NICANDER
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NICANDER

THE POEMS
AND
POETICAL FRAGMENTS

EDITED WITH A
TRANSLATION AND NOTES

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CONTENTS

Preface .................................................................................. page xi

INTRODUCTION

I  The Life of Nicander ......................................................... 3
II  The Text ........................................................................... 9
III Scholia, Commentaries, and Translations ......................... 16
IV  The Subject-matter of the Poems .................................... 18
   A. Zoology ................................................................. 19
      (i) Reptiles .................................................................. 19
      (ii) Frogs and Toads .................................................. 21
      (iii) Fish ..................................................................... 21
      (iv) Scorpions and Spiders .......................................... 21
      (v) Insects, etc. .......................................................... 23
   B. Botany ........................................................................ 23

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Sigla .................................................................................... 26
Theriaca ................................................................................ 28
Alexipharmaca .................................................................... 94
Fragments ............................................................................ 138

Notes .................................................................................... 170

APPENDICES

I  The botanical drawings in II ............................................. 222
II  Weights and measures .................................................. 224
III  Books and papers relating to Nicander ......................... 225

INDEXES

I  Fauna, Flora, etc. ............................................................ 228
II  Index to Introduction and Notes .................................... 238
   A. Greek ........................................................................ 238
   B. English ...................................................................... 242
PREFACE

Nicander has some claims upon the attention of students both of ancient literature and of ancient science. Medicine, zoology, botany, and mineralogy are the themes of his two extant poems; whatever his exact date he belongs to a period from which little Greek literature of any kind has survived; and among later writers Virgil and Ovid were in his debt. Yet for all that he has been little read either by scientists or by Classical scholars, nor is the reason far to seek. His contorted style and fantastic vocabulary put him beyond the reach of scientists unless they are also Greek scholars, and Greek scholars competent to face these considerable difficulties are commonly deterred by lack of interest in his subject-matter. Moreover even those who wish to read him are at present faced with a serious obstacle, for the only tolerable text, that of Otto Schneider, was published nearly a century ago and has long been hard to come by.

The aim of the present edition is very modest. It is to provide would-be readers with a text, and with first-aid in reading it; but we do not claim to provide more than first-aid. Apart from passages in which the text is certainly or probably corrupt, there may well be places in which the version here facing it is demonstrably incorrect; there are others in which our translation is only tentative; others where alternative interpretations will present themselves to the next reader, as they have often done to ourselves; others again in which an otherwise plausible rendering of the Greek will be rejected by scientists competent in the theme under discussion. Still, at the worst, we hope that the version will save even Greek scholars a good deal of recourse to lexicons and other works of reference, from which, incidentally, they would often extract extremely dusty answers.

Our title-page mentions the poems and poetical fragments since we have printed the text of the poetical fragments only. There will however be found in the notes a brief account of each fragment omitted by us but printed in Schneider’s collection, including those from works certainly or possibly in prose; and since his collection is standard we have preserved his enumeration throughout. Our exegetical notes are usually brief and do not constitute a continuous commentary. They represent such results of our own often incomplete
PREFACE

inquiries as seemed likely to be useful to others, and we would emphasise again that the book makes no pretence to be a definitive edition. If that is ever to be written it will involve, besides much work on the vocabulary and style of the poet, the collaboration of a number of scientists with somewhat unusual qualifications.

The book has been supervised by both editors, and in particular the translation, the first draft of which was complete before this edition was contemplated, has been much altered and revised. The primary responsibilities however are as follows. The text, the introduction except for the section on botany, and Appendix I are by A. S. F. G.; that section, the translation basically, Appendixes II and III, and the Indexes are by A. F. S. Among the notes, those on the text, on the lost works of Nicander, on the fragments not here printed, and most of those on zoology, are by A. S. F. G.; those on botany nearly all by A. F. S., who has taken charge of this subject throughout. The remainder, which deal chiefly with geography and mythology, may be by either, but are often confabulations of what the editors had jotted down independently in the course of their work.

It remains to express our thanks to scholars in various fields who have helped us. Our heaviest debt is to Professor D. L. Page and to Mr F. H. Sandbach, who very kindly found time to read our proofs. Both have saved us from numerous slips and oversights, and text and translation alike have been much improved by Professor Page’s acute suggestions. Many other scholars have answered our inquiries on particular points, and we are glad to express here our thanks to Professor D. G. Catchside, Dr K. C. Dixon, Dr U. R. Evans, Mr P. Fraser, Mr H. Gilbert-Carter, Mr J. S. L. Gilmour, Professor James Gray, Mr A. F. Huxley, Dr R. Keydell, Mr E. Lobel, Dr P. Maas, Dr W. Morel, Dr C. F. A. Pantin, Mr H. W. Parker, Professor R. Pfeiffer, Dr M. G. M. Pryor, Mr J. E. Raven, and Dr W. H. Thorpe. Our Frontispiece is from H. Omont Fac-similés des plus anciens MSS grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale Pl. LXV, which proved more suitable for reproduction than the photograph kindly supplied by the authorities of the Library.

We are grateful to the Syndics of the University Press for undertaking the publication of the book, and to the staff of the Press for the care they have expended on its production.

Cambridge A. S. F. G.
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