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Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic, Ivana Petrovic (ed.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram*. **Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv, 439. ISBN 9780521118057. $99.00.**

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Preview

As part of the new wave of interest in Greek epigram, partly prompted by the publication, in 2001, of the Milan Posidippus papyrus, M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic, and I. Petrovic offer a collection of essays, which is the result of an international and interdisciplinary conference on Archaic and Classical Greek epigram held in Castle Rauischholzhausen, Germany, in 2005. As the title indicates, the editors sensibly decided to shift the emphasis from Hellenistic epigram—the subject of a significant number of recent contributions—to epigrams from earlier periods, which have so far been seriously neglected by scholars: in general, they have only "rarely [been] analysed as literary texts, but rather for the historical information they convey" (p. 1).[1]

The collection contains 17 chapters, divided into two parts of different length (12 vs 4 papers). By way of an introduction, Chapter 1, which is written by the three editors, clarifies the object of investigation, its aims, and the intended approaches. After questioning the *communis opinio* according to which earlier epigrams served a merely informative function, existing only because of the objects they were inscribed upon, they suggest possible explanations for this dominant view: among these, the fact that verse inscriptions require specialization in different fields in order to be fully understood—such as ancient history, philology, and archaeology; this circumstance has led, according to the editors, to the paradoxical result that the epigrams have been ancillary to each of these disciplines. An interdisciplinary approach is exactly what the volume intends to offer. In what follows, I will characterise each part, but, for the sake of brevity, I will draw attention only to selected contributions. More general remarks will follow.

Part one, "contextualisation", tries to interpret earlier Greek epigrams by concentrating on the contexts in which they appear and which contribute to their meaning (they are reflected by the headings under which the essays are grouped). Thus we have discussions of questions related to the interaction between epigrams and passersby (Schmitz, Tueller, Vestrheim), as well as to spatial (Borg, Keesling, Lorenz), religious (Furley, Trümpy), historical/political (Higbie, A. Petrovic), generic/literary (Gutzwiller, Wachter) contexts. Papers concerned with visual elements are accompanied by well-produced illustrations.

Both Schmitz and Vestrheim start by considering that epigram stands apart from

other Greek literary genres because it was conceived from the very beginning as a written form, in an era when composition and reception of poetry was predominantly oral. Schmitz compares the ways in which epigrammatic and lyric texts engage their public, arguing that the strategies adopted by the two genres are very similar: both create imaginary roles for speakers and addressees, so as to construct a 'fictionalised' kind of communication; this leads to the conclusion that oral poetry involved a certain degree of fictionality, a fact denied by the supporters of a strong 'pragmatic' approach. A comparison between verse inscriptions—limited to sepulchral epigram— and lyric poetry is also drawn by Vestrheim, who tends to emphasize differences rather than similarities in order to show how the different circumstances of composition and performance affected the construction of 'voices' in the two genres. Although some of the distinctions drawn seem too schematic, he makes a good case that private Archaic and Classical sepulchral epigram tends to avoid individual features and to express, through a 'public' voice, shared views and values.

Dedicatory epigrams, in their connections with religious practices and mentality, are the focus of Furley's contribution. Particularly interesting is the discussion of what Furley calls the phenomenon of 'iconographic reciprocity': the essential ambiguity of the *korai* figures, which cannot be clearly categorized as either divine or human, is read against the background of Archaic religious mentality, where resemblance to the gods is taken as a sign (and guarantee) of their favor, according to a particular interpretation of the well-known principle of reciprocity (gods like men who are like them; men present the gods with god-like figures in order to obtain their benevolence).

A. Petrovic explores the ways in which public epigrams could function as producers of an 'official truth', i.e. how they were exploited by political authorities in order to display—and, to a certain extent, shape—a system of values.

Gutzwiller's essay is devoted to reassessing the date and purpose of the 'Aristotelian' *Peplos*, a collection of epigrams on epic heroes which is usually considered a Hellenistic product. Gutzwiller persuasively argues that the collection originally involved prose and poetry and was assembled by a Peripathetic author in the later fourth century. Epitaphs on heroes would thus represent a class of poems formed in the Classical period, linked to the cult of heroes and designed to circulate "both orally, perhaps in symposium games displaying knowledge of heroes, and in various texts, such as mythical compendia and local histories" (pp. 226-7); this origin might also account for linguistic variants and for the simple style of the epitaphs, often criticised by modern scholars. This important paper sheds new light on ancient epigrammatic books, hinting at the existence of particular kinds of epigrammatic collections, which could have functioned at least in part as models for the epigram books of Callimachus and his contemporaries.

Part two, "literarisation", concentrates on the transition "from stone to book"[2] and on the development of the literary features and strategies which were to be characteristic of Hellenistic epigram; imagery and language (Hunter), the birth of the technique of the art of variation (Fantuzzi), issues related to the employment of narrative strategies (Bowie) and ecphrasis (Bruss) are thus addressed.

Hunter explores the connection between Hellenistic epigrams and their earlier predecessors in terms of language and imagery. Particularly stimulating is the last section of his paper, where Asclepiades *AP* 12.50 = *HE* XVI is directly confronted

with its Archaic model, Alcaeus fr. 346 Voigt, in order to show, through a paradigmatic example, the "general sense of 'the literary'" (p. 287) which characterises Hellenistic epigram.

Fantuzzi investigates the origin of the 'Hellenistic' technique of the art of variation, a precursor of which has often been seen in the paired metrical inscriptions engraved on fifth- and fourth-century monuments. Through a careful analysis of the examples in *CEG*, he comes to the conclusion that the typologies of variation on a theme exploited by these Archaic 'predecessors' are basically different from their Hellenistic counterparts, because they do not explore the possibilities of competitive *poikilia*, but limit themselves to offering complementary voices and/or points of view. He thus demonstrates that the art of variation as such remains strongly connected to the development of a 'written' literary culture and to the formation of anthologies, where individual authors could engage in a sort of 'contest' with other poets.

Although the contributors analyse individual problems from their own perspectives, observations made by one scholar can prompt further thoughts on the conclusions reached by another. For example, Bowie (p. 372) makes the interesting suggestion that a shared victory in a competition for the (?) inscribed epigram could sometimes account for the engraving of more than one poem of the same length on a single monument. This fact—if proved[3]—could partly complement Fantuzzi's demonstration that the paired metrical inscriptions engraved on fifth- and fourth-century monuments represent only up to a certain point a precedent for the Hellenistic art of variation. If we assume that different authors competed in composing epigrams for the same occasion, the absence of the 'Hellenistic' art of variation in Archaic and Classical inscriptional poems would be a consequence of the genesis of the poems themselves, which would be composed at the same time by different authors, none of them acquainted with the work of the others; or—if these contexts were held orally—we can assume that the authors 'responded' to each other with ex tempore variations, which basically resulted in picking up the same theme, with only occasional linguistic reminiscences.

The fact that many of the essays collected in this volume reach (admittedly) speculative conclusions is a reminder of how tantalisingly scanty our knowledge is when it comes to the actual circumstances under which verse inscriptions were produced, received, and transmitted. Among the interesting questions to which this volume draws our attention is the role played by orality in the transmission and dissemination of texts so strongly and 'etymologically' linked to a written origin; whether the dimension of 'orality' can or cannot fully account for the repetition of phrases/expressions in inscriptions found in different areas and/or times is a question that deserves further investigation (a systematic enquiry into the often suggested existence of collections *ad usum officinae*, for instance, is still a *desideratum*[4]).

The attention here successfully devoted to a neglected period in the genre's history should also remind scholars that other periods, too, deserve to be further explored: Imperial (especially inscriptional) epigram, for instance, is another promising subject for a closer investigation (Fantuzzi's glimpse into paired inscriptions collected in *SGO* and *IMEGR*, with his conclusion that they basically share the characteristics of the previous centuries, provides an example of the direction research should take in the future; the reciprocal influences between inscriptional and 'literary' epigram are still to be fully explored, especially with regard to the question of how actual inscriptions responded to literary epigrams).[5]

The book concludes with a single index, which is basically a (selective) combined index of things and names; one regrets that an index of the passages discussed is not provided. This is all the more regrettable as several epigrams are discussed by more than one scholar,.

All in all, the interdisciplinary approach of this collection of essays will make it useful for those working in a wide range of fields, from archaeology to epigraphy, from ancient history to literature. Although many of the contributions are clearly addressed to a specialist audience, students and non-specialists alike will find useful insights on different problems (Trümpy's clear survey of dedicatory and sepulchral epigrams—to mention but one example—could be profitably read also by those approaching epigram for the first time). The fact that the Greek is always translated is a further aid in this direction.

There are remarkably few typos, and almost always of a trivial nature (δικαίοτατον for δικαιότατον, written more than once at p. 372, remains an isolated case).

Notes:

1. Exceptions include C. Tsagalis, *Inscribing Sorrow: Fourth-century Attic Funerary Epigrams*, Berlin/New York 2008, BMCR 2008.09.18, J.W. Day, *Archaic Greek Epigram and Dedication. Representation and Reperformance*, Cambridge 2010 (the two books, although mentioned by the editors in chapter 1, are not referred to in the papers, apparently because the bibliography in the essays has not been updated. This sometimes results in overlaps.
2. The expression is borrowed from K. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands. Hellenistic Epigram in Context*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1998, p. 47.
3. Bowie's interesting suggestion is based on arguments put forward by A. Petrovic, *Epigrammatic contests,* poeti vaganti *and local history* , in R. Hunter, I. Rutherford (edd.), *Wandering Poets in Ancient Greek Culture: Travel, Locality and Pan-Hellenism*, Cambridge/New York 2009, pp. 195-216 (BMCR 2010.01.05), and now rediscussed by Petrovic in this volume (pp. 205 ff.).
4. The existence of craftsmen's sample books is suggested, e.g., by A.E. Raubitschek (ed.), *Dedications from the Athenian Akropolis*, Cambridge Mass. 1949, pp. 424-31; see also Tsagalis's 'copybook-theory' (*Inscribing Sorrow...*, mentioned above, n. 1, pp. 53 ff., with further bibliography).
5. For examples of what can be achieved, see the contributions by M. Fantuzzi, V. Garulli and G. Agosti to A.M. Morelli (ed.), *Epigramma longum: Da Marziale alla tarda antichità / From Martial to Late Antiquity. Atti del Convegno internazionale (Cassino, 29-31 maggio 2006)*, Cassino 2008 (BMCR 2010.12.68).

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