

A NEW HELLENISTIC POETRY BOOK  
P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309

by Kathryn Gutzwiller  
University of Cincinnati

The earliest Greek poetry books come from the third century B.C., and surviving examples include Callimachus' *Iambi* and *Actia* and Herodas' *Mimiambi*, known from papyrus, and a few manuscript possibilities, such as Callimachus' *Hymns* and portions of Theocritus. Collections of epigrams were also among the earliest poetry books, and Meleager apparently used these single-authored collections in compiling his *Garland*, which became the primary source for Hellenistic epigrams preserved in the later Byzantine anthologies. Up to this point, however, direct evidence for epigram collections has been slight, consisting of a few papyrus scraps containing contiguous epigrams, ancient references to the *Epigrammata* of various poets, and a small sylloge of epigrams attributed to Theocritus that descends in bucolic manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> The new Posidippus papyrus now provides us with an epigram collection securely dated to the third century B.C. The editors point out, on the basis of the care given to the script and outlay of the text, that this papyrus was the product of a scriptorium, not a personal copy. They also recognize that the arrangement of the poems was not just formal or convenient, but refined, aesthetically designed to appeal to a reading public.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most surprising aspects of the papyrus is its division into sections, each with its own title, placed within a column and centered. Nine such sections are clearly visible on the

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion, see A. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford, 1993) 3-18, K. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands: Hellenistic Epigram in Context* (Berkeley, 1998) 15-46; L. Argentieri, "Epigramma e libro," *ZPE* 121 (1998) 1-20.

<sup>2</sup> G. Bastianini and C. Gallazzi, eds., with C. Austin, *Posidippo di Pella: Epigrammi (P.Mil.Vogl. VIII 309)*, *Papiri dell'Universita degli Studi di Milano*, 8 (Milan, 2001) 24-26.

papyrus, and the editors believe that a tenth may be lurking in the scraps at the end of the surviving text. The Byzantine anthologies are arranged in similar categories, though of larger scope, and it has been argued that Meleager's *Garland* consisted of at least four such sections -- epitymbia, anathemata, erotica, and one other of less certain content.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the collection of Theocritean epigrams in the bucolic manuscripts, of uncertain date, is easily divided into three sections, but without transmitted titles. The Posidippus papyrus shows that this type of division goes back to the third century, though some of the headings are unexpected. They are nevertheless, I suggest, functionally connected to poetic arrangement in a way that the Byzantine headings are not. The editors point out that certain poems would fit in more than one category, especially dedicatory and sepulchral epigrams, and that some epigrams are only marginally related to the heading of their section. This is not, however, because the headings are formally inadequate or because the ancient editor was careless in his arrangement. It is rather because the sections are ordered to create a certain poetic experience and themes take precedence over formal categories.

Most of the epigrams in this collection belong to inscriptional types, connected with dedications, grave monuments, or art objects. Erotic and sympotic epigrams by Posidippus are known from the *Anthology*, but no example of this more personal, subjective type appears in the surviving portion of the papyrus. As a result, the voice heard most commonly in the collection is that is the objective epigrammatic narrator, who only occasionally addresses an internal auditor or ventriloquates other voices. Artistic arrangement for a collection of the more objective type requires that cohesion be achieved within the natural variety of epigrams dealing with a wide range of subjects and individuals; the Posidippus collection displays a number of sophisticated techniques for creating such cohesion. Thematic and structural similarities are easily emphasized by the grouping of poems within sections, and the most similar poems are often given contiguous placement. In at least two instances the collection contains two poems on the same topic that are placed side by side (I 24-29 and 30-35, II 17-22 and 23-28), creating a knot of density within the

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<sup>3</sup> Cameron (1993) 24-33; Gutzwiller (1998) 278-321.

flow of the collection's variety. There is also a remarkable amount of verbal linkage between poems, mostly contiguous epigrams, but strong verbal parallels occur over larger spaces as well.<sup>4</sup> This technique also appears in the longer *Anthology* sequences deriving from Meleager's *Garland*, particularly the erotic section, where the poet-editor links his own epigrams both to earlier epigrams that he anthologizes and to other epigrams of his own, through similarity of vocabulary and phrasing. In Posidippus the phenomenon seems, in part, a result of natural verbal repetitions in poems on similar topics, but over the course of the collection the links are numerous enough, and often repeated in key or identical positions within poems, so as to suggest that they function to foster continuity within the ever changing subject matter endemic to epigram books. Another important element for giving the collection cohesion is the rhythm of the arrangement within sections. Certain sections, like the short one on shipwrecks, are ordered for the purpose of variation on a given theme, as the problem of commemorating the drowned is differently focalized by the empty tomb, the grieving family, the deceased buried by a stranger, or even perhaps the sole survivor of a wreck. But in some sections unique or special poems are placed first or last, or even at transitional points between sequences within one section. And importantly, several sections also display a movement from the specific to the general, the private to the political, or the small to the large. These movements work to identify the political world encompassing the various subjects of Posidippus' collection, from its historical background in the Argead dynasty and Alexander's conquests to the three generations of Ptolemaic rulers who apparently supported Posidippus' poetic endeavors. More speculatively, I will argue that arrangement combined with interconnection between poems offers a key to the aesthetic principles underlying Posidippus' epigrammatic collection.

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, the phrase *καλὸς ἡέλιος* or *καλὸν ἡέλιον* occurs in three noncontiguous poems, always at the end of an epigram (II 32, III 13, VIII 30). This sort of verbal repetition argues strongly for a single author for the collection.

A quick overview of the nine sections will highlight major themes and the flow of the arrangement. I warn that this discussion is based on only a preliminary reading of the text and reflects my initial impressions, which will surely be subject to change. The gaps in the papyrus certainly hinder a holistic reading, and it is unfortunate that the first few poems have almost completely disappeared. We lack as well knowledge of the full scope of the collection, whether the papyrus breaks off near the original conclusion or continued with additional sections.

The first section concerns stones, and the title λιθικά suggested by the editors fits well the gap in the papyrus. It begins with a long sequence of (probably) 16 epigrams on engraved gemstones, several of which mention the stone's origin in India or Arabia, or a Persian context for the object. Most of these stones, then, became available through Alexander's eastern conquests, and at least two of them were carved by Cronius, who was mentioned by Pliny as a successor to Pyrgoteles, Alexander's favorite engraver (Plin. *HN*37.8). One gem appears to be an old Persian stone that perhaps belonged to Darius, and another poem concerns the famous ring of Polycrates, here engraved with a lyre belonging to a court poet, apparently Anacreon. This combining of contemporary subjects with famous predecessors of another era will appear in other sections as well.<sup>5</sup> The editors note that the first seven epigrams, as best they can tell, concern gemstones belonging to women, but they fail to notice that the transition from this group is marked at the beginning of the eighth poem concerning an enormous carnelian engraved with Darius and a chariot. That epigram begins, "No neck or finger of any woman wore this carnelian, but the lovely stone ... was attached to a gold chain" (I 36-38). Next is the Polycrates epigram, which opens with the narrator addressing the tyrant, who is a suitable archaic predecessor for the Hellenistic owners of gemstones, because, as Herodotus (3.40-41) tells the story, he loved his ring better than any other possession. The sequence then advances to stones that were engraved with special craft, so that they change their visual properties, show contrast between surface and background, or display very

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<sup>5</sup> On interest in collecting antique gems, see D. Plantzos, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems* (Oxford, 1999) 108.

miniature images. The gemstone sequence is followed by a shorter section on natural or extraordinary stones, culminating in a fourteen-line poem about a huge boulder cast up onto Euboea by Poseidon. The final epigram, not about stones at all though verbally and thematically connected to the preceding poem, is a prayer to Poseidon not to harm Ptolemaic lands with earthquakes. This poem brings closure to the section by its expansive reference to the Ptolemaic kingdom, which may be perceived as the setting from which the poet has made his comments on various stones -- from the small and artistically worked, to the natural and the unusual, to the enormous and threatening.

The next section, entitled οἰωνοσκοπικά, consists of 15 epigrams pertaining to omens. It begins with a sequence concerning bird signs, particularly as relevant for sailors, farmers, and fishermen. This initial group may suggest to the reader that the title is to be understood in its narrow sense, as bird augury, but the section then proceeds to omens applicable to other situations, some of which do not concern birds. The tenth through thirteenth poems involve military omens. One warns that a sweating god signals an attack on a city, and another delineates omens that helped the Argeads -- an eagle, lightning, and a statue of Athena that moved its foot, the latter appearing to Alexander before he attacked the Persians. The final two epigrams concern specific seers, one an unknown Carian and the other a certain Strymon who aided Alexander's campaign against the Persians with bird augury. The movement in this section is, then, from omens for ordinary people to specific military omens, with special references to Alexander's conquests.

The third section, given the title ἀναθηματικά known from later anthologies, consists of only six poems. The initial four concern dedications to Arsinoe II Philadelphus. In the first of these, a girl of Macedonian ancestry offers Arsinoe a linen handkerchief from Naucratis, which the goddess requested during a dream in which she appeared sweating from her labors and holding spear and shield. The poem links back to the war omens in the previous section, which included a sweating deity, and so fosters a theme of Ptolemaic inheritance of the Argead hegemony. But Arsinoe, who in her epiphany has ceased her labors, may here signal a *pax Ptolemaica* in contrast

to the military expansiveness emphasized in the omen section. In the next poem Arsinoe's temple attendant offers her a lyre brought from the sea by Arion's dolphin, in the third a freedwoman offers a phiale, and the fourth concerns Arsinoe's role as protectress of sailors commemorated in the temple built by Callicrates at Zephyrium. The final two poems are puzzling or fragmentary, but the section as a whole is dominated by the great queen Arsinoe in her various capacities as warrior, patron of sailors and poets, and protectress of the humble.

The fourth section, whose title is lost, consists of 20 sepulchral poems. The great majority of these are about women, and the section begins with epitaphs for initiates in the mysteries. Particularly interesting is a poem (VII 20-23) concerning a girl from Pella who was initiated in Dionysiac mysteries. As we know from another papyrus containing a poem by Posidippus, his so-called *sphragis* or elegy on old age (*SH* 705), the poet himself was a Dionysiac initiate, and a gold lamella from a Macedonian grave bearing the name Posidippus has been taken as evidence that one of his ancestors participated in the mysteries.<sup>6</sup> This section is organized, as is the sepulchral section from Meleager, by type of individual -- maidens, women who died in childbirth, old women who left many descendants. Only the last two epigrams are for men, both of whom died in their prime with loving descendants; both poems contain the theme of "no need for tears," which appears as well in Posidippus' elegy where it is connected with the happy life of the initiate.

The fifth section, entitled ἀνδριαντοποιικά, concerns bronze statues and links with the first section, dealing largely with carved stones. The connection involves both similarity and difference, since sculpting in bronze and carving in stone were conceived as antithetical forms of artistic creativity (*Arist. Eth. Nic.* 1041a). The first of the nine poems in this section begins with a direct address to sculptors: "Mimic these works, sculptors, and leave aside ancient rules for larger-than-life-size statues" (μιμήσασθε τάδ' ἔργα, πολυχρονίους δὲ κολοσσῶν, ὧ ζωιοπλασταί,

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<sup>6</sup> L. Rossi, "La testamento di Posidippo e le laminette auree di Pella," *ZPE* 112 (1996) 59-65; M. Dickie, "Poets as Initiates in the Mysteries: Euphorion, Philicus, and Posidippus," *A&A* 44 (1998) 65-76.

ναί, παραθείτε νόμους, X 8-9); it then proceeds to praise the new art of Lysippus in comparison with the old style of earlier sculptors. Serving an obviously introductory function, the poem was perhaps composed for this position in the collection,<sup>7</sup> and here the poet himself speaks, alluding to the subjects of the remaining poems in the section with the phrase τὰδ' ἔργα. The first of these works is a statue of Philitas, commissioned by Ptolemy and remarkable for the realistic manner in which the poet-scholar's old age and intelligence are represented. The sculptor Hecataeus is also praised because he constructed the Philitas statue in human rather than heroic proportions and so realistically that he is "like one about to speak." The following poem addresses the reader, or viewer, who is asked to praise the bronze Idomeneus sculpted by Cresilas, and the words that Idomeneus seems to speak to his companion Meriones are then quoted. The point seems to be that, even if the Idomeneus statue is heroic in subject matter in the older fashion, it is nevertheless so lifelike that the viewer may perceive the very words the figure wishes to speak. The following poems emphasize the realism, polish, or limited size of the bronzes; their subjects are an Alexander statue by Lysippus (a poem known already from the *Anthology*, 16.119), the famous cow by Myron (the subject of a long series of later epigrams), a self-representation by the sixth-century sculptor Theodorus in which he holds a miniature chariot in one hand and a file in the other, the colossus of Rhodes by Chares who made it only half the size the Rhodians wished, another statue by Myron, of Tydeus, and, lastly, another Lysippan statue of Alexander. This section obviously has something to say about the aesthetic principles of the age, as it reaches back to the late archaic and classical periods to find predecessors for the new realism, here associated particularly with Lysippus, the favorite sculptor of Alexander. In particular, I call attention to the symbolism of the Theodorus

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<sup>7</sup> The majority of the epigrams in the collection were likely occasional in nature, later gathered for collection. But this first poem in the statue section does not fit with known types of epigrams and seems particularly well suited to its literary context.

statue, with its clear allusion to miniaturism and polish;<sup>8</sup> it seems significant as well that this Theodorus was the engraver of Polycrates' famous ring (Hdt. 3.41), so that the epigram about his self-representation creates another (though unexpressed) link back to the section on stones.

The sixth section, entitled ἵππικὰ and concerning equestrian victories, contains 18 poems which appear, as the editors note, in two series. The first series begins with seven poems that celebrate victories in single horse racing or chariot racing by various men, including Callicrates of Samos. Some of these mention commemorative statues of horses or victors, and yet others seem suitable for inscription in such contexts. The next five poems all concern victories by Berenice II, including a Nemean victory which may be the same one celebrated by Callimachus at the opening of the third book of the *Actia*, and so datable to 247 B.C. In the first of the five poems, 14 lines in length, the speaker appears to be Berenice herself who calls upon all Macedonian poets to tell of her κλέος-- the victories of her grandfather Ptolemy I Soter, her grandmother Berenice I, her father Ptolemy II Philadelphus, and Arsinoe II, as well as now her own triumph in chariot racing. The next four poems about her other victories may be taken as Posidippus' answer to that request, and this reading is supported by the last poem in the series where the poet directly addresses the queen as internal auditor: "Only you, queen, brought it about that your house was so many times heralded as victorious at the Isthmus" (XIII 13-14). The second section of six ἵππικὰ has a similar structure. The first four concern victories by individual men and the fifth an Olympian chariot victory by Berenice I; the last is spoken by her son Ptolemy II, who celebrates the κλέος gained by himself and his parents in Olympian victories. The two sequences in this section, the first ending with a victory in the early 240s and the second with a victory in 284, may define, at least generally, the chronological boundaries for the composition of Posidippus' collection, as they praise the various Ptolemies who have supported his work.

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<sup>8</sup> Pliny *HN* 34.83 stresses that the self-portrait was famous because of its realism (*similitudo*) and fineness (*subtilitas*); for discussion of Theodorus, see A. Stewart, *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration* (1990) 1: 244-46.

The seventh section, entitled *ναυαγικά* concerns men who died at sea. While in the Byzantine anthologies epigrams on the shipwrecked appear in the sepulchral sections, here they are separated out.<sup>9</sup> This arrangement has the advantage of highlighting the difficulty of maintaining the conventions of sepulchral inscription in the case of death by shipwreck, since any tomb erected by the family will lack a body and any epitaph for a body found will lack name and homeland. This short section, referring in the first line to an "empty tomb," neatly works changes on this theme.

The eighth section consists of seven *ιαματικά*, or poems on cures. In the introductory poem a physician, who has discovered a cure for the bite of the asp, dedicates to Apollo a bronze statue of an emaciated man. The next five celebrate cures obtained by individuals, in several instances from Asclepius, while in the last poem, on a more general theme, a man asks Asclepius for moderate wealth and health, "two cures," the "high acropolis" for men's characters (*ἡθέων*).

The ninth section, perhaps consisting of eight poems, is somewhat mysteriously called *τρόποι*, and the editors debate the meaning of the title. The poems in this section that are still readable are spoken by deceased persons to those who pass by their tombs. Taking note of the phrase *ἦθη τε καὶ τρόποι* in Plato's *Laws* (924d), we may understand that here *ἡθέων* in the last line of the eighth section looks forward to the title *τρόποι* and that the ninth section concerns various character types, at least the first of which are revealed through their speech from the grave. If this is the correct interpretation, then this section displays the poet's skill at distinguishing and delineating particular or idiosyncratic character traits, just as Hecataeus' statue of Philitas is said to be lifelike because it was "made distinct with so much character" (*ὄσῳ ποικίλλεται ἦθει*, X 22). At this point, perhaps at the beginning of a tenth section, the text of the papyrus breaks off.

The new Posidippus collection is clearly a remarkable poetry book that deserves a much more detailed and careful reading than I have been able to give it at this point in time. The force of

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<sup>9</sup> It does appear, though, that deaths at sea were grouped together in Meleager's sepulchral section; see Gutzwiller (1998) 312-13.

many scholarly minds now being brought to bear on the papyrus will do much to illuminate the meaning of individual poems and to help us understand the fragmentary passages. But I suspect that in the end the most exciting discovery will be the way in which the collection as a whole creates meaning from the interrelationship of its epigrams. The strategic placement of references to monarchs, the Argeads and Ptolemies, defines the chronological and spatial limits of the multifarious individuals named in the collection. The grouping of contemporary subjects with key predecessors from the late archaic and classical ages suggests those portions of Greek heritage that shape Posidippus' artistic vision. The two sections on works of art, emphasizing miniature carvings on gemstones and accurate, realistic portraits in bronze, may reveal the aesthetic principles that underlie Posidippian poetics. As in the instance of Polycrates' ring, carved by Theodorus who polishes with a file, containing a representation of Anacreon's lyre, and specifically named a *sphragis* (II 3), the works of art described in Posidippus' collection are carefully designed emblems of his own epigrammatic art.