

# Menander the Poet or Menander Rhetor? An Encomium of Dioscoros Again

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WHEN WE APPROACH the texts of ancient writers, we are able to catch only a fraction of the allusions and quotations they make, which bob up amongst the flotsam of the vast shipwreck of ancient literature and culture. We feel on more secure ground when those impressive names of the classical writers occur in a reference.<sup>1</sup> Identifying references and quotations in a writer of late antiquity seems an even chancier endeavor. In trying to determine the cultural level of a writer who operated in this twilight of ancient culture, we tend to assume that the circle of his cultural references had become increasingly narrow and that only the great authors continued to be read, quoted, and alluded to. In this paper I argue that the Menander mentioned in a poem of the sixth-century Dioscoros of Aphrodite, the *Encomium to Romanus*, was not, as commonly assumed, the Hellenistic playwright but was Menander of Laodicea, usually known as Menander Rhetor.<sup>2</sup> I will also examine the first part of Dioscoros' poem, in an attempt to shed light on some obscure points. I will try to show that the main motif that runs through this poem is the feeling of inadequacy of a rhetor confronting his subject's greatness, particularly if he is not as gifted as Menander in writing encomia.

A rich archive of papyri and excellent scholarly attention have made of Dioscoros the epitome of the *pepaideumenos* of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. in Dio Chrysostom 18 the list of authors for someone interested in entering political life. They are mostly "great books," known both to us and to Dio's original audience.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Russell, and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford 1981), focused on Menander's epideictic production. M. Heath has mostly examined his commentaries in *Menander: A Rhetor in Context* (Oxford 2004).

early Byzantine times.<sup>3</sup> He lived in Aphrodite in Middle Egypt, spent years in Antinoopolis, the capital of the Thebaid, and traveled repeatedly to Constantinople. He may have had the best legal, literary, and rhetorical education available at the time both in Greek and in Coptic, was a landowner, a lawyer, an encomiastic poet, and did some teaching at the grammarian's level.<sup>4</sup> Among his poetic production, the *Encomium to Romanus* has attracted the most attention.<sup>5</sup> The poem consists of thirty-eight lines in acrostics: the first eighteen are in iambs and function as a prelude to the second part, in hexameters, which is replete with mythological references. The proem has caused the most difficulties and has been variously interpreted, in part because of the tantalizing references to Isocrates and to Menander:<sup>6</sup>

Διοσκόρου ἀπὸ Θηβαΐδος ἐγ[κώ]μμα εἰς τὸν κύριον [Ῥ]ωμανόν  
 [O] Ὀλβιε, πανόλβιε τῷ γένει κ[α]ὶ τοῖς λόγοις,  
 Κ κάλλιστ' ἅ σοι πρόπει δέχο[υ], ὦ δέσποτα.  
 Ὑ ὑμῶν τὰς ἀξίας λέ[γ]ειν οὐκ ἰκανός  
 [P] ῥήτωρ ἄριστος εἰ μὴ εὐφυῆς πάνυ,  
 5 [I ι - <sup>14</sup> - ] λογισμὸν ἀκριβῆ

<sup>3</sup> See Jean-Luc Fournet, *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Cairo 1999), for a well-balanced consideration of Dioscoros, a comprehensive, excellent edition of his works, and full bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> As a poet, Dioscoros was part of that literary movement investigated by A. Cameron, "Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt," *Historia* 14 (1965) 470–509. Dioscoros' papyri show that he taught at least his own children: Fournet, *Hellénisme* 688–690, and R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton 2001) 40, 106, 141 n.52.

<sup>5</sup> Two fragments, *P.Lond.Lit.* 98 and *P.Rein.* II 82: E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* I (Abh.Gött. III.49 [1961]) 141 no. 12. See now Fournet, *Hellénisme* I 378–380, with bibliography 475–486 and pl. XLII; previously, Leslie S. B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodite: His Works and His World* (Berkeley 1988) 68–72, and P. van Minnen, "Isocrates and Menander in Late Antique Perspective," *GRBS* 33 (1992) 87–98.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek text is that of Fournet, *Hellénisme* I 378–379, with a small variant in line 2 (κάλλιστ' ἅ instead of κάλλιστα, without strong punctuation after πρόπει), and comma instead of period at the end of 8. The text is well preserved except for lines 5 and 6. The translation and interpretation that follows, however, differs from that of previous scholars.

- [O ο...].τα.σινωσπε.επι...ι..σην [-<sup>4</sup> -]  
 [Σ σο]φὸς παλαιὸς ὦ[ς] Μένανδρος τοῖς λόγοις.  
 [P ῥώ]μην μὲν ἀνδρείαν Ἴσοκράτης λέγει,  
 [Ω ὦ]δε δὲ π[α]ρ' ἡμῖν ἡ πόλις σωφροσύνης.  
 10 [M μ]εδῶν ἐπαίνων τετελεσμένος φύσει  
 [A ἄ]κριτος ἔφυς τὰ διπλά τῶν ἀρετῶν·  
 [N ν]εώτερος πανέντιμος τύχης, γένους,  
 [O ὀ]λβιοδαίμων ὁ δημοκηδεμῶν μέγας,  
 [Σ] σοφὸς σφωτάτων ὑπερέβης λόγον.  
 15 [ ] τοίνυν σύ γ' αὐτὸς συνδραμῶν τῷ ἴμῳ σκοπῷ  
 [ ] καὶ μὴ κατόκνει συγκροτεῖν ξένους ποτέ.  
 [ ] ἀ]γίως ὁ γράψας ποτέ τοὺς δύο π[λ]άκας  
 [ ] καὶ σοῦ χαράξῃ τοὺς χρόνους διπλώματι.

*Encomia of the lord Romanus from Dioscoros from the Thebaid*

Blessed, truly blessed for your birth and culture, accept, my lord, most beautiful words befitting you. An excellent rhetor is not adequate to tell the praise you deserve if he is not well endowed by nature ... (able to make) a precise argument and skilled in eloquence as was Menander of old. Isocrates says that boldness is power, but our city here has temperance. You are by nature a perfect guardian of praises but are difficult to assess because of your double virtues; so young, you are honored by fortune and good birth, and in your success you are a great protector of the people: with your abilities you have surpassed the discourse of the most able rhetors. Therefore, concurring in the same aim I have, do not shrink from helping foreigners. The one who wrote in his holiness the two tablets (of the law) will write your years in the diptych.

After its triumph in the first and second centuries, epideictic continued to be cultivated intensively.<sup>7</sup> Although in the fourth century most rhetors composed prose encomia, the practice of delivering poetic panegyrics became ever more common.<sup>8</sup> By

<sup>7</sup> L. Pernot, *La rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-romain* (Paris 1993).

<sup>8</sup> On the poetic elements in the rhetor Himerius' prose, see R. J. Penella, *Man and the Word: The Orations of Himerius* (Berkeley 2007) 14–16. On poetic encomia in Egypt, see Criore, *Gymnastics* 229–230. On the importance of poetry in a school of rhetoric, see R. Criore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton 2007) 155–169, particularly 163 on the friends of Libanius from various provinces of the Roman East who composed poetic

classical standards, Dioscoros was not a very competent poet,<sup>9</sup> but poetry was the best medium to convey his requests to eminent personages of his time. As a *doctus poeta*, he employed lush Epic vocabulary, rhetorical expressions, and convoluted contemporary language, forcing the whole to fit the frame of iambs and hexameters. But even with these shortcomings, the proem of the *Encomium to Romanus* has an internal logic and coherence that has escaped commentators. It addresses a young official who is honored for his high birth, education, and concern for the people he governs, yet in my view this portion of the poem is only indirectly about Romanus and is not a celebration of his proficiency as a panegyrist.<sup>10</sup> The predominant theme is the inadequacy Dioscoros feels in giving a fully satisfactory account of all the accomplishments of this eminent young man.

As the proem includes terms that can be interpreted in various ways, it is necessary to review them to elucidate the translation. I will also comment at this point on some passages that are unclear. In the first line, when Romanus is blessed for his λόγοι, the word can be taken to refer either to his eloquence or generally to all his cultural accomplishments.<sup>11</sup> Though lines

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encomia. See also Liban. *Or.* 40.19–28, which shows that a high official was not content to be celebrated by a prose encomium written by this sophist but also requested a poetic encomium of an Egyptian poet who resided in Antioch. Eunapius *VS* 10.7.10–13 (493) commented on the Egyptians' passion for poetry (and their lack of skill in rhetoric). A poetic text written by a rhetor for his class on the walls of a schoolroom in Upper Egypt was recently discovered, see R. Cribiore and D. M. Ratzan, "A Teacher's *dipinto* from the Dakhleh Oasis," *JRA* (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> Dioscoros was frequently disparaged, cf. B. Baldwin, "Dioscoros of Aphrodito: The Worst Poet of Antiquity?" *Atti del XVII congresso internazionale di papirologia* (Naples 1984) II 327–331, and Cameron, *Historia* 14 (1965) 509, who called his poems "sadly deficient." MacCoull, *Dioscoros*, was the first to consider him in his own right.

<sup>10</sup> Van Minnen, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 93, thought that all the proem was "praising a professional speech writer"; Fournet, *Hellénisme* 476–477 and *passim*, confined the traditional theme of the writer's inadequacy to the first lines and considered the whole proem a praise of Romanus in writing panegyrics.

<sup>11</sup> On the meaning of *logoi*, see Cribiore, *School of Libanius* 164 and 170.

5 and 6 are unfortunately very lacunose, the word λογισμός in 5 supports the idea that Dioscoros' expressions of inadequacy as a panegyrist, which started in lines 3–4, continue in the lacuna (and afterward). λογισμός should mean “reasoning, argument” and stands in contraposition to the “natural endowments” of the previous line. Isocrates in *Antid.* 290–292 used this term twice, arguing that it was not enough for a rhetor to be blessed by nature with the gift of eloquence, but through careful application and the “exercise of reason” (λογισμῶ) he could acquire rhetorical power. Likewise, Dioscoros seems to be saying that an excellent rhetor who was naturally gifted had to apply himself painstakingly in order to “make a precise argument.”<sup>12</sup> After the lacuna in 7, I would take λόγοι as “rhetoric, rhetorical skills,” while the singular λόγος in 13 has the generic meaning “discourse, speech,” in either prose or poetry.

The term σοφός is also a bit ambiguous. Besides referring to wisdom in terms of sound judgment, this word, already in classical literature, had the meaning “clever and skilled.”<sup>13</sup> The man who was σοφός functioned at a high level because of his intelligence and learning. In the Roman period and late antiquity, moreover, σοφός and σοφία were terms of professional characterization, which in many inscriptions took the place of ῥήτωρ and σοφιστής.<sup>14</sup> In line 7 Dioscoros uses σοφός to mean “skillful” and indicates the realm of proficiency with λόγοις, “rhetoric.”<sup>15</sup> A reference to the “wisdom” of Menander the playwright is out of place here, as we shall see.<sup>16</sup> I think that Romanus is not praised for his wisdom in line 14 either, but the theme of the inadequacy of his panegyrist extends to this verse

<sup>12</sup> This is the constant theme of educational writers, *physis* versus *ponos* and *askesis*: see e.g. Quintilian *Inst.* praef. 27–28, 1.1.1–3, 1.3.1–2.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Pl. *Prt.* 309D. In the late Roman period, cf. Eunap. *VS* 10.4.10 (489) and Liban. *Ep.* 843 and 1235.

<sup>14</sup> B. Puech, *Orateurs et sophistes grecs dans les inscriptions d'époque impériale* (Paris 2002) 3–4 and 15. Incidentally, Menander Rhetor never calls wisdom σοφία but always uses the word φρονησις (e.g. 2.380.1).

<sup>15</sup> In printing ὠ[ς] instead of ὠ, Fournet accepted a suggestion of C. Bradford Welles, *AJP* 68 (1947) 97: ὠ<ς>.

<sup>16</sup> Both van Minnen, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 92–96, and Fournet, *Hellénisme* I 380, take Menander to be the playwright.

as well. The young man is so learned and proficient that the most skillful encomiasts are unable to capture in full all of his qualities.

Lines 8 and 9 are difficult and have generated various interpretations.<sup>17</sup> They have been taken to refer to qualities of Romanus; I urge instead that Dioscoros is speaking of himself. A completely satisfactory solution is difficult to find, in any case, because Dioscoros' language is clumsy, his thought appears elliptical, and the reference to Isocrates is obscure. He knew Isocrates, since among his papers is a page of a *Life of Isocrates*, apparently copied in his hand; but we do not know with which works he was acquainted.<sup>18</sup> In the classical sources, ἰσχύς and ἀνδρεία, which often occur together, are usually differentiated as “strength” (of the body) and “courage” (in battle, a quality of the soul). Although Isocrates juxtaposed the two terms in *Nicoles* 3–4 and praised Evagoras for these qualities,<sup>19</sup> he never argued for an equivalence of them. We should not take “strength” and “courage” as referring to Romanus, in any case, because these were not attributes proper for an official in late antiquity. The literary and epigraphical sources praise a governor's justice, philanthropy, generosity, honesty, and culture, but not his military accomplishments.<sup>20</sup> A precise reference to the passage in *Nicoles*, moreover, would be somewhat clumsy in this context because there Isocrates was defending eloquence against those who upheld “strength” and “courage” at all cost. One is tempted, therefore, to look elsewhere.

I suggest that here Dioscoros indicates with ἀνδρεία his own “boldness, daring” in undertaking the encomium of the pow-

<sup>17</sup> The interpretation of van Minnen, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 88 (“Isocrates speaking with manly power”), is not justified by the text. Fournet, *Hellénisme* 380 and 479, is sounder, but I disagree with his view that “force is courage.”

<sup>18</sup> *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67175; Fournet, *Hellénisme* 670, 672.

<sup>19</sup> Evagoras had shown outstanding qualities as a child, such as temperance and strength (ἰσχύς), and as he grew developed other qualities: courage (ἀνδρεία), wisdom, and justice (*Evag.* 22–23).

<sup>20</sup> See B. Cabouret, “Le gouverneur au temps de Libanios, image et réalité,” *Pallas* 60 (2002) 191–204.

erful Romanus. The most common meaning of ἀνδρεία in antiquity was “courage” in battle, but alongside this a wider meaning started to develop so that already for Lucian ἀνδρεία could mean “boldness in speaking.”<sup>21</sup> Menander Rhetor contemplated both meanings of ἀνδρεία, “courage when in war” (a quality appropriate when praising an emperor) and “daring in speaking” (the frankness of an ambassador or of a governor coming before the emperor).<sup>22</sup> Boldness in delivering a speech brought ῥώμη, “strength and power” of discourse (or the other way around, awareness of oratorical force made a rhetor bold).<sup>23</sup> While ῥώμη continued to indicate bodily strength (and was sometimes defined with τοῦ σώματος), rhetors, particularly in late antiquity, also considered it as equivalent to “rhetorical power” and often defined it with τῶν λόγων.<sup>24</sup> If this interpretation is correct, Dioscoros, the provincial newcomer, would be saying that in spite of his willingness to compose a bold and strong praise of Romanus, he had to be careful since the environment—the city of Constantinople, “here (ὧδε) by us”—and his new audience appreciated temperance and self-control (σωφροσύνη). But then, what about Isocrates? Why did Dioscoros mention him? We should be aware that at this time Dioscoros was young and inexperienced, since these were his first poetic endeavors. He might have remembered the frequent juxtaposition of ῥώμη and ἀνδρεία in Isocrates, and this sufficiently justified in his eyes the “learned” reference.

Line 10, which has been taken to be praising the skill of Romanus in the art of encomium,<sup>25</sup> needs to be interpreted differently since this has no connection with what precedes and

<sup>21</sup> Lucian *Adv.ind.* 3, where “boldness” has some negative connotation as daring to speak and boast when not prepared to do so.

<sup>22</sup> As an example of the first meaning, see Menander 2.422.21; for the second, 2.386.7 and 2.416.24.

<sup>23</sup> Van Minnen, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 92, already viewed ῥώμη as ῥώμη τοῦ λόγου or τῶν λόγων as sometimes in Plato, e.g. *Phdr.* 267A.

<sup>24</sup> In Libanius this term often has this meaning, e.g. *Ep.* 19.5.3, 47.1.2, 789.1.2; *Or.* 13.3.2, 58.38.1; cf. also Dio Chrys. 33.5 and John Philoponos *Opif.* 230.20 (Reichardt).

<sup>25</sup> Van Minnen, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 88, and Fournet, *Hellénisme* 380.

follows. Line 11, in fact, expresses once more the thought that Romanus was out of reach for a panegyrist, because his many virtues made him “difficult to judge.” The ambiguous expression μεδῶν ἐπαίνων does not, in my view, describe Romanus’ own ability as a panegyrist. Dioscoros used here an Epic term, μεδέων (μεδῶν for metrical reasons), that meant “guardian and ruler” and was usually applied to gods ruling over particular places. I believe this term alludes to the natural ability of Romanus to gather every kind of praise. As “a perfect guardian of praises,” Romanus was an ideal subject with all his inborn qualities but of late had become so accomplished as to be impossible to encompass. Praising an official for his education (λόγοι in the broad sense of education in poetry and rhetoric) is very common in late antiquity. Inscriptions frequently mention closeness to the Muses among the accomplishments of governors.<sup>26</sup> The other encomia that Dioscoros wrote also celebrate the culture of officials by mentioning Homer, the Muses (and especially Calliope), and Orpheus.<sup>27</sup> Dioscoros never praised magistrates for being accomplished panegyrists but always alluded broadly to their education.

Critics have struggled particularly with line 7 and its reference to Menander. The fact that Dioscoros possessed the Cairo codex of the playwright Menander seems to have led scholars almost automatically to assume that the reference is to him.<sup>28</sup> The adjective παλαιός seemed to validate the identification, on the assumption that only classical writers could be called “old.” Thus the line was understood as “wise like Menander [the playwright] of old in the art of rhetoric.” But why would Dioscoros refer to a playwright’s “wisdom” in eloquence? One

<sup>26</sup> See Louis Robert, “Épigrammes relatives à des gouverneurs,” *Hellenica* 4 (1948) 35–114. The ability of governors to compose encomia, however, is not mentioned anywhere: governors did not need to praise but received praise.

<sup>27</sup> See *Encomia* 6.10–13, 7.14, 9.4–6, 13.5, and 50A.4, in Fournet, *Helénisme*.

<sup>28</sup> L. Koenen et al., *The Cairo Codex of Menander (P.Cair.7.43227)* (London 1978); it contains portions of four plays, but the *Monostichoi* are not included. On the excitement of the discovery, see C. A. Kuehn, *Channels of Imperishable Fire* (New York 1995) 42–47.

answer was that he was alluding to the Menander of the *gnomai*, maxims collected in antiquity which enjoyed continued popularity in the early Byzantine period, when the plays had started to fade.<sup>29</sup> Another critic, in addition to considering the wisdom of Menander's *Monostichoi* as very influential, quoted Quintilian's opinion that a budding rhetor must read Menander and invoked the arbitration scene in *Epitrepontes* in particular as very useful, surmising that it "must have been highly valued in late antiquity as reading material for all those involved in civil judication."<sup>30</sup>

A reference to the *Monostichoi*, which depends on taking σοφός as "wise," seems unsatisfactory. These maxims were heavily used in education but do not leave any trace in Dioscoros' works. That *Epitrepontes* was useful to rhetors is not fully convincing either. Dioscoros' poem is not concerned with a trial scene but is an encomium. It is true that Quintilian also referred generally to the fact that Menander could be helpful to the budding rhetor, maintaining that careful reading of the plays helped a writer in invention and style (*inveniendi copia et eloquendi facultas*). One wonders, however, how much the advice of Quintilian in the first century can illuminate what Dioscoros many centuries later thought of the usefulness of the playwright to a writer of encomia. Though Dioscoros owned some plays of Menander (but not *Epitrepontes* on present evidence), the papyri show that his plays were not much read in late antiquity. Those who read them may have favored Menander on account of his realistic portrayal of character (ἦθος) and the grace and charm (χάρις) of his comedies.<sup>31</sup>

I suggest instead that Dioscoros is referring to Menander Rhetor: in this tradition, he is portraying the task of the encomiast as very challenging, unless he can match the rhetorical skill of Menander. Menander Rhetor was the third-century author of two epideictic treatises and two commentaries (on Demosthenes and on Hermogenes' *On Issues*). In Byzantine

<sup>29</sup> MacCoull, *Dioscoros* 71 and 79; Fournet, *Hellénisme* 478. Text: S. Jaekel, *Menandri Sententiae* (Leipzig 1964).

<sup>30</sup> Van Minnen, *GRBS* 33 (1992) 94–95, on *Inst.* 10.1.69–71.

<sup>31</sup> As Dio Chrysostom did (*Or.* 18.).

times he was considered the authority *par excellence* on epideictic oratory. It is debated whether both of the epideictic treatises were written by him; but they were attributed to him in antiquity, which is what matters here.<sup>32</sup> Treatise I of Menander Rhetor ends abruptly and does not contain the principles for encomia of individual men, but in Treatise II, the proem of the *Imperial Oration* gives advice on the *topos* of modesty and on the necessity of “investing the subject with grandeur” by showing that “it is hard to match” (2.368–369). In this treatise, Menander also considered two other types of encomiastic speeches: a *προσφωνητικὸς λόγος*, that is, an address to a governor delivered by an individual, and the *λαλία*, the “talk,” which could also concern a governor but was less formal than an encomium.<sup>33</sup> The former speech was shorter than an encomium because it did not include all its elements, or at least quickly glossed over some of them. The “talk” allowed a rhetor to express his own feelings, and was characterized by “sweetness” (*γλυκύτης*) derived from *exempla* and myths that audiences favored. Dioscoros’ poems of praise are closer to this last form of encomium.

It is far from surprising for Dioscoros to refer to Menander Rhetor in his *Encomium to Romanus*. In the second and third centuries, rhetoric had made great progress in devising new theoretical approaches and applying them to contemporary needs. While much of that work is lost, Menander survived because of his outstanding reputation, which continued unchallenged in Byzantine times, as the ancient *testimonia* indicate.<sup>34</sup> He was well known in Egypt, as a letter from fifth-century Her-mopolis demonstrates.<sup>35</sup> After lending some books to a friend

<sup>32</sup> See Heath, *Menander* 127–131, on attribution of both treatises.

<sup>33</sup> Menander 2.415–418 and 388–394.

<sup>34</sup> On *testimonia* for the epideictic treatises, see Russell and Wilson, *Menander* xxxiv–xxxvi; on *testimonia* for all Menander’s works, see Heath, *Menander* 93–127.

<sup>35</sup> H. Maehler, “Menander Rhetor and Alexander Claudius in a Papyrus Letter,” *GRBS* 15 (1974) 305–311 [*SB* XII 11084]; Russell and Wilson, *Menander* xxiv–xxv; Heath, *Menander* 94–96, 125–127, 296–297; Cribiore, *Gymnastics* 243.

who later left the city (a commentary on Demosthenes and three works by Menander Rhetor, his *Art*, *Methods*, and *Encomia*), Victor realized that he needed them back urgently “for God knows, I am in dire need ... quickly ... quickly.” Scholarly attention has focused especially on the identification of the first two works of Menander, a *Techne* and *Methods*, trying to ascertain whether they were both of epideictic nature or if the first was a treatise on the theory of issues. The third work, *Encomia*, certainly concerned the rhetoric of praise, either in the form of a theoretical handbook or as a collection of epideictic compositions, perhaps models written by Menander.<sup>36</sup> Although we can only speculate on the reasons for Victor’s urgency, they may not have been very different from Dioscoros’ own need to eulogize some grandee of the moment.

Dioscoros, who intended to use his skills in rhetoric and encomiastic poetry for personal advancement, was certainly acquainted with Menander’s work.<sup>37</sup> Besides showing a general familiarity with the rhetor, in fact, he repeatedly used an image that is found in a very similar context in Menander. While discussing the features of a “talk,” Menander made some remarks on the *captatio benevolentiae* a rhetor ought to use in order to secure the favor of his audience. Attempting to make light of his power, the rhetor might say modestly that he was only a cicada, a small creature with a sweet voice.<sup>38</sup> The image is the same that Dioscoros employed in two poems and in a letter in

<sup>36</sup> Heath, *Menander* 127, makes the attractive hypothesis (which is unprovable) that the *Encomia* were models attached to the *Methods*, a theoretical work on epideictic. The two treatises of Menander that are extant, in any case, were easy to follow and could serve the practical needs of a rhetor.

<sup>37</sup> See Kuehn, *Channels* 161–162, 188–189, and *passim*. Fournet, *Hellénisme* 260, 265–266, 270, 501–502, and *passim*, noticed repeatedly the closeness of Dioscoros to Menander and thought that the image of the cicada might suggest direct imitation, yet he continued to identify the Menander of this poem with the playwright.

<sup>38</sup> Menander 2.391.13–14, with the commentary of Russell and Wilson, *Menander* 299, where they express doubts about two different readings. I agree with Fournet, *Hellénisme* 502, that the reading of most of the MSS. seems better.

verse.<sup>39</sup> Addressing an important personage, celebrating the arrival of another, and writing a poetic letter to a third, Dioscoros apologized for the inadequacy of his talent, reiterating his similarity to a cicada: this very small insect celebrated God who was much higher, and yet God listened to its tiny voice.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the humble poet was afraid to praise the many virtues of his addressees, who were much above himself, but hoped that they would lend a ready ear. The image of the cicada appears frequently in ancient poetry and prose, but nowhere else in the same rhetorical context.<sup>41</sup> For classical authors, who celebrated the cicada's melodious singing and its closeness to the Muses, this insect with its sweet voice surpassed bees and birds.<sup>42</sup> Ancient poets lauded the musicality of cicadas in order to praise the melodiousness of their own singing.<sup>43</sup> Thus in later rhetors, cicadas represented the voice of the poets and even the poets themselves.<sup>44</sup> The unique image that appears in Menander Rhetor and Dioscoros, however, focuses on the smallness of this insect in order to suggest humility and modesty.

The last, and crucial, question concerning the reference to Menander in the *Encomium to Romanus* concerns the suitability of the term *παλαιός* for a third-century writer. Was Menander Rhetor sufficiently "old" in the eyes of Dioscoros to justify this

<sup>39</sup> Fournet, *Hellénisme* 7.57, 18.38–40, 38.17–18, with commentary.

<sup>40</sup> Dioscoros adapted the cicada image to his Christian faith but of course with the word "god" also indicated his eminent addressee.

<sup>41</sup> A thorough survey of the cicada image in all times is in Kuehn, *Channels* 167–176.

<sup>42</sup> The myth in Plato *Phdr.* 259C left many traces in ancient literature, e.g. Hermogenes *Id.* 2.4.5 and Liban. *Declam.* 26.1.41. On cicadas' superiority, see e.g. Lucian *Rhet. Praec.* 13: the voice of the cicada prevails over that of bees, as trumpets drown out flutes and a chorus its leader.

<sup>43</sup> For the identification of a poet with a cicada, see e.g. Callim. *Aetia* 1.29–30.

<sup>44</sup> Himerius, who imitated poetic texts, not surprisingly mentioned cicadas very often, e.g. *Or.* 63.25. Libanius called some poets cicadas: *Ep.* 1223.1, 1255.1. He also alluded to their tiny size in mentioning the small quantity of food they ate, *Or.* 12.95, 18.175 (the emperor Julian ate like a cicada), 25.19.

adjective?<sup>45</sup> The singular *παλαιός* could mean “aged,” applied to a person advanced in years, to an old acquaintance, or to a variety of things such as wine.<sup>46</sup> The adjective modifying a proper name and meaning “ancient, of old” (as in Dioscoros’ text) occurs rarely; the plural *οἱ παλαιοί*, however, indicated “the ancients,” and very often the ancient writers such as Homer who had flourished many centuries before.<sup>47</sup> Yet everything was relative, so that for example, when Isocrates referred to the “ancient” orators and sophists, he named writers of a century or so before (*Antid.* 231, 268).

To be sure, references were more complicated later (and in the sixth century) when so many eminent writers, more or less *παλαιοί*, had become part of tradition.<sup>48</sup> The struggle to refer to one’s forebears in terms of their temporal precedence is evident in John Philoponos, the theologian and philosopher who lived in sixth-century Alexandria. John employs for this several adjectives, often in the comparative form; their meanings are not always constant and need to be evaluated each time. So in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima*, John says that the νεώτεροι interpreters had introduced a νεωτέρα interpretation:<sup>49</sup> they were not following Plutarch of Athens (who died by 432) but someone more recent, probably his pupil Proclus (who died in 485). In the same work, he calls some Presocratic philosophers *παλαιοί*, who are called *παλαιότεροι* elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> Socrates is either *παλαιότερος* or *ἀρχαιότερος*, when John has Aristotle in mind.<sup>51</sup> While he calls *παλαιοί* the ancient

<sup>45</sup> Dioscoros uses this adjective one more time in 11.20 (superlative) in a very lacunose context, so that it is impossible to see to what he referred.

<sup>46</sup> The same usage occurs in the literary sources and in the papyri: e.g. *P.Genova* II 60 (pens), *O.Claud.* I 129 (water skins), *BGU XII* 2175 r.8 (wine).

<sup>47</sup> Thuc. 1.3; Liban. *Or.* 1.8.13 and *Ep.* 561.7 refers to the books of the “ancient writers,” presumably the classical writers.

<sup>48</sup> As an earlier parallel, cf. the struggle of Latin grammarians in referring to their sources because of “problems produced by the assimilation of new material”: R. A. Kaster, “Servius and *idonei auctores*,” *AJP* 99 (1978) 181–209, at 207.

<sup>49</sup> *Comm. in Arist. Gr.* XV 464.30–32.

<sup>50</sup> *Comm. in Arist. Gr.* XV 91.28, XVI 142.17.

<sup>51</sup> *Comm. in Arist. Gr.* XIII.1 191.23, XVI 43.23.

poets, such as Homer, it should be noted that he uses the same term for Stoics, Epicureans, and Academics up to 200 A.D.<sup>52</sup> Only once does he use the singular to refer to a *παλαιός* forebear in a way similar to Dioscoros. In *De opificio mundi* (195.14), while discussing the writings of Basil the Great and “others” in the fourth century, John adds that Origen *ὁ παλαιός* had written on the same subject. Philoponos was especially interested in the works of the third-century theologian Origen, an “old” writer whom he considered an authority.<sup>53</sup>

An instance in the fifth-century Alexandrian philosopher Ammonius also shows that *παλαιός* did not necessarily distinguish only writers of archaic and classical antiquity but could be extended to those more recent. Ammonius considers three factors that discourage young men from consulting the works of *παλαιοί* writers.<sup>54</sup> Among these, he denounces the excessive length of exposition in the *Γαλήνεια*, the works of the second-century medical writer Galen—an opinion shared by other thinkers such as the sixth-century David and Elias.<sup>55</sup>

Scholars have noted the wider range of the meaning of *παλαιός* only in a later period, with regard to the twelfth-century Eustathius of Thessalonica. When Eustathius refers to the *παλαιοί* writers, he often means the ancient scholiasts. Yet he also includes in the same category writers such as Suetonius, Strabo, the ten-century lexicon known as *Suda* (Suidas), and especially the sixth-century grammarian Stephanus Byzantius.<sup>56</sup> Eustathius, therefore, expanded the category of the “old” writers to include witnesses from Homer to the tenth century. But Eustathius was not the first to widen the range of this term.

<sup>52</sup> *Comm. in Arist. Gr.* XIII.1 25.7, XIII.2 6.21; I thank R. Sorabji for the information.

<sup>53</sup> See L. Fladerer, *Johannes Philoponos, De opificio mundi* (Stuttgart 1999) 189–191.

<sup>54</sup> *Comm. in Arist. Gr.* IV.3 38–39.

<sup>55</sup> *Comm. in Arist. Gr.* XVIII.2 105.14, XVIII.1 42.3. Both considered Galen’s prose as “too spread out and lacking in restraint.”

<sup>56</sup> Cf. H. Schrader, “Porphyrios bei Eustathios zur *ΒΟΙΩΤΙΑ*,” *Hermes* 14 (1879) 231–252, esp. 244–245; and M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad* (Leiden 1963) 8 n.31 and 187 n.266 (I thank Alan Cameron for this reference).

Before him, as we have seen, writers of late antiquity regarded authors who preceded them by only a few centuries as sufficiently “old” to deserve to be designated as *παλαιοί*. When encountering this term in late antiquity, therefore, one must exercise some caution and evaluate each occurrence. Thus, a major obstacle is removed and we are free to prefer to identify “Menander of old” in the poem of Dioscoros as the rhetor rather than the playwright.

One last question remains. Why did Dioscoros so insist on his inadequacy to celebrate Romanus? Was this only a very lengthy and rhetorical *captatio benevolentiae*? It is important to keep in view that, when he composed this encomium, Dioscoros was young, was still experimenting with poetry, had travelled to Constantinople with a delegation from his village, and realistically could not expect an easy success.<sup>57</sup> He thought he needed a sure identification, and so added his own name and province in the dedication of the poem (a feature that does not appear in other encomia), addressing an audience who might not have known either him or his village. In the poem he expressed his hesitancy to praise in a commensurate way a newly-met grandee. Only a writer like Menander Rhetor could do justice to such a theme, and so Dioscoros turned to Menander for help, recognizing explicitly the rhetor’s eminence as a teacher of encomia. Menander Rhetor provided well-mapped territory into which a writer could proceed with less hesitation. Dioscoros had chosen a most helpful model and followed it dutifully like “a little cicada,” still commanding attention.

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<sup>57</sup> I agree with Fournet, *Hellénisme* 477, who thought that the poem dates to 551.