judicial genre, while Quintilian states that the *loci communes* belong to the sphere of the *genus iudiciale*: it is sufficient to add the name of the accused to transform them into genuine accusations (*accusationes*), and on occasions they can be of use also to the defense. Quintilian emphasizes the proximity of the *θέσις* ("thesis") to the deliberative genre, as do implicitly Theon, Hermogenes, and Aphthonius when they prescribe for it the use of the *τελικὰ κεφάλαια*. But these indications are not always exclusive: the utility of some exercises is recognized for the composition of more than one genre. And there are also oscillations: unlike Theon and Hermogenes, Sopatros associates the *θέσις* with the praise rather than the deliberation, and Aphthonius, contradicting his own precepts, gives an example of *θέσις* treated as praise of marriage which adheres, at least in part, to the list of encomiastic topics.

The association between preparatory exercises and oratorical genres becomes systematic in Nicolaus. Early on in his treatise he says:

> τά μὲν γὰρ ἡμᾶς πρὸς τὸ δικανικὸν γυμνάζει, τὰ δὲ πρὸς τὸ <συμ>βουλευτικόν, τὰ δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὸ τρίτον, τὸ πανηγυρικόν

Further, some *preparatory exercises* contribute to practice on judicial *species*, some on deliberative, and some on the third species, the panegyrical.

Nicolaus is particularly interested in this question: in the description of each preparatory exercise, he specifies the genre to which it belongs;

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6 According to Theon (*Prog*. 60.3 ff.), a narration (*διήγησις*) followed by its confirmation or refutation corresponds to a complete judicial speech; Hermogenes (*Prog*. 4.21 ff.) ends the section on *διήγημα* showing to which part of the judicial speech narrative figures are more appropriate.

7 *Inst*. 2.4.22.


9 The association between *θέσις* and the deliberative genre is explicitly affirmed in the commentary to Aphthonius’ *Progymnasmata* by John of Sardis: *in Aphth. Prog*. 230.8–9 and 268.7–8.

10 According to Theon, the *σύγκρισις* is suited to all three genres, cf. *Prog*. 114.11–12.

11 For Sopatros cf. Rabe (1926) 65 and 69. For Aphthonius cf. the variant mentioned in Rabe’s apparatus (42.9–10). Also Nicolaus prescribes the use of the encomiastic topics as a plan for the *θέσις* (*Prog*. 72.7–73.13). These oscillations are noted by Pernot (1993) 60.

12 Stegemann (1934) *RE* s.v “Minukianos 1” cols. 2043–2045 tried to classify, also for Theon, Aphthonius and Hermogenes, all the preparatory exercises according to the three genres but the association in these authors is not still rigid and systematic.

13 We imply *εἶδος* rather than *γένος*, following the habitual use of Nicolaus (cf. the following passages cited).