Greek Mythography at Work: The Story of Perseus from Pherecydes to Tzetzes

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As is evident from a variety of media and from the shelves of popular bookshops and research libraries alike, classical myths have appealed to a broad public from time immemorial. In fact, the scholarly study of these myths draws not only upon great poets such as Homer and Ovid, but also upon less-known mythographical writings. Unlike the imaginative creations of poets, the latter treatises approach myths from a non-artistic perspective in an attempt to capture their essential plots. Recently there has been a striking revival of interest in this genre of ancient mythography, resulting in the publication of a number of commented editions and translations.¹ However, as many commentaries are particularly concerned with the elementary identification of the literary sources of the mythographical work, the overall dynamics within this genre are often underestimated. Moreover, rather little attention is paid to the influence of Hellenistic scholarship, the existence of numerous similar collections now lost, and the compilatory technique of mythographers.

This paper aims to illustrate the relevance of such a broader perspective by analysing the Perseus myth as transmitted by various mythographical sources: this inquiry will take us from the fifth-century logographer Pherecydes of Athens to the

imperial mythographer Ps.-Apollodorus—the main surviving Greek representative of the genre\(^2\) and therefore the starting point of this inquiry\(^3\)—and the Byzantine scholar John Tzetzes. Thus, this case-study seeks to shed new light on the overall complexity of the mythographical genre in which literary sources, Hellenistic scholarly treatises, and earlier mythographical writings will be shown to be epitomized, modernized, blended, and contaminated continuously. Such a broader perspective contributes also to our understanding of the nature of individual mythographers and their position within this complex mythographical tradition.

1. From Pherecydes to Ps.-Apollodorus

When relating the vicissitudes of Perseus, Ps.-Apollodorus\(^4\) is generally assumed to draw upon the fifth-century logographer

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\(^2\) Cf. A. Diller, “The Text History of the Bibliotheca of Pseudo-Apollodorus,” *TAPA* 66 (1935) 296; Smith-Trzaskoma, *Apollodorus’ Library* xxii–xxvii. The *Bibliotheca* by Ps.-Apollodorus (first or second century A.D.) is generally considered the most comprehensive surviving mythographical handbook, tackling almost the whole of mainstream Greek myth and drawing from various excellent sources, including writings that are now lost. In addition, this bulk of information has been arranged pragmatically with all myths discussed fitted into a systematic genealogical framework. Thus, this compendium became a highly important source for the knowledge of Greek mythology and religion, not only for Byzantine commentators (e.g. on Homer’s *Iliad*, on some dialogues by Plato, and on Lycophron’s *Alexandra*), but also for modern scholars.

\(^3\) Since Ps.-Apollodorus is likely to have been mostly indirectly acquainted with Greek literature, through intermediary writings such as commented editions, prose summaries, and secondary companions (cf. A. Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* [Oxford 2004] 103), the study of his ultimate sources actually results in the study of the sources of these secondary writings on which he greatly relied (cf. A. Söder, *Quellenuntersuchung zum 1. Buch der Apollodorschen Bibliothek* [Würzburg 1939] 4). Hence the use of phrases such as ‘Ps.-Apollodorus consulted, drew on, modernized…’ in this paper must be taken with a grain of salt.

\(^4\) Bibli. 2.34–48. The text used here is the most recent edition: M. Papa-thomopoulos, *Apollodori Bibliotheca post Richardum Wagnerum recognita* (Athens 2010).
Pherecydes of Athens⁵ (frr.10–12 ex schol. Ap. Rhod. 4.1091, 4.1515a).⁶ This source identification is convincing, not only by reason of the unique thematic correspondences between both accounts,⁷ but also because of the multiple eye-catching verbal similarities.⁸ However, detailed study of both narratives suggests that Ps.-Apollodorus did not slavishly copy Pherecydes’ text, but rather skilfully adapted it to his own age and project—that is, the compilation of a comprehensive survey of Greek myth—by modernizing and abridging the original text. In addition, he is likely to have contaminated Pherecydes’ account with yet other sources when developing certain episodes.⁹

First, Ps.-Apollodorus has skilfully adapted his source text to

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⁵ Text quoted from R. L. Fowler, Early Greek Mythography I (Oxford 2000). Cf. W. Schmid and O. Stählin, Geschichte der griechischen Literatur I.1 (Munich 1929) 710–713; Smith-Trzaskoma, Apollodorus’ Library xxii. Pherecydes is known to have written ten books of Historiae in which the pedigrees of many famous Greek—mostly Attic (e.g. frr.145–155)—heroes are described in a straightforward and lively style. The some 180 surviving fragments in Ionic dialect reveal the logographer’s preference for epic sources (esp. Homer and Hesiod) and for the introduction of catalogues (e.g. fr.2) and etymologies (e.g. fr.1). Moreover, Pherecydes is the mythographical authority cited most often by Ps.-Apollodorus (thirteen instances).


⁷ E.g. Pherec. fr.12 ~ Apollod. 2.46: Dictys is appointed king of the remaining Seriphians.

⁸ E.g. Pherec. fr.10, χρωμένῳ δὲ αὐτῷ περὶ ἄρσενος παιδὸς ἔχρησεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν Πυθοῖ ~ Apollod. 2.34, Ἀκρισίῳ δὲ περὶ παιδῶν γενέσεως ἄρρενων χρηστηριαζόμενον ὁ Πυθιος ἔφη.

⁹ Van der Valk, REG 71 (1958) 114–143: the same working method is evident elsewhere in the Bibliotheca, e.g. Apollod. 1.107–109 ~ Pherec. fr. 105 (omission of lively details and implausible elements); Apollod. 2.1 ~ Acus. fr.23a Fowler (contamination with other genealogies); Apollod. 2.113–121 ~ Pherec. frr.16–17 (modernization of the Pherecydean view that the actions of men are guided and prompted by the gods).
the needs of his contemporary public by modernizing various typically archaic features. He has done so in various ways. The lively details that were recorded abundantly in the original have been reduced: for example, when Perseus got possession of the single eye and tooth which the daughters of Phorcus passed to each other in turn, the three maidens are originally said to have started shouting and to have begged Perseus to return them (Pherec. fr. 11, ἀς δὲ αἰσθανόμεναι βοῶσιν καὶ ἰκετεύουσι τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν καὶ τὸν ὀδὸντα ἀποδοῦναι). By contrast, Ps.-Apollodorus records dryly that the Phorcides asked for their single eye and tooth back (2.37, ὡς ἀπήτουν). Another example: after Danaë and Perseus were put in a chest and cast into the sea by Acrisius, the chest is said by Phercydes to have been caught in the nets of the Seriphian fisherman Dictys (fr. 10, καὶ αὐτοὺς ἔξελκε Δίκτυς ὁ Περισθένους, δικτύῳ ἁλιεύων). Ps.-Apollodorus by contrast merely states that the chest was washed ashore on Seriphus (2.35, προσενεχθείς δὲ τῆς λάρνακος Σερίρου).

Second, the development of the plot has commonly been speeded up considerably. For example, when Perseus returned from Seriphus in order to see his grandfather Acrisius, he is originally said to have found nobody at home in Argos, since Acrisius had fled to Larissa; hence Perseus left his companions with his mother and resolved to head for Larissa all alone (Pherec. fr. 12, ἐλθὼν Ἀκρίσιον οὐχ εὑρίσκει ἐν Ἀργεῖ ... μὴ καταλαβόν δὲ αὐτόν, τὴν μὲν Δανάην καταλείπει ... αὐτὸς δὲ ἔβη εἰς Λάρισαν). By contrast, Ps.-Apollodorus has simply skipped this stopover in Argos (2.47, ἀπολιπὼν Ἀργος εἰς τὴν Πελασγιώτιν ἔχωρης γῆν ... παρεγένετο καὶ ὁ Περσεύς).

Finally, the vocabulary has often been adapted to post-classi-
cal usage: e.g. Apollod. 2.37 προκαθηγουμένων, first attested in Polyb. 3.6.7; Apollod. 2.40 περιεσπειραμένας, first attested in Diod. 3.3.6. The typically archaic paratactic accumulation of finite verbs has usually been replaced by more concise participial constructions: e.g. Pheresc. fr.10, ἐκ τοῦ ὄροφον χρυσῶν παραπλήσιος ἤρει, ἡ δὲ ὑποδέχεται τῷ κύλπῳ καὶ ἐκφήναις αὐτῶν ὁ Ζεὺς τῇ παιδὶ μίγνυται ~ Apollod. 2.34, Ζεὺς μεταμορφώθεις εἰς χρυσὸν καὶ διὰ τῆς ὀροφῆς εἰς τοὺς Δανάης εἰσρυεῖς κόλπους συνήλθεν.12

Interestingly, Ps.-Apollodorus can occasionally be shown to have proceeded somewhat negligently while rewriting Pherecydes’ text. For instance, after Perseus and Danaë had been washed ashore on Seriphus, Ps.-Apollodorus (2.36) relates that “Polydectes … was then king of Seriphus and fell in love with Danaë, but could not get access to her, because Perseus was grown to man’s estate. So he called together his friends, including Perseus, under the pretext of collecting contributions towards a wedding gift for Hippodamia, daughter of Oenomaus” λέγων ἕρανον συνάγειν ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἱπποδαμείας τῆς Ὀινομᾶου γύμους.13 This deceitful pretext requires some explanation, especially since ἕρανος is used in a rather uncommon way. As LSJ s.v. indicates, the noun refers either to a “meal to which each contributed his share,” or to a “loan raised by contributions for the benefit of an individual, bearing no interest, but recoverable.” In Ps.-Apollodorus’ account, the ἕρανος seems to

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12 Admittedly, Ps.-Apollodorus’ text still bears evidence of archaic narrative style (e.g. 2.39, detailed description of Perseus’ outfit, cf. Dräger, Argo Pasimelousa 51) and sentence connection (e.g. 2.38, αὕτη δὲ ἐς νύμφαι: the repetition of nouns and the insertion of demonstrative pronouns as additional connectives, cf. S. Lilja, On the Style of the Earliest Greek Prose [Helsinki 1968] 100; 2.47, ἀγωνιζόμενος: a participle in the second clause picks up a verb used in the first for the sake of clarity, cf. Lilja 42), whether this was due to an unwitting imitation of the archaic source or to intentional sprachliche Archaisierung.

resemble the latter fifth-century type of ἔρανος-loan, yet, apart from Ps.-Apollodorus, this meaning is associated with marriage only at [Plut.] Paroem. 2.23, Φῶκος γὰρ τὴν θυγατέρα ἔχουν ἐπίγαμον ... ἔρανος συνήχειν ἐστίν τοὺς μνηστήριος: just as Phocus was showered with ‘contributions’ or gifts by suitors competing for his daughter’s hand, Polydectes plausibly pretended to be collecting similar contributions or wedding gifts (ἠδνα) in order to persuade Oenomaus to give his daughter Hippodamia in marriage. Schol. Lycoph. Alex. 838, which is known to depend upon the Bibliotheca, indeed explicitly mentions ἥδνα instead of ἔρανος (πλάττεται ὡς ἥδνων χρείαν ἔχει πρὸς γάμων Ἰπποδαμείας τῆς Οἰνομάου).

Why would Ps.-Apollodorus use ἔρανος instead of the more common and accurate alternative τὰ ἥδνα? The answer may be supplied by considering his relationship to Pherecides: according to the archaic mythographer (fr.11), Polydectes invited numerous friends for an ἔρανος, i.e. a sumptuous banquet to which each guest was expected to contribute. Curiously, the guests were not expected to bring food to contribute to the feast, but presents for the host of the banquet (cf. schol. Pind. Pyth. 10.72a and 12.25a). It seems, then, that Ps.-Apollodorus has adopted the banquet and specifically the noun ὁ ἔρανος from his main source, but introduced them somewhat clumsily in his own text because, having altered the Pherecydean account by introducing Hippodamia, he consequently had to use

14 I. Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys (Munich/Leipzig 2006) 122, also attributes this particular meaning to ἔρανος in the Ps.-Apollodorean context.

15 Cf. W. K. Lacey, The Family in Classical Greece (London 1968) 41: in Homeric society suitors were expected to offer gifts when they came to sue for a chieftain’s daughter in order to take her to their own house. In addition, suitors were often said to be competing with gifts (e.g. Od. 6.158–159; Apollon. Soph. Lex. 62.16 Bekker; Quint. Smyrn. 1.727–728; schol. Il. 13.366a).

16 Cf. Diller, TAPA 66 (1935) 304: when writing his commentary on the Alexandra, John Tzetzes often mined the Bibliotheca.
the noun in an unusual and less appropriate sense than had his source.

 Similar awkward adaptation has likewise obscured the phrasing of Perseus’ contribution to these wedding gifts and has puzzled many commentators and translators (Apollod. 2.36, τοῦ δὲ Περσέως εἰπόντος καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ τῆς Γοργόνος οὐκ ἀντερεῖν).17 An expression of the type ἀντερῶ ἐπὶ τίνι is not recorded in other extant sources; the phrase ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῆ, moreover, seems to be used exclusively in the literal and local sense (e.g. Hdt. 5.12, Xen. An. 2.5.23, Pl. Symp. 212E). Despite these oddities, Heyne seems to have elucidated this locus obscurissimus plausibly: ἐπὶ + dative can express the condition upon which a thing is done (hac condicione proposita; cf. LSJ s.v. ἐπὶ B.III.3). Hence this highly succinct clause may be interpreted as follows:18 Perseus took an oath that he would not speak against Polydectes (οὐκ ἀντερεῖν), viz. that he agreed to contribute to the wedding gifts for Hippodamia, even if (καὶ) this commitment would imply (ἐπὶ) that he would have to accomplish a seemingly impossible task, to fetch the Gorgon’s head (τῇ κεφαλῇ τῆς Γοργόνος). This explanation is assured if we assume that Ps.-Apollodorus’ phrasing has been influenced by Phercydes (fr. 11), as in his use of ὁ ἔρανος: since each guest was expected to contribute to the banquet by bringing presents for the host Polydectes, Perseus asked the latter what contribution was demanded from him (Περσέως δὲ πυθοµένου, ἐπὶ τίνι ὁ ἔρανος εὐωχεῖται). Polydectes answered that he wished to receive a horse (τοῦ δὲ φήσαντος ἐπὶ ἵππῳ), but Perseus hyperbolically swore to fetch the Gorgon’s head (Περσεὺς εἶπεν ἐπὶ τῇ τῆς Γοργόνος κεφαλῇ). Evidently, Ps.-Apollodorus has again adopted something from his main source (the phrase ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ τῆς Γοργόνος), but failed to adjust it for its new

17 E.g. C. G. Heyne, Apollodori Atheniensis Bibliothecae libri tres et fragmenta (Göttingen 1803) 136; Frazer, Apollodorus I 155; Dräger, Apollodor 87.

context, in this case the use of a different verb in his abridged version.

Besides modernizing and abridging the original account, Ps.-Apollodorus can be shown to have contaminated Pherecydes’ version with yet other sources. For instance, after Perseus had overcome the horrific sea monster which was about to devour Andromeda, he returned to the island of Seriphus in order to take revenge on Polydectes: by showing Medusa’s head, he petrified the Seriphian king and all other spectators. The exact circumstances of this petrifaction have been recorded variously. First, Pherec. fr.11 has it that Perseus ordered Polydectes to assemble his subjects in order to adduce proof of his successful quest for the Gorgon’s head: once all islanders were impatiently awaiting the unveiling of the cut-off head, Perseus revealed it with averted eyes and turned all the Seriphians, including their king Polydectes, to stone. Second, Apollod. 2.45 states that Perseus surprised Polydectes and his friends in the royal palace (cf. schol. Pind. Pyth. 10.72a); he was furious because his mother Danaë and Dictys had been compelled to take refuge at an altar on account of Polydectes’ violence, and therefore petrified all those present (cf. schol. Lycoph. Alex. 838). Third, Hyg. Fab. 64 states that Polydectes tried to kill Perseus by treachery after his return from the Gorgons, since he feared the latter’s courage. Perseus, however, discovered this plot and turned Polydectes to stone by showing him the Gorgon’s head.

Evidently, Ps.-Apollodorus has temporarily exchanged his main source Pherecydes for some other author. Although he does not acknowledge the source from which this episode derives, one might conjecture that the flight of Danaë and Dictys to an altar has been borrowed from a now-lost tragedy, e.g. Aeschylus’ Πολυδέκτης (TriGF III p.302) or, more plausibly,19 Euripides’ Δίκτυς (TriGF V.1 330b–348) in which Perseus’

19 Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 126: Aeschylus’ play is likely to have been lost since the fourth century B.C.
vengeance on Polydectes was staged. Certainly, the solemn ritual of ἱκετεία at the altar of a god is the centre-piece of many Euripidean plays (e.g. Ἡραcl., Ὀμήρ., Ἀνδρ., Ἡς, Ἁλ. ). This motif was usually introduced by the tragedian himself and was extraneous to earlier mythographical tradition.20

Curiously, Ps.-Apollodorus fails to mention the name of the god at whose altar Danaë and Dictys took refuge. However, the cult-statue of the god Poseidon is clearly depicted on an Apulian red-figure volute-crater (370/360 B.C.), which probably reflects the main themes of the Euripidean play Dictys.21 As it happens, the same episode is recounted in a second-century papyrus remnant of Theon’s commentary on Pindar’s Pythian Odes (P.Oxy. XXXI 2536): like Ps.-Apollodorus, the papyrus details that Danaë, when Polydectes was trying to violate her, fled for refuge to an altar (col. i.5–7): βιαζομένης γὰρ τῆς Δανά[ν]YSIS ἡ Ἕλε[κτ]ΟΣ συνέβη ἀυτῆν κατα[φυγ]ΕΙΝ πρὸς τὸν βωμὸν τὸ[δ] (blank space). Plausibly, the scribe of the papyrus could not read the name of the deity and left a blank space.22 From this we might hypothesize that the Ps.-Apollodorus paragraph is somehow related to Theon’s commentary: most probably, Ps.-Apollodorus and Theon ultimately depended upon a common source, for instance a tragic hypothesis of the Euripidean play.23 As noted, the mythographer is gen-


21 Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 155–156.

22 So E. G. Turner, P.Oxy. XXXI p.21. However, the deity must have been male (τοῦ), making Poseidon a possibility.

23 Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 161: Ps.-Apollodorus’ text presents certain stylistic features shared by the hypothesis of Euripidean plays, for instance the use of the participle παραγενόμενος (2.45) to indicate the first entrance of a hero on stage, the accumulation of participles, and the possibly theatrical nuance of καταλαβὼν and εἰσελθὼν (2.45). For this reason, Ps.-Apollodorus is more likely to be closely related to a Euripidean
eraly assumed to have known ancient literature primarily indirectly, through intermediary writings, such as commented editions, prose summaries, and similar compendia (see n.3 above). Similarly, the Augustan commentator Theon is likely to have derived his mythological material from learned monographs on the poets and from earlier mythographical treatises or closely related writings, such as collections of Euripidean hypothesis. 24

2. From Ps.-Apollodorus to Tzetzes

Given its comprehensiveness and pragmatic genealogical arrangement, the Bibliotheca may have appealed to a wide readership, ranging from students who sought access to the cultural inheritance of earlier Greek literature to educated persons who needed a handy guidebook and even professional educators who required a basic overview of Greek myth to answer questions quickly and help prepare lectures. 25 By the Middle Ages the handbook had become an authoritative reference work, at least in part because so many similar treatises had been lost, and it was frequently mined by scholars to produce explanatory notes to various texts (e.g. dialogues of Plato, Lycophron’s Alexandra, and the parodic epic Batrachomyomachia) and to flesh out their own writings (e.g. paroemiographical explanations by the interpolator Zenobii and Pediasimus’ treatise on the twelve labours of Heracles). 26

As regards the myth of Perseus, Ps.-Apollodorus’ account


25 Disagreement still exists concerning the audience for whom the Bibliotheca was designed. For an up-to-date status questionis see Smith-Trzaskoma, Apollodorus’ Library xxx–xxxii.

26 For an overview of the text history of Ps.-Apollodorus’ Bibliotheca see Diller, TAPA 66 (1935) 296–313.
inspired a number of Byzantine scholars. First, the so-called interpolator Zenobii supplemented the explanation of the proverb Ἄϊδος κυνῆ (1.41), which appeared in the second-century collection of Zenobius, with a ἱστορία taken without citation from the Bibliotheca (2.34–42, 45–47). This ἱστορία is interpolated after (1) the explanation of the proverb and (2) the original succinct paraphrase of the myth alluded to, and (3) is introduced by a transitional clause. Second, Ps.-Apollodorus’ account of the Perseus myth (2.34–49) is used extensively, again anonymously, by the twelfth-century scholar John Tzetzes when explaining the abstruse mythological allusion to Perseus in the Alexandra of Lycophron (838 τὸν χρυσόπατρον). Third, an abridgement of Ps.-Apollodorus’ account (2.34–47) is included in the Epitome Vaticana, a collection of anonymous excerpts from the Bibliotheca, again most probably by John Tzetzes. This abridged version was discovered only in 1885 by Richard Wagner in a fourteenth-century Vatican manuscript (Vat.gr. 950). The summary of the Perseus myth is one of several independent passages beginning with ὅτι, usually following the order of the full text.

Just as Ps.-Apollodorus refrained from transcribing his main source Phercydes slavishly, these Byzantine scholars can be

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27 The Epitome Vaticana is here quoted from R. Wagner, Epitome Vaticana ex Apollodori Bibliotheca (Leipzig 1891), the paraemioigraphical explanations of the interpolator Zenobii from E. L. Leutsch and F. G. Schneidewin, Corpus paraemigraphorum Graecorum I (Hildesheim 1839), and Tzetzes’ commentary on Lycophron from E. Scheer, Lycophronis Alexandra II (Berlin 1958).

28 (1) πρὸς τοὺς ἑπικρύπτοντας ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τινῶν μηχανήματον (“[said] of those who know to disguise themselves by subtle contrivance”). (2) τοιαύτη γὰρ ἡ τοῦ Ἄϊδου κυνῆ, ἡ Περσεύς χρησάμενος τὴν Γοργόνα ἑδειροτόησεν. (3) ἡ δὲ ἱστορία ἐχει ὀυτος... For the compilatory technique of the interpolator Zenobii see G. Dobesch, “Die Interpolationen aus Apollodors Bibliotheca in der Sprichwörtersammlung des Pseudo-Zenobios,” WS 78 (1965) 58–82.

29 For a detailed description of the Epitome Vaticana see Wagner, Epitome Vaticana 134–150.
shown to have skilfully adapted the *Bibliotheca* to their own project and age by abridging, annotating, and modernizing the original text. In addition, they have likewise contaminated Ps.-Apollodorus’ account with other sources when elaborating on certain details.

First, when fitting Ps.-Apollodorus’ account into their own writing, they tended to abridge by omitting less relevant details and even entire episodes. Especially source references, variant versions, and catalogues of names were frequently deleted. For example, the interpolator Zenobii has left out the variant version according to which Danaë was seduced by her uncle Proetus instead of by Zeus (Apollod. 2.34). Obviously, he did not require all details included in the *Bibliotheca* to explain the proverb in question. In addition, these Byzantines often resorted to paraphrase in order to abridge their source: for instance, the *epitomator Vaticanus* has aptly summarized the heading of Medusa and the subsequent rescue of Andromeda (Apollod. 2.36–46) in a single clause (p.23, ὤστε τὸ τὴν Γοργῶ Μέδοσαν κωρατομήσαν καὶ Ανδρομέδαν ἀγα-γέσθαι γυναῖκα).

Second, in order to meet the needs of the contemporary public the original account was frequently supplemented with explanatory remarks, all the more so in that the original context of the *Bibliotheca* was lacking. For instance, the interpolator Zenobii has added the specification that Danaë and Perseus were washed ashore on the *island* of Scriphus (προσενεχθείσης δὲ τῆς λάρνακος ἐν Σερίφῳ νήσῳ; cf. Apollod. 2.35), while Tzetzes ad Lycoph. Alex. 838 details that Perseus’ son Perses was left with his grandfather Cepheus in Ethiopia (τοῦ ἐτέρου υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Πέρσου καταλειφθέντος, ὃς ἔπομεν, ἐν Αἰθιοπίᾳ πυρὰ τῷ πάππῳ Κηφεῖ; cf. Apollod. 2.49). In addition, the language was often adapted to Byzantine usage: for example, Tzetzes ad Lycoph. *Alex.* 838 has frequently interspersed Ps.-Apollodorus’ original phrasing with Byzantine idiom (e.g. ἐπιστήθος, cf. Ant. Mon. *Hom.* 112.99; Joh. Dam. *Imag.* 1.19.18), alternative constructions (e.g. πρὸς τὸ μέσον τῆς ἁδίας ἀσπίδος ἢ ἐν μέσῃ τῇ ἁσπίδι, Apollod. 2.46), and uncommon
synonyms (e.g. ἀνέπηξεν for ἔνεθηκε, Apollod. 2.46).

Most interestingly, these later excerptors were still able to consult some good manuscripts now lost. Accordingly, they have sometimes preserved the correct reading when all surviving manuscripts of the Bibliotheca are in error.30 For instance, when Acrisius consulted the oracle about the birth of male descendants (Apollod. 2.34), ominous prophecies were delivered either by ὁ θεὸς (MS. O, rec. Wagner) or by ὁ Πύθιος (Epit. Vat., rec. Papathamopoulos). Alluding to this passage, M. van Rossum-Steenbeek states that the epitomator Vaticanus sometimes added names or explications to the original text:31 proper names, for instance, are said to be inserted instead of ἄντος or θεὸς. Admittedly, when referring to the Delphic oracle, Ps.-Apollodorus commonly prefers the noun ὁ θεὸς (e.g. 1.84, 1.107, 3.21, 3.48, 3.203) instead of a proper name (e.g. 2.73, 2.103, 3.207). At first sight, the reading ὁ Πύθιος may thus well be considered an explanatory remark, introduced by the epitomator Vaticanus himself for the sake of clarity. However, when skimming Ps.-Apollodorus’ text, one finds that the frequent θεὸς is replaced only twice by some proper name in the Epitome Vaticana, that is in Bibl. 2.82 (Epit. Vat. p.27, τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος, for Bibl. 2.82, τῆς θεοῦ) and in this prophecy to Acrisius. Furthermore, Ps.-Apollodorus’ main source for the Perseus myth similarly wrote ὁ θεὸς ἐν Πυθοῖ (Pherec. fr. 10). Consequently, the epitomator has probably copied the reading Πύθιος correctly from older manuscripts which are now lost, whereas the variant reading θεὸς is merely a simplification of the original text, introduced by later scribes in order to

30 This valuable contribution of the parallel transmission to the textual criticism of the Bibliotheca has been amply illustrated by e.g. R. Wagner, “Ein Excerpt aus Apollodors Bibliothek,” RhM 41 (1886) 137, in connection with the Epitome Vaticana, and by Dobesch, IVS 78 (1965) 81–82, with regard to the interpolator Zenobii.

harmonize the linguistic usage of Ps.-Apollodorus who commonly referred to the Pythian god by the common noun θεός.

Finally, the Byzantine scholars can be shown to have contaminated Ps.-Apollodorus’ account with other sources. For example, although Ps.-Apollodorus speaks of three daughters of Phorcus (2.37, Ἐνυὼ καὶ Πεφρηδώ καὶ Δεινώ),32 Tzetzes mentions only two (schol. Lycoφr. Alex. 838, τὴν το Πεφρηδῶ καὶ τὴν Ἐνυὼ).33 The Byzantine commentator may have adopted this anomalous detail from Hesiod who first recorded this version (Theog. 273, Πεφρηδῶ τ’ ἐὑπεπλόν Ἐνυὼ τε κροκό-πεπλόν), since he is known to have written a commentary on the Theogony.34 Moreover, one can observe that, although Ps.-Apollodorus follows his main source Pherecydes by referring to three Phorcides (Pherec. fr.11, Πεφρηδῶ καὶ Ἐνυὼ καὶ Δεινώ), his phrasing of Perseus’ encounter with the Phorcides seems to be rather influenced by Hesiod.35 Hence, inspired by this Hesiodic reminiscence, Tzetzes may have turned to the original writings of Hesiod and adopted this divergent detail from the archaic poet in order to bring it into the Ps.-Apollodoran framework.36

3. A step back in time: the Homeric D-scholia

Besides the various Byzantine commentaries and literary writings already referred to, the Bibliotheca seems to have an intriguing connection with the Homeric D-scholia.37 These

33 However, Tzetzes’ overall dependence upon the Bibliotheca is evident from numerous verbal and thematic correspondences between their accounts.
34 H. Hunger, Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner (Munich 1978) II 61.
35 Hes. Theog. 270–271 (Φόρκυι δ’ αὖ Κητὼ γραῖαι τέκε κάλλιπαρήους ἐκ γενετῆς πολιάς) ~ Apollod. 2.37 (γραῖαι ἐκ γενετῆς).
36 Hesiod is indeed often quoted by Tzetzes when commenting upon Lycophron (e.g. ad Alex. 286, 794, 839).
37 Quoted here from the most recent online edition by H. van Thiel,
scholia—named unfortunately for Didymus of Alexandria (I B.C.) with whom they are now known to have no connection—constitute the largest group of Homeric scholia: they contain a heterogeneous variety of explanatory comments, ranging from elementary lexicographical notes through scholarly exegetical comments to lengthier paraphrases, plot summaries, and mythological explanations called ἱστορίαι. Importantly, much of the material in this collection is very old: not only are the chief witnesses for these scholia older than for the other types of scholia, but also the origins of this collection go back far beyond the medieval manuscripts, as is evident from the similarities between these scholia and Homeric scholarship found on papyri. For instance, and most important for our purpose, a considerable number of mythographical ἱστορίαι not only were transmitted in the medieval manuscripts, but also have their counterparts in papyri dating from the first or second to the fifth century. In fact, it is commonly held that the two sets of ἱστορίαι represent two different stages in the transmission of a now lost independent and systematic mythological commentary on the Iliad and Odyssey, probably compiled around the end of the first century A.D., that related the full versions of the myths alluded to in the Homeric poems. Obviously, the papyrus fragments mirror the original make-up of this commentary, for which its unknown compiler, called Mythographus Homericus, may have consulted several excellent sources, possibly Alexandrian scholarly commentaries. In the following centuries, the original collection was supplemented with ἱστορίαι of varied origin and incorporated into the D-scholia.

38 These papyri are collected in van Rossum-Steenbeek, Greek Readers’ Digests? 278–309.


The brief mythological accounts called ἱστορίαι, as preserved on papyrus as well as in the manuscripts of the Homeric D-scholia, aptly summarize a given myth, omitting all variants. The narratives are often followed by a subscription attributing the content of the narrative to some authority, such as Hesiod (e.g. schol. II. 2.336), Pherecydes (schol. II. 6.153), Euripides (schol. II. 14.323a), Callimachus (schol. II. 18.487), and a certain Ἀπολλόδωρος (schol. II. 1.42, 2.103, 2.494). A number of these ἱστορίαι have close verbal agreements with passages in the Bibliotheca (e.g. schol. II. 2.103 ~ Apollod. 2.5–8; schol. II. 2.494 ~ Apollod. 3.21–23). The origin of these scholia, and especially the interpretation of the subscriptions, has been hotly debated:40 recent research argues that the subscriptions are simply transcribed from earlier intermediary compendia, the original sources not only unverified but probably also unseen.41 Further, all references to Ἀπολλόδωρος in the D-scholia are held to refer to the Hellenistic scholar Apollodorus of Athens (II B.C.) and the undeniable verbal similarities between the D-scholia and the Bibliotheca are explained by their dependence upon a common source.42

In order to illustrate this indirect relationship between the Bibliotheca and the D-scholia, one can study the case of schol. II. 14.319 relating the captivity of Danaë in an underground chamber, her impregnation by the golden shower of Zeus, and finally her exposure in the floating chest. Although the scholion is verbally nearly identical to Ps.-Apollodorus’ account (2.34–35), the Homeric commentator attributes a variant version, according to which Danaë was seduced by her uncle Proetus,

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41 Cameron, Greek Mythography 104–106.

42 Diller, TAPA 66 (1935) 298; Cameron, Greek Mythography 98.
Εἰς Πήνδαρος καὶ ἕτερον τινές. By contrast, Ps.-Apollodorus (2.34) refers vaguely only to ἕνοι. Cameron has argued that such divergences within two otherwise identical narratives are to be explained by their dependence upon a common source.33

For the source of the variant Proetus version, the poems of Pindar can be left out of consideration, in spite of the explicit reference to him by the scholiast: the standard version is always what Pindar evokes in his surviving poems, once explicitly mentioning the shower of gold (e.g. Pyth. 12.17, Nem. 10.11).44 By contrast, this rationalizing version45 is more likely to derive ultimately from tragedy, especially from Euripides’ fragmentary Δανάη (TrGF V.1 316–330a).46 This play staged the oracle that led Acrisius to imprison Danaë in an underground chamber, Zeus’ transformation into a shower of gold, and the exposure of Danaë and Perseus in the floating chest.47

Since Ps.-Apollodorus is generally assumed to have been acquainted with early literature primarily indirectly, he may have rather depended upon a hypothesis of the Euripidean play. His formulation of Danaë’s impregnation by the golden shower of Zeus indeed bears verbal resemblance48 to the extant manu-

33 Cameron, Greek Mythography 99, against the hypothesis of van der Valk (REG 71 [1958] 119–120) that the scholiast himself added the reference to Pindar on the basis of his own reading while copying Ps.-Apollodorus’ account.
34 Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 8: although Snell tentatively associated Pind. fr.70d.14–15 (φύτευεν [ν] ματρί [λ], ἀν λέχεα τ’ ἀνά [γ]κοῖα δολ[λ]) with this variant version, these verses seem likelier to refer to Danaë’s forced cohabitation with Polydectes.
35 Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 8: “considering that accession to the throne in Heroic Age Greece was often the outcome of marriage to a king’s daughter, Danaë’s rape by her uncle could be explained by an endogamic logic assuring that the power would remain in the hands of a single dynastic group”.
36 Contra Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 8.
37 Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 22–29.
38 M. Huys, “Euripides and the ‘Tales from Euripides’: Sources of Apollodoros’ Bibliotheca?” RhM 140 (1997) 322: although Ps.-Apollodorus is
However, perhaps Ps.-Apollodorus had no direct access to these Hellenistic writings either, but was familiar with their contents via intermediary mythographical companions. Such an intermediary handbook might well have been the actual common source on which both the Bibliotheca and the Homeric scholion depended.

Why then has the Homeric commentator attributed the variant version to Pindar, although it presumably derives ultimately from Euripides? The answer might again be supplied by the second-century papyrus remnant of Theon’s commentary on Pindar: the compiler of the common source handbook may have mistakenly attributed the information that he found in the Euripidean hypothesis to Pindar because he came across a similarly phrased narrative in the commentary on Pindar’s Pythians by Theon, who consulted the very same collection of Euripidean hypotheses (contamination), as I have demonstrated. When adapting this common source handbook, the Homeric scholiast has simply retained a more detailed, if mistaken, source reference than Ps.-Apollodorus:

shown to have adopted the main outlines of the myth from Pherecydes (fr. 10), the formulation of Danaë’s conception by the archaic mythographer—if quoted verbatim in schol. Ap. Rhod. 4.1091—is slightly different.

49 Apollod. 2.34, Ζεῦς μεταμορφώθηκε εἰς χρυσόν καὶ διὰ τῆς ὀρφῆς εἰς τοὺς Δανάης εἰσρεῖς κόλπους συνήλθεν ~ hyp. Danaë, ὁ Ζεῦς … χρυσός γενόμενος καὶ ῥευτὶς διὰ τοῦ τέγους εἰς τὸν κόλπον τῆς παρθένου. Cf. W. Luppe, “Die Hypothesis zu Euripides’ Danae,” ZPE 87 (1991) 3: this manuscript hypothesis, preserved in the fourteenth-century Vat. Pal.gr. 287, is much shorter than the original mythographical hypotheses, mainly preserved in papyri. For this reason, there is no objection to the variant Proetus version not being mentioned in this abridged summary. For a full discussion of this hypothesis see Karamanou, Euripides, Danae and Dictys 47–56.

50 Smith-Trzaskoma, Apollodorus’ Library xxxvi–xxxvii.
4. Conclusion

Through a close reading of the Perseus myth as transmitted by various mythographical sources, this paper has focused upon the actual practices of authorship of the imperial mythographer Ps.-Apollodorus and of some Byzantine scholars excerpting his Bibliotheca. It has been demonstrated that Ps.-Apollodorus as well as these Byzantine scholars were part of a continuous tradition in which various literary sources, Hellenistic scholarly treatises, and previous mythographical writings were being abridged, annotated, modernized, and contaminated time and again. In this process, the individual authors were guided by the requirements of their own project, by their attitude towards their predecessors as well as contemporaries, by the changing framework of the contemporary literary context, and by the expectations of their potential readers.

Hence, this case-study may contribute to a more complete and nuanced picture of Greek mythography in general. Most

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of the surviving mythographical writings are late—from the first century B.C. or later—and are often viewed as interesting mainly for the light they shed on earlier sources. The present paper, by contrast, has taken a more balanced approach, by acknowledging that ancient mythographical traditions extended well beyond classical antiquity. As a result, Byzantine collections should be treated as having equal importance in formulating a view of the whole genre.\textsuperscript{51}

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