



# Homer as Model for The Ancient Library: Metaphors of Corpus and Cosmos

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# Homer as Model for The Ancient Library: Metaphors of Corpus and Cosmos

Gregory Nagy

This essay treats the ancient library not so much as a place or institution but as an idea or concept - a Classical model, conveyed primarily by metaphors of comprehensiveness, completeness, and universality. Hence the words Corpus and Cosmos in my title. The focus is primarily on the Library of Alexandria in Egypt and secondarily on the Library of Pergamon in Asia Minor. I will argue that the Classical model represented by these libraries centers on the idea of Homer, and that the metaphors of Corpus and Cosmos apply especially to that idea. Before we consider these metaphors, I offer a brief introduction to the historical background.<sup>1</sup>

In using the expression “Classical model,” I have in mind the prestige of the Classics. By “Classics” here I refer not to any current general definition but to ideas that took shape in the specific historical contexts of centers of learning that flourished in the Greek-speaking world around the fourth through the second centuries BC.

The primary points of reference are

1. A) the Lyceum or Peripatos in Athens, as shaped in the fourth century by Aristotle and by his successor, Theophrastus
2. B) the Library at the Mouseion or Museum, “the sacred precinct of the Muses,” in Alexandria, as sponsored by the dynasty of the Lagidai (that is, the Ptolemies) in the third and the second centuries

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<sup>1</sup> The introduction to this essay is an abridged version of my introduction to “The Library of Pergamon as a Classical Model,” in Helmut Koester, ed., *Pergamon: Citadel of the Gods* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1998) 185-232.

3. C) the Library in Pergamon, as sponsored by the dynasty of the Attalidai (Attalids), especially during the reign of Eumenes II from 197 to 158 BC.

For the history of the concept of the “Classics” around the fourth through the second centuries BC, I rely mainly on Rudolf Pfeiffer’s *History of Classical Scholarship*.<sup>2</sup> He takes note of a key word for this concept, *krisis* (the source of our word “crisis”), in the sense of “separating,” “discriminating,” “judging” (verb *krinō*) those works and those authors that were deemed worthy of special recognition and those that were not.<sup>3</sup> Those that were “selected” in this process were the *enkrithentes*, a term that corresponds to the later Roman concept of the Classics, the *classici*, who were authors of the ‘first class’, *primae classis*.<sup>4</sup> This classical principle of selectivity, where some things have to be excluded in order for other things to be included, is the basis for the modern usage of the word *canon*.<sup>5</sup> The Greek word for those who were engaged in the process of making these critical selections was *kritikoi* ‘critics’.

Although the Alexandrian scholars eventually abandoned the term *kritikos* in favor of *grammatikos*, they preserved and in fact perfected the principles that shaped the concept of *kritikos* in the first place. It is from their work that we can see most clearly the combination of selective and holistic perspectives:

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<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Pfeiffer pp. 117, 204, 206-7, 242, 269. Followed by Nagy, “Ancient Greek Views of Poets and Poetry,” in George Kennedy, ed., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism I: Classical Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 1-77, esp. p. 1. For a more detailed discussion, see Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 61-2, 85, and 402-3 (with special reference to the wording of Plato).

<sup>4</sup> Pfeiffer pp. 206-7.

<sup>5</sup> See Pfeiffer p. 207 for a brief history of the modern usage.

The canon as conceived by the Alexandrian scholars is not to be confused with the actual collection of works housed in the great library of the Museum at Alexandria. The *Pinakes* or 'Tables' of Callimachus, in 120 books, was intended not as a selection but as a complete catalogue of the holdings of the Museum, generally organized along the lines of formal criteria, including meter.<sup>6</sup>

The Alexandrian Classical model, as formalized in the very concept of the *Pinakes* of Callimachus, makes it explicit that a holistic perspective is a prerequisite for the application of the principle of selection.<sup>7</sup>

Earlier, I had spoken of the prestige of the Classics, which now leads me to my central thesis: it is this prestige that primarily motivates the overall scholarship of the Library of Alexandria - as also of its rival, the Library of Pergamon. It is the prestige of the Classics, primarily of the corpus of Homer, that drives the continuum from, say, the Lyceum to the Museum.

In speaking of *prestige* we cannot separate it from *power* and *wealth*. From a sociological vantage point, we may think of social status in terms of this triad of power,

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<sup>6</sup> Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* p. 61n52 (cf. also p. 83n3), following James E. G. Zetzel, "Re-creating the Canon: Augustan Poetry and the Alexandrian Past," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983) 83-105, reprinted in Robert von Halbert, ed., *Canons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 107-129.

<sup>7</sup> For the basic information on the *Pinakes* of Callimachus, see Pfeiffer, pp. 127-134. Pfeiffer does not stress, however, the working distinction between the concept of a canon and the concept (not just the reality) of a complete collection. This distinction is the point of Zetzel's argument, cited above. See also Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* p. 83n3: "For the Alexandrian scholars, exclusion of an author from the canon does not preclude an active interest in that author, even as a model for imitation."

wealth, and prestige, viewing all three factors as *contiguous and interconnected*.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the history of ancient Greece, these factors had shaped the very concept of aristocracy as it evolved from a wide variety of sociopolitical realities into a single unified cultural ideal.<sup>9</sup> And the medium that conveyed such a seemingly monolithic concept or ideal was the Classics, with the corpus of Homer as the ultimate model.<sup>10</sup> To restate the central thesis, then, in more precise terms: the Classical model of the Library, featuring Homer as the primary author of literature, was interconnected with the power, wealth, and prestige of those who founded the great libraries of the ancient Hellenic world.

In the Library of Alexandria, as founded by the dynasty of the Ptolemies, that is, the Lagidai, we can see most clearly the interconnections between the idea of a library and the political realities of its foundation.

Let us examine an eyewitness description of the Library, as provided by Strabo. The primary physical setting was the sacred precinct of the Muses, the *Mouseion* or Museum:

ἅπαντα μέντοι συναφῆ καὶ ἀλλήλοις καὶ τῷ λιμένι καὶ  
ὅσα ἔξω αὐτοῦ. τῶν δὲ βασιλέων μέρος ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ  
Μουσεῖον, ἔχον περίπατον καὶ ἐξέδραν καὶ οἶκον

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<sup>8</sup> Here I am following the general outlines of Max Weber's sociological models: see especially *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen [1922]; 4th ed.: Mohr-Siebeck, 1956). On wealth and prestige in terms of an "economy of prestige," see in general Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Geneva: Droz, 1972). See also Richard Leppert and Bruce Lincoln, "Introduction" to the special issue "Discursive Strategies and the Economy of Prestige" of *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989) 5-23, especially pp. 6-8. On power and prestige, cf. Maurice Bloch, "The Disconnection Between Power and Rank as a Process", *Archives européennes de sociologie* 18 (1977) 107-148.

<sup>9</sup> On aristocratic ideologies of power, wealth, and prestige in ancient Greek culture, see Nagy, "Aristocrazia: caratteri e stili di vita," in Salvatore Settis, ed., *I Greci: Storia Cultura Arte Società* II (Torino: Einaudi, 1996) 577-598.

<sup>10</sup> Nagy, "The 'Professional Muse' and Models of Prestige in Ancient Greece," in *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989) 133-143 (in the same special issue, see Leppert and Lincoln on the "economy of prestige," cited above).

μέγαν ἐν ᾧ τὸ συσσωτιον τῶν μετεχόντων τοῦ Μουσείου φιλολόγων ἀνδρῶν. ἔστι δὲ τῇ συνόδῳ ταύτῃ καὶ χρήματα κοινὰ καὶ ἱερεὺς ὁ ἐπὶ τῷ Μουσείῳ τεταγμένος τότε μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν βασιλέων νῦν δ' ὑπὸ Κατσαρος. μέρος δὲ τῶν βασιλεγων ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ καλούμενον Σῶμα, ὃ περίβολος ἦν ἐν ᾧ αἱ τῶν βασιλέων ταφαὶ καὶ ἡ Ἀλεξάνδρου· ἔφθη γὰρ τὸ σῶμα ἀφελόμενος Περδικκαν ὁ τοῦ Λάγου Πτολεμαῖος κατακομζοντα ἐκ τῆς Βαβυλῶνος καὶ ἐκτρεπόμενον ταύτῃ κατὰ πλεονεξίαν καὶ ἐξειδιασμόν τῆς Αἰγύπτου·

All [the buildings] are connected to each other and to the harbor and what lies outside the harbor. The Museum is also part of the royal complex. It has a walkway [*Peripatos*] and an Exedra<sup>11</sup> and a great building that houses the place where the *philologoi* who take part in the Museum dine in common. Property, too, is held in common by this assembled group, and at their head is the priest who is put in charge of the Museum, who used to be appointed by the kings, but now by Caesar [Augustus]. Another part of the royal complex is the so-called *Sōma*. This is an enclosure where the tombs of the kings and of Alexander are located. For Ptolemy, the son of Lagos,

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 5.11.2.

took his [= Alexander's] body [*sôma*] away from Perdiccas, thus edging him out. *Perdiccas* had been bringing it [= the body] from Babylon and had detoured toward Egypt, moved by greed and by the ambition to make that country his own.

Strabo 17.1.8 C 793-4

I draw attention to the “part of the royal complex” called the *Sôma*. The manuscript tradition of Strabo gives the word as *Sôma*, [Σῶμα], which modern editors emend to *Sêma* [Σῆμα] - without justification, as I hope to show. I also draw attention to the implications of Ptolemy's political motivation in competing with his rival Perdiccas for the possession of the corpse of Alexander. A Homeric subtext here, as I also hope to show, is that Alexander's corpse is being treated as if it were a hero's body. A feature of traditional Greek hero-cults is the idea that a hero's corpse is a talisman of fertility, and that possession of the body is therefore a key to power, wealth, and prestige.<sup>12</sup>

Strabo goes on to report that Perdiccas was killed by his own men, and that his retinue thereupon departed for Macedonia. The narrative then adds this detail about Ptolemy's next move: τὴν δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου κομῶν σὺν τῷ Πτολεμαίῳ ἐκίδευσεν ἐν τῇ Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ὅπου νῦν ἔτι κεῖται ‘but Ptolemy brought home the body [*sôma*] and gave it the proper ritual in Alexandria, where it still lies’ (Strabo, *ibid.*). Strabo gives further details concerning a glass display-case in which the body of Alexander was kept during the geographer's own lifetime: this case was a replacement for an original golden sarcophagus that had been stolen in the era of Ptolemy XI (*ibid.*).

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<sup>12</sup> See Nagy, *Pindar's Homer*, p. 178.

I draw attention to my specialized translation of *komizô* here as ‘bring home’, not just ‘bring’, about which I will have more to say presently.<sup>13</sup> As I will argue, the component ‘home’ of ‘bring home’ is “subjective,” reflecting the standpoint of the speaker. The ex-post-facto concept of Alexander’s tomb at Alexandria as his *oikos* ‘home’, which is made explicit in the *Alexander Romance* 3.24.4 (also 1.33.9), is connected to the traditional use of *oikos* to designate the tomb of a cult-hero.<sup>14</sup>

In the *Alexander Romance*, the dead body of Alexander is visualized not only in Hellenic religious terms, as the *sôma* of a cult-hero, but also in Egyptian religious terms, as a mummy. Notionally, the body of Alexander the Great is not only the heroic corpus of a Hellenic hero: it is also the royal corpus of the Egyptian pharaoh, whose dead body is destined to become immortalized into an ever-living body through the ritual of mummification - and whose identity is reshaped by the Ptolemies into that of the *kosmokratôr*, the Ruler of the Cosmos.

In Egyptian religious terms, the pharaonic king’s body is a prototypical re-enactment, as it were, of the god Osiris. According to the sacred narratives, the body of Osiris was the first ever to be mummified and thereby ultimately immortalized.

With these thoughts in mind, let us return to the description of the Museum or *Mouseion*, the sacred space that contains the Library. This description abounds in traditional metonyms that reveal the connections of power, wealth, and prestige. These metonyms help explain the metaphors of comprehensiveness, completeness, and universality associated with the idea of the library as a Classical model. Again, I have in mind principally the metaphors of Corpus and Cosmos.

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<sup>13</sup> See n19 below.

<sup>14</sup> Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer* pp. 271-272.



By “metonym” I mean, as a working definition, the expression of meaning by way of *connection* - as opposed to “metaphor,” by which I mean the expression of meaning by way of *substitution*.

I offer here an inventory of metonyms that I see at work in Strabo’s description of the Museum of Alexandria:

(A) *Metonymy of part-for-the-whole: the Library as part of the Museum.* The first and most obvious metonymy to notice in Strabo’s description is the idea that the Library is “part” of the Museum or *Mouseion*, that is, of the sacred precinct of the Muses. Here we see the specialized metonymy of synecdoche, in that the Library is implicitly visualized as a part of the whole, an aspect of the totality that is the Museum.<sup>15</sup>

(B) *Metonymy of part-for-the-whole: the Museum as part of the “royal complex.”* Further, the Museum is explicitly visualized as a sacred space that is part of the whole that is the “royal complex.” Strabo’s statement of this contiguity is placed in the larger context of his overall statement that all buildings are contiguous in Alexandria.

(C) *Metonymy of part-for-the-whole: the assembly of librarians as part of the Library as part of the Museum.* Within the inner totality of the Museum, with its Library, is a *sunodos* ‘assembly’ of librarians who are constituents of this totality. The members of this assembly, Strabo emphasizes, eat together and share their wealth as if they were one. This metonym of an assembly that is part of the totality that is the Library which is part of the totality that is the Museum is thus connected with a metaphor that visualizes this same assembly of librarians as a totality in its own right - as a single living body.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 325. Fraser’s own usage in his book often blurs the distinction between Library and Museum. On the synecdoche of “canon” as a “model,” see Nagy, “Ancient Greek Views” p. 1.

(D) *Metonymy of connecting by metaphor: the assembly of men in a single body, connected to the assembly of books in a single corpus.* In Strabo's description, a body of men is implicitly coextensive with a body of books, a Library. The synecdoche of an assembly of men in the context of an assembly of books, a Library, recalls the narrative, in the *Letter of Aristeas*, about the assembled group of 72 wise men who act as one in simultaneously "translating" into Greek the sacred books of the Jews.<sup>16</sup> This "big bang" narrative about the genesis of the Septuagint is comparable to the "big bang" narrative about the genesis of the so-called Peisistratean Recension of Homeric poetry: according to that narrative, especially as politicized by the Peisistratids of Athens, the corpus of Homeric poetry was dismembered and disassembled, only to be reassembled by Peisistratos (or, in some versions, by his son; in other versions, by Solon) through the assembling of men who put the dismembered corpus back together again.<sup>17</sup>

(E) *Metonymy of contiguity between the Library and the royal Ptolemaic tombs, especially the tomb of Alexander the Great.* By extension (where "extension" itself becomes a metonym) from the contiguity between the royal space of the Ptolemies and the sacred space of the Museum, there is a further contiguity involving the words for "tomb" / *sêma* and "body" / *sôma* - a contiguity that we find embodied in the synecdoche of naming the *sêma* 'tomb' of Alexander as the *Sôma* 'Body' par excellence.<sup>18</sup> The Library of

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<sup>16</sup> Nagy, *Poetry as Performance* pp. 196-197; cf. Luciano Canfora, *Il viaggio di Aristeo* (Bari: Laterza, 1996) 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed discussion in G. Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) 70-75, 93-112. Further discussion in Nagy, "The Library of Pergamon," pp. 223-228 (the subsection entitled "Crates' Homer and the 'Peisistratean Recension'").

<sup>18</sup> As I have already noted, the manuscript tradition of Strabo has Σῶμα, literally meaning 'body', but modern editors conventionally emend to Σῆμα, meaning 'tomb'. I submit that Σῶμα is the *lectio difficilior*. (I now retract my reading Σῆμα in Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* p. 272n110.) In the *Alexander Romance* 3.34.5, it is made explicit that the *taphos* 'tomb' of Alexander was named the σῶμα Ἀλεξάνδρου 'the *Sôma* of Alexander'. The metonymy whereby the body (*sôma*) par excellence is the tomb (*sêma*) is reinforced by the phonetic parallelism of *sôma* / *sêma*. On the Orphic identification of *sôma* and *sêma*,

Alexandria is envisioned as contiguous with the body of the king, as if it were one overall *corpus*. The corpus of books is coextensive with the corpus of the king, who is the “body politic.”<sup>19</sup> The notional and even physical contiguity of the library with the *sôma* of the king is I suggest a traditional concept inherent in the very idea of the Library.<sup>20</sup>

(F) *Metonymy of contiguity between the corpus of the Library and the cosmos of the king.* In Strabo’s account, both the Museum and the *Sôma* are described in terms of being a *meros* ‘part’ of “the royal complex,” *ta basileia*. The idea that “royal space” embraces all its components is relevant to the pharaonic essence of the Ptolemaic king as *kosmokratôr* ‘ruler of the cosmos’.<sup>21</sup> The corpus of the Library in the Museum is contiguous to the corpus of the king, whose cosmos includes all.

The question remains, though: how are we to reconcile the metaphor of the corpus of books as a living body with the status of the *Sôma* of Alexander the Great, which is for us a corpse? The answer, I suggest, has to do with both Greek and Egyptian religious visualizations concerning the *sôma* as an entity destined for preservation and hence immortalization after death. As we will see, the preservation of the king’s body is coextensive with the preservation of the books.

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see Plato, *Cratylus* 400c. Cf. pp. 174-175 of Martha Payne, “Alexander the Great: Myth, the Polis, and Afterward,” in Dora C. Pozzi and John M. Wickersham, eds., *Myth and the Polis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 164-181.

<sup>19</sup> On the traditional symbolism of the body of the king as an incarnation of the body politic, cf. Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer* pp. 158, 177, 188, 258, 272.

<sup>20</sup> Cicero borrows the Greek word *sôma* in referring to a “corpus” of books: *Letters to Atticus* 2.1.4, *Letter to Luceius*. Note too the expression τὸ σῶμα τῶν γραφῶν ‘the corpus of scriptures’ (drawn into a parallel with τὸ σῶμα τὸ Μωυσέως ‘the body of Moses’) in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.132.2-3. For these and related earlier examples (Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 78 and *The Assumption of Moses* 93), see Annewies van den Hoek, “The Concept of σῶμα τῶν γραφῶν in Alexandrian Theology,” *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989) 250-254.

<sup>21</sup> On Alexander the Great as *kosmokratôr* (*Alexander Romance* 1.7.3, 1.17.4), see Payne, “Alexander the Great” p. 169, with bibliography.

The aetiological narrative, recorded by Strabo, concerning the “bringing home” of Alexander’s body to the Museum, is driven by a metonym: in ancient Greek religious contexts, the verb *komizô* in that narrative (17.1.8 C 794), which I translate in the specialized sense of ‘bring home’, conveys the preservation of either a hero’s body<sup>22</sup> or a body of literature.<sup>23</sup> In ancient Egyptian ritual contexts, further, the idea of “bringing home” matches the idea of mummification as the ritual dimension of ultimate immortalization. In this connection, I have already noted the “home sweet home” theme in the *Alexander Romance*, where the “home” or *oikos* for Alexander is the tomb that contains his mummy.

Let us consider the actual wording of the *Alexander Romance* (1.34.7): when Alexander the Great is crowned King of Egypt in Memphis, he refers to his own city, Alexandria, as the *mêtropolis* of the whole civilized world, (*oikoumenê*). The god Sarapis predicts to Alexander (1.33.9): οἰκήσεις δὲ αὐτὴν καὶ θανῶν καὶ μὴ θανῶν· τάφον γὰρ ἔξεις αὐτὴν ἣν κτίξεις πόλιν ‘you will have it [= Alexandria] as your home [*oikos*, via the verb *oikeô*], both as one who is dead and as one who is not dead: for you will have as your tomb [*taphos*] the city that you are founding’. In other words, Alexander’s ‘home’ or *oikos* defines him as both dead - because the *oikos* is a tomb - and not dead - because this same *oikos* promises the immortalization of his body after death.

In Egyptian religious terms, moreover, the pharaonic king’s body is visualized as a prototypical re-enactment, as it were, of the god Osiris. According to the sacred narrative, as I have already stressed, the body of Osiris was the first ever to be

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<sup>22</sup> Compare *Iliad* XIII 196, telling how the Achaeans κόμισαν ‘brought’ the corpse of Amphimakhos. Subjectively, they ‘brought it back to their side’--which is here by necessity the substitute for ‘brought it home’. Further argumentation in Nagy, “The Library of Pergamon.”

<sup>23</sup> In “Plato” *Hipparkhos* 228b-c, we read that one of the Peisistratids of Athens, Hipparkhos, ἐκόμισεν ‘brought home’ (*komizô*) the *epê* ‘[poetic] words’ of Homer to Athens.

preserved by mummification and thereby ultimately immortalized. In that sense, the preservation of the king, and, by extension, of any mortal, is a re-enactment of Osiris. Moreover, there are further sacred elaborations on the theme of re-enactment. The divine body of Osiris, according to the sacred narrative, is at one point also dismembered or disassembled in order to become ultimately reassembled as a model of eternal preservation. Plutarch reports the relevant portions of the sacred narrative in his essay *On Isis and Osiris* 13.356B and following.

356B. It all happens on the 17th day of the month Athyr. The occasion for the death of Osiris is a *sumposion* attended by the god and 72 symposiasts who conspire to trick Osiris into lying down into a *larnax* ‘chest’ that fits him perfectly - and him only. Once the god takes his place in the perfect fit of the *larnax*, the conspirators seal it and cast it into the river, from where it floats to the sea. With reference to the sacred number 72, we may compare the number of assembled men in the narrative about the genesis of the Septuagint.

357A. The *larnax* containing Osiris floats all the way to Byblos, the Phoenician city that becomes the namesake for “papyrus” and “book.” Isis ultimately brings back the body from Phoenicia.

357D. The *eidôlon* ‘image’ of any dead person, when it is ritually carried around in a *kibôtion* ‘box’, is not just some ‘reminiscence’ [*hupomnêma*], Plutarch says, of the ‘sacred experience’ [*pathos*] concerning Osiris. The ritual act of carrying around such an *eidôlon* is in the specific context of a *sumposion* ‘symposium’.

357E. The mythical honorand of the ritual symposium, Maneros, is envisioned as the inventor of ‘the craft of the Muses’ [*mousikê*].

357F-358A. Seth finds the *sôma* of Osiris in the moonlight and dismembers [*dielein*] it.

358A. Then Isis looks for the parts of the *sôma* in a papyrus boat. The narrative adds an aetiology: how papyrus boats are immune from attacks by crocodiles.

358A. There is a different *taphos* ‘tomb’ of Osiris for each different ‘part’ [*meros*] of Osiris in different places throughout Egypt because Isis performed a separate *taphê* ‘entombment’ for each. Another version has it that she made *eidôla* ‘images’ for each polis in which Osiris is entombed.

As we explore further the metonymies linking the corpus of Osiris with the idea of a corpus of writings, we may focus on a reference in the *Suda* to the *Vita Isidori*, by the Neoplatonist Damascius (v-vi AD), featuring this narrative detail: the garments of Osiris were placed on the corpse of Heraïscus, and then “the sacred figures on the linen became instantly illuminated.” In his commentary on Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris*, J. Gwyn Griffiths observes about this reference:

Allusion is probably made to the mummy-wrappings on which religious symbols were often figured. Plutarch [3.352B] seems to have taken the further step of identifying these wrappings with the garments worn. He also interprets the garments as a *sumbolon* for the presence of the *logos*. In Egyptian practice the placing of a copy of the Book of the Dead in the tomb was clearly the custom which gave rise to this comparison - unless, indeed, there be a closer parallel, namely in the fact that passages of the Book of the Dead were sometimes written on the linen bandages which enfolded the mummy; figures of the gods were

also inscribed on them, see Budge, *The Mummy*, 344-345.

The Greek and the Egyptian metaphors about preserving the body for immortalization are well suited to the *preservative* phase of the ancient Greek literary canon, as embodied by the Alexandrian Library. Here we may contrast the concept of the Library with the concept of which it is a part, the Museum. As the ‘sacred precinct of the Muses’, this larger concept is well suited to the creative or *productive* phase of what we know as the Classical era of Greek literature, especially around the fifth century. From a Classical point of view, the Muses preside primarily over the production of belles lettres, only secondarily over their preservation.<sup>24</sup> Between production and preservation, of course, is the concept of continuation: for the scholar-poets of Alexandria, continuity is the preservation of the old canonical literature and the production of new non-canonical (or, better, meta-canonical) literature.<sup>25</sup> I should add that such a concept of *continuation* is perhaps the most ambitious metonym of them all.

Strabo’s description of the Library of Alexandria reinforces my central thesis: the Classical model of the Library is tied to the power, wealth, and prestige of its patrons. For the model to be Classical, moreover, it must establish a continuity with the most prestigious earlier models. For the Library of Alexandria, that earlier model was the Lyceum. Here it is relevant to emphasize that Strabo’s description of the Museum of Alexandria includes, as we have just seen, the term *Peripatos*, referring to one of the

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<sup>24</sup> Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer* pp. 58-61, 77n21, 188-189. When I say “production” I include composition-in-performance as well as composition-for-performance.

<sup>25</sup> Nagy, pp. 82-84. Performance, not just writing, can be an aspect of preservation.

salient physical features of the Library at Alexandria. Metonymically, this physical feature is also a notional feature linking the Museum to the Lyceum.<sup>26</sup>

As we can see from the description of Strabo, the Library was contiguous with the sacred precinct of the Muses, the goddesses of the performing arts.<sup>27</sup> In this case, the very idea of the Library can be connected with the political impetus to control the application of the spoken word by controlling the text and keeping it in a secured place.<sup>28</sup>

It is the Library of Alexandria that makes it possible to visualize as “virtual libraries” all previous collections of texts recording the spoken word, including the archaic models of Polycrates and Peisistratos.<sup>29</sup> The physical reality of the Library of Alexandria, that is, a comprehensive and holistic collection of the Classics as contained in scrolls stored on the shelves of its *bibliothêkê*<sup>30</sup> ‘book-repository’ and catalogued in the 120 *Pinakes* or “Tablets” of Callimachus,<sup>31</sup> becomes the virtual reality of the Library as a concept that can now subsume all earlier patterns of canonization or classicism.<sup>32</sup>

The comprehensiveness and holism of the Library at Pergamon, in general terms as well as in specifics, is based on principles similar to those of the Library of Alexandria.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I 320, 316, and especially 325 on the Lyceum as a model for the Museum.

<sup>27</sup> On the traditional role of the Muses as the divinities who preside over the politics of performance, see Nagy, “Professional Muse.”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* I 334-335, II 479-80, 493-494.

<sup>29</sup> For comparative perspectives on the term “virtual library,” see p. 62 of Christian Jacob, “Lire pour écrire: navigations alexandrines,” in Marc Baratin and Christian Jacob, eds., *Le pouvoir des bibliothèques* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996) 47-83.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Canfora, *Vanished Library* p. 141: the *bibliothêkê* should be understood as comprised of “all the bookshelves located in the Museum precincts.”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Jacob, “Lire pour écrire” pp. 56-69.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Nagy, “Ancient Greek Views” pp. 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Full argumentation in Nagy, “The Library of Pergamon.”



Whereas the primary metaphor in the case of Alexandria is “corpus,” it is “cosmos” in the case of the Library of Pergamon. Either way, the central idea is that of totality, wholeness.

In my article “The Library of Pergamon,” I survey the philosophical *and* philological models of “cosmos” as developed by Crates of Mallos for his edition of Homer, which I argue was a centerpiece for the academic prestige of the Library of Pergamon. As I argue further, the metaphor of “cosmos” is apt for conveying the expansiveness of the edition of Homer produced by Crates in Pergamon, to be contrasted with the compression of the text of Homer as edited by Aristarchus in Alexandria. The idea of a compressed edition of Homer fits the metaphor of “corpus,” inherent in the usage of the term *sôma* as a reference to the whole collection of the Library of Alexandria. Let me reformulate, one last time, the combined metaphor and metonym of the *Sôma* at the Museum of Alexandria: the body of the king becomes, by extension, the corpus of the library. The central metonymy is in the application of the metaphor of the body to the tomb of Alexander, and the physical contiguity of the tomb and the library can then bring to life the metaphor of the corpus.

From an Alexandrian point of view, the preservation of a corpus of books is ultimately a sacred notion. The preservation of the king’s corpus by way of mummification is the ritual dimension of immortalization. Just as the corpus of the king is preserved for immortalization, so also the corpus of books.

Here I may summarize my earlier argument. The Alexandrian idea of “corpus” depends, at least in part, on distinctly Egyptian religious visualizations of the pharaonic king’s body as a prototypical re-enactment, as it were, of the god Osiris, whose divine

body, according to the sacred narrative, is dismembered or disassembled in order to become ultimately reassembled as a model of eternal preservation.

The Alexandrian idea of “corpus” depends also on distinctly Hellenic religious visualizations of the cult-hero’s body as a sacred talisman of fertility, prosperity, and eternally recycled life for the community that worships it.<sup>34</sup> The conventional setting of hero-cults in gardens is a visible sign: the cultivation of gardens is coextensive with the cult of heroes.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the overall idea of the Library of Alexandria depends on the overall idea of the Museum, the sacred precinct of the Muses. Again, the visualization of this Museum, a garden with porticos filled with scrolls that preserve and perpetuate the belles lettres of the Classics writ large - especially Homer - is quintessentially Hellenic.

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<sup>34</sup> Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer* pp. 270-272.

<sup>35</sup> For an overview of garden settings for hero-cults, see Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979; 2nd ed. 1999) 174-210, especially pp. 207-208.