Klooster, J.J.H.

Published in:
Bryn Mawr Classical Review

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Reviewed by Jacqueline Klooster, University of Amsterdam (j.j.h.klooster@uva.nl)

Preview

This book, a revised version of Margherita di Nino’s 2005 doctoral thesis at the Università degli Studi di Bologna, is a study of the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the epigrams on the so-called New Posidippus (*P. Mil. Vogl. VII 309*), with a specific focus on two sections of this papyrus, the *nauagika*, epitaphs for those drowned at sea, and the *iamatika*, epigrams dealing mainly with miraculous cures ascribed to Asclepius. The main part of the book is concerned with placing the epigrams in these two sections in their cultural and literary context by linguistic and thematic comparison with material from Greek and Latin inscriptions and literature; in the case of the *iamatika*, in particular, inscriptions from Epidaurus and Lebena. The study takes the form of a philological commentary on each separate poem, followed by discussion of general themes in the whole papyrus section. This in turn is followed by a brief chapter discussing single *hapax legomena* from all of the papyrus’ sections. At the end are provided a very complete bibliography, an *index locorum* and an *index nominum et rerum*. The book is well-researched and contains many useful insights regarding the style and vocabulary of the New Posidippus. It will for this reason be welcomed by specialists of Hellenistic poetry. Di Nino is alert in pointing out parallels and contrasts with earlier and contemporary poetry and inscriptive practices, which makes valuable points about how literary epigram relates to both. Weaker aspects of the book I found to be the lack of a clearly expressed position on the (admittedly thorny) question how, by whom and with what intentions this intriguing collection of poems was compiled or edited (an issue that becomes especially troubling in the *iamatika* section), some less than convincing explications of *hapax legomena* from a literary point of view, and a tendency to unnecessary long-windedness.

The book opens with an introduction (pp. 17-77) which adequately presents the *status quaestionis* regarding Posidippus old and new, the life, works and themes of this author. It has often been remarked that the Posidippean epigrams known to us before the surfacing of *P. Mil. Vogl. VII 309* are tonally and thematically very different from the new poems. The main contribution of this section consists in the attention paid to the question of how the old and new Posidippus do relate to each other thematically and linguistically. Valuable is for instance the finding that the New Posidippus shows specific stylistic characteristics (e.g. the remarkably frequent use of *hapax legomena* in the form of composite adjectives or adverbs) that fit well with Posidippus’ practice as hitherto known, making the attribution of the poems to this author more secure from a strictly objective point of view. Missing, however, as noted before, is a clearly expressed view on how the unknown identity and intentions of the compiler of this papyrus affect our possibilities to interpret the collection of poems as such, its unusual division in titled sections, and especially the choice and
arrangement of the epigrams within these sections. Is there any intentional arrangement (perhaps even derived from an original authorial intention), or are we dealing with excerpted epigrams on specific themes, haphazardly thrown together? While I do not pretend to have the answer, I still think the posing of the question would have been, in itself, important, as it makes the reader aware of her assumptions when she finds verbal echoes between single epigrams, instances of Ringkomposition in separate sections, and suggestive grouping of (for instance) propagandistically colored themes. I will illustrate the consequences of this point below in the iamatika section in more detail.

Chapter 2 (pp.77-187) discusses the nauagika. The chapter opens with a lengthy survey of the theme of death at sea in Greek literature and life. Not only full quotations of practically all epigrams related to this theme and passages from well-known works from the Greek and Roman tradition are cited without much discussion to illustrate the ancient attitude towards the sea and its dangers, but also a long passage from I Malavoglia by Verga, which seems entirely gratuitous. It might have worked better to have the parallels with Greek literature—which are in fact, in many cases relevant—incorporated into the commentary, thus avoiding many redundancies and abbreviating the chapter. Nevertheless, discussion of the single epigrams is generally rewarding and insightful from a stylistic point of view, and the work is clearly that of a conscientious and philologically accurate commentator.

The strength and weakness of Di Nino’s method (of extensively comparing both literary and non-literary material with Posidippus’ poetry to bring out variations and parallels) become apparent in her discussion of epigram 94 AB, a poem purporting to be the epitaph for an unknown victim of shipwreck by a certain Leophantus, who has chanced upon him and hurriedly buried him. Di Nino shows how this epigram varies an epigram by Callimachus (AP VII 277) where, significantly, the one who buries the unknown drowned man is named Leontichus. Callimachus’ Leontichus cries over the dead man, but really laments his own fate, being himself a sailor too (v. 4). In Posidippus AB 94, the point is more subtle and more obscure. Leophantus is called a stranger in a strange country (vs. 2-3), presumably like the man buried by him. This, as Di Nino shows, significantly varies the common epitaphic topos that the dead man is the stranger in a strange country (cf. GVI 351; GVI 920, 3-4; GVI 990,1, GVI 1312, 1-3, cited by her). At the same time, with the Callimachean epigram resonating through the lines, we understand that Leophantus is aware a similar fate might befall him, on land rather than at sea, perhaps: the burial is, as all burials, a memento mori. So far so good. However the epigram ends with the puzzling words:

άλλ’ ἀποδοῦναι
Λεωφάντωι μεγάλην μικκὸς ἐγὼ χάριτα

Di Nino discusses previous interpretations of these lines, discarding for instance the patently illogical thought that Miccus was the name of the dead man (how could the stranger Leophantus have known this and inscribed it on the grave?) The solution is then presented off-handedly: this is an instance of the topical paradox ‘small grave-great man/virtues’. However, this seems unsatisfactory. What should at least have been taken into account are the consequences of the implication that Leophantus is the one who has (in the fiction of the epigram at least) composed the words on the grave marker. If the stone states that it is too small to pay due thanks to the one who erected it, Leophantus appears as someone who is paying himself a rather fulsome compliment. This, and similar ironies deriving from the tension between the speaking voice in the poem versus the implied composer of the words and the historical author generally pass unremarked.

Chapter 3 (pp.187-274) discusses the iamatika. The informative, relevant introduction outlines the myth of Asclepius and his cult in the various medical centers throughout the ancient world. Discussion of the singular epigrams in this case benefits even more from comparison with real votive inscriptions, revealing the literary and stylized character of the epigrams on the New Posidippus. Di Nino clearly and convincingly traces a certain subtly humorous or skeptical irony regarding the miraculous cures related in some of the epigrams.
in this section. Thus 97 AB relates the sudden cure of Soses of Cos, in a single night, from epilepsy and another unspecified disease. Combining this with 103 AB, apparently an epitaph for the same individual, Di Nino cautiously discusses the possibility that this sudden cure may mean that Soses in fact died (the proverbial remedy for all cures). In 99 AB a previously deaf man regains his hearing to such an extent that he is able to hear though walls (and as Di Nino argues, he seems to intend to use this new skill to improper ends). In 100 AB a man of 85 years regains his eyesight for two days, only to end up in Hades (Greek Ἀἰδής, often etymologized by the Greeks as the place of 'not-seeing'). This seems to connect well with Di Nino's observation that the epigrams' language in fact often diverges from the attested cultic formulas in the real votive inscriptions: they are not meant as true renderings of votive tablets, but literary 'parodies' (in the ancient sense of the word). At the same time this raises the unanswered question of whether this accumulation of ironies is in any way intentional, in other words, whether the ironies in the separate epigrams here mentioned enhance the ironic effect of the section as a whole, and most importantly, how we should judge the inclusion of the epigram 95 AB, a poem purporting to describe a dedication of a statue of a skeletal man to Apollo by the doctor Medeius of Olynthus, whom Peter Bing has shown to be a functionary at the court of the Ptolemies. If, as Peter Bing1 has proposed (and Di Nino cites with agreement, p. 255) this section, or at least part of it, in particular the final epigram 101 AB, was composed in his honor ('un' intenzionale Ringkomposition propagandistico-celebrativa'), then how should we explain the ironic tone of the epigrams celebrating miraculous cures at the Asclepieia? Do they belong to this original celebratory arrangement, or not? Or should we perhaps say that they make this theory less appealing? It is a little disappointing that Di Nino has decided not, or only very marginally, to take this question into account.

In the fourth section of the book (pp. 275-301) a number of hapax legomena deriving from all sections of the papyrus are discussed. An initial problem directly inherent in the nature of the document, is the fact that some of these hapax legomena are in fact not guaranteed by the text but based on sometimes highly conjectural interventions of previous editors (e.g. the expression ὑπαὶ πεδίον, from the editorial integration κεῖται ὑπαὶ πεδίον· in 52 AB discussed on page 285). This makes the conclusions drawn from their occurrence less compelling. In other cases, as in the discussion of the adverb βαρύγηρως in 60, 5 AB, the epitaph for a certain Mnesticrates, I found farfetched the argument that explained this single adverb as “una sfida poetica” directed at Callimachus (299-300), referencing his complaints about old age in the Aetia prologue and its allusions to Euripides' HF 637-640. I would at least have liked more arguments that make clear why this unobtrusive epigram (one, presumably fictive, epitaph among many) should have been selected by Posidippus to make such a highly allusive and at the same time important programmatic claim about Callimachus' poetry.

The final section (pp. 303-307) briefly rounds up with some general conclusions drawn from the findings of Di Nino in her discussion of the epigrams and the hapax legomena.

Although I found it slightly disappointing that some major issues of interpretation regarding the New Posidippus are neglected in this book, I fiori campestri di Posidippo di Pella fulfills its promise in that it does investigate in detail questions of style and language. Besides, it contains a rich collection of relevant material for judging the epigrams in their historical and cultural context. It will thus doubtless take its deserved place among the growing number of studies dedicated to this intriguing document.

Notes:

2004, 276-291.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment on this review in the BMCR blog</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read Latest</td>
<td>Index for 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>