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THE CONTEST OF HOMER AND HESIOD AND THE AMBITIONS OF HADRIAN

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Abstract: This article examines the compilation known as the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*. More usually mined for the material it preserves from the sophist Alcidamas, here I advance a reading that seeks to make sense of the compilation as a whole and situates the work ideologically in its Imperial context. An anecdote early in the compilation depicts the emperor Hadrian enquiring about Homer’s birthplace and parents from the Delphic Oracle; he is told that Telemachus was Homer’s father and Ithaca his homeland. When the text says that we must believe this self-evidently absurd response on account of the status of the emperor, its author is satirizing Hadrian’s ambitions to participate in the Greek intellectual world and the pressures on scholars to accept Hadrian’s authority in their field. Moreover, the compiler has linked this anecdote to the long account of the poetic contest between Homer and Hesiod in order to draw an unflattering parallel between Hadrian and King Panedes, who, as writers such as Lucian and Dio Chrysostom suggested, exposed his ineptitude in choosing Hesiod over Homer as the victor of the contest.

The text known as the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* is an anonymous compilation, combining a summary of previous theories of Homer’s provenance and relative chronology with Hesiod (sections 1–4) with accounts of the wanderings of Homer and the deaths of both Homer and Hesiod (5–18).¹ The incident described in greatest detail is the famous poetic competition between Homer and Hesiod (6–13) during the funeral games for King Amphidamas at Chalcis in Euboea. This text is our major account of that competition, which seems to have been inspired by Hesiod’s reference to a poetic competition at *Works and Days* 650–59. Nietzsche (1870), then a fledgling philologist, conjectured that the compiler derived this narrative of the poetic competition from the *Mouseion* of the fourth-century BC sophist Alcidamas, a student of Gorgias. Nietzsche’s theory was confirmed in the 20th century twice over. The ‘Flinders Petrie’ papyrus (*P.Lit.Lond.* 191), dating from the third century BC, contains 48 lines corresponding closely to the description of the poetic competition in the *Contest*, thus confirming that at least part of the work was of early date. The ‘Michigan papyrus’ (*P.Michigan* inv. 2754) of the second or third century AD contains a further 14 lines corresponding with the end of the *Contest*, and includes a subscription [...]δαμαντος...περι Ομηρου... The first word is almost unanimously restored as *Alkidamantos*² and *Peri Homerou* is presumed to have been a section of the *Mouseion*.³ Yet another fragment of the *Contest*, on papyrus dating to no later than 100 BC, was published in 2001.⁴ The establishment

* jfu1@columbia.edu. Thanks must go first to Suzanne Saïd, who initially sparked my interest in the *Contest* and who offered guidance at each stage of developing this article. Thanks also to Marco Fantuzzi, David Levene and the anonymous readers for *JHS* who were generous and helpful with their comments on my work.

¹ The text quoted here is West (2003) 318–53; translations are my own. The work survives in just one 14th-century manuscript (Laur. 56.1); there, its ms. title is *περι Ὀμήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου καὶ τοῦ γένους καὶ ἀγῶνος αὐτῶν*.

² But cf. Koniaris (1971) 109–10, who cautions that Greek names ending with those letters are not uncommon.

³ The ascription to Alcidamas is generally accepted in current scholarship, but it has not been without controversy. Kirk (1950) saw evidence for *koine* in the Greek of the Michigan papyrus and concluded that it was the work not of Alcidamas, but of a later interpolator. This linguistic evidence has been refuted by Renehan (1971). The case for Alcidamas’ authorship has been made most strongly by West (1967), according to whom the compiler drew from Alcidamas a narrative including accounts of oracles delivered to Homer and Hesiod, their poetic contest and accounts of the deaths of both poets.

⁴ Mandilaras (2001). The papyrus seems to preserve a more expanded version of the *Contest* than the other extant versions, but unfortunately it is badly lacunose.

of a fourth-century BC provenance for the account of the poetic competition has, of course, allowed for the text, at least in part, to be interpreted against the backdrop of Classical Athenian debates about poetry and rhetoric. Graziosi (2002), for example, analyses the place of the *Contest* in what she calls ‘the invention of Homer’, locating the text specifically within a fourth-century dialogue about the value of Homer’s poetry in democratic Athens.⁵

By contrast, this article addresses the significance of the compilation as a whole, viewing the *Contest* instead as a text which, through irony and implication, focuses on the interest in, and use of, Greek knowledge and cultural prestige by the Roman emperor. The starting point for such an interpretation is an anecdote, placed as a kind of climax to the section presenting a variety of views on the origins of Homer, about the emperor Hadrian. The emperor, we are told, visited the Delphic Oracle in order to resolve the long-standing scholarly debate about Homer’s homeland and parentage. This anecdote is framed with the only first-person verbs of the compilation, a rare emergence of the compiler’s authorial voice in a text which more usually makes its canny arrangement of sources speak for itself. The text of the anecdote is as follows.

ὄπερ δὲ ἀκηκόαμεν ἐπὶ τοῦ θειοτάτου αὐτοκράτορος Ἀδριανοῦ εἰρημένον ὑπὸ τῆς Πυθίας περὶ Ὀμήρου, ἐκθησόμεθα. τοῦ γὰρ βασιλέως πυθόμενου πόθεν Ὀμηρος καὶ τίνος, ἀπεφοίβασε δι’ ἑξαμέτρου τόνδε τὸν τρόπον·

ἄγνωστόν μ’ ἔρεαι γενεὴν καὶ πατρίδα γαῖαν
ἀμβροσίου Σειρήνος. ἔδος δ’ Ἰθακήσιός ἐστιν,
Τηλέμαχος δὲ πατήρ καὶ Νεστορῆ Πολυκάστη
μήτηρ, ἥ μιν ἔτικτε βροτῶν πέρα πάνσοφον ἄνδρα.

οἷς μάλιστα δεῖ πιστεύειν διὰ τε τὸν πυθόμενον καὶ τὸν ἀποκρινάμενον, ἄλλως τε οὕτως τοῦ ποιητοῦ μεγαλοφυῶς τὸν προπάτορα διὰ τῶν ἐπῶν δεδοξακός (Certamen 3).

But we will set out what we have heard was said by the Pythia about Homer, in the time of the most god-like emperor Hadrian. For the emperor enquired what Homer’s homeland was and whose son he was, and she responded in this way, in hexameter verses:

You ask me the unknown lineage and fatherland of
an undying Siren. As to his home, he is an Ithacan.
His father was Telemachus, and Polycaste, daughter of Nestor,
was his mother. She bore him, a man exceeding mortals
in cleverness in every respect.

We must certainly trust these things, both on account of the one asking the question and the one answering it, and in any case because the poet extolled his grandfather so magnificently in his poems.

Nietzsche ((1870) 536) concluded from this anecdote that the work was compiled in Hadrian’s reign; according to West ((1967) 433), ‘the expression ὄπερ δὲ ... εἰρημένον implies that Hadrian is dead, but of recent memory’.⁶ But at very least, putting this reference to the

⁵ Cf. Richardson (1981) and, with far greater detail, O’Sullivan (1992) 63–105, who assess the place of the *Contest* in Alcidas’ thought as evidenced from surviving fragments. Rosen (2004) goes even further back: positing (with others) the existence of a *Contest* tradition on which Alcidas’ version was based, Rosen argues that the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* is a witty commentary on Homer and Hesiod’s poetic competition.

⁶ West does not argue the point, so the basis for this assumption is unclear. That the work was compiled while Hadrian was still alive is not ruled out by the Greek: the perfect tense in ἀκηκόαμεν does not specify how far in the past the story has been heard, nor does θειοτάτου necessarily suggest that the emperor has already been deified, since the epithet was frequently used when he was alive (Mason (1974) 53, 125).

Roman emperor in the frame of the compilation challenges the reader to assess the significance of the stories in the body of the compilation against idiosyncratically Hadrianic concerns. Accordingly, I argue here that the response given to Hadrian, which we are urged to believe, but cannot possibly be correct, satirises Hadrian's ambitions to participate in the Greek intellectual world. There is a distinctly political element to this satire, since the privileged position granted to Hadrian in answering this age-old Greek literary question about Homer's heritage mirrors the political position Hadrian had established for himself under the auspices of the Panhellenion, as an arbiter of the Greeks' cultural history and genealogy. Moreover, once the satirical thrust of the anecdote is recognized, the story of the poetic competition between Homer and Hesiod gains a new significance. Contemporary writers almost unanimously condemned King Panedes' decision in the contest as misguided, and the king in the story finds himself at odds with the will of 'the Greeks', as the text describes the audience of the competition. The mistaken Homeric theory delivered by the oracle to Hadrian is therefore echoed in the compilation by the proverbially mistaken decision of another king, King Panedes. Conversely, the grammarians whom Plutarch says constantly spoke about the contest find their own idealizing mirror in the figure of Homer, who is presented as a kind of *grammatikos* in the text, and, though a foreigner, is seen winning rewards and renown as a result of his learning and literary talent.

By reading different parts of the compilation in response to each other, I aim to exploit one of the capacities of the compilation as a form. By placing its component sections in a particular arrangement, the compilation can generate new meanings from the interplay between different sections, while each section nonetheless retains its own meaning.⁷ This is so even where – or perhaps especially where – the parts of the compilation seem ill-fitted to each other. Needless to say, this interpretation assumes a strong stance regarding the creativity of the ancient compiler. 'Compiler' has often functioned as an academic code-word in scholarship, suggesting both creative poverty and, misleadingly, that the ideas and themes of the text can be attributed exclusively to its sources. There is perhaps naturally a hesitation to assess the effect of a text as a whole when the seams show as much as they do here. But the compilation as a form should *provoke* interpretation, not shut it down. The juxtaposition of narratives and authorities from different periods and cultural contexts allows the compiler to reframe material already known in new ways, encouraging readers to make connections between sources and across time periods. Moreover, sources in a compilation can be played off against one another: stories contained in one source can challenge, complement or contradict stories contained in other parts of the compilation. The play of frames in a compilation, where clashing sources can be placed within or beside one another, also makes for a powerful vehicle for irony – as the *Contest* demonstrates well. Ultimately, the meaning of the work as a whole will be determined not by a reading of one constituent source or anecdote, but rather by an understanding of the complex interplay between them. The subtlety which we now customarily bring to intertextuality at the microscopic level of individual allusions can with equal validity be extended to the larger building blocks of the compilatory form.

⁷ Recent work has sought to revalue the 'compilatory' aesthetic in Greek and Latin literature of the Empire, embracing rather than rejecting the deliberate discontinuities such an aesthetic imposes upon ideas of structure, tone and even authorship. For important examples of recent work, see Murphy (2004) on the

'collage' of authorial voices in the encyclopedic form; König and Whitmarsh (2007) on the profusion of miscellanistic writing in the Imperial era; Fitzgerald (2007), for whom the juxtapository aesthetic of Martial's epigram book is an attempt to replicate the crowding together of opposing elements in urban experience.

I. The oracle

At first glance, it seems to be for the ultimate flattery of the emperor Hadrian's philhellenic and scholarly ambitions that the oracle at Delphi has provided him with a response to the oldest of Homeric *zetemata* – the provenance of Homer. Hadrian's love of Greek literature and culture was identified by later biographers as one of his most prominent traits, and he fostered a court in which Greek and Latin scholarship enjoyed a higher public profile than ever.⁸ Indeed, the emperor is himself depicted by one source expressing opinions about Homer in debates with grammarians, and although he pretentiously boasted to prefer Antimachus over Homer, his claim indirectly reinforces Homer's status as a kind of *lingua franca* for the educated philhellene.⁹ Hadrian also manifested a particular political (and, we might assume, intellectual) interest in Greek cultural histories and traditions during his reign in his establishment of the Panhellenion in 131/132.¹⁰ Although the specific functions of this political and religious institution are much debated, inscriptions attest to the process by means of which cities were admitted as members. So, for example, in a response to the attempt of Cyrene and Ptolemais-Barca to join the Panhellenion, Hadrian, in a surviving letter, briefly scrutinizes their pasts and decides that Cyrene is 'Achaean and perfectly Dorian' (γένος Ἀχαιὸν καὶ ἀκριβῶς Δωρῖον); Ptolemais-Barca, on the other hand, though 'true-born', has its claim vitiated through contact with the Macedonians (the precise text is unclear).¹¹ The establishment of this institution encouraged a 'preoccupation with civic pedigree' in Hadrianic Rome.¹² Hadrian himself, meanwhile, assumed a role as an arbiter of the Greeks' genealogical and cultural claims. The discussion of previous views of Homer's birthplace in the opening two sections of the *Contest* is staged precisely as a conflict between towns' competing claims: so, the Smyrnaeans say that Homer is the son of their local river nymph, the Chians 'produce evidence' (τεκμήρια φέρουσιν) that his descendents live amongst them and the Colophonians aetiologize a place in their territory as the spot where Homer first began his poetic career. If Hadrian has become an arbiter of such claims in the political context of the Panhellenion, the *Contest* appears flatteringly to attribute to him a similar role in an intellectual debate.

⁸ See Wallace-Hadrill (1983) 73–96. On Hadrian's cultural tastes, see *H.A. Hadr.* 14; Dio Cass. 69.3–4. Hadrian's philhellenism as a determining factor in his policies and self-presentation has certainly been overemphasized in the past (Vout (2006); Opper (2008)), but there is no reason to doubt his well attested intellectual interest in the Greek world.

⁹ Hadrian participating in scholarly debates about Homer: *H.A. Hadr.* 16. Hadrian himself published a treatise on grammar entitled *Sermones*, a title which attests to the work's probable origin in such debates (Charisius *s.v. obiter* [Keil 1.209]; Priscian *s.v. ambitus* [Keil 2.547]). For Hadrian's preference for Antimachus, see Dio Cass. 69.4.6. An interest in Homer is attested more indirectly in Arrian's ingratiating account (in a work addressed to Hadrian) of the cult of Achilles (*Periplus* 32–34) and in the story recorded at Philostr. *Her.* 8.2 of Hadrian reconstructing the tomb of Ajax. An epigram ascribed to Hadrian addresses Hector (*A.P.* 9.387); another, Achilles (Bühler (1978), though he doubts the attribution).

¹⁰ On the Panhellenion and its functions, see Spawforth and Walker (1985); (1986); Jones (1996) (emphasizing predominantly the religious aspect of the Panhellenion); Romeo (2002).

¹¹ I follow the interpretation of Jones (1996) 47–53. Text and translation in Oliver (1989) 275–76. Fragments of a decree of the Panhellenion concerning the city of Magnesia ad Meandrum are similar, referencing the city's historical alliances and affirming that its inhabitants are of the same *genos* as the Aeolians of Asia (Oliver 1970) 94–95. Another letter of Hadrian has recently come to light, issued to Naryka, a community in eastern Locris in Greece (revised text and commentary in Jones (2006), with references there to other treatments). Hadrian affirms their status as a *polis*, citing their participation in the Panhellenion and stating that Naryka had frequently been a departure point for heroes and a subject of poets. This mythic and cultural history was no doubt part of the claim the community put to Hadrian for admission into the Panhellenion.

¹² Spawforth and Walker (1986) 104. Testament to this milieu are works of local history from the period, such as Philo of Byblos' encyclopedic *On Cities and their Famous Men* in 30 books (the author also wrote a biography of Hadrian) and Hermogenes of Smyrna's works on Smyrna, settlements in Asia and Europe – and the birthplace of Homer (see Bowie (1974) 184–88).

Yet it is clear from the ancient evidence that the position of prominence which Hadrian assumed in Greek intellectual life, and which the *Contest* appears to reflect, was not met with a universally positive response from many of its major figures. While Philostratus, for example, is generous in praising Hadrian for his admiration and support of prominent Greek sophists,¹³ and Athenaeus praises the emperor a number of times as ‘the most cultured emperor’,¹⁴ a far less flattering picture of the relationship between the dilettante emperor and the ‘professional’ intellectual élite emerges in the *Historia Augusta* and the epitome of Cassius Dio’s book on Hadrian. The author of the *Historia Augusta* admits that Hadrian was not without literary talent, but says that the emperor had an antagonistic relationship with scholars. In a literary flourish of his own, the author says that Hadrian *risit, contempsit, obtrivit* (‘mocked, despised, demeaned’) scholars of all the arts ‘as if he were more learned than they’.¹⁵ In the account of Cassius Dio, Hadrian’s ambition (φιλοτιμία) was insatiable, leading him to vainglorious boasts of his scholarly achievements in every field.¹⁶ Something of Hadrian’s overbearing approach to scholarship is preserved in our knowledge of his work on grammar. As Charisius tells us, Hadrian challenged Terentius Scaurus (‘a most distinguished grammarian’, according to Aulus Gellius 11.15) on the Latinity of the word *obiter*. In proving his point, the emperor cited a letter of Augustus – whom he nonetheless characterized, in a condescending aside, as ‘not an especially erudite individual’.¹⁷

But however overbearing Hadrian’s pronouncements in intellectual society, he always had his immense political authority to support his position. Accordingly, both the *Historia Augusta* and the epitome of Dio’s book on Hadrian tell stories of intellectuals’ various responses to the uncomfortable truth that what Hadrian said in their fields was ‘right’. In the most revealing anecdote, the sophist Favorinus is reprehended by his friends for ceding to Hadrian on a point of grammar when Hadrian was clearly wrong. Hadrian had criticized his use of a particular word, even though the word was perfectly well attested, and Favorinus’ friends alleged that he had ‘backed down wrongly’ (*male cederet*). But Favorinus retorts: ‘You give poor counsel, friends, when you do not allow me to believe that a man who has 30 legions is more learned than everyone else’.¹⁸ The authenticity of the anecdote, as Fündling notes in his commentary on the passage, is impossible to prove, but the moral is clear: ‘power has, for the moment, proven stronger than intelligence or the truth’.¹⁹ By contrast, the sophist Dionysius of Miletus, according to Dio, is said to have quipped to a rival elevated over him by Hadrian that ‘Caesar can give you money and honour, but he can’t

¹³ He says that Hadrian ‘was, of the emperors of past times, the keenest to foster excellence’ (ἐπιτηδείοτατος τῶν πάλαι βασιλέων γενόμενος ἀρετᾶς αὐξῆσαι, *VS* 530). A similar sentiment is expressed at *Juv.* 7.1–21. Generally on Hadrian’s relationship with intellectuals, see Stertz (1993); Fein (1994).

¹⁴ μουσικώτατος βασιλεύς (*Deip.* 8.361, 13.574).

¹⁵ *H.A. Hadr.* 15.10: *Et quamvis esset oratione et versu promptissimus et in omnibus artibus peritissimus, tamen professores omnium artium semper ut doctior risit, contempsit, obtrivit.* For what it is worth, an epigram from a *grammatikos* complaining to Hadrian of starvation and near-death is also preserved, along with Hadrian’s epigrammatic response (*A.P.* 9.137 = Page (1981) 564); its context and attribution cannot be verified.

¹⁶ Dio Cass. 69.3.2–4: φιλοτιμία τε γὰρ ἀπλήστῳ ἐχρήτο...οὐδὲν ὅ τι οὐκ εἰρηνικὸν καὶ πολεμικὸν καὶ βασιλικὸν καὶ ἰδιωτικὸν εἶδέναι ἔλεγε (‘For his ambition was insatiable...he said that there was no art relating to peace or war, kingship or

citizen life, about which he did not know’). Cf. Tertullian, who characterizes Hadrian (derisively) as the ‘explorer of all kinds of inquisitiveness’ (*omnium curiositatum explorator*) (*Apol.* 5.7).

¹⁷ *non pereruditus homo*: Charisius s.v. *obiter* [Keil 1.209].

¹⁸ *Hadr.* 15.13: *non recte suadetis, familiares, qui non patimini me illum doctiorem omnibus credere, qui habet triginta legiones.*

¹⁹ ‘Macht ist für den Moment stärker als Geist oder Wahrheit’ (Fündling 2006) 765. Fündling pertinently cites Pollio’s quip about Augustus (Macrob. *Sat.* 2.4.21) as a parallel: *at ego taceo: non est enim facile in eum scribere qui potest proscribere* (‘But I am silent: for it is not easy to take aim against a man who can take your property’). Cf. also now Keulen (2009) 204, on Hadrian as ‘the personification of a fundamental dilemma in the communication between two types of authority, the authority of the intellectual and the authority – or, rather the power – of the ruler, since the latter is per definition the supreme authority in any discipline’.

make you an orator'.²⁰ The remark, if correctly reported, may well be the product of professional animosity between the two rivals. But Dio attributes the elevation of Dionysius' rival to the intellectual envy of Hadrian, and his narrative suggests that the quip was Dionysius' response, an intellectual's attempt to preserve the integrity of his own field from the influence of brute power. Indeed, the remark parallels other challenges by intellectuals to emperors' assumptions of a position of authority in their own fields merely by virtue of their political power; *Caesar non supra grammaticos*, as one intellectual later put it.²¹ So, Suetonius (writing, of course, as a scholar in the court of Hadrian) records an exchange between Marcus Pomponius Marcellus and the emperor Tiberius which mirrors the situation in Favorinus' exchange with Hadrian.²²

Ewen Bowie (1997) 7–11 has challenged the historical basis for the more extreme claims in Dio and the *Historia Augusta*, attributing their image of a 'concerted attempt by Hadrian to destroy the careers of successful intellectuals' to the virulent posthumous anti-Hadrianic tradition. The perils of uncritical acceptance of the *Historia Augusta* are also well-known, and Syme influentially traced the negative image of Hadrian's cultural involvement in chapters 14.8–16.7 of the *Vita Hadriani* to the scandalizing Severan biographer, Marius Maximus.²³ It would, then, certainly put too much credence in the sources to state, with one modern scholar, that 'Hadrian despised learned men'.²⁴ On the other hand, there is no reason to disbelieve entirely the credible picture of tension the sources present between the intellectual élite and an emperor who claimed omniscience as much as omnipotence. We know from other contemporary sources unconnected with Hadrian that the scholarly environment at the time was intensely competitive and hierarchical, and authority as a scholar was extremely hard-won.²⁵ It is not hard to imagine resentment, whether openly expressed or not, towards someone to whom a certain degree of authority accrued automatically. Moreover, too benign a view of Hadrian also goes against the sources, since it does seem that Hadrian could be dangerous as much as merely difficult. Unmentioned by Bowie are the letters of Fronto, not themselves immune to charges of bias, but nevertheless closer chronologically to Hadrian than either Dio or the *Historia Augusta*. Fronto was a member of the Senate at the time of Hadrian's death and preeminent as a scholar in this period.²⁶ Although Fronto's renown as an orator and his scholarly interests must surely have piqued Hadrian's interest – and indeed there is evidence of *familiaritas* between the two in Fronto's letters – Fronto's attitude towards Hadrian is cold, and he speaks with bitterness of having maintained friendships *cum periculo capitis* ('under the risk of my life') during Hadrian's rule.²⁷

²⁰ Dio Cass. 69.3.5: Καῖσαρ χρήματα μὲν σοι καὶ τιμὴν δοῦναι δύναται, ῥήτορα δὲ σε ποιῆσαι οὐ δύναται. On Dionysius of Miletus, see Philostr. *VS* 521–26.

²¹ The apophthegm is often rendered 'Caesar is not above grammar', but we should retain a literal translation ('Caesar is not above grammarians'). The source is obscure. It should perhaps be associated with the story told about the emperor Sigismund, popularized in English by Thomas Carlyle ((1858) 200). Having been corrected on his incorrect use of the neuter noun *schisma* as feminine at the Council of Constance in 1414, Sigismund is said to have imperiously declared: 'I am the Roman emperor, and above grammar!' (*ego sum rex Romanus et super grammaticam*).

²² *Gramm.* 22. When Atteius Capito attempted to defend Tiberius on a Latin word he had used improperly, saying that if it wasn't correct Latin now, it would be from now on, the former boxer turned advocate Pomponius Marcellus is said to have quipped *tu enim, Caesar civitatem dare potes hominibus, verbis non potes*

('Caesar, you can give citizenship to men; you can't give it to words'). For the text adopted here, see Kaster (1992) 102–03. The story is also told at Dio Cass. 57.17.2.

²³ Syme (1971) 115; also Barnes (1978) 102. Attempts to attribute positive aspects of the *Vita* to one source and negative to another, less trustworthy, source are made less secure by Hadrian's own notoriously variable character.

²⁴ So, Van den Hout (1999) 62.

²⁵ On the competitive nature of debate amongst grammarians and their struggles for authority through learning, see Champlin (1980) 47–49; Kaster (1988) 50–70.

²⁶ For a discussion of the dating, see Van den Hout (1999) 63–64. Fronto's preeminence as a scholar is attested by Gellius 19.8.1 and he is a frequent interlocutor in the scholarly debates staged in Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* (see Holford-Strevens (2003) 131–39).

²⁷ *Cum periculo capitis*: *Nep. Am.* 2.8. Fronto's frosty attitude towards Hadrian: *Ad M. Caes.* 2.1. On the evidence for Fronto being an *amicus Caesaris*, see Champlin (1980) 95.

This ambivalence about Hadrian's involvement in the world of the Greek intellectual élite is the background against which we should interpret the account of Hadrian's 'solution' to the problem of Homer's ancestry in the *Contest*. Rather than aggrandizing Hadrian's cultural authority in the world of Greek letters, the account of the oracle's response to Hadrian embodies a protest against the pressure to accept Hadrian's answers as 'right'. The first hint of irony comes in the sentence which the author includes directly after the response of the oracle: οἷς μάλιστα δεῖ πιστεύειν διὰ τε τὸν πυθόμενον καὶ τὸν ἀποκρινάμενον, ἄλλως τε οὕτως τοῦ ποιητοῦ μεγαλοφυῶς τὸν προπάτορα διὰ τῶν ἐπῶν δεδοξασκός ('We must certainly trust these things, both on account of the one asking the question and the one answering it, and in any case because the poet extolled his grandfather so magnificently in his poems'). The first sting of the sentence comes in the word δεῖ ('must'). The language of compulsion contrasts implicitly with that employed in the opening section, the catalogue of previous claims and deductions about Homer's parentage, where each claim is discussed without explicit preference between the alternatives. A record of scholarly controversy has abruptly become a matter of necessity. Moreover, the kind of reasoning is different: the earlier claims are explained in the first section of the *Contest* by brief reference to mythical genealogies, linguistic inheritances and geographical monuments, and not merely to the authority of the one making the claim. The compulsion to trust the oracle's assertion on account of the questioner is even more problematic in its apparent violation of logic: when does the identity of the questioner ever boost the reliability of the respondent? Nor were we ever asked to 'trust' (πιστεύειν) the theories of Homeric provenance presented in the opening sections of the *Contest*, as if accepting them were somehow a matter of faith. But this answer is indeed a matter of belief; it is hard not to think at this point of Favorinus' ironic advice to 'believe' (*credere*) that Hadrian is more learned than everyone else.

But the full irony only becomes explicit once we consider the answer the oracle gives to Hadrian's question about Homer. Homer's father turns out to be a figure from his own epic, Telemachus, and his homeland, like that of Odysseus, turns out to be Ithaca. To modern sensibilities, the answer is absurd. More pertinently, though, there is no reason why it would not have appeared absurd to anyone in antiquity as well. It is not attested in any other ancient source independent of this one. The only exception appears to be the beginning of the *Contest* itself, where the author, no doubt to synthesize separate parts of the compilation, cites Telemachus in a list of theories of the identity of Homer's father. By necessity given its novelty, although the author attributes every other paternal theory to some scholarly figure or national claim, he euphemistically says of the 'Telemachus theory' that 'some say it was Telemachus, son of Odysseus' (εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ Τηλέμαχον τὸν Ὀδυσσεύως). But not every part of the text has been synthesized, to highly ironic effect. In sections 7 and 11, after we are urged to believe the oracle to Hadrian, its theory of paternity is contradicted by Hesiod's references to Homer as the 'son of Meles'. Another oracular response at Delphi, delivered to Homer himself and reported in section 5, tells us that Ios is the homeland of Homer's mother, thus also implicitly ruling out Polycaste as Homer's mother. Without explicitly saying that the oracle to Hadrian is false, the very structure of the compilation argues against the response we are urged to believe on the emperor's authority.

It is true that the deduction of aspects of writers' lives from incidents in their work is well attested in ancient biographies of poets and orators, not least in the case of Homer, whose focus on Ithaca and topographical knowledge of the island led naturally to speculation about his background.²⁸ But the theory that Homer was Odysseus' grandson is not drawn from any textual evidence from within the work, and, indeed, acceptance of the theory involves twisting the

²⁸ On biographers' elaboration of a poet's life from details in their poetry, see Fairweather (1974) especially

232–42; Lefkowitz (1981).

evidence: a tradition about Telemachus' union with Polycaste is known and has some slender Homeric support, but their son's name, if given, is Persepolis (or Perseptolis), not Homer.²⁹ Moreover, the theory is of a very different kind to those given in the opening part of the *Contest*, all of which use extra-textual evidence to deduce facts about the text – Hadrian's oracle reverses their scholarly procedure. Finally, and significantly, there is simply no evidence that anyone ever believed this theory. At some point in antiquity the oracle was excerpted (with minor textual deviations) into the *Palatine Anthology* (14.102), but the 'Telemachus theory' does not reappear in discussions of Homeric *zetemata* until the sixth-century biographer Hesychius of Miletus, and then in the tenth-century *Suda*.³⁰ When it is next mentioned, by the Byzantine scholar John Tzetzes in the 12th century, the theory's proponents are described as talking 'nonsense'.³¹

Despite being presented as something we must accept, then, the anecdote attributes to Hadrian a theory of Homeric origins which is self-evidently false. Its closest parallel is not to be found in scholarly works but in Lucian's farcical theory that Homer was a Babylonian³² or in the theory advanced by the Egyptian priest Calasiris in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* that Homer was an Egyptian.³³ The satire gains additional point through Hadrian's own connections to Delphi. Against the backdrop of cynicism about the continuing efficacy of the Delphic Oracle, Hadrian planned to make Delphi 'the main Panhellenic centre' (Birley (1997) 187).³⁴ Hadrian visited Delphi in 125; earlier in the year, he had written a letter reconstituting the membership of the Delphic Amphictiony, originally founded for the administration of the Temple of Apollo, with the intention that it become a 'common Council for all Greeks'.³⁵ The Delphians seem to have responded in kind, celebrating Hadrian in an inscription at Delphi as 'the Savior who has healed and nourished his own Greece'.³⁶ The connection made in the *Contest* between Hadrian and the Delphic Oracle draws just such an intimate connection between the emperor and Delphi, suggesting, with ostensible flattery, that the Roman emperor has been made privy to the kind of sacred knowledge – particularly, Greek knowledge – of which the oracle had been a font throughout antiquity. The protagonist of the satirical story is not merely the 'private' Hadrian, whose combination of dilettantism and unbridled political power made for a sometimes uncomfortable relationship with 'professional' intellectuals; it is also the 'public' Hadrian, whose political policies attempted to harness the cultural capital of icons of Greek learning and tradition.

²⁹ The story appears to have arisen from the scene in *Od.* 3 where Nestor's daughter, Polycaste (also called Epicaste), bathes Telemachus in Nestor's household (*Od.* 3.464–68). Heubeck et al. ((1988) 189) assume that the lines were included in the *Odyssey* to account for a pre-existent tradition of their union. The name of their son is given in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 221). Later traditions also name Nausicaa as Persepolis' mother (cf. *RE* 972–73 s.v. 'Perseptolis').

³⁰ On *A.P.* 14.102, see Skiadas (1965) 17. Hesychius' text can be found in West (2003) 426; it is reproduced in the *Suda* s.v. *Homeros* (a).

³¹ 'Others, moreover, nonsensically suggest Telemachus and Thamyris' (Τηλέμαχον καὶ Θάμυριν ἄλλοι ληροῦσι πάλιν), *Prolegomena* 64 (ed. Boissonade (1851)).

³² *Ver. Hist.* 2.20. As Heath ((1998) 31) says, Lucian makes Homer Babylonian precisely because 'a Babylonian...is what Homer was least likely to be'. Homer's interaction with his own characters as if they were extra-textual personalities is also a comic motif in

Lucian's text.

³³ *Aeth.* 3.12–15. The idea that Homer was an Egyptian was surprisingly widely diffused, but its presentation in Heliodorus is certainly humorous; see the comments of Anderson (1993) 175.

³⁴ For contemporary scepticism about the oracle at Delphi, see *Juv.* 6.555–56. Other second-century texts focus on the obsolescence or unreliability of oracles more generally; cf. *Plut. De Def. Orac.* especially at 411E–412D; *Lucian JConf* 12–14; *Max. Tyr.* 29.7 [p.352–53 Koniaris]. The treatise 'Against the Oracles' (κατὰ τῶν χρηστηρίων) by the Cynic philosopher Oenomaus of Gadara, debunking famous oracles from Greece's past as foolish or misguided, is also likely a product of the Hadrianic period (Hammerstaedt (1988)).

³⁵ Oliver (1989) no. 75 [= *FdD* 3.4, 70–83, no. 302], col. 2, lines 5–6: πάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὸ συνέδριον. Cf. *Paus.* 10.8.4–5.

³⁶ *SIG*³ 835A: Αὐτοκράτορι Ἀδριανῶ σωτῆρι, ῥυσαμένῳ καὶ θρέψαντι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ Ἑλλάδα.

The anecdote of Hadrian's consultation of the oracle is presented as the culmination of a lengthy Greek scholarly controversy about Homer's origins. But its implications spread beyond Homer. It preserves some of the intellectual atmosphere to which the Favorinus anecdote in the *Historia Augusta* attests, but of which we have precious little contemporary evidence: an atmosphere in which Hadrian's supposed omniscience in the liberal arts and access to unlimited power made for friction, rather than mere benign acceptance, in the Greek intellectual world. The oracle is 'right'. The text says we must believe it 'on account of the identity of the person asking and the person answering'. But of course the oracle is *wrong*, and obviously, farcically wrong, and if the text says that we 'must' believe it, perhaps at this point the text is encouraging us to realize that power need not always prove stronger than intelligence or the truth.

One final point about the oracle is worth noting. On closer examination, the hopeless nature of Hadrian's inquiry seems to be foreshadowed by the response itself. Whoever wrote it, it is a curious production. The uncharacteristically helpful second sentence, apparently answering Hadrian's question in detail and without customary oracular mystification, makes an odd fit with the unpromising (but truer) opening word of the oracle: 'unknown' (ἄγνωστον). The most curious detail, however, and one which has aroused little comment, is its description of Homer as a 'Siren'. Homer does not appear to be called a Siren elsewhere, although Sirens did have an established connection in Greek literature with poetry and philosophy. They appear early on as emblematic of eloquence and persuasiveness.³⁷ The Sirens themselves had an ambiguous relationship with the Muses, and were increasingly described as figures of learning and allegorized as symbols of the liberal arts.³⁸ The description of Homer in the last line of the oracle's response as a 'man exceeding all mortals in his cleverness in all respects' (βροτῶν πέρι πάνσοφον ἄνδρα) is also reminiscent of the description of the Sirens in the *Odyssey* as knowing all things on earth (12.189–91).

But, especially in this explicitly Homeric context, it is hard not to think here also of the negative paradigm of the Sirens of the *Odyssey*, their characterization as a dangerous temptation threatening to lure the hero astray. Cicero combines these two visions of the Sirens in greatest detail, and it is his account which provides the most complete background against which to read the reference to Homer as a Siren in the tantalizingly explicit but woefully misleading oracular response to Hadrian.³⁹ After translating the relevant passage from the *Odyssey*, Cicero observes that it was not merely music which the Sirens offered. 'They offer knowledge', says Cicero, 'and it is little wonder that the desire for wisdom was more dear to him than his homeland'.⁴⁰ The connection is clear, and it is unflattering in the extreme. Homer, and the Greek intellectual world to which Homer is perpetual muse, is Hadrian's Siren. Anyone who knew their Homer knew instantly that Hadrian, like Odysseus, would never be privy to the secret knowledge which the Sirens offered. Hadrian reportedly claimed knowledge of every area of learning. The ancient biographies make much of Hadrian's ambitions as polymath and philhellene. Many no doubt, for whatever motive, celebrated these ambitions. But others, it seems, did not, and the oracle preserved in the *Contest* is one text that predicted that Hadrian's ambitions could only ever steer him astray.

³⁷ The Sirens are used as a figure for eloquence from Pindar onwards; see Slater (1969) 463; LSJ s.v. Σειρήν. II. Socrates' teaching is likened to the song of the Sirens at Pl. *Symp.* 216A. On the Sirens as proverbial for eloquence in Roman culture, see Allegri (2000).

³⁸ On early representations of the Sirens and their

ambiguous relationship with the Muses, see Gantz (1993) 150. Clarke gives an overview of later allegorizing accounts of the Sirens ((1981) 93–94).

³⁹ *Fin.* 5.49.

⁴⁰ ...*scientiam pollicentur, quam non erat mirum sapientiae cupido patria esse cariorem.*

II. The competition

If the anecdote about Hadrian and the oracle can be interpreted as a comment on Hadrian's ambitions in the Greek intellectual world, it remains to be examined how this affects our interpretation of the compilation as a whole. Specifically, why, of all stories about Homer, has the compiler paired this anecdote with the long account, most probably taken from Alcidas, of Homer and Hesiod's poetic competition? The pervasive interest in all things Homeric might be taken as explanation enough; but, intriguingly, once the Hadrianic frame has been established in the compilation, there are some marked Hadrianic resonances to the story of the contest which may explain its lengthy excerption by the compiler in this period. There is no reason to assume that the compiler has changed the story in any way to suit the reception environment of the second century,⁴¹ yet the universalizing rhetoric in the description of the contest may well have recalled Hadrian's establishment of the Panhellenia at Athens, a sporting and cultural festival held every four years, at which the Panhellenion's rhetoric of unification was no doubt reiterated.⁴² Indeed, the period saw an efflorescence of Greek-style festivals, not merely in Athens, but all over the Empire.⁴³ Although the poetic competitions at festivals of the Imperial era bore little actual resemblance to the contest presented here, the contest of Homer and Hesiod continued to be viewed as an ancient archetype for such competitions. Plutarch, when some of his colleagues at the Pythian Games in Delphi reportedly expressed a wish that the poetic competition be excluded from the festival, argued from historical precedent that the competition was an integral part of the Games and cited the contest of Homer and Hesiod as the obvious progenitor of the contemporary competition.⁴⁴

Indeed, if the number of extant discussions is any indication, interest in the story seems generally to have been high during this period. Contemporary discussions do not, however, tend to rehearse the major incidents of the competition or the poets' individual performances in any detail. Rather, the contest in this period becomes nearly synonymous with the supposedly foolish decision of King Panedes to choose Hesiod over Homer as the victor. Denouncing the injustice of this decision is a way of affirming the inimitable superiority of Homer amongst poets. In his second Kingship Oration, Dio Chrysostom has the philhomic Alexander contemptuously dismiss the defeat, saying that the contest was not conducted before kings at all, but rather 'rustics and laymen, or, rather, degenerates and effeminates'.⁴⁵ The same view is expressed, rather more good-humouredly, by Protesilaus in Philostratus' *Heroicus*. The vinedresser says that once, when asked to judge between two poets, he chose the poet who was *phauloteron*; Protesilaus replies that Panedes long ago did the same thing, despite his age and experience.⁴⁶ The passage plays on

⁴¹ Pace Heldmann (1982), who maintains that the section in which Panedes awards the prize to Hesiod because he is the poet of peace is a second-century AD creation; cf. the review of Richardson (1984).

⁴² The contest is presented in the text hyperbolically as an event which concerns 'all people', or, specifically, 'all Greeks': Amphidamas' son 'invited all people to compete who were distinguished not only for their strength and speed, but also for their wisdom, and honoured them with large rewards' (6); 'all the Greeks called for Homer to be crowned' (12); 'Amazed again at Homer, the Greeks praised him' (13). Cf. the universalizing claims made for Greek culture in the opening of the *Contest*: 'all people would like Homer and Hesiod to be counted as their fellow-citizens' (1); 'practically all cities and their inhabitants say that Homer was born amongst them' (2); 'everyone even today' invokes at feasts the verses of Homer dubbed Golden 'by the

Greeks' (8); Homer has beautified 'all Greece with his verbal craft' (17). That such gestures towards a panhellenizing Greek identity occur alongside the scholarly search to pin Homer's heritage to a particular place is typical of the period. So Romeo (2002), who demonstrates the coexistence of differing notions of cultural identity in the Second Sophistic, one based on broad notions of cosmopolitanism and *paideia*, and the other (typified by the institution of the Panhellenion) emphasizing specific genealogical and cultural ties.

⁴³ Van Nijf (2001); Newby (2005). Hadrian's personal involvement in the administration of games and the performance of musicians and athletes is illustrated very clearly by the extensive letters recently found at Alexandria Troas (Petzl and Schwertheim (2006)).

⁴⁴ *Quaest. conv.* 674D–675D.

⁴⁵ 2.12.

⁴⁶ *Her.* 43.9–10.

two senses of *phaulos*: the vinedresser preferred the poet who was more ‘simple, unaffected’ (*phauloteron*), but Protesilaus – who has already asserted Homer’s superiority over Hesiod (25.2) – humorously likens this to Panedes’ choice of a ‘poorer’ (*phauloteron*) poet. Similarly, when Lucian sees the two poets compete again on the Isle of the Blessed, he says that Homer delivered the superior performance, but Hesiod was made the winner, in an obvious comment on their original contest.⁴⁷ At some later point, a ‘Panedes’ judgment’ even seems to have become proverbial for a foolish decision.⁴⁸

If this is the reception environment in which the compiler assembled the *Contest*, any similar comments on Panedes’ judgment have not been inserted into this narrative. Rather, after Homer and Hesiod each recite the ‘finest’ (*kalliston*) passage of their poetry, we hear:

θαυμάσαντες δὲ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τὸν Ὅμηρον οἱ Ἕλληνας ἐπήνουν, ὡς παρὰ τὸ προσῆκον γεγονότων τῶν ἐπῶν, καὶ ἐκέλευον διδόναι τὴν νίκην. ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τὸν Ἡσίοδον ἐστεφάνωσεν, εἰπὼν δίκαιον εἶναι τὸν ἐπὶ γεωργίαν καὶ εἰρήνην προκαλούμενον νικᾶν, οὐ τὸν πολέμου καὶ σφαγᾶς διεξιόντα (*Certamen* 13).

Even at this point the Greeks marvelled at Homer, and were praising him for going beyond the merely fitting, and they enjoined that victory be given to him. But the king garlanded Hesiod, saying that it was just that the poet calling us to agriculture and peace be victorious, not the poet relating warfare and slaughter.

Reflecting a familiar dichotomy according to which Hesiod was a poet of peace and Homer a poet of war, King Panedes, for political more than aesthetic reasons, awards the prize to Hesiod.⁴⁹ Viewed in isolation, there does not seem to be anything capricious or ill-informed about this decision. But, viewed in the context of the whole work, Panedes’ verdict does represent a significant reversal. Perhaps even more than other versions of the myth, up until the final test, this narrative presents the contest as a thoroughly one-sided affair, with Hesiod putting each of the questions to Homer, and Homer meeting each challenge with success.⁵⁰ We are twice told that the crowd at the contest ‘marvelled’ at Homer’s verses (sections 8 and 13); we hear that his lines describing the ‘finest thing for mortals’ (= *Od.* 9.6–11) were instantly canonized; and twice ‘the Greeks’ call for Homer to be garlanded as victor (12, 13). The narrator, too, repeatedly makes reference to Homer’s success at meeting the challenges, and Hesiod’s increasing frustration (8, 10, 11). With these continued indications of Homer’s success throughout the competition, the narrative stresses the culturally ingrained superiority of Homer as much as possible, given the immutable narrative component of Hesiod’s victory.⁵¹

The inexorable feeling one gets, then, is that, however defensible King Panedes’ decision is on his own, civic agenda, he has made a gaffe (and an unpopular one) in choosing the weaker and less popular candidate in the poetic contest. Moreover, Panedes’ judgment sets him in opposition

⁴⁷ *VH* 2.22.

⁴⁸ Michael Apostolius *Proverbiorum Centuria* 14.11, cited by O’Sullivan ((1992) 96). Hesiod will have to wait until the late antique Greek orator Themistius to find a vocal partisan (348C–49C).

⁴⁹ On this dichotomy, see West (1967) 443. West is the most prominent exponent of the view that Panedes’ judgment is fair and not called into question by the text; Vogt (1959), followed by Rosen (2004), argue, on the contrary, that Panedes represents ‘the negative exemplum of a “bad judge”’ (Rosen (2004) 313). The poets’ chosen passages to recite (*Op.* 383–92 and *Il.* 13.126–33 and 339–44, the latter itself a ‘compilation’

of sorts) are discussed by Graziosi ((2002) 174).

⁵⁰ This despite the explicit statement earlier in the text that ‘both competed wonderfully’ (section 6). The alternate view that the poets were evenly matched, although not widespread, is to be found in Plutarch (*Conv.sept.sap.* 154A), who emphasizes the difficulty of deciding a winner between poets of such equal standing. But perhaps he is dealing with a different account of the competition: in his discussion, he quotes a riddle which also occurs in the *Contest*, but here Homer (or, in a ms. variation, another epic poet, Lesches) sets the riddle, and Hesiod successfully responds.

⁵¹ O’Sullivan (1992) 96–98.

with, as this narrative puts it, ‘the Greeks’, who had called for Homer to be crowned (sections 12 and 13). This, I suggest, is why the compiler has paired the contest narrative with the unflattering anecdote of Hadrian and the oracle. That anecdote satirized the pretensions to knowledge of an emperor who claimed, according to Dio, to know everything ‘relating to peace or war, kingship or citizen life’.⁵² The emperor Hadrian – whom, we might note, is called ‘king’ (*basileus*) within the compilation (3) – is therefore parodically mirrored in the figure of King ‘Pan-edes’ (‘all-knowing’, surely a mythic name awarded *kat’antiphrasin*). Moreover, the absurd hypothesis about Homer that we are asked to believe in the Hadrian anecdote is matched with a proverbial instance of Homeric misjudgment, King Panedes’ crowning of Hesiod against Homer. Without the need to reshape the contest narrative explicitly, the compilation pairs the two together, implicitly likening a Roman emperor of well-known philhellenic ambitions to the earlier king, whose imperious judgment on poetry ends up alienating him from ‘the Greeks’.

Plutarch, in his discussion of the Pythian Games at Delphi, describes the story of Homer and Hesiod’s poetic competition as a ‘well-worn story’ (ἔωλα...πράγματα). In a rhetorical *praeterito*, he leaves the narration of the story to the ‘prattling of *grammatikoi*’ (τῶν διατεθρυλῆσθαι πάνθ’ ὑπὸ τῶν γραμματικῶν), preferring to expound more *recherché* themes.⁵³ There is no doubt some truth to Plutarch’s association of the story of the contest with the teaching of *grammatikoi*. Both Homer and Hesiod were the subject of critical conversation by grammarians in the Empire, and the compilation of the *Contest* itself fits in with a wider Imperial interest in the incidents and chronology of Homer’s life.⁵⁴ Indeed, for one grammarian at least, the story seems not to have been merely the object of study, but part of his public self-fashioning. So, the Latin *grammaticus* Florus narrates a ‘life story’ in the prologue of his (now lost) treatise *Vergilius Orator an Poeta* in such a way as to recall unmistakably the contest of Homer and Hesiod. Participating in a poetry contest at the Capitoline Games, the majority of the crowd acclaimed Florus as the winner, but the biased judge (here Domitian), as misguided as Panedes, awarded the prize to his competitor. Like Homer, Florus’ verses were instantly canonized – he is told by a stranger that his verses are still sung and that he is ‘famous in every forum’ (*in foro omni clarissimus*). Florus, astounded by his loss, converts himself into a Homeric wanderer, before settling down and becoming a *grammaticus*.⁵⁵ More than an antiquarian curiosity, the implicit allusions to the contest in Florus’ autobiography suggest that the contest of Homer and Hesiod is a ‘culturally active presence’⁵⁶ in the second century, an iconic narrative around which identity, as much as intellectual debate, could be shaped.

A sense of how the figure of Homer in this story could function as an idealizing mirror of the grammarian’s place in Roman society can be gained from the *Contest* itself. Graziosi (2001) has noted the connection between the characterization of Homer and the figure of the rhapsode in the work.⁵⁷ But, when placed in an Imperial-era compilation, other connections emerge. Homer in this compilation appears anachronistically not as an oral bard but, at the beginning of his career, as a teacher of reading and writing.⁵⁸ The questions he answers in the poetic competition sometimes hew close to that brand of Homeric trivia with which Tiberius, for one, loved testing

⁵² Dio Cass. 69.3.2–3.

⁵³ *Quaest. Conv.* 674F–675A.

⁵⁴ On the authors likely taught by *grammatikoi* in the Roman Empire, see McNelis (2002) 77–83.

⁵⁵ On Florus and his works, see Courtney (2003) 381–82; text in Jal (1967) 111–15. Caldelli (1993) 125 gives the year 90 for Florus’ participation in the Capitoline Games. Statius also grandly likens his father, a Greek *grammatikos*, to Homer (*Silv.* 5.3.130–32).

⁵⁶ I adopt the phrase from Lorna Hardwick’s discussion of ‘(Why) Do Reception Studies Matter?’

(2003) 112.

⁵⁷ On the image elsewhere of Homer as a rhapsode, see also Graziosi (2002) 32–40. Richardson (1981) suggests that the presentation of Homer and Hesiod in the *Contest* reflects an analogous emphasis in the extant fragments of Alcidas on the importance of improvisation for an orator.

⁵⁸ ‘They say that he began his poetic career while teaching reading and writing’ (φασιν αὐτὸν γράμματα διδάσκοντα τῆς ποιήσεως ἀρξασθαι, *Contest* 2).

Greek *grammatikoi*.⁵⁹ Most of all, though a foreigner in each land he visits, the narrative of the *Contest* shows Homer being honoured with material rewards, recognition and (a key Imperial theme) citizenship by foreign kings on account of his learning and literary talent. Yet he remains an outsider of sorts: a man of disputed birth, who dies ingloriously as the result of a child's riddle and, after all, a man who loses the contest. This image of a celebrated outsider is similar to that in another Hadrianic-era text, the *De Grammaticis* of Suetonius. Whether literally true or not, the biographies of the *De Grammaticis*, through their repeated, archetypal story patterns, also propound an idealized identity for the grammarian in Roman society. Here, too, the grammarian is typically a figure of foreign or low birth, whose life is subject to dramatic rises and falls, who ascends to a position of prominence through learning and contact with powerful Romans, but remains an 'outsider' of sorts, either puckishly advertising their own low status, dying in disgrace or turning on society as a satirist.

We see in both the *Contest* and the *De Grammaticis* an increasing effort to present intellectual pursuits, necessarily bound up with structures of power to some degree, as nonetheless independent from political control. This compilation, with its shifting authorities and its scholarly theories jostling for acceptance, idealistically presents a world in which even the emperor's voice is not immune from irony, challenge, contradiction. While the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* preserves passages of greater antiquity than the Imperial era and of great interest to scholars, we ought not to lose sight of the compilation as a whole, the ideological context in which it was produced and the internal dynamics of the work itself. In a period of politicization of Greek cultural knowledge, the satirical anecdote about Hadrian in the *Contest* embodies a protest against the compulsion to treat the emperor's answers as 'right' and, by implication, a push towards the intellectual freedom of the scholar in Imperial Rome.

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⁵⁹ He answers, for example, the arithmetic question of how many Achaeans went to Troy. Cf. Suetonius (*Tib.* 70) on Tiberius' fondness for asking *grammatikoi*

abstruse literary questions. The name of Hecuba's mother, Achilles' drag name and the songs sung by the Sirens are three topics given by way of example.

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