

Dissertationes Batavae

Klooster, J.J.H. 2009. *Poetry as Window and Mirror. Hellenistic Poets on Predecessors, Contemporaries and Themselves*. PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 287 p. Promotores: prof.dr I.J.F. de Jong, prof.dr A.M. van Erp Taalman Kip, University of Amsterdam.

One of the main concerns of Hellenistic poets was their relation to other poets, both predecessors and contemporaries. This study discusses this relation by applying a close reading to many primary texts, but also by looking at them from the angle of modern sociological theories, in particular “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm), “cultural memory” (Assmann) and “the field of cultural production” (Bourdieu).

The first part of the book focuses on reasons for the Hellenistic concern with the literary past and discusses representations and evaluations of *historical* predecessors in literary epitaphs. It is also discussed how these predecessors function as characters in poetry to guarantee a poet’s authority to modify his literary examples. The appropriation of such historical poets, whose works were extant, was not without problems, a fact subtly acknowledged by the Hellenistic poets. Finally, the roles of Orpheus in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, and Daphnis and Comatas in Theocritus’ *Idylls* are studied. It is argued that these *mythical* poets (who left no undisputed literary works) could be modelled more easily to foreshadow the practices of Hellenistic authors; they represent examples of invented tradition.

The second part addresses criticism and praise among contemporaries. Remarks on the poetics of a colleague often have *rhetorical* rather than aesthetical value: the aim is to create a position in the Hellenistic field of literary production.

Finally, self-representation is discussed. *Sphragis*-poetry is interpreted as the counterpart of literary epitaphs on predecessors, and related to the technique of creating enigmatic first person speakers unidentifiable with the historical author or his poetic persona. Both the wish to broadcast an unambiguous persona and the ability to confuse the reader by creating an ambiguous first person speaker may ultimately be explained from the fact that Hellenistic poetry was poetry by readers, and intended for readers. The frequent creation of enigmatic *sphrageis* by means of ‘etymologizing’ receives particular attention in this context. The question

of poetic inspiration and authority is broached in the discussion of the Homeric hapax *hupophêtês* and its cognate *hupophêtôr* in Theocritus and Apollonius respectively. The final conclusion evaluates the importance of the social sphere and the position in literary tradition occupied by Hellenistic poets. It emerges that they use the poetry of others as an object to reflect on and to reflect themselves and their own concerns in, a window and mirror.

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