



Greek Commentaries

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the genre of “commentary” in ancient Greece. I will first briefly discuss ancient Greek scholarship and, above all, its sources and the issues that modern scholars have to face when dealing with them. Next, I will focus on the physical appearance of Greek commentaries (*hypomnemata*), and then I will survey some of the most important contents of ancient exegesis (intra-lingual translations, variant readings, questions about myths, geography and realia, authenticity of lines and entire texts, style and poetics, specific interests of some commentators). Finally, I will highlight the differences between commentaries on literary texts and commentaries on scientific texts and will focus on the two most important legacies ancient Greek commentators left to biblical and Christian exegetes: the allegorical reading and the principle that the words of an author must be interpreted in terms of the author’s words themselves.

Keywords

commentaries; scholia; *hypomnemata*; papyri; Alexandrian scholarship; Aristarchus; allegory

Introduction

For our modern literary standards, the “commentary” is a quite well defined genre-category, both in formal and functional terms: commentaries explain other texts considered “canonical” for a particular discipline (function) and they discuss the text following the order in which it is written, from the beginning to the end (form). However, such a definition may be inadequate from the functional point of view: commentaries are not the only works that explain a text: other genres, like lexica or monographs on particular authors, also aim at clarifying texts. This ambiguity in the definition

becomes even more of an issue when discussing Greek commentaries: Greek scholarly genres are much less differentiated in their content—at least for us—, because of the peculiar history and development of Greek scholarship. In fact, we can define rather precisely how an ancient commentary (*hypomnema*) looked like physically (form), but its content (function) is not easy to distinguish from the content of other scholarly products. Hence, even if technically speaking only *hypomnemata* are real commentaries, a survey conceived from a comparative perspective needs to include other texts “commenting on” canonical authors in order to have a sufficiently complete picture of what Greek commentators were doing. For this reason, I will distinguish here between a specific product with *specific formal characteristics* (the commentary or *hypomnema* in Greek) and the *function of commenting* upon canonical texts (which is common to many scholarly products).

In what follows, I will first give a very brief overview of Greek scholarship and, above all, I will discuss its sources and the issues that modern scholars have to face when dealing with them (§1). Then I will introduce some important commentaries and sources which will be used as examples in this survey (§2). The core of the paper will have two main sections. In the first (§§3–4), I will briefly describe the physical appearance of a real commentary (*hypomnema*) in antiquity. As I have explained, we can certainly define a *hypomnema* from a formal point of view, and we have enough examples from papyri to be able to identify some general characteristics of Greek “commentaries” in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Then (§§5–7), I will survey some of the most important contents of ancient exegesis; the examples will be taken from the *hypomnemata* on papyrus, and from the other exegetical texts mentioned in §2. Given the nature of the present volume, I will concentrate on Homeric scholarship, since the Homeric poems are the closest parallel to the sacred texts of the Jews and of the Near East; moreover, it is also the field for which we have most material. However, examples of commentaries on other authors will be also mentioned in order to give a more complete picture of the genre of commentaries in ancient Greece.

1. Greek Scholarship and Its Sources

The need of privileging the content/function of texts rather than focusing on the specific genre of commentary arises from the peculiar historical development of Greek scholarship and from the sources at our disposal.

The beginning of scholarship in Greece¹ occurs rather early and concerns the most important Greek author: Homer. The need for “explanations” in Homer was due to the fact that Homer’s poetry, which was at the basis of Greek education, was written in an artificial language that was Ionic-based but with elements of other dialects (especially Aeolic and Attic); moreover, Homeric language had many archaic formations. As a consequence, Homeric poems sounded odd and were difficult for Greeks of the classical period to interpret; therefore, among the first forms of exegesis to be developed there was glossography: the translation of Homeric words into “modern” Greek. The first testimony of such an activity derives from a fragment of the *Banqueters* of Aristophanes, in which a father asks his son to explain Ὀμήρου γλῶτται to him.²

Homeric poems also presented another problem: their gods behaved very much like humans and showed an almost complete lack of moral standards. When philosophical and ethical thinking started to develop in the sixth century B.C.E., thinkers like Xenophanes questioned the Homeric depiction of the gods (21, frags. B 11–12 D-K). To “save” Homer from accusations of immorality, the Greeks developed a specific tool: the allegorical exegesis, whose first representative is Theagenes of Rhegium (middle of the sixth century B.C.E.). If glossography and allegory are the earliest forms of scholarship on Homer, Greek scholarship becomes a fully developed discipline with Aristotle (fourth century B.C.E.) and then, above all, with the foundation and development of the Library and the Museum of Alexandria (third–second centuries B.C.E.). This is the time of the great grammarians, including Zenodotus of Ephesus,

¹ As an introduction to Greek scholarship, R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) is still standard (though sometimes outdated); see more recently N. G. Wilson, “Scholiasts and Commentators,” *GRBS* 47 (2007): 39–70.

² Aristoph., fr. 233 *PCG*: [A] πρὸς ταύτας δ’ ἂν λέξω Ὀμήρου ἐμοὶ γλῶτται· τί καλοῦσι κόρυμβα (*Il.* 9.241); /...τί καλοῦσ’ ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα (*Od.* 10.521, 536, 11.29, 49); / [B] ὁ μὲν οὖν σός, ἐμὸς δ’ οὗτος ἀδελφὸς φρασάτω· τί καλοῦσιν ἰδύους (Solon; cf. Eust. 1158.20); /...τί ποτ’ ἐστὶν ὀπίειν (Solon; cf. Hsch. β 466); “A: so in addition to these ones (i.e. prob. glosses) now tell me some Homeric glosses: what do they call κόρυμβα? ... And what do they call ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα? [B] Well, your son and my brother here will tell you; what do they call ἰδύους? ... And what is ὀπίειν?” All the translations are mine.

Aristophanes of Byzantium, and Aristarchus of Samothrace, who produced editions, commentaries and exegetical works on archaic and classical authors. Another important center was Pergamum with scholars such as Crates of Mallus and his pupil Zenodotus of Mallus, who, around the same period, combined the standard philological interests with allegorical readings that were also influenced by Stoic philosophy. Alexandrian and Pergamean scholarships continued to thrive during the Roman period and expanded in the Mediterranean reaching Rome and beyond; commentaries and other exegetical works were then continuously produced into the Byzantine period when scribes and erudition played a fundamental role in preserving Greek scholarship.

One of the main problems in working with Greek scholarship and exegesis is that almost no *hypomnemata* of the Hellenistic and early Roman period has been preserved in full by direct tradition. There are only two exceptions: Hipparchus' commentary on Aratus' *Phaenomena* (second century B.C.E.) and the commentary on the Hippocratic treatise *On Joints* by Apollonius of Citium (70 B.C.E.); these two texts, however, are very peculiar and not representative of the genre of commentary (see §6). The situation is partially remedied by other sources that more or less indirectly preserve fragments of more ancient commentators. The most direct and important sources are the fragments from papyri preserved either by the dry climate in Egypt and few other places, or because they were carbonized as in Herculaneum. Even if these fragments consist only of a tiny fraction of the original roll, they sometimes preserve significant amounts of text which open a window into the most ancient phase of the genre of the commentary—from the fourth century B.C.E. (with the Derveni papyrus, a commentary on an Orphic theogony; see §7.1) to the third to fourth centuries C.E. The papyrus fragments show how scholarship flourished and developed during the Hellenistic and Roman period: commentaries and exegetical texts were copied and recopied, often excerpted or complemented with additional material. This exegetical content was eventually transcribed in the margins of codices carrying the text of the author commented upon: this way, scholia, marginal annotations in medieval manuscripts, were born.³ Scholia are one of the most important sources for

³ How and when scholia were born is a very debated question. Generally, scholars think that the formation of scholiastic corpora dates back to late antiquity (fifth century C.E.): see N. G. Wilson, "A Chapter in the History of Scholia,"

ancient commentaries and commentators; in fact, even if a long time separates scholia from the original Hellenistic or early Roman exegesis, the process of continuous copying and excerpting has often maintained almost literally the content of these notes, as is clear when we compare fragments belonging to different times but strikingly similar in *Wortlaut* and content.

Ancient grammarians did not produce only commentaries (*hypomnemata*), but also editions (*ekdoseis*) of texts, collections of words used by literary authors (*lexeis* or *glossai*) as well as monographs on a specific argument (*syggrammata*). Even though the ancients did distinguish between these different types of texts (and we can too, at least from a formal point of view), their boundaries were easily crossed, as excerpts from texts of different types could be combined in other learned products. Therefore, in later scholia we can find material that originally was distributed among *syggrammata*, *hypomnemata* and glossaries, and which at a certain point was gathered together to comment on a specific text.

It has now become clear why it is almost impossible to discuss Greek commentaries and at the same time limit the analysis to *hypomnemata*: first, because we do not have many *hypomnemata* fully preserved; second, because the main sources for ancient *hypomnemata* are later texts that collect material also from other exegetical texts like exegetic monographs and lexica in a process of osmosis, which started quite early, among contiguous sub-genres of scholarship,⁴ and, third, because issues and topics that

CQ 17 (1967): 244–56; idem, “Two Notes on Byzantine Scholarship: The Vienna Dioscorides and the History of Scholia,” *GRBS* 12 (1971): 557–58; K. McNamee, “Missing Links in the Development of Scholia,” *GRBS* 36 (1995): 399–414; eadem, “Another Chapter in the History of Scholia,” *CQ* 48 (1998): 269–88. The “late antiquity” thesis was developed against the old thesis that no scholiastic corpora existed earlier than the Byzantine period (ninth century): see G. Zuntz, *Die Aristophanes-Scholien der Papyri* (2d ed.; Berlin: Seitz 1975) and, more recently, H. Maehler, “Die Scholien der Papyri in ihrem Verhältnis zu den Scholiencorpora der Handschriften,” in *La philologie grecque à l’époque hellénistique et romaine* (ed. F. Montanari, Vandoeuvres-Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1994), 95–141.

⁴ For an overview of the problems involved in the distinction among these genres and the osmotic relationship between them, see G. Arrighetti, “Hypomnemata e scholia: alcuni problemi,” *Museum Philologum Londiniense* 2 (1977): 49–67.

we would consider unique realms of commentaries were often addressed by the Greeks in other exegetical texts.

2. Different Genres “Commenting On” Canonical Authors: *Hypomnemata*, Glossaries, *Syggrammata*, and Other Exegetical Texts

In order to survey the content of ancient commentaries and exegesis, it is necessary to examine examples from specific texts. It is impossible here even to list all the fragments of *hypomnemata* on papyrus.⁵ I have therefore selected some of the most famous *hypomnemata* on papyrus with a focus on Homeric scholarship,⁶ but also including *hypomnemata* on authors from Greek poetry, drama,⁷ as well as prose. They are listed in Table 1 (Homeric exegesis) and Table 2 (exegesis on other authors); all the examples of scholarship from papyrus commentaries discussed in the following sections will be taken from those papyri.⁸

⁵ For a survey of *hypomnemata* on papyrus, see M. Del Fabbro, “Il commentario nella tradizione papiracea,” *SPap* 18 (1979): 69–127. The study is outdated but it has not been superseded so far.

⁶ For a survey of Homeric commentaries on papyrus, see J. Lundon, “Homeric Commentaries on Papyrus: A Survey,” in *Ancient Scholarship and Grammar: Archetypes, Concepts and Contexts* (ed. S. Matthaios, F. Montanari, and A. Rengakos; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 159–79.

⁷ On exegetical texts on drama preserved in papyri, see W. Luppe, “ΣΧΟΛΙΑ, ΥΠΟΜΝΗΜΑΤΑ und ΥΠΟΘΕΣΕΙΣ zu griechischen Dramen auf Papyri,” in *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter: Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung* (ed. W. Geerlings and C. Schulze; Leiden: Brill 2002), 55–77. On *hypomnemata* on ancient comedy, see S. Trojahn, *Die auf Papyri erhaltenen Kommentare zur Alten Komödie: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Philologie* (München: Saur, 2002).

⁸ All the papyri are quoted according the standard papyrological abbreviations of the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, which can be consulted at the following URL: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist.html> (last updated 1 June 2011).

Table 1: examples of papyrus *hypomnemata* on Homer
(chronologically ordered)

Papyrus Name	Date	Content
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 8.1086 ⁹	1st century B.C.E.	Commentary on <i>Iliad</i> 2.751–827
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 8.1087 ¹⁰	1st century C.E.	Commentary on <i>Iliad</i> 7.75–83
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 2.221 ¹¹	2nd century C.E.	Commentary on <i>Iliad</i> 21 by a certain “Ammonius, the grammarian, son of Ammonius”
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 53.3710	Latter part of the 2nd century C.E.	Commentary on <i>Odyssey</i> 20

Table 2: examples of papyrus *hypomnemata* on other authors
(chronologically ordered)

Papyrus name	Date	Content
<i>P.Derveni</i> ¹²	4th century B.C.E.	Commentary on an Orphic Theogony
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 19.2221 + <i>P.Köln</i> 5.206 ¹³	1st century C.E.	Commentary on Nicander’s <i>Theriaca</i> 377–395
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 37.2812 ¹⁴	1st century C.E.	Commentary on an unknown tragedy

⁹ See also H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (Scholia vetera)*, vol. I (Berlin: De Gruyter 1969), 164–74 (Pap. II) and J. Landon, *Un commentario aristarcho al secondo libro dell’Iliade: POxy VIII 1086* (Proecdosis: Florence, 2002).

¹⁰ See also H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (Scholia vetera)*, vol. II (Berlin: De Gruyter 1971), 222–27 (Pap. VI).

¹¹ See also H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (Scholia vetera)*, vol. V (Berlin: De Gruyter 1977), 78–121 (Pap. XII).

¹² T. Kouremenos, K. Tsantsanoglou, and G. Parássoglou, *The Derveni Papyrus* (Florence: Olschki, 2006).

¹³ See A. Colonna, “Un antico commento ai *Theriaca* di Nicandro,” *Aeg* 34 (1954): 3–26. *P.Köln* 5.206 supplements the left part of the first 19 lines of col. i.

¹⁴ See also J. Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982), 30–53.

Table 2 (cont.)

Papyrus name	Date	Content
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 31.2536 ¹⁵	2nd century C.E.	Theon's commentary on Pindar's <i>Pythian</i> 12
<i>P.Oxy.</i> 35.2737 ¹⁶	2nd century C.E.	Commentary on (probably) Aristophanes' <i>Anagyryus</i>
<i>P.Flor.</i> 2.112 ¹⁷	2nd century C.E.	Commentary on an unknown comedy of Aristophanes
<i>P.Berol. inv.</i> 9782 ¹⁸	Middle of the 2nd century C.E.	Commentary on Plato's <i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>P.Berol. inv.</i> 9780 ¹⁹	2nd–3rd centuries C.E.	<i>Didymus On Demosthenes</i> (commentary or monograph?)
<i>P.Amh.</i> 2.12	3rd century C.E.	Aristarchus' commentary on Book 1 of Herodotus's <i>Histories</i> (with <i>subscriptio</i> Ἀριστάρχου Ἡροδότου α ὑπόμνημα)

Since the focus of this survey is Homeric scholarship, it is necessary to list also other texts that are not *hypomnemata* but still preserve Homeric exegesis. For example, there are papyri with the Homeric text and marginal or interlinear exegetical annotations.²⁰ A very important exegetical product are the so-called *Scholia Minora* on papyrus, lists of Homeric words

¹⁵ See also M. Treu, "Theons Pindarkommentar (Pap. Oxy. 2536)," in *Serta Turyniana: Studies in Greek Literature and Palaeography in Honor of Alexander Turyn* (ed. J. L. Heller and J. K. Newman; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 62–85; Maehler, "Die Scholien der Papyri," 115–18.

¹⁶ See also F. Montana in *Commentaria et Lexica Graeca in Papyris reperta (CLGP), I.1.4* (München: Sauer, 2006), 157–82 (Aristophanes 27).

¹⁷ See also F. Montana in *CLGP, I.1.4*, 183–211 (Aristophanes 28).

¹⁸ D. Sedley, "Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetus*: *PBerol. inv.* 9782," in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini, vol. III* (Florence: Olshcki, 1995): 227–562 [9].

¹⁹ H. Diels and W. Schubart, *Didymos Kommentar zu Demosthenes* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1904); and L. Pearson and S. Stephens, eds., *Didymi in Demosthenem commenta* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1983), 1–54.

²⁰ E.g., the so-called Hawara Homer (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Gr. class. a. 1, second half of the second century C.E.), containing annotations to a beautiful copy of *Iliad* 2; see K. McNamee, *Annotations in Greek and Latin Texts from Egypt* (New Haven: American Society of Papyrologists, 2007), 269–71. There are

“translated” into Koine Greek and following the Homer books line by line.²¹ Similar to the *Scholia Minora* are the so-called “continuous paraphrases,” which form a continuous text rephrasing the Homeric lines with or without the original text.²² Another type of exegesis is preserved by papyri belonging to the so-called *Mythographus Homericus*, which summarizes the mythographical stories of the characters of the *Iliad*²³ or of the *Odyssey*.²⁴

Hypomnemata on papyrus, annotated text of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey*, *Scholia Minora*, continuous paraphrases, and *Mythographus Homericus* are all genres that need to be kept distinct from a formal point of view because they look different and served different purposes.²⁵ For example, the *Mythographus Homericus* and the *Scholia Minora* were also used at lower levels of education, while the *hypomnemata* were mostly aimed at professionals. However, if we consider them from a modern perspective, all these texts “comment” on the Homeric text and they all deal with topics that we now consider as mostly belonging to commentaries.²⁶

also annotated editions of other authors than Homer; the evidence is collected by McNamee, *Annotations*.

²¹ For example, *P.Oxy.* 67.4630 (first century C.E.) with scholia to *Il.* 2.24–40; see also J. Spooner, *Nine Homeric Papyri from Oxyrhynchos* (Florence: Istituto Papirologico, 2002), 43–55, and *P.Mich. inv.* 2720 (fifth to sixth centuries C.E.), with scholia to *Il.* 3, 4 and 5; G. W. Schwendner, *Literary and Non-literary Papyri from the University of Michigan Collection* (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Dissertation Services, 1991), 31–98.

²² E.g., *PSI* 12.1276 (first century B.C.E. to first century C.E.), which alternates the original lines of *Il.* 2.617–670 with their paraphrase.

²³ E.g., *P.Oxy.* 3.418 (second to third centuries C.E.) or *P.Oxy.* 61.4096 (second century C.E.). See now M. van Rossum-Steenbeek, *Greek Readers' Digests? Studies on a Selection of Greek Sub-literary Papyri* (Leiden: Brill 1997), 279–80 (no. 49) and 285–99 (no. 53).

²⁴ E.g., *PSI* 10.1173 (third century C.E.). See now van Rossum-Steenbeek, *Greek Readers' Digests?* 301–8 (no. 56). For an analysis of papyri of the *Mythographus Homericus* with a comparison with scholia and mythographical treatises, see van Rossum-Steenbeek, *Greek Readers' Digests?* 85–118.

²⁵ For a survey of these genres, see F. Montanari, “Gli *Homeric* su papiro: per una distinzione di generi,” in *Studi di filologia omerica antica II* (Pisa: Giardini, 1995), 69–85.

²⁶ Another subcategory of exegetical texts includes the *hypotheseis* (or *diegeseis*), the summaries of plots of dramas and of other poems (Homeric poems included).

Another important learned product that “commented” on specific texts or authors was the *syggramma*, which we generally translate as “monograph.” Unlike the *hypomnema*, a *syggramma* was not following a text in a linear way, but was focused on a specific topic and analyzed the text (or texts) according to the order followed by the argumentation; still, the content was often very similar to that of a *hypomnema*. The Homeric scholia preserve titles of some *syggrammata* by Aristarchus, like for example the one *On the Camp* (Περὶ τοῦ ναυστάθμου), where he discussed the geography of the Achaean camp at Troy, a monograph *Against Philitas* (Πρὸς Φιλίταν), and one *On the Iliad and the Odyssey* (Περὶ Ἰλιάδος καὶ Ὀδυσσεΐας).²⁷ The overlap in content between *syggrammata* and *hypomnemata* often makes it difficult to associate to any of these genres a papyrus fragment when it contains exegesis on a passage in absence of lemmata taken from the text or of other formal elements that we tend to attribute to *hypomnemata*. Even when we have a text that comments on a literary author and proceeds by continuous lemmata, there is still a question whether it is a *hypomnema* or a *syggramma*, as happens with *P.Berol. inv. 9780*, a work entitled *Didymus On Demosthenes*²⁸ (see §5.7).

As already explained, scholia preserved in manuscripts of various authors²⁹ give us a very good idea of the content of ancient exegesis, which could originally come from a *hypomnema*, a *syggramma*, or a glossary. Since my focus will be on Homeric scholarship, it is necessary to add some brief information about the Homeric scholia preserved in medieval manuscripts. The most important are the *Scholia Maiora* (given this name to distinguish

I have excluded them from this survey because, more than commenting on literary authors, these texts “summarize” them. For a survey of *hypotheses* on papyrus, see now van Rossum-Steenbeek, *Greek Readers' Digests?* 1–52 (*hypotheses* on tragedies and comedies) and 53–84 (Homeric *hypotheses* and Callimachean *diegesis*).

²⁷ The monograph Περὶ τοῦ ναυστάθμου is quoted in *Schol. Il.* 12.258a (Ariston.) and *Schol. Il.* 15.449–451a (Ariston.), Πρὸς Φιλίταν in *Schol. Il.* 1.524c (Did.) and *Schol. Il.* 2.111b (Did.), and Περὶ Ἰλιάδος καὶ Ὀδυσσεΐας in *Schol. Il.* 9.349–350 (Did.).

²⁸ For a discussion about the genre to which this text might belong, see Arrighetti, “Hypomnemata e scholia” and P. Harding, *Didymos on Demosthenes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13–20.

²⁹ For an overview, see E. Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18–71.

them from the *Scholia Minora*, mostly consisting of short lexicographical notes),³⁰ which can be divided in two major categories: the exegetical scholia and the scholia derived from the so-called *Viermännerkommentar* (“Four-Man Commentary”). The latter (abbreviated VMK) is a compilation of the fifth to sixth centuries C.E. which collected the Homeric work of four scholars: Aristonicus’ work on the critical signs used by Aristarchus in his edition of Homer (first century B.C.E.), Didymus’ work on Aristarchus’ Homeric recension (first century B.C.E.), Herodian’s work on Homeric prosody (second century C.E.), and Nicanor’s work on Homeric punctuation (second century C.E.). The VMK was excerpted over the centuries, and is preserved in fragments in the Homeric scholia (especially those preserved in the tenth-century manuscript *Venetus A*), the Byzantine *Etymologica* and Eustathius’ *Homeric Commentaries*. The scholia and the fragments deriving from the VMK, and especially those deriving from Aristonicus, are the most important sources for Aristarchus’ scholarship.³¹ The exegetical scholia instead derive from other scholars and commentaries, but their origin is more difficult to determine.

3. Formal Characteristics of a *Hypomnema*

Commentaries were supposed to follow a text line by line. Since in antiquity there was no line- or paragraph-numeration, the only way to indicate

³⁰ Cf. Montanari, “Gli Homerica su papiro,” 79–81. The *Scholia Minora* are preserved in papyri, as we have seen; the later medieval corpus of the so-called *Scholia D* (where D stands for *Didymi* because they were wrongly believed to derive from Didymus) are also part of this glossographical tradition, though they also include mythographical histories (closer to the papyri of the *Mythographus Homericus*) and *hypotheses*.

³¹ On the VMK, see Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*, vol. I, xlv–lix; F. Schironi, *I frammenti di Aristarco di Samotracia negli etimologici bizantini: Introduzione, edizione critica e commento* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 11–14. In this survey, in order not to load the text with too many abbreviations, I have normally omitted to signal the origin of the many scholia I quote. As a rule, all the scholia I refer to as ‘Aristarchean’ come from Aristonicus (Ariston.), who is considered the most trustworthy witness for Aristarchus’ Homeric *hypomnemata*. The scholia from Didymus (Did.) are considered fragments only when they quote Aristarchus specifically. I will also refer to exegetical scholia (ex.), especially in §§5.5 and 5.6.

which lines were discussed in a commentary (that is: the lemmata) was to repeat those lines, either in full or by the incipit. In the “continuous commentary” the lines were recopied in full and without gaps: in this way, a reader could have avoided the use of a separate edition because both text and commentary were part of the same “book.” An example of this type of commentary is *P.Oxy.* 19.2221 + *P.Köln* 5.206, where one can read all the lines being commented upon (Nicander’s *Theriaca* 377–395) without any need of a separate text of Nicander. However, most of the commentaries do not discuss every single line and, even if they do so, often the involved lines are recalled only by their incipit. As a consequence, to follow this type of commentary, a reader needs also an edition of reference. Since the time of Aristarchus (216–144 B.C.E.) who, as far as we know, was the first to write a commentary, there was a strict connection between commentary (*hypomnema*) and edition (*ekdosis*). Such a connection was physically highlighted by the “critical signs” (σημεῖα) which were written both next to the lines of the text in the edition and next to the same lemmata in the commentary. In particular, the most important signs used by Aristarchus on Homer are the *obelos* (—, for athetesis),³² the *asteriskos* (⌘, for repeated lines), the *diple* (>, for exegetical notes), and the *diple periestigmene* (>:, to argue against his predecessor Zenodotus). Many of these signs, as well as other signs of different shape and uncertain meaning are found in papyri containing texts (*ekdoseis*) of literary authors.³³ In *hypomnemata* on papyrus we often find signs very similar to those mentioned above, but which were not linked to any edition of reference, like the *diplai* that mark each lemma in *P.Berol. inv.* 9782. These signs are called “lectional signs” to distinguish them from the Alexandrian “critical signs”; their usual function was simply to help the readers to distinguish the various portions of the commentary (lemmata, explanations, sections within the same explanation).³⁴ Real critical signs are present in *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, which has *diplai* and *obeloi* before some (but not all) lemmata and they seem to have been strictly connected

³² To athetize a line meant to mark that line as suspicious (with an *obelos*) without physically removing it from the edition. See below at §5.4.

³³ On critical signs in papyri, see K. McNamee, *Sigla and Select Marginalia in Greek Literary Papyri* (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1992).

³⁴ Other examples of “lectional signs” never placed in connection with the *ekdosis* but only used in the *hypomnema* include the slashes (/) of unknown meaning in *P.Oxy.* 53.3710, or the dotted obelos (⋄), probably used to mark the different sections of the commentary in *P.Flor.* 2.112.

with an *ekdosis* now lost.³⁵ Moreover, scholia (deriving from earlier *hypomnemata*) do mention the presence of σημεῖα in *ekdoseis* and explain the reason why they were used. Critical signs then became a staple of ancient exegesis and were used for Greek and Latin authors, as well as by Origen who used them in his edition of the Bible.³⁶

In *hypomnemata* on papyrus, even in the absence of critical signs, lemmata are most often marked off from the explanations either by a blank space, or by a *paragraphos*, which is a line under the lemma extending onto the left margin (—), sometimes with a forked tail on the left-hand side (⤵). Lemmata are also often set in reverse indentation (*ekthesis*). All these devices (which can be used together in the same *hypomnemata*) make it visually easy to find a lemma or a new entry in the column.

4. Language and Style of *Hypomnemata*

Commentaries can be written in a rather cursive hand, but we have also commentaries written in literary hands like *P.Oxy.* 53.3710, copied by a professional scribe active in Oxyrhynchus. In *hypomnemata* abbreviations and short-hands are frequent: they are used for forms of the verb “to be,” for the names of famous scholars repeatedly quoted, or for the catch-word “search” (ζη for ζητει), which invited the reader to “look” at another passage to find additional explanations on a certain topic (our “see” or “cf.”). Explanations tend to be extremely concise, sometimes even obscure—often because of the presence of stock formulas: ὅτι (standing for τὸ σημεῖον ὅτι, “the critical sign is placed here because”) introduces the explanation after the lemma; ἀντὶ τοῦ, “instead of,” introduces the translation of a difficult word or a paraphrase; πρὸς with accusative means either “with reference to” (a specific question) or “against” (followed by the name of a scholar against whom the commentator argues: e.g., πρὸς Ζηνόδοτον, ὅτι . . ., “against Zenodotus, because . . .,” as we often read in the Aristarchean scholia). In addition, words are used with a technical meaning that is often

³⁵ Other examples of Homeric *hypomnemata* with critical signs referring to the *ekdosis* are quoted by Lundon, “Homeric Commentaries on Papyrus,” 174 n. 85.

³⁶ Cf. F. Schironi, “The Ambiguity of Signs: Critical Σημεῖα from Zenodotus to Origen,” in *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters* (ed. M. R. Niehoff; Leiden: Brill 2012), 87–112.

different from the common one, like λαμβάνεται, “it is used,” to indicate linguistic usages, or περισσός, “superfluous,” when referred to a line “which is not necessary” in that passage (see §5.4), or οἶον corresponding to our “e.g.,” “for example.” In commentaries, we often find quotations of sources, authorities and other scholars who support a certain idea or, on the contrary, against whom the commentator is arguing. Typically, these quotations are introduced with ὡς + name of the scholar + (φησίν/λέγει). Sometimes these authorities are left anonymous, and referred to by the vague terms ἔνιοι or τινές. Alternative explanations are introduced by the adverb ἄλλως.³⁷

5. Content of Commentaries

Ancient critics were concerned with many different aspects of a text, from very basic issues, like simple understanding of the phrasing, to more complex problems, like discussing different variants, questions of authenticity and various types of exegetical questions (e.g., references to myths, geographical and historical questions, etc.) up to the discussion of poetics and aesthetic judgment of the poems themselves. In what follows, I will review some of the topics of greatest interest for ancient commentators. The examples (with a focus on Homer) will be taken from the *hypomnemata* on papyrus which I surveyed above, as well as from later scholia, to show how similar and connected this diverse material is.

5.1. *Intralingual Translations: Glossai and Paraphrases*

The first step towards the appreciation of a poem is the correct understanding of its sense. In order to do that, the most basic operation is that of “translating” unusual poetic words into more common ones. This is technically called “intralingual translation”³⁸ and is one of the most important activities when reading authors who use an archaic language rich in poetic terms. Homer presented this type of difficulty because his language is an

³⁷ On the language of *hypomnemata* and Greek scholarship in general, see Dickey, *Ancient Greek Scholarship*, 107–40, 219–65.

³⁸ According to the definition given by R. Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” in *On Translation* (ed. R. A. Brower; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 232–39.

artificial *Kunstsprache* with a mixture of different dialects and of different chronological strata. The problem with Homeric language was even more urgent because Homer was the text from which students learned to read and write.

The intralingual translations of Homer are typical of the *Scholia Minora* on papyrus where the Homeric text is translated word by word into Koine Greek. This basic form of interpretation is not limited to school texts,³⁹ but is widespread in different scholarly products. It is quite interesting to notice that the same Homeric gloss often tends to have the same translation in every source, from *Scholia Minora* to later lexica: the Homeric ὑκμίνη, for instance, is translated as μάχη in the *Scholia Minora*,⁴⁰ in the *Scholia D*,⁴¹ in the *Scholia Maiora*⁴² as well as in later lexica.⁴³

This practice is not limited to *Scholia Minora* or lexica, but is very common in *hypomnemata*, as well, whose entries sometimes are limited to the simple “translation” of a difficult word: for example, *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, ii 47 (ad *Il.* 2.782) explains that “the sign [is] with reference to χωομένω, because now it means ‘being angry’” (τὸ δὲ σημεῖον πρ(ὸς) τὸ χωομένω ὅτι νῦν τὸ χολουμένω δηλοῖ); or *P.Oxy.* 8.1087, ii 61–62, which glosses ταναήκεῖ (said of a spear of bronze in *Il.* 7.77) with τεταμένην ἔχον[τι τ]ῆν ἀκμήν [“which has a long point”], an explanation which recurs in *Schol. D Il.* 7.77.

Sometimes commentaries (unlike *Scholia Minora*) explain the meaning of a word by referring to another author, as in *P.Flor.* 2.112, frg. C, ii 17–19, where the word γενναῖον is explained to mean συγγενές “like in Homer”; similarly, *P.Oxy.* 19.2221 + *P.Köln* 5.206, ii 4–6, explains a word in Nicander quoting Callimachus. Explanations can become longer when the term requires more analysis, like in *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, iii 109–112, which explains the meaning of κορυθαίολος by using etymology and confirming it with a quotation of Alcaeus. In other cases, a dialectal indication is given, as happens in *P.Oxy.* 53.3710, ii 24–26, commenting on κορήσατε in

³⁹ See R. Criboire, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 50–51 (papyri 325–343 in her repertory).

⁴⁰ E.g., *P.Oxy.* 67.4630, i 23, on *Il.* 2.40; *P.Mich. inv.* 2720, fol. 3 recto, 9, on *Il.* 5.200.

⁴¹ E.g., *Schol. D Il.* 2.40 and *Schol. D Il.* 2.345.

⁴² E.g., *Schol. Il.* 11.72c (ex.).

⁴³ E.g., Hsch. υ 831, υ 832 and Su. υ 679.

Od. 20.149: “according to Parmeno of Byzantium κορεῖν is Athenian for καλλύνειν [‘sweep clean’].”

The next step is to paraphrase an entire line into Koine Greek; this operation allows the commentator to clarify specific syntactic difficulties and to make the text completely available to his readership. A typical example is the following one:

P.Oxy. 8.1086, ii 51–54: ὡς ἄρα τ(ῶν) ὑπὸ ποσσὶ μέγα στεναχίζετο | γαῖα (*Il.* 2.784): ‘ὡς ἄρα τ(ῶν)’ οὕτως τούτ(ων). ‘μέγα’ ἀντὶ τοῦ μεγάλως. ‘στεναχίζετο’ ἀντὶ τοῦ ἔσ|τενεν, τῶι παθητικῶι ἀντὶ τοῦ ἐνεργητικοῦ. ὁ δὲ λόγος οὕτως, τούτ(ων) ὑπὸ τοῖς | ποσσὶν μεγάλως ἔστενεν ἢ γῆ.

So the earth groaned greatly under their feet (*Il.* 2.784): ὡς ἄρα τ(ῶν) [is used instead of] οὕτως τούτων (‘so of them’); μέγα [is used] instead of μεγάλως (‘greatly’). Στεναχίζετο [is used] instead of ἔστενεν (‘she groaned’), that is, the passive instead of the active form. This is the meaning: ‘under their feet the earth groaned greatly.’

This operation is much more common in commentaries than what we might think: even the great Alexandrian Aristarchus often limits his comments to a paraphrase line by line, as in his note on *Il.* 5.863–864: Οἷη δ’ ἐκ νεφέων ἐρεβεννὴ φαίνεται ἀήρ / καύματος ἐξ ἀνέμοιο δυσσαέος ὀρνυμένοιο (“As a black mist appears from the clouds / when a stormy wind is stirred after the heat”), which he paraphrased as follows (*Schol. Il.* 5.864): “with reference to the contorted sequence: [instead of] οἷα φαίνεται ἀήρ ἐκ νεφέων δυσσαέος ἀνέμου ὀρνυμένου ἐκ καύματος.” When comparing the two phrasings, it is clear that there is a one-to-one correspondence between Homer’s words and Aristarchus’ rewording, as this outline shows:

Homer	οἷη δ’ ἐκ νεφέων (ἐρεβεννὴ) φαίνεται ἀήρ / καύματος ἐξ ἀνέμοιο δυσσαέος ὀρνυμένοιο
Aristarchus	οἷα φαίνεται ἀήρ ἐκ νεφέων δυσσαέος ἀνέμου ὀρνυμένου ἐκ καύματος

In this example, Aristarchus rephrases the Homeric poetical word-order into a more straightforward one. He translates the Ionic οἷη into the Koine

οἴα, turns the Homeric anastrophe κάυματος ἔξ into the more regular ἔκ κάυματος, and substitutes the Ionic genitives ἀνέμοιο and ὀρνυμένιο into the corresponding Koine genitives ἀνέμου and ὀρνυμένου. A Koine speaker can fully understand the difficult Homeric phrasing once it has been rephrased in this way.

The continuous analysis of Homeric language allows a scholar to single out Homeric morphological and syntactical peculiarities. Commentators often note that a certain form or syntactic construction is typical of Homer: for instance, Homer usually omits prepositions—that is, he uses simple cases without prepositions (contrary to what is common in Koine)—and this is often noticed in *hypomnemata* on papyri (e.g., *P.Oxy.* 2.221, vi 12–13, and *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, iii 83) as well as in scholia derived from Aristarchus' *hypomnema* (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 1.65b; 1.93–95; 1.111; 4.244b; 5.6b; 5.222b). Similarly, in Homer the case “changes” (πτῶσις ἐνήλλακται: e.g., *Schol. Il.* 9.632b; 10.35a; 10.298b; 14.218; 15.462; or ἐναλλαγή πτώσεως: e.g., in *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, iii 107–108; *Schol. Il.* 17.242b) in the sense that Homer uses different cases from those used in Koine. Sometimes these morphological or syntactical comments become real “morphological” excursuses like in *P.Oxy.* 8.1087, i 21–ii 61: here the explanation of (ἐπι)μάρτυρος (*Il.* 7.76), a nominative of the second declension derived—according to the ancients—from the genitive of the “normal” nominative of the third declension (i.e. ὁ μάρτυς, τοῦ μάρτυρος → ὁ μάρτυρος),⁴⁴ is carried out with a long excursus on these type of “derivative nouns” (παρῶνυμα), with quotations of similar cases from many literary authors (Pindar, Euripides, Simonides, Archilochus, Antimachus, Eupolis, etc.).

These observations about morphological and syntactical peculiarities are common in commentaries. They are important not only because they clarify the morphology or syntax of a passage, but also because they “justify” the author. By labeling the Homeric use as “typical” of Homer, the commentator defends the text and rejects “hyper-corrective” emendations: Homeric phrasing is sound, just different from Koine Greek.

⁴⁴ See also *Schol. Il.* 7.76b (Ariston.).

5.2. Orthography and Variant Readings

Intralingual translations and paraphrases thus become the basis for the identification of the specific idiolect of an author. By translating Homer word by word, the scholar achieves a complete correspondence between Homeric language and the Koine and can define Homeric language in its own peculiarities.⁴⁵ Once the Homeric idiolect is defined, a scholar can use it to correct the text when it is problematic, and choose the right variant. The result of this process represents a second—and very important—kind of information that we can glean from commentaries.

Ancient writing practice made texts particularly difficult to interpret because they were written in *scriptio continua*, with no division between words, and without any accent or breathings. Thus instead of (*Il.* 1.1–3):

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
 οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
 πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν

The incipit of the *Iliad* looked like this:

ΜΗΝΙΝΑΕΙΔΕΘΕΑΠΗΛΗΙΑΔΕΩΑΧΙΛΗΟΣ
 ΟΥΛΟΜΕΝΗΝΗΜΥΡΙΑΧΑΙΟΙΣΑΛΓΕΕΘΗΚΕ
 ΠΟΛΛΑΣΔΙΦΘΙΜΟΥΣΨΥΧΑΣΑΙΔΙΠΡΟΙΑΨΕΝ

With such a scribal practice, the first tasks were: 1) deciding where a word ended and the next began; 2) adding accents and breathings, especially in the cases (not rare in Greek) where these diacritics are the only way to distinguish between homographs.

Questions of accentuation are thus extremely common; *P.Oxy.* 2.221, iii 21–23, for example, discusses the accent of ENTAYΘOI: whether it is ἐνταῦθοι or ἐνταυθοῖ, and quotes the authority of Dionysius Thrax for the former solution.⁴⁶ Similarly, a note about breathings can be used to decide how to divide a *scriptio continua* and give a particular interpretation to a passage (e.g., *P.Oxy.* 19.2221 + *P.Köln* 5.206, i 29–ii 1).⁴⁷ Etymology is often used to solve problems related to orthography especially for proper

⁴⁵ The search for linguistic parallels in an author is not limited to Homer; for example, *P.Flor.* 2.112 highlights parallel expressions used by Aristophanes (in frg. C+D+E, i 16–18, and frg. C, ii 10–15).

⁴⁶ Cf. also *Schol. Il.* 21.122ab (ex.).

⁴⁷ Cf. Colonna, “Un antico commento ai Theriaca di Nicandro,” 21–22.

names or *hapax legomena*, as in the following case which discusses the vocative ἀπτοεπές referred to Hera:

Schol. Il. 8.209a (Ariston.) ἀπτοεπές: ὅτι δασύνουσιν ‘ἀπτοεπές’, καθαπτομένη τοῖς ἔπεσιν. Ἀρίσταρχος δὲ ψιλοῖ. ἐμφαντικώτερον δὲ τὸ ψιλοῦν, καὶ ἴσως ἦν παρὰ τὸ πτοεῖσθαι, ἢ ἄγαν πτοοῦσα, ἢ παρὰ τὸ ἀπτόν, τὸ ἰσχυρόν, ὥστε εἶναι δεινοεπές.

Because [some] pronounce ἀπτοεπές with rough breathing, ‘the one who attaches [i.e. from ἀπτῶ] herself to words.’ Aristarchus instead pronounces it with smooth breathing [i.e. ἀπτοεπές] and the form with smooth breathing is more suggestive. And it could either be from πτοεῖσθαι, ‘the one who greatly terrifies,’ or from ἀπτόν, that is ‘strong,’ so that it is ‘terrible at speaking.’

Even if this question starts as an orthographic problem, the commentator—Aristarchus in this case—is able to show that his reading is more suitable because it is more vivid and suggestive (this is the sense of ἔμφασις in ancient literary criticism).

At a higher level of difficulty lies the choice between variant readings. In particular, because of its long oral tradition, the Homeric text was very fluid, as shown by the Ptolemaic papyri of Homer whose text is quite different from the one of our vulgate.⁴⁸ The extent to which the Alexandrians proceeded by collecting manuscript evidence and comparing different readings is still debated. Aristarchus, for example, certainly looked at manuscripts when he had a doubt;⁴⁹ nonetheless, he often emended the text on the basis of his own linguistic knowledge and of what he considered to be the reading more consistent with Homer’s style and linguistic usage. In the scholia derived from Aristarchus’ commentaries, the choice for a particular variant is often justified because the reading is “more Homeric” (Ὀμηρικώτερον: e.g., *Schol. Il.* 2.397a and 3.163a); in other instances, Aristarchus rejects other scholars’ readings (often those by Zenodotus) because they are “not Homeric” (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 2.658 and 8.470a: ἢ λέξις οὐχ Ὀμηρική).

Commentaries can be more reticent: without stating any preference for a specific variant, they can simply mention a variant found “in some copies” (ἐν τισι: e.g., *Schol. Il.* 7.5a), suggested by “some” (ἔνοι: e.g.,

⁴⁸ Cf. S. West, *The Ptolemaic Papyri of Homer* (Köln: Westdeutscher, 1967).

⁴⁹ Cf. *Schol. Il.* 9.222b¹ (Did.).

P.Oxy. 31.2536, i 27) or by some specific scholar (e.g., all the scholia where Didymus mentions variants by Zenodotus, Aristophanes and other grammarians). Sometimes, a commentary can record two different variants suggested by the same scholar, most often by Aristarchus with the expression διχῶς Ἀρίσταρχος or διχῶς ἐν ταῖς Ἀριστάρχου (e.g., *P.Oxy.* 2.221, x 31–32, or Didymus in *Schol. Il.* 2.517a and 4.171a).

5.3. *Myths, Geography, Realia; Ζητήματα and Their Λύσεις*

Even if Homer is quite an “easy” text to understand in terms of its “content,” sometimes readers required some explanation about a myth or the world of the heroes. Mythographical details were often dealt with in the *Mythographus Homericus*; however, some questions were also discussed at length in *hymnematata* because of their difficulty. One problem that greatly interested the exegetes was the fact that Homer’s “mythographical universe” was different from that of later poets (the so-called *neoteroi*). *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, ii 48–51, explains that according to Homer Typhoeus is buried in the land of the Arimi while for later poets, such as Pindar (who is quoted verbatim: frg. 92 M.), he is buried under the Aetna. Similarly, Aristarchus in his commentaries was often remarking the differences between the Trojan myth in Homer and in the *neoteroi* (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 1.59c about Telephus and Mysia; *Schol. Il.* 2.722 about Philoctetes; *Schol. Il.* 9.145a about the murder of Iphigenia; *Schol. Il.* 16.222b, 16.574b and 18.57a about Thetis and Peleus).

A great effort was also made to explain Homeric geography, from the outer cosmos to the plain of Troy. In the scholia we have plenty of discussions about names and populations mentioned in the Homeric poems; a case in point, often discussed in our sources, is the identification of the various Ephyra mentioned by Homer in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 2.659, 6.152, 6.210, 13.301, 15.531) and in the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 1.259, 2.328). Similarly, *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, i 2–8, discusses the nature and location of the rivers Peneus and Titaresius mentioned in *Il.* 2.751–752.

Astronomical references in the poems were also a popular topic; a passing reference to a feast in *Od.* 20.156, for instance, offers the commentator of *P.Oxy.* 53.3710, ii 34–iii 19, a chance to dive into a long digression: first, he quotes Aristonicus’ opinion that this was a feast of Apollo during the new moon; then, to explain the connection between Apollo and the new moon (because only during new moons solar eclipses can take place)

the commentator goes into a long astronomical digression quoting verbatim his authorities: the astronomer Aristarchus of Samos (ca. 280 B.C.E.), who himself reported the explanations of Thales and of Heraclitus, and a Diodorus who could be Diodorus of Alexandria (first century B.C.E.).

Indeed, sometimes in commentaries we find “exegetic” digressions that seem quite odd to us: for instance, in *Il.* 21.203 Homer mentions “eels” and “fishes,” and in *P.Oxy.* 2.221, ix 28-x 18, we read a long explanation about the difference between these water creatures, in which the commentator quotes Aristotle as a technical authority.

Another important part of the job of a Homeric commentator was that of discussing ζητήματα or ἀπορίαι, “questions,” and find possible λύσεις, “solutions.” Ζητήματα were common exegetical problems in the Homeric poems which had become almost an obsession for commentators: Aristotle even wrote a work called *Homeric Problems*⁵⁰ (frgs. 142–179 Rose), in which he discussed many of them. Many of these ‘questions’ regarded geography, like the famous question of whether the Homeric Olympus was to be identified with the sky or not. While Aristarchus opposed such identification and considered Olympus only the mountain in Thessaly where the gods lived, other commentators like Crates of Mallus and the commentator of *P.Derveni* identified Olympus with the sky.⁵¹

Some authors required more exegetical comments than others. For example, it is paramount that a commentator explains the myths Pindar is alluding to in his poems because the myths he mentions are obscure or often hard to identify with more traditional versions. Mythographical explanations are indeed very common in the *hypomnemata* and scholia to Pindar: *P.Oxy.* 31.2536 has several entries (i 1–25) dedicated to explaining the myth of Perseus in Pindar’s *Pythian* 12, and commentators often highlight how Pindar diverges from the usual mythical account (e.g., *Schol. Pind. I.* 8.57b or Aristarchus in *Schol. Pind. O.* 6.23a).⁵² Mythological digressions are also common in commentaries on drama: in *P.Oxy.* 37.2812,

⁵⁰ Two titles are transmitted: Ἀπορήματα Ὀμηρικά or τὰ Ὀμήρου προβλήματα. Cf. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, 69.

⁵¹ For an overview of the question, see F. Schironi, “L’Olimpo non è il cielo: Egesi antica nel papiro di Derveni, Aristarco e Leagora di Siracusa,” *ZPE* 136 (2001): 11–21.

⁵² Cf. M. R. Lefkowitz, “The Pindar Scholia,” *AJP* 106 (1985): 269–82 (276–77).

a commentary on an unknown tragedy, the longest entry (ii 1–36) consists of a lengthy digression (probably taken from a *syggramma*: Apollodorus, *On Gods*)⁵³ dealing with the different versions of the myth of Apollo and Poseidon’s service for Laomedon at Troy; there are quotations from Homer, Nicander and a certain Dionysius;⁵⁴ the lemma of the tragedy commented upon is lost but most likely hinted at a version of this myth.

Others authors that required “special” attention were Aristophanes and all the playwrights of Old Comedy, since their plays were full of references to the fifth-century Athenian politics and daily life as well as to actual people who were the target of comic satire (the so-called κωμωδοῦμενοι). Another element that commentaries on comedy discuss is the source of tragic or lyric parodies (e.g., *P.Oxy.* 35.2737, frg. 1, i 19–27, quoting the opinions of Aristarchus, Euphronius, and another anonymous scholar).

In commentaries on dramatic texts we find also notes about the performance history of a particular play, like in *P.Oxy.* 35.2737, frg. 1, ii 10–17, which mentions Eratosthenes’ view about the various fortunes of the playwright Plato. This information is often not trustworthy but sometimes it is the only source available (through the scholia) to reconstruct the performance context of a specific play.

5.4. *Authenticity of Lines and of Texts*

A scholar often has to face authenticity issues: whether a text or portion of a text transmitted under the name of a certain author is authentic. Homer in particular raised two specific problems. First, whether or not both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written by him: the “Homeric Question” arose around the time of Aristarchus, who fought against the *Chorizontes*, anonymous scholars who maintained that the two poems were written by two different poets; in his commentaries Aristarchus often pointed to similarities between the two poems, such as a similar geography (e.g., the debated Ephyra, mentioned both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*), similar “mythic universe” (different from the one of the *neoteroi*) and similar stylistic features.

⁵³ Cf. Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion*, 30–48.

⁵⁴ According to Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion*, 40–41, this Dionysius is Dionysius Scytobrachion; in particular, the reference would be to his *Argonauts*.

The second important problem which any commentator needed to face when commenting on Homer was the discussion of spurious lines. The Alexandrians were well aware that the text they had was far from being the “original” one, and so they tried to restore it. They could delete lines completely from their text (as especially Zenodotus did) but they could also choose a more conservative solution: the athetesis, which meant that they marked with a marginal sign (the *obelos*) the lines that they considered spurious. The athetesis was an operation carried out by Zenodotus, Aristophanes, Aristarchus and many other critics in antiquity. The reasons why a line was suspicious could be written in the *hypomnema*, and we have many scholia derived from the *hypomnemata* of Aristarchus which explain why Aristarchus athetized certain lines. One of the most common reasons for an athetesis was inconsistency: the line was in contradiction with what had been already said in the text or was unsuitable for a particular character who had specific characteristics. Also, Aristarchus had problems with lines that he considered “superfluous” (περισσοί) or “not necessary” (οὐκ ἀναγκαῖοι). Often there was more than one reason that convinced Aristarchus that a line was not original. An example of an ancient debate about the authenticity of one or more lines is given by Ammonius’ commentary preserved in *P.Oxy.* 2.221,⁵⁵ discussing the athetesis of *Il.* 21.290. In Book 21, when he is attacked by the Scamander, Achilles invokes the help of Zeus (*Il.* 21.273–283); Athena and Poseidon go down and, disguised as humans, tell him that they have been sent by Zeus and reassure him that he will not meet his fate against the Scamander (*Il.* 21.284–298). The problem concerned the first words that Poseidon tells Achilles, when he says: “for among the gods we two are such helpers / with the approval of Zeus, I and Pallas Athena” (*Il.* 289–290):

⁵⁵ ‘Ammonius, the grammarian, son of Ammonius’ (so we read in the margin of the papyrus between columns x and xi) is an unknown grammarian; still, his is a rather learned commentary on *Iliad* 21, rich in overlaps with later scholia and quoting many scholars (for example, Aristarchus, Aristophanes, Zenodotus, Seleucus, and Crates).

P.Oxy. 2.221, xv 6–27

- νύσαντος ἐγὼ καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθή-
 νη<:> ἀθετεῖται, ὅτι {ὄνομα} οὐκ εἴ-
 ρηκεν ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ,
 10 μεταβεβληκῶς τὴν ιδέαν
 εἰς ἄνδρα: [κ]αὶ γ[ἀ]ρ οὐ[κ]α[] δὲ κατὰ
 τὴν ἄφοδον σημείω<ι> ἐπιφανεῖ
 τὸν Ἀχιλλέα ἐθάρσυνεν· “οὐδὲ Σκά-
 μανδρος ἔληγε τὸ ὄν μένος ἀλλ' ἔ-
 15 τι μᾶλλον / χώετο Πηλείωνι”.
 πρὸς ταῦτα λέγει Σέλευκος ἐν τῷ<ι> γ'
 Κατὰ τῶν Ἀριστάρχου σημείων ὅτι
 ἀνδράσιν ὁμοιωμένοι ὅμως κατὰ
 τ[ὸ] σ[ι]ωπώμενον διὰ τῆς δεξιῶσε-
 20 ω[ς] ἵχνη τοῦ θεοῦ εἶναι παρέχον-
 [τ]αι: [ἐ]πεὶ πῶς εἰρήκασι “τ[ο]ῖω γάρ τοι
 νῶι θεῶν ἐπιταρρόθω [εἰμ]έν”;
 καὶ [ὕ]πὸ Διὸς δὲ κατὰ τὸ σ[ι]ωπώμε-
 νον ἐπέμφθησαν. ἐν [δ]ε τῷ<ι> ε'
 25 [τ]ῶν Διορθωτικῶν ὁ αὐτὸς [ἀ]θετεῖ
 σὺν τοῖς ἐξῆς β' ὡς περισσο[ύ]ς. οὐ-
 κ εἶναι δὲ οὐδ' ἐν τῇ<ι> Κρητικῇ<ι>

With the approval of Zeus, I and Pallas Athena: [the line] is athetized because he has not said the name of the god [i.e. 'Poseidon'] but 'I' while now he has adopted human disguise. And he did not encourage Achilles by giving a clear sign when he left; [in fact, the river is not deterred as is clear from]: “and the Scamander did not stay his might, but even more he was angry with the son of Peleus” (*Il.* 21.305–306). With reference to these points in Book 3 of his work *Against the Signs of Aristarchus* Seleucus says that, even when disguised as humans, implicitly they offer hints that they are gods by greeting them; since how can they have said: “for among the gods we are such helpers” (*Il.* 21.289)? And they were sent by Zeus implicitly. But in Book 5 of the work *On Textual Criticism* the same Seleucus athetizes it with the following two lines [sc. *Il.* 21.290–292] because they are superfluous and [says that?] they were not in the edition of Crete.

The athetesis goes back to Aristarchus and this is confirmed by a shorter scholium in the Venetus A.⁵⁶ In the *hypomnema* we read that Poseidon should not say “I and Athena,” since this will be confusing now that the

⁵⁶ *Schol. Il.* 21.290a (Ariston.) Ζηνὸς ἐπαινήσαντος <ἐγὼ καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη>: ἀθετεῖται, ὅτι ἀπίθανον εἰς ἄνδρὸς μορφήν ὁμοιωμένον λέγειν “ἐγὼ καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη”. τίς γάρ ἐστιν, οὐ μὴ νοήση.

two gods are disguised as humans. The line is thus inconsistent with the context. Moreover, Poseidon does not give any clear sign of his real identity and this is proved by the fact that the Scamander is not deterred from this divine intervention and does not stay his anger (at *Il.* 21.305–306). Ammonius also records that Aristarchus' athetesis was argued against by Seleucus, who pointed out that, even without l. 290, the gods give signs that they are divine (at l. 289). Later on, however, Seleucus changed idea and suggested to athetize not only l. 290 but also the following two lines (*Il.* 291–292) because he found them “superfluous” (περισσοί). As a last piece of information, it is added that these lines were not present in the edition of Crete.

This example allows us to have a sense of the type of content we read in commentaries when the question is about authenticity. The commentator explains why in his view some lines are suspicious; he records other scholars' opinions and even their changes of mind. *P.Oxy.* 2.221 is certainly a learned work and Ammonius had at his disposal at least Aristarchus' *hypomnemata* (or excerpts of them) together with two works by Seleucus: *Against the Signs of Aristarchus* and *On Textual Criticism*. These two are *syggrammata* and, as is clear from this example, they were dealing with exactly the same questions of the *hypomnemata* of Aristarchus. The later commentator Ammonius, then, uses both *hypomnemata* and *syggrammata* to compile his own *hypomnema*;⁵⁷ fragments of this very debate, probably from the same sources, are also preserved in the *Scholia Maiora* to the same passage.⁵⁸ Questions of authenticity are also attested for ‘less’ problematic authors like Plato: for example, the *hypomnema* in *P.Berol. inv.* 9782, iii 28–37, discusses two different proems circulating for the *Theaetetus*.

5.5. *Style and Poetics*

Commentaries are also a very good place to discuss the style of a poet. Like lexicon, style is a typical trait of an author: once a scholar has defined the particular style of an author, he can then explain and correct the text, as well as decide issues of authenticity on the basis of stylistic elements. Rhetorical figures and stylistic devices are explained and commented upon.

⁵⁷ This is also exactly what the commentator of *P.Oxy.* 37.2812 is doing if he is really excerpting from Apollodorus' *On Gods*, as we discussed above in at pp. 419–420.

⁵⁸ In addition to *Schol. Il.* 21.290a (already mentioned), there is also an exegetical scholium preserving some of this debate: *Schol. Il.* 21.290b.

Sometimes scholars can argue against others on the basis of their ignorance of an author's proper style: for example, *P.Oxy.* 8.1086, i 11–18, reports a polemic between Aristarchus and the peripatetic Praxiphanes about the “reverse order” constructions in Homer.⁵⁹

Many stylistic comments are made to clarify obscure points in poems. As in the passage of *P.Oxy.* 2.221 quoted above, commentators explain that Homer sometimes does not say everything and the reader must assume that events not explicitly described by Homer have happened *κατὰ τὸ σιωπώμενον*, “implicitly” (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 9.224, 9.698a, 18.356a1.2).⁶⁰ Another problem with the organization of material in the poem is that Homer narrates events that happened at the same time as if they happened one after the other (the so-called “Zielinski's law”), a point highlighted by Aristarchus (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 12.2), the exegetical scholia (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 22.131), and *P.Oxy.* 8.1086 (ii 58–60).⁶¹ Also, commentators sometimes notice the alternation in Homer between the narrative mode (*διηγηματικόν*) and the dialogic mode (*μιμητικόν*), as Aristarchus does in *Schol. Il.* 23.855a and Dionysius Sidonius does in *P.Oxy.* 221, xi 1–4.⁶²

Often we read enthusiastic comments about certain stylistic features or choices. In his commentaries, Aristarchus explains some Homeric choices to achieve poetical beauty (*Schol. Il.* 2.45a about compound adjectives; *Schol. Il.* 18.483a about the description of the shield of Achilles). Exegetical scholia to Homer in particular are very sensitive to style and poetic technique. They notice prolepsis, i.e. anticipations of events that will happen later (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 16.46b) or outside the narrative (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 21.376);⁶³ they comment on how Homer introduces characters (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 2.876)⁶⁴ and how he is able to convey characterization (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 1.348).⁶⁵ Quite remarkably, exegetical commentators often

⁵⁹ On this principle, see R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 326–37.

⁶⁰ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 157–73. See also Maren Niehoff in this volume.

⁶¹ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 79–83.

⁶² Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 102–6.

⁶³ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 34–42.

⁶⁴ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 51–57.

⁶⁵ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 246–56. Characterization is also

notice the effects that a passage has on the readers: that it arouses their anxiety about what will happen (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 7.479) or their expectations (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 24.3–4); or they discuss the visual effects of a scene (e.g., *Schol. Il.* 6.467).⁶⁶

Similar comments can be found on other authors. Some are more author-specific; Pindar is notoriously obscure and so commentators often highlight the fact that the poet expresses himself through riddles (*αἰνίττεται*) hinting at something not expressly said (e.g., *Schol. Pind. P.* 3.195a and *Schol. Pind. I.* 5.2a). In particular, in *Schol. Pind. O.* 2.157a the commentator suggests that Pindar is hinting at a literary polemic (“He is alluding at Bacchylides and Simonides, calling himself a eagle and his rivals ravens”; cf. also *Schol. Pind. P.* 2.97).⁶⁷ While Homeric hexameters do not need many explanations, Pindar’s difficult metrical structures are discussed in the metrical scholia to Pindar, which derive from Alexandrian scholarship.⁶⁸ Dramatic commentators instead highlight the “tone” of how one should articulate certain lines: they notice that lines are uttered “with incredulity” (*ἀπιστῶν*; e.g., *Schol. Aristoph. Ran.* 51a; *Schol. Eur. Med.* 695), or “with irony” (*ἐν εἰρωνείᾳ*; e.g., *Schol. Aristoph. Ach.* 71a; *Schol. Aristoph. Vesp.* 635a; *Schol. Eur. Hec.* 26; *Schol. Eur. Phoen.* 966) or as “an aside” (*ἔνδοθεν*; e.g., *Schol. Soph. Ai.* 333; *Schol. Eur. Med.* 97).⁶⁹

important for the Alexandrian critics: they comment on it when they need to support an athetesis, because certain lines are ‘not fitting’ a certain character. See F. Schironi, “Theory into Practice: Aristotelian Principles in Aristarchean Philology,” *CP* 104 (2009): 279–316 (290–97).

⁶⁶ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 135–56.

⁶⁷ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 237.

⁶⁸ The metrical scholia are edited by A. B. Drachmann, *Scholiam vetera in Pindari carmina* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1927) but now the reference edition is A. Tessier, *Scholiam metrica vetera in Pindari carmina* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1989). For an overview on the content (and problems) of the scholia to Pindar see Lefkowitz, “The Pindar Scholia.”

⁶⁹ Cf. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work*, 347, 349–51. This survey is of course limited. For an overview of literary criticism in the scholia, see Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work* and also N. J. Richardson, “Literary Criticism in the Exegetical Scholia to the Iliad: A Sketch,” *CQ* 30 (1980): 265–87.

5.6. *The Teachings of the Poet*

Homer was always considered the “teacher” of the Greeks *par excellence* and his texts were at the basis of Greek *paideia* (“education”). The idea of Homer as the teacher is reflected also in some commentaries: in the exegetical scholia, for example, we often read that Homer teaches (διδάσκει δὲ ὁ ποιητής) some particular skills that often have nothing to do with the content of the poems. So Homer teaches how to arm yourself (*Schol. Il.* 3.330–331a1.2) and how to take care of your armor (*Schol. Il.* 13.340–342), but he also teaches proper behavior: to yield to those who are superior (*Schol. Il.* 1.33), not to get too excited by visions in dreams (*Schol. Il.* 2.36b), to drink properly in parties (*Schol. Il.* 15.95). He also advises kings not to abuse their power (*Schol. Il.* 1.193–194b) and gives useful advice on horses (*P.Oxy.* 8.1086, i 31–35).⁷⁰ This type of “exegetical” comments is instead missing in the scholia derived from Aristarchus’ commentaries: since the goal of poetry according to the Alexandrians was not teaching but entertainment,⁷¹ it was silly to interpret Homer as a “teacher of life.”

5.7. *Commentaries with a Specific Focus*

Authors other than Homer sometimes require a specific set of comments. Commentaries on philosophical texts are (perhaps not surprisingly) mostly concerned with the philosophical content of the texts rather than with linguistic explanation or literary analysis.⁷² This is typical of the scholia

⁷⁰ On this “didactic” view of an author in commentaries (not only limited to Homeric commentaries), see I. Sluiter, “Commentaries and the Didactic Tradition,” in *Commentaries—Kommentare* (ed. G. W. Most; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 173–205.

⁷¹ Strabo 1.1.10.31–33: οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀληθές ἐστίν, ὃ φησιν Ἐρατοσθένης, ὅτι ποιητὴς πᾶς στοχάζεται ψυχαγωγίας, οὐ διδασκαλίας, “For it is not true what Eratosthenes says: that every poet aims at entertainment, not at instruction”; see also Strabo 1.2.3.1–2.

⁷² For an overview of commentaries on philosophical texts, see (with a focus on Neo-Platonist commentators) I. Hadot, “Le commentaire philosophique continu dans l’Antiquité,” *Antiquité Tardive* 5 (1997): 169–76, and P. Hoffmann, “What Was Commentary in Late Antiquity? The Example of the Neoplatonic Commentators,” in *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (ed. M. L. Gill and P. Pellegrin; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), 597–622.

and of the *hypomnemata* on papyrus to Plato, such as the famous long commentary on the *Theaetetus* in *P.Berol. inv.* 9782.⁷³ This is one of the longest *hypomnema* preserved on a papyrus (595 cm long for 75 columns, almost all preserved) and is also among the most ancient ones: even if the papyrus is dated to the middle of the second century C.E., the commentary itself seems to date back to the first century B.C.E. Despite the many attempts to identify the commentator with a scholar known to us, the author still remains the ‘anonymous’ commentator of the *Theaetetus*;⁷⁴ he probably belonged to Middle Platonism and wrote other commentaries on Platonic dialogues, on the *Timaeus* (xxxv 10–12), the *Phaedo* (xlviii 7–11), and the *Symposium* (lxx 10–12).

The physical appearance of *P.Berol. inv.* 9782 is the same as a classic commentary: long lemmata (covering *Theaet.* 142–158) are signaled by *diplai* and *paragraphoi*.⁷⁵ The lengthy introduction about the general topic of the dialog—“knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη) and what Plato means by it (ii 1–iii 28)—, followed by a discussion about the proem (iii 28–iv 27), seems to indicate that the first four columns were a sort of introduction to the commentary, whose first lemma (*Theaet.* 142d1–3) comes only at iv 27–31.

Like for Homer, paraphrase remains important because, even if Platonic Greek was a more “modern” form of Greek, it was still much more complex than the Koine, and so it needed explanation. The paraphrases are often quite loose (e.g., xlvii 24–30; xlviii 35–44; liv 14–30), but one case (xxii 24–30) has a word-by-word paraphrase introduced with the technical phrase τὸ ἐξῆς ἐν τῇ λέξει (“the grammatical sequence verbatim is...”). Sometimes we find “intra-lingual translations” of “glossai” (e.g., xii 16–17: τὸ τηλικούτον ἀντὶ τοῦ νέον ὄντα; cf. also xlviii 47–xlix 9), but often these translations are specifically geared towards the philosophical interpretation

⁷³ This does not mean that Plato was not edited and commented upon by scholars more interested in philological questions. Indeed, in the medieval corpus of the Platonic scholia L. Cohn, “Untersuchungen über die Quellen der Plato-Scholien,” *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie, Suppl.* 13 (1884): 773–864, distinguished between “die philosophischen Scholien” and “die grammatischen Scholien.” On the philological/grammatical commentators of Plato, see F. Schironi, “Plato at Alexandria: Aristophanes, Aristarchus and the ‘Philological Tradition’ of a Philosopher,” *CQ* 55 (2005): 423–34.

⁷⁴ Cf. discussion in Sedley, “Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetum*,” 251–56.

⁷⁵ *Paragraphoi* are also used to mark the change of topic within an entry. The *diplai* here function as lectional signs (not as critical signs).

of the passage (e.g., lvi 42–43, about the meaning of ἔξ when referred to Socrates' *daimon* who “does not oppose” Socrates from doing something; or lix 46–49, on the meaning of αἴσθησις in the specific context of *Theaet.* 151a1–3). There is only one remark on orthography (xii 21–22: εὐαγγελεῖς, ὑφ' ἐν ἀναγνωστέον). The main goal is clearly to clarify Plato's doctrine, so most lemmata are taken from Socrates' words and they are put in connection with the other dialogues in order to show that this dialogue is both self-consistent and consistent with the rest of the Platonic doctrine. There are often polemical stances against other interpreters of the dialogue (ii 11–21) or against the Epicureans and the Stoics (v 3–viii 6; xxii 39–xxiii 12). The commentator also quotes other philosophers to support his own analysis (e.g., xv 16–29; xxiv 30–xxv 29). In addition, there are interesting drawings to accompany or exemplify the mathematical content of certain passages (xxxi, xxxiii 25, xlili). The mathematical explanations in cols. xxv–xlv (referring to the famous mathematical passage in *Theaet.* 147d3–148b3) give a sense of what interested the ancients and how they addressed passages which are still debated today. Even if there are some mathematical mistakes,⁷⁶ the commentator made an effort to use good sources: for example, in xxx 26–xxxi 22 he uses an argument that slightly modifies an Euclidean proof (*El.* 2.14), probably because he took it directly from some technical text.⁷⁷

Sometimes, commentators on “literary” authors show a specific interest, like the famous work of Didymus on Demosthenes' *Speeches* 9–11 and 13,⁷⁸ preserved in *P. Berol. inv.* 9780.⁷⁹ It is a long papyrus (15 columns), with lemmata and quotations from other sources generally (but not always) marked by *ekthesis* and *paragraphoi*; the papyrus has also the unusual feature of headings in the upper margin indicating the topic covered in that column. At the end, there is a *subscriptio* which mentions Didymus as the author of the text; the title *On Demosthenes* and the content of this text are very difficult to interpret, and scholars have long debated whether this is a

⁷⁶ See Sedley, “Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetus*,” 252 and 515–35.

⁷⁷ See Sedley, “Commentarium in Platonis *Theaetetus*,” 523–24.

⁷⁸ *Speech* 13 for Didymus was *Speech* 12; thus, the commentary covers the “ancient” *Speeches* 9–12 (i.e. *Third Philippic*, *Fourth Philippic*, *Reply to Philip's Letter* and *On Organization*).

⁷⁹ This papyrus was found in the same house of Hermoupolis where *P. Berol. inv.* 9782, the *Theaetetus* commentary, was found; an avid reader with scholarly interests probably lived in the house.

hypomnema or a *syggramma*. This debate confirms what we have said above about the difficulty to draw a line between these contiguous genres. Even if we find the usual elements of “literary commentaries” like linguistic clarifications through parallels from other authors—like Homer and Aristophanes (xi 22–26) or Sophocles and Aeschylus (xiv 10–14)—and discussions about the classification of *Speech* 12 within the Demosthenic corpus (xiii) or about stylistic matters (vii 1–2, on hyperbaton), Didymus’ main focus is the historical context behind those speeches. In order to achieve his goal, Didymus quotes verbatim many ancient authors (historians, orators, antiquarians, and poets). This abundance of direct quotations without much explanation by Didymus is one of the peculiar features of the commentary, which is more useful as a source for fragments of lost works than as an example of good scholarship. In fact, the commentary is full of historical mistakes and shows a generalized sloppiness.⁸⁰ Whether this is due to the excerptor or to Didymus himself, it should be a warning about the trustworthiness of ancient commentaries.

Another example of a commentary with a specific focus is *P.Amh.* 2.12, Aristarchus’ *hypomnema* on Herodotus: even if it is abridged from the original Aristarchean commentary, it clearly shows a specific interest of Aristarchus. As he is in his commentary on Homer, Aristarchus is more interested in the literary qualities of the text, in the explanation of words and phrases, and in drawing parallels with other literary authors (in particular, he compares a passage in *Hdt.* 1.215.2 to Sophocles’ *Ποιμένες*) rather than in the historical content of Herodotus’ work.

6. Commentaries on Technical Texts

To complete our survey, we need to look at another type of commentaries: the scientific commentary.⁸¹ The Greeks had a long tradition of scientific study and scientific writings, and these texts also needed to be clarified and commented upon. The most important commentaries belonging to

⁸⁰ See S. West, “Chalcenteric Negligence,” *CQ* 20 (1970): 288–96.

⁸¹ According to J. Geffcken, “Zur Entstehung und zum Wesen des griechischen wissenschaftlichen Kommentars,” *Hermes* 67 (1932): 397–412, the genre of “scientific commentary” originated in philosophical schools, especially in the Platonic circles (*ibid.*, 402–403).

technical disciplines are the commentaries on texts of medicine and mathematics/astronomy.⁸²

Hippocrates interestingly shares some common characteristics with Homer, since he, like Homer, stimulated the birth of lexica devoted to the explanation of his terminology. The first attested lexicon is that by Bacchius of Tanagra (third century B.C.E.), which was epitomized by various physicians-lexicographers; all these lexica are lost except Erotian's (first century C.E.). As far as we can judge from the extant fragments, Bacchius seems to be interested not only in obscure technical words used by Hippocrates, but also in poetic words or in semantic peculiarities; in particular, Bacchius quotes poets (especially Homer) and sometimes also prose authors to explain Hippocrates.⁸³ The tradition of commentaries on Hippocrates and other medical texts is long, since it started at Alexandria in the Hellenistic period and continued over the centuries. We have anonymous commentaries on papyrus⁸⁴ as well as commentaries preserved by direct tradition by many physicians-commentators; the most famous one is certainly Galen, who mixed his scholarly activity as a commentator with that of a scientist.⁸⁵ In particular, since in his many treatises and commentaries Galen also engaged himself with the past work of Hippocratic editors and commentators, he is one of best sources for earlier scholarship on Greek medicine. Among the commentaries on the Hippocratic texts, the commentary on

⁸² For the Greeks, astronomy was part of mathematics, not a separate discipline.

⁸³ On Hippocratic lexicography, see H. von Staden. "Lexicography in the Third Century B.C.: Bacchius of Tanagra, Erotian, and Hippocrates," in *Tratados hipocráticos (estudios acerca de su contenido, forma y influencia)* (ed. J. A. López Férez; Madrid: UNED, 1992), 549–69; W. D. Smith, *The Hippocratic Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, 1979; repr., Philadelphia, Penn.: Electronic edition, 2002), 202–4.

⁸⁴ On these, see I. Andorlini, "L'esegesi del libro tecnico: Papiri di medicina con scoli e commenti," in *Papiri filosofici: Miscellanea di Studi IV* (Florence: Olschki 2003), 9–29.

⁸⁵ On Galen as commentator of Hippocrates, see D. Manetti and A. Roselli, "Galeno commentatore di Ippocrate," *ANRW* 2.37.2:1529–1635 and 2071–2080; A. E. Hanson, "Galen: Author and Critic," in *Editing Texts—Texte edieren* (ed. G. W. Most; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 22–53; Smith, *Hippocratic Tradition*, 123–76. Galen, however, did not limit his exegetical activities to medical texts: he also wrote commentaries on Aristotle (lost) and on Plato's *Timaeus* (preserved in fragments; see Manetti and Roselli, "Galeno commentatore di Ippocrate," 1531 n. 2).

the Hippocratic treatise *On Joints* (Περὶ ἄρθρων) by Apollonius of Citium (70 B.C.E.)⁸⁶ deserves some attention because it is one of the only two Hellenistic *hypomnemata* that have reached us by direct tradition.⁸⁷ Apollonius' commentary is "selective," because it does not comment on the entire text of Hippocrates but rather selects only certain topics: Apollonius discusses surgery and instruments for dislocations, but omits other topics treated in *On Joints*, like anatomy. An important role in this commentary is played by figures which are paramount to clarify the Hippocratic text; thus, like mathematical treatises (or the *hypomnema* on the *Theaetetus* in *P.Berol. inv.* 9782), this commentary is also "visual." Apollonius also engages in polemics with Bacchius about the interpretation of certain Hippocratic words.⁸⁸

Like those who commented on medical texts, commentators of Greek mathematics or astronomy were mathematicians and astronomers themselves. The first commentary on Euclid's *Elements* that we know of was written by Heron (probably first century C.E.), and is lost. Among the most important commentators of mathematical and astronomical texts, Pappus (ca. 320 C.E.) wrote a commentary on Ptolemy's *Almagest* (only Books 5 and 6 survive) and one on Book 10 of Euclid's *Elements*, transmitted only in an Arabic translation. Similarly, Theon of Alexandria, mathematician and astronomer (ca. 360 C.E.), wrote a commentary on Ptolemy's *Almagest* in 13 books (most of which is preserved) and two commentaries on Ptolemy's *Handy Tables*.⁸⁹ Eutocius of Ascalon (ca. 520 C.E.)

⁸⁶ Edited by J. Kollesch and K. Kudlien in *CMG* xi.1.1.

⁸⁷ On this commentary, see A. Roselli "Tra pratica medica e filologia ippocratica: Il caso della *περὶ ἄρθρων πραγματεία* di Apollonio di Cizio," in *Sciences exactes et sciences appliquées à Alexandrie* (ed. G. Argoud and J.-Y. Guillaumin; Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1998), 217–31; see also Smith, *Hippocratic Tradition*, 212–15 and P. Potter, "Apollonius and Galen on Joints," in *Galen und das hellenistische Erbe* (ed. J. Kollesch and D. Nickel; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993), 117–23.

⁸⁸ Some scholars have even challenged the idea that this is a real commentary; see discussion in Roselli, "Tra pratica medica e filologia ippocratica," 220–23. However, even if there is a practical interest in Apollonius' work and he makes a selection from the Hippocratic material, there is no doubt that this is a commentary because it "clarifies" and discusses (with illustrations and words) an authoritative text.

⁸⁹ The *Handy Tables* are numerical tables setting out disparate astronomical parameters, to be used by practitioners of astronomy like astrologers. On Theon's

wrote commentaries on various works by Archimedes and on Apollonius' *Conics*.⁹⁰ The aim of these writings is the explanation of the mathematical content of the text; like the commentary on Hippocrates by Apollonius of Citium, mathematical and astronomical commentaries can be selective, often focusing only on some propositions. Commentators can also set forth alternative demonstrations or corollaries, so that the commentary itself almost becomes a new treatise with original content. Like those for Homer and the other literary authors, many of these commentaries were excerpted and collected again in the scholia to mathematical texts.⁹¹

A case *per se* is represented by Hipparchus' commentary on Aratus' *Phaenomena*, which, together with the commentary on Hippocrates by Apollonius of Citium, is the only Hellenistic *hypomnema* transmitted to us by direct tradition. In this work, the professional astronomer Hipparchus of Nicaea (second century B.C.E.) comments on a poetic text: the didactic poem by Aratus. Since Hipparchus' aim is to demonstrate that Aratus' astronomical information (based on Eudoxus) was incorrect, this is a unique example in the Greek world of a 'polemical' commentary: rather than clarifying and "defending" an author, it is aimed at showing his faults and errors. Besides, Hipparchus' polemical commentary also shows the importance that the text of Aratus was gaining: the *Phaenomena* was so popular that a "real" astronomer felt the need to write a work showing that this poem was wrong and it should not be used as an authoritative text on astronomy.

commentaries on the *Handy Tables* in connection with astronomical commentaries found in papyri and also with the so-called Babylonian Procedure Texts, see A. Jones. "Uses and Users of Astronomical Commentaries in Antiquity," in *Commentaries—Kommentare*, 147–72.

⁹⁰ For an overview of mathematical commentaries, see F. Acerbi, "Commentari, scolii e annotazioni marginali ai trattati matematici greci," *Segno e Testo* 10 (2012): forthcoming.

⁹¹ For an overview of the manuscript tradition of the scholia to mathematical texts and the problems about them, see F. Acerbi, *Il silenzio delle sirene: La matematica greca antica* (Roma: Carrocci, 2010), 362–68.

7. A Long-Lasting Exegetical Legacy

I would like to conclude with analyzing two specific trends among Greek commentators which have left a particular imprint in later exegetical traditions, especially Jewish and Christian exegesis: the allegorical reading and the principle of clarifying an author using the author himself.

7.1. *Defending One's Author: the Allegorical Reading*

Homer, as we have seen, presented a problem: his gods behaved in a very “human,” almost immoral, way. From the beginning, commentators tried to “save” Homer by reading the poems “as meaning something different.” This is indeed the meaning suggested by the word “allegory” (ἀλληγορία), although the first term used to indicate this type of exegesis was ὑπόνοια, “hidden meaning” of a text. For us, the first to read Homer allegorically was Theagenes of Rhegium (middle of the sixth century B.C.E.), whose work is lost. From a fragment (8, frg. 2 D-K), we can conclude that he probably read the battle of the gods in *Iliad* 20 as an allegory for the battle of cosmic elements; similarly, in a lost monograph entitled *On Homer* (Περὶ Ὁμήρου) Metrodorus of Lampsacus (fifth century B.C.E.) read the Homeric heroes as parts of the universe and the gods as parts of the human body (61, frgs. 3–4 D-K).⁹² We do not have a full commentary which reads the entire Homeric text from an allegorical perspective; however, there are works which select specific episodes of Homer and read them allegorically. The most famous of these works is the *Homeric Questions* by Heraclitus (end of the first century C.E.), who opens his work with a programmatic statement: “Homer would commit every sort of impiety if he did not use allegory” (Heracl. *HQ* §1.1). Heraclitus thus selected some “problematic” episodes in Homer to demonstrate that the gods were not behaving immorally but rather were images for the physical reality.⁹³ In the third century C.E. the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry wrote the *Cave of the Nymphs*, in which he interpreted allegorically *Odyssey* 13.102–112.⁹⁴

⁹² Cf. D. J. Califf, “Metrodorus of Lampsacus and the Problem of Allegory: An Extreme Case?” *Arethusa* 36 (2003): 21–36 (and references therein).

⁹³ On Heraclitus’ allegories, see F. Pontani, *Eraclito: Questioni omeriche: Sulle allegorie di Omero in merito agli dèi* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2005) and references therein.

⁹⁴ On this text, see R. Lamberton, “The Neoplatonists and the Spiritualization

Works like those of Heraclitus and Porphyry are not technically speaking “commentaries,” because they comment on “selected” episodes of the Homeric poems; still, they represent a particular and important exegetical approach to Homer, and for this reason they must be mentioned here.

Even if the allegorical reading has often been linked with Stoic philosophy, the situation is more nuanced. Indeed, many allegorists interpreted Homeric gods as personification of Stoic cosmogony and physics, but this does not mean that the Stoics were allegorists.⁹⁵ Similarly, scholars from Pergamum—especially Crates of Mallus—were influenced by Stoic cosmology and believed that Homer already knew such cosmology and that he “hinted at” it in his poems by describing the universe as spherical and the earth as a sphere placed in its center.⁹⁶ Even if Crates was reading Homer allegorically, his aim was not to defend Homer from accusations of immorality, but to demonstrate his *polymatheia*: Homer’s doctrine and knowledge of universal physics.

Another important example of allegorical reading can be found in the Derveni papyrus (fourth century B.C.E.), the earliest commentary that has reached us.⁹⁷ The Derveni commentator is not interpreting Homer but rather an Orphic theogony,⁹⁸ and his goal is to enlighten the inexperienced reader who fails to understand the real meaning of Orpheus’ poem (xxiii 1–3). For example, through the allegorical reading, Zeus is also interpreted as Mind and Air, and thus becomes the first principle of a cosmogony

of Homer,” in *Homer’s Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic’s Earliest Exegetes* (ed. R. Lamberton and J. J. Keaney; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 115–33 (esp. 126–30).

⁹⁵ See A. A. Long, “Stoic Readings of Homer,” in *Homer’s Ancient Readers*, 41–66.

⁹⁶ This view of a spherical cosmos was not only Stoic but common in the Hellenistic period; however, in Stoicism, this cosmology played an important role and this is how Crates probably took an interest in it. See M. Broggiato, *Cratete di Mallo, I frammenti: Edizione, introduzione e note* (La Spezia: Agora, 2001), li–lv.

⁹⁷ On the Derveni papyrus as a commentary, see A. Lamedica, “Il Papiro di Derveni come commentario: Problemi formali,” in *Proceedings of the XIXth International Congress of Papyrology, Cairo 2–9 September 1989* (2 vols.; ed. A. H. S. El-Mosalamy; Cairo: Ain Shams University, Center of Papyrological Studies, 1992), 1:325–33.

⁹⁸ Reconstructed on the basis of the lemmata of *P.Derveni* by M. L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

which is influenced by pre-Socratic speculation, especially by the ideas of Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia.⁹⁹

In modern analysis, we distinguish between “internal” allegory (when the text is conceived as an allegory by its own author) and “external” allegory (when the text is interpreted allegorically by a commentator independently from the real intention of its author). On the contrary, most of the ancient commentators did not make such a distinction: Heraclitus or the Derveni commentator firmly believed that their authors had “hidden” some deeper meaning into the text and that their duty was to reveal those meanings to the ignorant reader. Some ancient scholars, however, were aware of this distinction: for example, Aristarchus accepted only the internal allegory (which the sources call “rhetorical allegory”)¹⁰⁰ while he fought against “external” allegory because it read things beyond the poet’s words (cf. *Schol. D Il.* 5.385: “Aristarchus thinks that what is said by the Poet should be taken as a fiction, according to poetic license, without over-interpreting anything except what the Poet has said”).

It is also worth noticing that an allegorical approach to a text does not exclude more philological concerns in a commentary or in a commentator: in the Derveni papyrus, for instance, we find philological remarks that overlap with Aristarchus’;¹⁰¹ Crates, though interested in the cosmological elements in Homer, engaged himself also in “traditional” philology exactly like the Alexandrians, and used philological tools very skillfully (athetesis, etymology, linguistic analysis, etc.);¹⁰² Porphyry wrote both the allegorical *Cave of the Nymphs* and the *Homeric Questions*, which follow an Alexandrian philological approach to the text. The simultaneous use of allegory and strict philological analysis should not surprise us because, to the exegetes who employed it, allegory was a method as “serious” and legitimate as the more philological activities like intralingual translation or athetesis. Indeed, if the ‘real’ meaning of a text was hidden, allegory was the only

⁹⁹ The real goal and identity of the commentator of *P.Derveni* are still debated; for an overview of the various solutions proposed, see Kouremenos, Tsantsanoglou, and Parássoglou, *Derveni Papyrus*, 28–59.

¹⁰⁰ See Eust. 40.25–34 (ad *Il.* 1.46). Cf. A. Cucchiarelli, “Allegoria retorica’ e filologia alessandrina,” *SIFC* 15 (1997): 210–30.

¹⁰¹ See Schironi, “L’Olimpo non è il cielo.”

¹⁰² For example, *P.Oxy.* 53.3710 iii 19–23 mentions a transposition of lines due to Crates. For a discussion, see Broggiato, *Cratete di Mallo*, 231–32 (F 67).

possible method to find it, and so the only legitimate tool an exegete had at his disposal.

No matter how they were justified, allegorical readings played an important role in Greek exegesis and had a huge impact in later Christian circles. The highly educated Christians who enjoyed Homer could finally find a way to read it without shame. Similarly, Origen and the Christian allegorists used the allegorical method developed by the Greeks to “save” the most embarrassing pieces of the Bible.

7.2. *Explaining an Author with the Author Himself: The Aristarchean Lesson*

“To clarify Homer with Homer” (Ὁμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν) is a well-known formula to define Aristarchus’ critical activity. These words, however, are nowhere to be found in Aristarchus’ fragments but derive from Porphyry, who uses them to define his own way to approach Homer in the “philological” *Homeric Questions*.¹⁰³ Even if the phrasing is not original, this easy motto is a very good description of Aristarchus’ methodology, at least in two different aspects.

First, if Homer must be clarified with himself, then the commentator is not allowed to force him to say whatever he likes, as the allegorists do. In this sense, “to clarify Homer with Homer” can be seen as opposite to the allegorical method, especially when Aristarchus refuses “external allegory” and the way it forced a meaning upon a text beyond the poet’s intention.

Second, Aristarchus can use Homer to clarify Homer for any exegetical question, because he always looks for an answer within the poem itself. The assumption which underlines this principle is that Homeric poetry has internal and rational rules. Since Homer is internally consistent, then any questionable word, phrase, or episode can be explained or rejected using Homeric poetry itself as evidence. For example, as we have seen above, Aristarchus analyzes and determines the characteristics of Homeric language (§5.1) and style (§5.5); these characteristics are then used by

¹⁰³ Porph. *QH* 2.297.16–17 Scharder: Ἀξιῶν δὲ ἐγὼ Ὁμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν αὐτὸν ἐξηγούμενον ἑαυτὸν ὑπεδείκνυον, ποτὲ μὲν παρακειμένως, ἄλλοτε δ’ ἐν ἄλλοις, “Considering it right to explain Homer with Homer, I have shown that Homer interprets himself sometimes in passages which are nearby, sometimes in other [more remote] passages.” Cf. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, 226–27 and J. I. Porter, “Hermeneutic Lines and Circles: Aristarchus and Crates on the Exegesis of Homer,” in *Homer’s Ancient Readers*, 67–114 (73–80).

Aristarchus to correct the text, so that all his analysis remains “within Homer.” In particular, if in some passages the meaning of a word is not clear, Aristarchus always tries to find some instances where the context makes the meaning of that word obvious. These “clarifying” passages are commented upon in the scholia with the adverb σαφῶς, “clearly,” because that specific passage makes it “clear” that the word at issue has a certain meaning. For example, in Homer πρόμος is not “king,” “chief,” as in later authors (e.g., Aeschylus, *Ag.* 200 and 410, Soph. *OC* 884), but “fighter of the first row.” This becomes clear from two passages in *Il.* 15 and 22 where the context is “clearly” (σαφῶς) a battle and both times the word is referred to Hector who is not a ‘king’ but always fights in the front line (cf. *Schol. Il.* 15.293a and *Schol. Il.* 22.85c).

This principle became a staple of Greek commentators, not only on literary text. For example, Galen adopts it as a guiding principle in his work on Hippocrates;¹⁰⁴ in particular, he seems to use it exactly according to the two Aristarchean interpretations outlined above. Galen claims that one should interpret an author with the author himself without attributing him anything extraneous based on unjustified assumptions.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Galen revives the idea of “internal analysis” of an author, when he says that the interpreters of medical texts should behave like the Homeric scholars who clarify debated Homeric words in a specific passage by looking at other passages where the same word occurs and its meaning is clear.¹⁰⁶

Together with allegory, this Aristarchean principle was adopted by Jewish and Christian exegetes and later rephrased by Martin Luther as “*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres.*”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Manetti and Roselli, “Galeno commentatore di Ippocrate,” 1564, 1573, 1598 and Hanson, “Galen: Author and Critic,” 46–49.

¹⁰⁵ Gal., *De dignoscendis pulsibus libri iv*, VIII, 958, 6 K.: καὶ γὰρ μοι καὶ νόμος οὗτος ἐξηγήσεως, ἕκαστον τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ σαφηνίζεσθαι καὶ μὴ καιναῖς (κεναῖς Kuhn) ὑπονοίαις καὶ φάσεσιν ἀναποδείκτοις ἀποληρεῖν, ὅ τι τις βούλεται, “For I have also this rule in the exegesis: to clarify each author with himself and not to ramble and say whatever one wants basing [one’s interpretation] on odd, hidden meanings and undemonstrated statements.”

¹⁰⁶ Gal., *De differentia pulsuum libri iv*, VIII 715.4 K.:... καὶ τὰς παρ’ Ὀμήρω λέξεις ἅπασί τε τοῖς ἄλλοις παλαιοῖς οἱ γραμματικοὶ σαφηνίζουσι. τὸ γὰρ τῆδε τῆ ἐρμηνεία μήπω σαφὲς ἐξ ἑτέρας εὐδηλον γίνεται.... Cf. also Gal. *De Com. Sec. Hipp.* VII 646 3–4 K: ἐχρῆν γὰρ ἐξ Ἱπποκράτους αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐξήγησιν ποιεῖσθαι τῆς λέξεως.

¹⁰⁷ See B. Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (2 vols.; Basel: Reinhardt, 1987),

8. Conclusions

This survey has highlighted some of the main features of the genre of the commentaries in ancient Greece, from their physical appearance to their content. It has also shown how difficult it is to define such genre because, aside from remnants in papyri and two fully-preserved but not representative Hellenistic commentaries, we have only scholia or lexica that date back to the Byzantine period and are the result of excerpting Hellenistic and late antique commentaries, monographs, and other exegetical material. For this reason, while we can define a commentary (*hypomnema*) from a formal point of view, when looking for the content of what we now define as a “commentary,” we must take into consideration a wider pool of exegetical texts: not only the fragments from the ancient *hypomnemata* on papyrus but also *Scholia Minora*, collections of *lexeis* or paraphrases (for intralingual translations), the *Mythographus Homericus* (for mythographical questions) and finally later scholia which have incorporated material coming from ancient *hypomnemata* as well as from these other subgenres. As a consequence, while we can approximately define what interested ancient commentators, it is much more difficult to define the content of specific commentaries going back to specific authors. For example, while among the *Scholia Maiora* to Homer we can see a difference in interests and *Wortlaut* between the scholia that derive from the VMK and the exegetical scholia, we cannot recover any of the “original” texts: neither the VMK, nor the original exegetical commentary/-ies. Similarly, *P.Oxy.* 8.1086 has many entries that sound Aristarchean; however, we cannot say that this papyrus is a copy of Aristarchus’ *hypomnema*, nor even an excerpt of it.

By looking at commentaries on literary authors and at technical commentaries we have found a difference: while the commentator on literary text is a scholar who aims at clarifying and “defending” his author, the commentator on technical texts is often a (later) colleague of the author he is commenting on, and does not see himself simply as a subservient scholar. As a consequence, the scientific commentator takes more freedom on his author: scientific commentaries are thus selective in the text they

1:276–85. On the influence of Aristarchean scholarship on Jewish biblical exegesis in Alexandria, see also Maren Niehoff in this volume and eadem, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

choose to comment upon, they are richer in additional material, and they are also more critical towards their canonical authors.¹⁰⁸

Commentaries and exegetical texts are important at a very immediate level because they testify to the existence of a “canon”¹⁰⁹ of authors that were regarded as particularly important, and thus worth of exegetical attention. Indeed, at Alexandria the development of a professional activity producing editions and commentaries is closely connected with the creation of a list of “chosen” authors (ἐγκριθέντες), which arose from the list compiled by Callimachus in his *Pinakes*. The “chosen ones” had the privilege of being edited and commented upon—and so they became “treated,” *πραττόμενοι*—which meant that they were saved and transmitted over the centuries as “compulsory readings” to achieve a full-fledged education.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the link between exegesis and “classical” texts works in both directions: if would-be commentators are drawn to the exegesis of “canonical authors,” commentators are also the ones responsible for the creation and stabilization of a “canon.” Scholars choose who is worth their attention and so ultimately they select the authors that posterity is going to read. This reconstruction needs, however, some adjustment. First, even if

¹⁰⁸ Galen seems to go against the polemical use of commentaries in favor of a ‘neutral’ attitude; in his practice, however, he is often not so ‘neutral’; see Manetti and Roselli, “Galeno commentatore di Ippocrate,” 1558–61. On the ambiguous attitude of Galen in his commentaries on Hippocrates, see also P. Manuli, “Lo stile del commento: Galeno e la tradizione ippocratica,” in *Formes de pensée dans la Collection hippocratique* (ed. F. Lasserre and P. Mudry; Genève: Droz, 1983), 471–82.

¹⁰⁹ I am using the word “canon” within brackets when referred to classical authors because, as Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, 207, remarks, the term “canon” to indicate the lists of classical authors was “invented” by David Ruhnken in 1768 on the basis of the Biblical “canon.” Κανών for the Alexandrians (as well for any ancient Greek) only meant “model” or “rule”; most specifically, in scholarship it meant a “grammatical rule.”

¹¹⁰ The most famous list of Greek authors is that of Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 10.1.37–84. On the formation and characteristics of Greek “canons,” see Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, 203–8; H. Cancik, “Standardization and Ranking of Texts in Greek and Roman Institutions,” in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World* (ed. M. Finkelberg and G. G. Stroumsa; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 117–30; A. Vardi, “Canons of Literary Texts at Rome,” in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond*, 131–52; T. Hägg, “Canon Formation in Greek Literary Culture,” in *Canon and Canonicity: The Formation and Use of Scripture* (ed. E. Thomassen; Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2010), 109–28.

Hellenistic and later scholars and commentators played a pivotal role in implementing and reinforcing the list of the “chosen authors,” the process of selection started much earlier, already in the classical period; for example, at Athens in the dramatic and rhapsodic contests only certain authors were “chosen” and could perform their dramas, and they were also “ranked” according to the place they obtained in those contests; to a certain extent, then, the Alexandrians already worked on selected material. Second, one important difference between the classical “canon” and the biblical canon is that, while the latter operates a censorship of the authors excluded from it (because they are heretical), the classical “canon” is simply a list of “suggested” or even “compulsory” readings for a good education but without any censorial aim toward the authors who had not been chosen (cf. Quint. *Inst. Or.* 10.1.42–45 and 57). For this reason, while the Alexandrian editorial activity on the list of chosen authors certainly influenced the survival of certain authors, on the other hand, those lists were not an absolute watershed between authors that were “chosen” and so saved, and authors that were lost; indeed, authors not included in any canons have reached us (like the authors of epigrams collected in the *Anthologia Palatina*), while “chosen” authors like the nine lyric poets were not preserved by direct tradition (with the exception of Pindar). Notwithstanding these two caveats, it is undeniable that the commentators helped authors to reach the status of “classic”; if only for this reason alone, ancient exegesis needs our attention.

On the other hand, commentaries and exegetical texts are important in themselves as *texts*. This does not mean that they should be used as equivalent of modern commentaries: we cannot trust Didymus in terms of historical data when reading Demosthenes; similarly, we cannot learn mathematics from the commentator of Plato’s *Theaetetus*.¹¹¹ However, ancient commentators testify to the questions that interested the ancients (which might be very different from our interests), and to the answers they gave to those questions. An ancient commentary is in itself a text bearing witness of a particular time; we cannot blame the ancient commentators of Homer because they did not know about oral poetry and for this reason they missed many of the interesting points of Homeric oral technique;

¹¹¹ In fact, this is not very different from what happens now with “modern” commentaries: while the “easy” points are well commented upon, the most technical or difficult aspects of the text are often either avoided or incorrectly explained. No one can be an expert of everything, both now and in antiquity.

similarly, we cannot simply smile at the weirdest allegorical interpretations. If we are interested in the primary texts, then we should also look at the commentaries because they are the most important testimony for the ancient reception of those texts.

Abbreviations Used

<i>CLGP</i>	Bastianini et al., <i>Commentaria et Lexica Graeca in Papyris Reperta</i> (CLGP), München, 2006–
<i>CMG</i>	<i>Corpus medicorum Graecorum</i>
Eust.	<i>Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes</i> , ed. M. Van der Valk, 4 vols., Leiden, 1971–1987
Hsch.	<i>Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon</i> , ed. K. Latte, 2 vols. (α–ο), København, 1953–1966; <i>Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon</i> , ed. P. A. Hansen and I. C. Cunningham, 2 vols. (π–ω), Berlin, 2005–2009
<i>PCG</i>	<i>Poetae Comici Graeci</i>
<i>Schol. Aristoph. Ach.</i>	<i>Scholia in Aristophanis Acharnenses</i> , ed. N. G. Wilson, Groningen, 1975
<i>Schol. Aristoph. Ran.</i>	<i>Scholia vetera in Aristophanis Ranas</i> , ed. M. Chantry, Groningen, 1999
<i>Schol. Aristoph. Vesp.</i>	<i>Scholia vetera et recentiora in Aristophanis Vespas</i> , ed. W. J. W. Koster, Groningen, 1978
<i>Schol. D Il.</i>	<i>Scholia D ad Iliadem, secundum codices manuscriptos</i> , ed. H. Van Thiel, Proecdosis 2000: http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/ifa/vanthiel/scholiaD
<i>Schol. Eur.</i>	<i>Scholia in Euripidem</i> , ed. E. Schwartz, 2 vols., Berlin, 1887–1891
<i>Schol. Il.</i>	<i>Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (scholia vetera)</i> , ed. H. Erbse, 7 vols., Berlin, 1969–1988
<i>Schol. Pind.</i>	<i>Scholia vetera in Pindari carmina</i> , ed. A. B. Drachmann, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1903–1927
<i>Schol. Soph. Ai.</i>	Τὰ ἀρχαῖα σχόλια εἰς Αἴαντα τοῦ Σοφοκλέους, ed. G. A. Christodoulos, Athens, 1977
Su.	<i>Suidae Lexicon</i> , ed. A. Adler, 5 vols., Leipzig, 1928–1938