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La nascita del titolo nella letteratura greca: Dall'epica arcaica alla prosa di età classica

Emanuele Castelli, *La nascita del titolo nella letteratura greca: Dall'epica arcaica alla prosa di età classica. Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte*, 148. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. Pp. xvi, 373. ISBN 9783110703627 \$126.99.

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Preview

The reader should not be surprised if this volume, despite its declared focus on “the birth of the title in Greek literature,” starts with a thorough discussion of Umberto Eco’s novel *Il nome della rosa*, because it constitutes a wonderful test case to introduce the multifaceted senses and the intrinsic importance of the title for a work and for literary studies in general.

A title can be broadly defined as the designation of a book, written at the margins of the very text: in the introduction, Castelli preliminarily discusses its multifarious purposes, in particular as “name” of the book and as information about its contents. He then starts his introductory remarks by tracing two main divides in the history of scholarship on titles in Greek literature. The first is chronological: before and after the rise of the papyri as writing media. Studies have concentrated especially on the latter phase, which is better known thanks to the material evidence, but it reflects the phenomenon at an already developed and established stage. Conversely, discussions of the blurred origins of titles have usually focused on poetry. Castelli, on the contrary, correctly underlines the importance of prose, too, to evaluate the entire issue, and he further notices that the understanding of ancient titles—their functions, formats, origins—is complicated by the differences in the citations by the sources: a primary methodological issue that is discussed at the end of the introductory part.

The second part deals with titles in archaic Greek poetry. A main baseline of Castelli’s discussion is the inherent lack of titles in compositions that were transmitted orally: they were useless as the contents to be sung were declared by the Homeric bards in the proems and by the poets in the incipits. As regards Homer, Castelli endorses the hypothesis that the titles Ἰλιάς and Ὀδύσσεια came from more general epic material—the songs about the Trojan war, on the one hand, and those dealing with Odysseus, on the other—later adapted and adopted for two specific selected masterpieces, likely after their written fixing. I would underline the statement that links title implementation to writing (p. 70), since it is the general bottom line of the monograph. As regards the titling of each Homeric song after the alphabetic letters, Castelli wisely restricts himself to setting out the main current theories, because no definitive statement can be made about such earliest phenomena without indisputable sources, which are lacking.

The archaic performative dimension of text circulation is correctly regarded as the reason why lyric compositions were continuously known, mentioned, and named after their incipits. However, Castelli notes that archaic poetry partially laid the foundations for the later emergence of literary titles, thanks to a few yet significant cases of the poet’s will to personally present himself as the author of the verses. Hesiod, Phocylis, and Theognis make their authorial presence explicit by including their names within the very text of their compositions,

overcoming the aedic anonymity and moving towards a full awareness of authorship as authority and as claim for poetic skills and immortal memory. Castelli notices that Phocylis' declaration of authorship—τόδε Φωκυλίδεω—recalls archaic inscriptions expressing property and possession. This is a relevant point that deserves deeper attention, because it recalls attested cases of literary writings deposited in temples as forms of sacred dedication and authorial copyright grant,^[1] as well as the famous herms disseminated in Attica with the tyrant Hipparchus' wise phrases (μνῆμα τόδ' Ἰππάρχου κτλ.: [Plat.] *Hipparch.* 229a-b). All such examples connect the (sacred) dedication of a written text to instances of publication, preservation, identification, and self-declaration; these are all instances that would fall into the purposes of written titles.

Athenian drama more directly alerts us to the interplay between titles and authorship. Castelli strengthens with a detailed examination Wilamowitz' intuition about the distinction between a “theatre” stage and a “book” stage in the development of tragedies and comedies. In the former phase, titles (above all, the indication of the authors' names) could have served the purpose of official registration of the competing plays, though the sources leave room for different possible scenarios. Conversely, the title must have played a central role in the writing down of the texts, to stress authorship in a sort of ante-litteram copyright and to promote circulation and celebrity. Some side considerations deal with the problem of tragic tetralogies (the titles of which most probably coexisted with the specific titles of the single plays) and provide a systematic analysis of the transmission of the titles in the manuscript tradition, which is a recurrent feature of this research.

Castelli's core argument—titles in ancient Greek literary prose—is the topic of the third, wider part of the monograph. Castelli convincingly challenges Nachmanson's idea that early written laws (usually considered among the earliest instances of prose) exhibited a prefatory title, showing that the few extant examples only bear proemial indications to be read and recorded as organic parts of the texts, just as in lyric poetry and in the other above mentioned epigraphical formats. The same goes for the earliest Ionic prose, which was originally conceived for oral lectures and, as Castelli properly remarks, again deployed the strategy of including a proemial indication of authorship. A recurring incipit—“these things does NN say” or the like—is retrieved in Hecataeus, Alcmaeon, Antiochus of Syracuse, and likely also Heraclitus, allowing for the definition of a tradition of prose proems, reflected in the attested use of citing the works by quoting their incipits, while a proper title (e.g., *περὶ φύσεως*) is likely a later product, as the attestations of multiple titles for the same work (e.g., Pherecydes' theology in prose) show.

The development of literary writing between the 5th and the 4th century BC is presented as the very turning point towards a publishing concept of book production and circulation, the Sophists being the clearest motive force. Three consequent innovations produced a new framework for the development of literary titles: the book functions (i) as a product for preservation and private reading; (ii) as a repository of intellectual legacy; and (iii) as a homogeneous space for complex textual architectures. By uniting these three functions into one object, the book, as an intellectual product, at this point acquires a material specificity, of which both writers and readers were aware.

A first consequence is seen in Herodotus, who changed the traditional literary preamble by directly referring to his own product and explicitly calling it ἀπόδεξις ἱστορίας. It is a further literary development of the epigraphic uses evoked above and here discussed in more detail. Herodotus' innovation, in Castelli's view, is therefore the awareness of the independence of the written text as an object of transmission and as a testimony of a cultural framework. A final short discussion of the traditional articulation of the *Histories* in nine books named after the Muses recognises them as a later invention.

Thucydides followed the same path in presenting himself personally in the proem of his work and declaring its subject (τὸν πόλεμον), with a further innovation: the recurring closing formulas at the end of the narrative of each year of war (with irregularities due to the part drafted nature of his work), mentioning the contents of the preceding section and the author's

name. As Castelli notes, this could have been aimed at organising the oral performance of the work and maybe also its transcription onto several papyrus rolls.

The real turning point is recognised in Xenophon, who never declared his own name at the opening of his works despite using first-person introductory verbs. This fact is convincingly attributed to the existence of proper titles, indicating the author's name and the text's subject in a separate position with respect to the very text. The explanation offered for this innovation is twofold: the general intellectual framework in the first half of the 4th century BC, when book culture was by then stabilised and widespread, as well as Xenophon's personal production of several different texts, not one masterpiece like Herodotus and Thucydides, which made it essential to distinguish each product with an official "name." According to Castelli's acute intuition, this produces a basic stability of Xenophon's titles (which are also thoroughly examined in the light of the ancient sources) in the Byzantine and later manuscript traditions, contrary to what is noted apropos of the earlier writings, including the previous historians' texts.

Xenophon is therefore regarded as the main example of 4th-century prose trends. Here, as usual, Castelli's discourse is twofold. Reflections on the origins of the titles intertwine with thorough analyses of the titles themselves and of their traditions, between ancient sources and later manuscript transmission. He first considers Philistus' and Theopompus' historical works, in which he recognises similar evidence of original extra-text titles. As regards the orators, Isocrates—with his explicit interest in the material preservation and the publishing circulation of his own works—is opposed to Demosthenes; since the latter was less interested in the dissemination of his products, their titles were therefore set not by Demosthenes himself but by his supporters. Philosophy, after a short discussion of Protagoras' problematic title, is dominated by the characters of Plato and Aristotle.

Contrary to Nachmanson, Castelli convincingly argues that Plato did systematically name his own dialogues with autonomous titles, supporting this view with the similarity between philosophical "scenic prose" and the theatrical works (it is noteworthy that most of Plato's works are named after their main characters, just as plays are) and with Plato's own interest in underlining authorship. More blurred are the origins of the "secondary titles" of Plato's dialogues, added to clarify their specific topics: it is impossible to state whether they were originally imposed by the author himself or by his successors.

Finally, Castelli evokes Aristotle's systematic attitude in study and research, which led him make abundant use of titles in the references and quotations scattered among his treatises, depicting him as the best and ultimate witness of a book practice by then established and widespread. Nevertheless, Aristotle himself could have had quite diverse approaches towards his own written products: Castelli reasonably recalls the distinction between the internal and the external destination of the philosopher's works, and his epigones' primary role in the arrangement of them after his death.

Before the conclusions, which summarise the main points of the book, a chapter includes reports and personal reflections about the physical appearance of ancient titles: their actual position in the "books;" the limits of their ancient pictorial representations, subject to iconographic conventions; and a lexical study of the occurrences of ἐπιγραφή and ἐπίγραμμα, which point to "displayed writings," clarifying the idea of an attached paratext.

Finally, an appendix deals with the intriguing question of the original title of the first part of Xenophon's *Hellenica*. Here, Castelli restates Niebuhr's hypothesis about a basic bipartition of the work, that the first two books are a plain continuation of Thucydides and therefore titled Θουκυδίδου παραλειπόμενα, while the rest is the original narration titled Ἑλληνικά. After a thorough examination of ancient sources and manuscript witnesses, with new remarkable outcomes in the study and identification of the codices, he concludes that no decisive statement can be cast without a more general reassessment of the entire matter.

The appendix, in fact, is the perfect example of Castelli's properly philological approach to the

matter: ancient sources, manuscript tradition, and modern scholarship are always critically contrasted and acutely discussed in an attempt to reconstruct the prehistory and the early history of titles in ancient Greek literature. In most cases, this line of enquiry has born new and certain fruits with respect to preceding scholarship. An overall positive result is then to be stressed: Castelli's monograph allows for reconsidering the literary title as an established pre-Hellenistic phenomenon deeply connected—from the parallel perspectives of materiality and function—with the development of literary writing and the emergence of book culture and of the consequent publishing attitudes. What we actually see in the papyri of Greek and Roman times is therefore just the end of a long process, which is now masterfully illuminated by this monograph.

Notes

[1] L. Perilli, *Conservazioni dei testi e circolazione della conoscenza in Grecia*, in *Biblioteche del mondo antico*, ed. A.M. Andrisano, Rome 2007, 36-71; N. Reggiani, *Dalla magia alla filologia*, "Papyrotheke" 1 (2010), 97-135: 111-113.