

## ERUDITION AND SCHOLARSHIP IN GREEK EPIGRAM

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1] The scholarly climate of the Hellenistic age had a significant influence on the growth and development of literary epigram. As part of their competitive cultural politics, Hellenistic kings patronised science and scholarship as much as poetry, and many poets actively engaged in scholarly study themselves [23; 27, 67-279]. Their own and others' research in literature and science directly influenced their own poetic production [15], resulting in works which were avowedly learned (εὐμαθία, *AP* XII, 257.8) and the painstaking product of toiling, sleepless nights (→ *Agrypnie*). In → Alexandria, this interplay of poetry and scholarship was particularly encouraged by the → Ptolemies' patronage of two specific institutions, the Library and Museum [12, I. 305-479], but the erudite nature of Greek epigram continued well beyond the fall of the Hellenistic kingdoms, drawing on continuing scholarship and rhetorical training [22]. In epigram, as much as in other literary genres, we can witness this cross-fertilisation of scholarship and art in the poetry's frequent interest in literary history, recondite myths and language, as well as its allusions to contemporary science, medicine and philological debate. The genre itself also proved a popular medium for literary polemic, judging by the numerous poems we have that mock scholars' pedantic interests (e.g. *AP* XI, 20, 130, 321, 322, 347).

2] Literary learning is one of the defining features of Hellenistic and later Greek poetry, and epigram is no exception. The systematic cataloguing and classification of past literature in Hellenistic libraries (→ Bibliothèque) prompted an intensified interest in literary history: numerous epigrammatists dwell on the careers and lives of both contemporary and past poets (→ critique), especially in the form of fictive epitaphs, which express their sense of both rupture and continuity with former greats [3, 58-65; 30]. Moreover, their poems' dense and elaborate allusions to past and contemporary literature (→ Intertextualité) exploit a reader's expected familiarity with texts both common and rare (e.g. Pollianus' echoes of Callimachus, Parthenius, and Epictetus in *AP* XI, 130 [24, 188-193] or Fronto's euphemistic use of canonical Menandrian titles in *AP* XII, 233 [25, 120-122]). Formal scholarly interests in → metre, → dialect and genre also manifest themselves: from the Hellenistic period onward, epigrammatists manipulated newly-codified generic boundaries to toy with the limits of their own genre [5, 389-425] and encapsulated core features of other genres into their own poetry (so-called → Mélange des genres); dialectal variants were exploited for a variety of literary and cultural effects [7; 8; 29]; and epigrammatists freely experimented with metrical forms [9, 39 n.155], often with striking results, as in Erucius' elaborate imitation of galliambics in *AP* VI, 234 [5, 454-5]. The scholarly editing and ordering of earlier texts into poetry books also influenced epigrammatists' arrangement of their own poems, as poets became artful editors of their own collections (→ Poète-éditeur), while the very textuality of the written epigram inspired a host of visual literary games and *technopaignia* [21], as poets played with the distinction between → image and text [35; 36]: these include → acrostics,

which spell out a word or phrase at the start of consecutive lines (e.g. ΘΕΙΕ, *AP* VI, 330; ΓΕΡΜΑΝΟΥ, *AP* XIV, 148; and the *abcdaria* of *AP* IX, 385, 524, 525); more complicated varieties of acrostics, in which a single word is hidden in a string of separate words (e.g. ΚΡΑΝΙΟΝ, *AP* V, 74 [16]); palindromic *anacyclica*, which can be read both forwards and backwards, without disrupting metre or sense (e.g. Nicodemus of Heraclea, *AP* VI, 314-20, 323; IX, 53); → isopsephy, the art of using Greek letters' numerical value to produce couplets or individual verses of equal value (e.g. → Leonides of Alexandria); and → *carmina figurata* which are written in the shape of the objects they describe [18].

3] Greek epigrammatists also display a learned interest in philology and → language. This is visible in their etymological play and puns, such as Ammianus' exploitation of the common etymology for Apollo from ἀπόλλυμι, 'I destroy' (*AP* XI, 188) and punning collocation of φθειρῶν, 'lice', and φρενῶν, 'brains' (*AP* XI, 156) [11, 90-93]. They also flaunt their knowledge of foreign words (e.g. Meleager's combination of the Syrian σάλαμ, Phoenician ναίδιος and Greek χαῖρε, *AP* VII, 419), alongside their mastery of technical vocabulary (e.g. Leonidas of Tarentum's lists of craftsman's tools, *AP* VI, 204-5 [5, 450-3]). But their most learned exploitations of language come in their allusions to lexicographical research. Hellenistic and later scholars compiled lists of rare or obsolete words, especially from epic and lyric poetry (known as *glossai*), whose meanings were often unclear or disputed. Like poets of other genres [28], Epigrammatists relished using such *glossai* not only to display their erudition, but also to signpost an intertextual connection with pinpoint precision or indicate their preferred interpretation of a word's meaning [5, 426-450; 32]: Callimachus' use of the Homeric *hapax legomenon* συνέριθος, for example, directly evokes the innocent world of Nausicaa's Scheria (*AP* VII, 459.3; *Od.* 6.32) [32, 405], while various epigrammatists took differing sides in interpreting the meaning of the Homeric *hapax legomenon* κρήγυον (*Il.* 1.106), which was understood by some to mean 'good', but by others to mean 'true': see Asclepiades *AP* VII, 284.5; Archias *AP* V, 58.1; Leonidas of Tarentum *AP* VII, 648.9, *AP* IX, 335.2; Theocritus *AP* 13.3.3 [31, 205; 32, 396]. In so doing, poets conducted exegesis and interpretation through their own poems: epigram became an active form of literary criticism and commentary.

4] However, erudition in epigram is not limited to the spheres of language and literature. Epigrammatists also exhibited a broad range of knowledge and learning in other fields, including:

- Aetiology: e.g. Dioscorides on the foundation of a shrine to the Magna Marta (*AP* VI, 220) and on the invention of the double flute for Cybele (*AP* IX, 340); Hedylus on the origins of the deer sanctuary at Kourion's temple of Apollo Hylates (*SH* 459) [5, 97-114].
- Astronomy: e.g. Antipater of Thessalonica on two bowls that together represent the whole celestial sphere (*AP* IX, 541); Philodemus on a certain Anticrates' star-signs (*AP* XI, 318).
- Botany: e.g. Meleager's list of plants, fruits and flowers in his prefatory epigram (*AP* IV, 1), cf. Theophrastus' *Historia Plantarum*.
- Ethnography: e.g. Philodemus' epigram on the beauty of the black woman Philaenion (μελανεῦσα), whose hair is more curled than parsley (σελίνων οὐλοτέρη, *AP* V, 121); cf. Asclepiades on the black Didyme (μέλαινα, *AP* V, 210) [34].

- Geography and Topography: e.g. Callimachus's possible allusion to scholarly debate about the distance between Mounts Ida and Dicte (*AP* VII, 518) [5, 207-9]
- Local Antiquarianism: e.g. epigrams by Theodoridas (*AP* VI, 156) and Euphorion (*AP* VI, 279) on epichoric hair-cutting traditions [5, 294-306]
- Mathematics: e.g. Eratosthenes' epigram on duplicating the cube (fr.35 Powell, p.66) [20]; Archimedes' epigrammatic *Cattle Problem* (*SH* 201) [2; 19]
- Medicine [5, 216-242]: e.g. Callimachus' epigram on the cures of love (*AP* XII, 150) [10]; Asclepiades' manipulation of the language of disease (*AP* XII, 46).
- Mythology: e.g. Antipater of Thessalonica's mention of Sleep's wife, Pasithea (cf. *Il.*14.275-6), and mythical musicians in *AP* IX, 517 [30, 381-383]; numerous epigrams evoking Trojan myth [14].
- Paradoxography: e.g. Posidippus on the θαυμάσιον τέρας of a double magnet (*AB* 17) [4, 132-5; 17, 88-92]; Archelaus Chersonesites' epigrams on creatures that emerge from animal corpses (*SH* 125-9, *FGE* pp. 20-24).
- Philosophy [5, 66-94; 6]: e.g. Meleager's treatment of Democritean theories of vision (*AP* XII, 127); Callimachus' engagement with Platonic doctrine [1].
- Zoology and Life Sciences: e.g. Callimachus' epigram on the nautilus shell (14 *HE*), which draws on Aristotle's account of the animal [13], and Posidippus' *Lithika*, a section which owes much to prose treatises like Theophrastus' *On Stones* [33].

5] The concise nature of epigram evidently made it an attractive and successful vehicle for the display of much learning and erudition from a variety of spheres. But we should not simply take this as a sign that literary epigram was solely designed for or read by a highly esoteric and cloistered elite; for there is in fact evidence that it was read and enjoyed by a considerably wider audience. Epigrams feature alongside Homer, tragedy and comedy in school anthologies from the Hellenistic period (e.g. *SH* 978-9) [26], while the very nature of Greek education, with its emphasis on the texts of Homer and an atomistic focus on individual words, facts and language, is not worlds apart from many of the erudite interests we have discussed above (see e.g. the schooling question-and-answers of Aristophanes *Daitales* [*Banqueters*], fr. 233 K.-A.; Herodas 3.24-6). Much of the learning on display in epigram would thus be, at least to some degree, familiar and accessible to a relatively broad audience.

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