Philology and Its Histories

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The subject of this essay is the primary evidence for practical applications of philology in the Greco-Roman world. For present purposes, I use “philology” in a broad sense, to embrace various sorts of practical attention applied to manuscripts in order to bring a reader as close as possible to a proper understanding of an author’s words. The evidence treated here consists of the marginal and interlinear notes in some three hundred fragmentary manuscripts of Greek and Latin literature that were copied in Egypt between the second century B.C.E. and the seventh C.E. Collectively, these books are referred to conventionally as “papyri,” since papyrus was the commonest writing material in that time and place, although the body of evidence includes texts written on parchment.¹ Their annotations leave traces of various steps that ancient readers took in their efforts to understand, in greater or less detail, books that were written at a time already distant even for them. I see these marginalia, most of which convey only the most elementary information, as evidence of the practice of a sort of philology according to the definition I offer for that word.

Ancient marginalia also give, therefore, a sense of how readers read, a central issue in this book and one that can serve as a jumping-off point. Various approaches to reading are detectable in annotations. One, which can only be called reading in the most generous definition of that term, is the kind practiced by the corrector of a handwritten book. It was this person’s responsibility to discover where a newly copied text deviated from its model.

¹. The evidence is collected and analyzed in McNamee 2007.
and to set it right. To do this effectively, the corrector’s manner of reading must necessarily be mechanical rather than intellectual. What he sought was deviation, not sense. Comprehension of what he read could, in fact, be a liability, if his interest in content distracted him from errors. The differences between this type of reader and the next, which are subtle, are differences of intention.

Another kind of reader—let us call him the reviser—followed the same procedure as the first. He also compared one text with another and recorded their deviations from each other, but he used a carefully edited copy of the text as the basis for his comparison rather than the original scribe’s exemplar, and he worked from a different perspective. This person recognized a certain enhanced authenticity in the secondary text, and he valued it as a relatively reliable witness to the author’s *ipsissima verba*. Occasionally, he recorded a name beside the variant. Such attributions may signify simply that the comparison text belonged to the person named. In most cases, however, where the names appear to belong to known scholars, we surmise that the reviser found the reading in a manuscript containing that scholar’s edition of the text, or that he found it in a learned commentary in which the scholar’s reasons for championing this particular reading were supplied. The specific attribution suggests, in either case, that the later reader had special interest in grasping the relative merits of different versions, and in probing the author’s meaning more deeply than a corrector would ever need to. Both the corrector’s and the reviser’s approaches to reading, rooted as they are in technical accuracy, deal exclusively with the concerns of textual criticism. Together, they represent the ancient equivalent of the “radical core” of philology that Sean Gurd has discussed in the introduction.

Another approach to reading that characterizes many papyrus notes has nothing to do with a reader’s concern (or lack of it) for accuracy. It reveals, rather, his preoccupation with understanding the author’s language and with assembling the background information he needed for the text to make sense. Notes reflecting this approach might metaphrase an author’s words, or construe them to eliminate syntactical difficulties, or supply background information. Whether their content is humble or learned, their purpose is the same, namely, to provide the reader with an objective understanding of the author’s words.

Textual accuracy and factual explanation represent only two possible concerns of a reader in approaching a text. Ancient writers on literature

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2. By “reviser” I mean here the reader who ordered that the manuscripts be compared, or who thoughtfully compared them himself, rather than any scribe in his employ who might perform the collation. The automatic work of such a scribe is like that of a corrector.
adumbrate others (see below, e.g., for Dionysius Thrax’s six-point definition of the study of literature). Still others can be discovered in scholia, whose sources are ancient. Alternative ways of attacking a text might involve, for example, special attention to the study of etymologies, analogies, or allegories, or to the sound of the text when recited aloud. Such concerns were clearly immaterial to the people who wrote the notes, however, for papyrus marginalia contain virtually no trace of them. The textual and factual notes that did concern them, and the context in which those notes were added, will be the focus of the rest of this essay.

Let us begin with the general context from which annotated papyri emerge. All those under consideration (and indeed most papyri) were discovered in Egypt at the sites of cities and towns that flourished in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods. As the economic strength of the Roman empire waned in late antiquity, these cities and towns were gradually abandoned and reclaimed by the desert. Thanks to Egypt’s exceptionally arid climate and a water table that is sufficiently low in many of the former settlements, many of the objects that inhabitants forgot or discarded—cast-off books and papers included—were preserved under coverings of sand and earth. In the delta and near the coast, things were different. With a climate less sere and a water table much higher, scarcely any ancient writings survived.

A significant consequence of this fact of topography is that although the capital Alexandria was one of the cultural centers in the ancient world, virtually no papyri have survived from there. This is a great misfortune, since Alexandria was the site of the fabled library established by Ptolemaic kings soon after Alexander’s founding of the city and maintained by them for many generations. From the start the library’s royal patrons intended it to be the most comprehensive and the most authoritative assemblage of books the world had seen, and to this end they put it under the care of eminent scholars whom they maintained in comfort in the Museum, the influential research institution located, along with the library, within the royal palace. The prestige and influence achieved by the work of these Alexandrian scholars was immediate, strong, and lasting. In condensed and excerpted form it survives as medieval scholia. Their principal interests revolved around textual criticism—“philology” in the strict sense of the term—and this has shaped the interpretation of classical literature to this day. Alexandria was not the only center of learning. But the ancient books that survive come almost

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3. For example, the so-called exegetical scholia (bT) on Homer included in Erbse 1969–88 represent the genre.
5. The most celebrated library apart from Alexandria’s was that at Pergamum, where resident
entirely from its environs. This is a small but important point: papyri survive in substantial numbers not in Alexandria itself, the cultural center, with its elevated water table. They come, rather, from towns and cities considerably removed from Alexandria. To what extent did the work of the Museum scholars, strongly philological in nature, percolate into Greco-Roman cities in villages in Egypt? The answer is complex, as this essay will show.

We can be fairly sure of one or two things. Educated people, even learned people, certainly lived in Egypt outside of Alexandria. Eric Turner has shown that at least one Alexandrian scholar made a home (more likely, a second home) in Oxyrhynchus. Furthermore, there are written materials from Oxyrhynchus, Hermopolis, and even from villages such as Socnopaiou Nesus that carry impeccable scholarly credentials, including named references to known Alexandrian scholars. Only a few such references are to unrecognizable authorities. Papyri also suggest that children could receive a decent education outside the capital, although those whose families had the means and the desire completed their studies in Alexandria. This was quite certainly the center of intellectual life in this part of the world. It had the indispensable library and the Museum, which both facilitated scholarly intercourse; there is no evidence for similar scholarly foundations elsewhere in Greco-Roman Egypt. Thus, the unfamiliar scholars’ names that appear in a few papyrus notes are less likely to indicate the existence of rival local schools than to reveal the limitations of our knowledge.

Let us turn now to the papyrological evidence and consider how much, and in what manner, the philological work of Alexandrian scholars penetrated the reading experience of people in the rest of Egypt. Although the very fragmentary nature of the papyri makes it rare to find evidence of more than one or two kinds of note in a single text, it seems safe to say that a book belonging to a discerning reader of Greek literature in the time of the Roman empire is likely to have contained evidence of various philological interventions corresponding to the approaches to reading outlined above. To illustrate how, in practical terms, these interventions could have found scholars influenced by Stoic philosophy favored an allegorical approach to literature. Other libraries existed at Antioch and Pella. In addition, Aristotle’s Academy at Athens remained influential for centuries after his death, and there were important foundations of higher learning at Constantinople, Antioch, and Gaza, as well as law schools at Beirut and Alexandria: Pfeiffer 1968: 234–51 (Pergamum); Cribiore 2007: 42–82 (higher education in Athens and the Roman East) and passim (Antioch); Collinet 1925.

6. With some notable exceptions, for example, the papyri found at Derveni, Herculaneum, and Dura-Europus: Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006; Sider 2005; Fink, Gilliam, and Welles 1959.

their way into the margins and between the lines of ancient books, I have devised a scenario involving imaginary readers who are not learned scholars. Scholars, after all, were only a tiny minority of the ancient literate population.

Imagine the year is 200 c.e., the place Oxyrhynchus, an Egyptian city several hundred miles south of the Alexandrian library and Museum, a seat of Greek scholarship for nearly five centuries. A scribe copies a manuscript of Aristophanes’ *Birds* for our Discerning Reader. Someone—perhaps the scribe, perhaps a slave or apprentice—compares the copy with its exemplar and enters corrections. In this model, he has accomplished Step One, which corresponds to the first type of reading: the correction of out-and-out errors. The second person’s theoretical object is to purge the copy of any deviations from the exemplar. These are undesirable, of course, because they corrupt the poetic text and therefore alter its meaning. The corrector’s objective is only theoretical, however. Chances are good that his practical application of theory is imperfect.

The Discerning Reader, therefore, aware of human frailty and realizing that the exemplar itself cannot be a perfect replica of the author’s original text, takes the trouble to compare his new copy with another one. The friend who lends him the second copy assure him it is quite reliable. He copies its variant readings into his new book, sometimes between the lines, sometimes in the margin. Some discrepancies are between one main text and the other. Others show up as later additions in the margins or between the lines of the second manuscript. The Discerning Reader may prefer to do this job himself to ensure good results. Alternatively, he may give it to a secretary he trusts. Either way, we will have completed Step Two, the addition of variants, corresponding to the second sort of reading considered above.

The Discerning Reader now nervously lends his fairly reliable copy of the *Birds* to his oldest son, a boy in his teens. The boy is reading the play with his teacher, the grammarian (γραμματικός, grammaticus), and needs help understanding the text. Because much of Aristophanes’ vocabulary and idiom elude him and his classmates, the teacher habitually has to offer explanations in class. He assists them in reading, that is, according to the third method. Presumably, the grammarian reads the explanations aloud from an informal copy that he made for himself, some time earlier, of a glossary on just this play. The boy writes *exactly what he hears* into the margins and between the lines of his father’s book. I do not know whether he tells his father about this. Whatever he faces at home, we can be certain that the innocent vandalism gives him a better understanding of what Aristophanes has to say, since now he has a rendition of the difficult words in his own
vernacular. When the boy writes synonyms in the margins or, as often, between the lines, he completes Step Three, the addition of notes providing elementary exegesis.

Contrary to the belief of many twenty-first-century students of ancient Greek, however, vocabulary alone is not sufficient for comprehension. The grammarian therefore also provides his students with the factual information they need to get the jokes. He identifies the foibles of the politicians Aristophanes pillories, fills in historical background, fixes the location of any topographical features mentioned in the play, explains the democratic process in Athens, supplies the context for a poem alluded to by the playwright (if the reference is to a poem the class previously studied, he will probably have students recite it in full). The teacher gets most of this secondary information from a hypomnema, a line-by-line commentary on the play. At least a line-by-line commentary was the intention of the commentator who first composed it. The version belonging to our grammarian probably has gaps in coverage. Like the glossary he made for himself, he probably also copied this hypomnema from a loaner. He left out the parts that did not serve his purposes, and probably also those he did not understand. The resulting string of excerpts probably contains, in addition to factual material, some useful glosses and metaphrases that are missing in his glossary, and passages of scholarly argumentation for or against a variant reading or two. All this he passes along to the class. As the teacher reads new information aloud, the Son of the Discerning Reader again tries to capture the recitation verbatim and write it down in the margins of his father’s book.8 If his haste makes him careless, his spelling is likely to reflect the itacistic pronunciation of contemporary Greek. On some days, the grammarian may allow him and his classmates to copy directly from his book into theirs. Through varied activities like these, explanatory notes will have found their way into the margins of the book: Step Four in the philological cycle. Like the preceding phase, this is also connected with the third sort of approach to reading, since the reader’s concerns are rooted neither in textual accuracy nor in interpretation, but (still) in factual information.

The class finishes the Birds, and the boy returns the book to his father, who may receive it with some dismay. Pause now to imagine what the book of the Discerning but Oblivious Reader looks like once his son is finished with it. The margins contain corrections written by a corrector, variants copied by someone else from a second edition of the text, glosses from a

8. This is one way of explaining how it happens that so many annotations correspond verbatim, or nearly so, with other ancient commentary.
glossary and glosses from a commentary, and explanations from the same commentary. Some of this information came via the teacher’s lectures, some was copied from the teacher’s manual, some from other copies of the play, and still the story is not finished.

Five years later, the man’s second son is reading the *Birds* with a different teacher. With fatalistic resignation, the Discerning Reader hands over his marked-up copy of the play. Son Number Two annotates it too, adding information his brother had not included (as well as some that he failed to notice in the crowded margins). In fact, the second child’s teacher has a library superior to that of the grammarian who taught the first. It includes not one but two commentaries on the play, and the second grammarian reads aloud to the class from both. The margins of the Discerning Reader’s book now contain a sort of anthology of textual and explanatory information deriving from a large number of sources. No other kinds of notes appear. It would be hard, at this point, to detect which source produced which glosses, explanations, and variants. We might try to sort things out if we could distinguish the handwriting of the two children from each other and from the writing of the two revisers. Even if this were possible, however, there would be no sure way to distinguish which of the notes by Son Number Two originated in which of the two commentaries his teacher consulted. We have reached, admittedly in an informal sense, Step Five, the compilation of exegetic material.

The book is a mess. A certain thoughtful friend of the Discerning Reader sees it, covered as it is with different people’s scrawls, and he decides he must have a copy of the entire compilation. He sees how useful the secondary information will be when it is time for his daughter to study Aristophanes. He borrows the book, therefore, and brings it to a scribe to have it transcribed, complete with annotations, in the fair handwriting of a single professional amanuensis. Of course, this latest scribe may alter the main text—he may even believe he ought to do so—by incorporating the corrections he finds in the exemplar. He may also adopt the variants, or transcribe them as marginalia, depending on the orders of his customer. One thing he certainly will not do is use his own judgment to pick and choose the variants he thinks are right. Most of the time, the work done by professional scribes was quite mindless.

Up to a point, then, the new manuscript contains a text that very nearly integrates the two unannotated models that the Discerning Reader used at the beginning of our story. Variants present in the new book already existed.

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in those manuscripts and also, very likely, in the wider textual tradition of Aristophanes. The scribe may also have introduced additional variants unwittingly. Perhaps he misread a marginal gloss, thinking it a correction, incorporated it into the text, and thus invented a new variant. If the new lection fits the meter and makes some sort of sense, the fact that it was a mistake might even escape detection for a long time. The latest scribe will also, inevitably, introduce his own new errors, and perhaps his corrector will miss them. That corrector, in turn, may also make false corrections of his own. In any of these ways, another, slightly variant version of the Birds would come into circulation. By the time the thoughtful friend of the Discerning Reader hands the new manuscript to his daughter, Step Six will be finished, the alteration of a text on the basis of previous interventions. A second cycle of philological intrusions will already be halfway done.

At every stage in this fiction, the fundamental objective of the players—the Discerning Reader, thoughtful friend, the two grammarians, and perhaps even their students—is philological. Everyone in the chain gives careful attention to the form of the literary text in an effort to understand Aristophanes correctly. Does any of them reach a perfect understanding of the author’s meaning? Of course not: no one has access to the exact words of the poet, much less to any layered meanings he intended. This is a situation modern classicists understand well. It was also the prevailing situation in antiquity.

Now let us turn to the ancient books themselves for illustrations of the various steps of the model. The surviving material is voluminous but spotty in every imaginable way. As we have seen, it comes from secondary cities and from towns and villages of Egypt, not from Alexandria. Archeological find spots are poorly documented, or not at all. The contents of ancient manuscripts are an indiscriminately mixed lot of authors—some widely read but with scarcely any annotation, some less popular and with rather a lot, some with abundant notes in texts from earlier centuries but hardly any from late antiquity, some the reverse. The evidence is very fragmentary: even though a text lacks notes altogether, the lost portion may have once been thickly annotated. Even the oldest annotated texts are several recopyings away from the authors’ originals. Marginalia themselves, furthermore, vary greatly in subject and learning, and the motives of annotators are never really as clear as the story suggests. The model intimates that most marginalia come from a school context, and in fact I think this is usually the case. But there is not even any objective way to know who actually wrote the notes. Even if professional scribes made the annotations, this tells us little. Some marginalia on typical school subjects have the air of a schoolmaster’s lecture
whereas others are learned. Many annotated papyri, finally, are subliterary
texts—commentaries, recipe collections and the like—that were assuredly
not schoolbooks. With these caveats in mind, and with the model as guide,
let us look at the texts.

**Correction**

Corrections in papyri, first, are often made by the original scribe, sometimes
in the course of writing. Methods vary. Mistakes are sometimes erased and
rewritten, sometimes dotted (expunged, literally), with the right text added
above the error. For long alterations, scribes sometimes wrote a siglum beside
the faulty lines and wrote the correct text in the upper or lower margin,
with a matching symbol. The words ἄνω or κάτω, “above” or “below,” as
appropriate, sometimes accompany the siglum. Some corrections are cases
of indisputable error made good, for example:¹⁰

a. The restitution of essential letters, without which the text is not Greek:


1.15 σκήπω
altered to σκήπτω

1.110 ἑκήβολο ἄλγεα τεύχει
altered to ἑκήβολοϲ ἄλγεα τεύχει

b. The correction of a scribe’s visual errors, for example, the misreading of
ε as ς:

MP³ 48, ii, Fragment of Aeschylus.

［κοιϲινεν］
altered to ［κοιϲινεν］

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c. Erroneous repetitions that entered the text when a scribe’s eye jumped from the line he was copying to a similar one nearby—the “saute du même au même”:

\[\text{MP^3 26, ii, Fragment of Aeschylus.} \]

\[\text{νύμφ[ι]ο̣ν ἡδη (wrongly repeated from 7 lines above)} \]

\[\text{altered to νύμφ[ι]ο̣ν οἷον} \]

Corrections like these are fairly straightforward. In some alterations, however, it is less obvious what the scribe is up to, for example:

d. \[\text{MP^3 7, iii, Aeschines, De Falsa Legatione.} \]

\[\text{Κίμωνοϲ εἴποντοϲ ὅτι φοβεῖται μὴ δικαιολογούμενοϲ περι­γένοιτο ἡμῶν ὁ Φίλιπποϲ} \]

\[\text{φοβεῖται altered to φοβοῖτο} \]

e. \[\text{MP^3 177, ii, Bacchylides 17.} \]

\[\text{ὄρνυϲο ἐϲ} \]

\[\text{altered to ὀρνυϲ’ ἐϲ} \]

φοβοῖτο in (d) is the reading of later manuscripts. But was the scribe’s initial φοβεῖται part of a gloss that wrongly found its way into his exemplar, or his faulty substitution of the indicative form for the optative, a mood rarely employed in his day, or is it a hitherto unknown (and implausible) variant? Technically, either form works. In (e), it is unclear whether the corrector meant to bring the text into line with an exemplar or was recording advice from a teacher about oral delivery—a warning, that is, not to let the \text{scriptio plena} fool the reader into pronouncing the omicron. If so, this is not a textual emendation but an instruction for recitation.

**Variants**

Variant readings, the second kind of modification made in the Discerning Reader’s manuscript, must have had great importance for readers for whom an accurate text was paramount. Variants are sometimes distinguished, in papyri, by being written with a dot on each side. The ones most worth trusting as genuine readings are accompanied by a scholar’s name. About a dozen names are preserved in such a context. Some are known. Many can only tentatively be identified because of the inclination of scribes to abbreviate:

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As we saw, a variant, attributed or not, may have come from collation of manuscripts, or it may have been copied from a commentary. If the former, it would be nice to know more about the source. How exactly did the variant come to be associated with a single scholar who, for the most part, is now unknown to us? How many recopyings separated this copy from his original? How carefully written and corrected was the comparison manuscript from which the variant came? Where did that manuscript normally reside—in a private collection? In the Alexandrian Library? Who had access to it? Why those people?

Corrections and variants—Steps One and Two of the model presented earlier—represent the kind of activity traditionally associated with philology. Other kinds of intervention in ancient manuscripts deal more with meaning and less with text. At Step Three in the model, glosses and metaphrases were the notes the Son of the Discerning Reader first scribbled in his father’s copy of *Birds*. Synonyms and metaphrasings helped him at the most fundamental level. In papyri, notes like this outnumber notes on factual background two to one. Their ratio to textual notes is even greater, about three to one.

The Table (see pp. 45–46) lists authors whose texts contain elementary exegesis (column A), textual comments other than variants (column B), or notes providing factual background (column C). The authors listed first are those whose manuscripts contain the largest number of elementary notes. The three outliers at the top of the list, however—Callimachus, Theocritus, and Pindar—need to be set aside, since for each author a single, long, and exceptionally heavily annotated manuscript skews the results. Among the remaining names—Isocrates, Aristophanes, Homer, various lyric poets—are the principal authors perennially read at the secondary level and the
advanced primary level by schoolchildren, as ancient writers on education
tell us. (Two of the three poets we excluded were also, in fact, read routinely
in schools, and their work survives in many papyri.) According to Quintil-
ian, the best authors for children at the secondary level are Pindar, Alcaeus,
Stesichorus, and Simonides (Inst. 2.5.1–5). Statius’ father, a grammarian at
Naples, taught Pindar, Ibycus, Alcman, Stesichorus, Sappho, Callimachus,
Lycophron, and Corinna (also Sophron, who does not appear here) (Silvae
5.3.146–58). These curricula consist only of poetry, but Quintilian holds
that certain prose authors are also appropriate for schoolchildren, especially
at the later stages of grammatical education or the early stages of a rhetor’s
instruction. We know, in fact, that Libanius taught Thucydides’ Pelopon-
nesian Wars to his rhetorical students (Or. 1.148–50), and the heavily anno-
tated Kellis Isocrates (MP3 1240.03) is patently a schoolbook, although the
class that used it was probably no farther along than the advanced elemen-
tary level. Virtually all the marginalia that proliferate in late Aristophanes
codices, finally, come from pedagogical sources, as Günther Zuntz (1975)
demonstrated.

The point is this: that any list of the authors principally taught at the
intermediate level in antiquity coincides fairly well with a list of papyri
that contain unsophisticated notes on word meanings. If there had been
something like a student bookstore for the pupils of grammarians in Roman
Oxyrhynchus, most of the authors listed at the top of the Table would be
on the shelf. Certainly all of them would show up, in different groupings,
on the combined reading lists of local teachers. If the shopowner also sold
second-hand books, several would contain simple glosses and metaphrases
added by schoolchildren.

Elementary Glosses and Rephrasings

The source of the elementary notes surviving in papyri was typically a gloss-
sary specific to the work being studied, with words and their meanings listed
in the order in which they appeared in the literary text. This was the usual
form of glossaries, as we know from the multitude that survive, particularly
for Homer.12 Such a collection was certainly the source of the Kellis notes,
which are packed into the margins of the codex without any of the concern
that annotators regularly show for aligning notes with the text they explain.

12. Naoumides 1969 demonstrates that short, text-specific glossaries predominate over com-pre-
hensive lexica in papyri.
The simplicity, not to say banality, of the glosses in this text is a clear sign that it was used at a fairly elementary level:

MP\(^3\) 1240.03, iv, Isocrates, *Ad Demonicum*.
«πρέπει»: χρή  “It is fitting;’ it is right”
«ὁρῶ»: βλέπω  “Observe;’ see”
«οὐ μικρά»: πάνυ  “Not a little;’ very much”

Notes like these hardly look like philology in the narrow sense of the word. They do, however, bring a schoolchild closer to a correct understanding of a text, or they ought to. I offer them as examples of practical philology, according to my broader definition.

**Background Information 1:**
**Scholarly Notes**

We reach now the final category of evidence, represented in Step Four: notes that offer background information that a reader needs to understand a text thoroughly. Comments like these we may loosely divide into two uneven groups. The smaller set are those found in scholars’ texts, the larger consists of all the rest. The vagueness of this description indicates the difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of deciding whether a given manuscript is a scholar’s text or not.

One obstacle is the broad connotation of the word “scholar” itself. At one extreme, it describes an Alexandrian scholar of lasting influence like Aristophanes of Byzantium or Aristarchus. At the other, it refers to the intelligent protégé of an intelligent and conscientious grammarian, whether in Alexandria, Oxyrhynchus or elsewhere, who has access to a good library. Scattered between these extremes are hundreds of Museum scholars, students, and grammarians living in the cities of Greco-Roman Egypt during the millennium for which we have papyrus evidence. A second difficulty is that the clearest criteria for identifying scholars’ texts to date are formulated in a way that casts the net even wider. For Eric Turner, these are books that show clear signs of informed revision, have critical signs that indicate the text was used in conjunction with a scholarly commentary, and contain marginal notes.\(^{13}\) Informed revision like that represented by the annotated variants considered earlier is certainly a mark of such a manuscript. Critical

\(^{13}\) Turner 1956 and 1980, especially 93–96.
sigla are not. 14 Although they probably indicate that a reader has compared
the manuscript with a commentary, not all surviving papyrus commentaries
are learned. Nor are marginal notes. We have already seen that notes sup-
plying elementary exegesis are vastly more common than any other kind
of comment. For present purposes, then, I consider a scholar’s text to be
one in which any of several kinds of additions have been made, including
variants, detailed textual notes like that in (a) below, informational notes
attributed to named authorities as in example (b), or—in general—margina-
lia providing detailed background information. Here another problem arises,
however. Detailed notes are not, simply for that reason, scholarly. Note (c),
below, for example, comes from a papyrus with multiple indications that it
belonged to a learned reader. At the end of the following list, I include also
a ‘faux-scholarly’ note (example d). Despite its accurate and specific detail,
the information it supplies is irrelevant to the context. The manuscript in
which it appears, moreover, although remarkable for its dense and lengthy
annotation, contains no evidence of truly scholarly intervention: 15

a. MP3 79, 1 b.c.e.–1 c.e., Alcman.
πηρεγγρά(φεται) ἐν το[ι]ϲ ἀντιγρά(φοιϲ) αὐτή
τί ὡδῇ ἐν τῷ πέμπτῳ καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῳ
ἐν μὲν τῷ Ἀρ(ιϲτο)ν(ικοϲ) περιγέγρα(πτοϲ), ἐν δὲ τῷ Πτολ-
(εμαίου)
ἀπερ[i]γρα(πτοϲ) ἦν
“This . . . is wrongly inserted in . . . copies in the fifth (book) . . . and in
that (book) it was bracketed in Aristonicus’ copy but was not bracketed
in Ptolemy’s.”

b. MP3 998, i, Homer Iliad, 23.842 or 845. 16
ἔρριψε
τὸ ρῆψαι ἐν τῷ ἑράς(φεται).
εἴρηται γ(ὰρ), φ[ηϲ]ν ὁ Τρύφω[ν],
παρά τὸ ρῆμα κ(α)i ρίπτειν
“ρῆψαι is written with an iota (i.e., iota only: not epsilon iota, ρεῖψαι).
For it is said to come, Tryphon says, from ρῆμα and ρίπτειν”

16. This text was also used by someone who was certainly not a scholar and who added
the charmingly simple gloss κρυεράρα: ψυχρά (“icy cold”: freezing cold”). This says nothing, however,
about whether the person who wrote the comment on morphology was a scholar or a scholar’s stu-
dent, since the simple gloss may come from a much later pen.
Chapter 1

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c. MP³ 1360, iii, Pindar, Paean 20.19 (Group S1 Rutherford).

ἀμφίπολοι Κεφαλλήν
ἡ Κεφαλλή(νη) πρότερον τοῦ Ἀμφίτρυω(νοϲ) Δουλίχιο(ν) ἐκαλεῖτο· ἦν δ’ ὑπὸ τὸν Πτερέλαον· ἀπὸ δὲ Κεφάλου τὴν προϲηγορίαν ἔϲχεν

“Cephallene before the time of Amphitryon was called Dulichium, and it was under the control of Pterelaus. It got its name from Cephalus”

d. (A ’faux scholarly’ annotation) MP³ 1356, vi, Pindar, Pythian 1.52–53.

φαντὶ Λαμνόθεν ἕλκει
tειρόμενον μεταβάϲονταϲ ἐλθεῖν

[«φαντὶ Λαμνόθεν»: οἱ γὰρ Ἕλληνεϲ ἐκ Λήμνου μετεϲτείλαντο τὸν ἥρωα. ὁ δὲ Φιλοκήτηϲ πόαν ἐπέθε­
[το ἐπὶ τὸ τραύμα καὶ οὕτωϲ ύγιάϲθη]

“(They say from Lemnos . . . ’: for the Greeks summoned the hero from Lemnos. And Philoctetes put an herb (on his wound and in this way was cured.)”

Background Information 2:
Informational Notes That Are Not Scholarly

By contrast with examples (a) through (c) above, the intellectual content of explanatory marginalia in most papyri is neither scholarly nor even particularly high. As in the case of elementary notes, background comments in this second group are thickest in papyri of the same three poets for whom disproportionately large fragments survive. Again, though, if we set these three authors aside, we find that most factual notes in this set appear in copies of authors read in schools: Aristophanes, Aratus, Alcaeus, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Menander, Alcman, Plato, Hipponax. Within this larger group we may distinguish three general types of informational notes. The first supplies factual information about the organization or performance of the text:

a. Identifying speakers or persons addressed:

MP³ 1487, v–vi, Theocritus 15.59.
πρὸϲ γραῦν τινά
“To an old woman”
b. Explaining the circumstances of production or the setting of a play (the note having been excerpted, in this case, from a “hypothesis,” i.e., a plot summary):

```
MP3 46, ii–iii, Aeschylus, TrGF 3.451v.
ἡ μὲν σκηνὴ τοῦ δράματος ὑπόκειται ἐν
] ο ὄ χο (ρός) συνέστηκεν ἐκ πολιτῶν γερόντων· ὁ προλογίζων ὁ προλογίζων ὁ προλογίζων

“The scene of the play is in... The chorus consists of old citizens... The person speaking the prologue (is) . . . .”
```

c. Drawing attention to the tone of a speech:

```
MP3 145, v, Aristophanes, Clouds 3.
οὐδέποθ’ ἡμέρα γενήσεται
«οὐδέποθ’ ἡμέρα γενήσεται»: τούτο καὶ ὁ ὅργιζόμενος καὶ ὑποκρινόμενος δύναται λέγειν

“This he can say in both an angry and a dramatic manner”
```

The second deals with language and expression, for example issues of morphology, dialect or syntax. Here are the subjects dear to the hearts of grammarians from the Alexandrians onward.

a. Metaplasrn (an unconventional alteration in a word’s form):

```
πίϲυρον, ὡϲ ἀπὸ εὐθείαϲ τοῦ πίϲυροϲ ....
...... πίϲυρεϲ, ὡϲ ἀπὸ εὐθείαϲ τοῦ πίϲυρ ἀλλὰ μεταπλα­
μόϲ (ἐϲτιν), ὡϲ χρυϲάρματοι, ἐρυϲάρματεϲ

“πίϲυρον (lemma): as if from a nominative πίϲυροϲ. [?He does not write] πίϲυρεϲ, as if from a nominative πίϲυρ. Rather, it is a meta-
plasm (a form created from a stem different from that of the nominative singular—KM), like χρυϲάρματοι, ἐρυϲάρματεϲ”
```
b. Dialect (Aeolic, Boeotian):

MP\(^3\) 59, ii, Alcaeus, Voigt 77 i.16.

οἱ Αἰολεῖϲ ςι[?]ντ( )...[?
πολλ[ ]ν λέγοι ἂν τη[ ]
[C]απφώ κατ[...]
“The Aeolians (say). . . . Sappho would say . . . ?”

MP\(^3\) 251, Corinna, PMG 654 i.22.

ἔν χρουϲοφαῖϲ
ἐϲ
“To”
I.e., the equivalent of the Boeotian form ἐν (ἐϲ in the vernacular), which means “to.” The annotator does not supply the corresponding fact, that Boeotian χρουϲοφαῖϲ is equivalent to Attic χρουϲοφάϲ.

c. Morphology and dialect:

MP\(^3\) 55, i, Alcaeus, PLF 30.

«ἀ]γόντο»: πρ(οϲτατικὸν) [ἀ]ν(τὶ τοῦ) ἀ̣γέ[τωϲα
“ἀ]γόντον: imperative, instead of (the Attic form) ἀ̣γέ[τωϲαν, ‘let them go’”

d. Meter:

MP\(^3\) 201, iv, Callimachus, Ectheosis Arsinoes Pf. 228.1.

(Parcel, θεόϲ, οὐ γὰρ ἔγω δίϲια τὸν δ’ ἀείδειν
τὸ μ(έν) μέτρ(ον) Ἀρχεβούλ(ειου) λογαοιδ(ικὸν) καλ(εῖται)
πεντάμετρον: ή α’ ἐπιδέχετ(αι) ἀνάπαιϲτ(ον)
ἐπεὶ ἀδιάφορ(οϲ) η τελευτ(αία) ςυλλαβή
“The meter is called the Archeboulian logaoedic, a pentameter: the first position (θέϲιϲ?) allows anapaest, spondee, or iamb; the following positions anapaests; the last a bacchius and amphibrachys, since the final syllable is indifferently (short or long)”

Figures of speech attract a great deal of attention.

a. Irony:

MP\(^3\) 61, ii, Alcaeus, Voigt 120.5 (ed. A. Porro).

ταῦτα ἐ[ὐν ι]ρωνεία εἰϲ τινα
γήμαντα [πρίν γε]νείαϲαι
“These things (are said) with irony toward a man marrying before he
has a beard”

b. Ellipse, expressions para prosdokian:
MP³ 361, ii, Epicharmus, Odysseus Automolos, CGFP 83.8–18.
ε]νθὼν τείδε θωκηϲώ τε καὶ λεξοῦ[μ’ ὅπ]ωϲ
ἰράδιν’ εἰμειν ταύτα καὶ τοῖϲ δεξιοτέροιϲ ἐμεῦ[c
ἐιλη]πτ(α]ι πα(ρὰ) προϲδοκ(ίαν), ὡϲ εἰ ἐλεγε καὶ τοῖϲ ἀμα­θετάτωιϲ τὸ καθ[ . . .
“ . . . has been left out as contrary to expectation, as if he meant to say,
‘even to the stupidest people’ [instead, that is, of the author’s ‘even to
the people smarter than I’] . . . ”

c. Pleonasm:
MP³ 87.01, ii, annotation in a commentary on Anacreon.
τα|υτολ|ογίϲ
“. . . repetition”

These were the fundamental subjects of grammatical education since at least
the second century B.C.E., when Dionysius Thrax formulated his influential
definition of γραμματική—the subject, after all, of secondary instruction
in antiquity.

Background Information 3:
Notes Supplying Context

There is one more category of information that ancient grammarians were
expected to pack into the intellectual kit they provided their students: back-
ground facts. Although the specific subject of particular notes of this kind
varies widely according to the nature of a text, the topic that dominates is
mythology. Myth is a fundamental substratum of ancient commentary on
works by the dramatic poets and by Homer, all of whom children read early
in their schooling. Recondite myths are also the delight of the Hellenistic
poets, who were read by advanced students. A paramount task for a gram­
marian, therefore, was to make sure that students knew the facts of the case
as they read. Marginalia on myth range from terse simplicity to concise reci­
tations of key facts to long-winded, fully documented recitations of stories:

η δὲ Διώνυσον Σεμέλη τέκε χάρμα βροτοῖς
οἶνου εὑρετή[ει, -ν]

“Inventor of wine”

b. MP³ 1338, IV-V?, Parthenius, *Arete*.

τὸν Ζέφ(υρον)· ἐκεί-

νῳ γ(άρ) ἔγα-

μῆθη ἢ ἦρις

“Zephyrus, for Iris was married to him”


] [ ] ἐκπεϲόντοϲ χρηϲμοῦ Ἐργίνῳ ϲτρατευομ(έν)ῳ ἐπὶ Θήβαϲ

έτρου[]

λέγει γ(άρ): “ἀλλ’ οὕτως τῷ Ἐργίνῳ ἐπεμψαϲ χρηϲμοῦϲ τῷ

ἐπὶ τὰς Θήβαϲ[0]

ἐλκ[υ]ςαμένω τῷ ξίφοϲ,” ἀν(τί τοῦ) στρατεύϲαντι τῷ γ(άρ)

ἐλκ[υ]μ(ένου) ἀν(τί τοῦ) ἐλκ[υ]μ(ένου) [εἰρήϲται].

Κλύμ[υ]μ(υ)ν ἀναιρεθὴ(ναι) [Εὐφορί]ων μ(ὲν) ὑπὸ Περιήρουϲ,

Ἐλλάνι(κοϲ) δ[ε]

ὑπ[ο] τοῦ Καθ[μεἴων? ] κ[(ατ’) Ό]χιςτῶν(?) μαχόμ(εν)ν ἐπὶ

μενίδη[κ]

δ’ ἐν ἐ[ξεαλογίῳ]ν ὑπὸ Γλαύκου ἐρίϲαντα τῷ ξέγυϲει τ[ά]

δύο δὲ πόλ(ει)μων ἐγένοϲ(ντο), ὡ[μ(εν)] Κλυμένου ἀναιρεθέντο(κ),

ὸ δὲ τοὺϲ ἐπὶ δαϲμὸ(ν) πρὸ(κατ᾿) Ὀχ[ήστον] μαχόμ(εν)

ἐκρωτηρία(καντοϲ)

“. . . another oracle for Erginus was delivered while he was campaigning against Thebes. . . For he (Pindar) says (about Apollo,) ‘But thus you sent oracles to Erginus who had drawn his sword against Thebes.’ (‘Had drawn his sword’) instead of ‘who had campaigned.’ For ‘drawing the sword’ was said (by the poet) instead of ‘having drawn.’ Euphorion(?) (says) that Clymenus was killed by Perieres. Hellanicus, though, (cf. Paus. 9.37.1) . . . by one of the Cadmeians . . . as he was fighting at Onchestus, and Epimenides (*FGrH* 457) . . . in the 60th book of Genealogies (says he was killed) by Glaucus as he competed with the chariot. . . . There were two wars, the first when Clymenus was killed, . . . the second when Heracles mutilated the men who were there to collect tribute” (after Rutherford).

In fact, ancient authors make clear that an occupational hazard of grammar-
ians was giving in too readily to wretched excess in the teaching of myth. The example from Pindar's *Pythian* 1 (above, Background Information 1, note d) illustrates just this fault. In the first *Pythian*, Pindar likens Hiero to Philoctetes: both of them triumph over physical pain. The commentator in the papyrus supplies a complete but boiled-down account of Sophocles' version of the Philoctetes myth, including the story of the herb that eventually healed his sore, although there is nothing about the cure in Pindar. Why include an irrelevancy in a note on the *Pythian*? Because, as I suspect, the annotation is meant for students. Not only does it betray the same obsession with myth as the other notes in this papyrus. It also would give the teacher the opportunity to remind his students of the details of Sophocles' play, which they had very likely read before they got to Pindar.

Of course notes on myth appear in scholars' texts also, where the information supplied tends to be very precise, as in the note on Pindar *Paean* 8 (above, note c). Here the highly specific citations of authoritative sources compensate in some degree for a mythographic excess that Quintilian might have deplored. In fact, though, difficulties may lurk even in citations like these, since some mythographical compilators added the luster of learning to their work by incorporating bogus references. The very precision of these phony citations seems, superficially, to testify to their *bona fides*. The enhanced credentials of mythographical collections doctored like this—precision masquerading as accuracy—must have added to their appeal in some circles, and both grammarians and scholars probably played a part, knowingly or not, in transmitting falsified testimonials in commentaries and notes. The point is not that the citations of Epimenides and Hellanicus in the *Paeans* manuscript are phony, for the scholarly credentials of this text are otherwise strong. The point is that even in scholarly texts like this, the information in mythographic notes cannot be accepted without question: even the scholarly annotator of a book like this may have been fooled.

Following mythographic notes in frequency, in distant second place, are notes on geography and history, the latter not always distinguishable from myth. Historical notes appear in predictable contexts, for example, in copies of Alcaeus' political poems for which the reader needs to know the circumstances and the principal actors; in Pindar's *Paeans*, where the achievements of the cities being honored needs to be explained for readers of later generations; or in Callimachean passages that honor members of the house of Ptolemy.

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17. Quintilian warns against it (Inst. 1.8.18–21). Juvenal lampoons parents who expect their sons' teachers to know every possible mythological detail (7.229–36).

a. MP\textsuperscript{3} 60, i–ii, Alcaeus, Voigt 114.1.
κατὰ τὴν
φυγὴν τὴν
πρώτην, ὁ-
[τ’] ἔπὶ Μυρϲίλον
καταϲκ[ευάϲαϲ]ν(εν)οι
ἐπιβουλήν οἱ π(ερὶ)
tὸν Ἀλκα̣ῖον κ(ατα­)
φανέ̣ν̣τεϲ̣ δ(ὲ) π̣(αρα­)
φθάϲα[ν]τεϲ πρὶν
ἡ δίκη[υ] ὑπο-
[c]χείν ἐσ[υ]γον
[i]ε[ν][Pύρρ[α]ν
“At the time of the first exile, when those who sided with Alcaeus, hav-
ing prepared a plot against Myrsilus but having been exposed, got away
before being brought to justice and fled to Pyrrha.”

b. MP\textsuperscript{3} 1361, ii, Pindar, \textit{Paeans} 2.3–4.
ϲέθ[εν Ἰάοιν τόνδε λαῷ] παι[
ἄποικοι γάρ εἰϲιν οἱ Ἀβδηρῖται [Τῆϲyperp τον ‘Αλκα̣ῖον κατα­
φανέ̣ν̣τεϲ δ(ὲ) π̣(αρα­)
φθάϲα[ν]τεϲ πρὶν
ἡ δίκη[υ] ὑπο-
[c]χείν ἐσ[υ]γον
[i]ε[ν]"For the Abderites are colonists (of the Teians. Teos) is a city of
Ionia . . .”

c. MP\textsuperscript{3} 186, vi–vii, Callimachus, \textit{Aetia} 4 (\textit{Coma Berenices}) Pf. fr. 110.45.
βουτόρος Ἀρϲινόης μητρός, καὶ διὰ μέϲσου /Μηδείων ὀλοαὶ
νῆεϲ έβηϲαν/ Ἀθω
“Ἀρϲινόης μητρ(ός)”
κατὰ τŷμην εἰ-
πεν ἐπεὶ θυγά-
τηρ Ἀπάμαϲ κ(αί)
Μάγα
“Of your mother Ar sine.” he (i.e. Callimachus) said this out of respect,
since she (i.e. Berenice) is the daughter of Apamas and Maga”

Notes on geography are about as numerous as those on history.\textsuperscript{19} In general,
they simply identify as river, mountain, or strait a physical feature men-
tioned in the text. Sometimes they also identify its location.

\textsuperscript{19} Assuming, that is, that we discount the proliferation of geographical notes in one particular
copy of Callimachus, a poem about Sicilian cities.
a. MP³ 373.2, ii, *fragmenta* (Euphorion?).

Ληλάντοιο

“Λήλαντον· | (ἔϲτι) δ(ὲ) ὄροϲ κ(αὶ) πόλ(ιϲ)”

“Lelantum: it is a mountain and a city.” (An error: in fact, it is a plain between Eretria and Chalcis.)

[Ἀονιό[ι]ο

Βο[ιωτιο]]

“Boeotian”

Κάλ(ηϲ) ποταμ(ὸϲ) Μυγδονί|αϲ περὶ Βιθυνίαν

“Cales is a river of Mygdonia in Bithynia”


Πόλ(υϲ) ὡϲ Αἴ[ν]ου τε ἔριφον καὶ Πολτυμβρία ἀπὸ Πόλ̣τυοϲ τοῦ βασ̣̣[ν]έωϲ

“... formerly called Poltymbria. ... but thereafter it was called Poltymbria from Poltyos its king, as Hellanicus (says)”

Since factual error like that in (a) above is rather rare, there is a sort of pleasant irony in the fact that one of these infrequent mistakes appears in a note on geography in a copy of a poem by the geographer Eratosthenes:

c. MP³ 364.2, 1 B.C.E.—i C.E., Eratosthenes, *Hermes, SH* 397

ἡ νῆϲοϲ [Πάφοϲ]

Κύπροϲ, ἦ μη-τρόπολιϲ Πάφοϲ

“The island is Paphos Cyprus, the chief town Paphos”

Subjects other than myth, history, and geography get much less attention. They deal with proverbs, local ritual, local custom, botany, astronomy—whatever a newcomer to a text needed to know to acquire a full appreciation of the author’s meaning.

a. Proverbs:

MP³ 59, ii, Alcaeus, Voigt 71.1–2.

φίλοϲ μὲν ἰɛθα κάπ’ ἔριφον κάλην
καὶ χοῖρον. οὕτω τοῦτο νομίζεται

φίλος, ἦν ὥσπερ καὶ ἐπὶ χοῖρον καὶ ἔριφον· ὥστε σὲ καὶ ἐπὶ χοῖρον καὶ ἐπὶ χοῖρον καλεῖν, θεῶν λέγει «οὕτω τοῦτο νομίζεται»

“You were a friend (of such a kind,)’ he says, ‘that I would invite you for pig and for kid,’ that is, for any events happening (at my home). For they especially enjoy preparing feasts for guests. ‘To invite for kid and pig’ is a proverb. Whence he says ‘this is the custom.’”

b. Botany, animal husbandry

The presumed source, indirectly, of nearly all the marginalia in papyri is the work of Alexandrian scholars. Whether in textual studies, in grammar, or in non-linguistic subjects like history, geography, and ethnography, their approach was much the same: they assembled evidence methodically from disparate sources, and they classified it logically. In the third century B.C.E., Zenodotus inaugurated textual criticism by collecting and systematically collating manuscripts of Homer, and Callimachus classified the contents of the Ptolemaic Library by genre and author, among his other undertakings. A century later, Dionysius Thrax analyzed the study of language and literature and on this basis formulated a definition of grammar, broadly understood, whose influence still endures. Other scholars, with the contents of the Alexandrian Library at their disposal, wrote works of secondary scholarship—on laws, place names, rituals, tribes, rivers, myths, and the like. Their research found its way back into commentaries by Alexandrian and other scholars on literature, and most factual annotations in papyri, as well as many textual notes, are vestiges of their work. Indeed, ancient marginal and interlinear notes in general illustrate, quite nicely, key elements in Dionysius’ terse definition of γραμματική:
Grammatike is familiarity with the expressions typically used by the poets and the writers of prose. It has six parts. First, well practiced reading with attention to pitch and pronunciation; second, explanation of the poetic tropes embodied in the text; third, the interpretation in common speech of glosses and questions arising from the text; fourth, the development of etymologies; fifth, the demonstration of analogy; sixth, the assessment of the poems, which is the finest of all the parts of the craft. As we have seen, most ancient notes are concerned with the same set of subjects: explaining poetic tropes, interpreting unfamiliar language, and answering questions arising from the text. Like γραμματική, their object is to help a reader come closer to comprehending an author’s meaning. Usually, it seems, that reader was the student of agrammarian, who drilled the student in forms, meanings, and facts. If the proficiency of such a student ever reached the point at which he was ready to engage in the sixth and “finest” part of literary education, the assessment of poems (κρίϲιϲ ποιημάτων), this is not reflected in papyrus marginalia.

This, then, was the general state of philology several hundred miles south of the Alexandrian Library, in Oxyrhynchus, not only in the second century when the Discerning Reader and his children were reading Aristophanes there, but also for several centuries before and after, at least until the evidence gives out about the time of the Arab conquest. Of course, my survey of the evidence has handled many questions inadequately or not at all, for example, the identity of the annotators in ancient papyri (not all were Sons of Discerning Readers); the mechanical process entailed in writing or copying notes into books, especially when the books are in roll form; the tone of discourse in marginalia and commentaries (it is not really as invidious as tales of life at the Museum make out); the preservation of commentaries (one wonders how long they survived uncontaminated and in a form their authors would recognize, whether there were dominant versions, whether there were competing versions); finally, the disputed links between ancient marginalia and medieval scholia. I hope I have succeeded, however, in my initial purpose, namely, to illustrate the practical applications of philology in antiquity on the basis of the annotations of ancient manuscripts, and to give

20. γραμματική ἐστιν ἐμπειρία τῶν παρὰ ποιηταῖϲ τε καὶ συγγραφεύϲιν ὡϲ ἐπὶ τό πολὺ λεγομένων. μέρη δὲ αὐτῆϲ ἐστιν ἐξ’ πρώτων ἀνάγνωϲιϲ ἐνυπάρχονταϲ ποιητικοὺϲ τρόπων, τρίτων γλώϲϲῶν τε καὶ ἱϲτοριῶν πρόχειρων ἀπόδοϲιϲ, τέταρτον ἐτυμολογίαϲ εὑρέϲιϲ, πέμπτον ἀναλογίαϲ ἐκλογιϲμόϲ, ἐκτὸϲ κρίϲιϲ ποιημάτων, ὃ δὴ κάλλιϲτον ἐστὶ πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ (Uhlig 1883).
a sense of what was entailed in reading the classics in Greco-Egyptian cities some distance from the Library at Alexandria. Readers there leave traces of their concerns with textual accuracy and basic comprehension. If we wish to investigate the reading habits of people keen on other matters—authorial intention or interpretation of texts, for example—we must seek other sources than these marginalia.
Table

Annotated Authors, with Tallies of Three Kinds of Note

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