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MYTH AND HISTORY IN THE BIOGRAPHY OF APOLLONIUS

MARY R. LEFKOWITZ

1. *Introduction*

Ever since Boswell wrote his *Life of Dr. Johnson*, biographers (and their readers) have sought to situate each writer in his proper context, in the hope of being able to discover the relation between his art and his life. But very few, if any, biographers of Greek poets offer us the kind of detailed historical information that we would like to have. The biographies attached to Byzantine manuscripts appear to be based on a misunderstanding and misreading of the poets' works and comic writing about them. They had very little else to go on, because the poets' contemporaries were not interested in recording the kind of information that later biographers would have liked to have. Apparently, no ancient writer's contemporaries were interested in keeping day-by-day records of an individual poet's thoughts and actions. Instead, a contemporary would relate an illustrative anecdote. Ion of Chios tells how when Sophocles was serving as general in the Samian war of 440 B.C. he stole a kiss from a young slave boy. The story is meant to illustrate that, although Pericles thought he was a poet, but didn't know how to be a general, Sophocles showed that in love at least he was a clever strategist: "he could speak and act cleverly when he was drinking or lucky. But he was not particularly astute or effective in civic affairs, but just like any other upper-class Athenian" (392 *FGrHist* F 6/Ion fr. 8 von Blumenthal/Ath. 13.104D). The comic poet Aristophanes makes the poets Agathon and Euripides act and talk like the characters in their dramas (*Thesm.* 149; *Ran.* 888–894). Euripides' biographer Satyrus, describing how Euripides wrote and thought in solitude, quotes Aristophanes: "the man is like the speeches that he writes" (Aristophanes fr. 694 *PCG*/Satyrus, F 6 fr. 39 ix Schorn/T 4.12 Kovacs). What Euripides himself actually said and did in his lifetime was not recorded. As Aristotle said, "poetry is more philosophical and serious than history, for poetry is concerned with

the universal, and history with individual happenings" (*Poet.* 9. 1451b). History is not so intelligible as myth.¹

In the Hellenistic age, as I shall try to argue in this paper, the writing of literary biography was not more scientific (in our sense of the word) than it was in the fifth and fourth centuries. Aristotle's successors in the Peripatos, like Satyrus, wrote about poets. But, as Momigliano observed, these were not biographies in our sense, but "historical interpretations of selected passages from one classical author".² In order to make philosophy comprehensible, they sought to illustrate concepts by particular anecdotes.³ The biography of Apollonius of Rhodes is no exception to this general rule. Most of the most reliable information we have about ancient poets comes from those poets who tell us about themselves, like Hesiod or Archilochus. But the subject of this paper, Apollonius of Rhodes, tells us nothing about himself. Everything we know about him comes from other sources, the two brief lives that are attached to the *scholia* to the *Voyage of the Argo*, an entry in the *Suda*, and a reference to him in a list that is preserved on a corrupt and damaged papyrus (P. Oxy. 1241/Callimachus T 13 Pf.).⁴ In an article about Apollonius that is included in my book *The Lives of the Greek Poets* I maintain that much of what these sources tell us is likely to be fictional. I suggest that Apollonius probably never went into exile in Rhodes, that he did not quarrel with Callimachus, and that he was called a Rhodian because he came from Rhodes.⁵ Some scholars were not persuaded by my arguments, but in general my findings have been supported by Rengakos, who has carefully reviewed all the evidence.⁶ But in *Callimachus and his Critics* Cameron has argued that although the biographies of the classical poets and the Byzantine lives in particular contain much that is "worthless", he believes that the sources of the biographies of Hellenistic poets are more reliable than those used by the biographers of earlier poets, and seeks to show that there is no reason to discount the notion of a literary quarrel between Callimachus and Apollonius.⁷ In this paper I shall try to show that Cameron's arguments are in fact not at all decisive, and that the biographers of

¹ Lucas (1986) 119.

² Momigliano (1971) 69–70.

³ Dihle (1956) 59.

⁴ Vian (²1976) vii.

⁵ Lefkowitz (1980) 1–19, (1981) 117–135.

⁶ Rengakos (1992a) 39–67.

⁷ Cameron (1995) 219.

Hellenistic poets continued to rely on the same methods and sources as their predecessors. But first I would like briefly to describe some of the techniques employed by ancient biographers in constructing the biographies of earlier poets.

2. *Biographies of Earlier Poets*

We know that Hesiod lived in Ascra, quarreled with his brother about their inheritance, and won a prize in Chalcis for his performance at the funeral games of Amphidamas, because we have his own direct testimony in the *Works and Days*. But other information about him is fanciful and almost certainly fictional, even though it apparently derives from the same source, the *Works and Days*. Hesiod's biographers were determined to know more than the poet himself chose to reveal, they created new "facts", and provided a narrative structure for the poet's life out of material that is not biographical in nature.⁸ Hesiod does not tell us his father's name, but the fourth-century historian Ephorus claims that it was Dios (70 *FGrHist* F 2/Ps.-Plu. *Vit. Hom.* 12). How was he able to know centuries after Hesiod's death what Hesiod did not tell us? In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod refers to his brother Perses as δῖον γένοϋς (*Op.* 299).⁹ Thucydides knows a sensational story about Hesiod's death (3.95–96.1), which was later retold by Aristotle (fr. 75 Rose) and the sophist Alcidamas in the fourth century (*Certamen* 14); it was also the subject of a poem by the third-century B.C. poet Eratosthenes (fr. 17 Powell/*Cert.* 17). According to Alcidamas, Hesiod was falsely accused of raping a young woman and was murdered by her brothers; but when his body was thrown out at sea and was brought back to land by dolphins, the accusation was shown to have been false. This story appears to be an illustration of a general statement about the justice of Zeus in the *Works and Days*, which Hesiod states in personal terms: "I would not wish to be righteous (δίκαιος) among men, nor would my son, since it is bad to be a righteous man if the more unjust man will have the greater justice; but I do not expect that wise Zeus will ever bring this to pass" (*Op.* 270–274).

The story of Hesiod's death illustrates another tendency in biographical writing. Biographers had a flair for the dramatic, for conflicts and

⁸ Lefkowitz (1981) 4.

⁹ Lefkowitz (1981) 6.

spectacular deaths. Euripides was said to have been hated by the Athenians, and while in exile in Macedonia was torn to pieces by dogs. The notion of dishonor or trouble in one's own country also has its origins in heroic myth, and occurs in biographies of Homer and Aeschylus. The story of Euripides' death was clearly inspired by the account of the death of Pentheus in his drama *The Bacchae*.¹⁰ Other stories about Euripides were based on comedies in which his poems were discussed or he appeared as a character. Comedy was undoubtedly the source of the "fact" that Euripides' mother Cleito was a vegetable seller.

The writers who invented these anecdotes appear to have taken some pleasure in their creation; no doubt some of the wittier and more fanciful assertions were meant to be entertaining. The fourth-century Attidographer Philochorus was prepared to suggest that Euripides sometimes alluded to contemporary historical events in his dramas: for example, he claimed that Euripides was referring to the sinking of Protagoras' ship in his drama *Ixion* (328 *FGrHist* F 221/D.L. 9.55/T 16 Kovacs). But Philochorus did not believe *everything* that had been said about Euripides. He pointed out that Euripides' mother could not have been a vegetable seller, as had been claimed by the comic poets, because both of Euripides' parents were well-born (328 *FGrHist* F 218/Suda E 3695/T 2.2 Kovacs). He also observed that Euripides could not (as had been claimed) have been referring to the death of Socrates in the *Palamedes* (fr. 588 N.) because he died before Socrates was executed (328 *FGrHist* F 221/D.L. 2.44/T 33 Kovacs). We can also get a sense of the give-and-take of discussions about literary biography from some of the surviving fragments of a dialogue about Euripides' life by the third-century writer Satyrus. Each of the three speakers in the dialogue draws on Euripides' writings in order to throw light on his character and his thought, and they each support their assertions by citing remarks about Euripides made by the comic poets. But at one point one of the respondents, Diodora, professes that she is not persuaded by the other speaker's claims that a passage in a choral song (fr. 911 N.) refers to Euripides' decision to go to Macedonia. "What do you mean?" Diodora asks; "what you say seems more ingenious than true" (κομψό[τ]ε[ρ]α φαίνε[ι μοι] λέγειν ἤπε[ρ] ἀληθινώτερα, F 6 fr. 39 xviii Schorn/T 4.20 Kovacs).¹¹

¹⁰ Lefkowitz (1981) 95–97.

¹¹ Lefkowitz (1984) 340–342; Schorn (2004) 45–48, 327.

That assertions could be questioned suggests that biographers knew that other biographers had drawn on the poets' own works and on comedies about them. What other source materials did they have at their disposal? When such corrections and modifications were suggested, they were almost always made on the basis of common sense. For example, Philochorus knew that Euripides died before Socrates was executed, so how could he have known about Socrates' death? Why should Satyrus' character Diodora believe that a choral song about flying into the sky with golden wings and the Sirens' sandals refers specifically to Euripides' exile in Macedonia? There is no reason to imagine that Philochorus or Satyrus had done research in special archives or were relying on letters or memoirs when they suggested that it was not necessary to believe every assertion that could be made about him.

3. *Biographies of Apollonius*

What were biographers able to make of the life of Apollonius? *Vita A*, the longer of the two biographies of Apollonius appended to the manuscripts of the *Voyage of the Argo*, offers the following account of his life:

Apollonius the author of the *Voyage of the Argo* was by birth an Alexandrian, of the Ptolemaic tribe, the son of Silleus, or as some say, Hilleus. He lived during the reign of Ptolemy [sic], [and was] a pupil of Callimachus. At first he kept company with Callimachus, his own teacher, and after a long time turned to writing poetry. It is said that when he was an *ephebe* he held a public reading of the *Voyage of the Argo* and was adversely criticized for it. Because he was unable to bear the obloquy from the citizens and the slander of the other poets, he left his fatherland and went into exile in Rhodes, and there he polished and improved his poems and so held a public reading and was very well-received. For that reason he put his name down as Apollonius of Rhodes. He was a famous teacher in Rhodes and was awarded citizenship and honor by the city of Rhodes. (*Vita A*, 1 Wendel)

Vita B offers essentially the same story, but adds that his mother was called Rhode, and that "some say that he went back to Alexandria and having given a second public reading there won high praise and so was 'thought worthy of' the library and Museum and buried alongside Callimachus". The brief entry in the *Suda* (A 3419 Adler) adds that he was a contemporary of Eratosthenes, Euphorion, and

Timarchus, at the time of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246–221 B.C.), and that he was Eratosthenes' successor as librarian of the Alexandrian library.¹²

It is impossible to know what sources of information lie behind these brief accounts. Clearly the compilers of the two manuscript biographies at some point had before them divergent or incomplete accounts. Apparently scholars did not agree on the name of his father, or on the question of whether or not he returned to Alexandria after his stay in Rhodes. The compiler of *Vita A* chose to mention his return to Rhodes, while *Vita B* did not, and neither gives the reason for his decision. It looks as if the compiler of the *Suda* entry preserves two specific pieces of historical information, although even there some chronological confusion is involved. The *Suda* says that Apollonius lived during the time of Ptolemy III Euergetes I, and that he was Eratosthenes' successor as librarian of the Alexandrian library. But a papyrus list of librarians dating from the second or third century A.D. makes him Eratosthenes' predecessor: "Apollonius son of Silleus, an Alexandrian known as a Rhodian ([Ἀπολλ]ώνιος Σιλλέως Ἀλεξανδρεὺς ὁ καλούμενος Ῥόδιος), an acquaintance of Callimachus. He was the teacher of the first [sic] Ptolemy. Eratosthenes succeeded him" (P. Oxy. 1241 col. ii.1/T 13 Pf.).

The biographies seem to be consistent about the question of Apollonius' relationship with Callimachus. *Vita A* and *B* and the *Suda* say he was a pupil (μαθητής) of Callimachus; the papyrus list of librarians (P. Oxy. 1241) says that he was an acquaintance of Callimachus (γνώριμος). That would imply that he flourished during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (246–221 B.C.). But they disagree about other details: *Vita A* records also that he kept company with him, and after a long time (ὀψέ) turned to writing poetry. *Vita B* omits those details, but adds that after he returned from exile and was "thought worthy of" the library and Museum he was buried alongside Callimachus. All the sources suggest that he was closely associated with Callimachus. But we need not take at face value the information that he was Callimachus' pupil, or that Callimachus was his instructor in rhetoric (γραμματικός), as *Vita B* tells us: these terms are anachronisms, dating (at the earliest) from late antiquity. In the biographies "pupil" and "teacher" are metaphors for a perceived connection between two authors. Most often

¹² Wendel (1958) 1–2; see also Hunter (1989a) 1–6.

it means that the later author was thought notably to have been influenced by the earlier author's works.¹³

Aside from the information that Apollonius was closely associated with Callimachus and was librarian at Alexandria, how much of the information in these biographies is likely to be historical? If the information in the papyrus is correct, Apollonius preceded Eratosthenes as librarian. But then why does the compiler of the *Suda* entry manage to make Apollonius Eratosthenes' *successor*? One possibility is that a biographer confused Apollonius of Rhodes with Apollonius of Alexandria known as the Eidographer, who succeeded Aristophanes of Byzantium as librarian (P. Oxy. 1341 col. ii.9–11).¹⁴ The compiler of *Vita A* is not even sure which Ptolemy was on the throne during Apollonius' lifetime.¹⁵ Whoever copied the papyrus list of librarians inadvertently placed Apollonius under the "first" (πρώτου) Ptolemy, Ptolemy I Soter I (305–285 B.C.), unless the correct reading is the "fifth" (πέμπτου), Ptolemy V Epiphanes (205–180 B.C.), which would make sense only for Apollonius the Eidographer.

If none of the compilers of the three biographies was precise about chronology, how accurately have they preserved other information about the poet? We have seen that in the case of earlier poets' lives biographers invented information that was otherwise lacking or took at face value what comic poets had said in jest. So we must be prepared for the possibility that the name of Apollonius' father may be imaginary, because in either of its forms it is a *hapax legomenon*. If it derives from σίλλος, "lampoon", it may have originated in a satirical poem. The name of the poet Archilochus' mother is said by Critias to have been Enipo (Critias 88 B₄ DK); ἐνίπη means "abuse". The name of Apollonius' mother, Rhode, is a real name; but could it have been suggested by his epithet Rhodius?¹⁶

It is also puzzling that Apollonius is known both as an Alexandrian and a Rhodian. According to the papyrus list of librarians he was an "Alexandrian known as a Rhodian" (Ἀλεξανδρεὺς ὁ καλούμενος Ῥόδιος, P. Oxy. 1241 col. ii.i/T 13 Pf.). At the time Rhodians who lived in Alexandria were known as "so-and-so of Rhodes" (e.g. Ἀλεξικράτης

¹³ Fairweather (1974) 262–263; Lefkowitz (1981) 128–129, 131–132.

¹⁴ Rengakos (1992a) 47–48.

¹⁵ Fraser (1972) 331–332.

¹⁶ Lefkowitz (1981) 130.

Ῥόδιος, Δρομάρης Ῥόδιος, Πανσίστρατος Ῥόδιος, Δημήτριος Ῥόδιος).¹⁷ But close association with a city other than one's birthplace could result in one's being known by the names of both one's native and adoptive cities. Strabo says that "Dionysius the Thracian and Apollonius who wrote the *Voyage of the Argo*, although both Alexandrians, were called Rhodians" (*Geog.* 14.3.13). Dionysius taught in Rhodes after he was exiled from Alexandria in 144 B.C. The Stoic philosopher Posidonius is listed in the *Suda* as "of Apamea in Syria or of Rhodes", where he kept a school of philosophy (Π 2107).¹⁸ But in some cases biographers appear to have assumed that poets physically spent time in the places that they wrote about. According to his *Suda* entry, some biographers called Nicander of Colophon "Aetolian" (Κολοφώνιος, κατὰ δέ τινας Αἰτωλός, Ν 374 Adler). The author of his manuscript *Vita* explains why: "he spent time in Aetolia, as is evident from his writings and poems about Aetolia" (ὡς φανερόν ἐκ τῶν περὶ Αἰτωλίας συγγραμμάτων καὶ τῆς ἄλλης ποιήσεως).

So it seems that (at least in biographies) there are several ways in which one can acquire a second (or third) geographical designation: by being born in a particular place, by physical association with it, or by writing about it. Apollonius wrote poems about Rhodes, Alexandria, and Naucratis.¹⁹ Athenaeus calls Apollonius not an Alexandrian but a "Rhodian or Naucratisite" (Ἀπολλώνιος δὲ ὁ Ῥόδιος ἢ Ναυκρατίτης ἐν Ναυκράτεως κτίσει, 7.283 D–E). Did Athenaeus suppose Apollonius came from Naucratis because Apollonius wrote a poem about the foundation of Naucratis, or was he claiming him for Naucratis out of patriotism, because Athenaeus himself came from there?²⁰ The two manuscript *Vitae* offer a different explanation: Apollonius was known as a Rhodian because he went into voluntary exile in Rhodes, was well-received there, and he was made a Rhodian citizen.

Whoever invented this story imagined that the citizenship rules in fifth-century Athens were the same as in third-century Alexandria. The story about Apollonius in Rhodes also does not represent the meaning of citizenship in the third century B.C. accurately: Greek cities ordinarily extended *proxenia* rather than citizenship to citizens of

¹⁷ Fraser (1972) vol. II, 149 n., 209.

¹⁸ Cameron (1995) 216.

¹⁹ He also wrote about the foundation of Caunus, Cnidos, and Lesbos (F 4–12 Powell); cf. Sistikou (this volume).

²⁰ Rengakos (1992a) 53–54.

other cities. At the time, the one exception to this rule was Alexandria, because that city wished to attract new citizens. Most Greeks who came there refused to give up their original affiliations, including all the leading literary men who were invited there and subsidized by Ptolemy I Soter.²¹ Why should Apollonius be the one apparent exception to this rule? Apollonius could have been a Rhodian who became a “naturalized” Alexandrian, according to *Vita A*, a member of the Ptolemaic tribe, one of the artificial tribes created by Ptolemy I Soter? That possibility (rather than the story of exile to Rhodes) would provide the most natural explanation of his apparent dual citizenship. Aristophanes’ biographers imagined that naturalization was possible also in fifth-century Athens. They saw that comic poets had claimed that Aristophanes came from Aegina (his family owned property there) or even from Rhodes, Lindos, Egypt, or Camirus and needed to reconcile these claims with the fact that he presents himself in his plays as an Athenian citizen.²² So they concluded that Aristophanes “was made an Athenian, for he was enrolled by them as a citizen” (θέσει δὲ Ἀθηναῖος· ἐπολιτογραφήθη γὰρ παρ’ αὐτοῖς, *Suda A 3932 Adler/T 2b PCG*).²³

Why did the compilers of the two manuscript lives (or their sources) suppose that exile was a reasonable way to explain why Apollonius was called “Rhodian”? If (as it appears) they did not know the difference between Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy III Euergetes I they could hardly have had any detailed knowledge of the historical context in which Ptolemy I Soter attempted to recruit citizens for the new city of Alexandria. As scholars, they would have known from other biographies that many of the famous poets were thought to have gone into exile because the citizens of their own cities became angry at them. According to one of his biographers, Homer left his home town of Cyme in Asia Minor because the town government would not support him at public expense (*Vit. Herod.* 13–14); Aeschylus’ biographer reports that according to his sources the poet went into voluntary exile in Sicily because of adverse criticism of his poetry:

²¹ Selden (1998) 294, 300.

²² In reality he was the son of Philippos, from the deme Kydathenaion; this information, reported in his *Vita* (T 1.1 *PCG*), is confirmed by an inscription (*IG II² 1740.21/T 9 PCG*).

²³ Lefkowitz (1981) 112, 130.

He went off [to Syracuse] to stay with Hieron, according to some authorities, because he was criticized by the Athenians and defeated by Sophocles when the latter was a young man, but according to others because he was defeated by Simonides with an elegy for those who died at Marathon. Elegy in particular needs to have the conciseness necessary to arouse emotion, and Aeschylus' poem (as we said) did not. Some say that during the performance of the *Eumenides*, when he brought the chorus on one by one, he so frightened the audience that children fainted and unborn infants were aborted (*Vit. Aesch./T* 1. 8–9 Radt).

The compiler of Aeschylus' *Vita* apparently did not realize that children and women were unlikely to have been in the audience when the *Eumenides* was first performed, or that Aeschylus would have been well rewarded for going to Sicily. One of Euripides' biographers supposes that the reason why Euripides went into voluntary exile had something to do with the way he was treated in Athens: "the comic poets also attacked him and tore him to pieces in their envy. He disregarded all this and went away to Macedonia to the court of King Archelaus" (*Vit. Eur./T* 1.35 Kovacs). The author of the *Suda* entry on Euripides suggests that the poet went into exile because of his marital difficulties (E 3695 Adler/*T* 2.8 Kovacs);²⁴ again no one suggests that a visit to Archelaus would have been very profitable. For all of these biographers voluntary exile provided a ready explanation of why the poets left their homelands, and often died without returning.

According to the compilers of the two *Vitae*, Apollonius, like the Athenian dramatists Aeschylus and Euripides, is supposed to have gone into voluntary exile because his work was not well received at home; his work was better appreciated in exile, like that of Aeschylus and Euripides. Although there is no analogy in the earlier biographies to the story that while in Rhodes he spent his time polishing and improving his poem, so that he was able to perform it again successfully, we need not look far for the origin of this story. It accounts for the existence of a supposed "first edition" (προέκδοσις) of the *Voyage of the Argo*. This "first edition" is mentioned in the *scholia* to Apollonius in connection with six sets of variant lines in book 1 (285–286; 516–518; 543; 725; 788; 801–803); variants are also preserved in cross-references in the *scholia* in two passages in book 2 (963–964; 1116)—a total of 17 lines.²⁵ Was the "first

²⁴ Lefkowitz (1981) 129.

²⁵ Vian (1976) xxi; cf. Schade–Eleuteri (this volume).

edition” and the story of Apollonius’ reworking of the text invented to explain the existence of these variants?²⁶

There is no analogy in the biographies of earlier poets to the story in *Vita A* of Apollonius’ success and recognition in his place of exile or in *Vita B* of Apollonius’ triumphant return to Alexandria, where he was “judged worthy of” the Library and the Museum, and buried next to Callimachus. Perhaps, as Cameron suggests, the detail about his being “a famous teacher in Rhodes” (ἐπαίδευσε δὲ λαμπρῶς ἐν αὐτῇ, *Vita A*) derives from a confusion on the part of some biographer between himself and a later Apollonius, the first-century Apollonius of Alabanda who taught rhetoric in Rhodes.²⁷ Perhaps the notion of Apollonius’ return to Alexandria was invented to explain another confusion, which is that the name Apollonius appears twice in close succession on the list of Librarians. Or it may simply attempt to account for the tradition that Callimachus and Apollonius were buried together, like members of the same family.

On the basis of biographical information about Apollonius that we have considered so far, no one would imagine that he had ever had a significant disagreement with Callimachus. But the biographical tradition about Callimachus says that Callimachus considered Apollonius to be his enemy: according to the *Suda* entry, Callimachus wrote the “*Ibis*—this is a poem noted for its obscurity and abuse against one Ibos [sic], who was an enemy (ἐχθρός) of Callimachus. This was Apollonius of Rhodes, who wrote the *Voyage of the Argo*” (*Suda* K 227/T 1 Pf.).

The work referred to was undoubtedly Callimachus’ *Ibis*. But if it was noted for its obscurity, how could biographers know for sure that it was directed at Apollonius?²⁸ The most likely explanation is that they knew Apollonius’ name and that he was a contemporary of Callimachus. They knew from the prologue to the *Aitia* that Callimachus said that: “Telchines complain of my song, ignorant men who are not friends of the Muses”, because he has not written a long poem (fr. 1.1–3 Pf.). The most famous long poem of his time was the *Voyage of the Argo*. Ancient biographers were always eager to find historical counterparts to mythical figures: when Pindar speaks of chattering jackdaws in comparison with the eagle of Zeus, ancient commentators suggested that “he is hinting at Bacchylides and Simonides, calling himself an eagle,

²⁶ Rengakos (1992a) 48.

²⁷ Cameron (1995) 214.

²⁸ Cameron (1995) 228.

and his rivals jackdaws” (αἰνίττεται Βακχυλίδην καὶ Σιμωνίδην, ἑαυτὸν λέγων ἄετόν, κόρακας δὲ τοὺς ἀντιτέχνους, *sch.* Pind. *O.* 2.157a.2). So it was only natural to suppose that Apollonius’ exile was connected with Callimachus’ enmity. The story about the poor reception of the “first edition” of the *Voyage of the Argo* and Apollonius’ voluntary exile also suggested the possibility of tension between Apollonius and the other poets attached to the royal court. That appears to be the idea behind the crude epigram attributed to Apollonius the grammarian: “he was responsible, Callimachus, who wrote the *Origins*” (αἴτιος ὁ γράψας Αἴτια Καλλίμαχος, *AP* 11.275.2 / *T* 25 Pf.).²⁹

Why did ancient biographers choose to concentrate on the story of the quarrel, and on Apollonius’ discomfiture and exile, rather than on the kind of information we would now prefer to have: an exact account of his early life and education, along with a precise chronology of his career and motivations for writing what he did? The answer may be that these were the kind of events, real or imaginary, that enabled them best to explain why, despite obvious affinities between Callimachus’ writings and Apollonius’, Callimachus’ poetry appeared to them to be more admired and to have had the widest influence. Biography, for them, was literary criticism in narrative form. But the story of the quarrel has also appealed to ancient and modern scholars because it offered a ready explanation of what Callimachus had in mind when he spoke in mythical and metaphorical terms about his critics, and so created a literary world in Alexandria that was full of drama and excitement. Ancient poets often complain of the envy and malignity of real and imaginary enemies. Callimachus calls his detractors Telchines, but does not identify them with any of his contemporaries. Some of the possibilities are named in a fragment of *scholia* to a papyrus of *Aitia*, but Apollonius’ name is not among them. So it appears that the idea that Apollonius was an enemy of Callimachus must derive from the existence of the poem *Ibis*, and the notion that it was somehow connected with Apollonius’ departure for Rhodes.

In conclusion, I would suggest that it would be a mistake to expect that we could extract from the biographical information that we have about Apollonius anything that might help us date his poetry with precision, or allow us to understand exactly what his contemporaries thought of it. Only one aspect of the tradition can be corroborated

²⁹ Rengakos (1992a) 63.

from Apollonius' poetry, and that is the notion that he was closely connected with Callimachus: his interest in *aitia*, in geography, in religious practices, his carefully crafted verse, which does not rely on epic formulae.³⁰ The biographers were surely right in judging Callimachus to be the greater poet. But their suggestion that he quarreled with Apollonius has kept students of Apollonius' work from judging it on its own merits. It has also allowed ingenious scholars like Cameron to suppose that they could reconstruct with accuracy detailed accounts of the literary ambience in Alexandria.

4. *Biographies of Hellenistic Poets*

In *Callimachus and his Critics* Cameron goes out of his way to imply that the biographers of the Hellenistic poets were more accurate and sophisticated than those of the earlier poets. He believes that in *The Lives of the Greek Poets* I was overly skeptical about the historical value of the biographies of Hellenistic poets. His aim (or so it would appear) is to encourage his readers in their turn to be skeptical about my discussion of the quarrel between Callimachus and Apollonius.³¹ He believes that there is more historical value in the sources than I had realized:

Lefkowitz took too little account of the very different nature of the sources available for the lives of Hellenistic writers. To be sure, these sources have seldom survived in their original form, but much of what they have said has been preserved in varying degrees of detail and accuracy in later compilations, chief among them Diogenes Laertius and Athenaeus.

Furthermore, it is the *Lives* of the Greek poets that Lefkowitz studied, and not the lives of the Greek poets. Since the surviving versions of these *Lives* are mostly products of late antiquity, the end result of centuries of abridgement prefixed to Byzantine copies of their works, it is not surprising that they preserve little of value. But that does not mean that better information based on reliable sources never existed.³²

I am not sure why Cameron says that my book was about the *Lives* rather than the lives of Greek poets, since in *The Lives of the Greek Poets*, both in my chapter on Hellenistic poets and elsewhere, I discuss

³⁰ Lefkowitz (1981) 133–135; Rengakos (1992a) 65–67; Cameron (1995) 228, 247–256.

³¹ Cameron (1995) 185–187.

³² Cameron (1995) 186.

many other source materials other than the abridged Byzantine *Lives*. Also I cannot understand why he says that I took “too little account” of the difference between earlier and later sources; in the chapter on Euripides in particular, where we have Satyrus’ biographical dialogue from the Hellenistic period, I show in detail how in the later tradition jokes were reinterpreted as disparagement.³³

What specific source materials had I overlooked? None of the sources Cameron goes on to cite turns out to have any relevance to the question of the accuracy of the Hellenistic biographies. Cameron cites Ion of Chios, who told stories about Aeschylus and Sophocles in his *Epidemiai*: “there is no reason to believe that these too were intended to link the dramatists with their dramas”.³⁴ But in none of the passages from *The Lives of the Greek Poets* that Cameron cites did I ever claim that Ion based his anecdotes on these poets’ works. Rather, I sought only to point out that Ion’s accounts of dinner conversations should not be understood as literal transcripts of what was said.³⁵ Nor did I ever seek to deny that some of the surviving biographical information about the poets comes from sources other than their own poetry and comedies about them. The Athenians in the fifth century kept records of certain public events, such as the *Didaskaliai* of the performances of tragedies and comedies.³⁶ Members of Athenian demes put up inscriptions recording honors awarded to their members for participating in local cults.³⁷ Biographers could have learned from these that Sophocles led the chorus that sang the paean at the sacrifice after the Athenian victory at Salamis (*Vit. Soph.* 3) or that Euripides was the torch-bearer of Apollo Zosterios (*Vita* 8/T 1 Kovacs).

What other biographical data was available to ancient biographers? Cameron implies that Philochorus and Theophrastus made the question of Euripides’ birth a subject of serious research: “Theophrastus cited temple records to prove that Euripides was well-born”.³⁸ But a closer look at the passage Cameron cites (Philochorus 328 *FGrHist* F 218, IIIb Suppl. I, Text, 585) suggests that Theophrastus was writing about a different topic altogether. Jacoby’s commentary refers to a passage from Athenaeus (10.424E–F/T 12 Kovacs), in which the famous

³³ Lefkowitz (1981) 98–104.

³⁴ Cameron (1995) 186.

³⁵ Lefkowitz (1981) 67.

³⁶ Sickinger (1999) 46.

³⁷ Whitehead (1986) 184–185, 380–381.

³⁸ Cameron (1995) 187.

jurist Ulpian of Tyre (Ath. 1.1D–E) is rattling off citations of what writers have said about mixing water with wine. Ulpian observes that the wine-pourers came from the best families.³⁹ In support of his assertion he cites Theophrastus, who said in his treatise *On Drunkenness* (fr. 119 Wimmer): “in any case I have heard that even the poet Euripides poured wine for the men known as the Dancers”. Theophrastus had heard (πυνθάνομαι) the story, and mentioned the young Euripides as an example of the significance accorded to the ceremony of wine-pouring in Athens in his treatise on drinking. Ulpian mentions a γραφή about the ceremony in which the Dancers took part in the temple of the Laurel Bearer (i.e. Apollo Daphnephoros) in Phlya, which was according to Harpocration Euripides’ birthplace (T 11 Kovacs).⁴⁰ Presumably Ulpian—who in Athenaeus always comes up with the most astonishing array of citations—is referring to an inscription on the temple wall that listed the names of participants in the ceremony, the kind of inscriptions that presumably recorded that Euripides was the torch-bearer of Apollo Zosterios (*Vita* 8/T 1 Kovacs).⁴¹ But we cannot infer from this passage that Theophrastus (or anyone else) consulted an archive there of “temple records” in the process of writing about the life of Euripides. In any case, Theophrastus was writing about the use of wine, not about the poet’s biography.

Cameron goes on to list some of the titles of Hellenistic treatises about poetry; in particular he complains that I did not take sufficient account of the work of Lynceus, “a disciple of Theophrastus, who wrote a treatise on Menander in at least two books”. He adds:⁴²

To judge from his other works (known from a number of quotations in Athenaeus), Lynceus was fascinated by the trivial and anecdotal, but *it would be absurd to suppose* that a contemporary who lived in Athens and even wrote comedies himself preserved nothing of value. Though mainly concerned with Menander’s plays, Lynceus is *bound to have* touched on numerous biographical and prosopographical details, details on which he *undoubtedly* had first-hand information.

³⁹ Ulpian also notes that Sappho in her poetry mentions that her brother Larichus was a wine-pourer (Ath. 10. 425A/Sappho T 203 Voigt).

⁴⁰ Deubner (1932) 202.

⁴¹ For example, Plutarch (who appears as one of the characters in Athenaeus’ banquet) reports that the figurehead of the first Persian ship to be captured at Salamis was dedicated to Apollo the Laurel Bearer in Phlya (*Themist.* 15.2).

⁴² Cameron (1995) 188.

Cameron is confident that Lynceus preserved valuable information about Menander, but it is clear from his own words that he cannot lay hands on any evidence that would support his assertions. Instead, he relies on conjecture (see italicized words above). But on what grounds does Cameron suppose that Lynceus was any more accurate about his contemporary Menander than Aristophanes was about his contemporaries Euripides and Socrates? In the one quotation from his *On Menander* that has survived, Lynceus sounds more like Ion of Chios than like Plutarch. He records some funny sayings by two witty parasites and notes that the more affable of the two was better liked (Ath. 650B–C). He appears to have been telling these stories to make a moral point; but then he was writing a biographical treatise (ὑπόμνημα) about Menander, not an account of his individual life or the history of his times. In any case Lynceus was not a pupil of Theophrastus, but a friend (Θεοφράστου γνώριμος, *Suda* Λ 776).⁴³

Cameron mentions a number of other authors who wrote about kings, hetaeras, philosophers, poets and other celebrities. Very little of this material, as Cameron admits, has any direct relevance to the biographies of Callimachus or Apollonius. None of the anecdotes or epigrams that survive from these works suggest that they contained anything but the usual exemplary anecdotes that we have discussed above in connection with Ion, Satyrus, and Lynceus. But Cameron is justified in scolding me for not having discussed the *Lives* of Aratus and Nicander in my discussion of the Hellenistic poets in *The Lives of the Greek Poets*. I might also have said something about the *Lives* of Theocritus. Can we infer from these biographies that there was more reliable information at the disposal of Hellenistic biographers than my work on the Hellenistic poets has suggested?

In the case of the *Lives* of Theocritus and Nicander, the answer is no. The compilers of Theocritus' *Lives* record that his father was Praxagoras or Simichos—the latter, as the compiler of the Byzantine *Life* notes, because he calls himself “son of Simichos” (Simichidas in *Id.* 7.21). The compiler of the Byzantine *Vita* of Nicander identifies Nicander as the son of Damaios, a priest of Apollo at Claros. His source is Nicander himself, who mentions both his father (fr. 110) and his homeland (*Theriaca* 958; *Alexipharmaca* 11). The compiler of the *Vita* remarks that Dionysius of Phaselis said that Nicander came from

⁴³ Nesselrath (1990) 105–106, n. 51.

Aitolia, but argues instead that he spent a long time in Aitolia, to judge from his frequent references to that region of mainland Greece. The compiler of the *Suda* identifies Nicander as “the son of Xenophanes of Colophon, or according to some authorities, an Aitolian” (Νίκανδρος, Ξενοφάνους, Κολοφώνιος, κατὰ δέ τινας Αἰτωλός, *Suda* Λ 374). As Cameron points out, neither the *Vita* nor the *Suda* entry for Nicander seems aware that there were in fact two Nicanders, one who was active around 280–250 B.C., and the other around 200. The first Nicander is identified as the son of Anaxagoras in an inscription of 254/3 at Delphi (*Syll.*³ 452); presumably whoever wrote the *Suda* entry confused the names of two famous philosophers.⁴⁴ The compiler of the *Suda* entry assigns to the younger Nicander all works written under that same name. Most scholars agree on the basis of style and content that it was the younger of the two who wrote the *Theriaca* and the *Alexipharmaca*.⁴⁵ Cameron argues vigorously that it was the older, since he and Aratus each appear to imitate the other,⁴⁶ but he does not discuss the scientific evidence that suggests that it was the later of the two. Even if Cameron were right about the date of the author of the *Alexipharmaca*, it is hard to understand why he judges the “prosopography” in the *Lives* of Nicander to be particularly “accurate”.⁴⁷

Vita A of Aratus in particular is much longer than those of Apollonius and provides information about Aratus’ family, his tutors, his contemporaries (he was an older contemporary of Callimachus), and his association with Antigonos Gonatas, the king of Macedonia (277/6–229 B.C.), who gave him the assignment of writing the *Phaenomena*. It is here, then, if anywhere, that we have an example of the “biographical and prosopographical detail” that Hellenistic biographers might have had at their disposal. What were the sources that the compiler of *Vita* A consulted? He cites poetry about Aratus. He quotes Callimachus’ epigram about Aratus twice, once to confirm that he came from Soloi, and again to confirm that Aratus was an “imitator” (ζηλωτής) of Hesiod (*HE* 1297–1300/*AP* 9.507). He also cites an epigram about writers of *Phaenomena* by Ptolemy (712 *SH*/311–314 *FGE*), though he does not specify which Ptolemy.⁴⁸ In addition, the compiler says that he con-

⁴⁴ Cameron (1995) 198; cf. 271 *FGrHist* F 1–2 with commentary IIIA, 233–234.

⁴⁵ Gow–Scholfield (1953) 7.

⁴⁶ Cameron (1995) 203.

⁴⁷ Cameron (1995) 213; cf. Jacques (1979) 33–41.

⁴⁸ Since Aratus was a contemporary of Alexander Aetolus, the author of the epigram is almost certainly Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 B.C.).

sulted Aratus' letters, which he considers to be genuine. These letters have not survived, but the compiler of *Vita A* notes that "Apollonides the Cephean [sic] in the eighth book of his *On False History* says that the letters were not written by Aratus, but by Sabirus [sic] Polio; he said that the same man wrote the letters of Euripides". If the scholar mentioned is probably the grammarian Apollonides of Nicaea, and P. Sabidius Pollio is the author of the letters, they were written no earlier than the mid-first century A.D.⁴⁹

How reliable a source were the letters of Aratus? If they were written by the same man who wrote the letters of Euripides (T 100 Kovacs), they are (a) *not* by Aratus and (b) fictional rather than historical in nature.⁵⁰ Some of the names mentioned in the letters of Euripides are otherwise well-known, such as Aristophanes and Sophocles. Others (like Cephisophon) seem to derive from comedy (T 1.12 Kovacs). In the letters, Euripides is represented as explaining why he left Athens and went to the court of Archelaos; he gives advice to the king and discusses local events. In general, the letters appear to have been designed to make Euripides appear to have been wise and generous. But they make no specific references to dates, and do not include the particular messages and expressions of concern that are characteristic of authentic correspondence. If the letters of Aratus were similar to these in nature, as the ancient scholar Apollonides thought, their historical value would have been limited. At best, they would have preserved the names of some of Aratus' contemporaries, as known from his own works or what they said about him in theirs. But they would have contained fictional matter that would also have made its way into the later *Lives*, such as the stories about how Antigonos encouraged Aratus to write a poem based on Eudoxus' astronomical handbook, the *Mirror*.

Cameron devotes considerable ingenuity to trying to establish an accurate chronology for both Nicanders and Aratus, and to assign the works attributed to Nicander to the appropriate bearer of that name. That so much effort is required to make sense of the tradition provides eloquent testimony to the deficiencies of the data even in these "better" *Lives*. It is puzzling also that Cameron does not discuss the specific source materials mentioned or cited in these *Lives*. In particular he does not discuss the biographer Dionysius' clearly erroneous supposition that Nicander son of Damaios came from Aitolia; he does not point out to

⁴⁹ Gößwein (1975) 6–12.

⁵⁰ Gößwein (1975) 28–30.

his readers that the compiler of the long *Vita A* of Aratus tells us himself that he is drawing on the letters of Aratus, which he supposes to be genuine, but that one ancient critic considered them, along with the letters of Euripides, to be spurious.

As a result, I do not believe that Cameron has demonstrated, or indeed that anyone can demonstrate, that Hellenistic biographers had at their disposal the kinds of source materials that would have enabled them to provide us with the kind of information that we would like to have. Individual biographers, like the compiler of *Vita A* of Aratus, may from time to time demonstrate their common sense in discarding implausible material, but they are at their most reliable when their information is drawn directly from what the poets themselves tell us. Perhaps the *Lives* can also provide us with some limited information about a poet's contemporaries; here even the brief Byzantine *Lives* of Apollonius are not misleading. But names can also lead to confusion, especially when biographers appear to have amalgamated into one entity different persons who bore the same name. Thus Apollonius of Rhodes acquires some of the experiences of Apollonius the Eidographer and Apollonius of Alabanda, and the two Nicanders of Colophon are blended into one. Because of such confusion, I do not think that there is any reason to suppose, as does Cameron, that silences in the lives can also give us a precise sense of patterns of acquaintance, or that "what these *Lives* do not say is as accurate as what they do say".⁵¹ It is of course possible that the absence of any reference to Apollonius in the *Vitae* of his contemporaries implies that Apollonius was active only in Egypt and Rhodes.⁵² But it is much more likely that the absence of his name in the *Vitae* of other poets may indicate only that later critics did not think that these poets had any mutual influences on one another.

5. Conclusion

Cameron concludes his discussion of Hellenistic biography by stating:⁵³

It is too simple to brush aside the entire biographical tradition. The "ancient" *Lives* of Apollonius are largely worthless, but his Suda *Life* is a little better, and the Oxyrhynchus librarian list better still. Theocritus's

⁵¹ Cameron (1995) 214.

⁵² Cameron (1995) 213.

⁵³ Cameron (1995) 219.

Suda *Life* is worthless, but one of the other *Lives* preserves a few scraps. And the *Lives* of Aratus and Nicander clearly derive from early Hellenistic tradition. Their prosopography is especially well founded. Good information was available, and there is no reason in principle why the life and connections of Callimachus should have been less well documented than those of his contemporaries.

Here Cameron is describing a fictional enemy. No one, so far as I know, including myself, has sought to “brush aside the whole biographical tradition”. Nor has anyone said that the Byzantine *Lives* of Apollonius and Theocritus are “worthless”, because even these record who their contemporaries were and what they wrote. I doubt that anyone would disagree with Cameron’s assessment of the value of the surviving sources of biographical information about Apollonius, but he needs to qualify what he means by *better*. *Better* than what?⁵⁴ The ancient *Lives* of Hesiod and Euripides? It is hard to see how. The biographers of Aratus and Nicander, like Euripides’ biographers, mined such biographical information as they could find from the poets’ own writings. They also drew on the work of their contemporaries, and from works later attributed to them, such as the *Letters* of Aratus. In that way they came up with the names of some of the people with whom the poets lived and worked. But it is somewhat misleading to say that “their prosopography is especially well founded”, when it is not infrequently marred by misidentification (as in the case of the various Ptolemies, Apollonii and Nicanders), and often depends upon conjecture and inference (Ibis is Apollonius, Apollonius was Callimachus’ pupil). Perhaps “there is no reason in principle why the life and connections of Callimachus should have been less well-documented than those of his contemporaries”, but *in practice* none of the lives and connections of any Hellenistic poet is as well-documented as we would like them to be.

Perhaps it is safe to say that Apollonius knew and admired Callimachus, and that he was head of the Alexandrian library. The respect paid to him by writers such as Virgil suggests that his work was read and studied long after his death. Was he a Rhodian and a naturalized citizen? Did he go into voluntary exile? Do we know the names of his parents? Probably not. We can say almost nothing with certainty. That Aeschylus and Euripides were erroneously thought to have gone

⁵⁴ Similarly, when Cameron (1995) 186 says, “much of what they said has been preserved in varying degrees of detail and accuracy in later compilations”, what does he mean by “much”?

into voluntary exile does not prove that Apollonius did not actually do so. But because we know so little, I believe it is a mistake to try to write a precise literary history of intellectual life in Alexandria. I do not believe that on the basis of the information that we now have we can know exactly when Apollonius published the *Voyage of the Argo* and Callimachus published the *Aitia* prologue. Since we do not have the information that enables us to write that kind of history, I believe that instead we should devote our energies to learning about what we do have: the poems themselves, and the subjects that the poets wrote about, especially the poets who found themselves in Egypt, writing about the myths and the geography of a Greek world that they themselves could never have seen in its entirety. As Callimachus said of his friend Heracleitus, it is the poems that have endured; not the mortal beings who composed them.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν που, / ξεῖν' Ἀλικαρνησεῦ, τετράπαλαι σποδιή, / αἱ δὲ τεαῖ ζώουσιν ἀηδόνες, ἧσιν ὁ πάντων / ἄρπακτῆς Ἄϊδης οὐκ ἐπὶ χεῖρα βαλεῖ (Callimachus, *Epigr.* 2.3–6 Pf./1206–1208 *HE*).