Beyond the canon: Hellenistic scholars and their texts

Abstract
My paper offers a survey of the surviving evidence on the genres and authors that were the object of study in Hellenistic times. Only a limited number of texts were systematically edited and commented on in the scholarly centres of Alexandria and Pergamum; this selection goes back to choices that were originally made in fifth- and fourth century Athens, in particular by Aristotle and his school. While the bulk of the Hellenistic scholars’ work was devoted to these works, there is nonetheless some documentation regarding their interest in minor authors, non-canonical genres and in contemporary poets as well.

1. Scholars, authors and genres

In this paper I would like to offer some reflections on the role played by Hellenistic philologists in choosing and arranging the texts of Greek literature as we read them today, in particular on their choice of genres and authors to study and hand on to the succeeding generations of readers and scholars. In addition, in the second part of my paper, I shall try to show how texts belonging to “submerged” or “underground” genres, which were not the direct object of scholarly work in antiquity, do sometimes resurface as quotations or parallel passages in erudite works dealing with major authors, or in compilations with miscellaneous contents.

The term ‘genre’ in itself, if we look back to the early stages of Greek literary production, can engender misunderstandings, since we have the tendency to apply to an archaic culture, which was still much more oral and aural than literate, the conventions of a later society when the written word prevailed. For the sake of clarity, I shall be using the term ‘genre’ in the modern, current
sense, as it has been codified for Greek literature from the time of Aristotle onwards.\footnote{On the fundamental importance of performance and occasion in the early history and definition of genres see \textit{R. Nicolai's contribution in this volume}.}

If we consider an overview of the work of Hellenistic philologists, for example the well-known \textit{History of Classical Scholarship} published by Rudolf Pfeiffer in 1968 or the more recent contribution by Franco Montanari (in the collective work \textit{Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica}, 1993), we immediately see that a large part of the editorial and exegetical work of major ancient philologists had as its object a relatively small number of authors and genres, in particular epic poetry, lyric, iambus and drama, then history and later oratory.

The available evidence is summarized in the following table, that presents, as far as possible, the scholarly work of the most important Hellenistic grammarians, arranged by genre (for more details on the single authors studied see below, § 3).\footnote{This table requires a few remarks. First of all, note that comedy was an object of study well before Eratosthenes: in the early Hellenistic age Lycophron and Euphronius both wrote on ancient comedy (Pfeiffer 1968, 119 f. = 201 f. and 160 f. = 259 ff.; the fragments have been edited by C. Strecker in 1884); on the studies on comedy by Aristotle’s school and in third-century Alexandria see now the detailed analysis in Lowe 2013. Regarding the genre of philosophy, the Alexandrians studied Plato’s dialogues as literary texts, and do not appear to have had an interest in their philosophical contents (on this see Schironi 2005; I would like to thank Maria Grazia Bonanno for drawing my attention to this important fact). Finally, a special case is the commentary on a hexametric Orphic poem found in the Derveni papyrus (see Kouremenos-Parássoglou-Tsantsanoglou 2006).}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& epic & lyric & iambus & comedy & tragedy & historiography & philosophy & oratory\
\hline
Zenodotus (IV-III BC) & x & x? & & & & & & \\
\hline
Eratosthenes (III-II BC) & x & & x & & & & & \\
\hline
Aristophanes of Byzantium (III-II BC) & x & x & x & x & x & x? & & \\
\hline
Aristarchus (II BC) & x & x & x & x & x & x & x? & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Genres studied by the major Hellenistic scholars}
\end{table}
In the table I did not discriminate between editions of texts (ἐκδόσεις, διορθώσεις), ὑπομνήματα (commentaries), and the so-called Περί-Literatur, which comprises monographs on particular problems, works or authors. In fact, as our sources tend to omit work titles, it is often impossible, from the short fragments we possess, to decide whether the discussion of a particular passage belonged, for example, to a commentary or to the edition of an author.

We should remember that my table does not take into account other types of works, such as collections of lexeis, proverbs, and works on non-literary texts. We shall go back to these later. It is evident, in any case, that the ancient grammarians focused their work on a limited number of genres, and within these on a limited number of authors. These are Homer (understood as the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey), Hesiod’s Theogony and Works and Days, the nine lyric poets, Archilochus, the three major tragedians and, among the comedians, Aristophanes. We possess less information on prose writers, who undoubtedly received much less attention than the poets; however, we have a papyrus with the fragment of a commentary by Aristarchus on Herodotus (Pap. Amherst, II, 12).4 From Didymus, who based his works on the writings of earlier interpreters, we can probably infer that Aristarchus had written a commentary on Thucydides as well;5 moreover, there surely existed commentaries on Demosthenes written before Didymus, who makes explicit

---

3 On ancient editions of the epics see Pagani-Perrone 2012, 97-124.  
4 See also a fragment of the grammarian Hellanicus, an older contemporary of Aristarchus, who discusses the word-division, and consequently the accentuation, of a passage in Herodotus’ Histories: we cannot ascertain whether this is the discussion of an isolated passage or the fragment of a systematic commentary (see Hellanicus fr. 5 Montanari = sch. Soph. Philoct. 201, discussing Hdt. 2. 171. 2, with Montanari’s notes).  
5 See Pfeiffer 1968, 225 = 349 f.
reference to them in his monograph on Demosthenes, preserved in a Berlin papyrus.\(^6\)

Therefore, while Callimachus in his *Pinakes* listed an enormous number of authors and works, apparently only a fraction of them was the object of editorial and exegetical work in Hellenistic times. Evidently the Alexandrian library possessed a treasury of other texts which were certainly read, but not commented on. This selection process did not take place by chance, and certainly Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus had a decisive role in it. The term that was later used to refer to this process of selection is \(\varepsilon\gamma\kappa\omicron\iota\vartheta\epsilon\nu\varepsilon\varsigma\), and the authors included in the lists of selected writers were called \(\varepsilon\gamma\kappa\omicron\iota\theta\epsilon\nu\varepsilon\varsigma\); their works were commented on (\(\pi\rho\acute{a}\tau\tau\epsilon\iota\nu\iota\)), and they were accordingly called \(\pi\rho\acute{a}\tau\tau\omicron\mu\epsilon\omicron\nu\omicron\). Their writings were copied to be read in schools and by educated readers, while the others over time were forgotten.\(^7\)

2. Pre-Alexandrian scholars and their texts

In order to better understand the historical context of the work of Hellenistic scholars, it will be useful to investigate whether their choice to analyse some authors rather than others can be explained through the influence of an earlier tradition of studies.

The earliest representative of philology and literary exegesis is for us Theagenes of Rhegium, who lived in the last quarter of the sixth century BC. Theagenes interpreted the Homeric poems, which is not surprising, since the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would be the main object of study and interest in the whole course of Greek culture. The same considerations apply in general to epic poetry, and in particular to Hesiod: a contemporary of Theagenes,

---

\(^6\) *P.Berol.* inv. 9780, published by H. Diels and W. Schubart (*Didymos Kommentar zu Demosthenes*, Berliner Klassikertexte Heft I, Berlin 1904); see Pfeiffer 1968, 278 = 419 f. A new edition of the papyrus, with translation and notes, has been published by P. Harding in 2006 (see especially pp. 31 f. on Didymus’ predecessors). On ancient scholarly works on Demosthenes see Gibson 2002 (pp. 26-35 discuss scholarship on Demosthenes before Didymus).

\(^7\) See Pfeiffer 1968, 203-208 = 323-326: the term \(\varepsilon\gamma\kappa\omicron\iota\theta\epsilon\nu\varepsilon\varsigma\) is attested only for the orators, but it can be applied to poets as well (p. 323 and n. 233). The very existence of lists of selected authors has been questioned; moreover, this topic is linked to the problem of imitation, as the selected authors are offered as models of style: see Nicolai 1992, 251-265, with a review of modern literature on the problem, and *his contribution in this volume*. 
Xenophanes of Colophon, had attacked Hesiod and Homer’s representation of the behaviour of the traditional gods. Theagenes, probably replying to these allegations, used allegorical exegesis to defend those episodes of poems, such as the battle of the gods in the *Iliad*, that could be accused of representing the gods in a manner not in keeping with the expectations of a sixth-century audience.8

More than a century later, in Plato’s *Ion*, the rhapsode Ion boasts about the interpretations of Homer he can offer to his audience, and Socrates asks him if he is able to explain not only Homer, but Hesiod and Archilochus as well.9 The passage, I believe, is a valuable clue as to which texts were considered central in the interests of Greek exegesis of the time. As for Homer, his presence in school teaching in Athens is clearly attested in a well-known fragment of Aristophanes’ *Banqueters*, where the father, to test his son’s knowledge, asks him a series of rare Homeric expressions (fr. 233 K.-A.).

Already in the fifth century, therefore, we can discern a range of authors and genres of the past that are universally known. To the authors already named we should naturally add the three major tragedians, already, so to speak, canonized in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes, which identify them as a separate group, distinct from all other playwrights.10 Evidence from vasepaintings of the fifth and fourth century BC points in the same direction: the majority of tragedy-related vases found in the Greek West depict tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.11

---

10 Aristophanes in *Frogs*, however, does not seem to imply that this superiority of our three tragediographers was generally taken for granted: see ll. 68 ff., where Dionysus says to Heracles that he wants to bring Euripides back from the Underworld, and Heracles mentions a number of contemporary authors of dramas, who are still alive; so Wehrli in the commentary to his edition of the fragments of Heraclides Ponticus, p. 123, on fr. 179.
11 See the overview of available evidence in Todisco 2003 (tables 5, 6, 7, 13), comprising West Greek and Attic vases found in Italy and Sicily. On the problems related to drama, its exportation across the Hellenized world, and its representations on vase-paintings see Taplin 1993 and Taplin 2007; on the process of canonization of the three major tragedians, which evidently made
In Athens, Aeschylus’ exceptional status had been defined by an Athenian decree, aimed at encouraging reprises of his plays, which provided a chorus to all those who wanted to stage his texts again, clearly in view of their patriotic content.\(^{12}\) In the fourth century, when Heraclides Ponticus, a pupil of Plato and Aristotle, wrote a treatise *On the three tragedians*, he no longer even needed to name the three authors in the title (Περὶ τῶν τριῶν τραγῳδοποιῶν, fr. 179 Wehrli, with the comm. on p. 123).

Aristotle’s work had without doubt a great influence in the process of selection and canonization of the texts of the past. In Homer’s case, from Aristotle onwards the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are considered on a different level from all the rest of the epic production. Aristotle in the *Poetics* is the first to argue that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are superior to all the other epic poems in matters of style and content.\(^{13}\) He sets the two poems apart from the remaining hexameter poetry, and this was the opinion that became commonly accepted in the following centuries.\(^{14}\)

In the discussion of tragedy in the *Poetics*, it is clear that the three tragediographers, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, had already reached a status that set them apart from all the other authors of tragedies, as the number of quotations from their plays clearly shows.\(^{15}\) We can remember that it was a friend of Aristotle’s, the Athenian statesman Lycurgus, who established that the city should erect bronze statues of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides and arranged for the creation of an official copy of their tragedies ([Plu.], *Lives of the Ten Orators* 841 f.). Lycurgus himself, interestingly, later became part of a canon, that of the ten Attic orators. Among the titles of subjects from their plays more easily recognizable, see Csapo 2010, 38 f. and 67.


\(^{13}\) All Homeric quotations in Plato’s dialogues derive from the the two major poems, and we can therefore assume that he held a similar position: see Labarbe 1949.

\(^{14}\) Poet. ch. 24, 1459 b 16: πρὸς δὲ τούτως λέξει καὶ διανοία πάντα υπερβέβληκεν. See Pfeiffer 1968, 73 with n. 3 and 74 = 139 f. and n. 89: πάντα is the correct reading, with reference to the other epic poems (ποιήµατα); the variant πάντας would refer instead to all the other poets. A notable exception is the *Margites*, that is considered in the *Poetics* to be a work of Homer (1448 b 30 and b 38 ff.; see Pfeiffer 1968, 74 = 140 f.).

\(^{15}\) See the *Index locorum* in Kassel’s OCT edition of the *Poetics* (Oxford 1965), 78 f.
the lost works of Aristotle, next to the *Homeric Questions*, from which a number of fragments are extant, we find writings on Hesiod and on Archilochus, Euripides and Choeirilus.\(^{16}\)

If we go through the extant titles of the works of the pupils of Aristotle, we find that most of them deal with those that have become for us the canonical authors and genres: Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus, the three tragediographers, the contents of the plays of Sophocles and Euripides are the subject of a number of works of his pupil Heraclides Ponticus.\(^{17}\) Dicaearchus wrote on the contents of the plays of Euripides and Sophocles, on competitions at Dionysian festivals (frr. 73-89 W.) and possibly on Alcaeus (fr. 99 W.).\(^{18}\) Aristothenes wrote on tragedy, on tragic dancing, and on the dithyrambographer Telestes (end of the fifth century BC, see PMG 805-812). Chamaeleon wrote on Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, Stesichorus, Pindar, Simonides, Anacreon, Aeschylus, and also on the tragediographer Thespis and the melic poet of the second half of the sixth century BC Lasus of Hermione, who was an influential figure in musical theory (his poetic fragments are collected in PMG frs. 702-706 Page); he also authored general works on satyr drama and on comedy. His contemporary Praxiphanes of Mytilene commented on Homer, possibly also on Hesiod and on Sophocles and had an interest in poetics (see frs. 8-23 Wehrli).\(^{19}\)

\(^{16}\) Απορήήµατα Ἡσιόδου and Απορήήµατα Ἀρχιλόχου Ἐυριπίδου Χοιρίλου ἐν βιβλίοις γ’, in Pfeiffer 1968, 145 = 237: the titles only are preserved in the lists of Aristotle’s works, see Moraux 1951, 252 and 272-275.

\(^{17}\) See Diogenes Laertius (5. 87): Περὶ τῆς Ὀµήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου ἁλκίας (frr. 176-177 W.); Περὶ Ἀρχιλόχου καὶ Ὀµήρου (fr. 178 W.); Περὶ τῶν τριῶν τραγῳδοποιῶν (fr. 179 W.); Περὶ τῶν παρ’ Ἐυριπίδη καὶ Σοφοκλεῖ (fr. 180), on the contents of the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles. On the literary interests of the pupils of Aristotle see the helpful collection of material in Podlecki 1969 and Martano-Matelli-Mirhady 2012 (in particular the contributions by F. Montanari on the Peripatos and literature and by D. Mirhady on Chamaeleon on the origins of tragedy). On Aristotle and his school’s work on comedy see now N. Lowe’s detailed discussion: in particular, the first monographs on individual comedians were the work *On Menander* by Lyneus of Samos, an associate of Theophrastus, and the treatise *On Antiphanes* by Demetrius of Phalerum (Lowe 2013, 346-347).

\(^{18}\) See Pfeiffer 1968, 193 = 304 f. and 181 f. = 289.

\(^{19}\) On Praxiphanes see Podlecki 1969, 124 f.; E. Matelli’s new commented edition of all his fragments (Matelli 2012) and Martano-Matelli-Mirhady 2012.
Modern scholars offer contrasting judgments on the role played by Aristotle and his school in the development of literary studies in Alexandria in the following centuries. Pfeiffer’s authoritative survey of ancient literary scholarship, challenging previously held assumptions, assigned little significance to the Aristotelian school in this respect, underlining the aspects of novelty in Alexandrian literary studies rather than the elements of continuity with earlier philosophical reflection. However, several aspects of Pfeiffer’s reconstruction have been called into question after the appearance of his book, and in recent years the emerging scholarly consensus has underlined again the debt of Alexandrian scholarship towards Aristotle and his pupils: to name just one of the most conspicuous clues in this direction, Demetrius of Phalerum, the pupil of Theophrastus, lived in Alexandria at the time of the first and second Ptolemy – we do not know much about his activity and his contacts there, but his presence in the new centre of the cultural Hellenistic world at the time when the Library and the Museum were founded is certainly significant.  

The role of Aristotle and his school on the development of Alexandrian scholarship could also be linked to the predominantly Athenocentric perspective of the grammarians who worked at the Ptolemies’ court (and of Hellenistic culture in general); this is evident if we consider the range of authors who became the object of the Hellenistic scholars’ best interpretive efforts.

3. The canon in Alexandria and Pergamum

To sum up my argument so far, it appears that the authors and genres that are the subject of scholarly interest up to the early third century BC are, first of all, epic poetry; then iambus, lyric poetry, and drama. It is noteworthy that for most of these genres the events and social celebrations they were originally linked to were still in place; local festivals and city celebrations which were, in the archaic and classical ages, these genres’ reason of existence, continued throughout the Hellenistic and later the Roman period.  


21 See the contributions of R. Palmisciano, A. Ercolani and L. Lulli in this volume, which touch on different aspects of this point.
As we move into the Hellenistic age, the production of erudites and scholars who worked in the cultural centres of the Hellenistic world becomes more and more significant. Over time, technical literature acquired ever-increasing importance and circulated among the specialists throughout the Greek-speaking world; we witness the emergence of a new type of written text, containing reflections, observations and remarks of various nature on older literary works; erudite literature, in other words, becomes a genre in itself (let us just consider, for example, the commentaries, ὑπομνήματα). Little of it is preserved today; we owe most of the extant fragments to the fact that the products of ancient literary research ended up as scholia, that is, marginal annotations in the medieval manuscripts that contain the works of archaic and classical authors. The loss of most of the erudite production of Hellenistic scholars should make us aware of the fact that they were themselves ‘submerged’, in the sense that they were the victim of the same process of gradual selection and disappearance that took place for the texts of the great authors they were working on.

At this point, we can try to consider in detail the authors who were the object of the direct study by the most important philologists of the Hellenistic age. The list that follows includes evidence for editions, commentaries and monographs.\(^2\)

**Authors studied by Hellenistic scholars**

**Zenodotus:**
Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Anacreon?

**Eratosthenes:** Homer; ancient comedy

---

\(^2\) I collected the relevant testimonies from Pfeiffer 1968; Bagordo 1998; McNamee 2007 and the CEDOPAL online database. On the single grammarians I have used the editions and studies that follow. Eratosthenes: Geus 2002; Aristophanes of Byzantium: Slater 1986; Aristarchus on Herodotus: Pap. Amherst II. 12; on Plato: Schironi 2005; on Euripides: sch. ad Eur. Rh. 540; on Ion of Chius: Athen. 14. 634 c-d; on Thucydidès: Didymus’ work implies earlier commentaries (Pfeiffer 1968, 225 = 349 f.); Crates: Broggiato 2001; Apollodorus of Athens on Epicharmus and Sophron: FGrHist 244 T 18 and F 213-128; Didymus on Alcaeus: POxy. 1788; on Anacreon: POxy. 3722; on Ion of Chius: Athen. 11. 468 d; Athen. 14. 634 e; on Phrynichus: Athen. 9. 371 f; on Herodotus: POxy. 4455; on Isocrates and Dinarchus: Schmidt 1854, 320; on Antiphon: Schmidt 1854, 310; on Didymus’ work on Demosthenes see above, § 1.
Aristophanes of Byzantium: Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus, Alcman, Alcaeus, Anacreon, Pindar, Aristophanes, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato?, Menander?

Aristarchus: Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus, Alcman, Alcaeus, Anacreon, Pindar, Bacchylides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides?, Ion of Chius, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Thucydides?, Plato?

Crates of Mallus: Homer, Hesiod?, Alcman?, Stesichorus?, Pindar?, Euripides?, comedy?

Apollodorus of Athens: Homer, Epicharmus, Sophron


The first observation we can make is that the range of their interests is wider, not narrower, than that of their predecessors in the fourth century BC; they worked on all the authors who had been the subject of earlier research and on a number of other writers, who had not been studied before. This is not unexpected, if we remember that the scholars who worked in the great Hellenistic libraries had at their disposal for the first time collections of books that came from the whole of the Greek-speaking world. If, on the one hand, they focused their attention on a small number of writers, on the other they also started to work on other writers who had previously met with little attention. The range of genres is wider as well, for we find that prose works become the object of scholarly investigation for the first time. As a consequence, it is certainly true that the very context of the activity of Hellenistic philologists, who had at their disposal the largest collections of books in Greek history, speaks in favour of an activity of categorization and selection; it is also true, however, that the copiousness of material at their disposal must have encouraged them to pursue interests in topics that had previously been disregarded or overlooked.

There are certainly some absences. Elegy as a genre does not seem to have been studied in Alexandria, that is, we do not possess any evidence of editions or of commentaries on Greek elegy, even if we have fragments of a

23 See for example Acosta-Hughes 2011, 218.
24 See Wilamowitz 1900, 57 ff. – This could be an indication that elegy did not exist as a genre in itself, but should rather be considered as a group of authors, each of them linked to a single social occasion of performance: see R.
book with a critical edition of elegiac poems by Archilochus (in antiquity his poems had been grouped into books according to their metre). Less noticeable, but remarkable, is the Alexandrians’ lack of interest in the production of preeminent authors that did not fall within the boundaries of the genre they were famous for: they apparently neglected Sophocles’ paean in honour of Asclepius, for example, that survived for centuries as a religious song in Athens; we possess some lines of this poem thanks to an inscription (PMG 737). Another example is Euripides’ victory ode for Alcibiades, that is not preserved, with the exception of a few lines that are quoted in Plutarch’s Lives (PMG 755 and 756).

A good example of the widening of the research interests of scholars in Hellenistic times is the Alexandrians’ work on Bacchylides, an author who had not apparently raised any interest in the previous centuries. A commentary on his Dithyrambs (POxy. 2368) mentions the name of Aristarchus, who criticized Callimachus, because he had classified as a paean a composition that, in Aristarchus’ opinion, was actually a dithyramb, the Cassandra (Pfeiffer 1968, 130 = 217 and 345 = 222). We know that later Didymus wrote a commentary on the victory odes of Bacchylides. Aristarchus wrote on Ion of Chius, who was active in the middle of the fifth century BC as a tragediographer, lyric poet and author of philosophical and erudite works: Athenaeus quotes a note from a work of Aristarchus on Ion’s satyr play Omphale. It has recently been argued that Aristarchus wrote a

---

Palmisciano, Azioni drammatiche nelle fonti iconografiche arcaiche, in this volume.

25 See Obbink 2006, 1 f. (on Archilochus’ new elegy); Lulli 2011 (87-89) has a survey of recent bibliography on Archilochus’ fragment.

26 See Wilamowitz 1900, 61. The same happened to Aeschylus’ elegies, if he did write any: the two fragments we possess could be actually verse inscriptions (see Aesch. frr. 1 and 2 West).


28 Athen. 14. 634 c-d: Ἰὼν δ’ ὁ Χίες ἐν Ὀμφάλῃ … ὀπέρ ἔξηγούμενος ἴσημενον Ἀρίσταρχος ὁ γραμματικός … γένος αὐλοῦ φησιν εἶναι τὴν μάγαδιν. – Ion had been the subject of an earlier work by Baton of Sinope, a historian of the end of the third century BC: Βάτων δ’ ὁ Σινωπεύς ἐν τοῖς περὶ Ἰωνος τοῦ ποιητοῦ, quoted in Athen. 10. 436 f = FGrHist 268 F 6, also in BNJ); on this passage see also BNJ 392 T 8 (Ion of Chius). On Ion’s biographers and interpreters see the useful collection of testimonia in Leurini 1992, 12-16 (T 20-32).
commentary on Plato as well (see Schironi 2005), of which some traces are extant in Byzantine lexica, and that he might have used to this purpose a text of the dialogues prepared by Aristophanes of Byzantium: we know from Diogenes Laertius that Aristophanes had arranged Plato’s writings into triologies (3. 61-62), and he quite possibly prepared an edition of them as well. Apollodorus of Athens is another interesting case. He wrote on the Syracusan comic poet Epicharmus (530-435 ca. BC): we have the title of a monograph, Περὶ Ἐπιχάρμου, in at least six books (FGrHist 244 F 213); according to Porphyry, he had also prepared an edition of all the writings of Epicharmus in ten books (T 18). Apollodorus also wrote a Περὶ Σώφρονος (F 214-128), in at least four books: Sophron was active in Syracuse at the time of Euripides; he wrote mimes that were much appreciated by Plato, who was the first to bring them to Athens (Diog. Laert. 3. 18).²⁹ Attic comedy had been at the centre of the interests of the grammarians in Alexandria since the early third century BC (see above, § 1); as for Doric comedy, an antiquarian who had contacts with the court of Pergamum, Polemon of Ilium, had prepared the way to Apollodorus: Polemon had visited Sicily and was familiar with Doric comedy and with the poetry of Epicharmus, as some fragments of his work Against Timaeus show.³⁰

The extant titles and fragments of Didymus, who worked in Alexandria in the first century BC, offer a good summary of the research interests of his predecessors. Didymus is not generally credited with any original research work: the value of his work is that he has collected and transmitted to us the results of the efforts of earlier scholars. As a consequence, we can be reasonably sure that any topic he treated had been researched into by his more outstanding forerunners. If we analyse the list of the titles of his works, we find, together with most of the mainstream authors, a number of not very obvious names. He wrote a commentary on the Agamemnon of Ion of Chius (quoted in Athen. 11. 468 d = Did. p. 301 f. Schmidt), and apparently also another work on Ion, where he refuted earlier research on him.³¹ Didymus also commented on the Cronus, a comedy by Phrynichus, the fifth-century Athenian comic poet (Athen. 9. 371 f = Did. p. 306 f. Schmidt). He certainly

²⁹ See Pfeiffer 1968, 264 f. = 400-403.
³¹ Athen. 14. 634 e: Δίδυμος ὁ γραμματικός ἐν ταῖς εἰς Ἰωνὰς Ἀντεξηγήσεσιν (Did. pp. 302-305 Schmidt, who however proposes to read πρὸς Ἰώβαν instead of εἰς Ἰωνα). On this reading see the Jacoby’s notes on FGrHist 275 T 13 (Juba von Mauretanien).
commented on a passage of the *Games*, a tragedy by an Athenian poet of the mid-fifth century, Achaeus of Eretria, even if Athenaeus in his quotation does not make it clear whether Didymus had written a commentary on the entire play (Athen. 15. 689 b = Did. pp. 305 f. Schmidt).

4. Beyond the canon

We should not think, in any case, that the scholarly interests of Hellenistic philologists were limited to the authors they edited or commented on. The range of their studies was actually much wider. This applies to literary genres as well, as in the case of proverbs: Aristophanes of Byzantium prepared collections of proverbs, both in verse and in prose, in connection with his interest in Attic comedy.\textsuperscript{32} We know that Didymus wrote a work Περὶ παροιμιῶν, that enlarged Aristophanes’ collection.\textsuperscript{33} It should be noted that in this respect the Alexandrian grammarians followed again the lead of Aristotle and his disciples, who had collected traditional sayings because they considered them the expression of the wisdom of the ancients (Pfeiffer 1968, 83 f. = 153 f.).

Minor authors, included in the catalogues of the library of Alexandria but evidently not considered worthy of specific editions or commentaries, were read and studied all the same; this becomes evident if we consider the whole of the production of Hellenistic scholars, not only editions, commentaries and monographs. In fact, the preparation of collections of lexēs, that is, words (archaic or still in use) that were difficult or peculiar either for their form or their meaning was an important part of the activity of Hellenistic scholars.\textsuperscript{34} The first representatives of this scholarly genre had been the sophists of the fifth century BC, who had a special interest in the study of language. In the Hellenistic age, the most important work of this type were the *Lexēs* of Aristophanes of Byzantium, who had a lasting influence on all his successors. It is evident that compilations of this kind offered the possibility of quoting

\textsuperscript{32} See Pfeiffer 1968, 208 f. = 326. Eratosthenes before him had apparently discussed a proverb, in connection with his studies on ancient comedy (Pfeiffer 1968, 159 f. n. 8 = 259 n. 55). On the study of proverbs in the Hellenistic age see in particular Tosi 1994.

\textsuperscript{33} The work on the proverbs is mentioned by Helladius, quoted in Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 279 p. 530 a Bekker.

\textsuperscript{34} The best introduction to these collections is still, to my knowledge, the detailed survey prepared by E. Degani (1995); see also Tosi 1994 and Dickey 2007, 87-103.
from a virtually unlimited range of authors and texts; they are a precious testimony of a wide range of texts that are lost for us. This is not the place to explore in depth such an extensive subject; as a particularly significant example of the Hellenistic philologists’ interest in non-canonical texts, I would like to present here the fragments of an anonymous collection of glosses that has come down to us thanks to a papyrus roll from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 1802 + 4812); the remains of the papyrus have been recently re-edited by Francesca Schironi (Schironi 2009a). The glosses listed in the papyrus are illustrated with examples from a number of rare or erudite works, whose authors can all be dated before the first century BC; Schironi convincingly argues that the original nucleus of this collection probably goes back to the work of the scholars who were active in the Alexandrian library. Certainly its compiler had access to one of the large book collections of the Hellenistic age: otherwise it would have been very difficult to collect such a number of quotations from works than were not easily available. In fact, alongside citations from Homer, Xenophon and Aristotle we find a number of lesser-known authors such as Antenor, a second century BC antiquarian from Crete (FGrHist 463), Anticlides, an Athenian historian of the third century BC (FGrHist 140), Dionysius of Utica, who in the first century BC wrote a work On Agriculture, Andron, probably the fourth century BC historian from Halicarnassus (FGrHist 10), the Athenian antiquarian Autocides (FGrHist 353, probably third century BC), and, possibly, Hestiaeus (FGrHist 786), author of a work On Phoenicia that was used by Josephus.35 The presence of local historians is particularly remarkable, since writers who dealt with the history of single cities or regions were not included in the canon of Greek historians, which only comprises authors who had a wider perspective and a Panhellenic stature.36

5. Hellenistic philology on contemporary poets

To conclude, I would like to add a few notes on the interest of Hellenistic philologists for contemporary poetry. Franco Montanari, in a useful article published in 1995, made a first survey of the evidence we possess regarding early philological activity on Hellenistic texts; in particular, some fortunate papyrological findings indicate that already in the late third/early second

35 For a full list of the authors quoted see Schironi 2009, 9-12.
century BC there existed commentaries on contemporary poems. A significant example is il pap. Louvre inv. 7733 verso, of the second century BC, that contains a commentary on an anonymous epigram; we cannot identify its author, but it certainly originated in the circles of the scholar poets in Alexandria.\textsuperscript{37} The commentator shows a remarkable erudition, quoting as parallels a new fragment of Sophocles and an otherwise unknown comedy by Diphilus.

Moreover, if we analyse already known texts, such as the Homeric scholia, it is clear that Hellenistic poets were often used to comment on the \textit{Iliad} and the \textit{Odyssey}; this is a clue that the study of contemporary authors had already reached an advanced stage (see the discussion in Montanari 1995).\textsuperscript{38} The interest of the Alexandrians for texts that were closer in time to their own period finds a parallel in the activity of the philologists at the library of Pergamum. Crates of Mallus discussed passages of Aratus’ \textit{Phaenomena} in the context of his work on the Homeric poems.\textsuperscript{39} His follower Zenodotus of Mallus interestingly offers an early instance of a direct discussion of a line of the \textit{Phaenomena}: he explained the meaning of \textit{phaen}. 33, where Aratus recalls how Zeus as a baby had been hidden in a cavern in Crete, “in sweet-smelling Dicto, near mount Ida” (\textit{δίτκτω ἐν εὔώδει ὅρεος σχεδὸν Ἰδαίοι, phaen. 33}).\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} The text on the verso of the papyrus was first published by F. Lasserre in 1975; it was later included in Lloyd-Jones - Parsons, \textit{SH} (frr. 983-984, pp. 497-500). Further bibliography in Montanari 1995, 50 n. 8.

\textsuperscript{38} On this subject see however Rengakos 2000, who underlines how only from the first century BC onwards Hellenistic poets became a direct object of study; Aristarchus, on the contrary, did not read and study contemporary poets \textit{per se}, but for their usefulness in explaining the epics. On the work of Hellenistic grammarians on contemporary poets see also Pagani 2007, 27-31, in particular page 28 with note 67.

\textsuperscript{39} The name of Crates, who was a contemporary of Aristarchus, appears a number of times in the extant exegetical material on Aratus’ \textit{Phaenomena} (see Crat. F 50, F 65, F 131, F 133 Broggiato; also possibly F 132); in the past it was thought that Crates had written a commentary on the \textit{Phaenomena}, until E. Maass in 1892 persuasively argued that Crates in fact discussed Aratus in the context of his work on the Homeric poems (see Maass 1892, 167 ff.).

\textsuperscript{40} The interpretive problem arises from the fact that a mount Dicte does exist in Crete, but it is far away from mount Ida: Zenodotus, therefore, thought that the word \textit{δίτκτον} was in fact the name of a plant, also called \textit{δίσκταμον}, and for this reason, he argued, Aratus said it was “sweet-smelling”: on this discussion see Broggiato 2005, 148 f.
Zenodotus’ date is uncertain, but the close links between his work and that of Crates make us think that he was not too far distant in time from him.\textsuperscript{41}

Bibliography

Csapo, E., \textit{Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theater}, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2010
De Martino, F. - Vox, O., (a c. di), \textit{Lirica greca}, I-III, Bari: Levante, 1996
Lasserre, F., ‘L’élégie de l’huître (P. Louvre 7733 v° inéd.)’, \textit{QUCC} 19, 1975, 145-176
Leurini, L., \textit{Ionis Chii testimonia et fragmenta}, Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1992

\textsuperscript{41} See Broggiato 2005, 135.

Maass, E., *Aratea*, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1892


Nicolai, R., *La storiografia nell’educazione antica*, Pisa: Giardini, 1992


Schironi, F., From Alexandria to Babylon. Near Eastern Languages and Hellenistic Erudition in the Oxyrhynchus Glossary (P.Oxy. 1802 + 4812), Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 2009 (Schironi 2009a)
M. Schmidt, Didymi Chalcenteri grammatici Alexandrini fragmenta quae supersunt omnia, Lipsiae: Teubner, 1854 (repr. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964)
C. Strecker, De Lycophrone Euphronio Eratosthene comicorum interpretibus, Diss. Greifswald, 1884
Taplin, O., Comic Angels and other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993
Todisco, L. (ed.), La ceramica figurata a soggetto tragico in Magna Grecia e in Sicilia, introduzione, repertorio e contributi critici di Luigi Todisco et al., Roma: Giorgio Bretschneider, 2003
Totaro, P., ‘Eschilo in Aristofane (Rane 1026-1029, 1431a-1432)’, Lexis 24, 2006, 95-125
Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. von, *Die Textgeschichte der griechischen Lyriker*, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1900