The use of etymology as an exegetical tool in Alexandria and Pergamum: some examples from the Homeric scholia

In this paper I shall discuss some etymologies in the Homeric scholia, with the aim of highlighting differences and analogies in the methodological approach of grammarians active in the two rival centres of Alexandria and Pergamum. I shall start from my conclusions: the scholia that report the opposite opinions of Aristarchus, Crates and their pupils on the same problem show that both in Alexandria and in Pergamum etymology was used mainly to solve exegetical and textual problems, that is, to explain glosses and/or to establish the correct reading or spelling of a word. In fact, when we can compare their work on the same problem, no methodological differences are apparent.¹ These methodological analogies in the use of etymology can be used as an argument against the existence of two different and opposing Hellenistic traditions of grammar, a technical one in Alexandria and a philosophical one in Pergamum, and in favour of the unity of grammar as a τέχνη in antiquity.²

The material I shall examine to this purpose are the scholia on Homer that report opposing etymological interpretations of two grammarians of the 2nd century B.C., Aristarchus and Crates; as these scholia are too numerous to be all discussed

²See the arguments in favour of this reconstruction in Pinborg 1975: 110 ff.; Blank 1982: 1-5. See now the analysis of the usage of grammatical categories in Aristarchus by S. Matthaios, and especially his conclusions (Matthaios 1999: 621-25); on Crates, Broggiato 2002: xxxiii-xli.
in a short paper, I have provided a list of them at the end of this article. Here I would like to discuss just a few significant examples, where Aristarchus and Crates used etymology as an exegetical tool for interpreting difficult words in the poems. Let us consider first the scholia on *Odyssey* 12.89. Here Aristarchus and Crates discuss the meaning of the *hapax* ἀφρόι in the description of the sea monster Scylla in *Odyssey* 12, where Scylla’s πόδες, that is “legs” or “tentacles” are said to be ἀφρόι. Aristarchus understood the word as “unjointed”, and derived it from the Ionic ἁρπη (that is, κωλή, thigh-bone): so in his opinion Scylla’s tentacles were without bones or joints; Crates, on the contrary (fr. 60 Broggiato = 61 Mette = p. 53 Wachsmuth), connected it to ὀφέω (that is, φυλάσσω) and understood it as “that cannot be avoided”. According to Aristarchus, the description at 89 ff. suggests that Scylla’s long necks were long enough to reach the level of the sea and grab men from passing ships, whereas its tentacles were unjointed and feeble. Crates, though, maintained that Scylla lowered its feet (not its necks) from the cave, like a sea-monster: they were similar to tentacles in size and length, but

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3 For a complete list of Crates’ etymological explanations, see Broggiato 2002, Indice dei nomi e delle cose notevoli, s.v. “Etimologia”.

4 The sch. HQ ad *Od*. 12.89 is very long and with repetitions; the most relevant part runs as follows: ...

... Ἀριστάρχος δὲ ἀκώλους τοὺς γὰρ ἵωνας λέγειν φασί τὴν κωλῆν ἁρπη καὶ ὄραιαν οὐκ ἔχουτας οὖν ὀστά ἀκώλους καὶ ἀνάβρους λέγεσθαι, ὑποκείσθαι γὰρ φησι τῇ Σκύλλῃ πετραῖον τι θηρίον προσπεφυκός τῷ σκοπέλῳ καὶ κοχλίῳδες πόδας τε ἔχοι πλεκταινώδεις, ὡστε λέγειν οὕτως τὸν ποιητήν, Ἀριστάρχου πετραῖν” (*Od*. 12.231). κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀνωθέν φαντασίαν τῇ Ὄδρᾳ προσεπεκέναι καὶ τοὺς αὐχένας αὐτῆς ἰσομεγέθεις εἶναι τῷ σκοπέλῳ. καθείσαν δὲ τὴν Σκύλλαν τὰς κεφαλὰς οὕτως ἀναστάν τοὺς ἀρπαζομένους: "φέρει δὲ τε κρατὶ ἐκάστῳ / φῶτα ἀρπάζουσα" (*Od*. 12.99 sq.). ὡς ἀν οὖν ὀλισθηρῶν ὀστῶν τῶν ποδῶν καὶ οὕτω ἐχόμενος ἀντίληψιν, ἀφέτερο ἀν τις δέχατο τοὺς ἀκώλους. Κράτης δὲ ἐν τοῖς Περὶ διορθώσεως ἀφυλάκτους ἀκοῦει, οὕτως περὶ τῆς εἰκόνος διαλεγόμενους τοίούτων γὰρ τι ὑπόκειται ἥμων ἐξ μὲν ἔχομεν κεφαλάς καὶ δειρὰς οὐκ ἐλάττωνας, πρὸς δὲ τὴν θαλατταν ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ σπήλαιον ὑψος καθεμένους δώδεκα πόδας, οὕσως ἂν θαλάττων ἥμων ἔχοι, πλέκταναι ὀμοίους τῷ ὄγκῳ καὶ τῷ μῆκει, μείζονας τῶν αὐχένων καὶ τῷ ἀριθμῷ διπλασίους".
longer than the necks. The scholiast reports the two opposing explanations with unusual detail, quoting word by word Crates’ description of the monster and exceptionally also the title of his work where the problem was discussed, the Περὶ διορθώσεως. The underlying problem is in all likelihood what was Scylla’s appearance and whether the monster could move and chase its prey, a question we know was discussed in antiquity.  

The next scholia I would like to analyse are better known among modern scholars: the word in question is βηλός, which appears in the description of Hephaestus’ fall from mount Olympus in book 1 of the Iliad (ll. 591-4): Zeus throws his son from the divine βηλός, Homer says, and he falls for a whole day until he reaches the earth on the island of Lemnos. The scholia on this passage and on ll. 15.23 (where the word βηλός also appears), report the two different explanations held by the Aristarcheans and by Crates: according to the followers of Aristarchus, βηλός meant the threshold of Zeus’ dwelling on mount Olympus (cf. the future βήσω); in Crates’ opinion the word was connected with the Chaldaean name of the sky god, Bel, and it signified the outer limit of the universe.  

Crates’ etymology is linked to one of his notorious interpretations of Homer, which has come down to us in the Homeric Allegories (27.2-4) of an otherwise unknown Heraclitus, who wrote in the 1st century A.D. As Heraclitus tells us, Crates explained the myth about the throwing of Hephaestus as a cosmic measurement: Hephaestus is the god of fire, so he falls at the same speed as the sun; as he falls for a whole day, Homer’s lines give us the relative measure of the distance between earth and the outer limit of

5As the sch. H on Od. 12.124 testifies: someone athetised lines 124-6, because they stated that Scylla was not one with the rock (ἀθετοῦνται γ’, ὅτι διὰ τούτων σημαίνει μή εἶναι τὴν Σκύλλαν σύμφυτον τῇ πέτρᾳ).

6Sch. T ad ll. 15.23 b¹, AbT, *B and D ad ll. 1.591; Heracl. quaest. Hom. 27.2-4. On these scholia see Porter 1992: 95 ff.

7Crat. fr. 21 Broggiato (= 22 d Mette = 1 Helck = p. 44 Wachsmuth) and fr. 3 Broggiato (= 22 a Mette = pp. 40 sq. Wachsmuth). Notice also that in connexion with his etymology, Crates preferred to write βηλός with a circumflex accent (as opposed to the common spelling βηλός).
the universe (βηλός). Crates’ interpretation implies that the Homeric universe is a sphere with the earth at its centre, a theory Crates defended in many of his fragments dealing with the epics: Aristarchus, on the contrary, as we do today, thought that Homer described a flat earth, with the sky above and the underworld below. Olympus, of course, was the mountain and had nothing to do with the sky.\textsuperscript{8} This exegesis of the fall of Hephaestus is commonly considered one of Crates’ more bizarre readings of the \textit{Iliad}, so it comes as a surprise to discover that Crates in this interpretation was indebted to an Alexandrian grammarian of the school of Zenodotus, Agathocles of Cyzicus, who lived between the III and the II century B.C. He derived βηλός from βαίνω, and explained it as the outer circumference of the universe, that moves together with the stars\textsuperscript{9} (fr. 9 Montanari): as Montanari points out in his notes on the fragment (1988: 37), Agathocles had evidently interpreted the passage allegorically before Crates did. This is interesting, as allegory evidently was sometimes used in connection with etymology in Alexandria too, not only in Pergamum.

The last etymology I would like to present in detail concerns Apollo’s epithet HIE, that occurs twice in the \textit{Iliad} (15.365 and 20.152). What is the correct spelling of this epithet? The sch. A ad \textit{Il.} 15.365 \textit{a} (Herodian), sch. bT ad \textit{Il.} 15.365 \textit{b} (sch. ex.) and Eustathius ad \textit{Il.} 15.365 (1020,17)\textsuperscript{10} offer the following explanations:

(i) Crates’, who thought it should be written with a smooth breathing, as it derives from ἴασις ‘healing’ (see ἴαωμαι, to heal).
(ii) Aristarchus’, who writes HIE with a rough breathing, deriving it from ἔσις, ‘the act of throwing’, i.e. from the verb ἔημι;

\textsuperscript{8}On Crates’ reconstruction of the Homeric universe, see Broggiato 2002, Introduction, § 5.2. The scholia that report Aristarchus’ opinion on the subject have been conveniently collected by Martin Schmidt (Schmidt 1976: 81 ff.).

\textsuperscript{9}Agathocles fr. 9 Montanari: the sources for Agathocles are the same scholia (see above) that report Crates’ and Aristarchus’ etymologies.

\textsuperscript{10}See also the \textit{testimonia} ad Crates fr. 23 Broggiato (= 55 Mette = 7 Helck = p. 45 Wachsmuth).
(iii) Herodian’s, who quotes some examples aiming to demonstrate that η before a vowel always takes a smooth breathing, and that therefore this is the right spelling, independently of which etymology is the right one.

(iv) Another etymology, from εἰμί, ‘I shall go’, was certainly connected with Ἰπέριων, the Homeric epithet of the sun, understood as ὑπὲρ ιὼν (see the paraphrase of this scholium in Eustathius 1020.17); what underlies it is the identification of Apollo with the sun.\(^{11}\)

Etymology here is very probably used again as a tool to solve an interpretative problem. The issue concerned Apollo’s role in the epics: was Apollo the god of healing in Homer, as he was in later Greek literature? We can reconstruct this discussion from a number of sources. First, the D scholium on Il. 15.365, which discusses the meaning of Apollo’s epithet. It reports first Aristarchus’ etymology, then Crates’; the latter is rejected because Paeon, not Apollo, was the healer god in the epics.\(^{12}\)

In fact, we know that a pupil of Crates, Zenodotus of Mallos, suggested that Apollo and Paeon, the gods’ healer in Homer, were in fact the same god;\(^{13}\)
Aristarchus too discussed the problem, and argued that Apollo and Paeon were two different gods (see Aristonicus in A ad Iliad 1.473 a, 5.899, and Lehrs 18823: 177). We cannot be sure that Zenodotus of Mallos’ theory was in fact Crates’ own,14 but I think we can safely assume that the issue of Apollo’s healing powers in the epics had been a point on which scholars in Alexandria and Pergamum disagreed. I think we can assign to the same context the sch. ad Odyssey 4.231: in this line Homer states that in Egypt everyone is a physician, skilled above all other men, because they are descendants of Paeon.15 The scholium on this line offers an alternative version of Od. 4.231-2, assigning it to Aristarchus; “everyone is a physician, because Apollo gave them the gift of healing, skilled above all other men: for they are descendants of Paeon”. This version implies not only that Apollo had healing powers but also that he and Paeon were the same god.16 The scholiast then objects that Apollo and Paeon were not to be identified, quoting a line from Hesiod. The assignment of the variant to Aristarchus in the scholium is an evident mistake (see Lehrs 18823: 177), as it is not the variant, but the arguments against it that probably go back to him (so Ludwich 1884: 541—2). The alternative version of 231-2 could go back in fact to Zenodotus of Mallos (so Schmidt 1854: 192) or even to Crates, whose name is on other occasions

14So Helck 1905: 38; Wachsmuth, on the contrary, assigned it to Crates himself (1860: 28).

15Od. 4.231 f.: ιθρός δὲ ἕκαστος ἐπιστάμενος περὶ πάντων / ἀνθρώπων· ἢ γὰρ Παϊήνος εἰς γενέθλιος.

16Sch. BHQ ad Od. 4.231: ιθρός δὲ ἕκαστος· . . . Ἀρίσταρχος (Ludwich; Ζηνόδοτος Μάλλωτς propos. Schmidt; an Κράτης?) δὲ γράφει οὕτως: ιθρός δὲ ἕκαστος, ἐπεὶ σφυ όρκυν Ἀπόλλων / ιάσθαι· καὶ γὰρ Παϊήνος εἰς γενέθλιος, κακῶς, διαφέρει ὁ Παϊήν Απόλλωνος, ὡς καὶ Ἡσίοδος μαρτυρεῖ: εἰ μὴ Ἀπόλλων Φοίβος ὑπὲκ θανάτου σαώσαι, ἢ καὶ Παϊήν, ὡς ἀπάντων φάρμακα οἶδεν” (fr. 307 M.-W.). Cf. sch. MTV ad Od. 4.232.
certainly confused with Aristarchus’ in our sources, as they often are quoted together.\footnote{See sch. H ad \textit{Odyssey} 11.14; \textit{EM} p. 779.9 = \textit{Et. Gen.} p. 293.19 Miller.}

So, I think it is very likely that the etymology of Apollo’s epithet $\text{HIE}$ belongs to the discussion we have just reconstructed. The wider context of this disagreement was the different approach of Aristarchus and Crates to the poems of Homer, which was also the main point of disagreement between them on the exegesis of poetry: Crates took Homer to have a correct understanding of the world; as a consequence he read into the epics allusions to Homer’s knowledge of Hellenistic astronomy and geography. Aristarchus, as we do today, placed the poems in a social and historical context different from his own; therefore, he could understand why Apollo in the epics did not necessarily have the same area of influence he had in classical Greece and why the universe described in Homer’s poems did not have to be correct according to Hellenistic scientific knowledge. Today, Aristarchus’ approach can be applied not only to classical literary texts but also to the remains of ancient scholarship on these texts: ancient etymologies and interpretations can be properly understood and evaluated only if we place them in the historical and cultural context of the time when they were produced.

Opposing etymological interpretations by Aristarchus and Crates in the Homeric scholia:

\begin{itemize}
  \item $\delta \iota \' \acute{\alpha} \sigma \pi \iota \delta \acute{\epsilon} \acute{o} \acute{s}$ ad \textit{Il.} 11.754 textual problem (hapax)
  \item $\beta \acute{h} \iota \circ$ ad \textit{Il.} 1.591, 15.23 exegetical problem
  \item $\acute{h} \iota \circ$ ad \textit{Il.} 15.365 exegetical problem
  \item $\acute{a} \nu \acute{o} \pi \acute{a} \acute{i}$ ad \textit{Od.} 1.320 difficult word (hapax)
  \item Πλαγκταί ad \textit{Od.} 12.61 difficult word (place name)
\end{itemize}
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