APOLLONIUS RHODIUS AS A HOMERIC SCHOLAR

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The rise of Homeric scholarship as an academic discipline coincides with the heyday of Hellenistic poetry. As Pfeiffer in his epoch-making *History of Classical Scholarship* has abundantly shown, this is no pure accident but an essential relationship; in other words, the beginnings of philology as a discipline and the new aesthetics informing the poetry of the first half of the 3rd cent. B.C. are bound intimately together, and the quality of ἀνωμοία καὶ νοητικὸς is characteristic of all Hellenistic poets of this period with very few exceptions (e.g. Herondas).

Many of these Hellenistic scholar-poets did not work on the Homeric epics as “professional” scholars; however, they can be said to have engaged in Homeric interpretation in so far as their poetry gives proof of great familiarity with the text of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and allows in numerous places inferences about the way they understood the meaning of a disputed Homeric passage—to varying degrees, this is true of Lycophron and Callimachus, of Aratus and Apollonius Rhodius, of Theocritus and Rhianus, to name but the most important among them. But it is Apollonius Rhodius who most deserves the title of ὀνοματοτοκός, and this in two respects: compared with any other contemporary poem, his epic, the *Argonautica*, shows a far higher number of imitations of Homeric phrases, verses, motifs or scenes and reproduces lexical, morphological, syntactical and metrical peculiarities of the old epic to such an extent that it can be used as a veritable treasury for its poet’s

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1 Occasional voices were raised, of course, against Pfeiffer’s reconstruction of the origins and the earliest stage of scholarship, but they are mainly concerned with the influence of Aristotle and the Peripatos on the rise of academic philology, a problem which need not further occupy us here; see, for instance, the review by Wilson (1969) 366ff. and (1997) 87ff.; Rossi (1976) *passim* and (1993) 14ff.; Montanari (1993) 261ff.; Richardson (1994) 8ff. (see also Montanari, *ibid.*, p. 29ff.). Pfeiffer’s views have been defended, among others, by Fraser (1972), Ch. 8, and Pretagostini (1988) 290ff. and (1995) 34ff.

2 Pfeiffer (1968), esp. 89ff.


4 Pfeiffer (1968) 147ff.
exegetical and critical engagement with Homer; moreover, Apollonius composed the first scholarly monograph of the Hellenistic period on Homer, a book titled Πηγὰς Ζηνόδοτον and directed against Zenodotus’ edition of the two Homeric epics.

The task of evaluating Apollonius’ scholarly achievement is thus doubly important. First, the Argonautica needs to be interpreted against the background of its omnipresent Homeric model, in other words addressing the question of Apollonius’ understanding of Homer, i.e. the question of his primary understanding of a 500-year-old epic, is the main prerequisite for any further discussion of Apollonius’ reception of Homer.

However, apart from holding promise of insights into Apollonius’ poetic technique, an inquiry into the scholarly aspects of the Argonautica opens up also the possibility of approaching two central issues of ancient Homeric scholarship. First, we can only shed some light on the pre-Aristarchean period of the ancient Homeric exegesis (about which we are rather scantily informed due to the loss of such specialized works as Philetas’, Simias’ or Zenodotus’ collections of glosses) by indirectly tracing the Hellenistic poet-scholars’ achievement through their literary work. Their performance in the field of Homeric semasiology will then serve as a foundation on which a proper evaluation of the works of Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus can be conducted. Secondly, important information may be gathered from the Argonautica about the Homeric text of the early Hellenistic period; for instance, we can determine the influence of Zenodotus’ critical edition of Homer on his contemporaries by comparing Zenodotus’ readings with Apollonius’ epic. The Hellenistic epic can also be laid under contribution for further variant readings transmitted under the name of other, mostly later, Homeric scholars or anonymously. Homeric variants which can be shown to lie behind certain passages of the Argonautica would then have to be seen as earlier or transmitted in manuscripts rather than as late conjectures. This means that with the aid of these variants we can solve one of the most disputed questions in the early history of the Homeric text in antiquity, namely the question of whether ancient critics constituted their text by taking account of the manuscripts or worked on it using subjective criteria and by means of conjectures. The Argonautica, like any single passage in a Hellenistic poem imitating a Homeric verse, is apt to make a substantial contribution towards confirming the early evidence for a certain Homeric variant of Alexandrian origin. It is the aim of this contribution to answer the question (1)