

LOWELL EDMUNDS

Antonio Aloni

After early publications on New Comedy and on Plutarch, Antonio Aloni turned in the opposite direction chronologically and to research on the poetry of the archaic period that would continue for the rest of his life. His monograph on Archilochus was the first major result (1981). Aloni took a special interest in performance and thus also in the social and political contexts thereof. He focused on the second half of the sixth century and wrote articles on Hipparchus and two monographs, one on the archaic traditions of the Troad (1986) and another on the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (1989), a poem to which he returned more than once.

Already in the decade just surveyed, genre became a theme of Aloni's work. He saw that the Alexandrian distinctions of genre were inadequate to describe the verse of the archaic period. In the monograph on the *Hymn to Apollo* he showed that this song was likely to be the prooemium to a choral performance. As he was to say later in *La performance di Cineto*, «sembrano cadere a livello delle performance le linee di demarcazione tra forme poetiche epiche e liriche» (*Cantare glorie di eroi. Comunicazione e performance poetica nella Grecia arcaica*, Torino 1998, p. 73). He spoke of the epic aspects of the then new Simonides (in 1994 at a conference in honor of Bruno Gentili; published in English in 1997). Having shown iambic elements in Sappho, he spoke of «una poesia con funzioni e contenuti di tipo giambico, al di là della forma metrica specifica» (in the same collection in 1998, p. 222).

In the 1990s came also the editions of the iambic poets (1993) and of Alcman and Stesichorus (1994) for Mondadori and of Sappho for Giunti (1997). It was a decade of work on performance in Pindar (two articles in the collection just mentioned, one originally a lecture given at universities in the United States in 1992). Now there is also *Epinician and the Polis*¹.

The first decade of this millennium saw the monograph *Da Pilo a Sigeo* (2006), in which Aloni returned to a favorite theme, the role of Athens in the textual fixation of Homer, and

¹ «BICS» LV/2 (2012) 21-37.

argued brilliantly for the importance of Sigeion, the home of Hippias in exile, in the Athenian text. His interest in Sappho continued with an edited volume on the then new (now there is a newer one) Sappho (2008). With Alessandro Iannucci he published *L'elegia greca e l'epigramma: dalle origini al V secolo* (2007). His contribution on elegy in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric* (2009) is the summa of his thought on this genre.

Much has been omitted in this brief survey, the purpose of which was to bring out some of the main lines of Aloni's research and contributions. His final publication will be *Hesiod Between Performance and Written Record*, to appear in a volume edited by Christos Tsagalis. This article follows from the conclusion of an earlier article on the same poet (2010), in which Aloni showed that the *Opera* can be regarded as the syllogē of a poetic tradition having pronounced elegiac and iambic traits. In its parts, he argued, the *Opera* would have been appropriate for symposial settings and the addressees would have been local aristocrats, devoted to their land and under threat in changing political conditions. Aloni's sensitivity to the elegiac and iambic traits in Hesiod came from many years of study of the poets who composed in these genres.

In the forthcoming publication, Aloni first continues along the lines of the earlier article on Hesiod and shows a pervasive analogy of the *Works and Days* to the Theognidean syllogē. He then extends this analogy to the socio-political context of Hesiod's poem. He describes Ascra as a village caught in the historical change that led to the formation of the city-state and its control of the surrounding territory. In this case, the incipient city-state is Thespieae, located about ten kilometers from Ascra. In the process of synoecism, the relationship between the city and the village is normally antagonistic, and the conflict between the poetic "I" and Perses must be understood in this context. Perses has misused his inheritance in an attempt to bribe the "gift-eating" kings of the city. Aloni makes an incisive critique of historicist interpretation of the situation. «In the perspective of oral traditional poetry *Works and Days* contains [...] an attack by a poetic 'I' located in a village called Ascra, in respect of a dual target, or a double implicit listener: a 'You' who is nearby but not for this reason present at the performance, and 'Kings', who may be those of Thespieae or of any other place that, like Thespieae vis-à-vis Ascra, advances claims of dominion or at least of synoecism and political centralization». In other words it is a situation that *mutatis mutandis* is like the one in which the disgruntled Theognis found himself.

The survey of Aloni's work presented here, even though it omits much, might give the impression of ceaseless research and writing. Such an impression would be completely false.

Aloni led a more various life than most of us. He was an accomplished carpenter and a three-star chef. He was a “biker,” to use the American expression – an enthusiast of the motorcycle – and even in the last weeks of his life it was his means of traveling to and from the hospital where he was receiving treatment. After the birth of their daughter, Sofia, his and Chiara’s motorcycle trips, which had taken them to remote parts of Greece, were curtailed. Aloni continued, however, even after his retirement, to escort a group of students to Greece every year. One had the impression of someone always in motion, although somehow he must have spent many hours book in hand or at his computer.

He was a philhellene in every sense and he knew the history of the Greek language from Mycenaean to Modern Greek. He could speak Modern Greek and once gave a lecture in this language. His affection for Crete, where he had a summer home, and for the Cretans is everywhere apparent in the pages of an unpublished novel (a *giallo* but more than a *giallo*) that he wrote with the journalist Paolo Colonnello.

He reflects upon travel in Greece and its indispensable relation to philology in a fugitive essay *Della filologia e del viaggiare* (2004)². Of the many examples that he gives, the concluding one, on the history of Pylos from the Palace of Nestor up to the present and to a present in which he places himself, is the longest and most moving. At the end of a day he sits with friends in a café by the harbor drinking ouzo and engaged in conversation. He thinks of the ancient symposium, of Theognis’ counsel of moderation (“do not drink to excess”) and of Theognis’ companion, who says ἔγγεε (“keep pouring”, 487). As these thoughts cross his mind, Aloni hears the cry Βάλε κι ἄλλο (“Pour another”), as the waiter circulates among the tables. «The modern words renew for that evening, and forever, we hope, the ancient ritual».

Let us leave Antonio Aloni there in that café. His life and work are now a part of that special history of a philology that has traveled in and loves Greece. Βάλε κι ἄλλο.

Lowell Edmunds
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
School of Arts and Sciences
lowedmunds@gmail.com

² In Renato Gendre (a cura di), *Lycaenum: Ricordando Bruno Negri*, Alessandria, 13-22.