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

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CHAPTER 8:
QUESTIONING THE MUSE: AUTHORITY AND INSPIRATION IN THE AGE OF THE MUSEUM

8.1 Introduction

In an age that differed greatly from the times when Homer sang of the Trojan War and Pindar praised the victors of athletic games, pervasive and undying *topoi* such as invocations of the Muses and κλέος as poetry’s main *raison d’être* needed to be interpreted anew if they were to remain relevant.¹ How was a poet to account for his knowledge of things past if the Muse had, with the waning of orality, become a convention, perhaps even a figure of speech?² Was the Muse still relevant? The inspiration she provided had been questioned in Plato’s attacks on poetry, which denied any truth or educational value to the utterances of poets, who, according to this philosopher, were in a state of irrational *enthousiasmos* when composing their works.³ Their poetry, then, could hardly contain anything that might withstand the test of the intellect. To rethink the implications of the Muse and the inspiration she provided therefore meant to question both the function of poetry as a receptacle of collective memory, and the doctrine of divine inspiration.

In Homer’s *Iliad*, the Muses owed their omniscience to their eternal omnipresence, which granted them knowledge of all that had happened in the past through eye-sight as opposed to hearsay (κλέος), the only source of knowledge available to humans:

\[\text{ήμείς γάρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάσας ἐν τῷ ἰστε τε πάντα,} \\
\text{ήμείς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούσμεν οὐδὲ τι ἴδεν... (Il. 2.485-6)}\]

For you are goddesses and are present and know everything, while we know nothing but hear only rumors...

According to this belief, the cooperation of the Muses enabled a poet to convey an impression of almost visual directness to his audience.⁴ The listeners were made to feel as if

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¹ For an overview of the development of the concept of κλέος, see Steinkopf (1937), Greindl (1938).
² For an analysis of the decline of the Muses’ importance, see Häussler (1973: 117-145). For an overview of Muse invocations in ancient literature in general, see Falter (1934).
³ On Plato’s opinions on poetry (especially in *Ion* and *Resp.*), see Murray (1981), Else (1986).
they had been present, or at any rate the poet, at the events he was narrating. In a sense, poetry thus made the past present through divine intervention.\(^5\)

By the Hellenistic age, when written literature, scholarly prose as well as poetry, about people and things long gone was securely stored (but retrievable for those who knew their way about the Museum), poetry about the past produced by fellows of the Museum necessarily acquired a new character and function. A striking and well known example of how the changed attitude vis à vis the past altered the perception of the Muses may be found in Callimachus’ *Aetia* (fr. 75 Pt. *Acontius and Cydippe*). The narrator here states that the history of the isle of Ceos, of which the love story of Acontius and Cydippe forms a part, derives from the writings of Xenomedes, “an old man concerned with truth,” (πρέσβυς ἐπητυμῇ μεμελημένος) who “once stored the whole history of the isle in his mythological chronicles” (ὅς ποτε πάσαν νῆσον ἐνὶ μνήμῃ κάτθετο μυθολόγῳ). In itself, such a statement would remind a reader rather of a historian than of a poet. However, the most surprising turn is yet to come, for the narrator continues: “And from thence, the story of the boy swiftly made its way to my Calliope” (ἐνθέν ὁ παῖς ἡμετέρῳ ἐδίδαξε Καλλιόπην).\(^6\) If the story was set down in Xenomedes’ chronicles before it reached Calliope, this implies that she is presented as a learned lady who does not gain her omniscience from omnipresence but rather from the diligent study of ancient texts. Thus, the passage expresses that Callimachus turns stories found in ancient documents into fiction (poetry). It is clear how far he has wandered from the Homeric invocations of *Iliad* 2. Both poets make a claim to knowledge about the past by relying on the Muse, but whereas Homer’s Muse is simply and unquestionably omniscient on account of her divine nature, Callimachus’ Muse is reliable because she chooses her sources well. Would Plato’s qualms as to the untrustworthiness of irrational inspiration still apply to a Muse who gains her knowledge from a conscientious chronicler?

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5 Cf. Od. 8.487-491, Odysseus’ compliment to Demodocus: Δημόδοκ’, ἔξοχα δή σε βροτών αἰνίζομ’ ἀπάντων. / ἢ σε γε Μουσ’ ἐδίδαξε, Διός παῖς, ἢ σε γ’ Ἀπόλλων· / λαῖν γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιών οἴτ’ ἄειδες, / δόσ’ ἐξαν τ’ ἐπαθὼν τε καὶ δόσ’ ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοί, / ὡς ταῦ ποῦ ἢ αὐτὸς παρεὼν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας. (Demodocus, I praise you above all men, whether it was the Muse, the daughter of Zeus, that taught you, or Apollo; for well and truly do you sing of the fate of the Achaeans, all that they did and suffered, and all the toils they endured, as though you had been present, or had heard the tale from another).

6 On Callimachus’ unusual relation with the Muses in *Aetia* books 1 and 2, see Harder (1988: 1-15).
Callimachus’ description of the way the Muse gathers her knowledge presumably forms an accurate portrayal of the way many of the poetae docti of the Library or Museum in reality proceeded: they found their material in prose treatises. The versification of such learned prose works became popular in Hellenistic poetry, as can be seen from the vogue of didactic poems: Aratus’ Phaenomena, largely a poetic adaptation of Eudoxus’ treatise of this title, Eratosthenes’ Hermes, with its many geographical excursus, and the Alexipharmaca and Theriaca of Nicander, which probably draw heavily on the works of the Alexandrian iologist Numenius. A final example of a somewhat different nature may be found in the epic Argonautica of Apollonius. Throughout this narrative, learned excursions on recondite aetiological and geographical facts breathe the atmosphere of the library, as is confirmed by the many references to Apollonius’ possible sources in the scholia to his epic. On the level of vocabulary, the learned and “unspontaneous” content of Hellenistic poetry was matched by a recherché employment of rare and archaic words, as shall presently be explored in more detail.

In the field of encomiastic poetry, problems—albeit of a different nature—also arose. Poets saw themselves in the entirely new position of having to praise kings like the Ptolemies who had reserved the prerogatives of (semi-)divinity for themselves and their dynasties. What was more, panegyric poetry had to compete with epideictic prose orations, royal pageants, and even temples and sacrifice in honor of the monarch. Could a poet in such surroundings still capitalize on his privileged role, his own particular brand of divinity, and claim to be a mouthpiece of the Muse? At any rate, caution was needed in this new situation, and the two kinds of divinity, poetic and royal, had to sound in unison.

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7 Nicander, who is probably later than Callimachus and Aratus, cf. Gow and Scholfield (1997 [1953]: 5-8), does not even bother to invoke the Muses; for him the fact that poetry draws on prose or other written sources has apparently become completely acceptable.

8 On Apollonius’ sources see e.g. Stössl (1941).


10 E.g. the impressive and lavish parade organized by Ptolemy Philadelphus described by Callixenus (Ath. 5= FHG3), on which see Rice (1983).

11 This is suggested by the alleged fate of the satirical poet Sotades who attacked the holy brother-sister marriage of the Ptolemies with obscene verse addressed to Ptolemy Philadelphus: Εἰς σῶς όσίην τομαλάν τὸ κέντρον ώθεῖς (you are shoving your prick into an unholy hole, fr. 1 Powell). Anecdote has it that this caused the latter to have Sotades shut into a leaden chest and thrown into the sea to drown.
In coming to terms with such issues, Hellenistic poets looked, once more, to the poetry of the past. They found ways to reinterpret what they encountered in the literary heritage. The ensuing aims to illustrate this by discussing an example of a philological approach to the past in poetry. I examine how the Hellenistic glossographical and interpretative-critical interest in Homer gave rise to a creative re-fashioning of the figure of the poet by Apollonius and Theocritus.

8.2 Homeric Scholarship and Hellenistic Poetry

With regard to Hellenistic scholarship on Homer, Antonios Rengakos states, “the rise of Homeric scholarship as an academic discipline coincides with the heyday of Hellenistic poetry. (...) This is no pure accident, but an essential relationship” (2001: 193).12 This applies to most major Hellenistic poets; in the case of Apollonius, one scholar even stated, “The Argonautica itself is a work of scholarship on Homer,”13 and another claimed it was “a kind of poetic dictionary to Homer.”14 Much in it can indeed be read as a commentary on Homeric poetry and contemporary Homeric scholarship.15 Passages in the Argonautica make implicit comments on the alleged meaning of rare Homeric words, demonstrating through their context how Apollonius (dis)agreed with the interpretations offered by previous and contemporary scholars.16 He was also concerned with verb- and noun-formation on the basis of incomplete Homeric paradigms. This is not coincidental: Apollonius himself wrote a scholarly work on Homer, entitled πρὸς Ζηνόδοτον, in which he apparently attacked the critical recension of Homer by Zenodotus, his predecessor as head librarian of the Alexandrian Library.17 Clearly, his scholarly interests impinged on his poetry, although this does not mean that his poetry was subsidiary to them. Theocritus, the other poet to be

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15 See Rengakos (1993); (1994); (2001: 193-217). Fantuzzi (1988) has calculated that Apollonius uses 102 Homeric hapax legomena not attested since Homer. Of these, he uses 65 in the same metrical position as Homer. For an idea of the extent of Apollonius’ occupation with Homeric vocabulary, one can also look at the overwhelming amount of Apollonian Homerisms gathered by Campbell (1981).
discussed here, was not a scholar connected to the Museum, yet his works too demonstrate “an unrelenting and often learned engagement with (...) in particular the Homeric epics ...”

It is not surprising, then, to find that Apollonius and Theocritus both seized on a Homeric hapax legomenon to express a crucial notion about their poetry. The word in question is ὑποφήτης (Il. 16.235), which is varied by Apollonius in the Argonautica in the form ὑποφήτης. The significance and connotations of these rare words, which qualify poets (in Theocritus Id. 16.29; 17.115; 22.116) and inspirational deities (in Apollonius Arg. 1.22), will be analyzed, demonstrating how these poets view revealed knowledge or divine inspiration. The preoccupation with Homer, Homeric scholarship, and Homeric vocabulary makes it likely that hapax legomena would stand out for learned readers and convey a message best understood against the backdrop of the original passage from which it was taken and the scholarly debate about its interpretation. My discussion of Apollonius’ use of the word will find itself substantially in agreement with the findings of José González’s (2000: 270-292) although his argument will be furthered in Apollonius’ case and expanded in that of Theocritus, whom he only mentions in passing.

8.3 Overview of other Passages featuring ὑποφήτης

To provide a background against which to interpret the passages in Apollonius and Theocritus, this section discusses the Homeric passage from which the hapax derives and lists and analyzes all Hellenistic passages in which the word ὑποφήτης subsequently occurs. It

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18 Thus e.g. Sens (1997: 36). Theocritus’ familiarity with Homer is widely agreed upon by scholars from Gow (1952) to Hunter (1999).
19 On the importance of hapax legomena for the development of Homeric scholarship in general, see Keil (1998).
20 The only other instances of variants of ὑποφήτης or ὑποφήτεια between Homer and the Hellenistic age are: P. P. 2.76: ἀμαχὸν κακὸν ἀμφοτέροις διαβολιᾶς ὑποφάτιες. (a irremedial evil is the mutual transmission of slander); Hyp. fr. 178.7: τὴν ὑποφήτιν καὶ ξάκορον Ἀφροδίτης (the prophet and attendant of Aphrodite).
21 Other attestations of this noun (probably all later): Eus. P. E. 5.8.7.6 (fourth cent. CE) quoting Porph. De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda 158.7 (third cent. CE); Nonn. Paraphrasis Sancti Evangelii Ioannis 5.157 (fifth cent. CE); AP 14.1 (hard to date, but in all likelihood Hellenistic or later); Ps. Man. Apotelesmatica 2.295 and 3.326 (third-fourth cent. CE); P. Oxy 7.1015 (Encomium Theonis Gymnasiarchi, third cent. CE); P. Berol. 10559A et B (fourth cent. CE); a quotation of Arg. 1.20-22 in the Scholia ad Dionysii Periegetae Orbis Descriptionem. Cf. Clauss (1993: 17, n. 13), González (2000: 270).
22 Although the word has a different significance in A.R. Arg. 1.1311, as will be discussed below.
must be noted that the word also occurs in Apollonius, in a passage (1.1310-1320) that will help to shed light on his use of a variant of the word (ὑποφήτωρ, 1.22) in his proem.

Homer, Iliad 16.233-238

Il. 16.233-238 contains Achilles’ prayer to Zeus before Patroclus goes into battle wearing his friend’s armor. Achilles introduces his prayer with the following hymn-like invocation:

Ζεῦ ἄνα Δωδωναίε Πελασγικὲ τηλόθι ναίων
Δωδώνης μεδέων δυσχειμέρου, ἀμφὶ δὲ Σελλοὶ
σοι ναίον’ ὑποφήται ἀνιπτόποδε χαμαιεῦναι,
ημὲν δὴ ποτ’ ἐμὸν ἐπος ἐκλυεις εὐδαιμένοια,
τίμησας μὲν ἐμὸν ἐπος ἐκλυεις ἐμὸν ἐπος,
ἡδ’ ἐτι καὶ νῦν μοι τὸδ’ ἐπικρήηνον ἐελδωφ’ (16.233-238)

Lord Zeus, Dodonian, Pelasgian, you who live far away, ruler of stormy Dodona, around you live the Selloi, your ὑποφήται with feet unwashed, who sleep on the ground; you have once heard my words in prayer—when you honored me and greatly harmed the army of the Achaeans—so now also grant this wish of mine...

Achilles prays that Patroclus may avert battle from the Greeks ships and return alive and well from the fray. As the narrator remarks, Zeus hears (ἐκλυε, 249) Achilles, which initially creates the impression that the prayer will be granted. But Zeus grants only the first part of it, saving the Greek ships; he denies Patroclus a safe return:

Ὣς ἐφατ’ εὐχόμενος, τοῦ δ’ ἐκλυε μητίετα Ζεὺς.
τῷ δ’ ἐτερον μὲν ἐδωκε πατήρ, ἐτερον δ’ ἀνένευσε… (16.249-250)

So he spoke, in prayer, and Zeus of wise counsel heard him. And to him the father granted one thing, but the other he denied...

The passage illustrates how unfathomable the designs and motivations of the gods may be for humans and how futile human wishes in relation to divine power. The reference to the Selloi, priests of the oracle of Dodona and intermediaries who explain the will of Zeus from the sounds of speaking oaks, serves to emphasize this distance between humans and gods: the word ὑποφήται may here be translated as “interpreters/revelators/transmitters (of an

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23 Cf. Janko (1985: ad loc.).
oracle or divine will/plan).”²⁴ The word is practically synonymous with προφήτης,²⁵ as the explanation of the D-scholia *ad loc.* confirms:²⁶

*Ὑπομάντεις ἢρείς. Ὁ ἐστὶ, χρησιμοδοι, θεολόγοι, προφήται. Ὑποφήτας γὰρ λέγουσι τοὺς περὶ τὰ χρηστήμα αισχουμένους καὶ τὰς μαντείας τὰς γιγνομένας ὑπὸ τῶν ἢρείων ἐκφέροντας.* (Erbse, 1975)

Priests, who divine the meaning of an oracle. That is, oraclemongers, diviners, prophets. For they call υποφηται those who occupy themselves with the oracles and bring out the oracular sayings that have been given by the priests.

The υποφηται are subordinate to the priests (ἱερεῖς) who “deliver” the oracular sayings; they are interpreters and expounders of the oracle after the priests have received it from the gods (cf. υπομάντεις). This implies a hierarchy: Zeus (speaking through the oak)—priests (ἱερεῖς, who produce the oracular response)—ὑποφήται (who publish and interpret this response)—public. This would seem to echo the practice as it was at Delphi, where the hierarchy (at least in the classical age) was Apollo—Pythia—προφήται—public.²⁷

Aratus, *Phaenomena* 163-4

There were many stories about the birth of Zeus and his subsequent upbringing, either by a goat or nymph called Amalthea or by both.²⁸ Aratus claims here that Zeus was brought up by a goat that was caterized as the star Capella. This is endorsed by his assertion that the name “Olenian Goat” was given by the υποφήται of Zeus:

Αἰξ ἢρη, τὴν μὲν τε λόγος Δί μαζὸν ἑπισχεῖν· Ὀλενίην δὲ μιν Αἴγα Διός καλέουσ' υποφηται. (163-4)

The sacred Goat, who is said to have tendered her breast to Zeus: the υποφήται of Zeus call her the Olenian Goat. (transl. Kidd)

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²⁴ On the oracle at Dodona, see in general *DNP* s.v. *Dodona* and Parke (1967a and b). The consultation of the oak was no longer in use in the Hellenistic age.


²⁷ Cf. McLeod (1961: 317-325), Parke (1965), Fontenrose (1978), although terminology expressing the functions could vary. It may be that the *scholia’s* explanation is based on analogy with Delphic practice as known from the classical era.

²⁸ The story that Zeus was nursed by a goat was perhaps taken from the Cretan poet-philosopher-historian Epimenides (sixth cent. BCE), cf. Kidd (1997: 242) and DK fr. 21; Str. 8.7.5 claims that there was a nymph named Amalthea who possessed a goat which nurtured Zeus, cf. *Hyg.* 2.13.14. *Call. Hymn* I, 48-9 names the goat Amalthea.
In Aratus’ view of the cosmos, there is a divinely given name that describes which catasterism the constellation symbolizes and hence provides significance to each constellation. In inquiry into the names of these cosmic phenomena constitutes an interpretative effort as to the divine plan directing the cosmos. This explains why ὑποφήται are brought in to endorse the name “Olenian Goat.” They are privy to knowledge of how the universe works through Zeus’ plan and able to explain this to humankind.

Apollonius, Argonautica 1.1310-1320

In Arg. 1.1280-1283, the Argonauts find that, after a stop at Mysia, they have set sail again without bringing Heracles and Polyphemus. A dispute breaks out among them: should they return or continue without their shipmates? In the middle of discord, Glaucus, the son of the seagod Nereus, suddenly rises up out of the water and stops them from turning back:

τοῖσιν δὲ Γλαῦκος βρυχίης ἀλὸς ἐξεφαάνθη,
Νηρῆος θείοιο πολυφράδμων ὑποφήτης.

(...) καὶ ιαχεὶν ἐσσυμένοισιν:
“Τίπτε παρὲκ μεγάλοιο Διὸς μενεαίνετε βουλήν
Αἰήτεω πτολίεθρον ἅγειν θρασὺν Ἡρακλῆα;
Ἄργεΐ οἱ μοῖρ
ἐστὶν ἀτασθάλῳ Εὐρυσθῆι ἐκπλῆσαι μογέοντα δυώδεκα πάντας ἀέθλους,

But to them appeared Glaucus from the depths of the sea, the wise interpreter of divine Nereus (...) and he cried to the eager crew: “Why against the counsel of mighty Zeus do you intend to lead bold Heracles to the city of Aeetes? At Argos it is his fate to labor for insolent Eurystheus and to accomplish full twelve toils and dwell with the immortals, if so be that he bring to fulfilment a few more yet; so let there be no vain regret for him.” (transl. Seaton, adapted)

Here too a ὑποφήτης clearly possesses privileged knowledge regarding the will of Zeus (1.1315). Unlike in the two previous passages, however, the mediator between humans and

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29 There seem to be Stoic overtones to this belief, cf. Martin (1967) on Phaen. 1-18. One could compare the openly Stoic Zeus of Aratus’ contemporary Cleanthes in his Hymn to Zeus, line 2: Ζεῦ φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, νόμου μετὰ πάντα κυβερνῶν… (Zeus, ruler of nature, you who steer all with your law…). On the Stoic influences on Aratus’ view of the cosmos, see further Erren (1967), Effe (1977). Their view has been nuanced by Kenney (1979). It is still a debated issue.
Zeus is a divinity himself. Moreover, Glaucus is not directly a ὑποφήτης of Zeus, but rather of Nereus, the marine deity.31 The information concerning the fate of Heracles comes to the Argonauts from Zeus, via Nereus and Glaucus.32 This complex way of relaying knowledge about the divine plan is typical for the difficult communication between humans and gods in the Argonautica.33 At the same time, the hierarchical structure implied here is reminiscent of the hierarchy in the D-scholia glossing the word ὑποφήτης.

To recapitulate, a ὑποφήτης appears to be a revelatory prophet subordinate to a divine authority in all of the discussed passages. He may be human (Il. 16.235; Phaen. 164) or divine (Arg. 1.1311).

8.4 The Μούσαι ὑποφήτορες of Apollonius

I am now ready to return to one of the passages which formed the main focus of this chapter, namely the passage at the end of the proem of Apollonius’ Argonautica 1:

Ἦα μὲν οὖν οἱ πρόσθεν ἐτι κλείουσιν ἄοιδοί
Ἄργον Ἀθηναίης καμέειν ὑποθημοσύνῃσιν·
νῦν δ’ ἂν ἐγὼ γενεῖν τα ὑποθημαίμην
ηρῶν, δαλιχῆς τε πόρους ἁλός, ὡσα τ’ ἐφεξάν
πλαξόμενοι Μοῦσαι δ’ ὑποφήτορες εἰεν ἄοιδῆς. (Arg. 1.18-22)

The ship, as former bards relate, Argus wrought by the guidance of Athena. But now I will tell the lineage and the names of the heroes, and of the long sea-paths and the deeds they wrought in their wanderings; may the Muses be the ὑποφήτορες of my song. (transl. Seaton, adapted)

Because of the occurrence of the hapax ὑποφήτορες, this passage has long been a scholarly conundrum defying convincing interpretation.34 The word is not attested before Apollonius

31 Nereus was traditionally known, though not explicitly so in the Argonautica, for his prophetic powers. The fact that Hesiod calls him ἀψυνθέα καὶ ἀληθέα and νημερτής τε καὶ ἠπίως (Theog. 233-264) may reflect this belief. In general, all sea- and river divinities were believed to possess prophetic powers.
32 At Soph. Trach. 1166, Heracles relates how he has received a prophecy very similar to the one in Arg. 1.1317-20 at Dodona, in the wood of the Selloi. This would appear to be a relevant subtext connecting the passage in Apollonius to the one in Il. 16.235.
and only very rarely afterwards. It would seem, therefore, that he has coined it himself as a variant of ὑποφήτης. Starting out from LSJ’s explanation of the word, “suggester, interpreter, expounder esp. of divine will or judgment,” the term has been interpreted in either one of two ways: “suggester” (i.e., de facto: inspirer) or “interpreter.” In the context of the Apollonian passage, this leads to the respective interpretations “inspirers of my song,” which sounds very traditional, or “interpreters of my song,” which sounds very unusual, since it is usually held to imply that Apollonius puts himself above the Muse: Apollonius sings the song while the Muses interpret it for the audience. This second translation would imply a revolutionary, unique way of presenting the relationship between poet and Muse.

The passage has therefore been interpreted as a triumphant expression of the typically Hellenistic “anthropocentric” worldview, a rebellion against the traditional subordination to the gods.

It is necessary to study these apparently mutually exclusive meanings (interpreter and suggester) in closer detail. To begin with, according to the laws of the formation of nomina agentis in ancient Greek, ὑποφήτων should mean the same as ὑποφήτης:

- ὑποφήτης and ὑποφήτων occurs in nouns of relationship and in agent nouns. The agent nouns in ὑποφήτης and ὑποφήτων are numerous despite their extensive displacement by -tēs and -tas. (…) As a productive type of agent nouns this [i.e., the type of agent nouns ending in -tēr and -tōr] was displaced in Attic-Ionic prose, and partly elsewhere by that in -tēs and -tas. (…) But the older type [i.e., in -tēr and -tōr] still continued in use in poetry, including Attic tragedy, and was even to some extent productive, since the later poets came to feel that -tēr and -tōr was a stylistic device that might be freely substituted for -tēs.

This means ὑποφήτης and ὑποφήτων have practically the same meaning, which makes the Muses in Apollonius “interpreters.” This has however frequently been challenged by


35 Apollonius was not averse to supplementing incomplete Homeric verbal paradigms; analogously, he may have tampered with prefixes and suffixes of nouns and adjectives to coin new formations. Rengakos (1994) does not discuss the word, because it is not strictly Homeric in its own right, but merely derivative.


critics, who refuse to accept that the Muses could have been represented in ancient literature as anything but “inspirers.” Should we then accept the idea that the Muses are called “interpreters of my song” by Apollonius? But why should the Muses be presented in 1.22 as interpreters of Apollonius’ song to the audience when Apollonius’ attitude towards them in the other invocations is so much more traditional? This has been explained as follows: Apollonius starts out boldly, but gradually pretends to lose confidence in his poetic abilities as he tells his story. Eventually, he feels forced to return to the traditional model where the Muse is hierarchically placed above him. However, in reality, there are no cogent reasons to assume that Apollonius does anything as extraordinary as placing the Muses below him. The solution to the problem of the meaning “interpreter” may be found in a comparison of the passage at 1.20-22 with the use of the words ὑποφήτης and ὑποφήτωρ in other passages (within and outside of the Argonautica) and in the correct interpretation of the context of the Argonautica’s proem, as was first recognized by González.

As we saw in all passages discussed above, a ὑποφήτης is an individual revealing/interpreting the will of a higher (divine) entity. This parallels the use of the word ὑποφήτωρ in post-Apollonian practice. Instead of understanding the Muses as the interpreters of Apollonius’ song for the benefit of the audience, therefore, a higher entity whose will the Muses reveal or interpret should be sought. Turning to the context of the invocation, that is to say, the proem of the Argonautica, it is obvious who this higher authority must be: “Starting from you Phoebus, I will recall the fame of men born long ago,” (Ἀρχόμενος σέο Φοίβε παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν / μνήσομαι, Arg. 1.1-2).

From this passage, it transpires that the god Phoebus Apollo, traditionally the “Mousagetes,” the leader of the Muses as well as the god of prophecy and of song, must be

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41 Yet, one could argue that the dialogue of Callimachus and the Muses in Aetia 1-2 is another example of an untraditional way of representing this relationship.
42 A notion supported first by Gercke (1889: 135-136).
43 Most notably at Arg. 3.1-5; 4, 1-4; 4.1381-1382, on which see below.
46 González (2000: 285-290) demonstrates this by an elaborate syntactic analysis of the post-Hellenistic occurrences of the word ὑποφήτωρ.
47 Pi. fr. 94c Snell-Maehler.
understood as the provider of the Muses’ knowledge. 48 Apollo is specifically invoked as the god of oracles here, since the name “Phoebus” indicates him particularly in his Delphic or Pythian incarnation. 49 To reinforce this emphasis, his associates the Muses are indicated with the word ὑποφήτορες. This term, with its Homeric reminiscences, reminds the reader of the oracle of Dodona, where the prophetic Selloi resided. Moreover, the oaks of Dodona provided the prophetically speaking timber that built the Argo. 50 The oracular connection is thus emphasized from the outset of the epic, 51 determining its theme, the Argo’s journey, and its poetics, which will be discussed below.

As has already been noted, Apollo plays an important role throughout the narrative of the Argonautica (cf. Chapter 3.6). The hymnic invocation to him indicates that he is connected to its theme and its poet, his near namesake (cf. Chapter 7.3). However, this does not mean, as Albis suggests, that ἀοίδη (1.22) should be equated with the oracle Apollo gave to Pelias, referred to in lines 5 and 8. 52 A more convincing interpretation is that the Muses are proleptically asked to reveal/transmit the “material for the song” (i.e., ἀοίδη), to Apollonius, who turns it into a song. 53 In this set-up, the Muses act as Pythia-like priestesses of Apollo, relaying his oracular utterances about the past to Apollonius. The resulting epic is a translation of Apollo’s inspiration (an oracle relating to the past conveyed to the poet by the Muses) into hexameter verse. 54 Apollo thus combines his qualities of inspirational god of poetry (20) and god of prophecy (5, 8) at the beginning of this epic. 55

48 Albis (1996: 19-21) had already suggested this interpretation but with different conclusions. To him the Muses become suggesters or inspirers after all. González (2000: 270-292) was the first to come up with the correct interpretation of the translation interpreters.


51 Among the Argonauts Mopsus is a prophet (or should we say hypophet?) of the oracle at Dodona, while the prophet Idmon is a son of Apollo.

52 Albis (1996: 19).

53 González (2000: 281-2) does not see it this way and consequently hesitates to whom the song should be attributed, Apollo or Apollonius.

54 Cf. e.g. McLeod (1961: 317-325) as to the existence of oral bards at the sanctuary at Delphi, who formed the Pythia’s incomprensible and unconnected shouts into hexameters. McLeod conjectures that they are to be identified with the προφήται officiating at Delphi. The idea that Apollonius analogously translated the Muses’ oracles into poetry has also been explored by Albis (1996: 20). González regards it as a “facile equation.”

55 The fact that Apollo is invoked earlier on and much more prominently than the Muses confirms that the Muses are his subordinates, González (2000: 283).
Such “mantic” investigation of the far past, hidden by intervening eras, is an activity that, like the search for truth about future events, was recognized by the Greeks as prophecy, the interpretation of divine revelation. Indeed, many oracles did not predict the future so much as indicate which event in the past had occasioned a god’s wrath that needed to be appeased. The activity of the epic poet who traditionally told of events that took place long before was in many ways similar to that of the prophet. As West writes:

In the absence of written records the ability to see into the distant past is no less miraculous than the ability to see into the future, and there is no room for a sharp distinction between the two. Neither is possible without divine revelation, for only gods have the necessary first-hand knowledge. (West, 1966 ad Theog. 32)

This relates to the function argued for Apollonius’ Apollo and his servants, the Muses. Not only does he give the oracles about future events to the Argonauts at the time of their expedition through various seers, he also provides the poet Apollonius with inspiration and knowledge relating to the same events, now long past, via his interpreters, the Muses. From Apollo both the poet and the Argonauts receive information about the events that make up the Argonautica: he is its fountainhead and this is why Apollonius begins his epic with an invocation of him.

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56 Cuypers (2004: 47) remarks that the Muses seem to be “the opposite of prophets” who “provide insight into the past in the manner divinely inspired prophets provide insight into the future: uncertainty remains.” However, “normal” prophets often provide insight into the past as well. Moreover, in Arg. 1.1311ff, the hypophetes Glaucus refers to the future fate of Heracles.

57 Cf. e.g. Il. 1.59-67, where Achilles proposes to ask a prophet to find out what has angered Apollo, and what can be done to appease his anger; Calchas (1.69-70 ff) does exactly that.

58 Hes. Theog. 31-3: ενέπνευσαν δὲ μιὰ αὐθήν / θεσπίν, ἱνα κλείσω μιὰ τὰ τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἐόντα, / καὶ μ’ ἐκάλονθ’ ὑμείν μεκάρων γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων. (They breathed into me a divine voice, so that I might be able to celebrate the future and the past and they ordered me to hymn the race of the blessed who live forever). Apollo appears to play a certain part in this investiture, through the laurel (Th. 30). On the difficulty of ascertaining what future prediction Hesiod is referring to, cf. West (1966: 166), Tigerstedt (1970: 172-3). Cf. further Il. 1.69-70: Κάλχας Θεσπόδης οἰωνοπόλων οὐχ’ ἀκούσας, / ὡς ἡ δὲ τὰ τ’ ἐόντα τὰ τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἐόντα. (Calchas, the son of Thestor, the best of augurs, who knew the present, the future and the past). Cf. further Epimenides, who chose only to prophesy about the far past (fr. B4 DK). An epic poem is attributed to him about the building of the Argo and the voyage of Jason to Colchis in 6500 lines (Diog. Laert. 1.111). It is hard to establish the truth of this claim, and the relevance of it to Apollonius’ epic (cf. Huxley, 1969: 60), but the coincidence is striking.
8.5  Apollonius’ View on Poetic Inspiration

The word ὑποφήτης has now been interpreted in its context, but what further consequences does this representation of the Muses have for Apollonius’ view of poetic inspiration? If Apollonius’ knowledge derives from oracles, it is important to remember that “uncertainty remains on some occasions” in prophecy.59 In ll. 16.235, the Homeric subtext to Arg. 1.20-22, this hiddenness of divine purposes is subtly alluded to by Achilles’ mention of the Selloi, priests necessary to interpret the will of Zeus.60 Inscrutability of divine motives is also a major theme of the Argonautica, as scholars agree. It is attractive to consider the relevance of this theme for the presentation of the relationship between narrator and Muses. Apollonius’ representation of divine inspiration differs from the previous tradition mainly in the fact that he questions how the Muses get their knowledge. The locus classicus with regard to this issue, as noted above, is ll. 2.484-286, where the Muses are presented as omnipresent and omniscient.61 According to Apollonius, however, the Muses themselves are not omniscient per se but dependent on information they receive from Apollo, who is hierarchically above them. Apollonius apparently felt that there was a hint of subordination in the word ὑποφήτης (and by implication ὑποφήτως), which he exploited in this passage. The presentation of Glaucus also illustrates this (Arg. 1.1311). He is called the ὑποφήτης of Nereus, who has charged him with conveying the will of Zeus (1.1315) to the Argonauts. The fact that a divinity may be called a ὑποφήτης confirms that some gods are subordinate to others. They do not possess omniscience merely by virtue of their divinity. The hierarchy Zeus—Nereus—Glaucus—Argonauts is structurally paralleled by the representation of the Muses in 1.20-22. The oracles of Apollo (Arg. 1.5; 8) may have set events in motion, but they are not the ultimate cause of the expedition; they are in turn an expression of the inscrutable plan of Zeus, as appears at other instances in the epic.62 So the hierarchy is: Zeus—Apollo—Muses—Apollonius—audience.63

63 Cf. Pl. Ion 533d-e where poetic inspiration is compared to magnetism: like a magnet infuses its power into an iron ring, which in turn attracts other iron rings, so the Muse inspires poets, who in
The passage at 1.20-22, standing as it does at the opening of the epic, must be considered programmatic for Apollonius’ treatment of revealed knowledge and inspiration in general. Particularly in combination with the varied representation of the Muses in the rest of the epic, it is significant for the point Apollonius tries to make: poetic inspiration is not a straightforward or simple process, but a problematic, equivocal, and complex one consisting of many elements. So if the narrator sometimes believes and needs the Muses, sometimes appears to doubt their information or reluctantly relates it, and sometimes even speaks against the will of the Muses, this should be interpreted as illustrating various facets of Apollonius’ knowledge about the past.

Some remarks may illustrate this. Apart from his remarkably varied invocations of the Muses, the narrator occasionally emphasizes his qualms about the truth of his narrative by his use of the particle ποι (I suppose), which normally marks statements as assumptions, not as the certainties of an omniscient narrator. This kind of usage is never found in utterances of the omniscient narrator of the Homeric epics and is more congenial to a narrator of a work of historiography wishing to express his reservations when his sources are in conflict. Clearly, then, Apollonius does not represent himself as an omniscient narrator receiving unequivocal or directly comprehensible information from the Muses; it is turn infuse their “enthusiasm” into their audience. In Apollonius’ case, the hierarchy is extended upwardly, to include Apollo and Zeus.

Contrast González (2000: 270-292), who tries to homogenize the invocations.

As he clearly does at 3.1-4: Εἰ δὲ ἀγέ νῦν Ἐρατώ, παρ’ ἐμ’ ἱστασο καὶ μοι ἐνσπε... (Come now, Erato, stand by me and tell me...); 4.1-5: Αὐτῇ νῦν κάρματον γε θεά καὶ δήνεα κούρης / Καλχίδος ἔννεπε Μοῦσα, Δίως τέκος. (You must tell me yourself now, goddess, the suffering and wiles of the Colchian girl, Muse, daughter of Zeus...); 4. 552-7: Άλλα θεάι, πώς... (But goddesses, how?...); 4.1381-8: Μουσάων ὅσε μῦθος, ἐγὼ δ’ ὑπακουός αἰείδο / Πειρίδων, καὶ τίνδε πανατεκές ἐκλογον ὀμφῆν. (This is the tale of the Muses and I sing obediently to the Pierides, and this report did I hear quite clearly.).

Cf. e.g. at Arg. 1.24, where the verb φατίζεται (it is told) clashes strangely with the invocation of the Muses two lines earlier, cf. Cuypers (2004: 50).

If at the bidding of the Muses I must tell this tale outright...).

Arg. 4.984-5: ιάλοτε Μοῦσαι, οὐκ εἰθέλον ἐνέπα προτέραν ἐπος... (Be gracious, Muses, unwillingly do I tell this tale of olden days...).


not something the Muses always may or will provide. This acknowledgement of the problematic character of information relating to the past may be read as a metaphor for Apollonius’ own negotiation of sources and informed invention about that past. That practically all information relating to the Greek past was stored in the Mouseion (lit. “shrine of the Muses”), an institution with cultic associations of which Apollonius was the director, may well be relevant to this particular conception of poetic inspiration. The Muses would not always provide unambiguous information; likewise, the documents in the Museum might not provide clarity on all aspects of the distant past. They might contradict each other, evoke doubts, relate incredible stories, or simply be silent on certain matters.

8.6 Parallels to Apollonius’ Representation of the Muses

In the Odyssey, Odysseus compliments Demodocus on his singing skills by saying “the Muses must have taught you, or Apollo.” In this conception, Apollo and the Muses are both related to the art of the bard, but there is no sign of a hierarchy between them. The poetry of Apollonius’ contemporaries, however, does provide parallels of such hierarchies in which the Muses function as transmitters subordinate to a higher authority. Aratus is one such author. He begins his didactic poem as follows:

Εκ Διός ἀρχώμεσθα, τὸν οὐδέποτ’ ἀνδρές ἐώμεν ἀρχήτων· μεσταὶ δὲ Διός πᾶσαι μὲν ἄγμαι, πάσαι δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἄγοραι, μεστὴ δὲ θάλασσα καὶ λιμένες· πάντη δὲ Διὸς κεχρήμεθα πάντες. Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν. Ό δ’ ἦπιος ἄνθρωποις δὲξιὰ σημαίνει ... (Ph. 1-6)

71 Cuypers (2004: 47) thinks that some Muse-invocations (e.g. 4.984-85) resist such a reading. But the fact that Apollonius here pretends to be telling a story the Muses dislike constitutes a reference to Pl. Resp. 377ε, where it is said that the tale of Cronus’ castration (referred to in Arg. 4.985-6) is better not told. In addition, it points to the fact that Apollonius here disagrees with Call. Aet. fr. 43.69-71 Pf. about the island at which the sickle that castrated Cronus was kept, cf. Livrea (1973: ad loc.). This invocation addresses the conflicting traditions surrounding this story, and at the discussion of what is fitting (prepon) in epic.

72 On the religious overtones of the Mouseion and its employees, see Fraser (1972: I, 324), Weber (1993: 353), Too (1998: 119). Diod. Sic. (1.49.3) calls the Alexandrian library “sacred.” For a remarkable parallel, cf. Athen. 634c-d on the famous scholar Aristarchus: Ἀρίσταρχος ὁ γραμματικός, ὁν μαντιν ἐκάλει Παναίτιος ὁ Ῥόδιος φιλόσοφος διὰ τὸ ὄραδιος καταμαντεύεσθαι τῆς τῶν ποιημάτων διανοιῶς. (Aristarchus the grammarian, whom Panaetius of Rhodes the philosopher called a seer, through his great ability to interpret the deeper meaning of poems).
Let us begin with Zeus, whom we men never leave unspoken. Filled with Zeus are all highways and all meetingplaces of people, filled are the sea and the harbors; in all circumstances we are all dependent on Zeus. (transl. Kidd)

In this proem, Aratus presents his poetic venture as a way of translating the omnipresent signs of Zeus (especially the heavenly bodies) into humanly comprehensible language, in this case didactic poetry. For this undertaking, as he later states, he also needs the Muses, who will point out to him (τεκμήρατε, 18) how he is to name the stars (ἀστέρας εἰπείν, 17) and interpret them so that they will become a song. It may be assumed that the Muses receive this information from Zeus, who initially designed and ordered the heavens: 73

Χαίρε, πάτερ, μέγα θαύμα, μέγ’ ἀνθρώπωσιν ὄνειαρ,
ἀυτός καὶ προσέρχῃ γενεή. Χαίροιτε δὲ Μοῦσαι
μελίγχαι μᾶλα πάσαι. Ἐμοὶ γε μὲν ἀστέρας εἰπείν
ἠ θέμις εὐχομένῳ τεκμήρατε πᾶσαι ἀοιδήν. (Phaen. 15-18)

Hail, Father, great wonder, great boon to men, yourself and the earlier race! And hail, Muses, all most gracious! In answer to my prayer to tell of the stars in so far as I may, guide all my singing. (transl. Kidd)

In this passage, then, the poet is presented as receiving information about the plan of the uppermost divinity Zeus through the intercession of the Muses. 74 In reality, Aratus’ source of inspiration and knowledge about the heavenly bodies was the prose treatise of the fourth-century astronomer Eudoxus. 75 In a similar way, Apollonius plunders the works of earlier historians and geographers to describe the Argonautic journey as if relying on “revealed knowledge” reaching him from Apollo through the Muses.

Another parallel, albeit of a slightly different nature, for Apollonius’ representation of divine inspiration and the difficulty of shaping it into poetry may be found in Lycophron’s Alexandra. 76 In this poem, Apollo inspires the Trojan prophetess Cassandra about the fate of Troy and all that will happen afterwards; her enigmatic prophecy is relayed by a messenger to her father, King Priam, as a narratological analysis of this poem shows:

73 Cf. the implication of the title of the Diosèmeia, a lost didactic work of Aratus.
74 Another less elaborate parallel may perhaps be found in the opening of Posidipp. AB 118. εἴ τι καλόν, Μοῦσαι πολλήτεσ, ἢ παρὰ Φοίβου / χρυσολύρεω καθαροῖς οὐκαίν εκλύετε... (If ever, Muses of my city, you have with pure ears heard anything beautiful, either from Phoebus of the golden lyre...), cf. Ch. 6.4.
75 Cf. Ch. 5.2.
The key thing about Apollo as a narrator [in the Alexandra] is that he does not, strictly speaking, narrate; rather he instills narrative content directly into the consciousness of its recipient [i.e., Cassandra]. In effect, this is narrative unmediated by any form of actual narration, and part of Cassandra’s problem is that the fabula instilled in her—the whole of human history—has no intrinsic or pre-formed narrative shape; it is up to her to give it one... (Lowe, 2004: 309)

Apollo’s inspiration in this poem is once more an expression of the plan of Zeus, so the resulting hierarchy of narrating instances in the Alexandra (Zeus—Apollo—Cassandra—Messenger—Priam—Lycophron—audience) recalls that in the Argonautica (Zeus—Apollo—Muses—Apollonius—audience). The Argonautica illustrates the problems accrued by the hierarchically relayed oracular information about the past through emphasizing the unepic insecurity of the narrator. In the Alexandra, on the other hand, the difficulty of interpreting oracles about the future and shaping them into a narrative is dramatically embodied in the deliberately enigmatic language that made Lycophron notorious. This could be read as Lycophron’s way of expressing the difficulties of the task of representing facts his audience knew as myth and history as an oracle about future events.

8.7 The Theocritean Passages

I now turn to the passages in Theocritus’ Idylls where poets are named ὑποφήται. To determine whether any connection exists between them, a look at the broader context of the poems in which they occur is necessary. In the first place, all three poems play with the format of hymn poetry. A unifying theme underlies them, namely the procuring of κλέος (fame in song) by the poet for the dedicatees. In each of the poems, this process is somehow problematic.

8.7.1 Idyll 16: κλέος and Prophecy

Idyll 16 has been named an “Enkomium der Zukunft” (Vahlen 1883: 211) because it predominantly expresses wishes for the future instead of enumerating laudable past

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77 Although in the Alexandra, where there is no external narrator, these last two categories remain implicit.
78 Forms of ὑμνως / ὑμνεῖν in 16.2 (twice); 50; 103; 17.8 (twice) 22.1; 4; 10; 26; 135; 214; 219. On the remarkable popularity of hymnic poetry in the Ptolemaic age, see Hunter (1996: 46-48). On the close parallels between the opening of 16 and 17 and the HH, see Fantuzzi (2001: 232-233, n. 1).
accomplishments. This has been explained by the fact that Hiero II of Syracuse, the laudandus of the poem, had not done anything by the time Theocritus wrote his encomium.\footnote{So already Schol. ad 16 (Wendel 1914: 325), Gow (1952: II, 305-307), Griffiths (1979: 12-6); contrast Hunter (1996: 77-8), who thinks this is merely a topical fiction.} In the poem, the word ὑποφήται occurs (16.22-31) in an offer of advice about the best way to spend money:

Δαμάντες, τί δε κέρδος ὁ μυρίς ἐνδοθι χρυσός
cēμενος; οὐχ ἀδε πλούτου φρονέουσιν ὀνάσις,
ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ψυχά, τὸ δὲ ποῦ τινι δοῦναι ἄοιδων-
pολλοῖς δ’ ἐν ἔρξαι πιᾶν, πολλοῖς δὲ καὶ ἄλλων
ἀνθρώπων, αἱ ὄλθες ἐπιβώμια ἰδέειν,
μηδὲ ἐξεισόδοκον κακὸν ἔμμεναι ἀλλὰ τραπέζη
μελιζαντ’ ἀποτεμέμει ἐπὴν ἐθέλωντι νέεσθαι,
Μοισάων δὲ μάλιστα τίεν ἱεροῖς ὑποφήταις.

Fools, what gain is it, the gold that lies uncounted in your coffers? Herein is not, to thinking men, the profit of wealth, but rather to be generous to one’s own desires, and to some poet too, maybe; to do kindness to many of one’s kin, and to many too of other folk; and ever to sacrifice to the altars of the gods, nor play the churlish host, but to treat the stranger kindly at one’s board and speed him when he would be gone; but most of all to honor the holy ὑποφήται of the Muses, that even when you are hidden in Hades you may be well spoken of and not mourn unhonored on the chill shore of Acheron... (transl. Gow, adapted)

In this passage, ὑποφήταις (29) looks like a doublure of the more usual term for poets, ἄοιδοι (24).\footnote{Wifstrand (1963: 309) reads 16.29 as a recapitulation, and stresses the connection between μάλιστα and ὧδος.} It seems unsubtle on the part of Theocritus to advise Hiero twice in the compass of five lines to spend his money on poets, so it is attractive to assume that the two words indicate two different types of singers. This may be explained as follows (cf. Chapter 2.3): in 5-21, Theocritus complains that people are not prepared anymore to spend money on living poets who may earn them κλέος. They think the poets of the past are enough. This is a serious misunderstanding, as Theocritus, with an eye on his own profit, duly attempts to point out. To procure fame, one needs the inspiration of the Muses and must sing of a contemporary human subject.\footnote{Cf. 16.58: Ἐκ Μοισᾶν ἀγαθὸν κλέος ἔχεται ἀνθρώπωσι (From the Muses comes noble fame for men); 69-70: χαλεπά τὰ ὄπλα τελέσθουσιν ἄοιδος / κουράων ἄπανεθε Δίος μέγα βουλεύοντος.} This inspiration is not the same as the ability to perform the
songs of dead poets about the gods or the heroes of the past. Hence, Theocritus distinguishes between the ἄνδοι of line 24 (rhapsodes) and the ὑποφήται Μοισάων of 29 (creative poets), who are able to provide the living with κλέος.82

The claim that it is the specific privilege of ὑποφήται to glorify the living sits very well with what Maehler remarks about the analogous expression “prophet of the Muses” in Pindar:83

Das erinnert an die alte Vorstellung die hinter dem Homerischen ἄνδοα μοι ἐννεῖτε Μοῦσα steht, aber schon bei Homer war das zum bloßen Klischee geworden, und während die homerischen Sänger einfach berichten wollen, was sich zugetragen hat, und sich nur darum bemühen müssen es κατά κόσμον d.h. möglichst genau und vollständig zu tun, ist das was Pindar zu verkünden hat viel prinzipieller verborgen; er will nicht das Geschehen berichten, sondern das edle rühmen, aber eben das sieht er in Frage gestellt und von dem „blinden Sinn“ der Leute verkannt. (Maehler, 1963: 98)

Like Pindar, Theocritus identifies the specific power of the Muse-inspired poet in this context particularly as the ability to provide ἀγαθὸν κλέος to the living. To do so, he does not need to make the Muse subordinate to another god, but presents her in her traditional guise of purveyor of divine knowledge and wisdom, a goddess in her own right. The poet is her priest and interpreter; Apollo has no place in this concept.

Nevertheless, the emphatic return to the concept of “prophet of the Muses” is remarkable, since it shows that Theocritus, like Apollonius, seeks to return to the ancient (mantic/vatic) origins of poetry in his self-representation: poet and prophet apparently have to be reunited if poetry is to be successful in this new age. This is confirmed by the emphatically oracular prediction of the triumphant emergence of the dedicatee, a heroic Hiero who will scare away the Carthaginians (71-81).84 In this poem, revealed knowledge coming from the Muses clearly is not enigmatic and does not relate to the past. It is, however, the exclusive possession of the (inspired) poet.

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82 He is not consistent in this distinction; in the rest of the poem both poets and rhapsodes are referred to by the word ἄνδοα. At 16.103 it seems there is a complete merging of rhapsodes, Muse-inspired singers and creative poets, all striving to sing the praises of Hiero and Syracuse. It is of course Hiero who enables this profusion (and fusion) of poetry.

83 Pi. fr. 150 Snell-Maehler and Paean fr. 52F6 Snell-Maehler.

84 E.g. 16.73: ἐσσεται οὔτος ἄνήρ ὥστε ἐμεύ κεχαριστε' ἄνδοῦ... Cf. Gow (1952: II, 320): “emphatic prophecy,” Dover (1971: ad loc.): “His language is a shade oracular.” For the tone, cf. e.g. ll. 4.164: ἐσσεται ἥµαρ.
In *Idyll 17* Theocritus, wishing to provide the king of Egypt with fame, encounters another kind of problem. At first sight, Ptolemy Philadelphus appears eminently fit for celebration in song because of his achievements (77-105). Unlike Hiero, he is moreover willing to pay poets for this favor (106-117). Clearly, then, he should be able to gain as much κλέος as he wants:

οὐδὲ Διωνύσου τις ἱερὸς κατ’ ἁγῶνας
χιουτέτ’ ἐπιστάμενος λιγυρὰν ἀναμέλψαι ἀοιδάν,
ὣς οὖ δωτίναν ἀντάξιον ὄπασε τέχνας
Μουσάων δ’ ὑποφῆται ἀείδοντι Πτολεμαῖον ἀντ’ εὐεργεσίης.
(17.112-120)

And never comes there for the sacred contests of Dionysus one skilled to raise his clear-voiced song but he receives the gift his art deserves and those ὑποφῆται of the Muses sing of Ptolemy for his benefactions. And for a prosperous man what finer aim is there than to win him goodly fame on earth? That is abiding even for the House of Atreus, while the countless treasure won when they took the great halls of Priam lies hidden somewhere in that darkness whence there is no return. (transl. Gow, adapted)

Traditional though the thought expressed here may be, there is something remarkably odd about this passage, since, considering whom he is addressing it seems as if Theocritus “flirts with disaster,” because “such a memento mori seems like a fatal misjudgement at the christening of a new and, by its own insistence, immortal dynasty” (Griffiths, 1979: 81).

Indeed, this is Theocritus’ problem: Ptolemy is no mere mortal:

Μοῦνος οὖν προτέρων τε καὶ ἄν ἔτι θερμὰ κονία
στειβομένα καθύπερθε ποδῶν ἐκμάσσεται ἴχνη,
ματρὶ φίλᾳ καὶ πατρὶ θυώδεας εἵσατο ναοὺς∙ (17.121-123)

Of men of old and of those the imprint of whose steps still warm the trodden dust holds beneath the foot, Ptolemy alone has founded fragrant shrines for his dear mother and his father... (transl. Gow)

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85 Cf. Goldhill (1991: 277) who remarks upon “the difficulty of discovering a strategy of celebration which is adequate to the new circumstances of the Ptolemaic dynastic rule, but which is not diminished in contrast with the great tradition of Greek encomiastic verse.”

Would such a king still need a poet to gain him κλέος and save him from oblivion after death? The immortality of his parents seems to imply at least that, once Philadelphus himself departs from this world, he will be among the gods on Olympus; he will certainly never be “nameless and forgotten, wailing on the banks of cold Acheron.” How does Theocritus approach this problem in the rest of the poem? Is there a way out?

Lines 17.16-33 have already sketched the immortal existence on Olympus of Ptolemy Soter, Philadelphus’ father. The tone of the passage is strikingly similar to that of for instance the Homeric Hymns to (Olympic) divinities, in its use of a quasi omni-temporal present tense to describe the actions of the divine Ptolemy Soter. In setting the scene on Olympus, it moreover provides an insight that is normally inaccessible to ordinary mortals. The implication of the passage is therefore that only a vessel of the revealed knowledge of the Muses is able to envisage this scene. This is of course where the Μουσάων ὑποφῆται (119) necessarily come in, among whom Theocritus may once more be reckoned. Although Ptolemy clearly does not need to fear oblivion in Hades like his mortal contemporaries, even he, immortal as he is, needs a poet. This had in fact already been acknowledged in the phrase ὑμνοὶ δὲ καὶ ἀθανάτων γέρας αὐτῶν (hymns are the gift of honor even for the gods, 8). If Ptolemy is a god, he will need hymns; hymns are the province of the Μουσάων ὑποφῆται. Having more or less solved the problem thus, Theocritus ends his encomiastic hymn on a prophetic note once more:

Χαίρε, ἀναξ Πτολεμαῖε· σέθεν δ’ ἐγὼ ἱσα καὶ ἀλλῶν
μνάσομαι ἡμιθέων, δοκέω δ’ ἐποχος οὐκ ἀπόβλητον
φθέγξομαι ἐπουμένοις· ἁριτή γε μὲν ἐκ Δίως αἰτεύ.
(135-137)

87 Id. 16.30-1, this is the fate that awaits Hiero should he not employ a poet.
89 Cf. Call. Ektheosis Arsinoes (fr. 228 Pf.), which is located on Olympus as well. The opening phrase of the fragment (Ἀγέτω θεός, ού γὰρ ἐγώ δίξα τῶν δ’ ἀείδειν, let a goddess lead, for I am not competent to sing of these things) suggests the referring of the song to a higher (divine) authority.
90 Hunter (2003: 148) connects the word with the Hes. Theog. 80-93. Weber (1993: 322) thinks the phrase points to the fellows of the Alexandrian Museum; however, as noted, the word also occurs in the Sicilian Id. 16.
91 Cf. Pi. fr. 121 Snell-Maehler: πρέπει δ’ ἐσολοίσαι ὑμνεῖσθαι ... καλλίσταις ἀοιδαίς. / τούτο γὰρ ἀθανάτοις τιμαίς ποταιώθηαι μόνον, / θανάσκει δὲ σιγαθέν καλόν ἐχον. (It is proper for good men to be hymned... with the noblest songs, for that alone touches upon immortal honors, but a noble deed dies when left in silence). What makes the phrase in 17.8 even more piquant is the fact that it alludes to the Homeric subtext ὁ γὰρ γέρας ἐστὶ θανόντων (for that is the honor for the dead). For the thought that song is the best gift because it is immortal, cf. Call. Iamb. 12 (fr. 202 Pf.).
Farewell Prince Ptolemy, and of you no less than of other demigods will I make mention, and I will utter, methinks, a word which men hereafter shall not reject; but for excellence you must pray to Zeus. (transl. Gow, adapted)

Yet, prophecy apart, the passage is somewhat problematic: in the last half line, it almost seems as if Theocritus is saying that Ptolemy has not yet achieved any ἀρετή (excellence); a somewhat improper claim at the end of an encomium.93 The Hesiodic subtext of the Kings and Singers passage, which informs much of the rest of the poem,94 may be relevant here too:

ὅντινα τιμήσουσι Δίως κοῦραι μεγάλοι
γεινόμενον τε ἱδασι διοτρεφέων βασιλῆων,
τῷ μὲν ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ γλυκερὴν χείουσιν ἐέρσην,
τοῦ δ’ ἐπε’ ἐκ στόματος ὅει μείλιχα. (...)
(...)
ἐρχόμενον δ’ ἄν’ ἀγώνα θεόν ὃς ἰλάσκονται
αιδοί μειλιχή, μετά δέ πρέπει ἀγρομένουσιν.
τοῖς Μοῦσαῖς εἰρή δόσις ἀνθρώπωσιν.
ἐκ γὰρ τοι Μουσέων καὶ ἑκηβόλου Ἀπόλλωνος
ἄνδρες αἰοδοί ἔασιν ἐπὶ χθόνα καὶ κιθαρισταί
ἐκ δὲ Διὸς βασιλῆς· ὁ δ’ ὀλβίως, ὄντινα Μοῦσαι
φιλοντα γλυκερή οἱ ἀπὸ στόματος ὅει αὐθή. (Theog. 81-98)

Whomever among zeus-nourished kings the daughters of great Zeus honor and behold when he is born, they pour sweet dew upon his tongue, and his words flow soothingly from his mouth. (...) and as he goes up to the gathering they seek his favor like a god with soothing reverence, and he is conspicuous among the assembled people. Such is the holy gift of the Muses to human beings. For it is from the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that men are poets upon the earth and lyre-players, but it is from Zeus that they are kings; and that man is blessed, whomever the Muses love, for the speech flows sweet from his mouth. (transl. Most)

King Ptolemy has already received the gifts of the Muses, thanks to Theocritus (who is their servant and Apollo’s), but he must look to his own patron god Zeus for the specifically “kingly” gift of ἀρετή, which will make people treat him like the god he is. Judging by the rest of the poem this should not prove to be a problem, since through the intercession of his father Ptolemy Soter and his forefather Heracles, Zeus’ own son, Ptolemy Philadelphus may assume to be in Zeus’ good books. Through the allusion to Hesiod, the gifts of Zeus and that

93 Gow (1952: II, ad loc.) glosses ἀρετή as “glory, victorious achievement.” He believes the passage indicates that the Syrian war was not yet brought to a successful end.

of the prophet of the Muses are moreover implicitly coupled like they are in the *Theogony*; together they determine the immortality of Ptolemy Philadelphus.

### 8.7.3 Idyll 22: Rewriting the Poetic Past

The final instance of the word ὑποφήτης is found in the complex *Idyll 22*. In this poem, the poet sets out to hymn both the Dioscuri together (1-26) and then Polydeuces (27-136) and Castor (137-211) separately. A striking characteristic of the poem is that its second half, narrating the fight of the Dioscuri with the Apharetids (22.134-211), does not recount the fate of its heroes in the traditional, well known, way (cf. Chapter 3.9). Considering the protean quality of Greek myth, this may appear unsurprising, but it must be noted that Theocritus’ twenty-second *Idyll* actually underlines the fact that the poet presents a revisionary version of the tale.  

The best known tale about this fight is as follows. According to Pindar *Nemean* 10, the Tyndarids or Dioscuri once got into a fight with the sons of Aphaeus, Idas and Lynceus “for some reason to do with cattle” (N. 10.60). Castor, the mortal twin, son of Tyndareus, was killed by the Apharetids. Polydeuces, son of Zeus, was so shattered with grief at the death of his brother that he wished to die as well. Zeus offered him the following choice:

> εἰ μὲν θάνατον τε φυγὼν καὶ  
> γῆς αὐτὸς ἀπεχθόμενον  
> αὐτὸς Οὐλιμπιον θέλεις <ναίειν εμοί>  
> σὺν τῷ Ἀθαναίῳ κελαινεγχεῖ τῷ Ἄρει,  
> ἐστὶ σοι τούτων λάχος: εἰ δὲ κασιγνήτου πέρι  
> μάρνασαι, πάντων δὲ νοεῖς ἀποδάσσασθαι ἰσον,  
> ἥμισυ μὲν κε πνέοις γαῖας ὑπένερθην ἐὼν,  
> ἥμισυ δ’ οὐρανοῦ ἐν χρυσῷ<ε> ς δόμοισιν. (N. 10.82-88)

If you wish to escape death and hated old age and to dwell in Olympus yourself with me and with Athena and Ares of the dark spear, you can have this lot. But if you strive to save your brother and intend to share everything equally with him, then you may breathe for half the time below the earth and for half the time in the golden homes of heaven. (transl. Race)

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Polydeuces chooses to share death as well as immortality with his brother; hence the Dioscuri reside part of the time on Olympus and part in Hades.  

In Homer, the story appears to be different still. At Il. 3, the teichoscopia, Helen speculates about the reason for the absence of her brothers; she fears they may have declined coming to Troy for fear of being shamed on her account. The narrator remarks that in reality they were already dead and buried in their native Lacedaemon. This passage constitutes the single mention in the Iliad of the Dioscuri. Their irrevocable death (no part-time immortality on Olympus here) implies that they share the status of the other mortal Homeric heroes; they are no divinities.  

Theocritus presents a remarkably different ending to the story of the Dioscuri. Instead of dying or becoming partly mortal and partly immortal, they emerge victoriously from the battles they wage, illustrating the narrator’s remark: “No light thing it is to war with the sons of Tyndareus. They are mighty, and sons of a mighty sire.” (Οὐτοὶ Τυνδαρίδαις πολεμιζέμεν οὐκ ἐν ἐλαφρῷ / αὐτοί τε κρατέουσι καὶ ἐκ κρατέοντος ἐφοσάν, 22.211-212). Once this rather remarkable difference between the tradition, particularly the Iliad, and Idyll 22 is acknowledged, certain aspects of the hymnic envoi start to look enigmatic:

χαίρετε, Λήδας τέκνα, καὶ ἡμετέρους κλέος ὅμιλοι ἐσθλὸν ἀεὶ πέμποιτε. φίλοι δὲ τε πάντες αἰοίδι Tυνδαρίδαις Ἑλένῃ τε καὶ ἄλλοις ἡρώεσσιν, Ἄνακτες Χῖος ἀοιδός ἐμήσατο Χῖος ἀοιδός, ὑμνήσας Πριάμοιο πόλιν καὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν Ἰλιάδας τε μάχας Ἀχιλῆας ἐσθλὸν ἀεὶ πέμποιτε. φίλοι δὲ τε πάντες αἰοίδι

Farewell, sons of Leda, and send ever noble renown upon our hymns. All bards are dear to the sons of Tyndareus, to Helen and to the other heroes that aided Menelaus.

96 For a mortal Castor and immortal Polydeuces, cf. Cypria (Bernabé fr. 8): Κάστωρ μὲν θνητός, θανάτω δε οἱ αἰσὶ πέμπσατε, / αὐτάρ ἡ γ’ αὐθάνατος Πολυδεύκης, ὠς Λεόνης. (Castor is mortal, and his fatal day is set; but the other one, Polydeuces, is immortal, that shoot of Ares).
97 Il. 3.236-244: Ὡς φάτο, τοὺς δ’ ἕθη κάτεχεν φυσίως αἰαί / ἐν Λακεδαιμονίοι αὖθι φίλη ἐν πατρὶδι γαίῃ. (Thus she spoke, but the lifegiving earth already held them, right in Lacedaemon, their own fatherland).
98 Cf. Pi. N. 10.72: χαλεπὰ δ’ ἔρις ἄνθρωποις ὠμλεῖν κρεσσόνων. (It is hard for mortals to wage battle with their betters) and Call. Hymn. II, 25, with the remarks of Williams (1978: ad loc.).
to sack Ilium. Glory for you, princes, the bard of Chios fashioned when he hymned the town of Priam and the ships of the Achaeans, the battles round Ilium, and Achilles, that tower of strength in fight. And to you I too bear the soothing strains of the clearvoiced Muses such as they give me and my own store provides; and for gods songs are the fairest meed. (transl. Gow, adapted)

This passage seems to proclaim that Theocritus thinks that Homer has provided the Dioscuri with renown, in the Iliad. This is a problem, for, as noted, the Iliad mentions them only in passing, and what is more, as already dead. As Gow puts it: “However we seek to evade this difficulty, the objection remains that, in a hymn which celebrates the Dioscuri as gods, any reference to the Iliad is unfortunate, since, according to that authority, they were of the same clay as the other heroes.”

Considering Theocritus’ expert knowledge of Homeric poetry, it is hard to believe this was some slip of the pen. It seems more attractive to conjecture that Theocritus deliberately invites his readers to contrast his own poetic treatment of the Dioscuri with the brief handling they receive in the Iliad. It might of course be argued that the mere fact that the Dioscuri are referred to at all in the Iliad gains them immortal fame. Yet, Theocritus strives to procure them a different kind of immortality, or immortal fame. His poem actually brings the Dioscuri back to life: if neither of them died in the battle with the Apharetids, they would have been alive to wage war in the Iliad, and could have gained undying renown. Theocritus restores this possibility like the true divine prophet of the Muses he claims to be: this explains his statement that he brings to the Dioscuri both the gifts of the Muses (here the

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99 That this is the poem Theocritus is thinking of is strongly suggested by the synoptic description in 22.218-219. Gow (1952: II, 406) remarks that it is natural to take ἐμήσατο (22.217) and ύμνησας (22.218) as referring to the same action, cf. Sens (1997: 218-219).

100 Gow (1952: II, 406-407) considers the possibility that Theocritus is referring to the Cypria (cf. Cameron 1995: 436) but concludes (on the basis of ld. 16.49) that Theocritus did not ascribe this poem to Homer. At any rate, according to the Cypria, the Dioscuri were not wholly immortal either. Dover (1971: 250) and Hunter (1996: 76) interpret ύμνιν (22.218) as referring to another group of heroes than ύμνιν (22.221). Yet, even if 22.218 refers to a wider group of heroes, it should still include the Dioscuri, who are certainly addressed in 22.223 as θειοί, cf. Sens (1997: 210). Griffiths (1976: 363-7) argues that the narrative voice in ld. 22 must be understood as a parody of a narrator who does not know what he is claiming; Laursen (1992: 92) sees the passage as an indication of Theocritus’ ethical views about the Iliad: the fact that the Dioscuri did not participate in the war around Troy counts as laudable. This oddly neglects to take account of the bloody and unjust battles ld. 22 describes.


102 Even though they are dead and therefore hardly able to gain κόδος, with its particular meaning of “glory won in battle” (cf. LSJ s.v.).
Muses would seem to stand for the poetic tradition as symbolized amongst others by Homer) and items from his own store.

This demonstration of poetic prowess may have been given for the benefit of the Ptolemies, who accorded an important status to the Dioscuri in royal cult. They may even have perceived a kind of “typological” similarity between their own status and that of the Dioscuri. The hymn is thus another meditation on κλέος, immortality and poetry: poetry proves to be of the essence for the gaining of κλέος. This is what is expressed, slightly varying the adage of 17.8, near the end of *Idyll* 22: hymns are the most beautiful of honors for the gods (κλέον δὲ θεοίς κάλλιστον άοιδαί, 22.223). Hymns are “better than shrines, sacrifices, processions and other honors” (Sens, 1997 *ad loc.*), because they immortalize by revealing what usually remains hidden from the sight of men (as in 17), or by setting right what has become (wrongly) established by tradition (as in 22). In Theocritus’ hymn, the Dioscuri have become immortals, as the Argonauts in Apollonius’ epic “hymn” (cf. Chapter 3.6), and Ptolemy in the seventeenth hymnic *Idyll*.

8.8 Conclusion

By representing the Muses as the “interpreters” of Apollo for the benefit of his epic about the legendary past, Apollonius has done something interestingly innovative. He has not changed the hierarchy of poet and inspirational deity, as scholars have claimed, but found a new way of addressing the problematic aspects of revealed knowledge in a subtle envisioning of divine inspiration. A particularly striking feature is the hierarchical structure he expresses by his use of the phrase “may the Muses be the ὑποφήτορες of my song,” which implies that the Muses are subordinate to Apollo and that therefore their information is not direct, with all problems this entails. This hierarchical representation seems triggered by the contingencies of an age in which most readers would have been aware that, in reality, poets obtained a large part of their information about the past from the accounts of predecessors.

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103 Note the alternation between “sons of Zeus and “sons of Tyndareus.” Cf. the double paternity of Heracles (Amphitryon and Zeus, cf. *Id.* 24); Alexander (Zeus-Ammon and Philip); the same seems implied of Ptolemy Soter (Lagos and Zeus?) at *Id.* 17.16, cf. Hunter (2003: 111).

104 Cf. the way Pindar changes traditional myth to fit his own conception of the divine (e.g. *O.* 1.35-41; *O.* 9.35-40; *N.* 7.22-27; 8.32-37), on which see Šperduti (1950: 235), Pfeijffer (2004: 222-223).
(who, in turn, doubtless had their own sources) stored in the shrine of the Muses, the Mouseion. In Apollonius' work, the Muses may be read as personified references to the different ways in which an epic poet with scholarly inclinations establishes, negotiates, chooses, and incorporates truth, tradition, and invention in his narrative. Their first invocation (1.20-22) questions the concept of revealed knowledge by implicitly asking how they obtain their information. The passage thus points to the interpretational difficulties adhering to the establishment of cause and effect, the decision about which version of legend or history is true, and who is ultimately responsible for it.

By connecting prophecy and poetry in this way, Apollonius also, on another level, links two disciplines that had long before his times become separate. This process is reminiscent of the insertion of a hymnic opening and ending in his epic, as analyzed in Chapter 3. In both instances, Apollonius is innovating and creates something new by returning to the fundamental archaic functions of Greek poetry (hymning the gods) and of poets (prophets revealing the truth about the past and about the divine purposes that structure the world and history). Meanwhile, he is able to turn this into a subtle trope of the way in which a learned poet in an age of scholarship deals with the traditional concept of inspiration coming from the Muse.

Theocritus' use of the hapax is altogether different. He uses the Homeric word in pindarically influenced contexts of praise in order to emphasize the significance of his status as κλέος-providing singer for rulers with heroic or semi-divine aspirations. He thus stresses the importance and exclusivity of revealed knowledge about the present and future. Only the poet in possession of such knowledge is able to provide humans but also immortal beings with glamor and status. κλέος is the best gift for men; hymns are the best gifts for the gods; hence both categories need a Muse-inspired prophet to compose for them.

Styling himself thus as a ὑποφήτης Μουσάων, Theocritus not only points backwards to the great poets of the epinician tradition, most notably Pindar, but may also be said to foreshadow the Augustan poets:

When the Romans for the first time were becoming aware of Greek literature, and ... were turning to the Greeks for their literary types and their metre, it is fair to conjecture that they simply borrowed the term poïetes because they felt it carried

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105 It could be asked who was the first to use the hapax; however, questions of priority in Hellenistic poetry are notoriously difficult to answer, cf. Köhnken (2001: 73-92).
greater prestige and dignity than their own word *vates*, in that it connoted a greater degree of skill and polish. It was not until later that the term *vates* flowered anew and was endowed with deeper brilliance by the Augustan poets who revived the word deliberately, conscious of its more ancient religious connotation, and by so doing renewed the ancient alliance between poetry and prophecy. (Sperduti, 1950: 221)

It seems Hellenistic poets too looked to the prophetic connotations of poetry to infuse their works with a deeper brilliance. And so, although both poets arguably took the same subtext as their basis for their new conceptions of the process of poetic inspiration, the ideas of Apollonius emerge as directly opposite to those of Theocritus. Whereas Theocritus emphasizes his closeness to the Muses and their omniscience and his similarity to such great prophets of the Muses of the lyric, hymnic, and epic tradition as Pindar, Homer, and Hesiod, Apollonius distances himself from the easy acceptance of the belief in revealed knowledge and uses the concept to illustrate the novel difficulties facing a contemporary poet working in a poetic tradition so full of opposing poetic, historical, mythical, and philosophical traditions.