Diomedes on *Iambus*: Genre in Ancient Educational Sources
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As teachers and researchers we are familiar with the situation: literary genres are not the same in research as in the classroom. Indeed, generic categories often function as organizing principles in introductory courses to Greek and Roman literatures. We spend a great deal of effort teaching our students the definitions of epic, lyric, tragedy or comedy, just to go on and to blur the generic borders in seminars for advanced students. This is completely understandable: at introductory levels, genres are useful cognitive tools for mapping out new and complex literary landscapes. For that we need genres to be discrete, definable *per genus et differentiam*. A similar need was felt in ancient education, where generic categories make a schematic grid for organizing knowledge through generalization. What happens when we take the handbook, ancient or modern, for reconstructing the complexities of literary history? More often than not we realize that definitions cover but a minority of the instances that the ancient perceived as belonging to a given genre.

In Diomedes' *Ars Grammatica* (4th cent. CE) we find a section on the classification of poetry, *de poematibus* ('On Poems'). The piece appears as a patchwork of ancient scholarship, indirectly transmitting Hellenistic scholarship combined with Roman literary history, with Varro and Suetonius as major sources. In this paper I take Diomedes' definition of *iambus* (*GL* I, p. 485, ll. 11-17) as a case study for exploring how ancient handbook definitions of literary genres operate.

Diomedes defines *iambus* in terms of content and metre (*carmen maledicum*). He quotes an example (Hor. *Ep*. 12.1-2), explains the etymology of the genre's name (*iambus* from *iambizein*) and gives a short list of exemplary authors both Greek (Archilochus and Hipponax) and Roman (Lucilius, Catullus, Horace, Bibaculus). To which extent does his definition cover the traditional corpus of Greek iambic poetry? *Carmen maledicum* implies abuse or even imprecation, elements current in ancient definitions of *iambus* since Aristotle's *Poetics*, but found in only part of the archaic corpus (Rotstein, forthcoming, chapter 2). The etymology, though typical of the Greek lexicographical tradition, is probably wrong (*iambizein* derives from *iambos*), and Diomedes himself knew of more alternatives (*GL* I p. 476 l.18 - 477 l. 20). The example cited makes the epode paradigmatic, although no explicit references in that respect are available to us before Callimachus. Finally, the Latin poets do not comply for the most part with the definition they come to illustrate. In sum, Diomedes defines *iambus* by dominant features and traditional prototypical examples, ignoring fuzzy areas for didactic purposes (the "chunking" typical of human categorization, e.g. D'Andrade 1995, 42-5). Moreover, the definition is so strongly influenced by the Roman re-formulation of the genre that it cannot help us retrieve the early Greek *iambus*.

Handbooks may be dubious tools for reconstructing the past, but they are wonderful for exploring different historical 'ways of seeing' (Kapchan, 1995, p. 482). Diomedes' *Ars* circulated in the Carolingian renaissance and throughout the Middle Ages. It was published several times in the late 15th and the 16th centuries, having an impact on European humanists as a source of information and as a model of literary classification -- probably up today.