

Questo articolo è stato pubblicato in *Etymologia. Studies in Ancient Etymology*, a c. di C. Nifadopoulos, Münster 2003, pp. 65-70. Questa è una versione pre-print.

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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

¹So already Schröter 1960: 64-6 and Pfeiffer 1968: 241.

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.³ 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* ἄωροι in the description of the sea monster Scylla in *Odyssey* 12, where Scylla's πόδες, that is "legs" or "tentacles" are said to be ἄωροι. Aristarchus understood the word as "unjointed", and derived it from the Ionic ὠρη (that is, κωλῆ, 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 ὠρέω (that is, φυλάσσω) and understood it as "that cannot be avoided".⁴ 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

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

⁴The sch. HQ ad *Od.* 12.89 is very long and with repetitions; the most relevant part runs as follows: ... Ἀρίσταρχος δὲ ἀκόλους· τοὺς γὰρ Ἴωνας λέγειν φασὶ τὴν κωλῆν ὠρην καὶ ὠραίαν· οὐκ ἔχοντας οὖν ὅστ᾽ ἀκόλους καὶ ἀνάρθρους λέγεσθαι. ὑποκεῖσθαι γὰρ φησι τῇ Σκύλλῃ πετραῖόν τι θηρίον προσπεφυκὸς τῷ σκοπέλῳ καὶ κοχλιῶδες πόδας τε ἔχον πλεκτανῶδεις, ὥστε λέγειν οὕτως τὸν ποιητὴν, "Σκύλλην πετραίην" (*Od.* 12.231). κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἄνωθεν φαντασίαν τῇ "Υδρα προσεοικέναι καὶ τοὺς αὐχένους αὐτῆς ἰσομεγέθεις εἶναι τῷ σκοπέλῳ. καθεῖσαν δὲ τὴν Σκύλλαν τὰς κεφαλὰς οὕτως ἀνασπᾶν τοὺς ἀρπαζομένους· "φέρει δέ τε κρατὶ ἐκάστῳ / φῶτα ἀρπάζουσα" (*Od.* 12.99 sq.). ὡς ἂν οὖν ὀλισθηρῶν ὄντων τῶν ποδῶν καὶ οὐκ ἐχόντων ἀντίληψιν, ἄωρους ἂν τις δέξαιτο τοὺς ἀκόλους. Κράτης δὲ ἐν τοῖς *Περὶ διορθώσεως ἀφυλάκτους ἀκούει*, οὕτως περὶ τῆς εἰκόνος διαλεγόμενος· "τοιούτων γὰρ τι ὑπόκειται ζῶον ἕξ μὲν ἔχον κεφαλὰς καὶ δειρὰς οὐκ ἐλάττονας, πρὸς δὲ τὴν θάλατταν ἀπὸ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ σπήλαιον ὕψους καθειμένους δώδεκα πόδας, οἷους ἂν θαλάττιον ζῶον ἔχοι, πλεκτάναις ὁμοίους τῷ ὄγκῳ καὶ τῷ μήκει, 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.⁵

The next scholia I would like to analyse are better known among modern scholars:⁶ the word in question is *βηλός*, which appears in the description of Hephaestus' fall from mount Olympus in book 1 of the *Iliad* (Il. 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 Il. 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.⁷ 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 μὴ εἶναι τὴν Σκύλλαν σύμφυτον τῇ πέτρᾳ*).

⁶Sch. T ad Il. 15.23 b¹, AbT, *B and D ad Il. 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 *βῆλος* 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.⁸ This exegesis of the fall of Hephaestus is commonly considered one of Crates' more bizarre readings of the *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 stars⁹ (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 ΗΙΕ, that occurs twice in the *Iliad* (15.365 and 20.152). What is the correct spelling of this epithet? The sch. A ad *Il.* 15.365 *a* (Herodian), sch. bT ad *Il.* 15.365 *b* (sch. ex.) and Eustathius ad *Il.* 15.365 (1020,17)¹⁰ offer the following explanations:

- (i) Crates', who thought it should be written with a smooth breathing, as it derives from ἰασις 'healing' (see ἰάομαι, to heal).
- (ii) Aristarchus', who writes ΗΙΕ with a rough breathing, deriving it from ἔσις, 'the act of throwing', i. e. from the verb ἔημι;

⁸On 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.).

⁹Agathocles fr. 9 Montanari: the sources for Agathocles are the same scholia (see above) that report Crates' and Aristarchus' etymologies.

¹⁰See also the *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 εἶμι, 'I shall go', was certainly connected with Ὑπερίων, the Homeric epithet of the sun, understood as ὑπὲρ ἰών (see the paraphrasis 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 // 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

¹¹On the identification Apollo/sun, very common in allegorical interpretations of Homer, see Buffière 1956: 187-97; Crates too identified Apollo with the sun, but in a different context (sch. A ad // 18.240 b = Crates fr. 26 Broggiato). On the etymology ὑπὲρ ἰών see e. g. [Plut.] *De Hom.* 2.104.2.

¹²Sch. D on // 15.365: ἦϊε: τοξικέ. παρὰ τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν βελῶν. ἔστιν γὰρ ἐπίθετον Ἀπόλλωνος. ἔστιν δὲ κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν τῆς πρώτης συλλαβῆς, ἵν' ἦ ἰήϊε· ἰὸς γὰρ λέγεται τὸ βέλος παρὰ τὸ ἰέναι. ἔνιοι δὲ ψιλῶς ἀναγινώσκοντες ἀπέδοσαν ἰατρέ, οὐκ ὀρθῶς, ἐπεὶ θεῶν ἰατρὸν τὸν Παιήονα Ὅμηρος παραδίδωσιν. I follow van Thiel's provisional text (*Scholia D in Iliadem secundum codices manu scriptos* ed. H. van Thiel, Proecdosis 2000, <http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/ifa/vanthiel>).

¹³Sch. T ad // 15.262 (sch. ex.): ἔμπνευσε μένος μέγα <ποιμένι λαῶν> Ζηνόδοτος ὁ Μαλλώτης (fr. 2 p. 149 Pusch, see also p. 150 and 153) ἐκ τούτου συνάγει ὅτι Παιήων ἐστὶν ὁ Ἀπόλλων, εἶγε αὐτὸς ἐπιρρώνυσι τὸν Ἑκτορα. See also sch. Veron. ad Verg. *Aen.* 10.738 (p. 448 Hagen): Zenodotus in eo, quem inscribit πειτονίην . . . riam (*an Epitomen historiae? Erbse, coll. FGHist 19, 1*) sub nomine Naucratis facit

Aristarchus too discussed the problem, and argued that Apollo and Paeon were two different gods (see Aristonicus in A ad *Iliad* 1.473 a¹, 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 assignation 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

disser[ere] Aristarchios, qui putant alium Paeana esse, alium Apollinem; ipse eundem nec diver[sum] multis docet.

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

¹⁵*Od.* 4.231 f.: ἰητρὸς δὲ ἕκαστος ἐπιστάμενος περὶ πάντων / ἀνθρώπων· ἧ γὰρ Παιήονος εἶσι γενέθλης.

¹⁶Sch. BHQ ad *Od.* 4.231: ἰητρὸς δὲ ἕκαστος: . . . τ'Ἀρίσταρχοστ (Ludwich; Ζηνόδοτος Μαλλώτης **propos. Schmidt; an Κράτης?**) δὲ γράφει οὕτως· "ἰητρὸς δὲ ἕκαστος, ἐπεὶ σφισι δῶκεν Ἀπόλλων / ἰᾶσθαι· καὶ γὰρ Παιήονος εἶσι γενέθλης", κακῶς. διαφέρει ὁ Παιήων Ἀπόλλωνος, ὡς καὶ Ἡσίοδος μαρτυρεῖ· "εἰ μὴ Ἀπόλλων Φοῖβος ὑπέκ θανάτοιο σαῶσαι, ἧ καὶ Παιήων, ὃς 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.¹⁷

So, I think it is very likely that the etymology of Apollo's epithet ΗΙΕ 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:

δι' ἀσπιδέος	ad <i>Il.</i> 11.754	textual problem (hapax)
βῆλος	ad <i>Il.</i> 1.591, 15.23	exegetical problem
ἥϊος	ad <i>Il.</i> 15.365	exegetical problem
ἀνόπαια	ad <i>Od.</i> 1.320	difficult word (hapax)
Πλαγκταί	ad <i>Od.</i> 12.61	difficult word (place name)

¹⁷See sch. H ad *Odyssey* 11.14; *EM* p. 779.9 = *Et. Gen.* p. 293.19 Miller.

ἄωροι	ad <i>Od.</i> 12.89	difficult word (hapax)
ἐπιγουνίς	ad <i>Od.</i> 17.225, 18.74	difficult word
λάω	ad <i>Od.</i> 19.229	difficult word (hapax)
κουρίξ	ad <i>Od.</i> 22.188	difficult word (hapax)
ὑπερικταίνοντο	ad <i>Od.</i> 23.3	difficult word (hapax)

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