

# Scholiasts and Commentators

*Nigel Wilson*

DR JOHNSON'S DEFINITION of the lexicographer as a harmless drudge is well known. Perhaps the scholiast was also a drudge, but whether harmless is the right adjective for him is an intricate question, which I shall attempt to explore in this paper.<sup>1</sup>

“To interpret scholia exactly is not always a simple task.” So wrote Eduard Norden, and he gave a striking example. A scholiast's note on Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* appears to give us the authority of the excellent scholar Asconius Pedianus for the view that the child celebrated by the *Eclogue* was Asinius Gallus.<sup>2</sup> Norden argued that if the scholium is read attentively it demonstrates the exact opposite: Asconius was in fact refuting on chronological grounds Gallus' claim to be the child in question. The matter was incidental to Norden's main purpose, and so he did not explain how it comes about that scholia are difficult to interpret. Other scholars have not always recognised the existence of the difficulty, to their cost, as examples will show. The nature of the problem and its significance will be one of my main themes, but in addition I shall try to show that at their best scholiasts offer something of value to their modern successors, who disdain the title of scholiast and replace it with that of commentator.

<sup>1</sup> The original version of this paper appeared in Italian translation with the title “Scolisti e commentatori” in *Studi classici e orientali* 33 (1983) 83–112. It had been my intention to issue a revised and enlarged text within a few years, but other commitments took precedence. However, thanks to the kind invitation of Prof. Bernhard Zimmermann to conduct a seminar on this subject at the University of Freiburg in May 2006, I have had the opportunity to prepare this new version.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Geburt des Kindes* (Leipzig 1924) 11 n.1, citing Servius Danielis on *Ecl.* 4.11.

## I.

Scholia are generally defined as the commentaries on classical authors, both Greek and Latin, written in the margins of the medieval manuscripts that transmit the texts. This definition makes them a product of the middle ages, for the obvious reason that in the vast majority of cases we can only read them in the form they had assumed by that stage in their history. Some scholia are the work of medieval scholars and schoolmasters, whose names in certain cases are known to us, but it is a mistake to suppose that the content of the scholia as a whole is medieval in date, or that the form in which they appear in manuscripts and printed editions can be proved to be a medieval invention.

The history of scholia goes back to the time when explanations of literary texts first became necessary, in other words the classical age of Greece, when schoolmasters found that pupils required some explanation of rare words and other difficulties in Homer and the lyric poets, the basic texts of a literary education. The pupils' needs can be inferred from a fragment of Aristophanes' first play, *Daitaleis*, produced in 427 B.C., in which one speaker asks the other the meaning of some Homeric words (fr.233). The word scholium itself presumably means a short lecture.<sup>3</sup> The growth of this form of literary scholarship was slow. Though few if any of the schoolmasters wrote down in a form suitable for publication their stock-in-trade of classroom material, it is a plausible conjecture that the simple explanations of Homer now known as the D-scholia depend ultimately on their work. The ancients, who liked to be able to identify inventors, had a tradition that the first person to write about Homer and by the same token to undertake grammatical studies was Theagenes of Rhegion, whose floruit they located, rather strangely, in the reign of the Persian king Cambyses (529–522 B.C.) (fr.1, 1a, 2 in Diels-Kranz).<sup>4</sup> The next identifiable figure is the poet Antimachus, who may be credited not

<sup>3</sup> Not so defined in LSJ, but see G. Zuntz, *Byzantion* 14 (1938) 545–614, at 548.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably he had no connection with Athens, and so they had no reason to call him a contemporary of Peisistratus.

with a commentary on Homer but some kind of recension of the text and a life of the poet. That discussion of Homer was not confined to the classrooms of elementary schools is a reasonable inference from the fragments of Aristotle's *Homeric Problems* (fr.142–179 Rose). The fourth-century Derveni papyrus with a commentary on an Orphic text is of uncertain authorship; among the candidates proposed is Diagoras of Melos, which would make it a work of the late fifth century.<sup>5</sup> One detail of interest for the present purpose is that the author's vocabulary includes the term *hyperbaton*.<sup>6</sup>

Homer retained his pride of place in the school curriculum and so won most attention from the Alexandrian critics. Their efforts to establish the text generated new forms of scholarship. It was not the commentary that was produced first, but various sophisticated kinds of pamphlet, corresponding roughly to articles in modern learned journals. An early example is Apollonius Rhodius' pamphlet on the recension of the great epics prepared by his predecessor Zenodotus, the purpose of which must have been to discuss disputed readings and interpretations. It is not clear how much Zenodotus wrote,<sup>7</sup> and Apollonius did not write any commentary on a text. The first attestation of such a book is the mention of a commentary by Euphronius on Aristophanes' *Plutus*;<sup>8</sup> the first writer of commentaries in any quantity was Aristarchus, in the second century B.C. Aristarchus may also have widened the sphere of the commentator by writing on a prose author, Herodotus;<sup>9</sup> pre-

<sup>5</sup> R. Janko, *ZPE* 118 (1997) 61–94.

<sup>6</sup> A. Lamedica, in P. Radici Colace and M. Caccano Caltabiano (eds.), *Atti del I seminario di studi sui lessici tecnici greci e latini* (Messina 1991) 83–91.

<sup>7</sup> A new hypothesis about his work on Homer was put forward by H. van Thiel, *ZPE* 90 (1992) 1–32 and 115 (1997) 13–36.

<sup>8</sup> *Lexicon Messanense*, ed. H. Rabe, *RhM* 47 (1892) 404–413, at 411; cf. R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford 1968) 161. My debt to Pfeiffer's work, despite certain criticisms expressed below, should be obvious.

<sup>9</sup> *P.Amherst* II 12. Prof. A. C. Cassio drew my attention to schol. Soph. *Phil.* 201, which attests a reading of Herodotus (but not commentary) by Hellanikos. Is this the Hellenistic grammarian? Or could this be an anecdote about one historian reading the work of another? The view that

viously Homer and other poets had been the chief beneficiaries of scholarly activity, as far as we can tell from the scanty evidence now available. But perhaps we should be wary of assuming that the fortunes of literary texts are a safe guide to the history of these developments. The Neoplatonist scholar Proclus (410–485) records that Crantor (ca. 335–275 B.C.) was the first commentator on Plato (*In Ti.* 20D, p.76.2 Diehl). Crantor's work is clearly earlier than anything achieved in Alexandria at the Museum, and doubtless he was more concerned with philosophical than literary matters.<sup>10</sup>

The distinctions between the types of Hellenistic scholarly publications are subtle and difficult to define. Between the short pamphlet at one extreme and the full commentary at the other there seems to have been an intermediate class of second-order literature, the nature of which became clearer when the Berlin papyrus containing a work by Didymus on Demosthenes was published (P.Berol.inv. 9780). Didymus deals almost exclusively with historical, not linguistic questions; but not all the points of historical interest are touched on, and so the question arises whether the papyrus text as we have it is an abridgement of a full historical commentary. This simple answer was not accepted by F. Leo in his review of the first edition;<sup>11</sup> he proposed to recognise a separate class of literature, to which Asconius' commentaries on Cicero's speeches also belong. Asconius goes to work in the same way as Didymus: he selects for comment historical points that interest him and does not attempt a full treatment. Neither book is a complete commentary or *hypomnema*, to give it its technical name, but rather the discussion of a number of historical questions, *zetemata*, forming part of the class of literature known as *συγγράμματα περὶ τοῦ δεῖνα*. In that case the correct title of Didymus' book will be simply *περὶ Δημοσθένους*. The distinction is explicitly made in regard to the writings of his predecessors by Didymus himself

---

Aristarchus wrote commentaries on Hesiod has been shown to rest on very uncertain foundations: M. L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford 1978) 65.

<sup>10</sup> Though his name has not figured in histories of scholarship, he is given due credit by K.-H. Stanzel, *Der neue Pauly* 6 (1999) 805.

<sup>11</sup> *NAkG* (1904) 254–261 = *Kleine Schriften* II 387–394.

in the scholium on *Iliad* 2.111. But that is not the end of this complex discussion. In a valuable paper on Didymus, Stephanie West showed that the omissions in the Berlin papyrus could be accounted for by assuming that these topics had all been dealt with at an earlier stage of the commentary; the papyrus preserves part of Book 18 of a series, and opportunity would have arisen already to explain many historical matters.<sup>12</sup> So perhaps in this case a subtle distinction between types of commentary is out of place. However, it is important for our purpose that Didymus made it when speaking of his predecessors.

Commentary and learned discussion were not the only products of the Alexandrian scholars. They compiled reference books for the benefit of readers of the classics. Among these were lexica to various authors, such as Apion's list of rare words in Homer or Harpocration's lexicon to the ten Attic orators (which in fact is a slightly later work). Other useful compilations were the lists of persons mentioned in Old Comedy, the *κωμωδοῦμενοι*, and the lists of persons with identical names, the *ὁμώνυμοι*. Fragments of both are embedded in the scholia to Aristophanes (e.g. *Ach.* 214, 703; *Clouds* 1022; *Birds* 749, 822; *Peace* 347), and fragments of the latter in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*.

By the end of the Hellenistic age there was a mass of academic literature written mainly by members of the Alexandrian Museum and to a lesser degree by their rivals at Pergamon. Potentially it was available to educated readers and schoolmasters throughout the Greek-speaking world. We do not know how quickly it spread, but it is found eventually in the Egyptian country districts such as the Fayum; the most striking example is perhaps the private letter written in the second century A.D. (*P.Oxy.* XVIII 2192) in which the writer asks for books of *κωμωδοῦμενοι* and abstracts of the mythology found in tragedy, and tells his correspondent where some of these texts may be obtained.

Very little of this literature survives; most of it was lost in late

<sup>12</sup> *CQ* 20 (1970) 288–296, esp. 290–291. See also G. Arrighetti, *SCO* 26 (1977) 13–67, at 49–67.

antiquity when economic resources declined to a level which did not permit the copying of the full range of ancient literature with sufficient frequency to make good the inevitable losses caused by war, natural disasters, and ordinary wear and tear. Apart from the texts already mentioned a tiny quantity of Hellenistic work has come down to us in its original form: the astronomer Hipparchus' discussion of Aratus' poem about the constellations and Dionysius Thrax's tiny but influential pamphlet on grammar (if it is genuine) are the best-known examples, to which one should add the partially preserved treatise by Demetrius Lacon on textual difficulties in Epicurus.<sup>13</sup> The efforts of scholars dating from the Roman Empire have fared only a little better: we have substantial books on grammar and syntax by Apollonius Dyscolus and the lexicon to the ten Attic orators by Harpocration, and there are in addition two unusual cases of double transmission, about which I shall have something to say below. In order to complete the picture it should be noted that apart from works of literary scholarship there are many philosophical commentaries, especially on the Aristotelian corpus, mainly products of late antiquity.

Scholia help us to make good the enormous losses because they preserve, usually in a much altered form, but sometimes in verbatim quotations, fragments of ancient commentaries. Two interesting cases are the metrical commentary on Aristophanes and Nicanor's guide to the punctuation of the *Iliad*. Numerous quotations in the scholia seem to preserve to a large extent the original wording. But more often than not we have to deal with paraphrase and with scraps of erudition that are not attributed to their author.

All these texts enjoyed initially an existence independent of the literary works they dealt with. The ancient form of book, being a roll with columns of writing often set close to each other, did not favour the addition of much explanatory material in the margin round the text. But good copies of literary texts had a special series of signs in the margin which told the reader about certain kinds of note that he might expect to find

<sup>13</sup> *P.Hercul.* 1012, ed. E. Puglia, *Demetrio Lacone: Aporie testuali ed esegetiche in Epicuro* (Naples 1988).

in a commentary. The obvious case is Homer, where the obelus and other signs soon came to have established meanings and are found in a number of papyri. Some of the signs were used, but not always with the same meaning, in texts of tragedy and comedy, Plato, and Demosthenes.<sup>14</sup>

But though continuous commentary could not find a place in the margins of the ancient book, there was room for the schoolmaster or reader to add short notes or interlinear glosses, as they are seen in the famous papyrus of Pindar's *Paeans* (*P.Oxy.* V 841).<sup>15</sup> A wide interval could be left between the columns, as is seen in *P.Köln* IV 185 of Aratus' *Phaenomena*, part of the same roll as *P.Oxy.* XV 1807. There was nothing in principle to prevent the addition of excerpts from learned monographs or commentaries, especially as cursive script could be written very small. One curious exception to the general rule should be mentioned: Lille papyrus 82, a copy of Callimachus dating from the third century B.C., adopts a quite different format. A few lines of poetic text are followed by commentary.<sup>16</sup> This alternation dispenses with the need for broad margins, and it is surprising that this practice was not adopted for all commentaries that followed a text closely. Perhaps it was an experiment that failed to find favour with the public.<sup>17</sup>

## II.

Originality and fresh contributions to scholarship seem to have become rare by the time of Didymus at the end of the first century B.C. The only other significant figure from this period may be Theon, whose work on Hellenistic poets is dated to the reign of Augustus. There is not enough evidence to allow a

<sup>14</sup> For signs applied to poetic texts see R. L. Fowler, *ZPE* 33 (1979) 17–28, at 24–28. For philosophical texts see *P.Oxy.* XLVII 3326 with M. W. Haslam's note, *P.Oxy.* LII 3656, and Diog. Laert. 3.65. A general survey is given by K. McNamee, *Sigla and Select Marginalia in Greek Literary Papyri* (Brussels 1992).

<sup>15</sup> For some valuable observations on Pindar scholia see M. R. Lefkowitz, *First-person Fictions: Pindar's Poetic 'I'* (Oxford 1991), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Ed. P. J. Parsons, *ZPE* 25 (1977) 1–50. The reader for *GRBS* kindly draws my attention to the somewhat similar format in the Derveni papyrus.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Carlini, *Maia* 32 (1980) 225–253, at 235–236.

confident judgement about him; one needs to note that work on these poets had begun earlier, as is clear not merely from the Lille papyrus of Callimachus but also from such hints as the mention of the name Asclepiades of Myrlea in the scholia on Theocritus and the treatise by Hipparchus on Aratus, who tells us that he was by no means the first person to expound the *Phaenomena* (p.4.1–2 Manitius). The first two centuries of our era did, however, produce some notable scholarship. Pride of place must go to the linguistic treatises of Apollonius Dyscolus and his son Herodian. One should also note the elaborate system of punctuation devised by Nicanor; apart from a general treatise he discussed in detail punctuation in the *Iliad*.<sup>18</sup> But there are two further critical stages in the history of scholarship in antiquity. The first results from a change of interest in the literary world: whereas the Hellenistic scholars had concerned themselves to explain rare words, to discuss matters of historical or antiquarian interest, and to criticise the classical texts as literature, in the Roman imperial age the new fashion of writing Attic Greek, or as close an imitation of it as possible, meant a change of emphasis in the classroom, and it was a change with consequences that lasted right up to the end of the Byzantine age. Less time was spent on the appreciation of literature, more on the mastering of Attic words and idioms that could be exemplified from the classical authors and were supposed to be the ingredients of good imitation Attic prose. Hence a high proportion of extant scholia deal with arid details of rhetoric or inform us, frequently wrongly, that such and such a usage is a feature of Attic style, as opposed to the koine or one of the other ancient dialects. These linguistic notes must often have displaced other information which would have been of greater value to us.

The second change in this period is the substitution of the codex for the roll as the normal type of book, a change that for classical texts was complete by the end of the fourth century. The new type of book had the advantage of permitting more

<sup>18</sup> Many excerpts are found in MS. Venice *Marc.gr.* 454 = **A**, where his name figures in the subscriptions at the end of the books; see also *Scholia in Dionysii Thracis artem grammaticam*, ed. A. Hilgard (Leipzig 1901) 26.4–28.8.

annotation in the margins, so that readers no longer needed to suffer the inconvenience of referring to another book for most of the commentary on the text. It was only a matter of time before not only the jottings made in the classroom or during private reading but also the full-scale monographs and commentaries were transcribed in whole or part into the margins of the new copies. The task of compilation and amalgamation must have been enormous, since there were sometimes several commentaries or monographs on the same text. The date at which it was carried out is not certain and has been the subject of controversy. Extremely few ancient books have extensive marginal notes; the best example is a famous and very late papyrus of Callimachus (*P.Oxy.* XX 2258); it can hardly be earlier than the sixth century. Probably the process of transformation began in late antiquity and after an interval continued in the ninth and tenth centuries during what is sometimes called the first Byzantine Renaissance. The new arrangement of the commentaries on classical texts is in some way related to the standard form of commentary on the Bible. The history of exegesis of scripture has some analogy to the history of classical scholarship. The so-called Antiochene school of exegesis in fact adopted the methods established by their pagan predecessors in Alexandria.<sup>19</sup> After a time a considerable mass of commentaries on the text of the Septuagint and the New Testament had been accumulated, and early in the sixth century Procopius of Gaza took the step of combining verbatim extracts from existing commentaries into a large new single commentary, known as a “catena,” or in Greek *σειρά*. Catenae have a certain similarity to scholia as we know them from medieval manuscripts, and it is natural to ask which served as the model for the other. A hint is given by the fact that in catenae it is very common to cite at the beginning of each excerpt the name of the author from whose work it is taken, whereas this happens much less often in scholia; one might infer that the Biblical scholars made an innovation because they wished to be precise

<sup>19</sup> See the important monograph of C. Schäublin, *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der Antiochenischen Exegese* (Theophaneia 23 [Cologne/Bonn 1974]).

in these matters, especially as the orthodoxy of individual authors might be questioned.<sup>20</sup>

Even the ninth and tenth centuries are not necessarily the end of the story, because we cannot always edit scholia on a Greek author from manuscripts of such early date. Instead we are often compelled to rely on copies written late in the Byzantine period, and therefore we need to know about the history of classical studies at that time. Byzantine schoolmasters were active for many centuries in much the same way as their counterparts of late antiquity. There was no drastic change in the curriculum; one should note the disappearance of Menander, but apart from that the most important fact is a reduction in the quantity of classical literature that the pupils could be expected to master. Certainly there was no deviation from the basic aim of turning out pupils well versed in classical Attic. But each successive generation might wish to alter the inherited commentary on the classical authors in accordance with current taste and needs. Though Byzantine schoolmasters tended to be conservative, the inevitable result was that ancient learning in the scholia was gradually reduced in quantity because it was above the heads of the pupils, or for that matter of the literary man reading in private. More notes of a purely linguistic character were put in to help the reader understand the increasingly remote language of the ancient texts.

The process can be seen in the recensions of scholia prepared by Demetrius Triclinius in the early fourteenth century: he eliminates a good deal of antiquarian and other information found in the old scholia, and it must be admitted that he was not entirely without justification, since the subject matter, although sometimes interesting to us, was often irrelevant to the text of the author. At the same time he added translations of words that were no longer current in the spoken language, e.g. for νείφει he gave the translation χιονίζει (*Ar. Ach.* 1141), for ἀλλᾶς λουκάνικον (*Ar. Eq.* 143).<sup>21</sup> The same watering-down of

<sup>20</sup> For more about this see my articles in *CQ* 17 (1967) 244–256, *GRBS* 12 (1971) 557–558, together with *CR* 27 (1977) 271.

<sup>21</sup> He is found doing the same in his notes on Theocritus: C. Wendel, *Überlieferung und Entstehung der Theokriteischen Scholien* (*AbhGött* 17.3 [1920]) 35.

scholarship took place in the Homer scholia. The rich learning of the unique tenth-century Venetian manuscript (*Marc.gr.* 454) with its quotations from Didymus, Nicanor, Herodian, and other ancient sources is a striking contrast to the mediocre notes of the Geneva codex of the *Iliad*, which probably dates from the thirteenth century. The compiler of the latter is generally wrestling with the meanings of the individual words and no more; he rarely rises to interpretation of the context, and still less often does one have the impression that in discussing a difficulty he is satisfying his own need for enlightenment.<sup>22</sup> And yet neither Triclinius nor the Geneva codex can be entirely neglected. Both had access to good sources now lost, which they reproduce in part: in the scholia to Aristophanes' *Acharnians* Triclinius is our sole source for two notes stating that lines of Aristophanes are parodied from Euripides' *Telephus* (schol. on *Ach.* 440 and 1188), and the Geneva codex in Book 21 of the *Iliad* suddenly produces excellent notes much superior to the comments on the first twenty books.<sup>23</sup>

Since many scholia found in the margins of medieval copies derive from ancient monographs, it is natural to ask whether there are cases of double transmission, in which the original text of the monograph can be compared with excerpts made from it. Two examples can be cited. A short work by the otherwise unknown Heraclitus dealing with allegory in Homer is transmitted as an integral text in a few relatively late Byzantine copies (*Ambr.* B 99 sup.; *Vat.gr.* 305, 871, 951; New College, *Oxford* 298). Short passages from it are found in the margins of a few copies of Homer (e.g. *Marc.gr.* 453; Leipzig, *Univ.* 1275; Vienna, *Phil.gr.* 133). The other case again involves Homer: the first book of Porphyry's *Homeric Questions* exists in one medieval manuscript (*Vat.gr.* 305, probably copied in 1314), while extracts from it can be found in the margins of a number of Homer manuscripts. In this case the text offered by the two branches of the tradition is just sufficiently different to have

<sup>22</sup> I cite the judgement of H. Erbse, *RhM* 95 (1952) 170–191, at 182–183.

<sup>23</sup> But Moschopoulos' recension of the Theocritus scholia is a simple commentary for ill-prepared schoolboys of the late thirteenth century and as such valueless for our purposes; see Wendel, *Überlieferung* 20–22.

induced the modern editor to print the text in two columns rather than try to record all the variant readings in an apparatus criticus. This gives us a hint of the degree to which other scholia, for which no parallel text can be found, may have been altered.<sup>24</sup>

### III.

From this brief historical sketch it will be apparent that scholia contain material deriving from sources which vary enormously in character and antiquity. It is important where possible to distinguish the various strata and to interpret their language correctly. Even competent scholars have sometimes been led into error by failure to do so.

First a few words about terminology in scholia. It is wrong to assume that technical terms or turns of phrase can be confidently assigned to identifiable individuals. An erroneous belief of this kind would be for instance the idea that scholia introduced by the word μήποτε “perhaps,” or by rhetorical questions, come from the pen of Didymus.<sup>25</sup> A moment’s reflection will convince us that if we could attribute the invention of a critical term to a particular scholar, that term might soon become a standard part of the vocabulary for all successive generations of scholiasts, so that its use does not tell us a great deal. In the late Byzantine period Demetrius Triclinius took over much of the commentary written by his mentor Thomas Magister. Although Th. Hopfner showed<sup>26</sup> how the terminology of these late Byzantines can be distinguished, it is only because we possess autographs of some of these scholars or manuscripts bearing unmistakable evidence of authorship that we are in a position to identify their individual contributions to the scholia with some degree of certainty.

The terminology itself is not always easy to understand. The relationship between Aristophanes and Eupolis was long mis-

<sup>24</sup> A. R. Sodano, *Porphyrii Quaestionum Homericarum liber I* (Naples 1970). Antonio Carlini kindly draws my attention to the fact that many scholia on Plato’s *Alcibiades I* are excerpts from Olympiodorus’ commentary.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Richter, *WS* 33 (1911) 37–70, at 63–64. The idea is mentioned also by Wendel, *Überlieferung* 147.

<sup>26</sup> *SBWien* 172.3 (1912).

interpreted, even by an authority as eminent as Wilamowitz, because of a misreading of the scholium on *Knights* 1291. It appeared to state that verses 1288–1315 were the work of Eupolis. The words in question are ἐκ τοῦ “ὅστις οὖν τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα” φασί τινες Εὐπόλιδος εἶναι τὴν παράβασιν, εἴ γέ φησιν Εὐπόλις “ἔξυνεποίησα τῷ φαλακρῷ” (fr.89). It was left to Max Pohlenz to insist on the correct translation.<sup>27</sup> The words ἐκ τοῦ do not mean “from this point onwards.” The sense is: “because of line 1288 some people say that Eupolis wrote the parabasis (i.e. the whole of it), because he elsewhere says ‘I collaborated with my bald colleague’.” The original commentator had presumably hit on another fact, not now mentioned in the scholia, that verses 1288–89 in the second parabasis of the play have at least a superficial resemblance to the corresponding verses of the parabasis, the antepirrhema, in Eupolis’ *Demoi*, which began ὅστις οὖν ἄρχειν τοιούτους ἄνδρας (fr.99.33). When that fact is deleted from the scholium the simple phrase ἐκ τοῦ becomes ambiguous.

Another trap for the unwary is that when a scholiast explains a word by giving one or more synonyms for it, we should not mistake any of these synonyms for the word that originally stood in the text of the author before him. The warning sounds so elementary as to be unnecessary, but it is easier to fall into the trap than might be supposed. A case in point occurs at Apollonius Rhodius 1.219, where the words ἀκροτάτοισι ποδῶν are glossed by the scholiast τοῖς σφυροῖς ἢ τοῖς ἀστραγάλοις. These are intended as synonyms only, but in H. Fraenkel’s edition (1961) ἀστραγάλοισι was adopted in the text because of its occurrence in the scholia; yet there is not the slightest ground for thinking that the scholiast read this word in his copy.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Hermes* 47 (1912) 341–347 and *NakG* 1952.5 96–128, at 120–121. In my review of R. R. Schlunk, *The Homeric Scholia and the Iliad* (Ann Arbor 1974), in *Gnomon* 48 (1976) 716–717, I pointed to some errors of translation which were blemishes in the author’s praiseworthy attempt to treat an important theme.

<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding Fränkel’s defence of his choice in *Einleitung zur kritischen Ausgabe der Argonautika des Apollonios* (*AbhGött* 55 [1964]) 109–110.

Apart from terminology the other main difficulty in dealing with scholia is to distinguish where possible what I would call the strata within the scholia. Scholiasts very rarely refer to contemporary events in such a way that they can be dated, and when they do it is not usually possible to tell whether the words in question are part of the original core of a note or a later accretion. For example a reference to Belisarius (schol. Thuc. 4.83) only gives us a terminus post quem for the sentence in question. If the Apollonius scholia (on 3.1241) give the text of an epigram which appears in the *Palatine Anthology* (9.688), we may conjecture that the scholia were being revised after the compilation of the *Anthology*, in other words in the tenth century; but we do not know the extent of the revision, nor can we entirely exclude the possibility that the epigram was incorporated into the scholia at an earlier date from another source.

Nevertheless, study of the manuscripts enables us to discern facts which are sometimes obscured in modern editions. This has important results in the Aristophanes scholia, where modern commentators have occasionally supposed that a scholium was written by an ancient commentator when in fact it dates from the middle ages or even the Italian Renaissance. At *Frogs* 340 there is a crux which has been variously handled by editors. As transmitted in the manuscripts the line is metrically faulty and something must be deleted. The scholiast says that in some copies of the text the word τινάσσω was omitted. This statement was misinterpreted by W. B. Stanford in his edition (ed. 2, London 1963). He deleted the word, which may well be the correct policy, but he cited in support of his decision the scholium just mentioned as follows: “sch. notes that τινάσσω was absent in some ancient versions.” Note the word “ancient”; it is pure fabrication; the scholiast only says ἐν τισιν (sc. ἀντιγράφοις), and investigation of the manuscripts reveals that the word was first deleted by Triclinius, and the scholiast is none other than Marcus Musurus, the editor of the first printed text of 1498, noting the reading of some Triclinian copies in his possession. A millennium and a half is a wide margin of error in dating scholia. A similar case arose at *Acharnians* 1, where a

metrical note was taken by K. von Holzinger,<sup>29</sup> and apparently also by K. Zacher and W. G. Rutherford,<sup>30</sup> to mean that the ancient critic Heliodorus, perhaps writing in the first century, read in his text stage-directions, which of course had to be specifically excluded in his analysis of the metres used by the poet. The words in question are ἐξαιρείσθωσαν καὶ αἱ παρεπιγραφαί. They do not appear in any manuscript, and J. W. White omitted them from his edition.<sup>31</sup> Now that we have a reliable witness for the Triclinian recension of the text (*Holkham gr.* 88) we can see that Triclinius wrote a note mistakenly treating two short stage-directions as if they were lines of text and therefore needed to be taken into account in his metrical analysis. This grave error was corrected by Musurus; no earlier scholiast had anything to do with the matter, and Heliodorus' name should not have been introduced into the discussion.

Now for a mistake with more serious consequences, leading to a dubious reconstruction of one aspect of the history of medicine. The point at issue is the origin of free medical services provided by doctors acting as employees of city councils and other authorities. A modern monograph on the history of hospitals claims, following the view put forward in an article some years ago, that such free treatment is a new development in the fifth century of our era.<sup>32</sup> The evidence cited is a scholium on *Acharnians* 1030. The article said that the Aristophanes scholia date from after A.D. 400, citing as authority a valuable if somewhat polemical monograph by L. Cohn-Haft.<sup>33</sup> In fact

<sup>29</sup> *Ueber die Parepigraphae zu Aristophanes* (diss. Vienna 1883).

<sup>30</sup> See respectively *Bursian* 71 (1892) 102–105, and *A Chapter in the History of Annotation* (London 1905) 105.

<sup>31</sup> *The Verse of Greek Comedy* (London 1912) 397.

<sup>32</sup> T. S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*<sup>2</sup> (Baltimore 1997) 47, following D. W. Amundsen, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 45 (1971) 553–569, at 556 n.15. What Miller says is: “Of greater interest [than a statement in Chrysostom] regarding the chief physicians in the early Byzantine period is a scholion to Aristophanes’ *Acharnenses* written in fifth-century Constantinople and reflecting contemporary conditions. The scholiast defines the public physicians (i.e., archiatroi) as those who offered their services for free.”

<sup>33</sup> *The Public Physicians of Ancient Greece* (Northampton 1956) 34 n.9.

Cohn-Haft qualified his statement with the word “probably” and was wisely sceptical of the value of the scholiast’s note for his purpose, which was to consider free medical treatment in classical Greece. The result of careless reading of a scholium is a misleading assertion about the history of medical care.

#### IV.

After these cautionary tales I come to the merits and demerits of scholia. First the demerits. One must resist the temptation to devote too much space to a series of easy jokes at the expense of scholiasts, but a few examples should be given.

1. Plain ignorance is rampant. (a) At Aristophanes’ *Knights* 42 a scholiast in the Ravenna manuscript tells us that the Pnyx was an Athenian law-court. From scholia in the other manuscripts we learn that the Pnyx was a place where the Athenian assembly was sometimes held. The *Suda*, citing the same source, omits, by luck or superior knowledge, the adverb “sometimes.” (b) In the same play at 55 the scholiast has to comment on the Athenian success at Pylos, but he confuses it with Thermopylae, normally known as Pylae, and talks about the Spartan king Leonidas. (c) Linguistic ignorance may masquerade in another form, by the assertion that something is superfluous. At *Knights* 37 the scholiasts are unable to understand the force of the preposition in the compound verb *παραιτησώμεθα*. So they say not merely that it is superfluous, which is a common way of evading the issue, but that Attic authors add or omit prepositions in this arbitrary fashion.<sup>34</sup>

2. Other manias possess the scholiastic mind. (a) One is for allegorical interpretation, especially of Homer. This is not of course an aberration of the medieval mind; it goes back to Theagenes of Rhegion in the late sixth century B.C., was taken up by the Stoics and then by the Christians, and is most obviously visible in the treatise by Heraclitus mentioned above, which begins with the observation that allegory is to be found in Alcaeus and Anacreon. A typical example from chapter 8: in the first book of the *Iliad* the plague is said to be caused by Apollo, but Apollo is synonymous with the sun, and therefore

<sup>34</sup> For other cases see e.g. at *Achamians* 610 and 835.

what Homer means is not that a god inflicted plague but that the heat of summer corrupted the air. Allegorical explanation and rationalism combine to destroy any feeling for saga and poetry. A closely related phenomenon is the anxiety of scholiasts to extract an edifying moral from a text that does not justify it. This is not a common feature in the Aristophanes scholia, although there is an example at *Acharnians* 366; there Dicaeopolis refers to himself as a very small, insignificant person, the epithet being humorous and nothing more, whereas the scholiast assures us that the poet is here teaching us to judge men not by their size but by the merit of what they say. But such explanations are a substantial element in one class of scholia on the *Iliad*, generally but rather misleadingly known as the exegetic scholia. One example: commenting on Agamemnon's anger at 1.103–104 the scholiast says that we should avoid anger carefully since it overcame even such a great hero. But there is nothing in Homer to justify the note, which is a misunderstanding of heroic qualities and values. (b) There is a craze for quoting Homer to illustrate Attic usage. Quotations from Homer can even be inserted without need into otherwise sound notes. At *Acharnians* 142 the scholiast's object is to explain that *φλαθήναιος* belongs to a class of compound adjectives which take a proparoxytone accent. He lists some of them, and when he comes to *ἐχέπωλος*, which is found at *Iliad* 4.458, he pauses to cite a phrase from Homer, unnecessary though it is in the middle of a list. This citation seems to me to be a later addition to a straightforward philological note. The converse error is also found: Homer is thought of as an Attic author. This view is expressed by Aelius Aristides in his *Panathenaios* (1.328 Lenz, 13 p.296 D.). The context is the universal adoption of Athenian culture and language as a sign of respect for the glories of Attic civilisation. Even Homer can be claimed as one of them, since he came from Smyrna, an Athenian colony; its language, and therefore his, is derived from Athens. The scholia on Aristides here adduce the first line of the *Iliad* in support, saying that the form Πηληιάδεω is Attic, being parallel to the Attic genitive Μενέλεω.<sup>35</sup> Aristides is not the originator of

<sup>35</sup> Cited by J. F. Kindstrand, *Homer in der zweiten Sophistik* (Uppsala 1973)

this erroneous vision of Homer as an Athenian. It occurs in the D-scholia (on *Iliad* 2.371) and in the ancient lives of Homer it is attributed, probably wrongly, to the eminent authorities Aristarchus and Dionysius Thrax.<sup>36</sup> One need hardly add that muddled thinking continued in Byzantium, where the grammarian George Choeroboscus (*Grammatici graeci* IV.2 86) criticises no less a person than Aristarchus for failing to realise that Homer wrote an early form of the Attic dialect. Another eccentric trait is the desire to assure us that the Athenians were the autochthonous inhabitants of their country. While this is not an irrelevant fact at Sophocles *OC* 947, it is inapposite as part of the explanation of the words δύσκολον γερόντιον in Aristophanes *Knights* 42. Equally eccentric is the explanation of the difficult word ἐπίκωπος meaning “up to the hilt” at *Acharnians* 230, where the scholiast is led astray by the Athenians’ nautical achievements and can only think of a derivation from the word for an oar.

3. A third failing of scholia from the classical scholar’s point of view is that they contain much which only informs us of practices in the classrooms of late antiquity or the middle ages. (a) In the first place great attention is paid to rhetorical effects. Admiration for rhetorical skill in dramatic or other texts is not in itself out of place, and there are some unobjectionable notes of this type in the commentary on Sophocles *OC* 939, 1257, 1760. But as a rule the scholiast’s first concern was classification into the categories of rhetorical figure, metonymy, synecdoche, and the rest, that the pupil had to master, rather than any desire to point out literary merit. These categories were listed and discussed exhaustively by W. G. Rutherford in *A Chapter in the History of Annotation*. (b) Other scholia show us a procedure of the classroom in operation. The master picks out a word in the text, asks what it refers to, and has the model answer in the commentary in front of him. An example from Soph. *OC* 25: the scholium on the word ἡῦδα runs τί ἡῦδα; ὅτι αὐταὶ εἰσιν αἱ Ἀθηναί· ἐμπόρων δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ ὀδοιπόρων, διὸ τὸ χ. The pupil’s attention and comprehension are tested in ele-

197. He wonders if the assertion is to be taken seriously.

<sup>36</sup> See T. W. Allen’s OCT, V 244.13.

mentary fashion. Other examples are found at 156, 354, Aeschylus *Choephoroi* 661, Euripides *Alcestis* 999. (c) There is also a natural preoccupation with mastering Attic usage so as to earn admiration for the excellence of one's archaising prose style. A vast number of notes tell us that such and such a word or usage is Attic. In the commentary on the *Achaeians* there is a series of notes which make clear the motive for studying Attic usage: one will acquire the reputation of being an educated person (see especially on 207, also 210, 245, 272).

Most of the shortcomings I have enumerated date from late antiquity or the middle ages. The early and valuable Hellenistic commentaries have been encrusted with, or more often supplanted by, later material. A good example of the shift in interest is afforded by a comparison of Didymus' notes on Demosthenes and the scholia of the medieval manuscripts; none of the extant Didymus survived long enough to be incorporated into the corpus of scholia that we read.<sup>37</sup> An unusual exception to this generalisation is provided by a papyrus of Aristophanes with scholia that correspond almost word for word with the medieval notes (P.Berol.inv. 13929 + 21105 on *Knights* 552 and 580).<sup>38</sup> More often we may expect to find much the same subject matter and interpretation expressed in somewhat different language, as in the monograph on *Iliad* 21 (P.Oxy. II 221), perhaps composed by a grammarian with the common name of Ammonius, which has a reasonably close relationship with the scholia in the Geneva codex.<sup>39</sup> In this case we find a papyrus agreeing to some extent with a strand of the medieval tradition that cannot otherwise be traced earlier than the thirteenth century.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The fact was noted by H. Diels, *BKT* I (1904) li–lii.

<sup>38</sup> See G. Zuntz, *Byzantion* 13 (1938) 635–690, at 635–637; H. Maehler, *Hermes* 96 (1968) 287–293. Cf. C. A. Gibson, *Interpreting a Classic: Demosthenes and His Ancient Commentators* (Berkeley 2002), esp. 62–69, and P. Harding, *Didymus on Demosthenes* (Oxford 2006), esp. 13–20 and 41.

<sup>39</sup> H. Erbse, *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem* I (Berlin 1969) xlii.

<sup>40</sup> For similar phenomena in the text of several authors see *CR* 19 (1969) 234.

## V.

After this survey of the failings of scholiasts let me turn to the achievements of the scholars who preceded them. First of all, Hellenistic commentators assembled a vast mass of purely factual elucidatory material about the ancient texts, just as modern scholars attempt to do. Unfortunately neither ancient nor modern commentators have invariably followed Corinna's precept that one should sow with the hand and not with the sack. And a good deal of the information that the ancients put together is of limited interest, for instance the accumulations of local antiquarian and historical lore that accompany parts of the text of Apollonius Rhodius. But from time to time an ancient scholar hit on a fact of importance to us which luckily none of his successors saw fit to suppress. A famous instance is the note on Aristophanes *Knights* 400, which tells us about Cratinus' play *Pytine*. Another intriguing note, more difficult to interpret, occurs at *Clouds* 889: there the entry of the two Logoi is announced with the statement that they are brought on stage in wicker cages ready to fight like birds. This detail of production is not supported by any hint in the text, but as it is hard to see why it should have been invented, it may be an inference from something said in the first edition of the play.<sup>41</sup> It has to be borne in mind that ancient scholars were not able to see revivals of Old Comedy, and so their comments on production, even when excellent, need to be attributed to intuition, not erudition, if they cannot be derived from the text itself. At *Thesmophoriazusae* 101 the scholium tells us that Agathon sings the whole of what appears to be a song in two parts. Although Hall and Geldart (OCT) divided it between Agathon and the chorus, if one thinks about the humorous possibilities of making Agathon sing the whole passage, there can be little doubt that the scholium is right. In the same play at 295 there is a note about the use of prose in comedy, to which a note at *Knights* 941 provides a supplement; but they are both very brief and one would have liked to see a fuller original version.

Scholia with valuable information could be listed at length. An ingenious recent demonstration of their value in matters of

<sup>41</sup> See Sir Kenneth Dover's edition (Oxford 1968) xc.

textual criticism exploited a note on the *Odyssey* to settle a point in the first line of the prologue of Callimachus' *Aitia*.<sup>42</sup> But the majority of the best examples come from the commentaries on the *Iliad*. A note on 2.665 recognises that what appears to be the definite article in Homer is a demonstrative pronoun. At 1.277 Aristarchus observes that the trisyllabic form ἐθέλω is regular in Homer. From the note at 2.48 one can tell that he worked out the chronology of the events narrated in the *Iliad*, a task repeated in modern times by J. N. L. Myres.<sup>43</sup> Nicanor's book on punctuation showed some awareness of the rules forbidding heavy punctuation at certain points in the hexameter verse (see e.g. scholia on 12.49 and 434, 15.360). Another good observation is that the first book of the poem has no similes (D on 1.611, AbT on 2.87). And one may add that scholia are one of our main sources about difficult points of Greek accentuation, since they contain many fragments of Herodian and Apollonius Dyscolus.<sup>44</sup>

For readers brought up on modern Homeric scholarship the question that will seem most important is whether the ancients showed any awareness of the oral tradition that lies behind Homer. The answer is that the scholia on the Homeric text do not make the point explicitly, but the scholia on the grammar of Dionysius Thrax contain the notion that for a time the written texts were lost, so that the poems were preserved by memory, until Peisistratus had fresh copies made.<sup>45</sup> F. A. Wolf was aware of this unduly simplified account of the process of transmission, and quoted it alongside the better-known passage of Josephus *Contra Apionem* 1.2, in his epoch-making study of the genesis of the Homeric epics.<sup>46</sup> More important, however, are the scholia which enable us to see how far the ancient scholars were able to develop the principles of literary criticism and

<sup>42</sup> F. Pontani, *ZPE* 128 (1999) 57–59.

<sup>43</sup> *JHS* 53 (1933) 115–117.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. the remarks on enclitics by W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) 424–427.

<sup>45</sup> *Scholia in Dionysii Thracis Artem grammaticam* 179.11–13, 481.17–20 Hilgard.

<sup>46</sup> *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (Halle 1795) lxxviii.

scholarship; scholia are our best source for the growth of philological method, and a significant proportion of the most helpful are found only in the Venetian codex of the *Iliad*, without which it would scarcely be possible to trace the history of the subject. From them one can see how the Alexandrians collated various copies of Homer and other authors that came into their hands and noted the variant readings. It is possible that they occasionally had to deal with copies written in the old Attic alphabet, removing the ambiguities caused by the failure to distinguish certain vowels (cf. e.g. Aristarchus on Pindar *Nem.* 1.24).<sup>47</sup> Since the text of Homer was more subject to variation than others the scholars are more easily seen at work here. It is well known how they recorded the readings found in copies from different Greek cities such as Sinope and Massilia.<sup>48</sup>

By the middle of the second century B.C. a standard or vulgate text had been established, which circulated among the reading public and was not much affected by subsequent emendation. But one great question remains unclear: did Zenodotus and his successors normally make proposals for the improvement of the text when they found a better reading in one or more copies? Their procedures remain obscure because reports of what they did are so brief; one does not get a full account of how they evaluated the variants they found or learn whether they proposed readings which had no basis in any known copy.<sup>49</sup>

Exegesis of the text led to the formulation of principles that are fundamental to modern scholarship. One procedure, the deletion of unwanted lines in Homer, was admittedly used much too frequently, and for reasons which may at first provoke laughter. But in defence of the Alexandrians it should be said that they were wielding a new critical weapon, and they

<sup>47</sup> For further details see my remarks in H.-G. Nesselrath (ed.), *Einleitung in die griechische Philologie* (Stuttgart/Leipzig 1997) 92–93.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. schol. on *Il.* 1.298. The early papyri with striking textual variants, sometimes known as “wild papyri,” were studied by S. R. West, *The Ptolemaic Papyri of Homer* (Cologne/Opladen 1967).

<sup>49</sup> Discussion of Zenodotus’ activity has been revived by the new hypothesis of van Thiel (n.7 above).

were probably encouraged to declare lines to be spurious by the discovery that the wild papyri had certain omissions. They also failed to realise the oral nature of Homeric poetry and its consequence for the critic: repetition and formulae are needed both by poet and audience. What is harder to explain is the Alexandrian zest for objecting to lines thought to contain some indecent or unworthy idea, especially as the Greeks were never a prudish race. How can intelligent men have supposed it their duty to identify as inauthentic lines such as *Iliad* 1.29–31 with their mild sexual reference? Or 3.423–426, where the goddess Aphrodite carries a chair for the mortal Helen, and Zenodotus is thought to have rewritten the passage? In these cases the critics used the term ἀπρέπεια. It is not confined to Homeric commentaries: it occurs in a note on Apollonius Rhodius 1.1207, where Hylas looks for a well and carries with him a bucket, on which the scholiast observes that it is unseemly for a young man to be carrying a bucket; he contrasts the correctness of Homer, who made a young woman carry a bucket (*Od.* 7.20), but does not suggest that any part of the text should be obelised. Where did the concept of ἀπρέπεια as a tool of literary criticism come from? The answer seems to be from Aristotle, who twice expresses the germ of the idea in the *Rhetoric* (1395a5, 1406a13), and is credited with having used the term elsewhere (fr.100 Rose).<sup>50</sup> It is also found in a scholium on *Iliad* 7.390 attributed to Democritus (68 B 23 D.-K.), but I should not care to place much reliance on this ascription. Surprisingly Pfeiffer in his history of classical philology scarcely mentions the term at all and does not consider the likelihood of Aristotelian influence, which, if correctly postulated, runs counter to his general interpretation of the history of scholarship. I attempted to deal with other signs of Aristotle's influence in my review of Pfeiffer.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps it is worth adding that the notion of Aristotle as the inventor of literary scholarship receives some support from the opinion expressed by an educated man writ-

<sup>50</sup> Cf. M. Pohlenz, *NAkG* (1933) 52–92, at 66.

<sup>51</sup> *CR* 19 (1969) 366–372. More recently R. Meijering, *Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia* (Groningen 1987), has made a case for seeing Aristotelian influence in Hellenistic scholarship.

ing at the turn of the first and second centuries A.D. In his short essay on Homer Dio Chrysostom says: “Aristotle, with whom they say criticism and the art of grammar began, discusses the poet in many of his dialogues, for the most part admiring and paying tribute to him, and so does Heraclides Ponticus” (36.1).

It is only fair to add that some critics made deletions in the texts for other and better reasons. Galen thought a passage in Hippocrates had been altered in order to make it clearer (XVII.2 110 K. on Hipp. *Epid.* 6.3 τῆς παλαιᾶς γραφῆς οὔσης ταύτης ἐπὶ τὸ σαφέστερον αὐτὴν μετατεθείκασι πολλοὶ τῶν ἐξηγητῶν), and there is a similar note on Sophocles *Ajax* 841, which to modern scholars seems fully justified (ταῦτα νενοθεῦσθαί φασιν ὑποβληθέντα πρὸς σαφήνειαν τῶν λεγομένων). The allegation that actors or producers altered the text of tragedy occurs from time to time, most notoriously perhaps at Euripides *Orestes* 1366–68.<sup>52</sup>

From athetesis and the grounds commonly adduced to justify it I return to other principles of scholarship developed at Alexandria and implicit in much modern work. The chief of these is the well-known maxim that each author is the best guide to his own usage, or in Greek Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὀμήρου σαφηνίζειν. Of course there are many breaches of this rule in the scholia; as I have said, one of the habits of scholiasts is to cite Homer in support of usage and vocabulary in other authors. But in the scholia to the *Iliad* and occasionally elsewhere the principle is upheld. Aristarchus used to be credited with its formulation, but Pfeiffer noted that it is not stated in so many words by any authority earlier than Porphyry in the third century A.D. and that the verb σαφηνίζειν is not used in scholia to mean “interpret.”<sup>53</sup> However, as Pfeiffer himself did not question, the maxim describes the character of Aristarchus’ work accurately and I found one piece of evidence to support the traditional view, an anecdote in Aelian (*VH* 14.13). The poet Agathon

<sup>52</sup> Cf. e.g. M. L. West’s edition (Warminster 1987) ad loc. and pp.40–41; also D. J. Mastronarde’s edition of Euripides *Phoenissae* (Cambridge 1994) 39–49.

<sup>53</sup> *History* 226–227. But there is a case in schol. h to *Il.* 1.279, which probably does not belong to an early stratum.

responds to a friend's criticism that his poetry is too full of antitheses, which ought to be removed. Agathon's reply was that by deleting the antitheses he would remove the genuine Agathon from Agathon's work, and the Greek text is λέληθας σεαυτὸν τὸν Ἀγάθωνα ἐκ τοῦ Ἀγάθωνος ἀφανίζων. The linguistic analogy with the famous maxim seems too close to be disregarded, and its occurrence in Aelian shows that the maxim had been formulated before Porphyry's day.<sup>54</sup>

Rigid application of the maxim entails that any unique word or expression in the text of an author is open to suspicion because there is no parallel passage to support it. But an unknown scholar of great intelligence devised a complementary principle to protect the classics from misguided emendation on a large scale: the rule was laid down that there are many unique words in Homer (schol. on *Il.* 3.54). This fact is not to be found in Pfeiffer's account, because his history concentrates on the achievements of individuals, at the expense of neglecting whatever cannot be assigned to an identifiable scholar.

As a pendant to this section I draw attention to an interesting anticipation of an important principle in the textual criticism of Greek drama. J. C. B. Lowe demonstrated that the assignment of lines to speakers in Aristophanes must depend on the context, and not on the supposed evidence of the manuscript tradition. A scholiast on Sophocles *Ajax* 354, whose date and identity one would very much like to know, observes in the same vein: "when there is doubt about the identity of the speaker one must pay attention to the characterisation and distinguish the person accordingly" (ἐν ταῖς γὰρ ἀμφιβολίαις τῶν προσώπων δεῖ τοῦ ἥθους στοχάζεσθαι καὶ διαστέλλειν τὸ πρόσωπον).<sup>55</sup>

## VI.

From philological method I turn to literary appreciation among the scholiasts. Dionysius Thrax in his grammar had defined the task of the grammarian so as to exclude textual

<sup>54</sup> On this see *CR* 21 (1971) 172; A. G. Lee, *PCPhS* 21 (1975) 63–64, and my reply at *PCPhS* 22 (1976) 123.

<sup>55</sup> *BICS* 9 (1962) 27–42.

criticism; as Pfeiffer observed,<sup>56</sup> the term *διόρθωσις* is absent from his little book and it is not to be found in the copious scholia either. But he defined the ultimate and noblest task of the grammarian as “criticism of poems” (*κρισις ποιημάτων*). Dionysius himself does not enlarge on the topic, and so we are deprived of a Hellenistic statement of the nature and purpose of criticism; but it is worth pausing to see how the term criticism was interpreted by commentators on his laconic and difficult pamphlet. The commentators are of course very probably post-Hellenistic, but I think it is reasonable to suppose that they or their material are pre-Byzantine. One tells us that Dionysius meant by criticism the appreciation of fine language and apposite arrangement of material, combined with the ability to state the reasons for one’s judgement (p.15 Hilgard). That is a good practical statement of an ideal which, if observed, would have improved many ancient and modern commentaries on the classics.

But not everyone in antiquity seems to have interpreted Dionysius in this way: another scholiast took him to imply that the purpose of the grammarian is not to judge the quality of the poet’s work but whether it is genuine or spurious (471–472 Hilgard, and cf. 303–304). By means of analysis of language, subject-matter and structure we can make a useful comparison with the undeniably genuine work of the poet. He adds, quite rightly, that there are a great many texts of doubtful authenticity. This accords well with the famous statement by Galen (XV 105 K.) about the large quantity of pseudonymous literature that came into the library at Alexandria. The outlook of this second scholiast is much less elevated and is not, so far as I know, taken into account by modern scholarship; but I cannot suppress the suspicion, which will perhaps be regarded as foolish or heretical, that our second scholiast has correctly understood Dionysius’ obscure text. Questions of authenticity were never far from the thoughts of the bibliographers who directed the library at Alexandria, and the dry linguistic text of Dionysius is perhaps more easily reconciled with this interpretation. The same view is clearly expressed by Sextus Empiricus

<sup>56</sup> *History* 269 n.2.

in a discussion of grammar and grammarians (*Math.* 1.93) which takes as its starting point the definition given by Dionysius. A letter of Cicero written early in 45 B.C. (*Fam.* 9.10) is relevant here. He records an argument between the scholar Nicias and an otherwise unknown Vidius as to the authenticity of a document supposedly recording a debt. Cicero's authority was invoked: *ego tamquam criticus antiquus iudicaturus sum utrum sint τοῦ ποιητοῦ an παρεμβεβλημένοι*. It may be significant that he should describe himself as a critic when called upon to arbitrate; the word *antiquus* and the fact that Nicias is dubbed Aristarchus prove that he had the old Hellenistic ideals in mind.<sup>57</sup>

It is worth recording that the view of the second scholiast was adopted in a Byzantine version of Dionysius' treatise, sometimes ascribed to Theodosius of Alexandria and found in several manuscripts, of which the oldest, *Monacensis gr.* 310, is of the ninth or tenth century. Examples of the pseudonymous literature which the expert is supposed to be able to unmask are the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Apocalypse of Paul* in Christian literature and Hesiod's *Aspis* and Nicander's *Theriaca* among classical texts.<sup>58</sup> Even if incorrect, this interpretation of Dionysius was influential.

After voicing these suspicions of the high ideal normally attributed to Dionysius I turn to consider what traces of it exist in the scholia. One finds a certain limited range of critical tools. (a) First the concept of poetic licence. This phrase is not mentioned by Pfeiffer; yet three different nouns are used to express it, all in conjunction with the adjective "poetic." First is ἄδεια, used for instance in commenting on Sophocles' patriotic embellishment of myth in an ode of the *Oedipus Coloneus* (712). The noun is not common; used in this sense it occurs only once in the *Iliad* scholia, on the very first line, where the commentator felt obliged to apologise for the poet addressing an imperative to the Muse, instead of the more urbane optative. Secondly

<sup>57</sup> The passage is cited by Suetonius *De grammaticis et rhetoribus* 14 ; cf. R. A. Kaster's ed. (Oxford 1995) 174–175, who notes Cicero's use of Aristarchus' name at *Att.* 1.14.3 and *Pis.* 73.

<sup>58</sup> See Hilgard, *Scholia* 568.15–31.

there is ἀρέσκεια, again used only once in connection with the *Iliad*, at 2.45. This usage appears to be *lexicis addendum* (it is not in the *DGE*). Finally there is ἐξουσία, which is fairly common in the scholia and known to be a Hellenistic term from its occurrence in Strabo 1.2.17, which refers to Polybius' discussion of Homer. (b) In assessing similes the critics found it easier to express their grounds for a negative judgement than for praise. Two good similes in Apollonius Rhodius (1.1201 and 1243) were pronounced simply to be “entirely sound and powerful,” and the verdict on a third is very similar (1.1265). Negative comment might take the form of the note on 3.1377, that the comparison of Jason with a shooting star fails to carry conviction (ἀπίθανον), but occasionally led to profitable debate. At 1.879 the first scholiast (schol. L) criticises the simile of the Lemnian women hovering around the departing Argonauts like bees hovering over flowers; he maintains that it is unsound and inappropriate (οὐχ ὑγιής, ἀνάρμοστα) to compare a flourishing meadow with a city downcast and depressed at the heroes' departure. The second scholiast (schol. P) takes up the criticism by explaining that part of the simile is designed to clarify (σαφήνεια τοῦ γενομένου), the rest to embellish the narrative (κάλλος μόνον καὶ ἔκφρασις). By this comment he attempts to understand why the poet wrote as he did, which is an important part of criticism. Curiously enough this second note comes from the less valuable recension of the scholia, probably put together by a Byzantine scholar somewhere between 1300 and 1475,<sup>59</sup> and so we must be more than usually aware of the possibility that what we read is Byzantine and not ancient criticism; but there is no doubt that our second scholiast was mainly dependent elsewhere on the old scholia. (c) Occasionally the application of a theory of criticism can be seen. It was probably the Peripatetics who used the concept of mimesis, defining the task of the writer of comedy as “imitation of life.”<sup>60</sup> The principle may also have been applied at times in discussion of tragedy. A hint of this comes from the third-century Peripa-

<sup>59</sup> C. Wendel, *Die Überlieferung der Scholien zu Apollonios von Rhodes* (*AbhGött* III.1 [1932]) 117.

<sup>60</sup> Pfeiffer, *History* 190–191.

tetic Hieronymus of Rhodes, who compared a story told about the inhabitants of the Attic deme Anagyrus with the events of Euripides' *Phoenix*, and did so in a book entitled *On the Tragic Poets* (fr.32 Wehrli). Aristotelian influence was hardly to be avoided in the realm of literary theory. A famous instance can be seen in the Homer scholia that describe the parting of Hector and Andromache (schol. T on 6.467, 474). The poet is praised for describing a scene from real life with such clarity that it is conjured up before the reader's eye and is perfect in its imitation; and a note is added that in so doing he does not in the least detract from the stately tone appropriate to epic. That is at least the right way to begin an appreciation and perhaps the original version of this note attempted to analyse in more detail how the poet achieved his effect. It is interesting to observe that the Victorian commentator Leaf did not deign to comment on the merits of the passage, whereas Geoffrey Kirk in 1990 did far better and acknowledged the merit of the scholia.<sup>61</sup>

Plato's misguided attack on *Iliad* 14 (*Resp.* 390C) was rebutted with the aid of critical theory.<sup>62</sup> The story of Zeus and Hera making love had been explained away allegorically (ps.-Heraclitus 39), but another critic invoked the theory usually associated with Asclepiades of Myrlea that poetic narrative can be divided into three categories, the true, the false, and the fictitious (schol. T on *Iliad* 14.342).<sup>63</sup> This does not entirely destroy the force of Plato's complaint, but it is an attempt to apply critical theory. Finally a very sound criticism that moderns and ancients alike should have heeded more: the T scholia on *Iliad* 21.269 comment on the strangeness of the battle between Achilles and the river, and say that it is acceptable in poetry because the poet here tells his story skilfully so that the reader

<sup>61</sup> G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: a Commentary II* (Cambridge 1990) 223 on lines 466–470.

<sup>62</sup> Plato's admirers in late antiquity studied his view of poetry with care; see A. D. R. Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen 1980).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. the related sources cited by W. Kroll, *Studien zum Verständnis der römischen Literatur* (Stuttgart 1924) 60.

does not have time to stop and think. That is important for the criticism of oral literature and not entirely irrelevant to the written word.<sup>64</sup>

## VII.

The contrast between ancient and modern scholarship was described by the most eminent of all modern scholars as follows.<sup>65</sup> Ancient scholarship had no sooner become an academic pursuit than it sank to the level of textual criticism and verbal analysis, and the latter deteriorated into establishing the bare sense of the text. A theory of the nature of poetry, understanding of the poet and his work in their historical context, and even the interpretation of each single work as a whole, either did not exist or were not attempted after the time of Aristophanes of Byzantium. No attempt was made to write a history of Greek tragedy<sup>66</sup> or a critique of tragic drama. The ideal of modern scholarship on the other hand should be to assemble for the reader all the information which will enable him or her to approach the work in question with as nearly as possible the same knowledge, presuppositions, and attitudes as the original reader or audience had; so a commentary on a Greek play should try to put us in the position of the Athenian as he entered the theatre to watch the performance, and to give us the same enjoyment as he had.

Wilamowitz made his contrast unduly sharp and not entirely accurate. He tried to compare a modern ideal that generally remains unrealised with ancient practice that can only be evaluated through the distorting mirror of the scholiastic tradition.

<sup>64</sup> See further N. J. Richardson, *CQ* 30 (1980) 265–287, for a survey of the literary criticism to be found in the Homeric scholia.

<sup>65</sup> Wilamowitz, *Einleitung in die griechische Tragödie* (Berlin 1921) 219–220, 256.

<sup>66</sup> Photius *Bibl. codex* 161, 103b11–32, refers to a certain Rufus, author of a *Δραματικὴ ἱστορία*, of which Book 8 was clearly nothing more than anecdotes; whether the same was true of Books 1–3 is less certain (the content of Books 4–7 is not relevant for our purpose). Equally uncertain is the character of the work on the theatre mentioned without an author's name in schol. Dem. 19.247 (M. R. Dils, *Scholia Demosthenica* [Leipzig 1983] 466). These texts are suggestive but do not amount to a refutation of Wilamowitz's judgement.

If we concentrate our attention on the fragments that can be identified with some plausibility as belonging to the commentaries of the best ancient scholars, we shall be able to defend them against some of Wilamowitz's charges. Certainly scholarship did not come to an end with Aristophanes; the first writer of commentaries on a large scale was his successor Aristarchus. It is equally clear that the commentators passed judgements on poetry which were based on a theory of literary criticism. And they did do something to help the reader enter the state of mind of the fifth-century Athenian, when they noted for instance the exploitation of patriotic feeling by the tragedians.<sup>67</sup> Appreciation of a tragedy as a whole was not entirely lacking in the man who noted the excellent structure (οἰκονομία) of Sophoclean plays.<sup>68</sup> Careful scrutiny of scholia, assisted by modern editions much superior to earlier ones, enables us to build up at least a partial picture of what ancient scholars achieved. It is of course easy to point to defects and shortcomings. But clearly they also had many merits and were much better than most of the scholiasts who succeeded them; it is a reflection on us if we confuse them with the inferior pedants of a less productive civilisation.

#### APPENDIX

The authenticity of Dionysius Thrax *Ars grammatica* has been a topic for debate for several decades. The scepticism expressed by V. Di Benedetto, who thought it a forgery of the fourth century or thereabouts, has elicited a number of responses. A balanced view of the current *status quaestionis* is provided by F. Montanari in his article in *Der neue Pauly* (3 [1997] 632–635). The purpose of the present note is to suggest that the debate might have been unnecessary, or at the very least should have been conducted in different terms, if account had been taken of a remark by Galen.

The last sentence of the pamphlet in which he lists and discusses his own writings mentions a now-lost work consisting of a single book with the title “Whether someone can be critic and grammarian”: εἰ

<sup>67</sup> Schol. on Soph. *OC* 457 and 712.

<sup>68</sup> Schol. on Soph. *OC* 28, and cf. parallels cited by V. De Marco, *Scholia in Sophoclis Oedipum Coloneum* (Rome 1952), from scholia on three other plays.

δύναται τις εἶναι κριτικὸς καὶ γραμματικὸς.<sup>69</sup> It seems not to have been observed that what induced Galen to discuss this question is presumably Dionysius' famous definition of the grammarian's highest task as κρείσσις ποιημάτων. For him the grammarian should aspire to be a critic. Since attacks on grammarians as pedants were common and often justified, one can imagine that Galen wished to consider whether denigration had gone too far. If it is right to set Galen's pamphlet in this context, Dionysius' work is either genuine or a much earlier forgery than has been supposed.

*August, 2006*

Lincoln College  
Oxford OX1 3DR, U.K.  
nigel.wilson@lincoln.ox.ac.uk

<sup>69</sup> *Libr. propr.* 17, ed. I. Mueller (Leipzig 1891) 124.16–17.