Poetry as window and mirror: Hellenistic poets on predecessors, contemporaries and themselves

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CHAPTER 1:
HISTORICAL POETS REPRESENTED: POETIC PREDECESSORS IN EPIGRAM

1.1 Introduction

The foundation of the Ptolemaic Library and Museum made Alexandria into the intellectual center of the Hellenistic world, a shrine of Greece’s literary and intellectual heritage, towards which scrolls from all over the known world gravitated, just like the scholars and poets who studied them. An epigram on the new Posidippus Papyrus (P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309), as Peter Bing argues, illustrates the idea that Greece’s literature had traveled from its old home to the harbor of Alexandria. It describes the dedication of a lyre brought to land by “Arion’s dolphin” on the coast of Alexandria and a song (?) about it at the shrine of Arsinoe Philadelphus, the wife and sister of Ptolemy II.

Arsinoē, σοι τῇ[ν]δε λύσην ὑπὸ χείρ[......]
φθέγγαμεν[ένην] δελφίς ἡγαν’ Αριστο[ν]]
οὐρημ ἐλ’ οὐ [βλάψ]ας ἐκ κύματος ἄλλ’ ὅτ[ε σώσας]
κεῖνος αν[....]ς λευκὰ περαὶ πελά[γη]
— πολλὰ πο[ει φιλ]ότητι καὶ αἰόλα— τῇ π[ανοδυρτωι]
φωνήι π[ήμ’ ἐλ]ακοῦν καίνον ἀθὸν[ίδες.]
ἀνθέμα δ’, [ὦ Φλά]δελφε, τὸν ἡλατεν [.....]μον,
τόνδε δέ[χου, ἴσου] με[ίλ]α ναοπόλο[ν.] (AB 37)

To you Arsinoe, this lyre, which the hands [of a bard] made resonant, was brought by Arion’s dolphin. With its tail, it lifted it from the wave without [damage], but when [after saving it] unexpectedly it goes on its journey through the white sea – it does many various things through [kindness] – with [all-plaintive] voice, the nightingales lamented the novel [calamity]. As an offering, [O] Brother- [loving one] receive this [...] which [A]rion brought forth, a present from [.]ysus the temple guard.1

Bing suggests:

The poem represents a striking example of how an object, the lyre, may be made to embody the cultural historical heritage and become (quite literally) the vehicle by which that heritage is transmitted to a new place. (...) The epigram clearly alludes to the legend of Arion, “the best singer in the world” (...) by describing how his lyre—together with the tradition it evokes—came to Egypt. Thus the poet links the third-century BC shrine of Arsinoe to one of the great figures of arcaic poetry from

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1 This translation, based on the text and translation of Austin and Bastianini, is more or less exempli gratia. Some notes on the text: 1 fin. χείρι μελωδόδο[θ] χειρ[ός αὐθὸν] vel χειρ[ός αὐθὸν] Austin | 3 Austin | 4 ἀν[αθεὶς] brevis spatio αὐ[ῳστω]ς fort. longius | 5-6 Austin | 6 κανόν pap. | 7 [οἰμὸν Αρ[ιστο]ν e.g. Austin 8 Λ[ύσου, Μ[ύσου, Ν[ύσου aeditui nomen μιλω] pap.
the seventh century and with him to the rich tradition of Lesbian lyric including Terpander, Sappho and Alcaeus. (...) That is, (...) emblematic of the Ptolemies’ claim to be the true inheritors and guardians of the literary legacy of Hellas, in particular here the great tradition of Lesbian song. The Lesbian lyre has passed on; today its home is Egypt. (Bing, 2004: 128-130)²

A similarly striking interest in the continuity with and renewal of the Greek literary heritage is evident in many other poetical expressions of the Hellenistic age. The aim of this chapter is to provide a discussion of how Hellenistic epigrammatists, prominently amongst them the Alexandrians, viewed and handled poets of the Greek past. Before doing so, I will cast a swift glance at the history of the Greek poets’ interest in the literary past and also address the particular drives underlying Ptolemaic interest in it.

1.2 Greek Poets and their Predecessors

Preoccupation with the literature of the past is of course not an exclusively Hellenistic phenomenon, even if its intensity may be peculiar to this age. The early Greeks already honored poets of the past as sages and artists, as various texts, portrait statues, and vase paintings from as early as the sixth century BCE affirm.³ They might be regarded as positive examples, a standard by which one’s own works might be measured and which provided instruction.⁴ Other critical assessments, in both the negative and neutral senses of the term, are also common in archaic poetry: in N. 7.20-23, Pindar attributes the undue admiration later generations had for Odysseus to Homer’s captivating representation of this hero;⁵ in P.

² Cf. Austin and Bastianini (2002: 60): *Arsinoeae Philadelpho lyram, quam ab undis delphinus servaverat, et carmen Arionium (v 7 s.) dedicat fani sacerdos*. Bing furthermore links this passage with Phan. fr. 1 Powell, where the severed head and lyre of Orpheus undertake a similar sea journey. They reach Lesbos and there become the fountainhead of lyric poetry.

³ The exceptional status of poets is also demonstrated by the cults that many of them enjoyed, cf. Clay (2004).

⁴ For instance, Aeschylus claimed that his tragedies were “only slices from the banquet of Homer” (Ath. 8.347); Antiphen remarks upon the usefulness of knowing the ancient poets (P. Oxy. III 414 coll. i-iii); Critias’ comments on Anacreon emphasize the immortal charm of his poetry (Ath. XIII 600D-E). See on the topic of portrait statues of the ancient poets in particular Schefold (1965) and Zanker (1995), who argues for a relationship between portraiture and biographical interests (1995: 145).

⁵ *N. 7.20-23: ἐγὼ δὲ πλεόν ἔλπισμαι / λόγον Ὀδυσσέου ἢ πάθαν / διὰ τὸν ἄδυτην γενέσθ’ Ὀμηρόν· / ἐπὶ πεισθείς οἱ ποιηταὶ <τε> μαχανὰ / σεμνὸν ἐπέστη τε σοφία / δὲ κλέπτει παράγωσα μέθος. (I believe that Odysseus’ story has become greater than his actual suffering because of Homer’s sweet verse, for upon his fictions and soaring craft rests great majesty, and his skill deceives, with misleading tales, transl. Race).*
2 he disparages the vicious poetic attacks of Archilochus. It is clear that poetry of the past for Pindar provides a rubric for assessing the qualities of later works, including his own. His remarks thus shed light on key elements of his own poetics: poetry should combine an elevated style with truth and praise of valor and exceptional feats. Assessments of ancient poetry, then, were always potentially formative in the production of new poetry.

An interest in poets of the past as historical persons also developed early on in Greek history; this resulted in biographies. The general idea behind ancient biographical writing is expressed in maxims like “talis oratio, qualis vita,” which can be understood as a moral admonition as well as a hermeneutic device: since little documentary evidence about the lives of ancient authors was available, their writings often served as sources of information. Together with random items of fantasy, gossip, and anecdote, this information formed the basis of biographical writing, of which traces are found in the Vitae and Scholia.

This writing of biographical essays gained new momentum in the Hellenistic era, when Greek literature and information relating to it were gathered and studied professionally on a previously unequaled scale. Scholars working in the Library of Alexandria sought biographical data to attach to their editions of and works on the poets. This information found its way into the poetic production of the time, since the poets in question were often the selfsame scholars who had gathered the data. In this way, two

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6 P. 2.54-6: εἴδον γὰρ ἐκάς ἕων τὰ πόλλ’ ἐν ἀμαχανίᾳ / ψογερὸν Ἀρχίλοχον βαρυλόγοις ἔχθεσιν / πιαινόμενον. (For standing at a far remove I have seen Archilochos the blame often in straits as he fed on dire words of hatred, transl. Race).
7 Tatian (2nd cent. CE) names as the first researchers on the poetry and life of Homer Theagenes of Rhegium, Stesimbrates of Thasos, Herodotus, and Antimachus of Colophon (31 p 61, 16 Schw.). Hellanicus of Lesbos (fifth cent. BCE) is considered by some the true father of literary history (cf. Lanata 1969: 234). According to Proclus he wrote on the life and dates of ε. g. Hesiod, Homer, Orpheus and Terpander (schol. in Hesiod. Op. 631). Other early “literary historians” are Damastes (fifth cent. BCE) (Vit. Hom. Rom. p. 30, 24.), and Glaucus of Rhegium (fifth cent. BCE) (Plut. de mus. 4 p. 1132E; 7 p. 1133F).
8 Seneca (Ep. 114), cf. Cicero (Tusc. 5.47).
9 E.g. the identification of Demodocus, the Phaeacian singer with Homer and hence his representation as a blind bard, or the remarks in the Pindar-scholia on Pindar’s quarrels with Bacchylides and Simonides as extrapolated from references to “silly crows” in his odes. On the development and characteristics of ancient biographical writing, see Bruns (1896), Leo (1901), Momigliano (1971), Lefkowitz (1981).
practices, one of poets evaluating their predecessors as poets and one of scholars studying and commenting upon poetry and poets of the past, flowed together.

1.3 Royal Patronage and “Cultural Memory”

The scholars and poets in the Library of Alexandria, who largely worked under the aegis of royal patronage, thus seem emphatically engaged with their relation to the literature of the Greek past. Their attitude is probably representative of what happened across the other royal libraries of this time. How may this preoccupation be explained?

Alexandria was a relatively new city, which had been founded by the recently deceased and immediately legendary Alexander the Great, whose aim had arguably been to spread Greek culture throughout the known world. Being a harbor, Alexandria literally looked towards Greece and the Mediterranean, at that time dominated by the Greeks, both economically and culturally, rather than to the Egyptian mainland. So, although her inhabitants came from all over the world, the dominant culture was Greek. Yet, unlike many of the earlier Greek settlements, Alexandria was not a colony tied to a single mother city by established cultural traditions, legends, and habits. All of Greece was, in a sense, the mother city of Alexandria. She became the capital and seat of a new Macedonian royal house under Ptolemy Soter, a former general of Alexander and one of the most successful of the successor kings. Ptolemy’s ambition seems to have been to found a dynasty and to proclaim himself

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11 On Hellenistic patronage see e.g. Fraser (1972: I, 305-336), Bulloch et al. (1993), Weber (1993), Erskine (1995: 38-48), Stroo (2007: 189-246). Callimachus and Apollonius enjoyed the royal support of the Ptolemies, like Aratus and Euphorion at the court of Antiochus. It is likely that Theocritus, Posidippus and Herondas (successfully or otherwise) sought some form of Ptolemaic patronage. In other cases this is doubtful, e.g. Leonidas, Nossis.

12 The rivalry between the libraries of Alexandria and Pergamon was notorious, cf. Platthy (1968: 144-48).

13 Cf. Fraser (1972: I, 3-37), cf. the later expression “Alexandria ad Aegyptum” (Alexandria near Egypt), which implies it was not seen as an Egyptian city. Although, as underwater archaeology in the Alexandrian harbor has shown, the Ptolemies did depict themselves in pharaonic guise for the benefit of their Egyptian subjects, Alexandrian poetry (presumably aimed at a smaller, more elitist subculture of Greeks) hardly even acknowledges the fact that Alexandria is situated in Egypt (and if it does, Egyptians are named in a pejorative sense, cf. Theoc. Id. 15. 46-50). However, for arguments in favor of the presence of Egyptian cultural elements in Hellenistic poetry, see Stephens (2002: 235-263); (2003, passim); (2005: 229-249), Hunter (2003). The main objection to this mode of reading is that it fails to make clear who the intended beneficiaries of the alleged Egyptian elements in this poetry are and why.

the rightful inheritor of Alexander’s legacy. It was presumably to this end that he took charge of the embalmed body of Alexander and moved it from Memphis, the previous capital of Egypt, to new-founded Alexandria, much nearer to the old Greek world. The guardianship over Alexander’s earthly remains symbolized the guardianship over his imperial legacy. It is attractive to interpret Ptolemy Soter’s interest in preserving Hellenic culture and supporting learning, demonstrated by his establishment of the Library and the Museum, also as claims to the inheritance of Alexander, to Greek paideia.16

His son Ptolemy Philadelphus, who had been educated by the learned scholar-poet Philitas, was an even more consummate lover of Greek literature, as the flowering of poetry and scholarship under his reign testifies. By eagerly supporting the Library, the Museum and its researchers, he continued what his father had begun and made Alexandria the intellectual center of the Hellenistic world.17

If the possession of the Greek literary heritage symbolically represented the guardianship of Greek paideia, then it followed that its possessors were the inheritors of Greek (cultural) hegemony.18 Who mastered it and was able to deliver the right interpretation or emulation of its texts was a true Greek. This sufficiently explains the Ptolemies’ well-documented interest in the learnedness they fostered in the Museum and the Library and their willingness to inject considerable financial support into these institutions.19

15 E.g. Id. 17.16-32. Ptolemy Soter is sitting on Olympus together with Alexander, and both are identified as great-grandsons of Heracles. In the same poem, the emphasis is on the fact that Ptolemy Philadelphus is so like his father (17.40-44; 52-57).
17 For a contemporary reference to Ptolemaic patronage of literature, cf. e.g. Theoc. Id. 17.111-116. Other poems clearly written with an eye to Ptolemaic patronage are e.g. Herond. Min. 1, Call. Aetia, Theoc. Id. 14, 15, 17, perhaps also 24 and 18, cf. Griffiths (1979: 51-107) and a number of the epigrams by Posidippus on Ptolemaic monuments and victories in horse races.
19 Cf. e.g. Timon SH 786 (cf. Ch. 4.1), Philostrat. Soph. 1.22.3 sketches the same image for the time of Hadrian, saying that the Museum constituted a “banquet hall comprising the most eminent guests among the Greeks.” Several other anecdotes reflect the kings’ lively interest in scholarly activities (Ath. 11.493e-494b, 12.552c). The ties between court and Museum were close: the princes’ tutors usually were the directors of the Library as well (cf. P. Oxy. 1241 for a list of names). For the physical
Naturally, this environment left its mark upon the poetry and poetic concerns of the poets affiliated to such institutions. The Greek literary heritage was emphatically their domain and point of reference. Indeed, they were presumably warmly encouraged to produce new poetry that reflected (on) the past splendors of Greek culture. It is therefore no surprise if Hellenistic poets stressed continuity with their poetical forebears rather than discontinuity. It follows, then, that the characteristics they emphasized in the representation of their predecessors both reveal something about the way they saw their poetic past and the way they (wished to) see themselves. Ancient Greek poetry provided them with a window and a mirror, an object to reflect upon and reflect oneself in at the same time.

It is enlightening to relate this Hellenistic, and more in particular Alexandrian, interest in the Greek Cultural legacy to Jan Assmann’s theories on the concept of “Cultural Memory.” According to Assmann, social groups, especially when severed from a continuous cultural past, have a tendency to create or reinforce their own identity by means of a collective memory determined by the consciously or unconsciously posed question: “What is it that we as a group should remember?” In answering this question, they select and create distinctive memories of a shared past to which certain events and texts are central. These are constructed as Erinnerungsfiguren (i.e., symbolical commemorative tropes) with sacred, religious, or festive characteristics, such as a calendar with sacred holidays or a festival commemorating the foundation of a city. Ancient texts and the societal values deriving from them, such as the Torah, Bible, Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey and Hesiod’s Theogony, play a great role in such collective memory. The fact that the interpretation or significance of such ancient texts and festivals often is no longer self-evident calls for specialized exegetes who assume responsibility for the cultural heritage. These may be poets, priests, sages, scholars, teachers or the like. They influence the collective cultural memory through Textpflege and Sinnpflege, the establishment and interpretation of canonical texts and

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connection between Museum, Library and the court, cf. Str. 17.1.8, who claims these institutions were part of the royal grounds. See further Pleifler (1968: 127), Weber (1993: 87-90).

20 Cf. e.g. Callimachus’ Πίνακες; Tzetzes names Alexander Aetolus, Lycophron and Eratosthenes as working in the Library (Prol. ad Arist. Ph 119).

21 Cf. Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: vii-viii); contrast e.g. Bing (1988), Radke (2007) who argue that the Hellenistic poets felt a distinct rupture with previous Greek literary culture.

the control and interpretation of ritual. This is similar to what was done in the Alexandrian Library. The texts studied and created here provided both the court and the scholar-poets with important items with which to construct their identities and celebrate and justify their Greekness. References to the poetry of the past might therefore appeal to a shared knowledge and thus create a feeling of belonging. But, as we shall see, they often also took the form of allusion to obscure facts and complex tongue-in-cheek appropriation of literary tradition, aimed at providing only those in the know with a sense of belonging to an intellectual elite. Greek literature thus became both a common ground and a playground of the literati.

1.4 Which Poets and what Past?

If Hellenistic monarchs and the poets in their service were occupied with the intellectual tradition of the great Greek past, who did they focus on and how did they view them? It is generally believed that, to a Hellenistic scholar looking at the past, a kind of watershed would seem to have occurred in the fifth century, dividing the poetry modern scholarship considers “archaic” (broadly speaking, up to the century) from the “Atheno-centric” (i.e., classical) poetry of the fifth century. For one thing, Hellenistic poets did not write for the benefit of a democratic polis, but for that of elitist royal courts. The poetic diversity at these courts will moreover have resembled that of the Archaic age rather than that of the classical era:

The triumph of Athenian culture could have been seen as the death knell for the rich tapestry of poetic forms to be found in the centuries before that triumph. (...) The variety of geographical centres for poetry in the Hellenistic world, the ever increasing importance of patronage and the burgeoning number of poetic festivals, competitions and opportunities for epideixis in the Hellenistic age may well have seemed more like the picture of poetic production which emerged from archaic texts than the rather monolithic image projected by the later fifth century in which the predominance in the field of Attic tragedy and comedy drove other high poetry from the field. (Hunter, 1996: 3)\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23} Cf. Cameron (1992: 305-312). Still, this representation needs some nuance: although the fifth-century Athenian cultural dominance may look monolithic to the modern eye, the Hellenistic Greeks must have been aware that various literary cultures had existed at royal courts in the classical era too. Hiero I of Syracuse commissioned poetry from Pindar, Bacchylides, and Aeschylus; Archelaus of Macedon apparently had ties with Euripides. Drama, moreover, was not the only viable form of poetry, even if it is the form best preserved.
Indeed, as their poetry shows, it was the archaic, or pre-Athenian age the Hellenistic poets looked to principally. Even so, they must have realized that this era also presented important differences with their own poetic practices. For one thing, in the days of ancient (choral) lyric, poetry, melody, and dance had been an indissoluble complex, as the complicated meters and stanzaic structures attest. This had gradually changed; music and poetry had become increasingly separate areas. 24 Predominant in Hellenistic poetry were the recitative elegiac distich, iambus and hexameter, even if Callimachus and Theocritus occasionally imitated the complex meters of archaic lyric. 25 This means that the compositional practice of a Hellenistic poet was more limited than that of an archaic lyric poet: texts as such were much more the central concern of the former than of the latter.

Balancing similarities and differences, archaic poetic practice probably nevertheless showed more resemblance to the Hellenistic mode of working than classical, in particular Athenian, poetry did. This might explain why most poets represented in the Hellenistic epigrams, which form the focus of this chapter, belong to the “pre-Athenian” age. There is also a number of epigrams on poets belonging to a more recent past, the fourth century, when literary sensibilities had presumably evolved in the direction of those found in Hellenistic poetry. But, as was to be expected, Athenian poets of the fifth century are underrepresented. 26 (For the corpus of the epigrams discussed, see the Appendix.)

1.5 Poetical Predecessors in Epigram

From a literary-historical point of view, the early Hellenistic period could be considered paradoxical. On the one hand, the giants of Greek literature such as Homer, Archilochus, and

24 As early as the late fifth century, there was a gradual dissolution of song culture, which was replaced in part by a book culture and in part by a music culture dominated by virtuoso musicians; the development is discussed by Herington (1985).

25 Theoc. Id. 28, 29, 30; Call. fr. 226, 227, 228, 229 Pf. Papyrus finds of the third century attest that musical notation was not the default expectation in the preservation of archaic lyrical poetry, cf. Hunter (1996: 5, n. 19). For a recent overview and discussion of the material, see Prauscello (2006).

26 Dramatists of the Hellenistic age may of course have had an interest in the dramatic productions of the fifth century, although no epigrams of their hand survive, cf. Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 404-437). Epigrams discussing Athenian playwrights are AP 7.410 (Thespis); 7.411 (Aeschylus); 7.37, 7.21, 7.22, (Sophocles); 7.46 (Euripides); 13.29 (Cratinus). It should be remarked that the first three form part of a series, written by Dioscorides, who is a generation or two later than the avant-garde Hellenistic poets such as Callimachus, and has a predilection for antiquarianism.
Pindar were geographically, linguistically and chronologically remote from the age of the Alexandrian Library. Yet, the texts and biographical data of these poets had never been studied so closely and documented so professionally, made available to so many people or preserved for future generations in such a secure way as precisely in this age. The two sides of this paradox are visible in the epigrams written in this period. Epitaphs or dedications on statues of predecessors who had been dead for hundreds of years became popular, testifying to the perception that the literary past existed as a kind of monument, something dead, yet alive: for these epitaphs on long-dead poets actually demonstrate the vivid interest and admiration they still aroused. Another aspect of this admiration of the past was the revival of dead poets through ethopoia, allowing them to speak for themselves in new poetry. This might be interpreted as a metaphor for the fact that the literary heritage was so close to the Hellenistic poets that it was in fact internalized, digested, and incorporated into their own poetry. They spoke with the voices of the dead, or vice versa (cf. also Chapter 2).

From a literary point of view, it is easy to see the attraction of such epitaphs and inscriptions. An epitaph is the ideal place to express a brief and final verdict about an individual’s personality and life; an inscription on the base of a statue likewise furnishes concise and essential information to the viewer about the subject depicted. In both cases, the challenge is to condense the characteristics of the poet in question as wittily and recognizably as possible.

From the fifth century BCE onwards, such literary epigrams had already been written in books rather than on stone. They presented the fictitious variations on the original dedications and epitaphs. By the Hellenistic period, epigram had become a popular literary genre, improvised at symposia and collected, or even written directly, in books. That the epitaphs and purported inscriptions to be discussed here were of an exclusively literary nature is reasonably certain. As Peter Bing argues, it is the exception rather than the rule that

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27 On the greatness of the Alexandrian Library: Ath. 5.203d-e; the Letter of Aristeas claims that Demetrius of Phaleron began with 200.000 scrolls and hoped to see the collection grow to at least 500.000; similarly Gell. NA 7.17.3. By the time the library was burnt down in 48/47 BCE by Caesarean troops, Ammianus Marcellinus claims 700.000 scrolls were lost in the fire (22.16.13), although Seneca estimates that there were only 400.000 (Transq. 9.5). See in general Parsons (1967), Canfora (1989), McLeod (2004).


29 A parallel development is that of erotic epigram out of skolia (drinking songs) and erotic elegies originally orally improvised and recited at symposia. See on the topic e.g. Reitzenstein (1983), Wilamowitz (1924: I, 130-1), Gutzwiller (1998), Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 283-291).
genuine inscriptions were cited on papyrus in antiquity.\textsuperscript{30} This means that epigrams that claim to be inscriptions are really literary, whether referring to actual monuments or statues or not.

Three topics frequently recur in these succinct characterizations of ancient poets: the description of poetic practices (singing versus writing), the material form texts take when conserved on scrolls (e.g. in the Alexandrian Library), and the reconstruction of the character of an ancient poet as based on his writings. These items will be addressed in the following sections.

1.5.1 Singing and Writing

If Hellenistic poets argued from their own practice, they would no doubt have imagined their predecessors as writers. Nevertheless, the ancient texts they studied may have suggested otherwise. What can epigrams tell us about this? In the first place, the Muses, originally patronesses who guaranteed the knowledge of the \textit{oral} poet, are of great importance in the descriptions of poets of the past in Hellenistic epigram.\textsuperscript{31} In these epigrams, however, this presence of the Muse does not symbolize the traditional divine guarantee of the factual knowledge of poets; rather, it provides an emphasis on the (divine) charm and excellence of their poetry as “works of art,” as expressions like “Cecropian star of the tragic Muse” and “holding the brightest torch of the Muses,” suggest.\textsuperscript{32} We could say that the Muses are used as a kind of shorthand to denote that the subject of the epigram is poetry.

When it comes to naming the profession of the poet, Hellenistic poets seldom call their predecessors \textit{ποιητής} (“maker; poet,” an expression which connotes writing as an integral part of composition);\textsuperscript{33} the default term is \textit{ἀοιδός} (“singer; bard”).\textsuperscript{34} This raises the

\textsuperscript{30} Bing (2002: 38-66); Obbink agrees: “The burden of proof lies on the shoulders of those who would claim that any of the epigrams that purport to be inscribed on an object were actually so inscribed, to show that they were ever actually cited from such a source.” (2004: 19)

\textsuperscript{31} The Muses are named in the following Hellenistic epigrams in combination with the poets stated between brackets: \textit{AP} 7.1, 7.2, 7.5, 9.24 (Homer); 7.9, 7.10 (Orpheus); 7.12, 7.13, 9.190 (Erinna); 7.19, 7.709 (Alcman); 7.21, 7.22, 7.37 (Sophocles); 7.25, 7.31 (Anacreon); 7.35 (Pindar); 7.55 (Hesiod); 7.407, 9.189 (Sappho); 7.664 (Archilochus); 9.63 (Antimachus); 9.184, 9.571 (nine lyric poets); 12.168 (combination of poets).

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{AP} 7.21, Simias on Sophocles; \textit{AP} 9.24, Leonidas on Homer, respectively.

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. Ford (1981) on the development, connotations and use of the term \textit{ποιητής}.

\textsuperscript{34} For a detailed overview of the distribution of terms indicating singing and writing, see Appendix.
question how they envisaged the poetic practices of composition and performance of their ancient predecessors. Did they consciously ask questions about the mode of poetic composition at all? The first fact to be noted in this context is that it is mostly the archaic *lyric* poets who are usually described as “singers/bards.” This is easily understandable: these poets described their own activities in terms of singing, their actual mode of performance. The stanzaic structure of their compositions would have revealed to the Hellenistic poets that they had indeed been performed in song with musical accompaniment. That these songs had at some point been written down is clearly not the focus of interest in epigram. It was probably assumed that this had been done by the lyric poets themselves.

It is far harder to determine whether Hellenistic poets thought an epic poet like Homer composed in writing or orally, instigated by the Muse. If they looked at the contents of Homeric epic, they might have come to the latter conclusion. The description of the art of the ἀοιδοὶ Demodocus and Phemius, who were believed to constitute self-representations of Homer, does not reveal any connection with writing. Yet, the immense *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, with their intricate and subtle compositions, had existed as *literary texts* at least since the Pisistratean recension (sixth century BCE) and were extensively analyzed by Hellenistic scholars. How did they imagine these texts had come into being, as oral or written compositions?

Did they even ask this question? It seems doubtful. The following epigram by Callimachus is illustrative of the way singing/reciting and writing are juxtaposed in the description of Homer without any evident feeling of contradiction:

Τοῦ Σαμίου πόνος εἰμὶ δόμω ποτὲ θείον ἀοιδόν
dεξαμένου, κλείω δ’ Ἑὔρυτον ὄσσ’ ἐπαθεῖν
καὶ ἑκάσθῃν Ἰόλειαν ὑμήν ἐκλείω καὶ Κρεωφύλωι
γράμμα. Κρεωφύλω, Ζεῦ φίλε, τούτο μέγα. (AP 7.80)

I am the work of the man from Samos, who once received the divine bard in his home, and I sing of Eurytus’ hardships and blonde Ioleia and I am called a writing of Homer. For Creophylus, dear Zeus, that is grand.

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35 Writing hardly figures at all in the epics. Of course, Hellenistic scholars may have argued that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* represented a world that was a distant past already to their composer. This could have explained the absence of writing to them.

36 Evidently, there could be a middle way, in which improvised texts were dictated, gathered and perhaps in some way revised, but this idea is not testified before Cicero, so it is doubtful whether it occurred to Hellenistic poets. Cf. Havelock (1986: 12).
In the first line, Homer is referred to as θείος ἄοιδός (divine bard). The bestower of this epithet, as the ancient reader was expected to gather from hints (2-3), is the (now lost) epic poem Oechalias Halosis. This work was wrongly ascribed to Homer (3-4) in Callimachus’ time, as he claims. Instead, Callimachus thinks the true author of the poem was a certain Creophylus of Samos, a contemporary of Homer. According to the epigram, Creophylus had only received Homer in his home; apparently this has somehow caused the false ascription.37 The last phrase of the epigram contains the literary pointe: it is an honor (too great an honor even, perhaps) for a work of Creophylus to be called a writing of Homer.

The Oechalias Halosis is referred to as a γράμμα.38 This seems to imply that Callimachus regards writing as the normal practice of Homer and his contemporaries, whereas he also calls Homer “divine bard.”39 Apparently, the question of writing versus oral composition is simply not considered relevant. Despite the cultural shift from orality to literacy and all it entailed for the preservation and availability of knowledge,40 neither this nor any other epigram reveals an awareness of a possible opposition between oral performance (or composition) and writing. They appear alongside each other, referring to the same poets without contradiction. This epigrammatic practice is comparable with the paradoxical Hellenistic way of portraying Homer (who, as tradition had it, was blind!) in statuary as reading from a scroll.41 Writing was clearly the default expectation in poetic composition and was unconsciously projected back upon the poets of the past, even if they were called singers.

1.5.2 The Text as Monument

37 Cf. Suda s.v. Κρεώφυλος, and the comments of Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.).
38 For the meaning of γράμμα indicating a work composed in writing, cf. AP 9.598 (Pisander); AP 9.184 (Anacreon) and LSJ s.v. III, 3, although here, interestingly, no references to works of poetry are given. Hesiod is portrayed as writing in Hermesian. fr. 7.24-5 Powell.
39 For Homer as an oral bard cf. AP 7.1; Theoc. ld. 7, 16, 22; Hesiod was apparently also envisaged as a singer (AP 7.55).
40 On this shift and its meaning for classical and in particular Hellenistic literary culture, see Havelock (1963; 1986) and Bing (1988).
41 Zanker suggests that this is a projection of the activities of the contemporary Homeric scholars onto Homer himself (1995: 166, fig. 88c). The question he does not raise is whether they would have been aware of this fact.
Whether referred to as singers or writers, the emphasis in Hellenistic epigrams on dead poets is specifically on the enduring quality or fame of their achievements, through which an author is sometimes even claimed to live on eternally. A key issue connected with this theme is the material form of the achievements: in a number of cases, this is explicitly a written text on a scroll, not mere “song.” This contrasts with the way in which archaic poets usually put immaterial fame in song (κλέος) over material monuments as a guarantee for immortality. It seems that, through the widespread materialization of song in its written form in the Hellenistic age, the ideas of immaterial fame in song versus a material monument occasionally merge in the concept of the immortality of the words of a poem written on a scroll.

Apart from actual poetic compositions (i.e., preserved works of the literary tradition), literary “inventions” (of a new poetic form or genre) ascribed to legendary inventors (the topos of the πρώτος εὑρετής) could also grant some kind of immortality, usually of a vaguer and more disputable kind. To illustrate this, an epitaph for Orpheus (AP 7.9 Damagetus), the pre-historical and legendary singer/musician, whose legacy was disputed, may be compared with an epitaph on the historical dramatist Sophocles (AP 7.21 Simias), whose works indisputably survived. The following epigram describes the grave of Orpheus:

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῾Ορφέα Θηρικήσι παρὰ προμολήσιν Ὀλύμπου
tύμβος ἔχει, Μουσῆς υἱέα Καλλιόπης,
ὡς δόξεις οὐκ ἀπιθήσαν, ἡτοι συνάμ’ ἔσπετο πέτρῃ
ἀψυχος θηρῶν θ´ ὑλονόμων ἄγελα,
ὅς ποτε καὶ τελετὰς μυστηρίδας εὑρετο Βάκχου
καὶ στίχον ἡρώιωι ζεύκτον ἐτευξέ ποδί,
ὅς καὶ ἀμειλίκτου βαρύ Κλυμένου νόημα
καὶ τὸν ἀκῆλητον θυμὸν ἐθελέξε λύραι. (AP 7.9)
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A tomb in the Thracian foothills of Olympus contains Orpheus, son of the Muse Calliope, whom the oaks did not disobey, whom the lifeless rocks and the tribe of the wood-dwelling animals followed willingly, who once invented the mystic rituals of Bacchus and joined the stichic line to the heroic meter, who swayed both the grim will and unchangeable heart of inexorable Clymenus with his lyre.

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42 E.g. AP 7.2, 7.5, 9.24 (Homer); 7.54 (Hesiod); 9.63 (Antimachus); 7.664 (Archilochus); Ath. 13.696, AP 7.407 (Sappho).
43 E.g. AP 7.12 (Erinna); 7.25 (Anacreon); cf. more indirectly AP 7.408, 7.536, 13.3 (Hipponax). The fact that even in death Hipponax is dangerous implies that his legacy is immortal.
44 E.g. Simon. PMG 531 (on the dead of Thermopylae), on which see Ford (2002: 105-111); see for further instances in archaic lyric Nünlist (1998: 115).
The poem lists Orpheus’ accomplishments and achievements: he was able to charm nature and is called the inventor of Bacchic mysteries and of “the line that was added to the hexameter” (i.e., the pentameter, significantly placed in the pentameter itself), a novel claim. His powers are emphasized by the choice of objects of enchantment (oaks, rocks, and wild animals with their topical connotations of immobility, toughness, and savageness) and the adjectives describing them. The list ends with Orpheus’ victory in swaying the adamant will of Hades (Clymenus) by his music. Significantly, however, no immortality is granted to Orpheus by virtue of any surviving works. This suggests an ironic contrast between the great power he possessed when living (he even persuaded the god of the underworld) and its complete annulment at his death. The attribution of the pentameter and the institution of the Bacchic mysteries constitute a claim to remembrance, but Orpheus’ enchanting songs are lost, while only an (imaginary) tomb remains. However, it should be noted that this description of the tomb is written in elegiac distichs, the meter Orpheus had invented, so that, paradoxically, he lives on in poetry after all, if not his own.

The following epigram by Simias, describing the tomb of Sophocles, provides a clear contrast to the vague description of Orpheus’ possible legacy:

Τόν σε χοροῖς μέλψαντα Σοφίλλου
τόν τραγικῆς Μούσης ἀστέρα Κεκρόπιον,
πολλάκις ὅν θυμέλησι καὶ ἐν σκηνῇσι τεθηλὼς
βλαισὸς Ἀχαρνίτης κισσὸς ἔρεψε κόμην,
τύμβοις ἔχει καὶ γῆς ὀλίγον μέρος, ἀλλ’ ὁ περισσός
αἰῶν ἀθανάτοις δέρκεται ἐν σέλισιν. (AP 7.21)

You who sang in the choruses, Sophocles, son of Sophillus, you who shone as the Cecropian star of the Muse, who were so often crowned with winding Acharnian ivy in the orchestra and on the stage, a tomb now holds you, and but a little piece of the earth, but the rest of the ages sees you in your immortal papyrus-columns.47

45 Cf. A.R. Arg. 1.26-28. The epithet ἄκηλήτος is notable, as κηλεῖν (to enchant) is frequently found as a metaphor to describe the effects of poetry on an audience. Cf. Nünlist (1998: 132-3).
46 There are other epitaphs in which there is no explicit mention of works, while Hellenistic poets did know them (e.g. AP 7.1 Homer; 7.55 Hesiod). However, the point in Damagetus’ epitaph depends on the irony that Orpheus was so powerful (because of his music) during his life, while after death he is gone and all his music with him. Moreover, unlike Hesiod’s and Homer’s works, the authenticity of any legacy of Orpheus was doubted in antiquity, cf. Ch 3.2.
47 For the problems of interpretation, see Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.). That this is the approximate meaning of the passage is however quite certain.
The poem laments the fact that a great man like Sophocles should have gone the way of all flesh and died (1-5). Up to this point, the scheme is quite similar to that of the epigram describing the tomb of Orpheus: the poet was exceptional during his life, but now he is dead and gone. However, the pointe of this poem is that Sophocles’ fate differs from that of other humans because of his literary achievement. Sophocles lives on thanks to the preservation of his writings; the epigram itself forms living proof of the immortalizing powers of the written word.

A comparable idea, but elaborated with a remarkably different emphasis, is found in Posidippus’ epigram on the hetaera Doricha, a contemporary of Sappho:

Δωρίχα, ὡστέα μὲν σα πάλαι κόνις ἢν ὁ τε δέσμος,
χαίτις ἢ τε μύρων ἐκπνοος ἀμπεχόνη,
ἡ ποτε τὸν χαρίεντα περιστέλλουσα Χάραξον
σύγχρους ὀρθοινῶν ἤψαν κισσυβίων.
Σατιφώου δὲ μένουσι φίλης ἔτι καὶ μενέουσιν
ὡδῆς σιλευκαν ὑπεγγόμεναι σελίδες.
ούνομα σὸν μακαριστὸν, ὁ Ναῦκρατις ὧδε φυλάξει
ἔστ’ ἀν ἢ Νειλού ναυὸς ἐψ’ ἀλὸς πελάγη.

(Ath. 13.696/GP XVII/122 AB)

Doricha, your bones were dust long ago, and the band of your hair and your perfume-breathing shawl, wherewith you once wrapped the charming Charaxus, skin to skin, until you took hold of the morning cups. But the white columns of Sappho’s lovely ode are still here and they will go on celebrating your most fortunate name, which Naucratis will thus treasure as long as ships sail from the Nile on the waves of the sea. (transl. and text Austin and Bastianini)

In this poem, it is not the death of the poet that is contrasted with the immortality of her poetical legacy, but that of the subject of her poetry, Doricha. Athenaeus, who preserved the epigram, explains that Doricha enticed Sappho’s brother, Charaxus, when he was sailing to Naucratis in Egypt for business. He claims that Sappho speaks ill of Doricha for preying on Charaxus’ purse. Surprisingly, there is no sign in the epigram of Sappho’s negative treatment of Doricha, such as can indeed be found in what is left of her work. It merely claims that Doricha’s fortunate name has been immortalized by Sappho’s “white columns,”

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48 This is a recurrent theme, cf. e.g. AP 7.1, 7.2 (Homer).
49 The MS reading of this first line is problematic: Δωρίχα, ὡστέα μὲν σ’ ἀπαλλὰ κοιμήσατο δεσμών. Austin’s text (with emendations of Casaubon, Jacobs and Meineke) is printed here.
50 Ath. 13.691: διὰ τῆς ποιήσεως διαβάλλει ὡς πολλὰ τῷ Χαράξου νοσφισαμένην. (She slanders [Doricha] in her poetry as having stolen a lot of Charaxus’ possessions). This is confirmed by Sappho fr. 15b Voigt and by Hdt. 2.132, where Doricha is however called “Rhodopis.”
which, to one unaware of the contents of Sappho’s poetry looks like a compliment.\(^{51}\) However, on closer inspection, the treatment of Doricha in the epigram itself could be called scathing. Posidippus describes how all her physical charm (implied in the images of the hair-ribbon, the fragrant shawl, and the skin-to-skin contact with which she enticed Charaxus), on which her fame depended, has disappeared.

The pointe of the epigram is therefore that immortality can only be achieved by (becoming the subject of) poetry, no matter how powerful charm may be—and no matter what this poetry precisely states. Dead as she is, Doricha has therefore become doubly immortal: once in Sappho’s poetry and now again in Posidippus’ epigram.\(^{52}\) This is a double-edged compliment: on the one hand, the mere fact that Sappho names Doricha could be seen as an honor. The mention of Doricha by Sappho in itself demonstrates the once-considerable power of her charm; it was great enough to make Sappho seriously worry about the fate of her brother.\(^{53}\) But Sappho also gave Doricha a negative reputation; now Posidippus refers back to Sappho’s judgement and moreover confirms Doricha’s irrevocable death. There is some irony in immortalizing someone in such a way.\(^{54}\)

A complex variation on the theme of enduring remembrance in written poetry and the interplay between fame, memory, and material monuments is seen in Callimachus’ *Aetia*, fr. 64 Pf. (*Selpuchrum Simonidis*), a fragment that alludes to the form and conventions of sepulchral epigrams.\(^{55}\) In it, the dead poet Simonides complains that a certain Phoenix, a Sicilian general, had his grave at Acragas razed and used the stone to fortify the city walls:

\begin{quote}
Οὔδ’ ἄν τοι Καμάρινα τόσον κακών ὁκκόσον ἀ[ν]δρός 
κινηθέεις ὁσίον τύμβος ἐπικρεμάσαι∙
καὶ γάρ ἐμόν κοτε σῆμα, τὸ μοι πρὸ πόλης ἔχειν·
\end{quote}

\(^{51}\) Gabathuler (1937: 51-2) claims that the epigram was meant as a real and therefore honorary inscription for a monument in Naukratis, glossing over the negative tone of Sappho’s writings on purpose, cf. also Gow and Page (1965: II, 498).

\(^{52}\) Ath. 13.69.15 claims Posidippus moreover devoted much attention to her in his lost *Aethiopia*, which may have been an elegiac or epic poem. This does not necessarily imply a positive evaluation.

\(^{53}\) As Rosenmeyer (1997: 132) suggests, the epigram may also play on the fact that Egypt, in particular Naukratis, was an important export-centre of papyri. Perhaps the ships sailing down the Nile in the final lines were therefore ships laden with papyrus, on which new editions of Sappho’s poetry might appear, celebrating/reviling Doricha.

\(^{54}\) Cf. Theogn. 237-54: Cynmus receives fame by being named in Theognis’ poetry; yet, Theognis accuses him in the same poem of being unfaithful. This reputation will therefore constitute his immortal fame (or rather notoriety). Cf. Helen foreseeing that she and Paris will be subject of song for generations to come, because of the evil fate Zeus has given them (*Il. 6.358*).

Not even if you were to disturb Camarina would you incur such a grave danger as in disturbing the grave of a holy man. For my own grave, which the Acragantines had erected to honor Zeus Xeiniós, was once demolished with brute force by an evil man; you may have heard of Phoenix, the pitiless general of that city. He embedded my stone into the fortifications and ignored the inscription that says that I, the son of Leoprepes, a citizen of Ceos, lie here, a genius, and the first to invent the art of memory. Nor did he fear you both, Polydeuces, who once, when the roof was about to collapse, made me go outside, the only one of the banquet’s guests, when the Crannonian home, alas, collapsed on the great Scopadae.

As noted, the fragment employs the characteristic *topoi* of epitaphs, in that it states name and patronymic, place of origin and exceptional achievements (8-10). At the same time, this alerts the reader to a problem: the grave is gone and the poet who lay buried under it is dead, so how can he be speaking here, and from where does his voice emerge? This is not an inscription that purports to speak in the voice of the deceased, since the inscription itself is gone. The odd truth is that the dead poet Simonides actually speaks about the disappearance of the monument that was to keep his remembrance alive. The passage thus delivers a

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56 For lines 10-14, cf. Cic. De Or. II 352, cf. Ch. 2.3.
57 A reference to the proverb “Disturb not Camarina,” cf. Pfeiffer (1949: ad loc.): the inhabitants of Camarina had received an oracle forbidding them to relocate the homonymous lake near their city; else, they would risk utter destruction. Presumably, in the rest of fr. 64, Simonides narrated how the removal of his tomb had similar or worse consequences for the Sicilian general Phoenix. This Phoenix is unknown, as is the attack that brought him to embed the tomb of Simonides in the walls of Acragas. Perhaps Φοίνιξ, is a name based on a misunderstood reference to the Phoenicians, who repeatedly invaded Sicily, cf. D’Alessio (1996: 470).
58 Cf. the intriguing fr. 4 (West): μνήμην δ’ ούτινα φημί Σιμωνίδην ἱσοφασίζεν, / ὀγδοκονταέτει παιδί Λεοπρέπεος. (I say that no one may rival Simonides, the eighty-year-old son of Leoprepes, in memory).
59 Cf. e.g. AP 7.28 (Anacreon).
60 For a similar paradox, cf. AP 7.479, the epitaph of the philosopher Heraclitus by Theodoridas of Samos. This forms an example of the self-conscious literariness of Hellenistic epigram by proclaiming the fact that it is a fictitious inscription: it has been so worn away as to become unreadable.
sophisticated paradoxical comment on the power of poetry and on Simonides’ opinions about the superior conserving power of poetry over material objects.

To better appreciate the intricacies of this paradox, some facts about Simonides need to be called to mind. In the first place, this poet was famous in antiquity for his epitaphs, encomia, and dirges on the (heroic) dead, by which he ensured their immortal κλέος (fame). This incorruptability of κλέος that transcends its material markers is the theme of one of Simonides’ more famous poems, his commentary on an alleged epitaph of King Midas. In this epitaph, a bronze statue makes the following claim:

χαλκῆ παρθένος εἰμί, Μίδα δ’ ἐπὶ σήματι κεῖμαι,
ἐστ’ ἀν ύδωρ τε νάηι καὶ δένδρα μακρὰ τεθήλη,
ἡέλιως τ’ ἀνίων λάμπητι λαμπρά τε σελήνη,
[kαι ποταμοι γε θέσων, ἀνακλυζηὶ δε θάλασσα,]
aυτοῦ τύμβε μένουσα πολυκλαύτωι ἐπὶ τύμβωι
ἀγγελέω παριοῦσι, Μίδας ὁτι τύμβε τεθάπται. (Diog. Laert. 1.89-90)

I am a bronze maiden and sit on Midas’ grave. As long as water will flow and tall trees shall grow and the sun rise and shine, like the gleaming moon, [and rivers shall stream and the sea break at the shore,] I will remain here on this much-lamented tomb and announce to the passers-by that Midas lies buried here.

Simonides considered this claim unacceptable and he countered it in his own poetry, with a pun (μωροῦ φωτός ἄδε βουλά, “this is the thought of a foolish man”) on the name of the alleged composer of the epitaph, one of the canonical seven sages, Cleobulus (lit. “of the famed counsel”):

tίς κεν αἰνήσει νόωι πίσυνος Λίνδου ναέταν Κλεόβουλον
ἀενάιοις ποταμοις ἀνθεσι τ’ εἰαρινοῖς
ἀελίου τε φλογὶ χρυσέας τε σελάνας
καὶ θαλασσοϊασι δίνης ἀντιθέντα μένος στάλας;
ἀπαντα γαρ ἐστι θεών ἄδειον λιθὸν δὲ
καὶ βρότοι παλάμαι θραύοντι μωροῦ φωτός ἄδε βουλά. (PMG 581)

Who in his right mind would praise that inhabitant of Lindus, Cleobulus, who set against the everstreaming rivers and the flowers of spring and the force of the sun and the golden moon and the eddies of the sea the force of stone? For everything must yield to the gods; and stone may even be broken by the hands of mortals. That is the thought of a foolish man.

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61 Cf. e.g. Theoc. Id. 16, Ch. 2.3.
62 Pl. Phaedr. 264d preserves a slightly different version.
It is plausible that through his denial that monuments of stone may endure Simonides implies that poetry lasts longer. The claim of the bronze maiden was in all likelihood known to him only as a poem, whether written down or circulating in oral form; he himself probably never saw the actual grave of Midas (which would have been in Phrygia), complete with its bronze maiden. Indeed, it is questionable whether such a grave of the legendary king actually ever existed, and, more to the point, whether it still existed in the time of Simonides. If not, Simonides’ poem becomes an ironic comment on the fact that the Midas epitaph was a paradox in the form he knew it: it claimed immortality for a monument that was not (or no longer) anywhere to be seen. Thus, it had already proven its own claim false and shown that poetry was more powerful than a material monument.

Presumably, Callimachus was aware of Simonides’ musings on the subject of the perishability of graves and monuments. He may have particularly enjoyed the irony in Simonides’ attack of the Midas epitaph, since disconnectedness of an inscription from its original monument likewise forms the departing point for relating the story of how Simonides’ own grave was demolished and how the physical monument for his existence thus ceased to exist, inscription and all. In an ironic way, Simonides’ attack on the claim that physical monuments outlast everything is vindicated by Callimachus. At the same time, the paradoxical situation imagined also forms a tribute to the lasting fame of Simonides’ poetry as such. Simonides’ own fame outlives the physical monument that was intended to keep it alive. This enables him to speak in Callimachus’ poetry about the disappearance of his own grave hundreds of years after his actual demise. The fame of the poet and his grave are not forever lost; they still exist in poetry, only, paradoxically, not Simonides’ own.

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64 Callimachus may have known other epitaphs by Simonides and drawn a similar conclusion from the fact that he, in Alexandria, knew the texts that were originally meant as markers on graves, e.g. AP 7. 249: Ὡ̣ ξεῖν’, ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις, ὅτι τῆδε / κείμεθα τοῖς κείνων ὁμοιωτάτων πειθόμενοι. (Stranger, report to the Spartans that we lie here, having obeyed their orders). This epigram enacts the disconnecting of the actual message of the monument from its monumental context by asking the passerby to take the report with him, to the Spartans.

65 Cf. Call. AP 7.80 on the death Heraclitus and AP 7.46 (anonymous) on the grave of Euripides. Perhaps Callimachus knew that many epigrams were falsely ascribed to Simonides. If so, he may even have been delivering a subtle comment on this fact by “pretending to be Simonides” in his own poetry.
Like the epigrams discussed in this section, this last example testifies to a strong awareness that the immortality of poets depended on their literary legacy. This continued to speak long after death had silenced their mortal mouths, and could be revived by later poets who knew their works. This was mainly possible because of the efforts of the founders of the great libraries of the age and the diligent librarians and scholars who worked in them, keeping the literary legacy alive and reviving it, as the text of the Aetia is doing in a typically subtle Callimachean way.

1.5.3 Biographical Readings

The ancient Vitae of the Greek poets partly came into existence in the same period as the epigrams discussed above and are the fruit of the same scholarly preoccupations. They often contain a great deal of information borrowed indirectly or directly from the poets’ own texts. In the case of lyric poets, this transference of information from poems to biography is facilitated by the fact that they regularly used first-person verbal forms (lyric “I”), which made it attractive to equate the author and the speaker of a poem. For instance, the poems of Archilochus and Hipponax were known for their biting scorn, vulgar language, and representation of repulsive subjects. The result was that the aggressive character of these poets’ poems was uncritically taken as a reflection of their personalities. Moreover, it was taken for granted that every situation described in their poetry was autobiographical.

How this mode of reading found its way into the poetry of the Hellenistic age can be seen in the reception of the anecdotal tradition regarding Archilochus. Dioscorides imagines what the daughters of Lycambe, speaking from the grave after hanging themselves from

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67 See on this process, and antiquity’s failure to distinguish between author and persona Clay (1998: 9-40).
68 On the way in which Archilochus’ poetry influenced his own notoriety, see Ael. VH 10.13 citing Critias (= Crit. test. 88 B 44 DK): “No-one would have known that Archilochus was the impoverished son of a slave woman named Enipo, that he picked fights, slandered friend and foe, was an adulterer and, worst of all, threw away his shield to flee in battle, had he himself not told us so.” Critias concludes: “οὐκ ἀγαθὸς ἄρα ἢν ὁ Ἀρχίλοχος μάρτυς ἐαυτῷ, τοιοῦτον κλέος ἀπολιπών καὶ τοιαύτην ἔκεις Ἀρχίλοχῷ φήμην.” (So, Archilochus was not a good witness to his own character, leaving behind such fame and such a reputation for himself).
shame over Archilochus’ allegations about their unchaste behavior, might say to defend themselves:69

Οὐ μᾶ τόδε φθιμένων σέβας ὅσιον, αἰδὲ Λυκάμβω, 
αἷς λάχομεν στυγερὴν κληδόνα, θυγατέρες, 
οὔτε τι παρθενίην Ἧσχυναμεν οὔτε τοκήας
οὔτε Πάρον, νήσου αἰτιώτατην ἑσών
ἀλλὰ καθ’ ἠμετέρης γενεῆς ρηξηλόν ὁνέιδος
φήμην τε στυγερὴν ἐφλύσεν Αρχίλοχος.
Ἀρχίλοχον, μὰ θεοὺς καὶ δαίμονας, οὔτ᾽ ἐν ἀγναιαὶς
ἐίδομεν οὐθ’ Ἡρής ἐν μεγάλῳ τεμένει
εἰ δ’ ἠμὲν μάχλοι καὶ ἀτάσθαλοι, οὐκ ἂν ἐκεῖνος
ἡθελεν ἐξ ἡμέων γνῆσια τέκνα τεκείν. (AP 7.351)

No, by the respectable oath of the dead, we, the daughters of Lycambes, who have received a hateful reputation, did not in the least shame our maidenhood, nor our parents, nor Paros, steepest of the holy islands. No, it was Archilochus who poured onto our family horrible and hateful shame. We did not meet Archilochus, by the gods and the divinities, in alleyways, or in the great precinct of Hera. For, if we had been lascivious and foolish, he would not have wanted to have lawful children with us.

Archilochus’ poetry is here turned upon itself: his alleged wish to marry one of the girls is used as an argument against his own accusations. The girls point out that he would never have wanted to marry them if they had really been all he has made them out to be. Archilochus appears in the epigram as unreasonable, spiteful, and dangerous. Yet, one might say that the girls’ denial of the allegations testifies to the power of his poetry. Even if untrue, the effect of his words apparently was such that it killed, since they speak from the grave, where they ended up after hanging themselves from shame.

An epigram attributed to Theocritus70 has a different tone than the predominant appraisal of Archilochus’ character as exemplified by the previous epigram:71

Ἀρχίλοχον καὶ στάθι καὶ εἰσίδε τὸν πάλαι ποιητάν

69 The best surviving witness to these allegations is the Cologne Epode, on which see e.g. West (1974), Van Sickle (1975: 125-165), Henderson (1976: 159-179), Slings (1987: 24-51) and, with an emphasis on the issue of the identity of the speaker, Slings (1990: 1-30).
70 On the disputed attribution of these epigrams, see Rossi (2001). For convenience’s sake, I call the writer of these epigrams Theocritus.
71 For a negative evaluation of his character, e.g. also Pi. P. 2, 100-1; Crit. test. 88 B 44 DK; AP 7.69-71, 7.674, 9.185, and Call. fr. 380 Pf. On the appraisal of Archilochus and Hipponax in the Hellenistic age, see Degani (1973: 79-104), who, however, constructs some indefensible literary quarrels on the basis of positive and negative evaluations of these poets.
τὸν τῶν ἰάμβων, οὗ τὸ μυρίον κλέος
διήλθε κῆπι τύκτα καὶ ποτ’ ἀώ.
ἡ ὃδε νιν Ἐδώμαι καὶ ὁ Δάλλος ἠγάπευν Ἀπόλλων,
ὡς εμμελής τ’ ἐγένετο κήπιδέξιος
ἐπειά τε ποιεῖν πρὸς λύραν τ’ αἰείδειν. (ἈΠ 7.664)

Stop and look at Archilochus, the ancient poet of the lambi, whose immense fame went both to the east and unto the west. The Muses and Delian Apollo must certainly have loved him, if we consider how melodious and capable he was in composing poetry and singing to his lyre.

This is one of the few poetical testimonies in the tradition about Archilochus that does not explicitly mention his unpleasant character.72 A possible explanation for this anomaly is that this epigram could be an actual honorary inscription for a statue of Archilochus. That would naturally not be the place to mention unpleasant characteristics of the poet. However, this explanation is improbable for several internal and external reasons.73 A more convincing suggestion, therefore, is that the poem, which omits the most common item about Archilochus as a poet, does so on purpose to deliver a subtle comment on the predominant way of judging him.

The last three lines state that Archilochus was loved by the Muses and Apollo and sang and played the lyre ably. This kind of praise looks so bland and undistinguished as to fit practically any lyric poet, but in fact it constitutes a rather pointed allusion to the oracles that Apollo at Delphi gave Archilochus’ father regarding his son.74 The average reader’s expectation to hear of Archilochus’ many vicious attacks is thwarted. The erudite reader, however, may have noticed that the poem does in fact reveal a thorough knowledge of Archilochus and his poetry. Apart from the reference to the oracle, the remarkable meter, an Archilochian followed by an catalectic and a catalectic iambic trimeter, is another hint to this

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72 Another candidate is Posidipp. AB 118 (SH 705), which calls Archilochus “the Parian Nightingale.” The fragmentary state of this poem makes it impossible to ascertain whether the reference was wholly positive.

73 There is no mention of ethnic or patronymic, nor of the location or dedicators. Moreover, this epigram is part of a collection of similar epigrams by Theocritus, which is in all likelihood entirely literary. The other poems display a similar kind of criticism of the literary biographical tradition cf. Bing (1988b: 117-123), Rossi (2001: 329-330). On the general likeliness of “inscriptions” found in poetry-collections being anything other than literary, see Bing (2002: 38-66).

74 Cf. Gerber (1999: 23), test. 3 and 18: “Ἀθάνατός ουὶ παῖς καὶ αοίδμος, ὁ Τελεσίκελε, ἐσται ἐν ἀνθρώπουσιν...”(Your son, Telesicles, will be immortal and subject of song among men...).
effect. Clearly then, the author of the epigram must know all about Archilochus and hence about his reputation. The mention of the “widespread fame” of Archilochus (2-3) gains ironic weight in this light, since every reader would know that the negative reputation of Archilochus formed a large part of this fame. However, this epigram apparently wishes to redirect attention to the fact that Archilochus’ great ability as a poet is at the basis of it. This poetic talent is alluded to throughout, in particular by the mentions of Apollo and of the Muses’ preference for him. If Archilochus had not possessed his talent, his reputation would not have spread around the world. Theocritus found it more interesting to stress this point than harp once more upon the negative reputation of Archilochus. In an understated way, he thus subtly attacks the facile approach of summarizing a poet’s character in epigram that was so common in his day.

A comparable process may be witnessed in Theocritus’ epigram on Anacreon, in comparison with the traditional approach as represented by Leonidas. The epigrams by Leonidas both invite a passer-by to look at the same (imaginary?) statue of Anacreon:

Πρέσβυν Ανακρέιοντα χύδαν σεσαλαγμένον οἶνωι
θάεο θυνωτοῦ στρέπτον ὑπερθε λίθου+
ὡς ὁ γέρων λίχνισθαι τοῦ πάτερ Διόνυσε
άχρι καί ἀστραγάλων ἔλεσεν ἀμπεχονέν
δισσῶν δ’ αρβυλίδων τὰν μὲν μίαν οδ
ἀλλὰ πάτερ Διόνυσε ὁ γέρων λίχνισθαι.

Look at old Anacreon, shaken in a disorderly manner by wine, in a distorted attitude on the rounded basis† (see) how the old man, with lascivious eyes casting languishing looks, wears his mantle trailing on his ankles. Of his two boots, he has lost one, wine-struck as he is, while in the other one his shriveled foot still sticks. He is singing of desirable Bathyllus or of Megistes, strumming his lovelorn lyre with his hand. Come, Father Dionysus, take care of him, for it is not right that a servant of Bacchus should be felled by Bacchus.

ἐκ Βάκχου πίπτειν Βακχιακὸν θέραπτα. (Pl. 306/GPXXXI)

Ὑπεσκέλεσθαι καὶ τὸ λώπος ἐλκεταί

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75 The epithet ἐμμελής could point to the fame Archilochus had gained as an innovator of music, cf. Rossi (2001: 327-328).
76 As suggested by Bing (1988b: 117-123) and Rossi (2001: 180-183).
77 On the difficulties of interpreting this phrase, cf. Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.).
See how old Anacreon is tottering from the wine, and how his mantle is dragged down to his legs; of his shoes, although he still has one left, the other he has lost. While he strums his lyre he is singing of Bathyllus or of beautiful Megistes. Take care, Bacchus, that the old man doesn’t fall.

The portrayal of Anacreon here is not meant as flattering, as is confirmed by the fact that Pl. 307/GPXC is written in iambi, the meter of invective and comic abuse. Two main characteristics of Anacreon’s poetry, the symposiastic and the erotic, combine to form a grotesque picture; the Dionysiac mysteries with which he was sometimes connected are ridiculed in the same breath.80 Scholars have repeatedly asked whether these descriptions fitted any actual representation of Anacreon in statuary. This question has so far been answered in the negative,79 which implies that Leonidas tried to imagine how Anacreon might be most satisfactorily represented in statuary on the basis of his well-known reputation.80 What outer characteristics would a man present who apparently wrote obsessively of love and symposia? The result is a caricature.81 This caricatural depiction of Anacreon appears to be exactly what the following epigram by Theocritus subtly criticizes.

Θάσσαι τὸν ἀνδριάντα τούτον, ὥ ξένε,  
σπουδᾷ, καὶ λέγ’ ἐπὴν ἐς οἴκον ἐνθῆς·  
“Ἀνακρέοντος εἰκόν’ ἐιδὼν ἐν Τέω  
tῶν πρόσω’ εἰ τι περισσόν ἁσθοποίων,”  
προσθέεις δὲ χῶτι τοῖς νέοισιν ἀδετό,  
ἐρείς ἀτρεκέως ὄλον τὸν ἄνδρα. (AP 9.599)

78 Cf. Dion. AP 7.31, with Gow and Page (1965: II, ad loc.) on this Dionysian connection.  
81 Cf. the anonymous epigram AP 7.28. Here Anacreon’s only epithet is οἰνοπότης; the fact that he was a poet is not even mentioned.
Look at that statue, stranger, with attention and say when you get back home: “I saw a statue of Anacreon in Teos, the best if ever there was, of the singers of yore.” If you add to this that he took delight in boys, you will accurately describe the whole man.

Theocritus ironically invites the passer-by to stop and look seriously (σπουδᾶί) at a statue. By indicating and emphasizing that what is described is a statue (ἀνδριάντα 1, εἰκόνα 3), the epigram prevents the illusion that the statue actually is the man represented. This impression was deliberately created in the Leonidean epigrams (cf. Πρέσβυν Ἀνακρείοντα/ο πρέσβυς Ἀνακρέων). No actual description of the (in all probability fictive) statue ensues, so the reader is left in the dark as to how Anacreon is imagined to have looked; a remarkable choice after the explicit invitation to “look seriously.” The ironic pointe of the epigram follows in the last two lines: “If you add to this that he took delight in the young, you will accurately (ἀτρεκέως) describe the whole man.” Bing remarks that Theocritus’ learned readers would certainly have realized that the biographical allusion of the epigram, although representing an important aspect of the literary interests and themes of the poet, could not in any way be said to describe the whole man in an accurate manner. Rossi adds that in this way Theocritus attacked the limited manner of considering the famous poet in contemporary biographical writing. Instead, I suggest that the undescribed statue referred to in Theocritus’ epigram may be the cliché depiction evoked in Leonidas’ epigram. If the implied statue of Theocritus’ epigram was that of a drunk and singing Anacreon (as his readers would no doubt expect), one would only need to add that he loved boys (the one thing perhaps not immediately visible in statuary) to complete the cliché. Once more, Theocritus subtly criticizes the facile and trite way of depicting the ancient poets by enumerating clichés about their poetry, which supposedly accurately (ἀτρεκέως) reflected their character. He points out that poets should be considered more seriously (σπουδᾶί) by their readers.

But why might he have felt that to identify a poet with his work was too simplistic? This feeling may bear a relation to the fact that many of the Hellenistic poets (certainly

82 Bing (1988b: 121).
84 Cf. also Theoc. AP 13.3, which qualifies the general caricature of Hipponax as a vicious character, to be feared even beyond death (as found in AP 7.408 and 7.536). In AP 13.3, Hipponax is only dangerous for people with a bad conscience.
including Theocritus) experimented with various roles and voices in their own poetry. Naturally, any poet who realized that it was not hard to take on an entirely different personality in poetry would have been aware of the problems caused by the effort of pinning down a poet on what he relates in a first person narrative.

1.6 Conclusion

The image of the poets of the past found in Hellenistic epigram suggests certain tendencies in the Hellenistic perception and hence representation of predecessors. The general tone of the epigrams confirms that poets of the past were held in high esteem, even if their idiosyncrasies sometimes lent themselves to caricature (Anacreon) or expressions that appear to hint at moral condemnation (Hipponax and Archilochus).

The Muses figure prominently and unquestionedly in the epigrams. In general, they are brought in as a means to underline aesthetic qualities rather than a claim to knowledge about the past. That poetry had been originally an oral performance art or even a musical art was suggested to the Hellenistic poets by the terms archaic poets used to speak about their métier; this is echoed in their epigrams. It is however difficult to ascertain whether they thought epic poets like Homer composed their poetry orally or through writing. They refer to the poetry of these ancient poets with words denoting written texts (γράμμα vel sim.) as well as with words belonging to the field of (orally composed) song/poetry (αοιδή etc.), suggesting that they do not feel a strong contradiction between these two concepts.

The emphatically material, written-down shape poetry often takes on in the Hellenistic age is nevertheless a phenomenon which visibly determines the way Hellenistic poets conceptualize poetic immortality. The old ideal of κλέος, fame in (oral) song is superseded by the feeling that it is specifically the written word that may time and again be brought to life. Dead poets continue to speak with their ipsissima verba, if these have been recorded and transmitted (cf. the topos of the speaking scroll, Ath. 13.696). Hellenistic poets

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85 Leaving the mimes apart for the moment, the voice of the hymnic narrator in Id. 22 is obviously different from that of the lovesick narrator in Id. 12, or that of the encomiast of Id. 16 and 17; the identity of Simichidas (Id. 7) will be discussed in Ch. 7.4.

86 The best example of this practice is Callimachus, whose hymnic narrators differ not only among themselves (some even appear to be women), but also e.g. from the learned narrator of the Aetia and the various narrators of the lambi (cf. e.g. Harder 2004: 63-83). This practice is discussed in Ch. 6.8.
even feel that, because of these recorded words, it is possible to engage in a literary dialogue with them (e.g. Dioscorides’ *ethopoia* of the daughters of Lycambes). The lack of a record of the authenticated speech of legendary poets, on the other hand, appears to give them a somewhat different, arguably more uncertain status, as in the case of Orpheus. Callimachus cleverly turns this whole idea of poetry as a medium for the preservation of fame on its head by making the dead Simonides lament the loss of his grave and hence epitaph—but he does so in a poetical work (viz. the *Aetia*).

The possibility of living on in one’s writings is connected to the thought that the content of poetry is a reflection of the character and experiences of its dead authors. This provides the living with the possibility to know them, judge them, imagine what they might have said (*ethopoia*) and distil their essence in caricature. This last practice, however, seems to have given rise to a kind of counterreaction (notably in some epigrams attributed to Theocritus), perhaps because there were poets who knew from their own experience that thoughts and feelings expressed in poetry are not necessarily identical to those of the author, that there is a sieve through which poetry filters reality and a practical distinction between author and role.

All in all, the way predecessors are dealt with in epigram reveals an awareness of the paradox that they are both dead and immortal. They are at the mercy of their readers, yet their texts hold their own and cannot be belied. The poetic text emerges as supremely important: it is all that is ultimately left of a poet and his life; it is the substance of Greek cultural memory.