

THE EVIDENCE OF GREEK POPYRI WITH REGARD TO TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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THE object of this paper is to bring together the materials which up to now have been provided by the Greek popyri discovered in Egypt on the subject of the textual criticism of the classical authors ; to see what extent of evidence is now available on this topic ; and to consider what bearing this evidence has, either on the actual state of our classical texts or on the methods which should be employed in editing them. The results of such an inquiry will, of course, need revision from time to time, as the mass of our materials increases ; but already there is sufficient evidence extant to form a reasonable basis for induction, and to wait until all discoveries have been exhausted would be to emulate the behaviour of Horace's rustic. A future generation may have more ample means for forming its opinions ; but that does not exempt us from the duty of forming an opinion to-day, and of coming to provisional conclusions on the evidence which is ready to our hand.

The evidence consists of a multitude of small details, which it would be impossible to enumerate at length, and which relate to a number of different authors ; but it may be possible to take each author in turn, to state what amount of evidence with regard to his text is provided by the extant popyri, and to indicate what the general bearing of that evidence is ; and then it may be possible to sum up the results and to arrive at some general conclusions with regard to the extent to which textual science has been affected by the discoveries, so numerous of late years, of Greek popyri in Egypt.

The interest of the inquiry lies, of course, in the fact that whereas until recently (but for a few exceptions one might say until the last fifteen years) our knowledge of the texts of the Greek classics rested upon manuscripts written upon vellum or paper between the tenth and fifteenth centuries of the Christian era, we now have a great quantity of texts (mostly small fragments, it is true, but

including several manuscripts of considerable length) written between the third century B.C. and the fifth century A.D., which must necessarily throw some light on the integrity of the tradition represented in our much later vellum MSS., and show us whether, as some have suspected, that tradition has been seriously corrupted in its transition through the comparatively dark ages of the Byzantine empire. The facts, so far as they are at present known to us, appear to be as follows.

The number of published literary papyri, large and small (but excluding theological texts, which form a class by themselves, affected by different conditions), is approximately three hundred and fifty¹. Nearly half of these², however, contain texts not previously known, and consequently are of little or no use in our present inquiry, since we have no adequate means of estimating the accuracy of their tradition. There remain 189 papyri containing texts of authors previously extant, for which we consequently have a basis of comparison. The total sounds large; but it must be remembered that most of them are fragments containing only a few lines, and that, as we shall see directly, more than half of them belong to a single author. The basis, consequently, is not so wide as we could wish. It may be slightly increased, however, by the inclusion of a few fragments on vellum, which have been discovered with papyri and belong to the latter part of the same period, and consequently are a legitimate reinforcement of their evidence.

To come to the individual authors. The first place is, of course, taken by Homer, both in date and in the number of extant papyri. Out of the 189 papyri of known authors enumerated above, no less than 109 contain portions of Homer. Of these seventy-nine contain portions of the *Iliad*, six scholia on the *Iliad*, twenty-two portions of the *Odyssey*, and two scholia on the *Odyssey*. Out of the 15693 lines contained in the *Iliad*, 6526 are extant, whole or in part, on papyrus; while out of the 12110 lines of the *Odyssey* only 942 are so represented. This is no unfair test of the relative popularity of the two works in Hellenistic times.

The papyri of Homer fall into two classes. First there is a small group of manuscripts, of relatively early date, which are remarkable

¹ My enumeration gives 347 up to and including the texts in *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, III; other lists would no doubt differ slightly in what they include and what they reject. The philosophical texts among the Herculaneum papyri are not included.

² 158; papyri containing scholia on known texts are reckoned among the known authors, since they provide evidence with regard to their texts, and are therefore available for our present purpose.