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INTRODUCTION

Ἆ μάκαρ, ὅστις ἦην κεῖνον χρόνον ἴδρις ἀοιδῆς,
Μουσάων θεράπων, ὅτ' ἀκήρατος ἦν ἔτι λειμών·
νῦν δ' ὅτε πάντα δέδασται, ἔχουσι δὲ πείρατα τέχναι,
ὕστατοι ὥστε δρόμου καταλειπόμεθ', οὐδέ πηι ἔστι
πάντηι παπταίνοντα νεοζυγὲς ἅρμα πελάσσαι.

(*SH* 317)

Blessed indeed the man who was skilled in song in those days, a 'servant of the Muses' when the meadow was still undefiled! Now, when everything has been portioned out and the arts have reached their limits, everyone else has a head start, and wherever one looks there is nowhere for a newly yoked chariot to drive.

These are the gloomy words of Choerilus of Samos, an epic poet writing in the late fifth century BC. Earlier writers have explored every avenue, have excelled in every type of poetry. What way is still untravelled by the chariot of song? Choerilus' response was to compose an epic poem which dealt, unusually, with a recent historical subject – the Persian Wars.

More than a century later Callimachus, most influential of all the Hellenistic poets, employed similar imagery in a famous polemical defence of his own approach to poetry. He rejected warlike themes and claimed that Apollo advised him not to use the well-worn high-road, but to drive his chariot along untrodden by-ways (*1–40*).

The texts collected in this book illustrate some of the highly diverse 'by-ways' followed by Hellenistic poets as they selected and combined elements from earlier writers to create a new, sophisticated type of poetry very different in tone and technique from anything that had gone before.

1 THE BACKGROUND[1]

By the middle of the fourth century many of the old Greek city-states had become weakened by decades of almost continuous warfare, and the centre of power shifted to wealthy Macedonia. Philip II of Macedon allied Greece with his own kingdom; his son Alexander conquered Egypt,

[1] Surveys: Walbank and Astin 1984, Tarn and Griffith 1952, Bulloch and Gruen 1993.

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Syria, Persia and Asia as far east as the Indus. At Alexander's death in 323 the empire was divided amongst his generals, and bitter wars ensued. By about 275 four main dynastic kingdoms had emerged:

(1) Macedon and Greece (capital Pella), ruled by the Antigonids, descendants of Antigonus 'Monophthalmus'.
(2) Asia (capital Antioch), ruled by the Seleucids, descendants of Alexander's general Seleucus.
(3) Asia Minor (capital Pergamum), which between 283 and 240 gradually expanded within Seleucid territory; ruled by the Attalids, descendants of Philetaerus (son of Attalus), who had administered Pergamum for Seleucus.
(4) Egypt (capital Alexandria), ruled by the Ptolemies, descendants of Ptolemy (son of Lagus), a Macedonian general of Alexander.

In Greece and Asia Minor the old city-states maintained their democratic machinery and had some local autonomy; but ultimate power resided with the kings, who lived in splendour at their courts, surrounded by official 'friends' and advisers and by large administrative staffs.

Rivalling the Athenian example of state patronage for the arts, the Hellenistic monarchs established their capital cities as centres of culture equipped with libraries, facilities for scientific enquiry, and schools of art and philosophy, the latter modelled on the Athenian Peripatos and Academy. The prospect of royal patronage attracted men of learning from all over the Greek world. These international centres promoted the exchange of ideas between scholars and artists living in close proximity, and resulted in an intellectual culture probably more unified than that which had existed in the πόλις-orientated Greece of earlier times.

The Greek language, too, became more uniform: a common speech, the basically Attic κοινή, was gradually replacing the ancient dialects. Doric did, however, continue in use in the Hellenistic period. (The stylized and artificial *literary* dialects, which had long since become linked with particular types of poetry, continued to be used by Hellenistic poets.)

During the second and first centuries the monarchies gradually came under Roman domination. Egypt retained a token independence until the death of Cleopatra in 30 BC. The deaths of Alexander and Cleopatra are taken conventionally to mark the limits of the Hellenistic period (323–30). Pergamum, Antioch and Alexandria continued as cultural centres well into the Christian era.

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2 ALEXANDRIA[2]

i. The social and religious background

Alexandria, situated on the western edge of the Nile delta, was founded by Alexander in about 331, shortly after his conquest of Egypt; his main aim was probably to provide easy sea communication with Europe. In 323 Ptolemy set up residence in the town and made it the seat of government; in 305 he declared himself king.

The Greek-speaking inhabitants of Alexandria were of immigrant stock, mostly from the mainland or the islands; some were from Cyrene, a long-established Greek city and centre of culture situated on the Libyan coast about 570 miles to the west. In addition there was a large population of Jews, Syrians, slaves and native Egyptians: it has been estimated that in the province as a whole the Egyptians numbered about seven million, the Greeks only about one hundred thousand. For those Greeks who were citizens, the trappings of democracy were established, but Ptolemy kept control of affairs through his own officials.

The first four Ptolemies were:

(1) Ptolemy I 'Soter' (a cult title often given to great benefactors). He reigned 304–282. For his third wife he married Berenice (I).
(2) Ptolemy II, son of Soter and Berenice I. He reigned jointly with his father 285–282, then alone 282–246. Both his wives were called Arsinoe. Arsinoe I was mother of, among others, Ptolemy III. Arsinoe II was his full sister; hence the title each carried of 'Philadelphus' ('brother/sister-loving').
(3) Ptolemy III 'Euergetes' ('benefactor'). He reigned 246–222. He married Berenice II, daughter of Magas, king of Cyrene.[3]
(4) Ptolemy IV 'Philopator', son of Euergetes and Berenice II. He reigned 222–204. He married his full sister Arsinoe (III).

It had not been unusual in Greece for divine honours to be paid to a great benefactor after his death. Hellenistic monarchs went a step further and instituted dynastic cults and ruler-cults as a focus for the loyalty and patriotism of their Greek citizens. Soter set up a cult of Alexander, whose body was buried in the city. A dynastic cult of the royal family was introduced by Philadelphus; it was administered by a hierarchy of

[2] General: Fraser 1972, Pfeiffer 1968: 87–279, Knox and Easterling 1985: 16–36, Reynolds and Wilson 2013: 1–18.
[3] On Berenice II see Clayman 2014.

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provincial priests who were official 'friends' of the king. Philadelphus and Arsinoe were worshipped during their lifetimes as Θεοὶ ἀδελφοί;[4] Arsinoe was in addition identified with Aphrodite[5] and with Isis, and after her death in 270 she was given a separate cult with its own priesthood. These cults, together with those of the traditional Olympian gods (especially of Dionysus, from whom the Ptolemies claimed descent), provided opportunity for public show as well as for ruler-worship. In 279 Philadelphus founded the Πτολεμαιεῖα, a festival with competitions in gymnastics, music, etc., modelled on the Olympic Games. A long passage from the historian Callixinus of Rhodes describes a spectacular πομπή or procession, an amazing pageant of the colourful and the exotic, which made its way through the streets of Alexandria in honour of Dionysus.[6] In the second *Idyll* of Theocritus (*574–738*) Simaetha describes how she fell in love whilst on her way to watch a procession of this sort.

Other deities, such as the Egyptian Isis and Osiris, and the newly introduced Sarapis, played a large part in religious life but left very little trace in Alexandrian poetry, which concerned itself with treating, often in novel ways, the gods familiar from earlier Greek literature.[7]

Native Egyptians worshipped the Ptolemies as pharaohs. It was at least in part in imitation of pharaonic tradition that Philadelphus married his sister.[8]

ii Alexandria as a centre of culture

The Ptolemies were themselves learned and cultured men: Soter composed a history of Alexander's campaigns; Philadelphus was interested in science; Euergetes published a narrative of his own entry into Antioch; Philopator wrote a tragedy called *Adonis* and founded a temple to Homer. Throughout the third century conditions were favourable to literature and learning. Patronage was nothing new: the Greek tyrants of the sixth and fifth centuries had earned praise from poets for their beneficence. But the Hellenistic approach was quite different. Under the early Ptolemies

[4] Cf. *1699* and n.
[5] See on *1945–56*.
[6] Callix. *FrGrHist* 627 F 1–2; Rice 1983; Hazzard 2000: 59–79.
[7] It has been suggested by some scholars that Hellenistic poets, and Callimachus in particular, not only adapt their subject matter to Ptolemaic political concerns but also make covert allusions to Egyptian pharaonic practice: Koenen 1993, Selden 1998, Stephens 2003. More sceptical are Hunter 2003: 46–53, Lightfoot 2013.
[8] For other possible reasons see Ager 2005 (imitation of Zeus and Hera; keeping the royal blood pure).

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permanent conditions were established for academic study totally at the royal expense. Facilities included an observatory, a school of anatomy and a zoo; but the most famous Alexandrian institution was the Μουσεῖον, literally 'shrine of the Muses', founded by Soter perhaps with advice from Demetrius of Phalerum, an exiled governor of Athens, pupil of Aristotle and author of philosophical works. The Museum was built close to the palace area. For those fortunate enough to secure royal patronage it provided free meals and accommodation and the opportunity to pursue research in most branches of learning, scientific as well as artistic and literary.[9] Given the Peripatetic (Aristotelian) influence on its foundation, it is hardly surprising that scientific as well as artistic and literary inquiries were carried on there. In overall charge was a ἱερεύς of the Muses or ἐπιστάτης, who administered rites for the patron goddesses. Such a concentration of scholars and artists in one place meant that there was ample opportunity for interaction between disciplines – and for disagreements. Timon of Phlius, a writer of satirical lampoons, drew an amusing analogy between Ptolemy's zoo and his well-fed scholars:

πολλοὶ μὲν βόσκονται ἐν Αἰγύπτωι πολυφύλωι
βιβλιακοὶ χαρακῖται ἀπείριτα δηριόωντες
Μουσέων ἐν ταλάρωι.

(*SH* 786)

Lots of pedants are kept penned up in multiracial Egypt, squabbling incessantly in the Muses' birdcage.

The scholars who flocked to enjoy Ptolemaic patronage needed texts from which to work. To facilitate their studies a library was set up at the same time as the Museum. (Again Aristotle's influence is likely: he is said to have been the first serious collector of manuscripts.[10]) The list of Chief Librarians during the third and second centuries, several of whom were tutors to successive crown princes, includes some of the most famous names in Hellenistic scholarship: Zenodotus, Apollonius of Rhodes, Eratosthenes (mathematician and poet), Aristophanes of Byzantium, Apollonius Εἰδογράφος ('Classifier'), Aristarchus (p. 9).[11] Under their direction the staff of the library attempted to collect and classify the

[9] On Ptolemaic patronage see Hunter 2003: 24–45; on the relationship between poets, especially Posidippus, and the royal house, Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004: 377–403.
[10] Strabo 13.1.54.
[11] On scholarship see Montanari, Matthaios and Rengakos 2015.

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More Information

whole of Greek literature; Callimachus, who probably never became Chief Librarian, compiled the Πίνακες, a 120-volume descriptive register (p. 85). Many scribes must have been employed in copying papyrus rolls of works commonly consulted; and other members of staff were sent out to mainland Greece in search of rare texts. Euergetes went to even greater lengths. He ordered that all books found on board ships which docked at Alexandria should be examined; and he borrowed from Athens for a surety of 15 talents the official performance texts of the three tragedians; then he kept the originals, sent back copies, and forfeited his money.[12] Philadelphus is said to have commissioned the κοινή translation of the Hebrew bible. The holdings amounted to tens if not hundreds of thousands of papyrus rolls. A large proportion of the books were burnt in 48 BC, when Julius Caesar was besieged at Alexandria. In that fire many rare works were lost for ever.[13]

The city long continued as a centre of learning, and the techniques of painstaking study and exegesis pioneered there spread throughout the ancient world. Modern Classical scholarship in these fields is part of an unbroken tradition which has its origins in the work of Alexandrian scholars.

3 HELLENISTIC POETRY[14]

i Problems

Serious difficulties face the would-be historian of Hellenistic poetry. In the first place, except for the plays of Menander almost nothing survives from the century preceding the generation of Aratus and Callimachus: little is known about the development of non-dramatic poetry during those years, and it is therefore hard to assess the originality of the third-century works which do survive. In the second place, both absolute and relative chronologies even for the works of the major poets are extremely uncertain. Callimachus, Apollonius and Theocritus in particular frequently allude to one another's work; but who alludes to whom in any given case it is usually impossible to decide. This problem is compounded by the fact that long poems such as the *Aetia* and *Argonautica* were probably recited as 'work in progress' over many years; this makes it quite likely that poets reacted

[12] These two stories are told by Galen: Fraser 1972: II 480–1 (n. 147).
[13] On the library see Fraser 1972: I 320–35, II 473–94. But the fragility of much of the evidence for almost every detail is emphasized by Bagnall 2002.
[14] General surveys: Hutchinson 1988, Gutzwiller 2007, Bing 2008, Clauss and Cuypers 2010.

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to one another's work actually during the process of composition. Thus even in the rare cases when it can be proved that one passage antedates another, the fact is of very limited use in establishing an absolute chronology. Moreover, several of the Hellenistic poets cannot be dated even to within fifty years. In the third place, only a small fraction of the poetry written during this period survives. Most of what does survive is broadly in line with Callimachean aesthetic principles (*1–40* nn.). But that may not be a true reflection of the popularity of those principles at the time. It seems quite likely that for every 'Callimachean' poem to have survived a hundred more traditional ones are lost. We have scant fragments or mere titles of many such poems, and their number is increasing as new papyri come to light. This is not to say that the new poets were less significant in their own time than they appear to us with hindsight; but clearly their criteria for excellence did not command anything like universal support.

In other words, a literary history of the Hellenistic period cannot be written. All that can be done is to consider the works which do survive and describe some of the broad characteristics which most of them appear to share – always bearing in mind that the sample is probably unrepresentative. On the whole, such generalizations are of limited value. It seems that the only characteristic shared by every poem in this book is that each is striving in its own way to be different.

ii Poetry and learning

Hellenistic poetry is often characterized as learned and allusive – as if the earlier epic, lyric, tragic and comic poets were not constantly indulging in puns and etymological play; as if they too were not preoccupied with roots, causes, origins and aetiologies. Every ode of Pindar, every play of Euripides bears witness to the fact that Hellenistic poets were not the first to display wide knowledge of myth or to exploit the possibilities of wordplay. Nevertheless, there is a palpable difference in emphasis between the allusive details of earlier poetry intended for performance and the learned nature of Hellenistic texts meant primarily for reading. That difference could be said to lie in the degree of self-consciousness, cleverness, subtlety or wit which Hellenistic poems display in their learning. Many Hellenistic poems allude to or echo earlier writers so as to draw attention to their own place in the poetic tradition and to point their similarities to and differences from past literature. Appreciation of this poetry requires an alert and learned reader: alert enough to spot an allusion, learned enough to remember details of a passage to which allusion is made. Allusion can consist in a single word or in the construction of a

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whole work. Callimachus wrote his *Hecale* (p. 86) for an audience familiar with the Eumaeus episode in *Odyssey* 15; appreciation of Theocritus' *Cyclops* (*493–573*) depends in part on its readers' remembering the words of *Odyssey* 9 and of a dithyramb by Philoxenus; when Jason and Medea finally meet as lovers (*Argonautica* 3.948–74) they do so with reference to Homeric encounters in battle; Moschus' *Europa* (*1344–1509*) requires knowledge of the Homeric Hymns, Aeschylus, Theocritus and Apollonius (see p. 241). These are texts to be read through other texts; learning and allusion are integral to their meaning.[15]

Even in the poor state of our knowledge about the Hellenistic poets' predecessors we can see that poetry of this learned and allusive nature did not appear fully formed in the early third century. It is clear, for example, that Antimachus of Colophon (born c. 440) anticipated many of the characteristics of Hellenistic poetry. His most controversial work was the *Lyde*, a long elegiac poem which dealt with heroes and heroines disappointed in love; the ostensible reason for its composition was the loss of his mistress Lyde. Antimachus was a scholar as well as a poet: he produced an edition of Homer often referred to by textual critics in the following centuries. The results of these philological inquiries can be seen in his use of rare Homeric 'glosses', words of disputed meaning, in his poetry; in addition he used rare words and neologisms, and was notorious for his obscurity. These characteristics point to a linguistic self-consciousness akin to that of Hellenistic poets, some of whom we know admired the *Lyde*.[16]

Of Antimachus' work only the most meagre fragments survive,[17] and it is not possible to say how he made use of allusion on a wider, non-verbal level. Nor can we be sure of the extent of his influence on poetry in the fourth century; certainly no evidence survives of other authors immediately following his lead. The next scholar-poet of whom we know is Philitas of Cos, born c. 320. He was described by Strabo as ποιητὴς ἅμα καὶ κριτικός; and, like Antimachus, he combined these two aspects in learned poetry.[18] He wrote a prose treatise called Ἄτακτοι γλῶσσαι, 'Miscellaneous Glosses', explaining rare Homeric and dialect words, which became a standard work of reference. It is possible that he was the first poet to concentrate on small-scale verse (e.g. the famous elegiac *Demeter*) as opposed to long

[15] This aspect, too, is not in itself novel: cf., for example, Euripides' pointed allusions to the *Choephori* in his *Electra*.
[16] Not Callimachus: see p. 89.
[17] Editions: Wyss 1936 (supplemented by *SH* 52–79), Matthews 1996.
[18] Editions: Kuchenmüller 1928, *CA* pp. 90–6 supplemented by *SH* 673–675D, Spanoudakis 2000, Dettori 2000 (grammatical fragments), Sbardella 2000 (poetic fragments), Lightfoot 2009: 2–98.

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epics. Callimachus pays tribute to him,[19] and Theocritus is said to have been his pupil. Propertius and Ovid allude to him as their inspiration for love-poetry, and to his mistress Bittis, whom he celebrated in elegies and epigrams. He is said to have been so slender (λεπτός) that he had to wear shoes with lead soles so as not to be blown away in strong winds.[20]

It seems, then, that Philitas was a pioneer of the Hellenistic approach to poetry. Ptolemy I had appointed him tutor to his young son, the future Ptolemy II, who was born on Cos; and it is likely that the poet followed his employer to Alexandria. He was succeeded as royal tutor by one of his own pupils, Zenodotus. In 284 Zenodotus was made the first head of the newly established library. He studied the Homeric epics, obelizing with a marginal mark lines which he thought suspect. The exact nature of his edition (διόρθωσις), if such it was, is uncertain; but his critical study of the text aroused much interest at the time, especially in respect of the controversial obelized lines. Like Philitas before him, he compiled a Homeric glossary, as well as a work entitled Λέξεις ἐθνικαί on foreign words in literary texts. During the next century and a half successive librarians, chief among them Aristophanes of Byzantium and the great scholar Aristarchus, edited and wrote commentaries on Homer and many other poets and prose authors.

Such was the atmosphere of critical scholarship at Alexandria. The word 'critical' is important here. Works of the past were being read not as formerly for enjoyment or moral improvement alone; rather they were being examined scientifically, explained, discussed, catalogued and classified. The individual word took on a new importance. Little wonder that poets of the Hellenistic period, most of whom were themselves scholars and grammarians, should include in their work Homeric *hapax legomena* (words occurring only once) and allusions to topically contentious passages; or that, themselves steeped in earlier literature, they should write for an elite of readers equally learned. Many aspects of these poets' work can be appreciated and enjoyed without this kind of detailed knowledge; but modern readers, who do not have even Homer by heart, are liable to miss much that is important, and can easily gain a false impression of tone, style and literary texture. One aim of the present commentary is to provide help towards a fuller reading of these sometimes difficult and allusive poets.

[19] See *9–12* n.
[20] Aelian, *Var. hist.* 9.14. On poetic λεπτότης cf. p. 91, 145 (but Cameron 1995: 488–93 is unwilling to see an allusion to this).

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iii The nature of Hellenistic poetry

Self-consciousness, learning and allusion have been discussed at some length because they are the aspects of Hellenistic poetry which readers have found most challenging. It is not necessary here to dwell at equal length on other characteristics, which will become clear from a reading of the texts presented in this volume. They include: great interest in the power of ἔρως and its workings; choice of unusual subject matter; pseudo-naive concentration on smallness, poverty and the simple life, paralleled by a concentration on smaller-scale, less grand types of poetry; novel fusions of metre, dialect and genre; variety of tone within individual poems, and variety of metre, dialect and subject within the oeuvres of individual writers.

Literary historians have suggested several possible reasons for the new direction taken by poetry in the Hellenistic period. One alleged reason is concerned with the function of poetry within society. Poetry (including tragedies and comedies) continued to be performed at festivals and competitions throughout the fourth and third centuries, and panegyrics of cities and their founders kept poetry in the public eye; but the decline of real democracy under the Hellenistic monarchies and the development of prose as a medium for communicating much that had previously been expressed in verse meant that the public role of poetry was far more limited than it had been in the fifth and earlier centuries. Many poets, it has been argued, began to cater instead for an audience of well-read private individuals. To this rarefied urban audience the simple life of rustics and the lower classes appealed because such people were outside their own experience and, paradoxically, exotic.

These and similar arguments could be greatly elaborated, but we should perhaps be wary of explanations couched in such general terms. Individual poets and individual readers are moved by a wide variety of motives, and the search for a single 'spirit of the age' can seem overly determinist. Truly circumstantial answers to general questions of this sort are unlikely ever to be found.

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