

INTRODUCTION

1. THE POET

i. Life

Our main sources for A.'s life are (i) a fragmentary papyrus listing the librarians of the royal library at Alexandria, (ii) and (iii) two biographical notices transmitted with our manuscripts of the text, and (iv) an entry in the Byzantine lexicon known as the Suda.

- (i) P. Oxy. 1241 (2nd century A.D., a miscellaneous handbook). Col. ii:
 - 'Apollo]nius, son of Silleus, of Alexandria, the one called Rhodian, the follower (γνώριμος) of Callimachus. He was also teacher to the first¹ king. His successor was Eratosthenes, then came Aristophanes of Byzantium, son of Apelles, [and Aristarchus]. Then came Apollonius of Alexandria, the one called "the eidograph" [i.e. "classifier"]; after him came Aristarchus son of Aristarchus, of Alexandria, but originally from Samothrace'
- (ii) Life A (probably an epitome deriving from the work of Theon, a critic of the late first century B.C.):²
 - 'Apollonius, the poet of the Argonautica, was by race an Alexandrian, of the Ptolemais tribe, the son of Silleus or, as some say, Illeus. He lived in the time of the third Ptolemy [i.e. Euergetes, who reigned 246–222],³ and was a pupil of Callimachus. He was at first associated with⁴ his own teacher, Callimachus; late in life he turned to poetic composition. It is

¹ Almost certainly an error for 'third', cf. below, p. 4.

² Cf. C. Wendel, Die Überlieferung der Scholien zu Apollonios von Rhodos (Abh. Göttingen 3,1, 1932) 113.

Most MSS read 'he lived in the time of the Ptolemies', which is too obvious to need saying. Wendel's text, adopted here, produces the likely sense of what was intended, if not the actual words.

⁴ συνών; this verb may suggest a close working partnership, cf. LSJ s.v. π.3.



2

INTRODUCTION

said that while he was still an ephebe he gave a reading (ἐπιδείξασθαι) of the Argonautica with no success at all; being unable to bear disgrace from the citizens and the reproaches and abuse of the other poets, he left his homeland and went off to Rhodes, where he polished and corrected the poem and won great critical acclaim after a reading. For this reason he calls himself Rhodian in his poems. ⁵ In Rhodes he taught successfully and was rewarded with Rhodian citizenship and honours.'

(iii) Life B (probably the work of Sophocles, a commentator under the Empire, whose sources will have included Theon):⁶

'The poet Apollonius was by race an Alexandrian; his father was Silleus or Illeus, his mother Rhode. He was a pupil of Callimachus who was a scholar (γραμματικός) in Alexandria, and he composed poetry which he read publicly. As he was very unsuccessful and felt ashamed, he moved to Rhodes where he took part in public life and taught rhetoric as a sophist; for this reason people even wish to call him a Rhodian. There he lived and polished his poems and won such acclaim after reading his poetry that he was thought worthy of the libraries of the Museum, and he was buried together with Callimachus himself.

5 This is usually taken to mean merely that ancient copies of Arg. were entitled 'by Apollonius the Rhodian'; if so, the heading need have no authority behind it. Nevertheless, poets freely name themselves and their cities, and we can hardly discount the possibility that A. somewhere (for some reason) referred to himself as 'Rhodian', since 'in his poems' need not refer only to Arg. Relevant parallels include Theognis 22-3, Timotheus 791.229-36, Call. Epigr. 21 and Eratosthenes fr. 35.18 Powell. So too, no firm conclusions may be drawn from the verb ἀναγράφει, cf., e.g., Porphyry, Life of Pythagoras 2 'Απολλώνιος δ' ἐν τοῖς περὶ Πυθαγόρου καὶ μητέρα ἀναγράφει Πυθαΐδα.

⁶ Cf. Wendel loc. cit. (n. 2); H. Herter, Rh.M. 91 (1942) 310-26.

⁷ There may well be confusion here with either Apollonius of Alabanda in Caria, a rhetorician who taught in Rhodes in the late second century B.C. and who, in at least one source, is called Apollonius the Rhodian (Theon 2.61.29 Spengel), or with the slightly later Apollonius 'Molon', also a Carian who worked in Rhodes. It may also be relevant that Philostratus traced the beginning of 'the second sophistic' to Aeschines' period of exile in Caria and Rhodes (Vit. Soph. 1.481).

This should mean no more than that his poems were included in the Library, cf. Pfeiffer (1968) 142. The idea that literary quality determined inclusion



1. THE POET

3

(iv) Suda α 3419

'Apollonius, an Alexandrian, epic poet, spent time in Rhodes, son of Silleus, pupil of Callimachus, contemporary of Eratosthenes and Euphorion and Timarchus, flourished in the time of Ptolemy Euergetes, and was successor to Eratosthenes in the headship of the Library at Alexandria.'

The briefest glance will confirm that these reports, even where the text seems secure, present 'a labyrinth of self-contradictory statements', 10 but a fitful light seems to appear around some of the corners. 11

The only reasons for rejecting the almost unanimous¹² biographical tradition that A. came from Alexandria are a belief that the label 'Rhodian' would not have stuck if he were not really a Rhodian, and the observation that the major poetic figures of third-century Alexandria tended to come from outside the city.¹³ This does not amount to very much. There is similarly no good reason to doubt the assertion of texts (i) and (iv) that A. served as Librarian in the library which was attached to the famous centre of scholarship and poetry

in the royal collection is unhistorical; the Ptolemies aimed at completeness. Nevertheless, the text is uncertain, and the biographer may have wished to imply that A. became head of the Library, cf. below p. 4.

Presumably the Timarchus who was involved in a revolt against Euergetes and was briefly tyrant of Miletos in 259/8, cf. RE VIA 1236-7.

10 Pfeiffer (1968) 141.

11 This brief account may be amplified from Herter (1944/55) 221-36 and art. cit. (n. 6); Eichgrün (1961) passim; P. Händel, 'Die zwei Versionen der Viten des Apollonios Rhodios', Hermes 90 (1962) 429-43; Fraser (1972) I 330-3; Blum (1977) 177-91; M. R. Lefkowitz, The lives of the Greek poets (London 1981) 117-20 and 128-35.

Simple references in lexica etc. to 'Apollonius the Rhodian' are discounted. In introducing the same story from A.'s Foundation of Naucratis (below, pp. 10-11), Athenaeus and Aelian describe A. as 'from Rhodes or Naucratis'. This may simply be a specialised variant of the standard division of his life into Egyptian and Rhodian periods, and we should not conjure with the notion that he was given citizenship in return for his poem (Herter (1944/55) 222).

Thus, Praxiphanes of Mytilene is sometimes called 'Rhodian', presumably because he taught there, cf. K. O. Brink, C.Q. 40 (1946) 22. Callimachus and Eratosthenes came from Cyrene, Asclepiades from Samos, Philitas from

Cos, Zenodotus from Ephesus, Lycophron from Chalcis etc.



INTRODUCTION

which the Ptolemies created in Alexandria, the 'Museum' (lit. 'shrine of the Muses').14 The date of his period as Librarian has been the subject of intense debate, as the Suda seems to offer two quite different possibilities. The list on the papyrus, however, now allows us to be reasonably confident that Apollonius preceded Eratosthenes of Cyrene, who was summoned from Athens to the position by Ptolemy III Euergetes whose reign, together with that of his Cyrenean wife Berenice, began in 247/6. If A. did indeed serve as tutor to a future king, as the papyrus suggests, then this must have been Euergetes himself, as the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus lasted from 283 until 247/6. Euergetes will have been of an age to require a tutor in the 260s, and so it is a plausible hypothesis that A, held both the royal tutorship and the royal librarianship - posts which often went together - by that decade. If this reconstruction is correct, it leaves unanswered the question whether A. succeeded the great Homeric scholar Zenodotus of Ephesus, who seems to have been the first to hold the post of Librarian, or whether there was another figure between them. If there was, the obvious candidate is Callimachus of Cyrene, who compiled catalogues of both extant and lost literature, the Pinakes, a work which brings him very close to modern notions of the functions of the librarian of a major collection.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the silence of our sources¹⁶ about his Librarianship is at least as striking as would be the fact of Callimachus not having been Librarian, and, given our total ignorance of the criteria governing royal appointments, it is best not to rely upon appeals to what might seem 'natural'.17 We may thus tentatively conclude that A. held the position of Royal Librarian in the period c. 270-45. If so, the chronological confusion in the Suda, and possibly also the story in Life B of the return from Rhodes, is neatly explained as the result of confusion with a later 'Apollonius of Alexandria', the 'eidograph' who was also Librarian.

Stories of the exile of poets are too common in ancient biography to

On the organisation of the Museum and Library cf. Pfeiffer (1968) 96-104; Fraser (1972) 1 312-35; Blum (1977) 140-70.

¹⁵ The *Pinakes* were not actually catalogues of the Library's holdings, but must, to some extent, have been based upon them, and may well have been used rather like a catalogue, cf. Pfeiffer (1968) 127-32, Blum (1977) 224-44.

¹⁶ Callimachus might, of course, have been named before A. in the lost portion of P. Oxy. 1241.

¹⁷ Such an appeal seems to lie behind the discussion in Blum (1977) 177-91, however healthy his scepticism is.



1. THE POET

5

allow us to treat the account in the two Lives with anything but the greatest suspicion. Nevertheless, some connection with Rhodes can hardly be denied: perhaps A.'s family came originally from Rhodes, or perhaps he did retire there when replaced in the library by Eratosthenes. The 'foundation poems' of which we know (below, pp. 10-12) seem to fit neatly into Egyptian (Alexandria, Naucratis) and Rhodian (Kaunos, Knidos, Rhodes) periods, but Ptolemaic interest in Rhodes and Caria was far too strong to make composition of poems celebrating these areas an unlikely undertaking in Alexandria itself.¹⁸ With the story of initial failure and ultimate success scholars have regularly linked the fact that, at six places in Book 1, the scholia cite textual variants which they attribute to the προέκδοσις, the 'preliminary edition'. 19 These variants range from one to five verses and are, on the whole, more radical changes than the variants which we find transmitted by our manuscripts and the papyri.20 Thus the scholars whose work underlies our scholia knew of a particular text which was thought to be earlier and preliminary to the vulgate. It is entirely plausible that different texts, perhaps of different parts of the poem, circulated during A.'s lifetime, as poets regularly gave readings of 'work in progress' or sent it to their friends for criticism. Whether or not the proekdosis was in fact such an 'unauthorised' early version we cannot say,21 but there is nothing in the character of the six preserved passages to suggest that the qualitative difference between the two

¹⁹ 1.285-6, 516-23, 543, 726-7 (a very doubtful case), 788-9, 801-3.

¹⁸ For Rhodes in the third century cf. the brief account by H. Heinen in The Cambridge Ancient History VII² I (Cambridge 1984) 432-3, and, more fully, R. M. Berthold, Rhodes in the hellenistic age (Ithaca/London 1984). The Rhodian republic remained neutral and on good terms with the Ptolemies through most of the third century, bound to them by important commercial ties; nevertheless, Rhodes does seem to have joined the alliance against Philadelphus in the Second Syrian War (Berthold 89-92). Kaunos was a member of the Ptolemaic alliance in the third century, and was then purchased by Rhodes early in the second century; Knidos was acquired by Rhodes through the Peace of Apamea (188).

So rightly Haslam (1978) 65. The most recent study, M. Fantuzzi, 'Varianti d'autore nelle Argonautiche di Apollonio Rodio', A. & A. 29 (1983) 146-61, sees the major difference as the greater tragic pathos of the surviving (and presumably later) version, a result of A.'s increasing distance from the 'Homeric' voice.

For some speculations cf. Fränkel (1964) 7-11. The 'parallel' of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* should not be pushed too hard: we can hardly take *Tristia* 1.7.23-30 at face value, cf. S. Hinds, *P.C.P.S.* n.s. 31 (1985) 21-7.



6

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INTRODUCTION

versions was very great or that the 'later' version was likely to meet a quite different critical reception.²² Nevertheless, the undisputed fact that at some date scholars had access to a text which seems to have differed significantly from the vulgate may suggest an origin for the stories of youthful disgrace and mature success. This would not be the only known case where colourful invention has given life to dry facts of textual history.

That Callimachus was literally A.'s 'teacher' is not impossible, if there is any truth in the tradition²³ that the former was a schoolteacher in Eleusis, a suburb of Alexandria, before moving to the royal court. Ancient biographers, however, habitually express poetic influence or similarity in terms of a pupil-teacher relationship, a family tie or the like, and so we can have little confidence in this story. We also hear that later relations between the two men were less than cordial. Callimachus is said²⁴ to have written a riddling and abusive poem called Ibis against an opponent whom later scholarship identified as A., and a brief epigram attacking Callimachus is very tenuously ascribed to A.25 This information, together with the stories in the Lives and the fact that certain Callimachean passages, most notably the conclusion of the Hymn to Apollo, can (with some effort) be imagined as attacks upon A., has led in the recent past to a romantic vision of scholarly warfare in which A. was finally driven out of Alexandria by a triumphant Callimachus. The rediscovery of the prologue to the Aitia (below, p. 37) did nothing to dampen these speculations, but an ancient commentary on the Aitia, in which A. does not seem to be listed among those whom one later scholar at least identified as Callimachus' literary opponents, brought both disappointment and consternation to modern critics.26

Very little of value can be salvaged from these bits and pieces. Where Arg. fits in relation to Callimachean poetic principles will be considered

23 Suda κ 227 s.v. Καλλίμαχος.

²⁴ Ibid.; for other references cf. Pfeiffer on Call. fr. 382.

That Book 1 only is involved need not be significant, given the process of selection by which the extant scholia have survived. On the other hand, A. may have originally circulated only the first book; here, however, we enter even deeper into pure speculation.

²⁵ A.P. 11.275 (= Apollonius fr. 13 Powell, Call. testimonium 25 Pfeiffer).

²⁶ PSI 1219, cf. Pfeiffer, Callimachus 1 3. The desire to find A.'s name somewhere in the text persists, cf. H. Herter, RE Suppl. xiii 197.



1. THE POET

7

presently (below, pp. 34–8), but it may be observed here that the fact that Callimachus claims to have been criticised for not writing 'one continuous poem...in many thousands of verses' (fr. 1.3–4) tells us nothing of what he would actually have thought of A.'s poem. There may, of course, be fire behind the ancient and modern smoke. The Museum was an argumentative place,²⁷ and even in more recent times scholars have been known to feud irrationally. The pattern of mutual abuse is certainly suggestive: the 'Apollonian' epigram refers to Callimachus as 'filth' or 'refuse' (τὸ κάθαρμα), the ibis was an Egyptian bird which was notoriously unclean and willing to eat anything,²⁸ and the Callimachean Apollo rejects the 'much filth and refuse' carried by the Assyrian river (h. 2.108–9). What is unclear, however, is whether real progress in understanding A.'s life or his poem can be derived from these scraps.

Parallels between the works of Callimachus and Arg. are numerous and striking. ²⁹ Of particular relevance are very clear parallels between passages in Arg. 4 and fragments of Aitia 1 dealing with the Argonauts' return to Greece; Callimachus also seems to have treated at least one episode from the Argonauts' outward journey in Aitia 4. ³⁰ That Aitia 1 is earlier than Arg. seems all but certain, ³¹ and Callimachean priority is also likely in the case of the parallels between Arg. and the Hymns and Hecale, but the chronology is too uncertain to allow us to assume this without further ado. ³² In any case, the fluidity of ancient 'publication' and the nature of intellectual life in Alexandria suggest that we need

²⁸ Cf. Pfeiffer on Call. fr. 382.

29 For possible echoes of Callimachus in Arg. 3 cf. nn. on 221-7, 276-7, 869-86, 932-3, 1306-25.

³⁰ For discussion cf. Pfeiffer, Callimachus II xli-xlii; Herter (1944/55) 232-5; Eichgrün (1961) 119-39; Fraser (1972) 1 637-40; Vian III 34-5. For Argonautic material in Aitia 4 cf. frr. 108-9 with the diegesis.

31 Call. fr. 12.6 is reworked at Arg. 4.1216 and repeated at Arg. 1.1309, cf. Pfeiffer on Call. fr. 18.9ff. It would be nice if Callimachus was one of the πρότεροι appealed to at Arg. 4.985; Vian III 35, however, sees there a distinction between archaic and modern writers.

³² Cf. nn. on 869-86, 927-31, 932-3; Hunter (1986) 57-60. A. W. Bulloch, A.J.P. 98 (1977) 97-123, argues for the priority of Arg. 2.444-5 over Call. h. 5.103.

²⁷ Cf. Callimachus, *Iambus* τ and, most famously, Timon, SH 786 'In teeming Egypt are fed many fenced-in pedants (βιβλισκοὶ χαρσκῖτσι), endlessly quarrelling in the Muses' birdcage.'



INTRODUCTION

not envisage in every case a reworking by one poet of a finished and 'published' poem by the other. Poets constantly fed off each other's ideas in ways which defy simple analysis into original and imitation. If, however, it is true that Arg. owes a considerable debt to the Aitia, we may hope to establish a rough chronology for A.'s epic; unfortunately, the composition of Callimachus' great poem is one of the thorniest problems of Hellenistic poetic chronology.

The extant proem to the Aitia dates from late in Callimachus' career (fr. 1.6, 37-8), and two passages of Books 3 and 4 in honour of Euergetes' wife Berenice must be later than 247/6.33 There are also tempting, if not strictly compelling, reasons for placing the Hymn to Apollo, which has striking correspondences with Arg., in this late period.34 The Callimachean parallels do not, however, necessarily fix a date for the 'final' version of Arg. in the 240s, as it is very likely that either individual elegies or a collected 'first edition' of the Aitia circulated in Alexandria well before this date, although there is no certain argument for the hypothesis.35 A rather earlier date for Arg. is perhaps also suggested by the obvious correspondences between the Apollonian and Theocritean versions of the stories of Hylas and Amycus (Theocr. 13 and 22);36 what little evidence there is for Theocritus' date points to the earlier, rather than the later, period of

³⁸ These are the so-called *Victoria Berenices* (SH 254-69) and the Coma Berenices (fr. 110, Catullus 66). For a possible echo of Aitia fr. 1 in Arg. cf. 874-5n., and an elaborate network of echoes between Callimachus, A., Catullus and Virgil perhaps suggests a connection between Arg. 4.1019-22 and the Coma, cf. Hunter (1987) 138-9.

³⁴ For the sceptical view cf. F. Williams, Callimachus, Hymn to Apollo (Oxford 1978) 2.

³⁵ Fr. 1.37-8 only suggests that Call. wrote poetry as a young man, and Schol. Flor. 17-18 (Pfeiffer 1 11) - Call. was ἀρτιγένειος when he met the Muses—is a literary fancy which cannot be pressed very hard. It seems natural to assume that the Telchines must have had poems to complain about in order to prompt the extant reply; here too, however, we should not draw too many biographical conclusions from what may in part be a programmatic strategy familiar from poets as different as Pindar, for whom cf. Hopkinson (1988) 88-9, and Terence. For discussion of the composition of the Aitia cf. P. J. Parsons, Z.P.E. 25 (1977) 1-50; Bulloch (1985) 553-7; P. E. Knox, G.R.B.S. 26 (1985) 59-65; A. S. Hollis, C.Q. n.s. 36 (1986) 467-71.

³⁶ For possible echoes of Theocritus in Arg. 3 cf. nn. on 220-1, 347-8 and 640; for [Theocr.] 25 cf. 242-6n., 1306-25n.



1. THE POET

Philadelphus' reign.³⁷ Finally, it must be stressed that imitation and reworking of the poetry of a contemporary is normally a mark, not of hostility, but of homage and affiliation.³⁸ Compelling reasons have yet to be found why this is not the case also with Callimachus, Theocritus and Apollonius.

ii. Works other than Argonautica39

About A.'s considerable output in both poetry and prose we are very poorly informed, but even scraps of information can help to place Arg. in its literary and intellectual context.

One late source⁴⁰ refers to A.'s epigrams, but none survive, if the problematic distich about Callimachus is excluded (above, p. 6). The citation is for a story of metamorphosis of a kind familiar both in Arg. 41 and A.'s 'foundation poems' (below, pp. 10-12). The popularity of the epigram form with Alexandrian poets requires no illustration. 42

Three choliambic⁴³ verses survive from a poem called Kanobos (frr. 1-2 Powell), which must have been concerned with the Ptolemaic temple of Sarapis at Kanobos (modern Abukir) on the coast east of Alexandria. Both subject and metre⁴⁴ place this poem in the mainstream of Ptolemaic 'court poetry'. It is likely that the poem included the story of the eponymous Kanobos, Menelaus' steersman, who was killed by a snake as he slept on the Egyptian beach and gave his name to the place where he was buried. In some versions of this story he was loved with an unrequited passion by the Egyptian princess

³⁷ Cf. Gow's edition 1 xv-xviii, and the remarks of M. Campbell, Hermes 102

³⁸ For the general principles involved cf. D. A. Russell, 'De imitatione' in D. West and A. Woodman, eds., Creative imitation and Latin literature (Cambridge 1979) 1-16.

³⁹ The standard collection of poetic fragments is J. U. Powell, Collectanea Alexandrina (Oxford 1925) 4-8; cf. also J. Michaelis, De Apollonii Rhodii fragmentis (diss. Halle 1875).

Antoninus Liberalis 23 (superscription, on the authority of Pamphilus).

⁴¹ Cf. 1.1063-9 (Cleite), 4.596-611 (the Heliades).

⁴² For a general survey cf. Fraser (1972) 1 553-617, Hopkinson (1988) 243-71.

⁴³ The 'choliamb' differs from the iambic trimeter in that the penultimate syllable of the verse is long.

⁴⁴ Cf. Herondas and Callimachus, Iambi.



INTRODUCTION

10

Theonoe, a lady of magical powers; such a scenario brings us tantalisingly close to the story of Jason and Medea.⁴⁵

The other poems of which we know all concern the mythical foundations of cities. This subject for poetry was a very old one, but was much favoured by Alexandrian poets, in keeping with their deep interest in all aspects of Greek cult and history. Callimachus treated the foundation of the Sicilian cities in *Aitia* 2 and also wrote a prose work on 'Foundations'. To what extent poems of this kind might reflect Ptolemaic political concerns it is impossible to say, but it is not difficult to see a place for such poetry under royal patronage.⁴⁶

The Foundation of Kaunos (a city on the Carian coast opposite Rhodes) seems to have included the stories of Caunus, who left Miletus to escape the incestuous passion of his sister Byblis, and of Lyrcus, a tale of passion and recognition. In many extant versions of the former tale Byblis is metamorphosed into a fountain after she has killed herself, a myth which resembles that of the tragic Cleite in the first book of Arg. It is noteworthy that Ovid's portrayal of Byblis (Met. 9.454-665) seems clearly indebted to A.'s Medea. Med Of the Foundation of Alexandria we know only that it gave the same origin for Egyptian snakes as is found at Arg. 4.1513-17, but the poem clearly dealt primarily with the city's mythical origins, rather than its foundation by Alexander, although it may well have looked forward to contemporary history. The Foundation of Naucratis included the story of Pompilus, a Milesian boatman who

⁴⁵ The basic discussion is E. Maass, Aratea (Berlin 1892) 359-69, rejected on insufficient grounds by Wilamowitz (1924) II 255-6; cf. also D. A. van Krevelen, Rh.M. 104 (1961) 128-31. For A.'s interest in snakebite cf. Arg. 4.1502ff. (Mopsus) and fr. 4 Powell. It may be worth suggesting that 4.1516 όσσαι κυανέου στάγες αίματος ούδος ἵκοντο, of the blood dripping from the Gorgon's head from which snakes were created, contains an alternative etymology for αίμορροῖς, the name of the snake which bit Kanobos; for the usual etymology, 'whose bite makes your blood flow', cf. Nic. Ther. 282-319, Lucan 9.806-14.

⁴⁶ On this genre cf. B. Schmid, Studien zu griechischen Kitsissagen (diss. Freiburg i.d. Schweiz 1947); Cairns (1979) 68-70; T. J. Cornell, 'Gründer', Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum XII 1107-45.

⁴⁷ Parthenius, Erot. Path. 1 and 11.

⁴⁸ Arg. 3.636 ~ Met. 9.474, Arg. 3.645-55 ~ Met. 9.522-7 (Ovid transfers Medea's hesitation on the threshold to Byblis' hesitations while writing). Clausen (1987) 8 discusses the apparent reworking of Arg. 1.1064-6 (Cleite) by Parthenius himself in verses on Byblis quoted in Erot. Path. 11; the Foundation of Kaunos, however, can hardly be left out of consideration.