

## BOOK REVIEW

*Greek Epigram from the Hellenistic to the Early Byzantine Era*. Edited by MARIA KANELLOU, IVANA PETROVIC, AND CHRIS CAREY. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xix + 439. Paperback, £90.00. ISBN: 9780198836827.

Greek epigram was probably the shortest and the most enduring poetic form, found in grave monuments, dedications, vases and herms. From the latter 6<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards, the elegiac distich was the common meter used in Greek epigrams, although hexameters (and less frequently iambic meters) were attested in surviving inscribed epigrams before this century. From Hellenistic period down to the Byzantine era, the epigrammatic poetry was a dominant poetic form and brevity continued to be its main feature challenging skilled composers to “charge the words with the maximum amount of meaning” (2). The volume under review edited by Kanellou, Petrovic and Carey intelligently serves as a supplement to modern scholarship on Greek epigram and its reception to late antiquity and the early Byzantine centuries. This volume consists of six main parts each one presenting a different thematic perspective by renowned scholars of Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, along with a rich bibliography section, two indexes and, most importantly, a catalogue of the epigrams drawn from *Palatine* and *Planudean Anthology*.

### Part I: Encountering Epigram

The first contribution of this part “Reading Inscriptions in Literary Epigrams” (19-34) by Joseph Day presents its readers the self-conscious reading of literary epigrams (meaning that the author himself becomes the reader) providing an “ekphrasis of the text” as well as an image, a description of reading colored with many literary effects and these representations have something to say about the actual inscribed epigrams (19). This chapter leads to conclusions that projections, such as *deixis* (construed to fit a speech situation generated by vocal reading) and the description of the inscribed project in literary epigram work to fit or

guide representations, or prompt enactments, of reading imaginary inscriptions while viewing the imaginary inscribed objects (34).

The aim of the following chapter “Lessons in Reading and Ideology: On Greek Epigrams in Private Compilations of the Hellenistic Age” (35-50) by Andrej Petrovic seeks to examine papyri - testimonies of epigrams outside poetic books and to explore the compilations privately assembled for individual’s personal use (35). The dominant epigrammatic genres in these papyri – material are, first, the dedicatory and the sepulchral epigrams mainly describing older poetic *personae* and, second, handbooks that show the importance of disseminating Ptolemaic ideology, instilled through the portrayals of cityscapes (49).

The next chapter “A Garland of Freshly Grown Flowers: The Poetics of Editing in Philip’s *Stephanos*” (51-65) by Regina Höschel expresses some general thoughts on the artfulness of Philip’s design, illustrated on the basis of select examples, and reflects on the various forms of “concatenation” both within individual sections and throughout the anthology. Höschel’s main argument is that it is impossible to reconstruct Philip’s Garland fully, but we can still determine clear traces of patterning and, with reasonable caution, ponder links not visible at first sight. However, based on her arguments we can tell that Philip did not succeed in being a well-praised rival of Meleager himself (65).

The last chapter of this part “Epigrams on Authors and Books as Text and Paratext” (66-82) by Kristoffel Demoen, on the one hand, presents canonical authors and their works that have always been a popular subject in the epigrammatic tradition (with many features in literary form and pragmatic function) and, on the other hand, analyses epigrams often used as prologues or epilogues in the manuscripts of the works they comment upon, in which case they are found *in situ* as book epigrams and are known under the name “paratexts” (66-67). Demoen’s main purpose is to study in depth epigrams *in situ*, as they appear in the manuscript of the *Palatine Anthology*, and, next, to conclude that the nature of poems, their textual or paratextual “being,” indeed depends upon and changes with their location, regardless of their original intention (76).

## Part 2: Imitation, Variation, Interaction

The first chapter of the second part “Miniaturization of Earlier Poetry in Greek Epigrams” (85-101) by Annette Harder questions us about how several of these new developments (such as literary criticism or the resemblance of the erotic and sympotic epigram with elegiac poetry), in the creative reception of earlier poetry

began in the epigrams of the first generation of epigrammatists and progressed from there, and special attention is paid to the ways in which generic aspects and contents were investigated, as well as to the reception of earlier poetic genres as a kind of “miniaturization,” particularly of smaller genres (85-87). While later epigrammatists were featured by generic and thematic variation in much more obvious and explicit ways, the poets of the first half of the third century BC already display the possibility of this kind of development and “by their careful and still fairly isolated experiments seem to sow its seeds, but they clearly stand at its beginning” (101).

The following chapter “Variations on Simplicity: Callimachus and Leonidas of Tarentum in Philip’s *Garland*” (102-118) by Charles S. Campbell focuses on the poets of Philip’s *Garland* themselves and their affiliation both to their Meleagorean predecessors and to one another. According to Campbell, Callimachus and Leonidas offered the poets of Philip’s anthology “not just templates for formal imitation, but also models of poetic *personae* whose poetic and ethical outlooks served by turns as positive or negative models for the later epigrammatists’ authorial self-representations” (103).

The third chapter “The Riddles of the Fourteenth Book of the *Palatine Anthology*: Hellenistic, Later Imperial, Early Byzantine, or Something More?” (119-134) by Simone Beta explores the fifty riddles in *AP* 14; Beta successfully contextualizes these epigrams into the Greek and Latin ‘riddling’ tradition and studies the connection between these riddle poems and the convivial and satirical epigrams of the *Palatine Anthology*, gathered together by Cephalas in Book 11 (119-120). Beta makes a detailed comparison of the riddles of the *Palatine Anthology* with the well-known enigmatic conundrums in Byzantium from the beginning of the tenth century onwards (120).

### Part 3: Writing Death

The first chapter of Part 3 “Death of a Child: Grief Beyond the Literary?” (137-153) by Richard Hunter explores a well-known poem of imperial date on a three-year-old boy who drowned in a well (*GV* 1159 = *SGO* 03/05/04) from Notion, the port of Colophon. There is an irregular mixing of the verses in hexameters and pentameters (a feature of the inscribed sepulchral poetry) and we cannot exclude the spatial relation between a poem and any image it accompanies from the consideration of the pattern of the verses (139-140). Hunter concludes that the

three-year-old's narrative in the Notion poem is characterized by poetic reminiscence and the construction of a "literary" narrative of events of which the dead child cannot possibly have known, a sequence of events, one constructed for him by the poet out of familiar scenes, and one that absolves his uncle of any blame for the death (153).

The following contribution "Hellenistic and Roman Military Epitaphs on Stone and on Papyrus: Questions of Authorship and Literariness" (154-175) by Sylvia Barbantani describes military *arētē* as a common topic for dactylic poetry since Homer. The tomb (*sema*) is seen as bestowing ἄσβεστον κλέος ("immortal fame"), although a monumental grave alone is not enough for the memory of heroic deeds to survive (154). Barbantani explores in detail a vast choice of curious and interesting Hellenistic inscriptional epigrams related to the army and, finally, notices that the only two inscriptional military epitaphs preserved in the Greek Anthology belong to the category of anonymous, customarily produced pieces (175).

The next chapter "Tears and Emotions in Greek Literary Epitaphs" (176-191) by Doris Meyer examines the function and the role of emotions in Greek literary epigram. Meyer mainly states that he is restricted to the poetical representation of grief and mourning in certain funerary epigrams, while confronting poems that belong to different historical contexts and periods (177).

The final survey of this part "Sea and Land: Dividing Sepulchral Epigram" (192-209) by Michael A. Tueller explores the idea of separation in sepulchral epigram; the boundary between the sea and the land came to play an important part in this competition. The oldest strand in the development of this theme is the separation of the living from the dead. By examining this theme through the lens of an older, simpler, and more common motif, that of separation, we have seen the full connection between these epigrams and the ideas that animate the genre of sepulchral epigram as a whole. Tueller concludes that many of the variations within sepulchral epigram are projected as manifestations of the epigrammatists' efforts to reinforce these separations or to bridge them (209).

#### Part 4: Gods, Religion, and Cult

This part consists of two main surveys: the first contribution "Epigrammatic Variations/Debate on the Theme of Cybele's Music" (213-232) by Marco Fantuzzi explores the priests of Cybele that are perhaps the most popular priests in the Greek Anthology; more than a dozen epigrams survive from Meleager's and

Philip's *Garlands* that touch upon several aspects of Cybele's cult through accounts of her priests' and priestesses' dedications or funerary inscriptions. Fantuzzi's main focus is to examine the motif of the lion's encounter with the *gallus* in the cave that appear rather to highlight the miraculous powers of Cybele's music (213). The second contribution "Dreadful Eros, before and after Meleager" (233-246) by Kathryn Gutzwiller presents Hellenistic literary epigrams that could at times develop larger themes from Greek literature, especially when anthologized as a series; Gutzwiller here offers a little discussed set of five interrelated epigrams by Meleager on a single theme concerning the god Eros (*AP* 5.176-80). The nature of love as an epigrammatic motif reworks themes from earlier Greek poetry, art, and philosophy. By personalizing these themes through the voice of the epigrammatic lover, the poems in turn transmit the tradition about Eros in a format that influenced not only later Greek epigrams but Greek and Latin literature more generally (213-215).

#### Part 5: Praise and Blame

The first chapter of this part "Mythological Burlesque and Satire in Greek Epigram—A Case Study" (249-271) by Maria Kanellou describes the fact that several epigrams of the Greek Anthology (mainly erotic ones) use and adapt Zeus' erotic adventures with women and with Ganymedes; the fact that these poems span a large swathe of antiquity, from Asclepiades up until Agathias' Cycle, makes them fertile ground for a diachronic examination of the reception of myths in the genre. Kanellou's arguments reach into conclusion that both poets employ mythological burlesque for skoptic purposes: Hedylus openly attacks Agis, who has an unstoppable crave for fish, and Asclepiades censures more tactfully the transformed Zeus (249-254).

The following chapter "Epigrams on the Persian Wars: An Example of Poetic Propaganda" (272-287) by Federica Giommoni explores the Marathon epigrams included in the Cycle that have a clear propagandistic function, as they present an image of Emperor Justinian as the new Μηδοφόρος. The survey concludes that continuity in the use of particular symbols of bravery in an emperor's representation can be found in the literary epigrams from Agathias' Cycle analyzed in this chapter, as they use exactly the same motifs as a means of propaganda (285-86).

The last chapter “From atop a lofty wall . . .’ Philosophers and Philosophy in Greek Literary Epigram” (288-304) by Joseph M. Romero makes a foray into the subject of philosophers and philosophy in Greek literary epigram. First, Romero investigates epigram as a medium of praise or blame, where the philosopher or, metonymically, his philosophy is exalted or vilified in accordance with the conventions of the kind of epigram being written: funerary, skoptic, or some other kind. Then, he elaborately establishes the encomiastic and skoptic range that “philosophical” epigrams display and investigates a smaller set of poems, in which the epigrammatist takes issue not merely with the philosopher or a school of philosophy as an exemplar of the *genus grande*, but with philosophy in general (288-292).

#### Part 6: Words and Images

The first contribution of the last part “Greek Skoptic Epigram, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts” (307-323) by Lucia Floridi refers to the literary ekphrasis in skoptic epigrams in connection with the art of viewing. We observe that the skoptic authors’ final aim, when exploiting their audience’s ability to mentally supplement images of visual elements, is to elicit laughter, mostly at the expense of a given type of person. Even for this purpose, the resources of *enargeia* and *phantasia* might prove to be very helpful (322-323).

The following contribution “Ekphrasis and Iconoclasm Palladas’ Epigrams on Statues” (324-338) by Peter Bing examines the literary function of ekphrasis in Pallada’s epigrams on statues; Bing actually observes at the end that as it may, Palladas, like Heracles, is a servant of the *καῖρός*, the particular moment he lived in, inasmuch as he adapted traditions of ekphrasis to describe something new, a troubling phenomenon of his turbulent time: the disfigurement and transformation of divine statues (338).

The last chapter “Art, Nature, Power Garden Epigrams from Nero to Heraclius” (339-353) by Steven D. Smith explores the importance of the description of nature and garden in connection to power, as it is observed in a series of epigrams; epigrams grace the gardens of the powerful, and the gardens of the powerful have been memorialized in anthologies of epigrams (339). We could generally highlight that the inscribed epigram authorized by Sergius in Byzantine era represents only one interpretation of the patriarch’s garden, as Smith very well puts it, and it remains unknown whether other literary epigrams by poets of the

Heraclian age circulated and offered alternative interpretations of the same space (352-353).

In conclusion, this volume, as I mention at the beginning of my review, serves as a valuable - worth reading – supplement of Greek epigram since it explores its literary evolution and its consequent reception through late antiquity; many perspectives and functions are discussed, such as the different kinds of this literary genre, its form and its nature, that deserve further attention from modern scholarship. Well – known scholars, experts of epigrams, gather their knowledge to offer their audience valuable details about epigram anthologies, compilations and paratexts, as well as many literary aspects, such as the ekphrasis and the visual act of reading; I totally recommend this intriguing book that raises further questions worthy to be explored not only by Academics and students, but also by anyone who wishes to learn about the Greek epigram from its acme during Hellenistic period down to its reception in the early Byzantine era.

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