

Making Lists in the Ancient World: Memory, Status, Identity, Tartu, 3-5 June 2022

Surprising Inclusions and Unexpected Omissions: Reception and Adaptation of Greek
Literary Canons in Quintilian's Reading List

Handout

Guillemette Mérot
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris
gmerot@phare.normalesup.org

1. Quintilian's reading list

Greek Poetry (10.1.46-72)	Latin Poetry (10.1.85-100)
Greek Historiography (10.1.73-75)	Latin Historiography (10.1.101-104)
Greek Oratory (10.1.76-80)	Latin Oratory (10.1.105-122)
Greek Philosophy (10.1.81-84)	Latin Philosophy (10.1.123)
	Seneca (10.1.125-131)

2.

VARDI, A., « Canons of Literary Texts at Rome », in FINKELBERG, M.; STROUMSA, G. (éd.), *Homer, the Bible, and beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, Leyde/Boston, Brill, 2003, p. 131-152, p. 131.

In modern literary studies [...], the term normally refers to a more or less authoritative or standard list of works representing the best literary products of a specific culture or era. A similar concept of « canon », if it is to be applicable to the ancient world, should consist of the following notions (a) a list (b) of selected literary works, (c) which are regarded as sharing a special value (being the only ones extant, the best, the most representative, or the most suitable for a specific purpose); in addition such a list should also be (d) more or less standard and generally known, as well as (e) authoritative, in the sense that it is generally accepted or at least acknowledged when it is rejected.

3.

BRZOSKA, J., *De canone decem oratorum Atticorum quaestiones*, Diss. Bratislava, 1883.

HAMPE, O., *Über den sogenannten Kanon der Alexandrinen*, Jauer, 1877.

HEYDENREICH, G., *De Quintiliani institutionis oratoriae libro X, de Dionysii Halicarnassensis de imitatione libro II, de canone, qui dicitur Alexandrino, quaestiones*, Diss. Erlangen, 1900.

KRÖHNERT, O., *Canonesne poetarum scriptorum arti cum per antiquitatem fuerunt ?*, Diss. Königsberg, 1897.

RUHNKEN, D., *Historia critica oratorum Graecorum P. Rutilii Lupi de figuris sententiarum et elocutionis libri duo, recensuit et annotationes adiecit David Ruhnkenius*, Samuel et Johannes Luchtmans, Leyde, 1768.

STEFFEN, G., *De canone qui dicitur Aristophanis et Aristarchi*, Leipzig, Krueger, 1876.

USENER, H., *Dionysii Halicarnassensis librorum de imitatione reliquiae epistulaeque criticae duae*, Bonn, F. Cohen, 1889.

4. Greek Hexametrical Poetry

Quint. <i>Inst.</i> 10.1.46-57	D.H. <i>Imit.</i> 2.1-4 Aujac	Dion Chr. <i>Or.</i> 18	Procl. <i>Chr.</i>	Tab. C and M
Homer Hesiod Antimachus Panyasis Apollonios Aratos Theocritus Pisander Nicander Euphorion Tyrtaeus	Homer Hesiod Antimachus Panyasis	Homer	Homer Hesiod Pisander Panyasis Antimachus	Homer Hesiod Pisander Panyasis Antimachus

5. Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.56-57

Audire uideor undique congerentis nomina plurimorum poetarum. Quid? Herculis acta non bene Pisandros? Quid? Nicandrum frustra secuti Macer atque Vergilius? Quid? Euphorionem transibimus? Quem nisi probasset Vergilius idem, numquam certe conditorum Chalcidico uersu carminum fecisset in Bucolicis mentionem. Quid? Horatius frustra Tyrtaeum Homero subiungit? Nec sane quisquam est tam procul a cognitione eorum remotus ut non indicem certe ex bibliotheca sumptum transferre in libros suos possit. Nec ignoro igitur quos transeo nec utique damno, ut qui dixerim esse in omnibus utilitatis aliquid.

I seem to hear people on all sides listing the names of a great many poets. What is it? Didn't Pisandre tell the story of Hercules' deeds? Come on! Did Macer and Virgil follow Nicander in vain? At last! Shall we pass over Euphorion in silence? If the same Virgil had not appreciated him, he would certainly never have mentioned in his *Bucolica* his "poems composed in Chalcis verse". Come on! Is it without reason that Horace associates Tyrtaeus with Homer? Surely no one is so far removed from the study of the poets that he cannot take a library catalogue and copy it into his works. I am well aware of those whom I pass over in silence, and I certainly do not blame them, since I have said that there is something useful in all authors.

Hor. *Ars P.* 401-403

post hos insignis Homerus/ Tyrtaeusque mares animos in Martia bella/ versibus exacuit.

6. Greek Lyrical Poetry

<i>Anth. Pal.</i> 9.184	<i>Anth. Pal.</i> 9. 571	<i>Quint. Inst.</i> 10.1.61-64	<i>D.H. Imit.</i> 2.5-8 Aujac	Tab. C and M
Pindar	Pindar	Pindar	Pindar	Alcman
Bacchylides	Simonides	Stesichorus	Simonides	Alcaeus
Sappho	Stesichorus	Alcaeus	Stesichorus	Sappho
Anacreon	Ibycus	Simonides	Alcaeus	Stesichorus
Stesichorus	Alcman			Pindar
Simonides	Bacchylides			Bacchylides
Ibycus	Anacreon			Ibycus
Alcaeus	Alcaeus			Anacreon
Alcman	Sappho			Simonides

7. *Quint. Inst.* 10.1.61-64

Nouem uero lyricorum longe Pindarus princeps spiritu, magnificentia, sententiis, figuris, beatissima rerum uerborumque copia et uelut quodam eloquentiae flumine : propter quae Horatius eum merito nemini credit imitabilem. Stesichorum quam sit ingenio ualidus materiae quoque ostendunt, maxima bella et clarissimos canentem duces et epici carminis onera lyra sustinentem. Reddit enim personis in agendo simul loquendoque debitam dignitatem, ac si tenuisset modum uidetur aemulari proximus Homerum potuisse ; sed redundat atque effunditur, quod ut est reprehendendum, ita copiae uitium est. Alcaeus in parte operis aureo plectro merito donatur, qua tyrannos insectatus multum etiam moribus confert, in eloquendo quoque breuis et magnificus et diligens et plerumque oratori similis ; sed et lusit et in amores descendit, maioribus tamen aptior. Simonides, tenuis alioqui, sermone proprio et iucunditate quadam commendari potest, praecipua tamen eius in commouenda miseratione uirtus, ut quidam in hac eum parte omnibus eiusdem operis auctoribus praeferant.

Of the nine lyricists Pindar is by far the first in inspiration, splendour, maxims, figures, the rich abundance of ideas and words, and, as it were, the flow of his eloquence; hence Horace rightly regards him as inimitable. Stesichore's subjects also reveal the strength of his talent, for he sings of great wars and the fame of chiefs, and makes his lyre bear the weight of epic. He does indeed give the actions and words of his characters the dignity due to them, and, had he shown more restraint, he might have been Homer's closest rival. But he is redundant and effusive, a faulty but rich trait. Alcaeus is rightly awarded the golden plectrum in the part of his work where, attacking tyrants, he contributes much to the correction of morals; his diction is concise, elevated, neat and mostly similar to that of an orator. However, he sometimes banters and stoops to amorous subjects, whereas he is better suited to higher themes. Simonides, who is otherwise fine and subtle, may be recommended for the property of his language and a certain charm, but his chief quality lies in the expression of pity, so that in this respect some prefer him to all other writers of the same kind.

8. Hor. Carm. 4.9.5-12

*non, si priores Maeonius tenet
sedes Homerus, Pindaricae latent
Caeaeque et Alcaei minaces
Stesichoriue graues Camenae*

If Homer the Meonian holds the place of honour by right,
The Muses of Pindar and the singer of Ceos are not relegated
In the shadows, neither the bellicose
Muse of Alcaeus, nor the grave Muse of Stesichorus;

*nec siquid olim lusit Anacreon,
deleuit aetas ; spirat adhuc amor
uiuuntque commissi calores
Aeoliae fidibus puellae.*

Of so many charming games of Anacreon time
Has erased nothing; we still feel the passion palpitating
And live the amorous ardour
That the poetess of Aeolia entrusted to her lyre.

9.

« In a list of Greek lyric poets destined for the Roman public, the absence of Sappho is anomalous, in view of the influence she had on Catullus. » (CITRONI 2006: 9)

« Quintilian both passes Sappho by in (very loud) silence, and also, through the allusion to Horace's poem, draws our attention to that *praeteritio*. For Quintilian her poetry was presumably nothing other than *lusus et amores*, whereas at least a part of Alcaeus' oeuvre was concerned with serious things. » (HUNTER 2019: 46)

10. Cic. Tusc. 4.71

Quid denique homines doctissimi et summi poetae de se ipsis et carminibus edunt et cantibus? Fortis uir in sua re publica cognitus quae de iuuenum amore scribit Alcaeus! Nam Anacreontis quidem tota poesis est amatoria. Maxime uero omnium flagrasse amore Rheginum Ibycum apparet ex scriptis.

Finally, what do not the statements made by great philosophers and illustrious poets in their poems and songs reveal? What did Alcaeus, who was known for his valour in the service of his country, write about the love of young men? As for Anacreon, his entire poetic work is certainly animated by love, but it is Ibycus of Rhegium - his writings attest to this - who was the most passionate of all the poets.

11. Dio Chrys. Or. 2.27-29

Τέρεσθαι δὲ ποιήσει καὶ προσέχειν τὸν νοῦν οὐχ ἀπάσῃ, τῇ δὲ καλλίστῃ καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεστάτῃ, συμβουλεύσαιμ' ἂν τῷ γενναίῳ καὶ βασιλικῷ τὴν ψυχὴν, οἷαν μόνην ἴσμεν τὴν Ὀμήρου καὶ τῶν Ἡσιόδου τὰ τοιαῦτα, καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλο τι λέγει χρηστόν. Οὐδὲ γὰρ μουσικὴν, ἔφη, πᾶσαν μανθάνειν ἐθέλοισι' ἂν, ἀλλὰ κιθάρα μόνον ἢ λύρα χρῆσθαι πρὸς θεῶν ὕμνους καὶ θεραπείας, ἔτι δὲ οἶμαι τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν τοὺς ἐπαίνους· οὐδέ γε ἄδειν τὰ Σαπφούς ἢ Ἀνακρέοντος ἐρωτικὰ μέλη πρέπον ἂν εἴη τοῖς βασιλευσίν, ἀλλ', εἴπερ ἄρα, τῶν Στησιχόρου μελῶν τινα ἢ Πινδάρου, ἐὰν ἦ τις ἀνάγκη. Τυχὸν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἰκανὸς Ὀμηρος.

I would advise a well-born young man with a princely soul to take pleasure in reading poetry and to do so carefully - not every kind of poetry, but the most beautiful and majestic, as we know only the poetry of Homer and the passages of Hesiod similar to those of Homer are, and whatever else he can read that is useful. Nor would I wish," said Alexander, "to learn all music, but only to play the zither or the lyre,

in order to sing hymns in honour of the gods and to venerate them, and also, I think, the praises of virtuous men. It would be improper for rulers to sing the erotic odes of Sappho or Anacreon. If they really sing them, let them be odes by Stesichorus or Pindar, if they must. But perhaps Homer is enough for that.

12. Plin. Ep. 5.3.1-2

Cum plurima official tua mihi grata et iucunda sunt, tum uel maxime quod me celandum non putasti fuisse apud te de uersiculis meis multum copiosumque sermonem eumque diuersitate iudiciorum longius processisse, exstitisse etiam quosdam qui scripta quidem ipsa non improbarent, me tamen amice simpliciterque reprehenderent quod haec scriberem recitareque. Quibus ego, ut augeam meam culpam, ita respondeo: facio non numquam uersiculos seueros parum, facio; nam et comoedias audio et specto mimos et lyricos lego et Sotadicos intellego; aliquando praeterea rideo, iocor, ludo, utque omnia innoxiae remissionis genera breuiter amplectar, homo sum.

I have many welcome acts of kindness to thank you for, but you do me a real service by thinking I ought to know that my verses have been the subject of much discussion at your house, a discussion which was prolonged because of difference of opinion. There were some people, you say, who had no criticism to make of the actual poems, but thought I deserved their censure—in a frank and friendly way—for composing and reading them in public. My answer to these critics will probably aggravate the offence. I admit that I do often write verse which is far from serious, for I also listen to comedy, watch farces, read lyric poetry, and appreciate Sotadic¹ verse; there are besides times when I laugh, make jokes, and enjoy my fun, in fact I can sum up all these innocent relaxations in a word “I am human ». (trans. B. Radice)

13. Hor. Carm. 2.13.21-32

*quam paene furuae regna Proserpinae
et iudicantem uidimus Aeacum
sedesque discriptas piorum et
Aeoliis fidibus querentem*

How close I came to seeing the kingdom
Of dark Proserpine, Aeacus at his court,
And the abode of the righteous departed,
And Sappho, who on her aeolian lyre

*Sappho puellis de popularibus,
et te sonantem plenius aureo,
Alcaeae, plectro dura nauis,
dura fugae mala, dura belli !*

Complains of the daughters of her country, and you
Whose golden plectrum evokes in a more male tone,
Alcaeus, the harshness of your trials
At sea, in exile, in war!

*utrumque sacro digna silentio
mirantur umbrae dicere; sed magis
pugnas et exactos tyrannos
densum umeris bibit aure uulgus.*

In the pious silence that we owe to both of them, their songs
Dazzle the shadows; but above all
The battles and the expulsion of tyrants
The crowds drink in with eager ears.