“Not Enduring the Wanderings of Odysseus”: Poetry, Prose and Patronage in Pseudo-Scymnus’s *Periodos to Nicomedes*[[1]](#endnote-1)\*

Jessica Lightfoot

*Trinity College, University of Cambridge*

<sc>summary<sc>: This article examines the *Periodos to Nicomedes* within its literary, cultural and political context. After offering an analysis of how and why the anonymous author creates a work which straddles the boundaries between prose and verse while engaging with contemporary Hellenistic literary critical debates, it argues for the significance of the figure of Homer’s Odysseus in terms of the author’s presentation of an idealized relationship with his real-world patron, the Bithynian monarch Nicomedes. Ultimately the *Periodos* emerges as a work which is especially fitting for its Bithynian patron in the context of Asia Minor in the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc>

<sc>keywords<sc>: *Periodos to Nicomedes*, Pseudo-Scymnus, Nicomedes of Bithynia, Homer, Odyssey, Odysseus

<sc>The *Periodos to Nicomedes* is a poem in comic iambic trimeters addressed to a king Nicomedes of Bithynia, the work’s patron. From internal evidence it is possible to determine that the poem dates to the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc> (most likely between 133–c.110/109 <sc>b.c.e.<sc>) and that its addressee is either Nicomedes II Epiphanes (149­­–c.127 <sc>b.c.e.<sc>) or Nicomedes III Euergetes (c.127­–c.94 <sc>b.c.e.<sc>).[[2]](#endnote-2) The identity of the author remains uncertain. Previous attributions to Scymnus, a writer from Chios who authored a lost *periegesis* at the beginning of the second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc>, are unquestionably wrong, since the *Periodos* was composed later than his active period, while more recent suggestions concerning authorship remain highly speculative.[[3]](#endnote-3) Since the question is unresolved, modern scholars have tended to continue to refer to the unknown author as ‘Pseudo-Scymnus’ (henceforth PS).[[4]](#endnote-4)

After outlining the work’s method and aims in a 138-line prologue, PS embarks upon a geographical catalogue of the lands and peoples of the known world (*oikoumene*) in the form of a clockwise description of the circuit of the earth from the Pillars of Heracles (Strait of Gibraltar) to the Euxine Sea’s west shore.[[5]](#endnote-5) The first 742 continuous lines of the *Periodos* are preserved in a single manuscript (*Codex Parisinus suppl. gr.*443), though the loss of the end of the codex means that the description of Asia and Libya promised in the prologue is mostly lost.[[6]](#endnote-6) PS’s geographical account is sparse and devoid of much supplementary description, consisting primarily of toponyms and indications of how the locations mentioned are situated in relation to one another. Often while plotting out this geographical route PS briefly and selectively notes matters of interest concerning the colonial origins of these settlements, their names, any name changes they may have undergone over time, and their respective founders and leaders. But mythical and historical events are never dwelt upon in any great detail: one of the main reasons why the *Periodos*—when it has been noticed at all—has seldom delighted the modern reader at first sight.

My aim in this article is to demonstrate that when examined more closely in its literary and cultural context, the *Periodos to Nicomedes* is more than a dry geographical catalogue, devoid of literary merit and of interest today only for its occasional useful snippet of geographical or toponymical information concerning Hellenistic views of the *oikoumene*. Instead it is a rare surviving example of a late Hellenistic literary production which straddles the boundaries between poetry and prose and which, in the process, casts a unique light on the cultural positioning of a minor Hellenistic kingdom in the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc> There are several aspects of the *Periodos* which have not yet been examined in sufficient detail. The first is the work’s place within broader poetic and prosaic traditions of geographical writing. In particular, the significance of the *Odyssey* and the figure of Odysseus in the background of PS’s narration of his geographical vision of the *oikoumene* has been underrated. A re-examination of this aspect of the *Periodos* impacts in turn our reading of the manner in which the anonymous author presents his relationship with his real-world patron Nicomedes. This relationship between writer and patron is the key to understanding the form of the *Periodos* as a whole. By creating a work which deliberately positions itself between poetic and prosaic traditions of geographical writing, PS is able to craft a form which is particularly fitting for his Bithynian patron in the context of Asia Minor in the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc>

In the opening section, I first turn to the prologue of the *Periodos* in order to examine what PS himself says about his decision to compose his work in comic trimeters. As well as exploring the place of the *Periodos* in the tradition of geographical catalogue poetry, the prologue’s mention of the importance of producing “grace” (*charis*) through its use of metrical form is shown to be of particular interest in light of the reciprocal relationship between writer and patron which PS is keen to cultivate. In the next section, the *Periodos*’s engagement with the traditions of Hellenistic geographical and literary critical scholarship is put under the spotlight to establish how the work’s balancing act between prose and verse is related to ideas concerning didactic benefit, readerly pleasure and claims of poetic and prosaic truth and authority. The third section turns to the significance of the figure of Odysseus in the *Periodos*. As well as influencing PS’s stance towards two different ways of gaining geographical knowledge—either via book-learning or from personal autopsy—Odysseus’s place in the geographical tradition is also especially relevant to the relationship constructed in the work between “poet” and patron. The final section demonstrates how the peculiarities of PS’s approach in the *Periodos* relate to the significance of the connections between poetry, geographical scholarship and patronage in the Bithynian court in the period of the work’s production.

<a>Between Poetry and Prose: *Charis* and the Prologue of the *Periodos*<a>

Perhaps one of the most baffling aspects of the *Periodos* for the modern reader is the way it elides the boundaries of prose and verse throughout the geographical body of the work, the style and content of which is much closer to what might be expected in contemporary prose than in poetry.[[7]](#endnote-7) Of course, the skillful versification of prose sources into verse replete with poetic effects is hardly unfamiliar in the tradition of Hellenistic didactic poetry. But in the *Periodos* we seem to be a world away from, for example, Aratus’s elegant poetic rendering of Eudoxus’s prose *Phaenomena*, as the following stark example of PS’s method makes clear.[[8]](#endnote-8)

After discussing the island of Crete, PS turns to describe the islands of Astypalaea, Kythera and Aegina, before finally reaching Athens (550­–65):

ἐν τῷ πόρῳ δὲ κειμένη τῷ Κρητικῷ

ἄποικός ἐστιν Ἀστυπάλαια Μεγαρέων,

νῆσος πελαγία· πρὸς δὲ τῇ Λακωνικῇ

Κύθηρα· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα κατ’ Ἐπίδαυρον ἥ

πρότερον μὲν Οἰνώνη προσηγορεύετο,

ὕστερον ἀπ’ Αἰγίνης δὲ τῆς Ἀσωπίδος

Αἴγιναν ἐκάλεσεν κατασχὼν Αἰακός·

καὶ πλησίον ταύτῃ Σαλαμὶς, ἐν ᾗ λόγος

τὸν Αἰακοῦ Τελαμῶνα βασιλεῦσαί ποτε.

ἑξῆς Ἀθῆναι· φασὶ δ’ οἰκητὰς λαχεῖν

ταύτας Πελασγοὺς πρῶτον, οὓς δὴ καὶ λόγος

Κραναοὺς καλεῖσθαι, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα Κεκροπίδας,

Κέκροπος δυναστεύσαντος, ὑστέροισι δέ

χρόνοις, Ἐρεχθέως τῆς πόλεως ἡγουμένου,

ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς τὴν προσηγορίαν λαχεῖν.

Ἡρόδοτος ἱστορεῖ δὲ ταῦτα συγγράφων.

And lying in the Cretan strait is Astypalaea, a colony of the Megarians, an island lying in the open sea. And near to Laconia is Kythera. And after these places opposite Epidaurus there is an island which was previously named Oinone, but later Aeacus began to call it Aegina after Aegina daughter of Asopus when he took power. And near this island is Salamis, which, it is said, Telamon the son of Aeacus once ruled. Next is Athens. And it is said that she first got the Pelasgians as settlers, whom the tradition says were called Kranaoi, and after this she got the Cecropidae, when Cecrops held power, but in later times, while Erechtheus was in charge of the city, she took her name from Athene. And Herodotus, writing in prose (συγγράφων), records these things.[[9]](#endnote-9)

In this passage, the style of which is indicative of the geographical body of the poem as a whole, PS first takes us from Crete in a north-easterly direction across the Cretan Sea to the island of Astypalaea, before turning west to Kythera, which lies across from the south-eastern tip of the Peloponnese, then moving north from there to first Aegina, then Salamis, and finally to Athens. PS’s account of the position of the mentioned islands in relation to one another follows the established conventions of geographical *periodoi*; a logical route is plotted which ensures an awareness of the spatial relationship and orientation of travel between each mentioned location. Although there is nothing particularly unusual—or exciting—about PS’s use of geographical conventions in this passage, the final line of this section of the route around the *oikoumene* does give us occasion to pause in terms of considering PS’s method of composition in more detail.

The trimeter line which ends this section of description effectively forms a source citation, revealing that the provenance of his information about Athens is Herodotus’s famous *Histories* (Ἡρόδοτος ἱστορεῖ δὲ ταῦτα συγγράφων, 565). If we turn to the relevant Herodotean passage to which PS refers his method becomes even clearer (8.44):

Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ ἐπὶ μὲν Πελασγῶν ἐχόντων τὴν νῦν Ἑλλάδα καλεομένην ἦσαν Πελασγοί, ὀνομαζόμενοι Κραναοί, ἐπὶ δὲ Κέκροπος βασιλέος ἐπεκλήθησαν Κεκροπίδαι, ἐκδεξαμένου δὲ Ἐρεχθέος τὴν ἀρχὴν Ἀθηναῖοι μετωνομάσθησαν.

And the Athenians, at the time when the Pelasgians possessed the land which is now called Hellas, were Pelasgians, named Kranaoi. But in the time of king Cecrops they were called Cecropidae, but after Erechtheus took up power their name was changed to Athenians.

In this case, it transpires that PS has not only used historical and geographical data about the Athenians gleaned from Herodotus’s writing, but has practically versified a brief passing description of Athens’s first inhabitants recorded in book eight of the historian’s work.[[10]](#endnote-10) Since we do not possess many of the relevant prose texts which PS is using as source material, it is impossible to say whether his geographical descriptions generally remain as close to their original prose sources in every other instance as they do in this particular case, where our knowledge of the Herodotean text allows us to see how close PS’s version is to its prose predecessor. But it is clear that the style and content of PS’s work is extremely close to that of prose throughout. Even PS’s manner of explicitly providing named citations of his prose sources is a reflex much more familiar from works in the prose traditions of historiography, ancient scholarship and scientific writing.[[11]](#endnote-11) The explicit citation of a prose author in verse is not entirely unfamiliar elsewhere in the Hellenistic poetic tradition—Callimachus’s explicit citation of the name of the historian Xenomedes of Ceos as the source of the story of Acontius and Cydippe in the *Aitia* (fr. 75.53–77 Harder) is an obvious comparison.[[12]](#endnote-12) But the *Periodos* is simply not that sort of poetic re-working of a prose source.

And yet, despite the fact that it very easily could have been—and perhaps more easily would have been—a work of prose, the *Periodos* consciously does *not* take this form. In that case, why does PS choose to write in this manner in the first place? The geographical body of the work offers few clues, but, luckily for us, before launching into his account of a clockwise route around various lands and peoples of the *oikoumene*, PS begins with a fairly extensive prologue (lines 1–138) in which he both describes the content of his upcoming work and provides a few flashes of methodological reflection. In fact, the *Periodos* opens a lengthy comment on the author’s stylistic approach to his material and its aims (1–10):

πάντων ἀναγκαιότατον ἡ κωμῳδία,

θειότατε βασιλεῦ Νικόμηδες, τοῦτ’ ἔχει

τὸ καὶ βραχέως ἕκαστα καὶ φράζειν σαφῶς

καὶ ψυχαγωγεῖν πάντα τὸν ὑγιῆ κριτήν.

διὸ δὴ δοκιμάσας τὸ πιθανὸν τῆς λέξεως

σοί τε διὰ ταύτης ἐντυχεῖν ἐσπούδασα

καὶ διαλεγῆναι βραχέα, τό τε συνηγμένον

ἐκπεριγράφως ὠφέλιμον ἀναδοῦναι τόδε

σύνταγμα, κοινὴν πᾶσι τὴν εὐχρηστίαν

διὰ σὲ παρέξων τοῖς θέλουσι φιλομαθεῖν.

Comic meter, most divine king Nicomedes, has this virtue which is most indispensable above all else: the ability to say each thing swiftly and clearly and to delight the sound critic in every respect. For this reason I have made trial of the persuasiveness of the style and have been eager to appeal to you through this style and to converse briefly, and to deliver this well-defined, brief and useful composition, providing through you a common benefit for all those who desire to love learning.

The importance of PS’s deliberate choice of comic trimeters for the presentation of his upcoming geographical work is made immediately obvious by the explicit placement of ἡ κωμῳδία at the end of the first line—the point at which the reader would first recognize that this was going to be a metrical work in comic trimeters rather than in prose. Already in antiquity, this meter was regarded as the closest possible verse form to prose, as we learn from Aristotle.[[13]](#endnote-13) In the *Rhetoric*, for example, Aristotle explicitly attributes the change in tragedy from trochaic tetrameter to iambic meter to the latter’s closeness to prose (1404a31–33), while in the *Poetics* (1449a24–28; see also *Rhet.* 1408b33–35) he describes iambic trimeter as being the most “speech-like” of meters. He also notes that it is not uncommon to slip naturally into trimeters while in normal conversation, something which does not occur with other meters, such as hexameter, unless the speaker deliberately chooses to move away from a normal register of speech. Furthermore, in his opening discussion at the beginning of the *Poetics* (1447b14–20), Aristotle remarks that the use of meter alone does not necessarily result in “poetry” of the type Homer produced. At the same time, elsewhere in the *Rhetoric* (1408b30–31) he cautions against the use of meter when writing prose, suggesting that prose must be rhythmical but not metrical to avoid turning into a poem. But, whereas Aristotle warns the budding rhetorician in particular to be both aware and wary of the gray areas and differences between various rhythms and meters, and attempts to guide him through the various advantages and disadvantages of making use of iambic trimeter in different circumstances as a result of its closeness to prose, PS’s approach to this meter is different. He fully embraces the opportunity which trimeter presents to craft an unpoetic verse form which is as close to prose as possible—and yet deliberately eschews the writing of prose itself.

The result is a work which plays with the potential of iambic trimeter to occupy a liminal space between prose and poetry. It allows PS to align his work with certain useful aspects of both poetic and prose traditions of geographical writing, while conveniently dodging some of the pitfalls associated with the poetic geographical tradition in particular. I shall return to the matter of what these pitfalls might be a little later, but for now it is worth considering one strand of the poetic tradition which lies behind PS’s text: geographical catalogue poetry. One reason for the *Periodos*’s perceived relative lack of conventionally “poetic” stylistic effects can partly be attributed to its status as a work which consciously situates itself in a tradition of geographical catalogue verse which places the Homeric Catalogue of Ships at its head.[[14]](#endnote-14) There is, however, a certain paradox at the heart of geographical catalogue poetry which inherently affects PS’s presentation of the *Periodos*. On the one hand, catalogue form allows an almost unparalleled sense of access to one of (epic) poetry’s most important perceived effects: the ability to act as a means of access to memory and historical truth. Its status, however, as an essentially non-narrative form closes down many of the forms of creative agency which are open to the poet through storytelling or lengthy description.[[15]](#endnote-15) But, even with this paradox of geographical catalogue poetry in mind, the question remains why PS goes beyond the conventions of traditional geographical catalogue form when he chooses to echo explicitly the style of historical and geographical prose in such an unfamiliar manner.

One part of a potential answer soon presents itself a little further on in the prologue when PS reveals that his *Periodos* is not the first work to make use of comic trimeters in such a way. In fact, he tells us that by writing in this way he is taking inspiration from a predecessor whom he compliments by first referring to him obliquely as “one of the genuine Attic philologists” (τῶν Ἀττικῶν τις γνησίων τε φιλολόγων, 19), a scholar who was a pupil of two well-known second-century <sc>b.c.e.<sc> intellectual figures, the Stoic philosopher Diogenes of Babylon and the grammarian and Homeric scholar Aristarchus of Samothrace (γεγονὼς ἀκουστὴς Διογένους τοῦ Στωϊκοῦ, | συνεσχολακὼς δὲ πολὺν Ἀριστάρχῳ χρόνον, 20–21). The “genuine Attic philologist” in question here is clearly Apollodorus of Athens (c.180–after 120 <sc>b.c.e.<sc>), a scholar who, as PS goes on to explain, “wrote a chronography setting events in order from the fall of Troy until the present day” (συνετάξατ’ ἀπὸ τῆς Τρωϊκῆς ἁλώσεως | χρονογραφίαν στοιχοῦσαν ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν βίου, 22–23). This work in four books was entitled *Chronica* and related, in a very brief form, the most significant historical events of the past one thousand and forty years.[[16]](#endnote-16) PS goes on to suggest why he himself has emulated Apollodorus in his adoption of comic trimeters in the *Periodos* and explains that his predecessor had done so in the case of his chronography for the sake of clarity and ease of remembrance, two aims and attributes of his work which Apollodorus justified through the use of a simile which PS relates (33–44):

μέτρῳ δὲ ταύτην ἐκτιθέναι προείλετο,

τῷ κωμικῷ δέ, τῆς σαφηνίας χάριν,

εὐμνημόνευτον ἐσομένην οὕτως ὁρῶν.

τὸ δ’ ὅμοιον ἔλαβεν εἰκάσας ἐκ τοῦ βίου·

ὥσπερ γὰρ εἴ τις ἀναλαβὼν θέλοι φέρειν

ξύλων λελυμένων πλῆθος, οὐκ ἂν εὐχερῶς

τούτων κρατήσαι, δεδεμένων δὲ ῥᾳδίως,

οὕτω λελυμένην λέξιν ἀναλαβεῖν ταχὺ

οὐκ ἔστι, τῷ μέτρῳ δὲ περιειλημμένην

ἔστιν κατασχεῖν εὐσκόπως καὶ πιστικῶς·

ἔχει γὰρ ἐπιτρέχουσαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ χάριν,

ὅταν ἱστορία καὶ λέξις ἔμμετρος πλεκῇ.

This brief account he [*i.e., Apollodorus*] chose to set forth in meter of the comic type for the sake of clarity, seeing in this way that it would be easier to remember. He grasped this simile having recognized the comparison from everyday life: for just as someone would not be able to pick up and carry a large amount of loose wood very easily, but would easily do it if the wood were bound together, thus it is not possible to take up loose words quickly, but it is possible to grasp hold of words contained within meter unerringly and faithfully. For grace spreads over a work which entwines knowledge learned by inquiry and metrical language.

Here PS returns once more to clarity (τῆς σαφηνίας χάριν, 34) as an advantageous aspect of the use of comic trimeters which conditions his metrical approach to his own *Periodos* in the wake of Apollodorus’ similarly motivated approach in his *Chronica*, though he now provides two further reasons why this clarity is to be sought through the use of trimeter rather than in prose. The first reason is that the use of this meter makes what is said easily memorable (εὐμνημόνευτον, 35) and ensures that such memory is absorbed reliably (εὐσκόπως καὶ πιστικῶς, 42). PS’s argument that it is possible to learn metrical verse more easily than prose is yet another aspect of the conceptualization of the difference between these two different forms of writing which had already been outlined in the work of Aristotle, who states in his *Rhetoric* (1409b6–7) that meter is what makes verse more memorable.[[17]](#endnote-17) Again, in this respect the *Periodos*, and the chronographical work of Apollodorus which inspired PS to write in such a manner, can be seen as engaging with one strand of an ancient literary critical debate concerning the appropriate uses of prose and verse for various ends. The more memorable nature of verse is also to be particularly valued because it permits the *Periodos* to fulfil one of its stated aims much more easily: to act as didactic enrichment for all those who, along with king Nicomedes, “desire to love learning” (τοῖς θέλουσι φιλομαθεῖν, 10).

The second reason given for seeking claritythrough the use of comic trimeters rather than prose relates to the work’s dedicatee. After outlining the advantages of clarity, memorability and reliability which the use of this verse form brings, PS states that a virtue of this approach is the fact that it causes the work as a whole to possess an innate *charis* (ἔχει γὰρ ἐπιτρέχουσαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ χάριν, 43). There are two main aspects of *charis* which are especially pertinent to PS’s presentation of the *Periodos* to his patron Nicomedes. The first aspect is the use of *charis* as a term which is particularly associated with the appealing effects poetry is able to have on a listener or reader: the charm, beauty and pleasure which contribute to a song or poem’s effectiveness and the enjoyment of its audience. The second relates to the social dimension of *charis* as a term expressing a combination of thanks and goodwill: referring both to the esteem expressed by a poet for a patron, and in turn the reciprocal favor which the patron bestows upon the poet.[[18]](#endnote-18) One further essential feature of the potential favor and goodwill which the *charis* of the poet is able to offer to his patron is *kleos*.[[19]](#endnote-19) As we shall see, *kleos* is indeed something PS claims to offer his patron Nicomedes later in the prologue. Furthermore, his decision to entwine knowledge gained from research and inquiry (*historia*) and metrical language in an attempt to foster *charis* (ἔχει γὰρ ἐπιτρέχουσαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ χάριν,/ ὅταν ἱστορία καὶ λέξις ἔμμετρος πλεκῇ, 43–44) is one strategy which he adopts in an attempt to partake, partially at least, of some of the perceived advantages which the poetic tradition can offer. On the other hand, moving too far into the realm of poetry poses potentially grave risks for a writer who claims to be producing a work of reliable and truthful *historia*: particularly for a writer who is dealing with specifically geographical material. PS’s decision to position the *Periodos* as a work which occupies a space between prose and poetry shows his acute awareness of these risks and the wider scholarly debates which surround them.

<a>Between Benefit and Pleasure: *Psychagōgia, Didaskalia* and the Prologue of the *Periodos*<a>

The opening ten lines of the *Periodos* reveal that PS is conscious of Hellenistic literary critical debates.[[20]](#endnote-20) These debates, and PS’s consciousness of his potential place within them, have profound ramifications for his overall approach to presenting a work of geographical *historia* to his patron Nicomedes. The first hint that PS is alluding to a well-known controversy in Hellenistic literary and geographical scholarship arrives when we reach the claim that he has chosen comic meter for the format of the upcoming work on the basis of its ability “to delight the sound critic in every respect” (ψυχαγωγεῖν πάντα τὸν ὑγιῆ κριτήν, 4). The verb ψυχαγωγεῖν alerts us to PS’s engagement with an important critical term in both literary and geographical criticism: *psychagōgia*.

*Psychagōgia* literally refers to the necromantic conjuring up or “leading” of dead “souls” out of the underworld and back into the light.[[21]](#endnote-21) Over time the term took on a more metaphorical aspect and started to be used as a way of describing the delightful, pleasurable and potentially persuasive ­effects of poetry.[[22]](#endnote-22) The first extant instance in which this idea is elaborated upon occurs in Isocrates’ *Evagoras*, an encomium written (c. 370–365<sc>b.c.e.<sc>) at the behest of Nicocles, the Cypriot king of Salamis, for the occasion of a festival in honor of his dead father. Isocrates’ observations are of particular interest in the context of the *Periodos* because of the fact that in this speech he reflects upon *psychagōgia* in the light of the particular challenges that present themselves when someone is engaged in the task of praising a patron, either in prose or in verse. According to Isocrates, the use of meter is one of the most crucial inherent advantages poets have over orators composing in prose when it comes to praising someone (9.10–11):

πρὸς δὲ τούτοις οἱ μὲν μετὰ μέτρων καὶ ῥυθμῶν ἅπαντα ποιοῦσιν, οἱ δ᾿ οὐδενὸς τούτων κοινωνοῦσιν· ἃ τοσαύτην ἔχει χάριν ὥστ᾿, ἂν καὶ τῇ λέξει καὶ τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν ἔχῃ κακῶς, ὅμως αὐταῖς ταῖς εὐρυθμίαις καὶ ταῖς συμμετρίαις ψυχαγωγοῦσιν τοὺς ἀκούοντας. γνοίη δ᾿ ἄν τις ἐκεῖθεν τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῶν· ἢν γάρ τις τῶν ποιημάτων τῶν εὐδοκιμούντων τὰ μὲν ὀνόματα καὶ τὰς διανοίας καταλίπῃ, τὸ δὲ μέτρον διαλύσῃ, φανήσεται πολὺ καταδεέστερα τῆς δόξης ἧς νῦν ἔχομεν περὶ αὐτῶν.

In addition to this poets compose everything with meter and rhythm, but prose writers do not share in any of these advantages. These attributes provide such grace that even if their work is poor in terms of its style and its reasoning, nevertheless they delight (ψυχαγωγοῦσιν) their listeners with its very rhythms and symmetries. And one might recognize the power of these attributes from the following: if someone were to leave remaining only the words and thoughts of the most esteemed poems, and get rid of the meter, they will appear by far inferior to the opinion which we have of them at the present moment.

Isocrates’ conceptualization of the relative difficulties of praise in prosaic form in contrast to the advantages which poets enjoy allows us to situate PS’s discussion of his decision in the *Periodos* to present his researches for Nicomedes in metrical form in its literary critical context. PS’s method seems to be an attempt to overcome one of the challenges which Isocrates outlines with regards to the difficulty of pleasing a patron: the *charis* of metrical verse, with its inherent rhythms and symmetries, is supposed to provide a more charming package for the information gleaned from prose sources which PS aims to convey, while the fact that this information is gathered from previous prose texts aims to ensure that the content of the work is rendered as intellectually weighty and edifying as possible.

There are further hints that such a compromise is indeed on PS’s mind in the *Periodos*. In the opening of the prologue, it is made clear that this work not only has the potential to delight sound critics—as Nicomedes is surely perceived to be here—but is also being presented as useful (ὠφέλιμον, 8): a source of shared benefit for those who love learning (κοινὴν πᾶσι τὴν εὐχρηστίαν | … τοῖς θέλουσι φιλομαθεῖν, 9–10). This wish to provide a form of didactic benefit for his audience shows that PS is acutely aware of the debates surrounding another critical term which was often paired with *psychagōgia* in the Hellenistic period: *didaskalia* (teaching or instruction). Once again, it is helpful for us to turn to Isocrates for the first extant iteration of this contrast between *psychagōgia* on the one hand, and didactic benefit on the other. In *To Nicocles* (374 BCE), a didactic address to Evagoras’s son which attempts to provide instruction and advice for ruling successfully, Isocrates reflects on the difficulties of writing useful advice for others. He notes that people generally find works of verse or prose which offer advice to be useful, though seldom pleasurable (ἐπεὶ κἀκεῖνό μοι πρόδηλον ἦν, ὅτι τὰ συμβουλεύοντα καὶ τῶν ποιημάτων καὶ τῶν συγγραμμάτων χρησιμώτατα μὲν ἅπαντες νομίζουσιν, οὐ μὴν ἥδιστά γ᾿ αὐτῶν ἀκούουσιν, 2.42). For this reason, those who wish to delight their audiences have been encouraged to stay away from material which has a didactic purpose and to stick to saying only what pleases the most (δέδεικται τοῖς ἐπιθυμοῦσιν τοὺς ἀκροωμένους ψυχαγωγεῖν, ὅτι τοῦ μὲν νουθετεῖν καὶ συμβουλεύειν ἀφεκτέον, τὰ δὲ τοιαῦτα λεκτέον, οἷς ὁρῶσι τοὺς ὄχλους μάλιστα χαίροντας, 2.49). In Isocrates’ self-reflexive meditation upon the difficulties of giving advice here at this point in his *To Nicocles* we can see that the idea of delighting and pleasing a mass audience (τοὺς ἀκροωμένους ψυχαγωγεῖν) is presented as being somehow at odds with advising or teaching them (νουθετεῖν καὶ συμβουλεύειν).

Already then in these works of Isocrates we can begin to see the traces of a potential antithesis between didactic benefit and pleasurable delight, as two competing aims and effects of literature on its audience, as well as the connection of *psychagōgia*—that is, literary pleasure and delight—to poetry in particular, rather than to prose. By the time we reach the Hellenistic period it seems this antithesis had developed into a critical debate which had a direct bearing on the practice of geographical scholarship and writing itself, at least according to the testimonia of the geographical writings of the famously polymathic Hellenistic scholar Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c.285–194 <sc> b.c.e.<sc>) which are preserved in the *Geography* of the Augustan writer Strabo of Amasia. Eratosthenes, who is generally considered to be the founder of geography as a scholarly discipline, produced a treatise in three books entitled *Geography* in the late third century <sc> b.c.e.<sc>[[23]](#endnote-23) From the citations and discussions of this work preserved in Strabo’s *Geography* it appears that the first book of Eratosthenes’ treatise discussed the geographical views and information provided by the writers of the past. It is in this context that Eratosthenes gives the debate between *psychagōgia* and *didaskalia* a specifically geographical twist.[[24]](#endnote-24) Strabo reports that Eratosthenes dismissed the value of the poetry of the past—and especially of Homer—as a means of learning and understanding the geography of the present since, according to him, “every poet aims at delight, rather than at teaching” (ποιητὴν γὰρ ἔφη πάντα στοχάζεσθαι ψυχαγωγίας, οὐ διδασκαλίας, *Geography* 1.2.3). Strabo himself fiercely objects to this Eratosthenic view: for him, Homer himself was in fact the first geographer and founder of the field of study as whole.[[25]](#endnote-25) Throughout his work he consistently defends poetry’s didactic value, arguing that its ability to teach is the reason why it is used as the first tool many Greek states turn to as a means of educating the young and providing ethical instruction, rather than existing for the sake of mere pleasure and delight (διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τοὺς παῖδας αἱ τῶν Ἑλλήνων πόλεις πρώτιστα διὰ τῆς ποιητικῆς παιδεύουσιν, οὐ ψυχαγωγίας χάριν δήπουθεν ψιλῆς, ἀλλὰ σωφρονισμοῦ, 1.2.3).

Certainly, we can see very starkly in the *Geography* that by the time Strabo was writing in the Augustan period, it had become necessary to take a position on the wider debate concerning the relationship of poetry and prose to *psychagōgia* and *didaskalia*, and on the respective place of each form of writing in the field of geographical scholarship at large, in the wake of Eratosthenes’ strong views on the subject. In fact, we can see that such engagement with the terms of this particular literary and geographical debate is already taking place in the *Periodos*. But, unlike Strabo, PS stakes a claim in thistext which makes the work a very valuable witness to other possible positions in this literary critical debate. This possible alternative position becomes even clearer later in the prologue when PS turns to summing up the content of his work as he re-iterates the intended effect which his combination of metrical language and well-researched exposition of scholarly *historia* is intended to elicit in the reader (90–97):

ἁπλῶς θ’ ἁπάντων χωρίων διέξοδον

καὶ τὴν ὅλην περίοδον ἐν ὀλίγοις στίχοις,

ἧς ὁ κατακούσας οὐ μόνον τερφθήσεται,

ἅμα δ’ ὠφελίαν ἀποίσετ’ εὔχρηστον μαθών,

εἰ μηθὲν ἕτερον, φασί, ποῦ ποτ’ ἐστὶ γῆς,

κἀν τίσι τόποις τὴν πατρίδα κειμένην ἔχει,

τίνων τε πρότερον γενομένην οἰκητόρων

πόλεσί τε ποίαις συγγένειαν ἀναφέρει·

In short, a description of all the lands and the whole circuit of the earth in a few verses, which the listener will not only be delighted by, but will at the same time gain useful benefit from, and learn—if nothing else, as they say—where on earth he is, and in which places his homeland is situated, and to which inhabitants it had previously belonged and which cities he recognizes a kinship relationship with.

Unlike Eratosthenes, PS does not reject the power of *psychagōgia* in his own geographical work, instead embracing the use of meter as a means of supposedly increasing the reader’s enjoyment and pleasure. His insistence that the distinctly prosaic content of the metrical verse of the *Periodos* is able to combine the effects of delight and benefit has much more in common with the position of a critic like Neoptolemus of Parium (third century <sc> b.c.e.<sc>). According to Philodemus, who discussed the views of his Hellenistic predecessor in the fifth book of his *On Poems*, Neoptolemus proposed that the perfect poet—exemplified by the figure of Homer himself—both simultaneously delighted and benefitted his audience.[[26]](#endnote-26) PS seems to exhibit a similar desire to assert the possibility of combining the twin goals of delight and benefit but, unlike Neoptolemus, he is loath to delve too deeply into the poetic realm in order to achieve such an objective. Instead, while acknowledging the possibility of combining these potentially diverse aims, PS takes heed of Eratosthenes’ instruction to be wary of poetry and its pleasurable forms of expression in geographical works by neglecting to go any further in his use of poetry or poetic forms. In this regard it is also particularly notable that all of the sources which PS explicitly acknowledges in the *Periodos* are prose sources. In the context of this wider Hellenistic literary critical debate, it seems likely that PS has hit upon comic trimeters as a sort of compromise: a type of text putatively able to combine the *psychagōgia* of poetry and the *didaskalia* of prose, while being, as a form, neither fully one nor the other.[[27]](#endnote-27)

There is also perhaps another aspect of the debate concerning *psychagōgia* and *didaskalia* and their relation to geographical material in the background of PS’s presentation of his *Periodos*. By the time PS is writing, other formulations of the Eratosthenic dichotomy between pleasure and instruction, poetry and prose, centered on the opposition between *psychagōgia* and truth (*alētheia*), rather than *didaskalia*. This opposition is already found in a geographical context before the time of the *Periodos* in terms consciously aligned with Eratosthenes’ views on poetry in the work of Agatharchides of Cnidus (c. 215–after 145 BCE).[[28]](#endnote-28) In his *On the Erythraean Sea*, an ethnographic, historical and geographical account of Ptolemaic exploration of the Red Sea and its environs, Agatharchides cautions against an over-reliance on poetry when attempting to establish accurate facts in relation to historical and geographical matters for the reason that “every poet is aiming at delight rather than at truth” (πᾶς ποιητὴς ψυχαγωγίας μᾶλλον ἢ ἀληθείας ἐστὶ στοχαστής, 1.8 = Phot. *Bibl*. cod. 250, 444b33–34).[[29]](#endnote-29) The suspicion that *psychagōgia* may go hand in hand with a concomitant lack of truth is particularly significant in a geographical context, since accounts of other lands—especially distant ones—were often suspected of embellishment, especially if reassurances of an author’s autoptic witnessing of far-off places were lacking.[[30]](#endnote-30) These suspicions surrounding accounts of other lands in the Greek tradition begin with the reception of Homer’s *Odyssey* and the travels of Odysseus—a figure who turns out to be of great significance for PS in the *Periodos*.

<a>Between Book-Learning and Autopsy: Pseudo-Scymnus’s Odyssean Wanderings<a>

Odysseus suddenly intrudes in the middle of the *Periodos*’s prologue at the moment when PS finally outlines the ultimate intended effect of his work on his patron Nicomedes (98–102):

συνελόντι δ’ εἰπεῖν, οὐχὶ τὴν Ὀδυσσέως

ἀναδεξάμενος, ὥς φασιν οἱ μῦθοι, πλάνην,

ἐπὶ τῆς ἰδίας δὲ καταμένων εὐδαιμόνως,

οὐχὶ μόνον ἑτερόφυλον ἀνθρώπων βίον,

ἐθνῶν ὅλων δὲ γνώσετ’ ἄστη καὶ νόμους.

To put it [*i.e., the aim of this work*] briefly: not enduring the wanderings of Odysseus, as the myths say, but remaining fortunately fixed at home, he[[31]](#endnote-31) will get to know not only the alien way of life of men, but the cities and customs of all peoples.

The primary benefit of the *Periodos* is here laid out clearly by PS: unlike Odysseus, neither Nicomedes nor any other reader of his work will have to undergo any physical wanderings, or concomitant sufferings, in order to see and learn about the lands and peoples of the *oikoumene*. Nor does Nicomedes even have to endure listening to lengthy narratives concerning the travels of another in order to gain geographical knowledge. Instead, PS claims to be offering in the briefest possible form a work which provides pleasure as well as learning. In these lines, then, PS manages not only to demonstrate his engagement with the position of Odysseus and his wanderings in the geographical and literary tradition, but also to display his learned awareness of yet another controversy of Hellenistic literary scholarship through an allusion to the *Odyssey* in line 102, where PS’s claim that his reader or listener “will get to know … the cities and customs” (ἐθνῶν ὅλων δὲ γνώσετ’ ἄστη καὶ νόμους) of all peoples through the *Periodos* is an obvious re-working of the third line of the *Odyssey*’s proem (πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, 1.3). PS’s promise that the “customs” of all people will be elucidated, as opposed to their “minds”, as the vulgate version of the *Odyssey*’s third line would have it, is not an elaboration on the part of the author of the *Periodos*. Instead, this alternative form functions as a marker that the writer is familiar with a well-known variant reading of this Homeric line promoted by Zenodotus, the first chief librarian in Alexandria and an early editor of Homer, who insisted that the end of *Od*. 1.3 should read νόμον ἔγνω (got to know their customs), rather than the more familiar reading championed by Aristarchus of Samothrace, νόον ἔγνω (got to know their minds).[[32]](#endnote-32) As the references to the importance of Odysseus in the geographical tradition and the awareness of Homeric textual debates which these lines show, and as the *Periodos*’s own careful positioning in relation to the wider debate concerning *psychagōgia* and *didaskalia* has already demonstrated, this is a text whose author is acutely aware of and concerned with his own place and position in the scholarly and literary debates of the Hellenistic period.

Moreover, there are further signs that the *Periodos* fits into the mainstream of contemporary literary debates relating to the status of Odysseus as a figure of the utmost importance in the Greek geographical tradition. By the time PS was writing, Odysseus was already the archetypal traveler, explorer, inquirer, geographer, historian and storyteller in the Greek literary tradition due to the narrative of his post-Trojan War wanderings contained in the central books of the *Odyssey*, the *apologoi*.[[33]](#endnote-33) By the Hellenistic period, as we saw in the previous section, the question of the veracity of the geographical information which Homer provides through Odysseus’s descriptions of his own wanderings in the *apologoi* is a matter of great debate. The question of geographical truth is made more complicated by the plurality of interpretations of Odysseus’s own narration which the *Odyssey* offers. On the one hand, it is possible to view Odysseus as a model of the autoptic narrator, whose status as an eyewitness of the events being recounted provides authoritative assurances of narrative reliability.[[34]](#endnote-34) Certainly PS’s near-contemporary Polybius chose to emphasize this aspect of Odysseus’s character when he argued that Homer portrays him from the very opening lines of the *Odyssey*’s proem as the ideal prototype of the historical inquirer, an inquisitive “man of action” (τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν πραγματικόν, *Histories* 12.27.10), who voyages around the *oikoumene* in order to find things out for himself. On the other hand, Odysseus’s status as a proto-inquiring historian and truthful traveler are potentially undercut by the *Odyssey* itself: the fabrications concerning his voyages included in the so-called “Cretan Tales” certainly demonstrate that he is capable of crafting his travel narratives to suit his present purposes, and his undoubted ability while speaking to “make many false things seem like true ones” (ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, *Od*. 19.203) might make us think twice about the veracity of every aspect of the descriptions of far-off and fantastical locations and peoples in the *apologoi*.

For PS, this paradox produces both problems and creative opportunities in the *Periodos* which concern his own relationship to issues surrounding the ideas of geographical truth and reliability, autopsy, and the traditions of geographical poetry and prose. These possibilities are complicated further by another more specific aspect of Homer’s portrayal of the narration of Odysseus’s travels which provides an important structural model for the *Periodos*’s packaging of geographical information. Just as the Homeric Catalogue of Ships provides one important paradigm for PS’s catalogic exhibition of geographical information, so too Odysseus’s *apologoi* provide a literary model for the dramatic situation outlined in the *Periodos*’s prologue: the presentation of a geographical itinerary to a king. Given the length of Odysseus’s response in the central books of the *Odyssey*,it is easy to forget that the report which he gives of his travels was initially motivated by Alcinous’s request for an account which contains two essential attributes—a description of the lands which the stranger in front of him has encountered over the course of his travels, and the details of the people he has met while doing so (8.572–76):

ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπὲ καὶ ἀτρεκέως κατάλεξον,

ὅππῃ ἀπεπλάγχθης τε καὶ ἅς τινας ἵκεο χώρας

ἀνθρώπων, αὐτούς τε πόλιάς τ' εὖ ναιεταούσας,

ἠμὲν ὅσοι χαλεποί τε καὶ ἄγριοι οὐδὲ δίκαιοι,

οἵ τε φιλόξεινοι καί σφιν νόος ἐστὶ θεουδής.

But come on, tell me about the following, and recount it precisely: in what direction you have wandered and which lands of men you have reached, about the men themselves and their well-situated cities, both those who were hostile and wild and unjust, and those who were friendly towards strangers and whose minds are god-fearing.

Alcinous’s initial request demonstrates that he is interested primarily in hearing of Odysseus’s geographical and ethnographic knowledge as a traveler who has come into contact with the varied places and peoples of the entire world over the course of his travels.[[35]](#endnote-35) On the one hand, Odysseus’s narration of his travels over the next few books of the *Odyssey* is of course more than a bare ethnographic and geographical account of previous wanderings, as the hero’s descriptions of his many sufferings and the pressing issue of his still-unfulfilled *nostos* provides a powerful emotional focus and shape to the rhetoric of his storytelling. At the same time, through the narration of the *apologoi*, Odysseus does in fact satisfy Alcinous’s request for an ethnographic and geographical account of his previous wanderings while also fulfilling the promise of the poem’s opening lines to inform us about the hero’s many travels and the places and people he met with on his way.[[36]](#endnote-36) For an author looking to provide a description of the world and its peoples to a king and potential patron, Odysseus’s meeting with Alcinous surely provides the most significant literary model for such an encounter.

For this reason, we should perhaps recall the significance of Odysseus as the archetypal model of a wandering geographical and ethnographic inquirer at the moment when PS finally decides to outline an extended summary of the contents of his work for Nicomedes about two-thirds of the way through the prologue, when he declares that he will soon turn to describing(75–89):

ποταμῶν τε μεγάλων ἰδιότητας καὶ ῥύσεις,

τὴν τῶν δύ’ ἠπείρων τε κατὰ μέρος θέσιν,

ἐν ἑκατέρᾳ τίνες εἰσὶν Ἑλλήνων πόλεις,

τίνες ἔκτισαν, κατὰ τίνας ᾤκησαν χρόνους,

τοὺς ὁμοεθνεῖς ὄντας τε τούς τ’ αὐτόχθονας,

τίν’ ἔστι πλησιόχωρα βαρβάρων γένη,

τίνα μιγάδων λεγόμενα, ποῖα νομαδικά,

τίνες ἥμεροι, τίνες εἰσὶν ἀξενώτατοι

ἔθεσι, τρόποις <τ’> ἔργοις τε βαρβαρώτατοι,

τίνα τῶν ἐθνῶν μέγιστα πολυανδροῦντά τε,

τίσιν νόμοις ἕκαστα χρῆται καὶ βίοις,

τῶν ἐμπορίων ὅσα τ’ ἐστὶν εὐτυχέστατα,

νήσων τε πασῶν τῶν πρὸς Εὐρώπην θέσιν,

ἑξῆς <τε> τῶν σύνεγγυς Ἀσίᾳ κειμένων,

κτίσεις τε πόλεων τῶν ἐν αὐταῖς φερομένων.

Both the particular properties and streams of great rivers, the position of the two continents in detail, which cities belong to the Greeks on each continent, who founded them, in which periods they settled them, which consist of people of the same race and which are autochthonous, which peoples live next to barbarians, which are said to be mixed, which kind are nomadic, which are cultivated, which are most inhospitable in their customs, and in their manners and actions most barbaric, which is the biggest and most populous of the peoples and which laws and way of life each use, which are the most prosperous trading places, and the position of all of the islands next to Europe, and the position of those situated near Asia, and the foundations of the cities reported to be on them.

PS’s words here should perhaps be read as an extended gloss on the request for information about lands, cities, and hostile and friendly peoples which Alcinous had desired to obtain from Odysseus, especially since his insistence on delivering all of this geographical and ethnographic information to king Nicomedes in a form which combines knowledge with *charis* also has a precedent in Alcinous’s court. After all, speech which is crowned with *morphē* (meaning form, grace or style) and *charis* is held up as the supreme form of grace by Odysseus before Alcinous’s request to tell his story, when he rebukes the harsh words of the Phaeacian Euryalus at 8.165–79. Furthermore, Odysseus himself then goes on to demonstrate the importance of speech imbued with *charis* by delivering the narrative of his wandering in such a gracefully crafted way that he delights and charms his audience, simultaneously earning an increased number of guest-gifts and help towards his long-desired *nostos* while impressing Alcinous to the extent that the king compares his performance to that of an actual singer (σοὶ δ᾿ ἔπι μὲν μορφὴ ἐπέων, ἔνι δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί/ μῦθον δ᾿ ὡς ὅτ᾿ ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας, 11.367–68).[[37]](#endnote-37) When considered with the model of Odysseus’s *apologoi* in the background, PS’s care to crown his own speech with *charis* in order to delight and obtain patronage from his royal addressee in the *Periodos* makes even more sense. In much the same way, Odysseus’s carefully crafted and artful narration of his wanderings to Alcinous in the Phaeacian court—a narration which results in Odysseus obtaining the goods and support he wants and needs from a king—can be seen as a paradigm for the relationship between a Hellenistic (geographical) poet and a royal patron which PS is attempting to construct with his Bithynian monarch.

With this in mind, it is worth examining PS’s claim that his work will save his reader any future labor of Odyssean wanderings in more detail. In this case such “wanderings” do not refer solely to literal real-world voyages around the *oikoumene*, for by this period “travelling” could equally well take place by traversing the space of the book-roll and gaining knowledge through reading rather than by journeying over land and sea to find out about distant places and peoples. PS is open about the fact that the *Periodos* is a text composed out of other texts, and dwells upon this aspect of his own creation at several points in the prologue, first when he briefly describes to Nicomedes his method of research and technique of composition while explaining what the contents of his work will consist of (65–68):

ἐκ τῶν σποράδην γὰρ ἱστορουμένων τισὶν

ἐν ἐπιτομῇ σοι γέγραφα τὰς ἀποικίας

κτίσεις τε πόλεων, τῆς ὅλης τε γῆς σχεδόν

ὅσ’ ἐστὶ πλωτὰ καὶ πορευτὰ τῶν τόπων.

For out of the scattered researches of other writers I have written for you in brief about colonies and the foundations of cities, and everything to do with the places accessible by sea or over land of almost the whole world.

Later on towards the end of the prologue, PS goes on to elaborate on the essentially bookish nature of his composition by going so far as to list the prose authors whose work he has especially depended upon to produce his own account, stating explicitly that he has set out the names of the authorities he is relying upon “whose use makes my researched account trustworthy” (τοὺς συγγραφεῖς ἐκθέμενος, οἷς δὴ χρώμενος | τὸν ἱστορικὸν εἰς πίστιν ἀναπέμπω λόγον, 110–11). In the fairly lengthy, though unfortunately lacunose passage which follows (lines 112–27), PS names the prose authors whom he has “very much put his trust in” (μάλιστα συμπεπεισμένος, 114): Eratosthenes of Cyrene, Ephorus, Dionysius of Chalcis, Demetrius of Callatis, Cleon of Sicily, Timosthenes, Callisthenes, Timaeus and Herodotus are just some of the names visible in the damaged lines which follow.[[38]](#endnote-38) Certainly, one immediate effect of PS’s insistence on these explicit source citations is to bolster the supposed authority of his work by providing an aura of reliability and scholarly exactitude. This potentially tempers suspicions concerning the unreliability of the information which PS is about to outline concerning distant lands which the reader has never seen or even heard about. Moreover, the packaging of such prodigious amounts of bookish information in summarized and contracted form in the *Periodos* is presented once more as one of the work’s most attractive features. With the help of the *Periodos*, not only does the monarch Nicomedes no longer have to voyage himself, he does not even have to listen to extended accounts of another traveler’s movements to gain knowledge about the organization and extent of the known world—nor does he have to spend his time traversing through voluminous prose accounts to lay claim to the fruits of Hellenistic geographical scholarship.

Nevertheless, despite his openness about the fact that his own work is composed “out of the scattered researches of other writers”, PS still feels the need to guarantee the authority of the *Periodos* through claims of personal autopsy at the very end of the prologue before jumping into his geographical catalogue proper (128–36):

ἃ δ’ αὐτὸς ἰδίᾳ φιλοπόνως ἐξητακὼς

αὐτοπτικὴν πίστιν τε προσενηνεγμένος,

ὡς ὢν θεατὴς οὐ μόνον τῆς Ἑλλάδος

ἢ τῶν κατ’ Ἀσίαν κειμένων πολισμάτων,

ἵστωρ δὲ γεγονὼς τῶν τε περὶ τὸν Ἀδρίαν

καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν Ἰόνιον ἑξῆς κειμένων,

ἐπεληλυθὼς δὲ τούς τε τῆς Τυρρηνίας

καὶ τοὺς Σικελικοὺς καὶ πρὸς ἑσπέραν ὅρους

καὶ τῆς Λιβύης τὰ πλεῖστα καὶ Καρχηδόνος.

And there are also the things which I myself have diligently examined in person, bringing the guarantee of eyewitness testimony to bear, as someone who has seen not only Greece or the towns situated in Asia, but having become knowledgeable about towns along the coast of the Adriatic and Ionian sea, and having gone to the borders of Tyrrhenia and Sicily and towards the west and to most of Libya and Carthage.

The promise of a “guarantee of eyewitness testimony” (αὐτοπτικὴν πίστιν) aligns PS’s work with prose traditions of geographical and historical writing, which often stressed the importance of personal autopsy and inquiry rather than a dependence on knowledge gleaned solely from books, as a means of bolstering the authority of the work as a whole.[[39]](#endnote-39) Moreover, PS’s keenness to emphasize his own experience of wide travel around the *oikoumene* is perhaps indicative of his interest in yet another Hellenistic literary critical debate concerning the reliability and usefulness of bookish knowledge. This matter was certainly one of great concern for PS’s near-contemporary Polybius, who denigrates the dependence of historians such as Timaeus on written sources and argues instead for the superiority of knowledge gleaned from personal autopsy and experience rather than in the library.[[40]](#endnote-40) It is precisely for this reason that Polybius, as mentioned earlier, holds up Odysseus as the ideal proto-inquiring historian, the man of action who travelled around and gained knowledge of the world before turning his observations into an account to be recounted to others.[[41]](#endnote-41) PS’s eager affirmation of a similar sort of Odyssean personal autopsy of the *oikoumene* at the end of the prologue of the *Periodos* is similarly meant to provide an assurance of reliable first-hand knowledge.

But, like Odysseus’s accounts of his own travels, closer inspection raises suspicions about the reliability of some of the finer details PS goes on to relate. For when the geographical body of the *Periodos* is scrutinized, it quickly becomes obvious that the account contains many glaring anachronisms and mistakes which would not be present if PS had really undertaken all of the voyages which he mentions.[[42]](#endnote-42) It seems instead that the *Periodos* really has been constructed entirely out of texts, and that, moreover, these written sources are frequently outdated and do not reflect the geo-political realities of the *oikoumene* in the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc>[[43]](#endnote-43) As it turns out, despite the repetitive assurances of the *Periodos*’s prologue that the forthcoming work is a truthful, reliable, well-researched and accurate reflection of the *oikoumene* from a traveler who has seen the lands he is describing, we are in fact dealing with a narrator whose voice is more akin to that of the Odysseus of the Cretan Tales than we might first have suspected given the prominence of those chief virtues of prose writing, clarity (*sapheneia*)and accuracy (*akribeia*), which PS takes such pains to emphasize in the opening few lines of his prologue.

<a>Between Writer and Patron: The *Periodos* in a Bithynian Court Context<a>

On one level, the doubtful nature of PS’s autoptic claims and his deliberate choice to construct his geography out of a range of outdated sources make it somewhat difficult to see how this factually inaccurate account of the *oikoumene* could be of much practical use or benefit to king Nicomedes or to “those who desire to love learning” (τοῖς θέλουσι φιλομαθεῖν, 10), despite the repeated claims in the prologue that straightforward didactic benefit is one of the chief aims of this work. But it is perhaps in this respect that the *Periodos* does begin finally to look more like a poem after all than it might have done at first—at least a didactic poem. For just as most didactic poems are of little use in a practical sense—for example, works such as Nicander’s *Theriaca* and *Alexipharmaca* are, in all likelihood, probably of very little immediate practical benefit to someone who has just been bitten by a snake—so too is the *Periodos* of little use if it is really the aim of PS’s work to provide a strictly accurate route around the lands and settlements of the *oikoumene* as it actually was in Nicomedes’ day. If this is not the benefit the author has in mind, then it is necessary to think again about what type of benefit the *Periodos* might be thought of as really offering for its patron Nicomedes.

In order to re-consider this question, it is worth examining the issue of autopsy in the *Periodos* not with the tradition of autoptic claims in historiographical prose in mind, but with the poetic tradition once again firmly in view. Long before reaching PS’s “guarantee of eyewitness testimony” (αὐτοπτικὴν πίστιν) at the prologue’s end, he has in fact already put forth another very significant autoptic claim relating to his own travels (50–54):

ἐγὼ δ’ ἀκούων διότι τῶν νῦν βασιλέων

μόνος βασιλικὴν χρηστότητα προσφέρεις,

πεῖραν ἐπεθύμησ’ αὐτὸς ἐπ’ ἐμαυτοῦ λαβεῖν

καὶ παραγενέσθαι καὶ τί βασιλεύς ἐστ’ ἰδεῖν,

ἵν’ αὐτὸς ἑτέροις πάλιν ἀπαγγέλλειν ἔχω.

But I, hearing that of kings today you alone exhibit royal excellence, I myself desired to try to take it upon myself to be present and see what a king is, so that I myself can announce this to others in turn.

PS’s claim that his visit to the royal court of Bithynia has been motivated by a desire to bear personal eyewitness to Nicomedes’ royal and scholarly credentials because of the fact that the Bithynian monarch is now the only contemporary king worth seeing is in fact perhaps more than a meaningless encomiastic commonplace, if the broader political context of Asia Minor in the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc> is considered. It is apparent from the *Periodos* that perhaps the most significant component of Nicomedes’ “royal excellence” for PS is his love of learning and the implicit suggestion that he is willing to patronize the literary and/or scholarly endeavors of others. In this period it seems that Nicomedes and his Bithynian court truly did provide one of the few remaining opportunities in Asia Minor for such a patronage relationship, since Pergamum, the kingdom which had until recently dominated the political and cultural scene, had by this point faded away—along with its renowned cultivation and patronage of artists and scholarly pursuits.[[44]](#endnote-44)

In fact, PS himself hints that the collapse of Pergamum has bolstered the potential for Nicomedes and his court to succeed to the important place which the Attalids held on the cultural scene when he explains that he is producing the *Periodos* for Nicomedes just as Apollodorus of Athens produced his chronography “for the kings in Pergamum, whose repute remains alive for all of us forever, although they are dead” (τοῖς ἐν Περγάμῳ | βασιλεῦσιν, ὧν ἡ δόξα καὶ τεθνηκότων | παρὰ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν ζῶσα διὰ παντὸς μένει, 16–18). PS returns to this theme a little later in the prologue when he puts forth a case to Nicomedes that by crafting a clear, concise and easily memorized record of the chief events which had occurred in the known world in his *Chronica*, and by using comic meter to achieve this, Apollodorus had gone beyond providing Attalus II Philadelphus with a useful and enjoyable work of scholarship: he had in fact managed to go so far with this scholarly creation as to “assign immortal renown to Attalus, who had been the dedicatee of the work” (ἀθάνατον ἀπονέμοντα δόξαν Ἀττάλῳ | τῆς πραγματείας ἐπιγραφὴν εἰληφότι, 48–49). Given his claims about Apollodorus’s effect on the renown of the Attalids, it is perhaps no surprise to find that later in the prologue PS goes so far as to claim, like a true poet, that the production of his scholarly *Periodos* will even have the power to spread Nicomedes’ personal *kleos* far and wide (103-108):

λαβοῦσα δ’ ἡ σύνταξις ἐπιφανέστατον

ἀρχηγέτην σε φιλάγαθόν τε προστάτην

ἥξει διὰ λόχους ἐπιμελεῖς εἰς τὸν βίον,

τὸ σόν τε, βασιλεῦ, πᾶσι κηρύξει κλέος

διαπεμπομένη πρὸς ἕτερον ἀφ’ ἑτέρου τόπον

καὶ τοῖς μακρὰν ἀπέχουσι τὴν εὐφημίαν.

This composition, having you as its most distinguished founder and as a patron who loves what is good, will enter into life through a careful childbed, and will announce your fame, king, to everyone, transmitting your good repute from one place to another and to those who live far away.

Rather than fitting into the traditions of geographical, historical and scientific writing in prose which the *Periodos* undoubtedly draws upon, the ability of this type of scholarly geographical work to reflect well on a specific patron’s reputation in both present and future time is in fact most reminiscent of claims of immortal fame, glory and memorialization which are often held up as one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of the poetic tradition. Like Odysseus, PS’s own (supposedly) autoptic wanderings both allow him to provide an authoritative geographical overview of the world’s lands and peoples, and culminate with a stay at a court located far-away from the Greek center of the world, with a king who is able to provide necessary support in return for an account of his interlocutor’s travels. In Odysseus’s case, this consists of guest-gifts and support for his much longed-for *nostos*; in the case of PS, Nicomedes’ munificent patronage is presumably the desired aim. PS’s claims of extensive travel and autopsy of the *oikoumene* therefore serve a double purpose in the *Periodos*, on the one hand providing a (tenuous) reassurance of the work’s geographical reliability, but also—and perhaps more importantly—lending a sort of credence to PS’s claim to be able to judge royal excellence reliably and accurately when he sees it.

On the other hand, these assertions of the *Periodos*’s ability to support, sustain and possibly increase its patron’s *kleos* raise the question why Nicomedes’ fame and reputation might be in any way improved, spread, or even connected to PS’s writing and dedication of such a work. After all, despite its author’s bold claims for his writing’s ability to provide pleasure, benefit and learning to its readers, it is difficult to see immediately how this strangely truncated and occasionally factually inaccurate metrical catalogue might reflect on Nicomedes’ reputation in any tangible way. But acts of scholarly excerption, compilation and compression, and the capacity to handle and transform multiple texts into manageable and summarized forms, are themselves marks of access to the vast resources of a well-stocked Hellenistic court library, the possession and use of which is an aspect of the wider projection of monarchical power in the Hellenistic period.[[45]](#endnote-45) On a general level, then, PS’s cataloguing of the geography of the Hellenic past can perhaps be seen as an aspect of the same impulse which led to the construction of competing libraries and centers of scholarship in earlier Hellenistic kingdoms. By PS’s time, it is no longer poetry alone which is conceived of as being able to convey the *kleos* of a patron far over the whole world: geographical writing and scholarship can now play a similar role.

This might suffice as an explanation for PS’s scholarly geographical project in general terms, but, like all writers in search of patronage, he is surely to a certain extent also bound by the prospect of a hoped-for reciprocal relationship with Nicomedes to craft his work into a form which has the potential to please the particular patron he has in mind. In that case, why might the *Periodos* be an appealing text for a Bithynian monarch *specifically* in the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc>? One relevant factor is Bithynia’s status as a land at the furthest margins of the spread of Greek cultural power in antiquity. The kingdom had long been ruled by partially Hellenized monarchs who engaged with Greek culture to varying degrees and for varying purposes.[[46]](#endnote-46) In the *Periodos* PS offers Nicomedes a thoroughly Hellenocentric vision of the *oikoumene*, a world with Greece at its very center and with a focus on Greek settlements and colonization.[[47]](#endnote-47) This insistence on viewing the world from a Hellenic point of view is one reason why PS constructs his work out of slightly outdated texts which take little account of various recent political developments—not least the rapidly increasing rise of Roman power and its concomitant geo-political effects on the *oikoumene*.[[48]](#endnote-48) Both Nicomedes’ connection to this vision of Greek cultural power and his credentials as a Hellenized monarch are therefore bolstered through PS’s dedication to him of a text which emphasizes such a Hellenic view of the world and which was only made possible through access to a large number of Greek texts from the past.[[49]](#endnote-49)

The ability of the *Periodos* to strengthen Nicomedes’ status as a Hellenized monarch is certainly one significant aspect of its possible appeal to its dedicatee. But as well as thinking about the significance of the geographical vision which the text offers in broad terms relating to the distinction between Hellenes and others, we also need to take more account of what PS’s work might mean within the more localized context of Asia Minor in the late second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc> While attempting to examine this issue in detail we are hampered slightly by the uncertainty regarding which king precisely the work is dedicated to, though it is certain that we are dealing with either Nicomedes II Epiphanes (149–c.127 <sc>b.c.e.<sc>) or Nicomedes III Euergetes (c.127–c.94 <sc>b.c.e.<sc>). Of the two monarchs the latter is the likelier candidate, especially because in the middle of the prologue we find an approving reference to the father of the *Periodos*’s dedicatee when PS declares that he has deliberately chosen Apollo of Didyma as the guardian of his work on the basis that this particular deity had previously supported the kingship of Nicomedes’ father and was also now honored by him (διὸ τῇ προθέσει σύμβουλον ἐξελεξάμην | τὸν συγκατορθώσαντα καὶ τῷ σῷ πατρί … τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα τὸν Διδυμῆ λέγω, 55­–59). This reference certainly lessens the probability that Nicomedes II is the dedicatee, since after being exiled and almost murdered by his father Prusias II, this Nicomedes returned to Bithynia at the head of an army, entered the capital Nicomedia and promptly took revenge by having his father slaughtered in the Temple of Zeus where he had taken refuge.[[50]](#endnote-50) While the *Periodos*’s approving reference to its dedicatee’s father does not by any means settle the issue, it does seem improbable that PS, who is presumably intent on fitting the *Periodos* to the needs of his patron, would include such a reference if his work were aimed at a notorious parricide. Nicomedes III therefore seems a more likely candidate.[[51]](#endnote-51)

If he is the work’s dedicatee, the *Periodos*’s presentation of an abridged yet complete, easily memorized and graspable vision of the *oikoumene* seems especially apt. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Pergamene kingdom, the balance of power in Asia Minor was inevitably altered, and new opportunities for the expansion of political power and territorial gain soon arose. In the long run it was of course the kingdom of Pontus which benefitted most from these new re-alignments of power, while Bithynia fell by the wayside, eventually ceding control of its own affairs when it was bequeathed to the Romans in 74 <sc>b.c.e.<sc> in the will of Nicomedes IV, the son of Nicomedes III, in an action which precisely echoed the manner in which Attalus III had transferred control of the Pergamene kingdom over to Rome in 133 <sc>b.c.e.<sc> But it is important not to be led by the eventual failure of the kingdom into underestimating the potential power Bithynia had hopes of laying claim to in the late second and early first centuries <sc> b.c.e.<sc>, around the time the *Periodos* was written. Nicomedes III seems to have been particularly keen to capitalize on new opportunities for conquest and expansion, as various seemingly opportunistic foreign policy decisions on his part suggest. In c. 108/107 <sc> b.c.e.<sc> he first exploited a new opportunity for territorial advancement by taking advantage of Roman distraction elsewhere and teaming up with Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus to annex the neighboring kingdom of Paphlagonia.[[52]](#endnote-52) The territory was divided up between the two powers, and although Rome expressed great disapproval and ordered Paphlagonian power to be restored, Nicomedes ignored these demands and was able to retain control for years afterwards.[[53]](#endnote-53) This conquest was soon followed up by an even more audacious, opportunistic and rapacious action which swiftly broke up any potential alliance between Bithynia and Pontus: the attempted annexation of Cappadocia in c. 105 <sc>b.c.e.<sc>[[54]](#endnote-54) Nicomedes made his attempt on Cappadocia after the death of its king, Ariarathes VI, who had been married to Mithridates’ sister Laodice. Seizing upon the potential instability which the death of the Cappadocian monarch brought in its wake and sensing an opportunity for territorial advancement, Nicomedes swiftly entered Cappadocia and staked his claim by taking the widow Laodice as his new bride in an attempt to gain control of the kingdom. Mithridates did not tolerate this situation for very long and swiftly drove Nicomedes back to Bithynia, an event which seems to mark a turning point in terms of power relations in Asia Minor.

In the long term Nicomedes’ ambitious and aggressive foreign policy was a gamble that did not pay off. Nor did his court attain the dizzy cultural heights of his Pergamene predecessors. Rather than becoming the predominant power in Asia Minor, he soon ran into financial trouble, and the situation in Bithynia only worsened in the reign of his son.[[55]](#endnote-55) In the end it was the kingdom of Pontus which became the most powerful kingdom in Asia Minor as Mithridates Eupator, not Nicomedes III of Bithynia, gradually transformed into the scourge of Rome still remembered today. But nevertheless, despite the fact that Nicomedes was not able to hold onto this territory for very long, his attempt at such a conquest, and his lack of fear in terms of challenging Mithridates, certainly reveals his confidence and territorial ambitions in the wake of the period of the *Periodos*’s probable composition. And whichever Nicomedes is the *Periodos*’s dedicatee, it is apparent that the power and cultural vacuum left by the fall of the Attalids in Asia Minor had created a situation in which Bithynia looked, however temporarily, as if it might metamorphose into a major regional player. The *Periodos*, with its promise to deliver the *oikoumene* in easily graspable form and its status as a symbol of control over the vast resources of a Greek library and Greek scholarship, is therefore an ideal gift for the monarch of a minor Hellenistic kingdom which has ambitions of becoming something more, a textual manifestation of the ability to grasp hold of the world and control it—at least in textual form, even if not yet in actuality. In an Asia Minor in between the fall of the Attalids and the potential rise of another great cultural center, where the mantle of cultural supremacy is now up for grabs and where the territorial boundaries of the world itself are once again in flux, the sense of “in-betweeness” we get when reading the *Periodos*—the feeling that we are somehow reading a text which could not quite decide what it wants to be—is curiously apt.

It is this propensity for “in-betweeness”, the fact that it is never quite one thing nor the other, which has made the *Periodos* so frequently appear peculiar to modern eyes. It is neither a proper poem, nor by any means a prose treatise either; not actually a work consisting of deep geographical knowledge of the contemporary *oikoumene* which is of use to those who love learning, nor a vision of fantastical lands and peoples completely devoid of geographical accuracy; definitely not a praise poem, but nevertheless a work which is under pressure to perform for a patron; a text that fundamentally falls betwixt and between several genres and modes it might possibly find a home in, but which somehow manages to miss the mark in every single one of them. This is not the result of incompetence, but a by-product of the fact that our anonymous author is operating in a world where *historia* is now for sale, a world in which new and delicate balancing acts have now become necessary between prose and verse, geography and scholarship, writers and potential patrons. As a unique outlier in the extant Hellenistic literature remaining to us, the *Periodos* is not so much a dull list of often anachronistic and inaccurate geographical information collected and collated for unknown reasons in the last few decades of the second century <sc>b.c.e.<sc> Rather, it is a fascinating claim to cultural power and a potentially exciting window into the mindset of a minor Hellenistic kingdom which seems to have been keen to dispute and transform this designation of its power and magnitude at the moment of the text’s production. The fact that Nicomedes never did make it big like an Attalus or a Mithridates should not blind us to the *Periodos*’s tantalizing geographical vision of an *oikoumene* that was there, however briefly, for the taking.

<sc>Works Cited <sc>

Ameling, W. 2008. “Ethnography and Universal History in Agatharchides.” In Brennan, T. C. and Flower H. I. eds. *East and West: Papers in Ancient History Presented to Glen W. Bowersock*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. 13–59.

Asmis, E. 1992. “Neoptolemus and the Classification of Poetry.” *CP* 87: 206–31.

Austin, N. 1975. *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer’s Odyssey*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Baron, C. A. 2013. *Timaeus of Tauromenium and Hellenistic Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berrey, M. 2017. *Hellenistic Science at Court*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Bianchetti, S. 1990. πλωτὰ καὶ πορευτὰ: *sulle trace di una periegesi anonima*. Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider.

\_\_\_\_. 2014. “Aspetti di geografia eforea nei *Giambi a Nicomede*.” *La Parola del Passato* 69: 751–80.

\_\_\_\_. 2016. “The ‘Invention’ of Geography: Eratosthenes of Cyrene.” In Bianchetti, S., Cataudella, M. and Gehrke H-J. eds. *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Geography: The Inhabited World in Greek and Roman Tradition*. Leiden: Brill. 132–49.

Biraschi, A. M. 2005. “Strabo and Homer: A Chapter in Cultural History.” In Dueck, D., Lindsay, H. and Pothecary, S. eds. *Strabo’s Cultural Geography: The Making of a Kolossourgia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 73–85.

Boshnakov, K. 2004. *Pseudo-Skymnos (Semos von Delos?)*. Stuttgart: Steiner.

Bravo, B. 2009. *La Chronique d'Apollodore et le Pseudo-Skymnos: érudition antiquaire et littérature géographique dans la seconde moitié du IIe siècle av. J.-C*. Leuven: Peeters.

Broggiato, M. 2001. *Cratete di Mallo: I frammenti*. La Spezia: Agorà Ed.

Burgess, J. S. 2017. “The *Apologos* of Odysseus: Tradition and Conspiracy Theories.” In Tsagalis, C. and Markantonatos, A. eds. *The Winnowing Oar: New Perspectives in Homeric Studies*. Berlin: De Gruyter. 95–120.

Burstein, S. M. 1989. *Agatharchides of Cnidus: On the Erythraean Sea*. London: Hakluyt Society.

Clarke, K. 1999. *Between Geography and History: Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Diller, A. 1952. *The Tradition of the Minor Greek Geographers*. Lancaster, PA: American Philological Association.

Dougherty, C. 2001. *The Raft of Odysseus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dueck, D. 2012. *Geography in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Erskine, A. 1995. “Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Museum and Library of Alexandria.” *G&R* 42: 38–48.

Fernoux, H-L. 2004. *Notables et élites des cités de Bithynie aux époques hellénistique et romaine: IIIe siècle av. J.-C.-IIIe siècle ap. J.-C.: essai d'histoire sociale*. Lyon: Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée.

Flatt, T. 2017. “*Anēr Poluplanēs*: Geography and the Odyssean Tradition in Polybius.” *CW* 110: 451–73.

Ford, A. L. 1992. *Homer: The Poetry of the Past*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Fraser, P. M. 1972. *Ptolemaic Alexandria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gabba, E. 2003. “Riflessione sui *Giambi a Nicomede.*” In Hantos, T. ed. *Laurea internationalis. Festschrift für Jochen Bleicken zum 75*. Stuttgart: Steiner. 143–47.

Gabelko, O. 2017. “Bithynia and Cappadocia: Royal Courts and Ruling Society in the Minor Hellenistic Monarchies.” In Erskine, A., Llewellyn-Jones, L. and Wallace, S. eds. *The Hellenistic Court: Monarchic Power and Elite Society from Alexander to Cleopatra*. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales. 319–42.

Geus, K. 2002. *Eratosthenes von Kyrene: Studien zur hellenistischen Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*. München: Beck.

Glew, D. G. 1987. “The Cappadocian Expedition of Nicomedes III Euergetes, King of Bithynia.” *ANSMN* 32: 23–55.

\_\_\_\_. 2005. “Nicomedes’ Name.” *EA* 38: 131–39.

Goldhill, S. 1991. *The Poet’s Voice: Essays in Poetics and Greek Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gruen, E. S. 2000. “Culture as Policy: The Attalids of Pergamon.” In De Grummond, N. T. and Ridgway, B. S. eds. *From Pergamon to Sperlonga: Sculpture and Context*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 17–31.

Gutzwiller, K. J. 1983. “Charites or Hiero: Theocritus’ *Idyll* 16.” *RhM* 126: 212–38.

\_\_\_\_. 2010. “Literary Criticism.” In Clauss, J. J. and Cuypers, M. eds. *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. 337–65.

Halliwell, S. F. 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

\_\_\_\_. 2011. *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hannestad, L. 1996. “‘This Contributes in No Small Way to One’s Reputation’: The Bithynian Kings and Greek Culture.” In Bilde, P. et al. eds. *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press. 67–98.

Hansen, E. V. 1971. *The Attalids of Pergamum*. 2nd ed. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Harder, A. 2012. *Callimachus Aetia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harris, B. F. 1980. “Bithynia: Roman Sovereignty and the Survival of Hellenism.” *ANRW* II.7.2: 857–901.

Hartog, F. 2001. *Memories of Odysseus: Frontier Tales from Ancient Greece*. Trans. J. Lloyd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hunter, R. L. 1996. *Theocritus and the Archaeology of Greek Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

\_\_\_\_. 2003. “Aspects of Technique and Style in the *Periegesis* of Dionysius.” In Accorinti, D. and Chuvin, P. eds. *Des géants à Dionysos: mélanges de mythologie et de poésie grecques offerts à Francis Vian*. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso. 343–56.

\_\_\_\_. 2006. “The Prologue of the *Periodos to Nicomedes* (‘Pseudo-Scymnus’).” In Harder, M. A., Regtuit, R. F. and Wakker, G. C. eds. *Beyond the Canon*. Leuven: Peeters. 123–40.

\_\_\_\_. 2017. “Pseudo-Scymnus.” In Sider, D. ed. *Hellenistic Poetry: A Selection*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 524–36.

\_\_\_\_. 2018. *The Measure of Homer: The Ancient Reception of the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jacoby, F. 1902. *Apollodors Chronik: eine Sammlung der Fragmente*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung.

Janko, R. 2000. *Philodemus, On Poems. Book One*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnston, S. I. 1999. *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*.Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jones, A. H. M. 1971. *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kim, L. 2007. “The Portrait of Homer in Strabo’s *Geography.*” *CP* 102: 363–88.

\_\_\_\_. 2010. *Homer Between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Korenjak, M. 2003. *Die Welt-Rundreise eines anonymen griechischen Autors (“Pseudo-Skymnos”)*. Hildesheim: G. Olms.

Krevans, N. 2004. “Callimachus and the Pedestrian Muse.” In Harder, M. A., Regtuit, R. F. and Wakker, G. C. eds. *Callimachus II*. Leuven: Peeters. 173–84.

\_\_\_\_. 2011. “Callimachus’ Philology.” In Acosta-Hughes, B., Lehnus, L. and Stephens, S. A. eds. *Brill’s Companion to Callimachus*. Leiden: Brill. 118–33.

Kurke, L. 1991. *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press.

Lightfoot, J. 2017. “Hipparchus’ Didactic Journey: Poetry, Prose, and Catalogue Form in the *Commentary on Aratus and Eudoxus*.” *GRBS* 57: 935–67.

\_\_\_\_. 2019. “Textual Wanderings: Homeric Scholarship and the Written Landscape of Strabo’s *Geography*.” *AJP* 140: 671–97.

MacLachlan, B. C. 1993. *The Age of Grace: Charis in Early Greek Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Magie, D. 1950. *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mangoni, C. 1993. *Filodemo: il quinto libro della poetica*. Naples: Bibliopolis.

Marcotte, D. 2000. *Géographes grecs I: Introduction générale. Ps.-Scymnos: Circuit de la terre*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

\_\_\_\_. 2001. “Structure et caractère de l'œuvre historique d'Agatharchide.” *Historia* 50: 385–435.

Marek, C. 2016. *In the Land of a Thousand Gods: A History of Asia Minor in the Ancient World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Marincola, J. 1997. *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

\_\_\_\_. 2007. “Odysseus and the Historians.” *SyllClass* 18: 1–79.

McGing, B. C. 1986. *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator, King of Pontus*. Leiden: Brill.

Meyer, D. 1998. “Zur Funktion geographischer Darstellungen bei Apollonios Rhodios und in der *Perihegese an Nikomedes* (Ps.-Skymnos).” In Döring, K., Herzhoff, B. and Wöhrle, G. eds. *Antike Naturwissenschaft und ihre Rezeption 8*. Trier: WVT. 61–81.

Michels, C. 2009. *Kulturtransfer und monarchischer Philhellenismus: Bithynien, Pontos und Kappadokien in hellenistischer Zeit*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Montiglio, S. 2005. *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Müller, C. 1855. *Geographi graeci minores I.* Paris: A. Firmin Didot.

Nicolai, R. 1991. “Zenodoto e Pseudo-Scimno (Hom *Od*. 1.3).” *RFIC* 119: 181–87.

Ogden, D. 2001. *Greek and Roman Necromancy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pfeiffer, R. 1968. *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pucci, P. 1996. “Between Narrative and Catalogue: Life and Death of the Poem.” *Métis* 11: 5–24.

Roller, D. W. 2010. *Eratosthenes’ Geography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

\_\_\_\_. 2018. *A Historical and Topographical Guide to the Geography of Strabo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Romm, J. S. 1992. *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought*: *Geography, Exploration and Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sammons, B. 2010. *The Art and Rhetoric of the Homeric Catalogue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schenkeveld, D. M. 1976. “Strabo on Homer.” *Mnemosyne* 29: 52–64.

Schindler, C. 2000. “Geographische Lehrdichtung.” In Hübner, W. ed. *Geschichte der Mathematik und der Naturwissenschaften in der Antike. Bd. 2: Geographie und verwandte Wissenschaften*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner. 163–83.

Schironi, F. 2019. “Enlightened Kings or Pragmatic Rulers? Ptolemaic Patronage of Scholarship and Sciences in Context.” In Bosman, P. R. ed. *Intellectual and Empire in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. London: Routledge. 1–29.

Scholten, J. 2007. “Building Hellenistic Bithynia.” In Elton, H. and Reger, G. eds. *Regionalism in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor*. Paris: De Boccard. 17–24.

Sullivan, R. 1990. *Near Eastern Royalty and Rome 100–30 B.C*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Too, Y. L. 1998. *The Idea of Ancient Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

\_\_\_\_. 2010. *The Idea of the Library in the Ancient World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Verdin, H. 1990. “Agatharchide de Cnide et les fictions des poètes.” In Verdin, H., Schepens, G. and de Keyser, E. eds. *Purposes of History: Studies in Greek Historiography from the 4th to the 2nd Centuries B.C*. Leuven: Kathol Universiteit. 1–15.

Vitucci, G. 1953. *Il regno di Bitinia*. Rome: A. Signorelli.

1. \* I am grateful to Richard Hunter for his very helpful advice and comments on an earlier version of this article. I would also like to thank the editor and anonymous readers of *TAPA* for their helpful suggestions. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See Bianchetti 1990: 23–35, Marcotte 2000: 7–16, Korenjak 2003: 11–13 and Boshnakov 2004: 4–6, 70–78 for detailed discussions concerning the *Periodos*’s date and addressee. I will return again to the issue of the work’s addressee in more detail below (pp. 33–34). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For recent discussions of various past authorial attributions and new suggestions concerning authorship see especially Marcotte 2000: 35–46 (who suggests Apollodorus of Athens) and Boshnakov 2004: 1–3, 33–69 (who argues for Semos of Delos). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. In line with recent scholarship and for reasons of convenience I will refer to the anonymous author as PS throughout, though none of my arguments depend on this attribution. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. On the tradition of geographical *periodoi*/*periploi*/*periegeseis* see Romm 1992: 26–31, Marcotte 2000: LV–LXII and Dueck 2012: 51–67. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Several fragments from this part of the work have been reconstructed on the basis of passages of the *Periodos* re–used in later geographical texts: see note at Müller 1855: 225 and Marcotte 2000: 134–49, 239–63 for text and discussion. See also Diller 1952: 165–76 on fragments of the *Periodos* recoverable from Pseudo–Arrian’s *Periplous of the Euxine Sea*. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The fact that PS seems to be attempting to produce poetry which is as close to prose as possible has frequently been noted: see e.g., Clarke 1999: 63, Schindler 2000: 170, Hunter 2006: 126 and 2017: 524. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. On the transformation of prose into verse and its relation to didactic intent in Aratus’ *Phaenomena* and the Aratean tradition see Lightfoot 2017: 935–67. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. All translations are my own. Greek text of the *Periodos* is from Marcotte 2000. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. On PS’s use of Herodotus here see Marcotte 2000: 216, Korenjak 2003: 92–93 and Hunter 2017: 537. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. On the use of prosaic “source citations” in the *Periodos* see Hunter 2006: 133. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. On Callimachus’s explicit source citation of Xenomedes within his poem, see Harder 2012: 632–58, Krevans 2004: 180–81 and 2011: 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. On Aristotle’s comments on the prose–like nature of trimeter in relation to the use of trimeter in the *Periodos* see Hunter 2006: 126, 134. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. On the Catalogue of Ships as the foundational text for the later mode of geographical periegetic writing see Hunter 2003: 354. On the geographical arrangement of the Catalogue and its role in mapping out an image of the Greek world see Sammons 2010: 136–39. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The terms and results of this catalogic paradox are outlined most clearly at Pucci 1996: 21; see also Sammons 2010: 16, 19, 205–206. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. PS goes on to describe the content of Apollodorus’s iambic chronography reporting that it contained brief details concerning “the capture of cities, the movements of armies, the migrations of peoples, the campaigns of barbarians, the attacks and crossings of naval forces, the laying down of hostilities, alliances, treaties, battles, the actions of kings, the lives of illustrious men, retreats, campaigns, the dissolutions of tyrannies” (πόλεων ἁλώσεις, ἐκτοπισμοὺς στρατοπέδων,/ μεταναστάσεις ἐθνῶν, στρατείας βαρβάρων,/ ἐφόδους περαιώσεις τε ναυτικῶν στόλων,/ θέσεις ἀγώνων, συμμαχίας, σπονδὰς, μάχας,/ πράξεις βασιλέων, ἐπιφανῶν ἀνδρῶν βίους,/ φυγὰς, στρατείας, καταλύσεις τυραννίδων, 26–31). For fragments of the *Chronica* and discussion see Jacoby 1902. On PS’s relationship to Apollodorus and his work see further Marcotte 2000: 3, 28–35, 41–46 and Hunter 2006: 126–27. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See Hunter 2006: 134 on the *Periodos* and this passage of the *Rhetoric*. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. On these multiple aspects of *charis* see e.g., Gutzwiller 1983: 220–23, Goldhill 1991: 132–34, Kurke 1991: 91–93, MacLachlan 1993 (esp. 73–86 on social *charis*), Hunter 1996: 97. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The relationship between *kleos* and *charis* which is at the heart of the poet/patron relationship is aptly summarised at Hunter 1996: 97. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See Hunter 2006: 126–29 on PS’s explicit use of terms which immediately signal his engagement with well–known language and debates of Hellenistic literary criticism in the opening lines of the *Periodos*. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. On the original necromantic meaning of the term *psychagōgia* see Johnston 1999: 19–21 and Ogden 2001: 95–112. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. For an excellent overview of *psychagōgia* in the literary critical tradition see Halliwell 2011: 223–26. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. On Eratosthenes’ significance in the history of geography as a discipline, see e.g., Geus 2002: 260–88, Roller 2010: 1–30 and Bianchetti 2016: 132–49. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. On the Eratosthenes’ place in the debate between *psychagōgia* and *didaskalia* see Pfeiffer 1968: 166–68, Fraser 1972: 527, Romm 1992: 185–86, 192, Halliwell 2002: 269–70, Gutzwiller 2010: 340–42 and Roller 2010: 112–14. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. As Strabo makes clear at the opening of the *Geography* (1.1.2): ἀρχηγέτην εἶναι τῆς γεωγραφικῆς ἐμπειρίας Ὅμηρον (“. . . Homer is the founder of the discipline of geography”). Strabo explicitly refutes Eratosthenes’ view early in the *Geography* at 1.1.10: οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀληθές ἐστιν, ὅ φησιν Ἐρατοσθένης, ὅτι ποιητὴς πᾶς στοχάζεται ψυχαγωγίας, οὐ διδασκαλίας (“for it is not true what Eratosthenes says, that every poet aims at delight, rather than at teaching”); he later goes on to argue against this specific view at much greater length in a broader discussion of the use of Homeric geography at 1.2.1–1.2.35. On Strabo’s attitude towards Homer and Homeric geography see Schenkeveld 1976: 52–64, Biraschi 2005: 73–85, Kim 2007: 363–88 and 2010: 47–84, Roller 2018: 15–39 and Lightfoot 2019: 671-97. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. See Mangoni 1993 col. 16.9–14: τῶι τελείωι ποιητῆι μετὰ τῆς ψυχαγωγίας τὴν τῶν ἀκουόντων ὠφέλησιν καὶ χρησιμολογίαν καὶ τὸν Ὅμηρον. On Neoptolemus’s views concerning *psychagōgia* and benefit see Asmis 1992: 217–20, Janko 2000: 147–48, Gutzwiller 2010: 361 and Halliwell 2011: 316–17. On the relationship between Neoptolemus’s views and those of PS in the *Periodos*, see Marcotte 2000: 26, Korenjak 2003: 72 and Hunter 2006: 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. On the use of trimeter as a potential compromise between readerly pleasure and benefit, see Marcotte 2000: 26 and Hunter 2006: 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. On the life, career and works of Agatharchides see Burstein 1989: 12–36 and Ameling 2008: 13–59. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. On Agatharchides’ engagement with the Eratosthenic debate between *psychagōgia* and *didaskalia* see Burstein 1989: 49, Verdin 1990: 10, Marcotte 2001: 428 and Ameling 2008: 29–30. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. See Romm 1992: 172–214 on geographical narratives and the development of the idea of fiction from the *Odyssey* onwards. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. I.e., the listener of this work (ὁ κατακούσας, mentioned earlier in line 92, see above p. 17). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. For Zenodotus’s variant reading see Σ ad. *Od*. 1.3. On PS’s allusion to this Homeric line, see Nicolai 1991: 181–87, Marcotte 2000: 155, Hunter 2006: 132 and 2017: 532. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. On Odysseus’s status as the first literary model of an inquiring traveller for the later Greek tradition see e.g., Romm 1992: 183–84, Clarke 1999: 100–101, Hartog 2001: 3–13, 36–39, 163–71, Marincola 2007: 1–79, Flatt 2017: 451–73 and Hunter 2017: 532. Among Hellenistic Homeric commentators Crates of Mallos adopted the most extreme position concerning Odysseus’s status as an inquiring traveller, arguing that the hero really had travelled in the Outer Ocean and that Homer had recorded these real travels (see Crates F37–72 Broggiato). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. See e.g., Dougherty 2001: 61–78 on the connection between Odysseus’s autoptic travels, poetic truth and narrative throughout the *Odyssey*. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. On the essentially ethnographic and geographical focus of Alcinous’s request see Montiglio 2005: 53 and Burgess 2017: 105–106. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. On the echo of *Od*. 1–3 at *Od.* 8.572–76 see e.g., Ford 1992: 113, Burgess 2017: 105–106 and Hunter 2018: 115–16. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. See also Austin 1975: 197–200 on the importance of *charis* in terms of Odysseus’s interactions with his hosts and at the Phaeacian court in general. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. On PS’s extensive use of Ephorus see Bianchetti 2014: 340–68. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. See e.g., Marincola 1997: 63–86 on the importance of autopsy in the historiographical tradition. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. See e.g., *Histories* 12.25e.7, 12.25g.1–4 and 12.25h.3, where Polybius declares that accounts formed from books, like those of his predecessor Timaeus of Tauromenium, are not written with experience or vividness, with the result that they are of little use for *historia*; see also the complaint at *Histories* 12.27.1–7 about Timaeus’s bookish research, which does not involve dangers or sufferings, unlike proper autoptic inquiry which is vital for the practice of real *historia*. For a detailed discussion of this Polybian criticism of Timaeus see Baron 2013: 66–85. On PS’s place in this debate see Hunter 2017: 532, Marcotte 2000: 20–21. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. See above p. 21 on Odysseus’s importance for Polybius’s conception of the historian. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. On the extreme scepticism which PS’s claims concerning his own autoptic knowledge have provoked see Marcotte 2000: 20–24, Schindler 2000: 168 and Bravo 2009: 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. On the outdated nature of PS’s sources, and the composite and anachronistic view of his contemporary *oikoumene* which ensues, see Müller 1855: LXXVIII, Meyer 1998: 72, Marcotte 2000: 5, Schindler 2000: 168–69, Gabba 2003: 145, Korenjak 2003: 16–19 and Bravo 2009: 30–111. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. On Attalid cultural patronage see e.g., Hansen 1971: 390–433 and Gruen 2000: 17–31. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. On the patronage of libraries, scholarship and science as a means of projecting power in the Hellenistic world see e.g., Erskine 1995: 38–48, Too 1998: 115–150 and 2010: 19–49, Berrey 2017: 89–125 and Schironi 2019: 1–29. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Beginning with Zipoetes I (356 BCE – 280 BCE), the first ruler of the independent kingdom to assume the title of *basileus*, Bithynian kings engaged with Hellenic culture to varying degrees: see Harris 1980: 861–69 and Hannestad 1996: 67–98. Gabelko 2017: 319–42 discusses the concomitant Hellenization of the Bithynian aristocracy, though Glew 2005: 131–32 and Scholten 2007: 17–24 take a more cautious approach and suggest that persistent Thracian influences in Bithynia may be underestimated. It is striking that Nicomedes II and III, the two possible candidates for the dedication of the *Periodos*, both seem to have been particularly philhellene in comparison to previous Bithynian monarchs, especially in terms of their euergetism towards Greek states and sanctuaries: see Harris 1980: 864, Hannestad 1996: 74–83, Fernoux 2004: 61–64 and Michels 2009: 54–87. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. On the *Periodos*’s consistently Hellenocentric viewpoint see Meyer 1998: 74–78, Gabba 2003: 144 and Hunter 2017: 529. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. See p. 28 n42 above on the anachronistic view of the *oikoumene* presented in the *Periodos*. See also Gabba 2003: 143–47 and Bravo 2009: 104–110 on the influence which the growing power of Rome may have exerted on PS’s presentation of the *oikoumene*. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. See Hunter 2006: 130–31 on PS’s use of his prologue as a space that allows Nicomedes to demonstrate his credentials as a monarch who understands Greek culture. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. For accounts of Nicomedes II’s act of sacrilegious patricide see App. *Mithr*. 4–7, Diod. Sic. 32.21 and Just. *Epit*. 34.4.1–5. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. On the various factors in play see Marcotte 2000: 11–15. See also Korenjak 2003: 12, 71–72, Gabba 2003: 143, Boshnakov 2004: 72–73 and Bravo 2009: xiii, xiv n.3, all of whom reflect the current scholarly consensus in favour of Nicomedes III as dedicatee. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. See McGing 1986: 66–67 on Roman distraction at the time of the conquest of Paphlagonia and the similarities between the kingdoms of Bithynia and Pontus in this period. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. On Nicomedes’ conquest of Paphlagonia see Just. *Epit*. 37.4.3–9. For discussion see Magie 1950: 197, Vitucci 1953: 99–100, Jones 1971: 162, McGing 1986: 69, Glew 1987: 23–24, Sullivan 1990: 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Glew 1987: 42 suggests this date for the Cappadocian expedition on the basis of the numismatic evidence. For discussion of the ambitious attempted annexation of Cappadocia and Nicomedes’ growing enmity with Mithridates, see Magie 1950: 203, Vitucci 1953: 102–105, Glew 1987: 24, Sullivan 1990: 32 and Marek 2016: 270–72. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. See Sullivan 1990: 30–32 for the view that Nicomedes’ territorial ambitions were to blame for the financial problems and weakening of the Bithynian kingdom which followed. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)