Introductory Notes [a Submerged Literature in Ancient Greek Culture. An Introduction]

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The theme and definition of ‘submerged literature’ stems from the writings of the late Luigi Enrico Rossi, common teacher to most contributors to this volume. In particular, in a set of unpublished notes from 1995, Rossi proposed

to initiate a *recensio* of that part of Greek literature which never received publication (although this description is inaccurate for anything predating the fourth century BCE: ‘which never received poly-centric distribution’, we may better say). Literature of this kind never enjoyed the protection of either the polis or any other authority with institutionalized – let us say – literary credentials.²

Rossi stimulated a discussion of this idea among his pupils and in 2000 published a paper with a few pages dedicated to the subject, where submerged literature served as a label encompassing mainly those texts that were not protected during their transmission by social contexts and institutions³ and were therefore excluded by the circuits of transmission, but that can nonetheless be reconstructed. Luigi Enrico Rossi did not develop his project any further.

As an ideal continuation of his project, a research group of Rossi’s pupils⁴ launched a series of seminars (2011‒2014) hinging on the subject of submerged literature as a far-reaching approach to Greek literature as well as to Greek cultural history. This volume presents most of the results of the 2011‒2012 seminar held at ‘Sapienza’ in Rome (*Fuori dal canone. La letteratura greca sommersa*) that set out to investigate the methods and the questions around submerged literature. The investigation continues to this day.⁵

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2 ‘Fare una *recensio* della letteratura greca mai emersa a livello editoriale (termine improprio per tutto quello che precede il IV sec. a.C.: sarebbe meglio dire ‘a livello di diffusione policentrica’). Tale letteratura non era stata protetta dalla polis o da una qualsiasi autorità – per così dire – istituzionale dal punto di vista letterario.’
3 See Ercolani in this volume.
4 Namely, Roberto Nicolai, who has succeeded Rossi on his chair, Maria Broggiato, Giulio Colesanti, Andrea Ercolani, Manuela Giordano, Laura Lulli, Michele Napolitano, Riccardo Palmisciano, Livio Sbardella, Maurizio Sonnino.
5 The seminars and the research have been sponsored and promoted by the following academic institutions: ‘Sapienza’ University of Rome, CNR – Istituto di Studi sul Mediterraneo Antico, University of L’Aquila, University of Calabria, University of Cassino and Southern
The research on submerged literature has prompted us to redefine apparently familiar categories such as author, text, genre, occasion, canon, and literature, above all, in terms more fitting to ancient Greek culture. As our research proceeded, it became increasingly clear how some of these categories are liable, if unchecked, to turn into conceptual pitfalls. First and foremost, it became apparent that recourse to the category of literature is a highly controversial matter vis-à-vis oral and aural cultures – an observation that finds a correlative in the absence of a match for our term ‘literature’ in ancient Greek. This is not to say ‘literature’ should be altogether dispensed with as a conventional term of reference, although one should be aware of the potential misapprehensions resting with a notion that is ill-suited to represent a properly emic point of view.

As a working definition, we propose to understand ‘literature’ for the purposes of this volume as a concept covering the whole range of texts produced for a socially relevant occasion; that is, all the texts that contributed to configure and articulate Greek culture as we know it from written and material sources, with the additional proviso that the term literature be used as a non-evaluative term. This definition implies a reassessment of the term literature and its extension to include, alongside preserved and lost texts, those texts we may reconstruct circumstantially, by way of investigation, regardless of their having been conceived for transmission. In this respect, reflecting upon submerged literature may provide a new way and a new model to understand texts and cultural history. Within the scope of submerged literature we may therefore take into account texts ranging from the religious to the legal or anthropological domains, from forensic speeches to choral odes, from ‘mystery cult’ texts to lullabies. This does not mean that the term literature, under this definition, can be foisted upon any variety of distinct textual types: in our perspective, on the contrary, whether a certain text is a ‘literary’ text is no longer an informative question; our assumption, rather, is to regard Ancient Greek texts as a unified and interrelated province.

This book, moreover, reflects an approach to Greek texts as ‘context’ rather than text, that cropped up early on in our investigation, an approach that bestows primacy to occasion and hence performance, and follows the lead of a

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thriving approach in Ancient Greek studies that found particularly fertile terrain in Italy (Gentili, Rossi). Occasion is seen as the living and encompassing context under which the phenomenon of an aesthetically marked discourse becomes significant: until the end of the fifth century, occasion oriented genres to a far greater extent than the reverse held true, producing a common code shared by the participants through recurring patterns, themes, and forms. In this direction, the investigation on submerged literature endeavours to tackle the occasions as well as the contexts, the spaces, and the conditions of transmission and diffusion of Ancient Greek texts, benefiting from anthropological and archeological hermeneutics as well. The picture that we offer in this volume criss-crosses dynamics of synchrony and diachrony, and explores the twilight area dividing lost and submerged texts. The essays contained here deal with questions of hermeneutics, philology and methodology as well as with epic Cycles, lyric poetry, tragedy, comedy, satyr play, and mime. In dealing with these genres from the point of view of submerged literature, the book attempts to provide a more precise contextualization of the texts in the ancient Greek system of communication and performance, mapping those texts individually and by typology together with the occasions of their performance.

This volume is a collaborative and shared work, as it sprouts from continual, intense, and rewarding discussions of the research group: each paper has been thoroughly discussed, scrutinized and commented upon in informal meetings by all the contributors to this volume. In this respect the volume rather represents a common undertaking than a set individual achievements, leading to final conclusions bearing the authorship of the entire research group.

This climate of lively and engaged scholarly conversations as well as the practice of putting *es meson* the issues at stake is the beautiful and standing legacy of our teacher, who often remarked that discussion is the essential part of any seminar.

The volume intends to encourage further extensive investigation that will hopefully foster a new understanding of ancient Greek culture and envisage its unique dynamics of orality and literacy under a new hermeneutic frame. To be sure, this first volume cannot aspire to completeness: it is our aim to pursue a more thorough treatment of the subject, from different angles, in two forthcoming volumes of the series we here inaugurate. It should at this point be

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7 See Ercolani in this volume.
apparent that the objective of this first stage in the research was to state a case (albeit broadly framed), rather than to supply all of the answers.

The introductory section defines and puts into perspective the models and tools of the research. In the first essay, Andrea Ercolani questions the heuristic validity of the terms 'literature' and 'genre' in approaching ancient Greek texts. From a historical perspective the terms ‘texts’ and ‘occasion’ seem to work best in reconstructing more carefully the historical scenario of Greek culture up until the end of the fifth century BCE. In this essay Ercolani sets out to define the issues revolving around ‘submerged’ texts and particularly the connection between socially relevant occasion and Greek poetry. The question is further developed in essay two, where Riccardo Palmisciano offers an ample overview of the conditions of poetic communication in the archaic and classical ages, providing a working framework within which to locate discourse around submerged texts. Particular attention is given in this essay to the dynamics connecting the emergence of authorial figures against a background of traditional anonymous repertoire, showing how their mutual influence developed a veritable system of poetic communication. In the third essay, Roberto Nicolai tackles the role of grammar and rhetoric schools in influencing and directing the opposite dynamics of emergence and protection and of submersion and marginalization of texts. As lists of excellent authors, literary canons come about as products of schools’ activity as well as the expression of the tastes of different audiences – to which canons in their turn contributed. In this essay, Nicolai also investigates the role of canons in the process of selection and in giving rise to the phenomena of emergence and submersion. Maria Broggiato deals with the issue of textual selection under a different angle in her essay, examining the surviving records of authors and genres studied in the Hellenistic age. Broggiato illustrates how the limited set of texts to be edited and commented on at the scholarly centres of Alexandria and Pergamum had been previously established in fifth- and fourth-century Athens, by Aristotle and his school in particular. Although Hellenistic scholars mostly concentrated on these works, there is, nonetheless, some documentation regarding their interest in minor authors, in non-canonical genres, and also in a number of coeval poets.

The second section applies the suggestions and methodology of the introductory essays to six case studies illustrative of the dynamics of submersion. In essay five, Livio Sbardella argues for a significant case of submersion in the archaic epic tradition, where the guild of the Homeridae from Chios successfully promoted their repertoire to the rank of mainstream epic tradition, eventually prevailing over parallel narrative traditions of their time. In particular, Sbardella reconstructs the activity of a competing guild, the Creophileans of Samos, depositaries of a distinct epic cycle. The author brings
to light the political and cultural factors which, as early as the late-archaic age, concurred in dooming to submersion this alternative epic cycle. In essay six, Laura Lulli continues the investigation of epic cycles and poems, with a focus on regional and civic traditions. Lulli tries to unravel the vast and complex net of lost and submerged poems, often attested by their titles only. The author identifies a connecting thread in the local dimension of these poems, whose themes and myths hinged on precise historical issues and local variations of mythical narratives, an aspect of indisputable interest within the limits of a local audience but that proved in the long run a main factor of submersion in the Panhellenic arena.

Giulio Colesanti examines in essay seven the poetic production connected to the occasion of the symposium (seventh – fifth cent. BCE), a production that underwent different stages of submersion determined by diverse cultural and political factors. Colesanti further examines the lullaby as a different type of monodic poetry, composed by and large by women. The author argues that lullabies are a perpetually emergent typology of text on the synchronic level, due to the recursive nature of their compositional occasion, and explores the dynamics which conversely resulted in the total submersion of the individual texts on the diachronic level, partly due to the failure to secure their written transmission.

The three remaining essays are devoted to drama. In essay eight Riccardo Palmisciano deals with satyr drama, with particular relation to non-verbal communication, sign language and its encoding in pottery. Palmisciano analyses in this light the Attic aryballos of Nearchus, representing a choreography of characters dressed as satyrs and a battle between Pigmies and cranes. The reading of the vase’s iconography allows Palmisciano to reconstruct a dramatic action referable to a satyrikon predating Pratinas’ production. In essay nine Maurizio Sonnino deconstructs the hitherto current view of mime as the original form of ‘secular’ farce giving rise to the more canonical forms of the fifth and fourth century BCE. Sonnino recovers the rich and complex plurality of submerged laughter-inducing spectacles (from the Theban Kabeirion to the italic phlyakes) connected to precise socio-ritual occasions that acted as the fertile background for more elaborate forms (in Megara, Athens, and Syracuse in particular). Sonnino shows furthermore that dramatic mime is, contrary to current opinion, a later elaborate production that underwent submersion in that it eluded the mechanisms of textual control. In essay ten Manuela Giordano maps out some of the occasions homologous to tragedy that may have prompted the production of texts. Giordano conducts her investigation guided by the theatron, the spatial context of tragedy. The author lists different
typologies of spaces, from sanctuaries to agora, and identifies the discriminating factors that would explain the emergence of tragedy.

The concluding essay advocates a fresh approach to ancient Greek texts and beyond, putting forward a more integral model, bridging historical, anthropological and philological perspectives; this model highlights cultural dynamics of exclusion and inclusion and the agency of political institutions and influential groups and centres. We hope that this model may prove fruitful in opening new perspectives and diverse fields of research.