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P.Mich. inv. 2754: New Readings of Alcidamas, "On Homer"

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THIS ESSAY OFFERS a new presentation of *P.Mich. inv. 2754*, the most significant of the five surviving papyrus witnesses to the *Certamen*, or *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod*. To my knowledge, the papyrus has not been examined closely since J. G. Winter's *editio princeps* in 1925, apart from one occasion in 1968 (G. Koniaris).¹ My principal aim in what follows is to present a proper, corrected text of the Michigan papyrus based on autopsy with the aid of a binocular microscope. A secondary aim is to hint at some of the implications that the papyrus holds for a reinterpretation of the *Certamen*, first taken by itself and then in the context of Alcidamas' *oeuvre* and against the context of the history of interpretations of Alcidamas by modern scholars. A fuller treatment of the *Certamen* must wait for another occasion.

I begin with a brief section on the history and significance of the papyrus. A diplomatic transcript of the papyrus follows, then a finalized text with critical apparatus and accompanying translation. Isolated issues concerning some of the more interesting interpretive findings round out the essay.

1. HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PAPYRUS

The *Certamen* has had a checkered history, involving, among other things, a belated clash between Friedrich Nietzsche (writing in the early 1870s) and Ulrich von Wilamowitz (responding in 1916) and a subsequent vindication of Nietzsche from an unexpected corner.² Nietzsche drew attention to the *Certamen* with

1. Winter 1925; Koniaris read the papyrus in 1968 (1971a, 107 n. 5). The sole exception is from 2002, which involved a single word (see n. 22 below). All other conjectures and "readings" of the papyrus, of which there are a considerable number, were based on Winter's photograph or later reproductions of the same. This is a curious chapter in the history of philology. Not only did scholars propose influential readings without ever having seen the papyrus (as in the case of C. H. Roberts; see Dodds 1952, 187; West 1967, 437 *ap. l.* 20), but Winter's own edition was in places based on readings made for him based on the photograph. As Winter (1925, 125) prefaces his text: "In studying the text I have received much help from Professor [A. S.] Hunt *who has seen the photograph and emended my original transcript*" (emphasis mine). For this and other reasons, Winter's edition is not the diplomatic transcript of the papyrus that it claims to be. More on this below.

2. Nietzsche 1870; 1871; 1873; Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1916a, 401–2, describing Nietzsche's hypothesis about Alcidamantine authorship as "dubious" and a worthless "figment of the imagination," though he did accept one of Nietzsche's textual transpositions (p. 402 n. 1). Wilamowitz's own "Volksbuch" hypothesis, which posited a sixth-century origin for the contest of Homer and Hesiod in the form of a compilation, in prose and meter, of preexisting folklore, originated in this rebuttal of Nietzsche, as a counter-theory. Bergk (1883, 63–66) and Meyer (1892, 377–80) had earlier argued, against Nietzsche in favor of a seventh-century origin for the contest in the form of a poem belonging to the repertoire of rhapsodes and that survived as a school text for memorization in late fifth-century Athens. Despite having had early adherents, Wilamowitz's hypothesis later met with similar disapproval. See Latacz 2014, 12–13 and 15–20 for a historical perspective on Nietzsche's contributions to the study of the *Certamen*, including Wilamowitz's response.

a pair of articles (1870, 1873) and the first modern edition of the text (1871) since Henricus Stephanus' *editio princeps* of 1573.³ Both editions were based on the sole surviving manuscript of the work, the fourteenth-century Florentine *Codex Laurentianus*. Nietzsche's edition marked an advance on that by Stephanus, but he also entertained theories about the work's authorship and its place in ancient literary history that would shape all future scholarship on this one work. The *Certamen* later attracted renewed attention when two different papyri containing traces of what appears to be the same work at different stages of its development were discovered in Egypt and subsequently published, first in 1891 (*P.Petr.* I 25 (1), ed. J. P. Mahaffy) and then in 1925 (*P.Mich. inv.* 2754, ed. J. G. Winter), the latter equipped with a *subscriptio* indicating the work's author (see below).⁴ A few further papyrus scraps have since come to light, all of them part of the same complex of materials, all of them paralleling the manuscript version of the *Certamen* printed in the *opera minora* of Homer by Allen with occasional slight variations, but none of them significant enough to add materially to the debate.⁵

The discoveries by Mahaffy and Winter confirmed Nietzsche's genial if controversial ascription of the original core of the *Certamen* to Alcidas of Elea, the fourth-century sophist and pupil of Gorgias.⁶ Nietzsche was committed to an insane asylum before Mahaffy's publication could confirm his findings from two decades earlier. These later scholars' conclusions, which have since found broad but not unanimous acceptance, were based on the following correspondences:

- a. *Cert.* 239–40 Allen: . . . , ὧς φησιν Ἀλκιδάμας ἐν Μουσείῳ, concerning a story about Hesiod's death.⁷
- b. Stobaeus 4.52.22: ἐκ τοῦ Ἀλκιδάμαντος Μουσείου, quoting two verses by Homer in his exchange with Hesiod in their poetic contest (*Cert.* 78–79); first connected by Nietzsche to the *Certamen* and to the problem of its authorship.
- c. *P.Petrie* I 25 (1), ed. Mahaffy 1891, 70–73 = *P.Lond. Lit.* 191 (Milne 1927, 157) = p. 225 Allen, quoting thirty-two verses from the poetic contest (*Cert.* 69–101), with slight variations, and dating from the mid- to late third century BCE. Prior to Mahaffy's publication, the *Certamen* could not be dated to a time before Hadrian, who is mentioned at *Cert.* 33.
- d. *P.Mich. inv.* 2754.24–25, ed. Winter 1925: [Ἀλκ]ιδάμαντος | περὶ Ὀμήρου. The *subscriptio* confirms Alcidas' authorship of some portion of the *Certamen*, the last twelve lines of which are repeated nearly verbatim in the papyrus. This portion would have included a version of Homer's death

3. Stephanus 1573; Nietzsche 1871. Nietzsche had his friend and colleague Erwin Rohde collate Stephanus' transcription with the Laurentian codex while Rohde was in Florence in 1869.

4. Mahaffy 1891; rpt. in Homer, OCT 5:225 (Allen); Winter 1925.

5. *P.Ath.Soc.Pap. inv.* M2 (second century BCE), quoting *Cert.* 226–35 (ed. Mandilaras 1990); *P.Freib. I 1b inv.* 12 (second–first century BCE), quoting *Cert.* 213–14 (ed. Aly 1914); *PDuk. Inv.* 665 (sixth–seventh century CE), quoting *Cert.* 309–12 (ed. Menci 2012).

6. See Meyer 1892, 378 n. 1, rejecting both Nietzsche's hypothesis and Mahaffy's confirmation of it. Wilamowitz sided with Meyer against Nietzsche, as did Körte (1927). More recently, Kirk (1950), Dodds (1952), Koniaris (1971a), and Heldmann (1982) share this skepticism.

7. References to the *Certamen* by line number alone are to Allen's (1912) edition.

as well as his genealogy and literary output ([τὸ γ]ένος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἄλληλην ποί|ησιν, 20–21). The papyrus dates from the second to early third century BCE.

The remaining papyri indicate that the *Certamen* was widely copied, possibly for use in schools.⁸

The discovery of *P.Mich. inv. 2754* was significant in at least two ways. First, it threw an important light on the history of Homeric scholarship and criticism at an early stage of the tradition. Alcidas could now be firmly connected to the few but important indications that parts of the *Certamen* were in circulation in his own day and possibly as early as the sixth century. Heraclitus, to be discussed below, provides one of several corroborating clues. The presence of two hexameters in the *Certamen* (lines 107–8) that are also found with small variations in a similar context in Aristophanes' *Peace* from 421 BCE (lines 1282–83) is another. Not only did the *Certamen* form a vital strand in the learned and very likely also popular reception of Homer down to the time of Plato and Isocrates, but it also provided a foundation for later developments. How much of the *Certamen* in its extant form stems from Alcidas and what the nature and title of his work were remain difficult questions, and these will be touched on below.

Second, and relatedly, the papyrus features one of the most celebrated and controversial moments of Homer's life in the ancient biographical tradition beyond his legendary contest with Hesiod (which Homer unexpectedly lost): namely, his encounter with two fisher boys on the island of Ios who posed a riddle that he could not solve. The event and its outcome occasioned Homer's death, exactly as the Delphic oracle had warned him ("Beware the young boys' riddle . . .," *Cert.* 60).⁹ In later renditions of this story, its several elements—the ominous oracle, the riddle followed by Homer's reaction to it (vexation, grief, or depression), and his death three days later—can appear together (as in the *Certamen*) or separately. The latter possibility is significant. It indicates that the story was sufficiently popular that individual elements were capable by themselves of conjuring up the memory of the ensemble. So, for example, the language of the oracle is repeated verbatim in an anonymous Hellenistic epigram (*Anth. Plan.* 14.65) and by Pausanias (10.24.2), who found it engraved on a statue of Homer at Delphi, but neither of these sources reproduces the rest of the story, just as the story of the riddle could be repeated with or without any mention of Homer's vexation or his death (both, one assumes, were implied).¹⁰

The anecdote about the riddle has a long pedigree. Heraclitus offers it as proof that Homer, despite being "wiser than all the other Greeks," was no less vulnerable to deception than they:

Regarding knowledge of things that are evident [i.e., visible] (πρὸς τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν φανερῶν), humans are fooled (ἐξηπάτηνται . . . οἱ ἄνθρωποι) in the same way as Homer. . . . For boys who were killing lice (φθειρας κατακτείνοντες) fooled him (έκεῖνον . . . ἐξηπάτησαν)

8. See Bassino 2012 and now Bassino 2019 for discussion.

9. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

10. *Anth. Pal.* 9.448 is an example of the latter, as is a Pompeian wall painting (both instances will be discussed momentarily). The implication of death may have been carried by the very word for "lice." See next note.

by saying, “The ones we saw and caught, we are leaving behind; the ones we did not see or catch, we are carrying with us (ὅσα εἶδομεν καὶ ἐλάβομεν, ταῦτα ἀπολείπομεν, ὅσα δὲ οὔτε εἶδομεν οὔτ’ ἐλάβομεν, ταῦτα φέρομεν)” (Hippolytus *Ref.* 9.9.6 = Heraclitus B56 DK = D22 Laks and Most).

The fragment as it is preserved makes no mention of the oracle or of Homer’s subsequent fate, but, as we just saw, that by itself proves nothing. It is conceivable that Heraclitus did make the connection between the oracle, the riddle, and Homer’s death in the original text, and that Hippolytus decided not to include these details, mainly because they contributed little to his discussion of the visible and the invisible in Heraclitus’ thought at this point in his treatise. But it is equally conceivable that neither Hippolytus nor Heraclitus felt the need to spell out the connections: they were implicitly understood.¹¹ The criticism of Homer will in that case have been threefold: not only is the poet blind to the meaning of the riddle (which involves a failure to see and to “catch” what it says, or even to see that it is a riddle at all), but he is also blind to his own lurking death (as shown by his failure to recognize that the moment has come), while the lice are nowhere to be seen. Instead, they are banished to the realm of the invisible, whether in their absence (having been left behind) or in their presence (being too tiny to spot and to remove). A veritable MacGuffin, or—if one prefers—a red herring, the lice are no more than a pretext for confounding and ultimately undoing Homer. Indeed, they need not exist at all except as momentary play of language.¹² Viewed in this way, the riddle appears tailor-made to mock Homer’s physical and mental blindness, a problem that would preoccupy his later biographers to no end.

The riddle of the lice became a staple of the tradition, if it was not already this before Heraclitus.¹³ It was retold in epigrams by Alcaeus of Messene in the third century BCE (*Anth. Pal.* 7.1 = 11 HE) and by a certain Archias (of Antioch?) (*Anth. Pal.* 7.213 = 21 GP), but it also appeared as a self-standing riddle in an epigrammatic collection of riddles (*Anth. Pal.* 9.448 [Anon.]). It features in five of the ten or so surviving *Lives* of Homer (the number depends on how these are counted), only one of which attempts to correct the record in Homer’s favor.¹⁴ And it was given pictorial form in the House of Epigrams in Pompeii, where a wall painting shows Homer seated on a throne being approached by

11. The more so if, as Bollack and Wismann (1972, 194–95) suggest, the word for louse (φθεῖρ) already conjures up the idea of death and destruction (φθειρω), while the juxtaposition of φθειρας κατακτείνοντες underscores the association (possibly in a pointed and paradoxical way: for what does it mean to “kill the killers”?). For the antiquity of the association, see Herodian (τὸ μὲν φθεῖρ ἀπὸ τοῦ φθειρω, *GG* 3.2:599.12 Lentz) and Galen(?) *On Theriac to Piso* 290.8–10 Kühn = Leigh, ed. 2016, 158.2–3. For good discussion, see Kahn 1979, 111–12; also Kahane 2005.

12. See Hitchcock in Truffaut 1967, 98–100, on “MacGuffin.” Fishing and seafaring have dark resonances of their own. See nn. 16 and 43 below.

13. Most scholars accept that the tradition predates Heraclitus, e.g., Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1916a, 435; Kirk 1950; Kahn 1979, 111–12; Richardson 1981, 1–2; Kivilo 2011, 93, 97; Bassino 2019, 191.

14. [Hdt.] *Vit. Hom.* 216.507–9 Allen (see n. 16 below). The other four are [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 242.63–74 Allen, *Vit. Hom.* 4 (Anon. Scor. I) 246.17–25 Allen, *Vit. Hom.* 5 (Anon. Scor. II) 249.37–250.52 Allen, *Vit. Hom.* 6 (Anon. Rom.) 253.58–64. Wilamowitz (1916b) lists eleven *Lives* to Allen’s ten (he adds excerpts from Pausanias and Plutarch, and counts the *Certamen* and the Flinders papyrus as separate items). Proclus repeats the story in a summary of earlier biographies (*Chrest.* 100.13–101.1 Allen), as does Tzetzes (*Chil.* 13.658–65, in Allen 1912, p. 255) and the *Suda* (η 162, ο 251). Further sources are discussed in Kindstrand 1979, 41–42.

two fisher boys and looking down at them darkly, with the labels “Homer” and “Fishers” hovering overhead and, written out below, the famous punch line (“ὄσσ’ ἔλομεν,” etc.) that occasioned the poet’s final vexation and death. This is all that was needed to bring the entire moment back to life.¹⁵

A question in these later iterations of the story was whether Homer’s being unable to solve, let alone recognize, the riddle was the cause of his death (as in the *Greek Anthology* and some of the *Lives*) or just an antecedent factor (as in the *Certamen*). In the *Certamen*, Homer, after hearing the riddle and its solution, slips in the mud, falls on his side, and dies three days later. The ignominy is evident, and typical of the Homeric tradition’s seamier underside, but the exact causal relationship of Homer’s failure to grasp the riddle and his death is left open. Later or just other versions fill in this gap, each adding a different hue to the underlying story.¹⁶ *P.Mich. inv. 2754* follows nearly verbatim the version that is found in the *Certamen*: it suggests without making explicit the causal connection between Homer’s encounter with the riddle and his subsequent death. Differently from the *Certamen* version, but in keeping with the line of attack that descends from Heraclitus, it too plays on the disputed fact of Homer’s physical and mental blindness. The fisher boys “see” Homer and exploit their advantage

15. Dilthey 1876, 302–5; Winter 1925, 127; Strocka 1995, 281–82; Prioux 2008, 37–38, 55–56; Bergmann 2007, 71–76. Homer’s enthronement in the image, signaling his near-divine status, coupled with his puzzled look, compresses the double ending of the *Certamen* in a single snapshot.

16. On the tradition’s underside, see Porter 2018 and forthcoming. Homer’s mental state after failing to understand the riddle is variously described and either implicitly or explicitly is made into the cause of his death in the following texts: *Anth. Pal.* 7.1 = Alcaeus 11 HE; *Anth. Pal.* 7.213 = Archias 21 GP; the anonymous Roman *Life of Homer* (253.58 Allen); the anonymous *Vita Scorialensis* I (246.17–19 Allen); [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* (242.70–71 Allen); Proclus (100.23 Allen); and Tzetztes, *Schol. ad Exegesis in Iliadem*, ad 57.8, 458.5–11 Papatthomopoulos. The pseudo-Herodotean *Life* will have none of these explanations, and it takes issue with them all (216.507–9 Allen). Homer’s reactions may seem extreme, but, as it happens, dying from bafflement is not unparalleled in early Greek literature. A fragment from the *Melampodia* attributed to Hesiod (frag. 278 M-W = Strabo 14.1.27) describes a riddling contest between Mopsus and Calchas that Calchas loses, only to die straightaway of grief and shame (διὰ λῶπην ἀποθανεῖν/ἀποθανεῖν ὑπὸ λῶπης)—so Strabo, citing Pherecydes (*FGrH* 3 F 142). The language is echoed in one of the *Lives*: διὰ λῶπην . . . τελευτήσαι (246.17–18 Allen). And as two later accounts have it, Calchas too takes his own life (Conon *FGrH* 26 F 1.6; Tzetztes in Lycophr. 427 Scheer). Whether the *Melampodia* influenced the *Certamen* or whether both are reflecting an earlier folkloric motif is unclear. See Vogt 1959, 204 n. 31; Kindstrand 1979, 42; Levine 2002–3, 143–44. The *Suda* (η 162), glossing the verb in *Anth. Pal.* 7.1.1–2 = Alcaeus 11.62–63 HE (παῖδες Ὀμηρον | ἤκαζον), provides a further link: Ἠκαζον· ἠρώων τὸν αἰοδὸν Ἴω ἐνὶ παῖδες Ὀμηρον ἤκαζον, ἐκ Μουσεῶν γρίφον ὑφηνάμενοι, ἀντὶ τοῦ ἐλῶπῃσαν. A unique variant is found in Isaac Porphyrogenitus, *Praefatio in Homerum* 14, who states that Homer *blinded himself* out of embarrassment and shame at having failed to solve the riddle—a talent for which he had enjoyed greatest renown (κλέος)—and then, depressed, took his own life. It is just possible that the story of Homer’s death was inspired by *Od.* 11.134, where Tiresias prophesies Odysseus’ death ἐξ ἁλός, “from the sea.” (A different understanding of this prophecy was known from the *Telegony* and widely discussed in antiquity. See West 2013 and Burgess 2014 on the ambiguity of ἐξ ἁλός.) As is noted by Levine (2002–3, 152), the fisher boys are said to be ἀφ’ ἀλείας ἐρχομένων, “coming from fishing,” when Homer meets them by the seashore at *Cert.* 324, thereby fulfilling a prophecy of his own, as issued by Delphi. A further correspondence was suggested by Rebecca Lämmle at the Cambridge seminar: just as Odysseus’ death is prophesied to come from the sea after reaching an inland location that is innocent of the sea, so too are the boys addressed as Arcadian hunters (*Cert.* 326) but portrayed as fishers. Parallels and connections between Homer and Odysseus were rife in the biographical tradition. According to the *Certamen* itself, Homer was even said to be an “Ithacan” and the offspring of Telemachus (*Cert.* 23, 39; cf. *Suda* ο 251 = 251.6 Allen). On the troubling connotations of fish in relation to Homer (they are un-Iliadic and therefore lowly and debasing, but they can also be ominous and deadly), see Kneebone 2007, 288, 292–93 and Levine 2002–3, 152, who notes that in post-Homeric myth Odysseus is said to die of a wound from a fish-bone, thus fulfilling Tiresias’ prophecy. Alcidas has Odysseus accuse Palamedes of having a fisherman for a father (2.12 Avezzù), evidently a damning trait. The metapoetic references are no less prominent (Rosen 1990), albeit with a sad twist: Hesiod’s scruples against seafaring notwithstanding, the sea proves fatal to him in the *Certamen*, as it does to Homer, despite obscure warnings by oracles in each case. See p. 21 below.

with a riddle (οἱ δὲ ὄρωντες[ς αὐ]τὸν ἐσχεδίασαν τόνδε τ[ὸ] γ στίχον),¹⁷ but he fails to “see” what they mean, let alone the lice they name, which are nowhere to be found and need have no material existence at all: they are no more than a vehicle of a joke with at best a symbolic meaning. The riddle of the lice has a cruel sting indeed. Homer’s blindness was a permanent question mark in the tradition (“What did Homer *really* see?”), and from there doubts of a deeper kind naturally crept in. His most distinctive physical trait turned out to be his greatest liability, and this dilemma was productive fodder for anyone who sought to tell the story of his life (or death), quite possibly long before Heraclitus appeared on the scene.¹⁸ With this background in mind, we may turn now to the papyrus.

2. THE PAPYRUS

I read the papyrus for the first time in the summer of 2002 and then again on several occasions, most recently in August of 2018. In 2002 I discovered that the papyrus was badly mounted: two pieces had been turned in the wrong direction and were dangling by bare papyrus fibers, one piece being located in the middle of lines 9 and 10 (the tops of three letters, ραφ), the other in line 19 (a single letter, ς in ταυτης). This reflected the condition of the papyrus from the date of its first mounting, as a comparison with Winter’s photograph in *TAPA* shows. It is doubtful that the papyrus, once mounted between two plates of glass in 1925, had ever been opened again, although Winter must have compensated for the rotation of the letters as best he could in the course of reading the papyrus. Once the pieces were rotated back into place by the staff of the Michigan collection in August of 2002, the papyrus was remounted, digitally rephotographed at high resolution, and then posted on the Michigan and APIS sites, where the readings to be offered below can now be more or less confirmed.¹⁹ It is hoped that the following represents at the very least a more definitive text of the papyrus, which remains in places difficult to read and in need of conjectures at critical junctures, nor do all the currently available conjectures convince, my own included. Nevertheless, some progress has been made.

A. Diplomatic Text

οιδεορωντες[. . .]τονεσχεδιασαντονδετ[.] γ
 στιχον† [ο]σσελ[.] [β]ογλ[.] πομεσθοσκουελαβον

17. This line has no equivalent in the *Certamen*, where it is Homer who notices the boys—how, we are not told—and initiates the exchange.

18. The *Lives* are radically inconsistent on the question of Homer’s blindness, though nearly all of them make Homer blind by the end of his life, including, most relevantly *Vit. Hom.* 5 (Anon. Scor. II) 249.37–39 Allen, which states that Homer was blind when he heard the fisher boys approaching him. (This appears as Aristotle frag. 20.3 Gigon, but the attribution seems doubtful.) The Ps.-Plutarchan *Life* and Proclus are notable outliers: they have Homer catching sight of the boys from afar (ἐθεάσατο ἀλιεῖς προσπλέοντας, [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 1.4, 3.54 Kindstrand = 242.63 Allen; θεασάμενον ἀλιεῖς, Procl. *Chrest.* 100.14 Allen), as does the Pompeian mural depicting this episode, to judge from its modern reproduction (*MonInst* 10 [1876] pl. XXXV.2, a drawing that illustrates Dilthey 1876, 300–305; it was produced before the fresco became badly deteriorated). The *Certamen* pictures Homer as both blind and sighted (and literate), almost agnostically. Is he blind at the end of the *Certamen*? The question has some bearing on Homer’s last act, his devising of his own epitaph, about which more below.

19. More or less, because the original digital image, though large (99.7 MB and 600 dpi; see <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?id=S-APIS-X-1622%5D2754V.TIF>), is still not as accurate as autopsys.

φερομε[.]θα—οδεουδύγαμενοςευρειντολε—
 χθενηρετοαυτουο[. .]λεγοιενοιδεεφασανε—
 5 φαλειανοιχομεγο[. . .]ευσαιμενουδενκαθη-
 μενο`ί[.]εφ[.]ειρ[ι]ζεσθαιτωνδεφθειρωνουσελα-
 βοναυτουκατα[.]ποιενουοδουκελαβονεν >
 τοιςτριβωσινετι αποφερειναναμνησθειςδε—
 τουμαγτει[ο]υ[. . .]ηκαταστροφηαυτωι[ο]υ[.]
 10 βίουηκεν, γράφειειςεαυτονεπιγραμματοδε—
 ενθαδ[.]τήνιερ[.]νκεφαληνκατάγαγιακαλυ-
 ψεαν`δ`ρώγηρωφγκοςμητοραθειονομηρογ
 καιαν[.]ναχωρ᾽ν`παληουοντοσολισθανεικαιπε
 15 κωνεπιπλευραν` ουτωςφασινετελευτηεν
 περιτουτουμεγουνποιεισθαιτηναρετηνποι
 ησομενμαλισταδ`ορωντουοιστορικουοθου
 μαζομενουσ`ομηρογουνδιατουτοκαιζων
 καιαποθανωνετιμηταιπαραπασινανθρω
 20 ποιςταυτηςγουναυτωτηςπαιδιαςχαρινα—
 ποδιδω[.]ενοσαυτουκαιτηναλληγηποι
 ησινδιακ[. . .]ειαςμνημηστοιςβουλομε
 νοιςφι[. . . . (.)]ειντωνελληνωνει`ς`τοκοινων
 παραδο[. . (.)]
 . . .]ιδαμαντος
 25 περι`ομηρου

B. Restored Text (*Ed. princ.* Winter 1925)²⁰

οί δὲ ὄρῳντε[ς αὐ]τὸν ἐσχεδίασαν τὸνδε τ[ὸ]ν
 στίχον· ὅσσ' ἐλομεν₁ λ[ι] πόμεσθ', ὅσσ' οὐκ ἐλομεν₁
 φερόμε[σ]θα. ὁ δὲ οὐ δυνάμενος εὐρεῖν τὸ λε-
 5 φ' ἀλείαν οἰχόμεγο[ι ἀγρ]εῦσαι μὲν οὐδέν, καθή-
 μενο`ί [δ]ὲ φ[θ]ειρίζεσθαι, τῶν δὲ φθειρῶν οὐς ἔλα-
 βον αὐτοῦ κατα[λ]ιπεῖν, οὐς δ' οὐκ ἔλαβον ἐν
 τοῖς τρίβωσιν ἔτι ἀποφέρειν. ἀναμνησθεις δὲ
 10 τοῦ μαγτει[ο]υ, ὅ[τι] ἢ καταστροφή αὐτῶι τ[ο]υ[δ]
 βίου ἦκεν, γράφει εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπίγραμμα τόδε·
 ἔνθαδ[ε] τήν ἱερ[ή]ν κεφαλὴν κατὰ γαῖα κάλυ-
 ψε | ἀγ' δ' ῥῶν ἠρώων κοσμήτορα θεῖον Ὅμηρον.
 και ἀν[α]χωρῶ ἄν' ἱτηλοῦ ὄντος ὀλισθάνει και πε-
 15 σῶν ἐπὶ πλευρᾶν· οὕτως, φασίν, ἐτελεύτησεν.
 περι τούτου μὲν οὖν ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἀρετὴν π<ε>ι-
 <ρά>σομεν, μάλιστα δ' ὄρῳν τοὺς ἱστορικοὺς θαυ-
 μαζομένους. Ὅμηρος γοῦν διὰ τοῦτο και ζῶν
 και ἀποθανῶν εἰτιμηται παρά πᾶσιν ἀνθρώ-

20. All corrections and restorations are Winter's unless otherwise noted. Unattributed readings of letters and punctuation are based on my own reading of the papyrus.

20 ποῖς. ταύτης γοῦν αὐτῶ<ι> τῆς παιδιᾶς χάριν ἀ-
ποδίδω[μι, τὸ γ]ενος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ποί-
ησιν δι' ἀκ[ριβ]είας μνήμης τοῖς βουλομέ-
νοις φιλ[ιστορ]εῖν τῶν Ἑλλήνων εἰς τὸ κοινὸν
παραδο[ύς].

25 [Ἀλκ]ιδάμαντος
περὶ Ὀμήρου

1–14 ~ *Cert.* 327–38 **1** ρ or φ ω or ο τε (τ or γ, ζ; traces of upper curve and right half of cross-bar of ε) τ[or γ], ζ[, π[γ or μ **2** punctuating space after στιχον εἰλομενι (bis) Winter (corrected from *Cert.* 328): εἰλοβον (bis) pap. β or κ (right foot) γ or μ **3** interpunction mark (short dash) after θα υ (faint traces of top angle) γ or μ (connected angle of vertical and downward sloping strokes) **4** ρ rather than ι, γ, η, or μ (trace of lower left descender) ε or θ ο or ς, ε λ or α, μ, δ **5** οἰχόμενοι Hunt *ap.* Winter ι (trace of vertical stroke) χ (bottom strokes) ο or ς, ε, ω μ (traces) γ likelier than ι **6** ι inserted over γ (correction) ζ or γ ς or ε θ (top trace) α (trace of right foot) ι (lower half of vertical descender) ε or ς, ο **7** τ (vertical stroke, rubbed and faint) κατα[λ]ιπειν Winter, correcting κατα[.]ιπειν pap. ι (trace of foot of vertical descender) κατα[λ]ιπειν Koniaris, Avezzù > (filler): read as τ and secluded by Koniaris **8** ετι Porter τ, γ, or ζ (trace of top horizontal bar; γ is excluded) ι (upper vertical stroke, but not part of θ or ν) ε[ν]θ' Winter: ε[ν]θ<εν>, ε[σ]θ<ω> (?) Avezzù ἀποφέρειν Winter: ε[ν]αποφέρειν Korte: ἐναποφέρειν Koniaris ς or ε δ likelier than μ; τ or γ, π, ζ, η (dot of top left cross-bar) ι (upper vertical) ι (trace of foot) τ or γ ο or φ **10** κ (faint, rubbed traces compatible with κ) γ or μ γράφει Litinas γ or τ rather than π ρ rather than ο α or λ φ (trace of upper vertical stroke, too high for any other letter) π[οι]εῖ or [ε]π[οι]εῖ Winter μ or ν, δ, α α or δ ο or ς δ or ζ **11** δ or α ρ or φ λ or α, δ **12** γ or μ ὀδ' correction inserted above θ ωγ (γ or μ) ωγ (ω likelier than ο; broken, rubbed traces of γ) ο or ε, ς γ (faint verticals) **13** ν' inserted above ωπ ιηλοῦ Winter (corrected from *Cert.* 334): παλρου pap. **14** π or γι, ηι (left vertical, trace of left and right ends of top horizontal bar) τ or γ (faint, rubbed traces) punctuating space after πλευραν **15** ο or ς γ or μ ποιεῖσθαι Winter: ποιεῖσθαι Korte: πο<ν>εῖσθαι Dodds lacuna between ποιεῖσθαι and ἀρετὴν posited by West ι (trace of foot; no room for a different letter) **15–16** π<ε>ι<ι> <ρά>σομεν Solmsen:²¹ ποι|ησομεν pap.: π<ε>ι|<ρά>σόμε<θα> Page: πον|ήσομεν(?) Richardson (but no room for γ) ἴποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἀρετὴν ποι|ήσομεν[†] Renehan **16** apostrophe after δ ὀρῶν Kirk: ὀρῶν<τε> Winter: ὀρῶ|ν Dodds **17** punctuating space after ους η (left vertical and trace of cross-bar)²² **18** τετ rather than πγ **19** ταύτης Porter τ or π, ζ, γ η rather than π (trace of

21. Solmsen 1932, 142.

22. The word has been a *luxus vexatus* for no reason. Winter (1925) prints Ομηρος. Korte (1927, 263) changed this reading to ὀδηγός (“Führer” in a cultural sense) after inspecting the reprinted (and barely legible) *TAPA* photograph. (Winter’s original photograph is not much better.) The alteration would carry much weight in virtually every treatment of the papyrus down to the present, chiefly by unsettling Winter’s original reading and his visual authority, but also by introducing a peculiar word. Only with Koniaris 1971a was the reading restored to the original. But which original? Dodds (1952, 187 n. 3) writes, “ὄηρος pap., corr. Winter: ὀδηγός Korte.” If Dodds is to be trusted, what Winter must have read on the papyrus (but not printed as his reading; see n. 1, above) was ὀδηρος. There is, however, no indication of this in Winter’s apparatus. Consequently, either Korte’s authority had displaced Winter’s (as is demonstrated by Page 1936, 626 n. 5: “the Δ [of the papyrus (!)] must be a mere slip”), or else the Δ really was read by Winter and was communicated through correspondence to or via A. S. Hunt (n. 1 above), and thereafter was passed on to others. The latter scenario is the least likely (Dodds knows of Hunt only through Winter’s edition), and it looks as if Winter’s authority was in fact being doubted on the basis of the *TAPA* photograph alone. Kirk (1950, 151) prints Ομηρος, likewise revising what Winters printed. The ghost reading of ὀδηρος persists in the literature even after Dodds. West (1967, 437) prints ὀδη ς and is followed by Richardson (1981, 3). But West also finds adopting “the correction” to “Ομηρος “hard to avoid” and he accordingly adopts it in his interpretation of the passage. See also Nagy 2010, 29 n. 1, who notes that Ludwig Koenen confirmed Homer’s name in line 17 for him in 2002, which demonstrates the unsettling power that ὀδηρος continued to exert even after Koniaris’ publication from 1971. Luckily, very little was at stake in this particular misadventure in photomechanical reproduction, just the single occurrence of Homer’s name, which ought never to have been in doubt (the papyrus supports “Ομηρος)—one more trace of ignominy in the reception of Homer!

upper vertical stroke) ς or ε, ο τούτη[ν] Winter: τούτη[ς] Körte γούν Litinas (bottom traces of γ and ο δ' ούν is excluded): ούν Winter παιδίας Winter: παιδ<ε>ίας Körte 20 ἀ|ποδίδω[μι Avezziù ϕ much likelier than φ (left half-semicircle is not closed at top) ἀ|ποδίδω[μεν Winter: ἀ|ποδίδω[ντες Page (too long for the space): ἀ|ποδίδω[ς West τὸ γ]ένος Porter: τὸ γ]ένος Page: ἀγ]ῶνος Winter: αἰ]ῶνος Kirk: ἀφέμ]ενος West (too long): ἀρξάμ]ενος Richardson (too long): τὸ τε γ]ένος Avezziù (too long): τὸ <τε> γ]ένος, τὸ <δὲ> γ]ένος (?) Porter λ. or α. ν (small trace of high right vertical) 21 κ or ι, γ, τ, υ, μ, ν, β, π (foot of a thickly drawn descender) εἰ rather than η δὲ' ἀγ]χιστ]είας Winter (but one letter too long): δὲ' ἀκ]ριβ]είας Körte: διὰ β]ραχ]είας Page and West: διὰ β]ροθ]είας (?) Avezziù: δὲ' ἀτ]ρεκ]είας or διὰ γ]λυκ]είας (?) Porter 22 φιλ[ιστορ]εῖν Porter ι (vertical descender followed by faded high angular trace compatible with λ, μ, ν) φι[λοκαλ]εῖν Hunt *ap.* Winter: φι[λοδοξ]εῖν Richardson: φιλ[οσοφ]εῖν, φιλ[ολογ]εῖν (?) Porter c inserted above τ 23 no traces of writing after ο [. . .] παραδ[ό]ως Avezziù: παραδ[ό]μεν Winter: παραδ[ό] Dodds: παραδ[ό]σω West 24 ι (dot of ink from foot of ι)²³ 25 space after περι coronis in lower left margin

C. Translation

Seeing him, they [sc., the fisher boys] improvised this verse: “All that we caught we left behind; all that we didn’t catch we are carrying with us.” Unable to discover its meaning, he asked them what they meant. (5) They said that they had gone fishing and caught nothing, but when they sat down they picked lice from themselves; those lice they caught they left there, while those they didn’t catch they were still carrying in their clothing. Remembering the prophecy that the end of his life had come, (10) Homer wrote the following epitaph for himself: “Here the earth covered over that sacred head, | marshaller [or “adorner”] of warrior heroes, divine Homer.” And as he was withdrawing from the place,²⁴ he slipped because of the mud and fell on his side. This, they say, is how he died. (15) I shall endeavor, then, to make my reputation about Homer,²⁵ especially as I see that historians are held in such high esteem²⁶ Homer, at any rate, has been honored both in life and in death by all mankind on account of this.²⁷ And so now, in return for this amusement [which Homer gave us, viz., that of the contest]²⁸ I give him

23. The letters of the *scriptio*, two lines centered beneath the column, are twice the size of the letters in the text, and they are arranged in such a way as to be justified on the right and, presumably, also on the left. If that is correct, then the available space above the letters περι matches perfectly the three missing letters before ι conjectured to be αλκ.

24. Viz., from the seashore. Understand ἐκείθεν, as at *Cert.* 334: ἀναχωρῶν δὲ ἐκείθεν.

25. A vexed line, not a single word of which has gone uncontested. See Renehan 1971, 104 n. 22 on all but the final verb. He proposes that something like “I shall sing the praises of Homer” lies at the original core of the line, which he daggars. As translated, the future refers to a reputation that is anticipated but not yet attained.

26. It is unclear whether historians in a general sense are meant, or more specifically historians of literature. But the lines between the two kinds of research are inevitably blurred. *Historia* came to be used as the technical term for conducting research into Homer, and Alcidas knows at least the term, if not this precise meaning (see below).

27. The antecedent of “this” in διὰ τοῦτο is unclear, as is the meaning of “in life and in death.” There are two possibilities: (a) Homer was himself a historian (Kirk 1950, 152, 154) and was celebrated in his lifetime and after his death on this account; (b) “this” refers to the activity of literary and biographical historians who described Homer’s life and death, thereby spreading his fame to “all mankind,” and thus honoring him in both states of his existence. The *Lives* not infrequently view Homer as a “historian” (“researcher”) in his own right—not in matters concerning himself, to be sure, but as concerns his subject matter (e.g., [Hdt.] *Vit. Hom.* 196.70–71 Allen: ἱστορεῖον ἐπινοῦνθάνετο; 196.83; 207.329; cf. [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 2.8 on Homer’s wide travels), which would lend some support to (a), but (b) seems the more natural option. The *Certamen* is itself a *Life* of Homer (a fact that is reflected in modern collections of his *Vitae*, which typically include it). And Alcidas, impressed by the way those who conduct *historia* into Homer garner acclaim for doing so, is enrolling himself, playfully, in this tradition.

28. The term παιδιὰς recalls and reinforces Alcidas’ own investment in ludic entertainment à la Gorgianic *paignia*, and for that reason is to be preferred to the emendation παιδ<ε>ίας (“education”).

thanks, (20) by publicly transmitting [the details of] his birth and his poetry as well²⁹ to anyone among the Greeks who wants to study the facts with [any] accuracy of memory.³⁰

Alcidamas'
(25) *On Homer*

3. INTERPRETATION

A. Was Homer Literate?

One of the most intriguing finds among the new readings of the papyrus is the discovery of γράφει in line 10, which was first seen by Nikos Litinas and confirmed by me in the summer of 2002 after I discovered that a piece of the papyrus containing these letters had been rotated out of place and required re-mounting. Winter's reading (accepted without comment in all subsequent versions)—π[ου]εῖ—was doubtless modeled after *Certamen* 333: ποιεῖ τὸ τοῦ τάφου αὐτοῦ ἐπίγραμμα. γ[ράφ]ει would have been a better guess simply based on the available space, which requires three letters. With the observable traces of ink, the letters of γράφει can be reconstructed. The result is of some consequence if it can be taken to establish that in this version of the *Certamen* Homer composed his own epitaph in writing rather than dictating it orally, as one of the *Lives* suggests, and in language strikingly similar to the Michigan papyrus: "The people of Ios gave him a magnificent funeral, and carved on his tomb this inscription which he had written for himself while still alive" (χαράξαντες ἐπὶ τῷ τάφῳ τὸ ἐπίγραμμα τοῦτο, παρ' αὐτοῦ ζῶντος ἔτι γεγραμμένον εἰς αὐτόν).³¹ ποιεῖ of the MS can point to either process. γράφει εἰς ἑαυτόν and γεγραμμένον εἰς αὐτόν,

29. Better than "the rest of his poetry." Cf. LSJ⁹, s.v. II.8; Kühner and Gerth 1904, 2.1:275 n. 1; *Od.* 8.368: Ὀδυσσεὺς ἠδὲ καὶ ἄλλοι Φαίηκες; and, e.g., Paus. 1.17.5: Ὅμηρός τε μοι δοκεῖ ταῦτα ἑορακὸς ἔς τε τὴν ἄλλην ποίησιν ἀποτολμῆσαι τῶν ἐν Ἰδῶν καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς ποταμοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν Θεσπρωτίδι θέσθαι. Thanks to Joe Farrell and others at the Cambridge seminar for discussion concerning the possible meanings of ἄλλην. In favor of the adverbial use of ἄλλην is a further consideration, namely that the pairing of "birth" (virtually, "life") and "poetry" (the whole of it, not the rest of it) sums up all that is significant about Homer, as it did for Theagenes (quoted on p. 18 below). See also n. 71 below on Proclus.

30. φι[λιστορ]εῖν is suggested by τοὺς ἱστορικοὺς in line 16. The verb is not attested before Strabo, but similar compounds are, and the sense is apt. Two other contenders (φιλ[ολογ]εῖν, φιλ[σοφ]εῖν) have some merit. Although φιλολογεῖν is not attested before Zeno of Citium, the following passage from Aristotle could not be more relevant: "and as Alcidamas [argued], that all honor the wise; at least, Parians honored Archilochus despite the nasty things he said [about them]; and Chians Homer, though he was not a citizen; and Mytilenaeans Sappho, although a woman; and Lacedaimonians, though least fond of literature (ἥκιστα φιλόλογοι ὄντες), made Chilon a member of their council of elders" (frag. 10 Avezzù = Arist. *Rh.* 2.23, 1398b10–16; trans. Kennedy 2007). Alcidamas knows the verb φιλοσοφεῖν, though it occurs only in a qualified, pejorative sense in his preserved writings ("to be clever" or "to use one's cleverness": frags. 2.12 and 2.22 Avezzù). φιλοκαλεῖν is too vague and somewhat pious for the context. δι' ἀκριβείας μνήμης occurs only here, if the supplement by Körte (1927, 264) is right (he is followed by Page 1936 and Kirk 1950). But the construction is harsh and there are other possibilities, none very appealing (e.g., ἀλ[ηθ]είας, ἀψ[ευδ]είας, ἀβ[λαβ]είας, ἀγ[γελ]είας, ἀμ[εμφ]είας). An adjective is needed, and only two will fit: ἀτ[ρεκ]είας (possibly evoking Herodotean *historia*) or γ[λακ]είας (a far less attractive alternative). Alternatively, understand (or supply) "and," as in Philostr. *VS* 628 (ἐφ' ὅσον προὔβη μνήμης τε καὶ ἀκριβείας): "for the sake of accuracy [and] of memory," i.e., δι' ἀκριβείας μνήμης (τε). More on the likely ironies of ἀκριβεία below. The last sentence is rhetorically organized around two sets of contrasts: amusement (παιδιάς) that carries edifying information (*historia*, φιλ[ιστορ]εῖν); and gratitude given to the individual Homer (ἀποδιδῶ[μι] . . . αὐτῷ<τ>) that is shown by transmitting information about him to a wider public (παραδο[ύς] εἰς τὸ κοινόν).

31. *Vit. Hom.* 5 (Anon. Scor. II) 250.48–50 Allen; trans. West 2003.

while not entirely free of ambiguity, tilt heavily toward a proces involving a literate Homer, or at the very least a Homer who stands on the cusp between oral performance and textualization.

The question of Homer's reliance on techniques of oral composition—improvisation in particular—is much debated in discussions of Alcidas, whose investment in the *Certamen* is thought to have hinged on the question. Nietzsche was the first to make the connection.³² More recently, the contest between Homer and Hesiod has been imagined as a face-off between two styles of discourse, one suited to oral delivery, improvised, and grand, the other shaped by the writing, prepared, and plain. The premise is that, because Alcidas argued the case for the superiority of improvisational rhetoric in his *On Sophists*, what is sometimes called the “unwritten” or “performative” style after Aristotle, he would have been keen to demonstrate its superiority in the *Certamen*.³³ A first problem with this view is that it awkwardly aligns Hesiod with the written style of rhetorical speech—awkwardly, because there is nothing to show that Hesiod's style in the contest is any more prepared or any less oral than Homer's.³⁴

A second problem with this view is the improbability of the outcome. If Alcidas truly meant to align Homer with oral improvisation (and Homer is said to improvise, *σχεδιάσαι*, at *Cert.* 279), can he truly have been advertising his cause by allowing Homer to lose—a loss that would only be compounded by Homer's inability to solve the fisher boys' riddle at his life's miserable terminus?³⁵ This final riddle is a reprise of the riddles from the contest with Hesiod.³⁶ Indeed, the riddle is itself an improvised hexameter *stichos* produced on the spot by the young boys, a point that the Michigan papyrus underscores in line 1 of the papyrus: *ἔσχεδιάσαν*. It is notable that *ἔσχεδιάσαν*, said of the fisher boys, appears in no other version of the story, including the *Certamen*, where *εἰπόντων* is used to introduce the boys' riddle (*Cert.* 327).³⁷ Moreover, both versions refer to the improvised riddle as *τὸ λεχθέν*, which underscores the undeniable orality

32. Nietzsche 1873, 220. See also Winter 1925, 127 ad l. 2.

33. See O'Sullivan 1992, esp. chap. 3, taking to new extremes an argument found in a long series of scholars from Nietzsche to Milne (1924), Vogt (1959), and Richardson (1981).

34. According to O'Sullivan (1992), Homer is presented by Alcidas as the “champion of the unwritten style throughout the contest” (p. 102) and thus of “his own preoccupations” (p. 67), whereas Hesiod is presented as “a suitable opponent” (p. 67) and “the champion of a rival style and theory of rhetoric” (p. 102). The stylistic premise is so pronounced for O'Sullivan that he takes it as evidence that the *Certamen* “in some form” could not have preceded the stylistic contrast that the work is designed to illustrate (p. 75).

35. Troubled by this outcome, Vogt (1959, 204) throws up his hands: having “forfeited his most brilliant characteristic [sc., his capacity for quick oral repartee],” Homer here “is no longer himself.” On the contrary, Homer *has no one self to be*: that is the signature of the motley biographical tradition of Homer to which the *Certamen* belongs.

36. With *ἕμνον* νικήσαντα ἐν Χαλκίδι θεῖον Ὀμηρον (*Cert.* 214 ≈ schol. ad Hes. *Op.* 657a and modeled after *Op.* 657: *ἕμνον* νικήσαντα) compare εἶτ' ἂν ἀπὸ γλώσσης παίδων μὴ γνῶς ἑακουσας | δυσζόνετον σκολιοῖσι λόγοις εἰρημένον ἕμνον (*Anth. Pal.* 14.66.6–7 [Anon.] = [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 1, 242.56–57 Allen).

37. See Winter 1925, 127 (ad l. 2). *εἰπεῖν* appears in other tellings, e.g., [Hdt.] *Vit. Hom.* 215.498 Allen (adding *μέτρον* to highlight the verse-form of their speech: οἱ δὲ φασὶ μέτρον εἰπεῖν αὐτούς), although *ἀποκρίνεσθαι* appears most frequently (e.g., [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 242.65 Allen), presumably because it is a standard technical term for responses in riddling contests. Cf. *Cert.* 42, 73, 104, 142 and *Vit. Hes.* 222.11–12 Allen, where the full panoply of terms appears: *ἐξηρωτηκέναι γὰρ αὐτούς* [sc. Homer and Hesiod] *πολλὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλους φασὶ δι' ἔπων αὐτοσχεδίων καὶ ἀποκρίνασθαι*. In *Anth. Pal.* 7.1.2 = Alcaeus 11.63 HE we find a third variant of the verb that is used to qualify the boys' riddling: *ἐκ Μουσέων γρίφον ὑφηνάμενοι*, “weaving a riddle at the bidding of the Muses.” As Bolmarcich (2002) notes (but see already Levine 2002–3, 146), this line is rich in poetic ambiguities: *γρίφος* is a fishing-basket and hence anything intricate like a riddle; both can be “woven” in different senses; and *ἐκ Μουσέων* is syntactically ambiguous, modifying either the riddle or the boys (though the difference

of the remark. The appearance of ἐσχεδίασαν in the Michigan papyrus is an intriguing and seemingly authentic touch: it attests to Alcidas's interests in improvisational poetics, which in no way excludes his interest in writing (see below). It further supports the view, which I will not argue for here, that the core of the *Certamen* could easily have sprung up as a popular art form rather than being the invention of the professional *litterateurs*. Using the *Certamen* as evidence of a contrast between oral and written styles is hardly a cut-and-dried affair, and if anything the evidence suggests that no such contrast shapes the form or meaning of the contest between Homer and Hesiod. A more relevant contrast might be between being blind or sighted in both a mental and physical sense, though this need not correlate with a contrast between singing and writing. Homer, after all, is presented as both sighted and blind in the *Certamen*.³⁸

Thirdly, what is an even more neglected point, the *Certamen* represents *both* poets as being *equally* clever in setting or solving, through improvisation, linguistic traps and puzzles³⁹—or rather, in appearing to do so, for much of the time they are merely trading platitudes, many of which are perfectly interchangeable (proof of which is the assignment of their lines, which varies from Allen's OCT edition to Wilamowitz's edition—with negligible, and often imperceptible, differences to the meaning of those passages).⁴⁰ And in the one ancient variant of the exchange that exists, involving the Cyclic poet Lesches and Hesiod, a pair of verses are in fact reversed, with Hesiod speaking Homer's lines from the *Certamen* and with Homer (or Lesches) speaking Hesiod's (Plut. *Mor.* 153F–54A = 218.17–21 Allen).⁴¹ One further clue, if it is needed, is to be found in Homer's behavior when he first greets the fisher boys by the seashore at the end of the *Certamen* (326): "O huntsmen from Arcadia, have we caught anything?" (ἄνδρες ἀπ' Ἀρκαδίας θηρήτορες, ἦ ῥ' ἔχομέν τι;). There are no sea fishers in landlocked Arcadia, and the boys are not men.

is arguably slight, and the phrase is probably best taken *apo koinou*). Alcaeus may indeed be converting the episode into an emblem of Callimachean poetics, thereby depriving Homer of his association with the Muses, but at least Alcaeus recognized the original point: the boys are beating Homer at his own game. I doubt, however, that the boys have been "inspired [by the Muses] to kill Homer" (Bolmarcich 2002, 72). Rather, the little boys have now simply displaced grand Homer and epic poetry (nicely underscored by the use of epicisms in the epigram), much to Homer's "vexation."

38. See n. 18 above, and see further below. The pervasive popularity of contests in the Archaic period is widely noted, from Nietzsche ("Homers Wettkampf," 1872) to Griffith (1990).

39. Rightly, West 1967, 443 ("there is no suggestion in the whole narrative that Homer is contrasted with Hesiod as an improviser against a lucublator") and Graziosi 2001, esp. 69–70 ("double riddles" and "collaborate"). To take a single example, consider *Cert.* 166: "And can you say what best thing grows in smallest space?" The question is no less difficult to frame than to answer, even if it admits of no one correct answer. Quite obviously, the two poets are collaboratively improvising (possibly hinted at in πρὸς ἀλλήλους in *Vit. Hes.*; see n. 37 above). For parallel practices among Turkish coffeehouse singers, see Martin 2000. Improvisation, in other words, does not belong to the respondent alone.

40. See Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1916b for the edition. And for the larger point, see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1916a, 403: "Worauf eine Reihe moralischer Fragen ohne viel Weisheit oder Witz erörtert werden." Wilamowitz has read Busse 1909, e.g., 116: "Wie kann man nur diesen mehr oder minder banalen Spielereien, die zum Teil ganz sinnlose, zum Teil absichtlich schlüpfrige Verse enthalten, den Wert einer ernsthaften Dichtung beilegen?" Differently, Graziosi 2001, 72: "In this text, competition is . . . seen as . . . a way of displaying wisdom and communicating it to the audience."

41. The MSS tell a mixed story (see West 1967, 438–40 for one treatment). What matters here is that someone, whether it was Plutarch acting as an interpolator or an earlier source, recognized that the verses were perfectly interchangeable.

Rather than assuming that Homer is putting a learned *zētēma* to the boys involving an allusion to the Catalogue of Ships,⁴² we should accept Alcidas' language at face value: Homer is playing word games, gently teasing and provoking the strangers, and the boys respond in kind with a word game of their own, one that seems to be inspired by the thought of a rhyme: θῆρ/φθεῖρ.⁴³ Without belaboring the issue here, one fact is or ought to be indisputable: in the last analysis, any credit for the inventiveness deserves to go not to one of the two poets, but to whoever it was who has *staged their performance*, namely, the author (or authors) of the *Certamen*—for that is where the true pleasure of the piece lies: in the manipulation of the speakers—and ultimately to the traditions that lie behind the text. And this holds true regardless of whether the text represents a sophistic *jeux d'esprit* or a distillation of either a *Volksbuch* or prior oral tradition, or some combination of traditions and rewritings by the time of Alcidas.⁴⁴ Do we not have a sign that this credit is being claimed at line 15 of the papyrus, where Alcidas appears to be saying, “I shall endeavor to make my reputation about Homer” (*vel sim.*)? At least some of that reputation (*aretē*) hangs on Alcidas' own literary prowess, his ability to string together an entertaining patchwork of quips, thrusts, and sallies, as well as a juxtaposition of competing biographical information, though to what extent he intervened in an already existing literature or lore remains unclear.

I doubt in any case that the alignment of the two categories of the spoken and written styles with Homer and Hesiod respectively can be made to stick just on the evidence of the *Certamen* itself. Homer, after all, is said by the Colophonians

42. Kirk 1950, 161–62, who notes that at *Il.* 2.603–14, an Arcadian contingent is said to have made its way to Troy aboard ships, somewhat controversially among the Alexandrians given the geographical location of Arcadia, but especially given *Il.* 2.614, which indicates that the Arcadians were ignorant of “the work of the sea,” a fact humorously underscored by Philostratus at *Heroicus* 23.14–15. Though this passage may be of interest to Alcidas' readers, Kirk goes too far in insisting that Homer's jibe is “a challenge of [the fisher boys'] knowledge of Homer” and that “the boys recognize the challenge” (p. 162). There is no evidence that they do. The alternative that Kirk rejects is best: what we have here is “simply a light-hearted attempt to puzzle” (better: to provoke) them. See Ludwig 1916, 222 (n. 43 below); Koniaris 1971b, 32–33. Whether compressing the story, confused, or just desperate for an explanation, Tzetzes *Chil.* 13.658–59 (Allen, p. 255) moves Creophylus to Arcadia and has Homer reach the (Ionian?) seashore by foot!

43. Homer's provocative stance was first noticed by Ludwig (1916, 222) (“Dann wäre die Anrede eine versteckte Fopperei, durch die sich die Fischerjungen gereizt fühlten, sie mit groberer Münze zu bezahlen”) and reprised by Kirk (1950, 161) and Koniaris (1971b), with the difference that Ludwig understands Homer to be idiomatically labeling the boys lowly “servants,” an unlikely explanation. In other tellings, it is the fisher boys who rashly provoke Homer first. What seems to have gone unnoticed is the sound-play between θῆρ (θηρήτορες, 326) and φθεῖρ (φθειρίσασθαι, 330; φθείρας, 331). The correspondence is brought out more explicitly in a later retelling of the episode: οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ θηράσαι μὲν μηδὲν, φθειρίσασθαι δέ, διὰ τὴν ἀπορίαν τῆς θήρας οὕτως ἀπεκρίναντο, κτλ. ([Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 1.4, 3.55–56 Kindstrand), a variant of *Cert.* 329–30: οἱ δὲ φασιν ἐν ἀλείᾳ μὲν ἀγρεῦσαι μὴδὲν, ἐφθειρίσθαι δέ, κτλ. The Ps.-Plutarch text is presented, with little warrant, as Aristotelian by Rose (frag. 76) and by Gigon (frag. 20.1). Whether the same play on words was available to Heraclitus is unclear, but neither was it relevant to his point.

44. On the *Volksbuch* thesis, which was mooted by Wilamowitz (n. 2 above), endorsed by others down to Schadewaldt 1942, at a time when “Volksbuch” bore slightly more sinister connotations (see Graziosi 2002, 14–15), and has since languished for want of evidence and credibility, see Jacoby 1933, 9–11; Kirk 1950, 154; Lesky 1968, 689 (“hat sich als halflös erwiesen”); Heldmann 1982, 10 n. 12. But setting this notion aside, some sort of popular oral tradition conveying a contest between Homer and Hesiod, possibly as part of the early biographical traditions from the sixth or even seventh century, is a perfectly plausible thesis. See Bergk 1883, 63–66; Meyer 1892, 377–80; Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1916a, 367, 373; Körte 1927, 262–63; Page 1936, 627 n.; Richardson 1981; Martin 2000, 413, 419; Graziosi 2002, 75–77; Rosen 2004, 299–304; and see below on rhapsodes and the Homeridae. Like Nietzsche (1873, esp. 220–21, 249), West (1967) believes that the contest between Homer and Hesiod was invented by the sophistic rhetorician Alcidas. Unlike Nietzsche, he holds that our *Certamen* is a disjointed compilation made up of no fewer than seven later sources, all accreted around the Alcidasantaine core.

to be a teacher of reading and writing, and then (apparently) on this basis to have composed his very first poetry (Κολοφώνιοι δὲ . . . φασιν αὐτὸν γράμματα διδάσκοντα τῆς ποιήσεως ἄρξασθαι καὶ ποιῆσαι πρῶτον τὸν Μαργίτην, *Cert.* 15–17). At the very least, Homer is an ambidextrous poet who is both literate and capable of improvising poetry orally—a duality that may mirror anxieties over the fact that Homer’s music-like poetry survived as a text and may have suffered in the process, most immediately by loss or interpolation, and not least of all at the hands of unscrupulous rhapsodes.⁴⁵ The *Certamen* is full of such instances of textualization. To take one example, the hymn to Apollo that Homer sings or recites (λέγει) on Delos is immediately recorded by the Delians on a white tablet (Δήλιοι δὲ γράψαντες τὰ ἔπη εἰς λεύκωμα) and “dedicated [. . .] in the temple of Artemis” (*Cert.* 316–21; trans. West 2003).⁴⁶

This rough join between competing technologies comes to a head in Homer’s desperate last act a few lines later and in the next episode in the *Certamen*. After embarrassing himself with the fisher boys and before landing ignominiously in the mud, Homer seeks to shore up his reputation by composing the epigraph to his own tomb, literally writing himself into literary history the way he wishes to be remembered, a hero among poets (*Cert.* 332–36). As a piece of meta-literary history, the finale mirrors the translation of Homeric song into permanent text (the process now known as “textualization”). The association with the poet Creophylus, with whom Homer spends his last days on Ios (*Cert.* 322–23 ~ Procl. *Chrest.* 100.10–13 Allen) before meeting his end (starting with the next line), hints at this very process: Creophylus was notoriously involved in the transmission of Homer’s poems via Lycurgus of Sparta who traveled to Ionia, copied Homer’s poems (these were now in Creophylus’ possession), brought them to the mainland, and published them there for the first time (Plut. *Lyc.* 4.4).

But the end of Homer’s life as it appears in the *Certamen* does more than portend his future literary memory in written form. It also complicates the final monumentalization of the poet, for it compresses into a single baffling snapshot the lowest and highest points of Homer’s career as this came to be imagined in the ancient biographical traditions. Disputing the details of Homer’s last moments on earth was serious business. At stake was nothing less than the difficulty of reconciling Homer’s status as a flesh-and-blood individual with his status as an immortal poet. For a biographer, the problem was deciding how one might

45. Cf. the scholia to Pind. *Nem.* 2.1c–e. The legend of the Pisistratean recension conveys this anxiety in spades (see esp. the scholia to Dionysius Thrax, 29.16–30.17 Hilgard). In Proclus (*Chrest.* 100.12–14 Allen), immediately before the riddle of the lice episode, Homer sails to Ios where he composes in writing (γράφαντα) a Cyclical poem (*The Capture of Oichalia*), which he “gave” to Creophylus, who later claimed it as his own work. There is a peculiar insistence on writing here: the poem is called a Ὀμηρεῖον γράμμα by Callimachus (frag. 7 Bernabé = Callim. *Epigr.* 6 Pf.). The poem is dated to the sixth century. Perhaps Creophylus or one of the Creophylei belonged to the earliest literate rhapsodes. Creophylus is also named as the intermediary in the alternative transmission of Homer by way of Lycurgus (to be discussed momentarily). The idea that Homer composed his two major epics in writing is in fact quite commonplace (e.g., *Anth. Plan.* 16.292 (Anon.) = [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 1, 243.78–83 Allen; Proclus *Chrest.* 102.2 Allen; Hsch. *Vit. Hom. ap. Suda* ο 251.29–34 (258.37–40 Allen); etc.). But so was the idea that Homer composed his poems orally (Joseph. *Ap.* 1.2.12; Philostr. *Her.* 23.11: “writing hadn’t yet been invented” at the time of the Trojan War and, presumably, in Homer’s day; Ael. *VH* 13.14). On the puzzles surrounding Homer’s literacy and blindness, see Beecroft 2011. On the changing technologies (oral and written) and on the often suspect role of rhapsodes in the process, see Jensen 2011, 96–158, esp. 108; Martin 2018; and next note.

46. Equally symptomatic of this fluid moment in evolving technologies is the case of Onomacritus. See Jensen 2011, chap. 9, esp. 154–55, 157; Martin 2018.

best represent Homer's passage from life into an everlasting afterlife. Any such narration was bound to be both literal and symbolic at one and the same time.⁴⁷

In the *Certamen*, Homer becomes a monumental poet by *monumentalizing himself*. And yet, even this is something of a riddle. We are told that Homer composed his epitaph. But how and under what circumstances? Orally? By dictation? By inscribing it on a tablet and leaving it for others to inscribe on a stone slab? The question is one that exercised Homer's biographers as they sought to visualize Homer's last act.⁴⁸ According to the *Certamen*, he may compose his own epitaph orally: ποιεῖ τὸ τοῦ τάφου αὐτοῦ ἐπίγραμμα (333; cf. 262). According to the new reading of the Michigan papyrus, he may do this in writing: γράφει εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπίγραμμα τὸδε (line 10). To be sure, the language is uncertain either way, and so is the situation.⁴⁹ But the end result may well be insignificant. Would anyone be able to spot the difference between an orally composed and a written pair of verses on a (hypothetical) tombstone? That is, could we ever actually know simply by reading and analyzing the text itself? And anyway, was Homer sighted or blind? The *Certamen* has it both ways. Is writing the preservation or the undoing of Homer? It seems to be both of these things at once.

This undecidability appears to lie behind Alcidas's theories about speech and writing. The *Museum* (*Mouseion*), the work that presumably contained a version of the contest (thus, the core of our *Certamen*), was, after all, a written text, as was *On the Writers of Written Speeches, or, On Sophists* (dated to around 391), a document that knowingly plays on the illogic of its position of both condemning prepared speeches (in favor of improvisation),⁵⁰ while doing so in the form of a written speech: "Perhaps someone might say it is illogical (ἄλογον) that I criticize the ability to write while I present my case by this very means, and that I cast aspersions on that very activity through which one procures a good reputation among the Greeks" (*Soph.* 29; trans. Gagarin and Woodruff). But that speech was a *paignion* in much the same way that the *Helen* of

47. The difficulty of reconciling Homer's human mortality with his poetic immortality is the theme of countless epigrams. See *Anth. Pal.* 7.1–7 and *Anth. Plan.* 16.301 (Anon.): "If Homer is a god, let him be honored as one of the immortals; but if he is not a god, let him be believed to be one." The quarrels over his unknown and unverifiable birthplace are tied directly into this worry, on which see Porter forthcoming.

48. See n. 31 above.

49. The phrasing for composing an epigram for and about oneself is common. For one of many parallels, see Aristodemus *FGrH* 104 F1.4.1, referring to the Spartan general Pausanias during the Persian Wars: ἐπίγραμμα ἔγραψε πρὸς αὐτὸν τοιοῦτον (a memorial inscription celebrating his own victories—a distich—follows). On the other hand, as an anonymous reader rightly points out, in a legal context *graphein* can be used to indicate verbal instructions for a written outcome (see LSJ⁹, s.v. II.6), and doubtless this is the case with Pausanias too. Of course, even under literate conditions, "to write" normally means that one dictates to an amanuensis. How different is this from oral composition? Presumably, the opportunity to see one's words in a fixed medium will make a difference to the final outcome, and probably to the dictation process itself. My point, however, is that the present instance from the *Certamen* is of a piece with the frequent attribution of literate composition to Homer in antiquity, which was a part of the ancient "Homeric Question." If γράφει has any significance here, it is not to advertise Homer's literacy *per se* but to heighten the desperate nature of the question, which in this situation is unfolding, as it were, *in extremis*, almost catastrophically.

50. The terms αὐτοσχεδιασμός, αὐτοσχεδιάζειν, αὐτοσχεδιαστικός, and αὐτοσχεδιαστός appear seventeen times in the speech. At *Soph.* §14 Alcidas notes that improvisation "resembles ραψωδία," viz., epic performance and recitation. Alcidas's usages contrast with Aristotle's at *Poet.* 4.1448b23 and 1449a9, where "improvisation" is tied to the earliest, fledgling forms of literary genres and has no clear relevance to writing *per se*, which is at most an "accident" of any advanced literature's form or essence.

Alcidamas' teacher Gorgias was. In *On Sophists*, Alcidamas uses the terms *παιδιά* and *πάρεργον* (τοῦ δὲ γράφειν ἐν παιδιᾷ καὶ παρέργῳ ἐπιμελόμενος εὖ φρονεῖν κριθεῖη παρὰ τοῖς εὖ φρονοῦσιν, 34), which could argue in favor of *παιδιᾶς* in line 19 of the Michigan papyrus, as does the playful tenor of the *Certamen* by itself.⁵¹ But *paidia* and *paideia* were not opposites in the ancient world, even if they are in our minds today.⁵² And neither were improvisation and composition through writing. Recall too that one can improvise in writing to the exact same extent that one can simulate the spoken voice in a written text, in a kind of "simulated orality," as Alcidamas was hardly the first or last to point out,⁵³ and as the *Certamen* demonstrates in spades: can we tell with any certainty which parts are improvised—and by whom?—and which are not?

The question is really a trick in disguise: it is doubtful that the *Certamen* contains a single trace of improvisation. It merely *looks* like it does. After all, it is a work that at one point was *written* by Alcidamas, in a style that at times simulates orality and that otherwise is composed in a written style, which is to say in a style that is—or, rather appears to be—prosaic, factual, and more or less precise (founded on *akribeia*).⁵⁴ And this is true however much transmitted (as opposed to self-invented) material Alcidamas' work will have contained, and however that material will have reached him, be it in oral or (more likely) in written form. It is tempting to imagine that Alcidamas seized on the tradition of the contest for this very reason, namely in order to blur, not fortify, the boundaries between impromptu and rehearsed speech or writing. But I doubt this was the sole attraction. In fact, Alcidamas' treatment of Homer in his text may in the end have had more to do with paradoxes of language, of literary judgment, and of literary history than with improvisation *per se*. Certainly among these paradoxes will have been the contrast between the lively presence of Homer in his poems, as embodied, for example, in his first-person utterances and his much-celebrated poetic *enargeia*, and the sheer inaccessibility of Homer, his unhealable remoteness from the present—and the troublingly uncertain question whether writing is the preservation or the undoing of Homer. Alcidamas, in his wisdom, may have recognized that it is both of these things at once.

B. Literary *Historia*

A striking component of the Michigan papyrus is the explicit attention we find placed there on *ἱστορία*. μάλιστα δ' ὄρων τοὺς ἱστορικοὺς θαυμαζομένους (16–17) and the new conjectured reading of φιλ[ιστορ]εῖν in line 22 are a surprising

51. See Richardson 1981, 5 n. 21: "the *Certamen* is a good example of Gorgiastic σοφία"—this despite the fact that he reads *παιδεία* and not *παιδιά* at line 19.

52. Cf. Clearchus of Soli *ap. Ath.* 10, 457c (= frag. 63.I Wehrli): "Inquiry into riddles is not alien to philosophy and the ancients used them to show off their education" (τῶν γρίφων ἡ ζήτησις οὐκ ἄλλοτρία φιλοσοφίας ἐστὶ, καὶ οἱ παλαιοὶ τὴν τῆς παιδείας ἀπόδειξιν ἐν τούτοις ἐποιοῦντο) (trans. Olson 2009). Cf. further Clearchus of Soli *ap. Ath.* 10, 457e–f for a description of riddling protocols that display (or sharpen) *paideia* through fiendishly clever *paidia*, e.g., "recite a line of poetry that contains X syllables (or a particular combination of letters and syllables)," or "recite a verse by another poet that presents the same thought as the poem just cited."

53. See Porter 2010, chap. 6, esp. 339–47 on Alcidamas' other writings.

54. *Akrib*-words are a frequent marker of the written style in *On Sophists*. ἀκ[ριβ]είας appears in Alcidamas' final *envoi* at line 21 of the Michigan papyrus.

but logical complement to what we know about Alcidas.⁵⁵ In *On Sophists* 1 he complains that sophists of his day “have neglected research and education” (ἱστορίας μὲν καὶ παιδείας ἡμελήκασι). His work on Homer attempts to rectify this deficit. Everything that leads up to the contest proper in his treatise and everything that surrounds it constituted his historical research (*historia*) into Homer’s origins and output (what today is called literary history)—and this makes up a considerable portion of the *Certamen* as we have it.⁵⁶ From Aristotle we know that Alcidas rejected the Chian claims on Homer (*Rh.* 2.23, 1398b11–12). He clearly had a stake in literary *historia*. The earliest rhapsodes and the Homeridae were one source of information.⁵⁷ We should probably also include the central *agōn* as itself an integral part of Alcidas’ research into Homer, however he arrived at this information, though probably not via the Homeridae, if Eustathius is to be believed: “Whether Homer indeed had a contest with Hesiod of Ascrea and was defeated by him—a subject that is taboo for the Homeridae even to put into words (ὅπερ ὄκνος τοῖς Ὀμηρίδαϊς καὶ λέγειν)—is a matter that has to be researched by consulting those who have written about this subject” (Eust. *Praef. Il.* 1.6.28–1.7.1 van der Valk).⁵⁸ On the other hand, if Eustathius is to be trusted, the contest could indeed reach back to a time before the Homeridae. Whether the Homeric rhapsodes, unlike the Homeridae, had no such compunctions about telling the tale of the contest with Hesiod is another matter, as are the relative chronologies of the two “official” transmitters of Homeric. A third possibility is that the contest was part of popular lore independent of these two conveyers of Homeric biographical information.⁵⁹ The attestation of the riddle of the lice in Heraclitus (frag. 56 DK) gives us one handle on the question, but not a decisive one.

It is worth noting in this connection that the earlier portion of the *Certamen*, composed of competing lore about Homer’s genealogy (τὸ γένος) and life, is itself a *disguised* contest, as the terms εὔχονται and φιλονεικίας indicate (*Cert.* 2, 3). At first glance, the language suggests the work of compiler, either before or after Alcidas, who would have been mimicking the contest-form in his discussion of the lore surrounding Homer. On the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that the popular lore, some of it lodged in epichoric biographical traditions, already conveyed these competing claims as they accumulated over time. I suspect that this process of disputed claims and their accumulation began at a very early date. In other words, the tradition was in essence diverse and compilatory, albeit unattributable to any single compiler. Homer’s identity must have been contested from the start, especially if it was invented *post hoc*, and a playful,

55. Alcidas provides the earliest instance of ἱστορικός outside of Plato. Richardson (1981, 4) suspects “a new or recent coinage.” Alcidas seems to have liked such novelties, for example, οἰκονομία in the sense of “formal organization” of a speech (*Soph.* 25).

56. ἱστορία, and ἱστορεῖν first appear in Herodotus (ἵστωρ is found already in Homer), but the objects and methods of history and literary history are convergent. Indeed, they converge already in Herodotus, not least in his discussions of Homer.

57. Pl. *Resp.* 599e6; *Isoc. Hel.* 10.65; Allen 1912, 186–87; Graziosi 2002, 201–17. The first attestation of “Homeridae” occurs at Pind. *Nem.* 2.1.

58. Trans. after Nagy 2010, 62.

59. So Meyer 1892, 379–80, who allows for a tradition reaching back in part or in whole through the rhapsodes into the sixth “and even seventh” centuries BCE, and at the limit even prior to the final redaction of the Homeric epics—a dizzying prospect, but also an unlikely one, especially if Homer’s name was associated with the poems only once they reached monumental stature, as West (1999) and others have persuasively argued.

competitive tradition will have quickly grown up around these uncertainties and in response to them, whether in the form of competing stories about Homer's birth, *curriculum vitae*, and death, or in a single story-form that encapsulated these contentious claims and counter-claims, as our *Certamen* does. At their core lay the contest proper, which crystallized the competing claims in its very form, and which may well have itself been vying with an early Hesiodic *Certamen* tradition.⁶⁰ Nor does the contest between the two poets end where the verses exchanged by Homer and Hesiod end. Their lives continue, and in continuing the poets continue to compete with each other, symbolically (and humorously), down to their deaths. Having posed and solved riddles like champions of improvisation, both poets are embarrassingly stumped by oracles forecasting their own deaths, and both receive epitaphic honors. Any of these legends could have arisen in popular tradition before formal inquiry into Homer's and Hesiod's lives and works began, and very likely these legends will have provided the impetus to it.

Such inquiry is first attested for Theagenes (περὶ γὰρ τῆς Ὀμήρου ποιήσεως γένους τε αὐτοῦ καὶ χρόνου καθ' ὃν ἤκμασε προηρεῦνησαν πρεσβύτατοι <μὲν> Θεαγένης τε ὁ Πηγῆ<ν>ος, Tatian *Oratio ad Graecos* 31.3 Marcovich = 8A1 DK), and in later centuries *historia* and *historein* were standard terms for naming this kind of inquiry: e.g., Philostr. *Her.* 6.1; [Plut.]. *Vit. Hom.* 1.1, 1.6–7 Kindstrand; πειρασόμεθα εἰπεῖν ὅσα ἰστόρηται τοῖς παλαιοῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ (sc., Homer); Hsch. *Vit. Hom. ap. Suda* ο 251.41 (259.51 Allen); *Vit. Hom.* 7, 253.1 Allen (= Eust. *Od.* 12.65); and, in language inevitably reminiscent of our papyrus, [Lucian] *Demosthenis encomium* 12: “We have received no information about Homer's upbringing, training, and education through the record of prior inquiry (μνήμη καθ' ἰστορίαν)” — a contrast with Hesiod follows.⁶¹

When Alcidas goes on to state at the end of Michigan papyrus, “I give him [sc., Homer] thanks by publicly transmitting [the details of] his birth and his poetry as well,” he is acknowledging what this early scholarly tradition had begun to sort out, which included the *Margites* (allegedly, his first poem), the *Thebaid*, the *Epigoni*, the Midas inscription, an inscription to Apollo at Delphi, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and sundry other occasional verses, culminating with Homer's own epitaph, all of which are mentioned in the *Certamen* (*Cert.* 17, 256, 258, 264, 272, 275–76, etc.). Sifting through the recorded literary output of Homer was a central element of **all *historia* into the** poet. Over time, and already by the fourth century, the Homeric canon was being narrowed down, but complete consensus remained elusive. Alcidas is surely playing this same game, but if so he is no doubt doing this tongue in cheek (see below). So concludes Alcidas' segment on Homer, the introductory part (if this is what it was) to the *Museum*, Alcidas' larger work on literature and literary history.

C. The Title

The *subscriptio* reads [Ἀλκ]ιδάμαντος περὶ Ὀμήρου. The genitive (“of Alcidas”) and the apparet title (“On Homer”), while solving some problems, also

60. See Martin 2000, 419 on the existence of such a forerunner.

61. *Zētein* is also so used.

create new ones. A first problem is whether “On Homer” is the actual title of a work by Alcidas. A second issue is the relationship between this work, if that is what it was, and his otherwise lost work, the *Museum*. Winter believed that the *Certamen* formed part of the *Museum* and that “On Homer” was its original name: “[W]e are warranted in asserting that Alcidas wrote an account, entitled simply *περὶ Ὀμήρου*, which was the immediate source of the end of the *Certamen*. So much is now fact, no longer theory.”⁶² But a work *On Homer* by Alcidas is nowhere attested beyond the papyrus that Winter discovered. What else the *Museum* contained Winter does not speculate. But there are other possible explanations for the apparent title “On Homer.”

To consider one alternative, the *subscriptio* of the papyrus may be an indication of later editorial activity, the genitive showing the source of the extract, the title being assigned to the extract but not original to Alcidas. On this view, it might even be misleading to treat the latter as a title and not as an instance of later *peri-literature*, signifying nothing more than the topic of the extract from a work by Alcidas: “Alcidas’ discussion of Homer.” E. R. Dodds’ suggestion that the Michigan papyrus comes from “a book of extracts *Περὶ Ὀμήρου*, one of which was taken from Alcidas,” and specifically his *Museum*, is attractive.⁶³ On this view, the phrase would have been misunderstood as a title by the copyist, who does indeed appear to have been somewhat “*gedankenlos*” in this and in other respects.⁶⁴ This still leaves a number of questions unanswered, however.

The papyrus tells us where the Alcidas material ends, but where does it begin? Since Körte, a break between lines 14 and 15 has been postulated, but also argued against.⁶⁵ In question is whether Alcidas was himself acting as a mindless compiler of preexisting material and not as an artful arranger of earlier accounts of the lives of the two poets, their contests, and their deaths, and whether lines 1–14 reflect his reporting, possibly verbatim, of this earlier material. Nietzsche’s own views were that the core of the *Certamen* belonged to Alcidas’ *Museum*, which he understood to have been a primer of rhetoric and a storehouse of rhetorical rules backed by illustrations, especially as these pertained to extempore invention, of which the *Certamen*, standing at its head, would have provided the most brilliant instance.⁶⁶ This seems unnecessarily reductive, and the truth may lie somewhere in the middle. The biographical material, in particular, would have no place in such a treatise. The *Museum*, if it was a literary work, could easily have served this purpose, with the Homeric material occupying a key and possibly opening role, and with rhetoric playing a subordinate role (if it played any at all).⁶⁷

62. Winter 1925, 125. He is seconded (and paraphrased) by Page (1936, 627 n.): “We can now say with certainty that Alcidas wrote a work entitled simply *περὶ Ὀμήρου*.”

63. Dodds 1952, 188.

64. Körte 1927, 264: “Vermutlich hat der Mann, der sich die Schrift auf die Rückseite von Rechnungen abschrieb, den Schluß [sc., of Alcidas’ work] gedankenlos verkürzt.”

65. Renehan 1971, 104 n. 22.

66. Nietzsche 1873, 218–22; 220: “das glänzende Einleitungstück.” Puzzles remain about Aristotle’s testimony that Alcidas somewhere qualified “museum” with “of nature” (*Rh.* 3.3, 1406a24–25). Nietzsche (1873, 222) took this to indicate a link to Empedocles as the reputed founder of rhetoric and as Gorgias’ teacher, and he wondered whether Alcidas’ original title might have been *The Museum of Nature*. But that seems a stretch.

67. *Poiesis* is explicitly mentioned in Aristotle’s treatment of Alcidas, as it is in the Michigan papyrus fragment (20–21). See further Solmsen 1932, 133–47 and Richardson 1981, 6–8 for an excellent canvassing of the evidence; also Pfeiffer 1968, 50–51.

Does this mean that Alcidas invented or rearranged the contest portion of our *Certamen*? His penchant for wit, wisdom, riddling, and the like, all in a sophistic spirit, is well-attested in other parts of his preserved writings, and improvisation (cf. ἐσχεδίασαν in line 1 of the Michigan papyrus) has its place here too. I say “penchant for,” but could as easily have said “attraction to”: it is quite likely that the playful sophistication of the *Certamen* was part of the tradition that Alcidas inherited and that no doubt exerted an influence on his thinking. The mere accumulation, over the centuries, of competing accounts of Homer’s birthplace and his *curriculum vitae* suggests skepticism, not certainty, and anything but factual accuracy. The *Certamen* is a record of this confusion. δι’ ἀκριβείας μνήμης (*vel sim.*) (21) is for this reason best understood as having been said tongue in cheek, as is μάλιστα δ’ ὄρων τοὺς ἱστορικοὺς θαυματοζομένους (16–17), with Alcidas mimicking, mocking, and subverting the historiographical obsession with Homer, a figure as much of forgetting as of remembrance.⁶⁸ Note too how not even *Homer* knows his place of birth: he must perform personal *historia* by making inquiries of the Delphic oracle (*Cert.* 56–58), as though he were a symptom of the tradition that sought to find him, which he of course is. There is no reason to suspect that Alcidas invented this episode and did not find it ready-made in the tradition he inherited: Homer’s authority was anything but sacrosanct from the Archaic period on.⁶⁹ What other specific uses Alcidas made of the tradition is anyone’s guess, though one speculation presents itself.

It is conceivable, and even likely, that Alcidas was responsible for the symmetrical arrangement of the two sets of lives as these play out before and after the contest proper. If so, then we can thank Alcidas for having recognized what popular lore implicitly knew, namely that the two *éminences grises* of the earliest Greek poetry competed not only at one point during their lives, but also through the full extent of their lives as these appeared in the lore that surrounded them both. Their lives, in other words, were themselves a kind of extended “contest” in the popular imagination, and even something like poetic works of art, each endowed with a beginning, middle, and end. Favoring this hypothesis about the work’s symmetrical arrangement of poetic lives is the fact that the four preserved attestations of Alcidas’ involvement in the *Certamen* (noted on pp. 13–14 above) cover all the relevant moments of this complicated itinerary—viz., Homer’s origins and birth (γένος, *P.Mich.* 2754, 20; τοῦ γένους, *Cert.* 14), the contest proper (the centerpiece of the work, whence the MS title of the *Certamen*), and the final watery demises of Homer and Hesiod.

It is unlikely that the lives and deaths of Homer and Hesiod would have been transmitted together in prior tradition. Rather, they will have followed separate paths of transmission, with the Hesiodic *Vita*-tradition being in any case far less robust, and less remarkable, than Homer’s (the *Certamen* is no exception here), while the stories of the two poets’ lives would have intersected only around questions of their synchronicity. Their contest, whether held at Chalcis, Aulis, or Delos, represented the culmination, or proof, of this latter line of inquiry,

68. Thanks to Mario Telò for insisting that I make this point more explicit, and for the phrase “historiographical obsession.” A further consideration is that in his rhetorical theory (*On Sophists*) Alcidas is no friend of *akribeia* of language or memory: these are signs of prepared speeches and the antithesis of improvisation. But all this may just be a pose.

69. See nn. 13 and 16 above.

now cast in narrative form. Such was, one suspects, the state of things that Alcidas inherited. If we are looking for a motive behind his intervention into these traditions, we need look no further than the evidence of the *Certamen* itself: as a repository of parallel lives, or rather of these two lives, the *Certamen* seems to be unique in the ancient literature. Alcidas' novelty, then, would have consisted in bringing these two life-stories together in a single work, while taking the central contest episode as their unique point of juncture, much like a narrative hinge that organizes the complete presentation of the *Certamen*, or so we may speculate. To be sure, the contest is a point of juncture and of disjuncture: the two poets meet as rivals, but with different paths leading to and away from the contest. Nevertheless, for all their differences, the paths taken by each of the poets' lives intersect at all the critical junctures on a formal level. They are in fact structurally parallel.

Though conspicuous all the way through, the parallels are most evident in the narratives of the two poets' deaths, as is only to be expected: the circumstances of Hesiod's birth and homeland were at once unremarkable and utterly uncontroversial. He tells us everything we need to know about himself in his own poetry (*Cert.* 2–6), unlike Homer, who remained a complete cipher and so too an object of endless controversy (*Cert.* 7–60). What is remarkable are the great number of similarities that structure their two lives as these appear in the *Certamen*. Recall how, as soon as Hesiod hears the oracle (μαντείον, 228) warning him to “beware Nemean Zeus' fair grove,” he withdraws from the land of the Peloponnese (τῆς Πελοποννήσου μὲν ἀνεχώρει, 224–25) and Nemea, recoiling from contact with the oracle, and heads for the sea coast of eastern Locris, which, as fate would have it and unbeknownst to Hesiod, is also sacred to Nemean Zeus. He is drowned in the sea at the hands of local youths (νεανίσκοι, 230) under murky circumstances hardly befitting a great poet. Attempting a desperate escape in a stolen fishing boat (ἀλιευτικὸν σκάφος, 238), Hesiod's killers are killed in turn by a thunderbolt from Zeus *en route* to Crete—at least so read Alcidas' version “in his *Museum*” (240). Homer's final days on earth contain all the same elements, and they are couched in often identical language: the oracle (μαντείον, 332), the sea (contrasted with the interior landscape of Arcadia), youthful fisher boys (νέων παίδων, 60) who are said to be ἀφ' ἀλείας ἐρχομένων (324; οἱ δὲ φασιν ἐν ἀλείᾳ μὲν ἀγρεῦσαι μηδέν, 329–30: the same expression could be said of Hesiod's murders!), and the withdrawal from a place while recoiling from contact with an oracle (ἀναχωρῶν δὲ ἐκεῖθεν, 334).

The parallels are striking and surely deliberate. Was Alcidas responsible for this symmetry? Quite possibly, even if he did not invent every detail in either biographical account.⁷⁰ He only needed to have brought them together for closer

70. See West 1967, 447–48, who recognizes the structural parallels of “oracle, death, epitaph,” and suggests one more, the episode of the funeral epigram for Midas and the awarding of a commemorative silver cup to Homer, which he dedicates to Apollo (260–74). This, West argues, must be an innovation by Alcidas, who interpolated the episode as a parallel to Hesiod's victory at the funeral games at Chalcis and to his dedication to the Muses of his bronze victory tripod. Alcidas' rationale? A last-minute vindication of Homer. The argument suffers from several weaknesses. First, why assume that Alcidas did not find the Midas episode ready-made in the tradition? Second, what in this episode takes the place of the contest? How deep does the parallel actually go? Third, it is not at all clear how the Midas episode vindicates Homer: it certainly does nothing to erase the memory of his loss at the contest, which the final riddle of the fisher boys brings smartingly back into the foreground. Why even assume that Alcidas wanted to scrub the memory of Homer clean? On the contrary, Alcidas seems to have been content to juxtapose Homer's successes with his failures, and the same holds for Hesiod. If there is a

inspection and appreciation. Verbal touches here and there may have been embellishments by Alcidamas designed to fortify patterns or else to put a signature stamp on the work, as is the case with his trademark language of improvisation (σχεδιάσαι, *Cert.* 279; ἐσχεδίασαν, *P.Mich.* 2754.1), even if the latter concept is hardly free of complication, as we saw.

So much for the poets' deaths. What about their origins? It is only logical that Alcidamas would have extended the symmetry back to the competing genealogies of the two poets' lives and works, which preoccupy the earlier parts of the *Certamen*. And although there are no other indications in the first half of the *Certamen* that bear the indisputable traces of Alcidamas' hand, the Michigan papyrus' mention of "birth" and "poetry" (20–21) secures this knowledge for us.⁷¹ Only the genealogy of Hesiod is left unaccounted for on this reconstruction, except by the logic of the parallelism itself, which requires it.⁷²

To organize the tradition in this artful way would have represented no small feat of the imagination, even if it also happened to provide a useful service by transmitting the materials in a convenient form to a public readership (ἐν ἑὶ τὸ κοινὸν παραδο[ύς]).⁷³ Simply to indicate the parallels in the two lives would have itself been one such service, though service needn't exclude entertainment value. Subsequently, once the work was detached from the *Museum* that contained it (possibly as its introductory section), writers added new information to the work (what Eratosthenes opined against Alcidamas, the views of Cleanthes and of Democritus of Troezen, Hadrian's visit to the oracle, and other inputs, many anonymous), which now became what might be called a "living document." Smaller excerpts for school use were also possible (*P.Mich.* 2754 may be an instance). It is no small irony that Alcidamas would eventually be interpolated into his own work as one more witness to the tradition that he sought to organize (*Cert.* 239–40). The tradition now encompassed him.

pattern, it is this: successes are followed by failures, and sometimes by further reversals of fortune. This moment belongs to that pattern.

71. As mentioned earlier, the pairing of "birth" and "poetry" seems to be a formulaic way of summing up all that is significant about either poet, at least in this tradition. Even more apt here than Tatian (p. 18 above) is Proclus, who contrasts the two stars of the *Certamen* in exactly these terms: "Homer and Hesiod are as far from being related by birth (ἀπέχουσι τοῦ γένει προσήκειν) as their poetry is different (ἢ ποίησις διέστηκεν αὐτῶν)" (*Chrest.* 101.7–8 Allen; trans. West 2003). Proclus was contradicting the argument, held by some, that Homer was Hesiod's cousin (a curious way of synchronizing the two poets). An open question is whether the episode of the final and fatal riddle was already connected in the biographical tradition with the riddles of the contest, or whether this was the handiwork of Alcidamas. I suspect the former is correct (popular traditions can be as clever as any sophist), and that the insertion of the term for "improvisation," but not the idea, would have been the work of Alcidamas.

72. It is astonishing that West (1967), despite noticing the structural parallels of "oracle, death, epitaph," and despite the evidence of the Michigan papyrus, refuses to attribute to Alcidamas the earliest sections of the *Certamen* that treat the genealogies of Homer and Hesiod.

73. Is τὸ κοινὸν a way of expressing a public treasury or common possession—a kind of archiving and publishing all in one—that could apply metaphorically to his *Museum*, itself a metaphorical shrine to literature, while serving as the latter's prelude? If so, then we would have one more reason to imagine that the *Certamen* represents the introduction to this larger work, as Dodds (1952, 187) suggests: the text of *P.Mich.* 2754 is "an extract from the preface to [Alcidamas'] Μουσῆιον." But unlike Dodds, who believes that the next "first section" would have been devoted to Homer, I believe that *P.Mich.* 2754 marks the end of the section on Homer and Hesiod, the twin originators of the Greek literary tradition, and that the *Certamen*, in the version that was produced by Alcidamas, stood at the head of the *Museum*. (The excerptor copied out only a portion or the portion on Homer, as the title he gave it indicates.) What followed is anyone's guess.

Further interpretation of the *Certamen* fragment, its relation to the existing *Certamen*, and of both to the remainder of Alcidamas' theory of rhetoric, literature, and literary history will have to await a future occasion. But at least this portion of the work will rest on slightly sounder foundations.⁷⁴

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