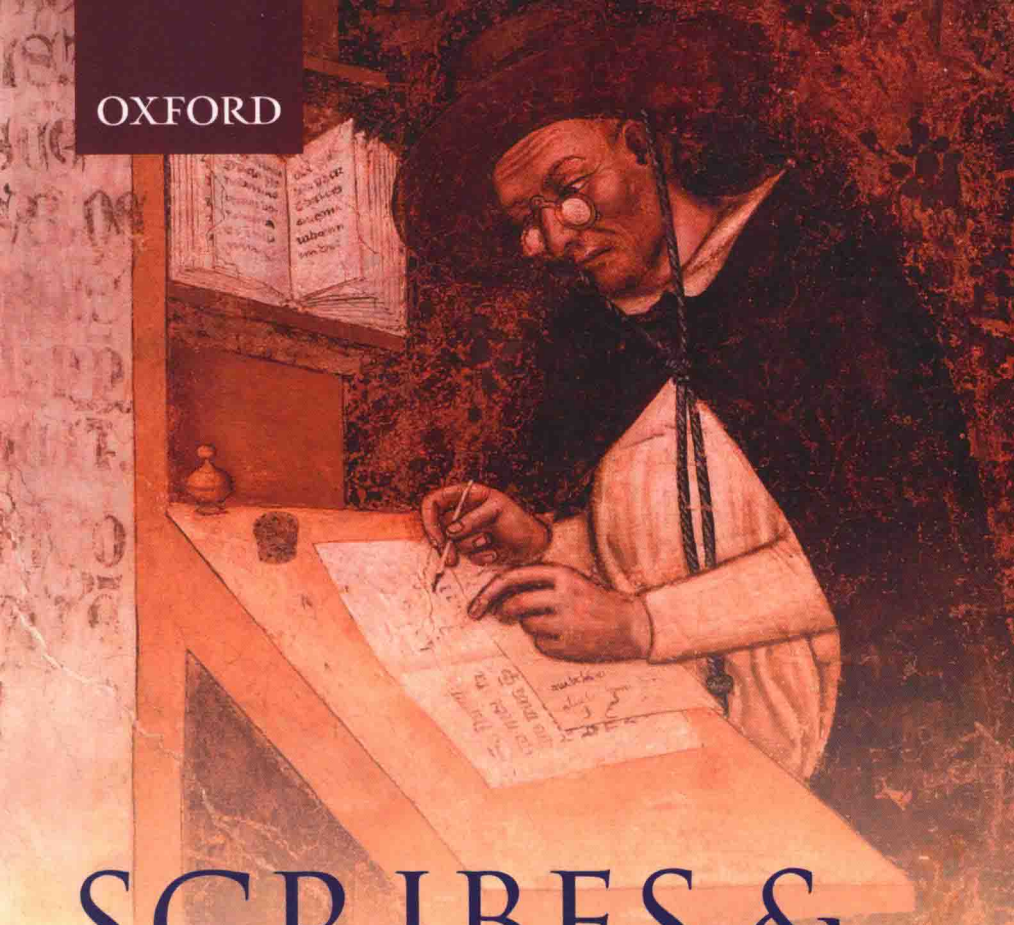

OXFORD

SCRIBES & SCHOLARS

A Guide to the Transmission of Greek & Latin Literature

FOURTH EDITION

L. D. REYNOLDS & N. G. WILSON

SCRIBES AND SCHOLARS

A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature

BY

†L. D. REYNOLDS

Fellow and Tutor of Brasenose College, Oxford

AND

N. G. WILSON

Fellow and Tutor of Lincoln College, Oxford

FOURTH EDITION

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

Fourth Edition published in 2013

Impression: 1

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013943248

ISBN 978-0-19-968632-2 (hbk.)
ISBN 978-0-19-968633-9 (pbk.)

Printed in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

PREFACE

As we said in the preface to the first edition, this book is designed as a simple introduction for beginners to a field of classical studies which generally remains little known or understood despite its importance and intrinsic interest. In schools and universities students read Greek and Latin authors in editions equipped with an apparatus criticus, but they are too often unacquainted with the historical facts which make such an apparatus necessary, and are at a loss to evaluate the information that it gives. There are few works in English to which they can be referred, and a short guide is needed, especially one which can be read by those whose linguistic and historical knowledge is limited.

We have attempted to outline the processes by which Greek and Latin literature have been preserved, describing the dangers to which texts were exposed in the age of the manuscript book, and showing to what extent ancient and medieval readers or scholars were concerned to preserve or transmit classical texts. The history of texts cannot be separated from the history of education and scholarship, which also bulk large in these pages. On the other hand, matters of pure palaeography receive attention only if they are of direct importance for transmission.

The book is intended in the first place for students of Greek and Latin, but the theme handled is so inextricably connected with the cultural history of the Middle Ages and Renaissance that we think our account may be useful to anyone concerned with these periods. We also hope that students of biblical scholarship may find something of interest.

Whereas the first edition took the story no further than the Renaissance and lacked notes, the second was enlarged in both these respects. In order not to encumber a readable text with a heavy apparatus we put the notes at the end of the book and made them largely bibliographical. The new chapter had to be even more selective than the others, but it seemed worth the effort to complete the historical perspective.

Despite a widely held opinion to the contrary, classical studies make rapid advances, and after an interval of fifteen years there are many points at which our second edition no longer represents the current state of knowledge. We have tried to make the necessary adjustments, and some small additions, without in any way changing the character and purpose of the book.

Over the years we have profited a great deal from the kindness of friends, reviewers, and the translators who have rendered our work into Italian, Greek, French, and Spanish. We should like to record once again our gratitude for their contributions.

L.D.R.
N.G.W.

January 1990

More than twenty years have passed since the publication of the last edition, and once again it is time to take account of recent contributions to the subject. I have left the main text largely unaltered. The notes required a fair number of adjustments. Many of these I owe to Michael Reeve, to whom I express my warmest thanks.

N.G.W.

July 2012

CONTENTS

1. ANTIQUITY 1

i. Ancient books
ii. The library of the Museum and Hellenistic scholarship
iii. Other Hellenistic work
iv. Books and scholarship in the Roman Republic
v. Developments under the early Empire
vi. Archaism in the second century
vii. The compendium and the commentary
viii. From roll to codex
ix. Paganism and Christianity in the fourth century in the Western Empire
x. The subscriptions

2. THE GREEK EAST 44

i. Scholarship and literature under the Roman Empire
ii. The Christian Church and classical studies
iii. The early Byzantine period
iv. Greek texts in the Orient
v. The Renaissance of the ninth century
vi. The later Byzantine period

3. THE LATIN WEST 80

i. The Dark Ages
ii. Ireland and England
iii. The Anglo-Saxon missionaries
iv. Insular influence on classical texts
v. The Carolingian revival
vi. The development of Caroline minuscule

vii. Carolingian libraries and the Latin classics
viii. Carolingian scholarship
ix. The Carolingian twilight
x. The resurgence of Montecassino
xi. The twelfth-century Renaissance
xii. The Scholastic Age
xiii. Greek in the West in the Middle Ages

4. THE RENAISSANCE 123

i. Humanism
ii. The first humanists
iii. The consolidation of humanism: Petrarch and his generation
iv. Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406)
v. The great age of discovery: Poggio (1380–1459)
vi. Latin scholarship in the fifteenth century: Valla and Politian
vii. Greek studies: diplomats, refugees and book collectors
viii. Greek scholarship in the fifteenth century: Bessarion and Politian
ix. The first printed Greek texts: Aldus Manutius and Marcus Musurus
x. Erasmus (*c.* 1469–1536)

5. SOME ASPECTS OF SCHOLARSHIP SINCE THE RENAISSANCE 165

i. The Counter-Reformation; the High Renaissance in Italy
ii. The beginnings of humanism and scholarship in France
iii. The Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
iv. Richard Bentley (1662–1742): classical and theological studies
v. The origins of palaeography

vi. Discoveries of texts since the Renaissance
(a) Palimpsests
(b) Papyri
(c) Other manuscript discoveries
(d) Epigraphic texts
vii. Epilogue

6. TEXTUAL CRITICISM 208

i. Introductory
ii. The development of the theory of textual criticism
iii. The stemmatic theory of recension
iv. Limitations of the stemmatic method
v. Age and merit in individual manuscripts
vi. Indirect tradition
vii. Some other basic principles
viii. Corruptions
ix. Fluid forms of transmission: technical and popular literature
x. Conventions in the apparatus criticus
xi. Conclusion

ABBREVIATIONS 243

NOTES 245

Index of Manuscripts. 299

General Index 308

Notes to the Plates 322

Plates 326

I

ANTIQUITY

1. ANCIENT BOOKS

A description of the processes by which classical literature has been transmitted from the ancient world to the present day may conveniently begin with a brief outline of the origin and growth of trade in books. In archaic Greece literature preceded literacy. The nucleus of the Homeric poems was handed down through several centuries during which the use of writing appears to have been completely lost; and in the second half of the eighth century, when the Phoenician alphabet was adapted for the writing of Greek, the tradition of oral literary composition was still strong, with the result that it may not have been thought necessary to commit the Homeric poems to writing at once. According to a tradition frequently repeated in antiquity the first written text of the epics was prepared at Athens in the middle of the sixth century by order of Pisistratus. This account is not above suspicion, and even if true would not prove that copies of the text of Homer began to circulate in any considerable numbers, for Pisistratus' aim was probably just to ensure the existence of an official copy of the poems to be recited at the festival of the Panathenaea. The habit of reading epic poetry instead of hearing it recited can hardly have been created overnight, and books remained something of a rarity until well into the fifth century. On the other hand the growth of forms of literature which do not depend on oral composition ensured that from the seventh century onwards there was a need for authors to put their works in writing, even if only a single copy was made for the purpose of reference; thus Heraclitus is said to have deposited his famous treatise in a temple and perhaps for this reason it survived to be read by Aristotle in the middle of the fourth century (Diog. Laert. 9.6). The multiplication and circulation of

copies was probably extremely limited, and it may be conjectured that the first works to reach even a limited public were either the writings of the Ionian philosophers and historians or those of the sophists. There must also have been a certain demand for copies of the poetic texts that formed the basis of school education. It is not until the middle of the fifth century or a little later that a book trade can be said to have existed in Greece: we find references to a part of the Athenian market where books can be bought (Eupolis fr. 327 K.-A.), and Socrates is represented by Plato as saying in his *Apology* (26D) that anyone can buy Anaxagoras' works for a drachma in the orchestra. All details of the trade, however, remain unknown.

Of the appearance of the books that were produced in classical Greece not much can be said with certainty. The number of books or fragments surviving from the fourth century is so tiny that it would not be reasonable to regard them as a representative sample. The general statements that follow are therefore based primarily on Hellenistic material, but it may be inferred with some plausibility that they are also true for the classical period. An attempt will be made to show how the physical differences between ancient and modern books affected the ancient reader in his relation to literary texts.

The form of the book was a roll, on one side of which the text was written in a series of columns. The reader would unroll it gradually, using one hand to hold the part that he had already seen, which was rolled up; but the result of this process was to reverse the coil, so that the whole book had to be unrolled again before the next reader could use it. The inconvenience of this book-form is obvious, especially when it is remembered that some rolls were more than ten metres long. Another disadvantage was that the material of which it was composed was by no means strong, and damage easily ensued. It is not difficult to imagine that an ancient reader faced with the need to verify a quotation or check a reference would rely if possible on his memory of the passage rather than go to the trouble of unwinding the roll and perhaps thereby accelerating the process of wear and tear. This would certainly account for the fact that when one ancient author

quotes another there is so often a substantial difference between the two versions.

The standard writing material was papyrus (Plate I), prepared by cutting thin strips from the fibrous pith of a reed that grew freely in the Nile delta; in the first century AD there were also minor centres of production in Syria and near Babylon. Two layers of these strips, one laid at right angles over the other, were pressed together to form sheets (Pliny, *N.H.* 13.68ff.). The sheets could then be glued together in a long row to make a roll. Many sizes of sheet were made, but the average book allowed a column of text between eight and ten inches high, containing between twenty-five and forty-five lines. As there was only one large source of supply the book trade was presumably exposed to fluctuations arising from war or a desire by the producers to exploit their virtual monopoly. Some such difficulty is implied by Herodotus' remark (5.58) that when writing material was in short supply the Ionians had used sheep and goats' skins as a substitute. In resorting to this expedient they seem to have followed the practice of their Oriental neighbours. But leather as a writing material compared unfavourably with papyrus, and was no doubt used only in emergency. In the Hellenistic period, if Varro can be trusted (cf. Pliny, *N.H.* 13.70), the Egyptian government placed an embargo on the export of papyrus, which seems to have stimulated the search for an acceptable alternative. At Pergamum a process was devised for treating animal skins to give a better writing surface than leather, the result being what is now called parchment (otherwise known as vellum); the word owes part of its etymology to the name Pergamum, and the derivation can be seen more clearly from the Italian form *pergamena*. But if this tradition is true the experiment was at first short-lived; one must assume that the Egyptian embargo was soon removed, for it is not until the early centuries of the Christian era that parchment comes into common use for books; an early example is the fragment of Euripides' *Cretans* (P. Berol. 13217).

To what extent the supply and price of papyrus hindered or encouraged its use in Greece is impossible to say. But when employed for the production of a book it was almost invariably

covered with writing on one side only. The form of the book made this necessary, since a text written on the back of a roll would have been very easily rubbed away, and perhaps the surface of the papyrus contributed to the formation of this convention, since scribes always preferred to use first the side on which the fibres ran horizontally. On rare occasions we hear of rolls written on both sides (Juvenal 1.6, Pliny, *Epist.* 3.5.17), but such books were exceptional. A shortage of writing material did, however, sometimes cause a literary text to be written on the reverse across the fibres: a famous example is the manuscript of Euripides' *Hypsipyle* (P. Oxy. 852). It is important to note in this connection that the quantity of text carried by an ancient book was very small: the maximum capacity was a substantial dialogue of Plato or a book of Thucydides, and Books I and XVII of the late Hellenistic historian Diodorus Siculus, which occupy 167 and 177 pages in a modern printed edition, had to be subdivided.

Finally it should be emphasized that the text as arranged on the papyrus was much harder for the reader to interpret than in any modern book. Punctuation was usually rudimentary at best. Texts were written without word-division, and it was not until the middle ages that a real effort was made to alter this convention in Greek or Latin texts (in a few Latin texts of the classical period a point is placed after each word). The system of accentuation, which might have compensated for this difficulty in Greek, was not invented until the Hellenistic period, and for a long time after its invention it was not universally used; here again it is not until the early middle ages that the writing of accents becomes normal practice. In dramatic texts throughout antiquity changes of speaker were not indicated with the precision now thought necessary; it was enough to write a horizontal stroke at the beginning of a line, or two points one above the other, like the modern English colon, for changes elsewhere; the names of the characters were frequently omitted. The inaccuracy of this method, and the state of confusion to which texts were soon reduced by it, may be seen from the condition of the papyri containing Menander's *Dyscolus* (P. Bodmer 4) and *Sicyonius* (P. Sorbonne 72, 2272, 2273). Another and perhaps even stranger feature of books in the pre-Hellenistic period is that

lyric verse was written as if it were prose; the fourth-century papyrus of Timotheus (P. Berol. 9875) is an instance, and even without this valuable document the fact could have been inferred from the tradition that Aristophanes of Byzantium (*c.* 257–180 BC) devised the colometry which makes clear the metrical units of the poetry (Dion. Hal., *de comp. verb.* 156, 221). It is to be noted that the difficulties facing the reader of an ancient book were equally troublesome for anyone who wished to transcribe his or her own copy. The risk of misinterpretation and consequent corruption of the text in this early period is not to be underestimated. It is certain that a high proportion of the most serious corruptions in classical texts go back to this date and were already widely current in the books that eventually entered the library of the Museum at Alexandria.

II. THE LIBRARY OF THE MUSEUM AND HELLENISTIC SCHOLARSHIP

The increase of the book trade made it possible for private individuals to form libraries. Even if the tradition that sixth-century tyrants such as Pisistratus and Polycrates of Samos possessed large collections of books is discounted (Athenaeus 1.3A), it is clear that by the end of the fifth century private libraries existed; Aristophanes pokes fun at Euripides for drawing heavily on literary sources in composing his tragedies (*Frogs* 943), and his own work, being full of parody and allusion, must have depended to some extent on a personal book collection.

There is no trace of any general library maintained at the public expense at Athens, but it is likely that official copies of plays performed at the leading festivals such as the Dionysia were kept at the theatre or in the public record office. Pseudo-Plutarch (*Lives of the ten orators* 841F) ascribes to the orator Lycurgus (*c.* 390–324 BC) a proposal to keep official copies of tragedy in this way, but the need would probably have arisen earlier. We know that after the original performance plays were revived from time to time. New copies of the text must have been needed for the actors, and if

they had been obliged to obtain these by a process of transcription from private copies it would be surprising that an almost complete range of plays survived into the Hellenistic age.

The advance of education and science in the fourth century made it only a matter of time before academic institutions with their own libraries were founded. It is not surprising to find Strabo reporting (13.1.54) that Aristotle built up a large collection of books, no doubt representing the wide diversity of interests in the Lyceum. This collection and that of the Academy were taken as a pattern soon afterwards by the king of Egypt when establishing the famous library at Alexandria (Diog. Laert. 4.1, 5.51). The main interests of the Lyceum were scientific and philosophical, but literary studies were not neglected. Aristotle himself wrote on problems of interpretation in Homer besides his well-known *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*; and in connection with the latter there is some evidence that he and his successors were interested in the study of Demosthenes' speeches.

Of much greater significance were the literary studies undertaken at the Museum in Alexandria. This was formally, as the name implies, a temple in honour of the Muses presided over by a priest. It was in fact the centre of a literary and scientific community, and it is essential not to underestimate this last aspect of it; the librarian Eratosthenes (*c.* 295–*c.* 214 BC), though a literary man, was also a scientist who achieved fame for his attempts to measure the circumference of the earth, and it is probable that other distinguished Alexandrian scientists were members. The Museum was maintained at the expense of the king, and the members of it had study rooms and a hall in which they dined together. They also received a stipend from the royal purse. It has been observed that there is a superficial resemblance between this institution and an Oxford or Cambridge college, but the analogy breaks down in one important respect: there is no evidence that the scholars of the Museum gave regular instruction to students. The community was probably set up by Ptolemy Philadelphus *c.* 280 BC, and it soon won a reputation, perhaps arousing jealousy through the lavishness of its arrangements, for we find the satirist Timon of Phlius

writing of it *c.* 230 BC 'in populous Egypt they fatten up many bookish pedants who quarrel unceasingly in the Muses' birdcage' (Athenaeus 1.22D).

An essential part of this foundation, housed in the same complex of buildings or in the near neighbourhood, was the famous library. It seems that some steps had been taken already in the previous reign by the first Ptolemy to set up a library, by inviting Demetrius of Phalerum, the eminent pupil of Theophrastus, to come to Alexandria for the purpose *c.* 295 BC. The library grew rapidly. The number of volumes is variously estimated by the ancient sources, but owing to the inaccuracy with which all large figures given by classical authors are transmitted it is difficult to calculate the true figure. Even if one accepts the highly implausible tradition that in the third century the library contained 200,000 or 490,000 volumes (Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 350B, Tzetzes, *Prolegomena de comoedia*), allowance must be made for the small capacity of each roll of papyrus. There is also no means of knowing to what extent the libraries made it their policy to stock duplicate copies. But despite this uncertainty it is beyond doubt that great efforts were made to form a complete collection of Greek literature, and there are anecdotes which throw light on the spirit in which the business of the library was conducted. The king is said to have been determined to obtain an accurate text of Attic tragedy, and persuaded the Athenians to lend him the official copy from the public record office. The Athenians asked for a deposit of fifteen talents as security for the return of the texts, but having once obtained these the Egyptian authorities decided to keep them and forfeit their deposit (Galen 17(1).607). We also learn from Galen that in their anxiety to complete their collection the librarians were frequently deceived into purchasing forgeries of rare texts (15.105).

The task of the librarians in reducing to order the mass of books flowing into the Museum was enormous. The principle of arrangement in the library is not known, but one indication of the vast labours involved is that Callimachus, who was not himself chief librarian, compiled a kind of bibliographical guide to all branches of Greek literature, which occupied one hundred and twenty books (the *Pinakes*, frr. 429–53). Owing to the conditions of ancient book

production the librarians faced certain problems that do not trouble their modern counterparts. Texts copied by hand are quickly liable to corruption; to make an accurate copy of even a short text is a much harder task than is realized by those who have not had to do it. In addition to this pre-Hellenistic books gave no help to the reader in any difficulty. Consequently there must have been numerous passages where the author's meaning could no longer be discerned, and many others in which various copies of texts reaching the Museum showed serious discrepancies. The incentive that this gave to the librarians to put the texts in order led to a great advance in scholarship and critical method. It is no coincidence that five of the first six librarians (Zenodotus, Apollonius Rhodius, Eratosthenes, Aristophanes, and Aristarchus) were among the most famous literary men of their day, and it is in no small measure due to the success of their methods that classical Greek texts have come down to us in a state that is reasonably free from corruption.

In one case we can see clearly the influence which the scholars of the Museum exercised on the state of texts in common circulation. Of the many fragments of ancient copies of Homer a modest proportion are as early as the third century BC. The text in these papyri is rather different from that now generally printed, and there are numerous lines added or omitted. But within a short time this type of text disappeared from circulation. This suggests that the scholars had not merely determined what the text of Homer should be, but succeeded in imposing this text as standard, either allowing it to be transcribed from a master copy placed at the disposal of the public, or perhaps employing a number of professional scribes to prepare copies for the book market. Discrepancies in the text of authors other than Homer were probably less serious, but not enough early papyri are preserved for us to generalize with much confidence; it is a reasonable assumption that the Alexandrians did what was necessary to prepare a standard text of all authors commonly read by the educated public.

After the standardization of texts the next feature of Alexandrian scholarship that merits attention is the development of a number of aids to the reader. The first step was to ensure that

fifth-century books coming from Attica, some of which must have been written in the old alphabet, were all transliterated into the normal Greek spelling of the Ionic alphabet. Until 403 BC Athens had officially used the older alphabet in which the letter epsilon represented the vowels epsilon, epsilon-iota and eta; similarly omicron was used for omicron, omicron-upsilon and omega. The old alphabet also lacked the compound letters xi and psi. The drawbacks of this script need no comment, and already before the end of the fifth century the more accurate Ionic alphabet was being used for some Athenian inscriptions on stone: probably the same was true of Athenian books. Nevertheless it looks as if some texts reaching the Alexandrian library were in the old script, for we find Aristarchus explaining a difficulty in Pindar as due to misinterpretation of the old alphabet; he tells us that at *Nemeans* 1.24 an adjective which appears to be in the nominative singular (ἐϲλόϲ) is incorrect for metrical reasons and must be understood as the accusative plural (ἐϲλούϲ) (cf. schol. ad loc.). Another point at which the critics showed their awareness of the old alphabet was Aristophanes, *Birds* 66. It is important to note that the adoption of the Ionic alphabet for early Attic texts has been recognized as the norm since the Alexandrian period. In contrast to the procedure used for editing texts in all other literatures there has never been an attempt to restore the original orthography of the authors in its entirety.

A second aid for readers was an improvement in the method of punctuation and the invention of the system of accentuation, both commonly ascribed to Aristophanes of Byzantium. In a text lacking word-division the addition of a few accents gave the reader a substantial help, and it is rather strange that they did not immediately come to be regarded as indispensable in a written text. But though they were sometimes written over words that would otherwise have been difficult or ambiguous, in general it is hard to see what principle determines their use in ancient books, and they were not regularly added until the beginning of the tenth century.

Although these improvements in the outward appearance of literary texts had significant and lasting results, they were of far less importance than the advances in scholarly method made by