Das Buch von L. gibt einen gründlichen und bisweilen (wenn auch nicht oft genug) kritischen Überblick über die Übernahmen und Abwandlungen der Stoffe der kyklischen Epen und vor allem der Odyssee durch Eur. Es liefert auch interessante Beiträge zur Interpretation der behandelten Dramen.

Zwei grundsätzliche Probleme bleiben freilich bestehen. Erstens ist zu unterscheiden zwischen intertextuellen Bezügen, die der philologisch geschulte moderne Leser entdeckt und für seine Interpretation fruchtbar macht, sowie solchen, die der Verfasser selber hergestellt hat in der Absicht, daß ein literarisch gebildeter zeitgenössischer Zuschauer oder Leser sie bemerken und sich an ihnen freuen konnte, und schließlich solchen, die so deutlich waren, daß auch der durchschnittliche Zuschauer sie bemerken mußte. Ferner ist zu fragen, für wen die attischen Tragiker eigentlich ihre Stücke schrieben und inszenierten, für die wenigen Gebildeten oder für das große Publikum. Ich meine, daß sie sich anders als die poetae docti des Hellenimus und der Römer in erster Linie an das große Publikum richteten; dieses aber dürfte von den intertextuellen Bezügen, die L. und andere zu entdecken meinen, nur das wenigste bemerkt haben.


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The argument of this book is clear, carefully articulated, fully researched – and highly provocative.

Stephens, Professor of Classics at Stanford and best known for her fine work on editing papyri, aims to set Hellenistic poetry in a cultural and political context. This may seem like an eminently reasonable and respectable project. She is, after all, following very well-recognized contemporary scholarly work on the bardic recitals of Homeric poetry, the festival context of Athenian tragedy and comedy, and the political impact of the literature of the Imperial Greek East, the so-called Second Sophistic. Where earlier generations of scholars privileged art for art’s sake and the sublimity of Greek poetic language, it is by now a familiar
move of contemporary criticism to ask about the ‘performative’ value of literature and to explore its effect within its cultural environment. What makes St.’s work remarkable, however, is its claim that Hellenistic poetry must be read as having a full and active engagement with Egyptian culture. It is this central claim which will stimulate and enrage scholars in equal measure. For what is thereby set at stake by St.’s project is not just the accurate description of Alexandrian art and society in the third and second centuries, but the notion of Greek culture itself: how it should be understood in relation to its colonial engagement with that evocatively charged world of Egypt. In short, St. sets out to debunk the purity of Greek artistic achievement – an act of ideological agit-prop, if ever there were one. If St. is right or even persuasive in her arguments, our image of the Greek poetic tradition could change fundamentally.

It is traditional, I think, to see the Hellenistic poetry of Alexandria as centred on the library and the court of the Ptolemies. Critics who delight in Hellenistic poetry, delight in its bookishness – its irony, its self-consciousness, its intellectual brilliance, its tortured or flamboyantly self-aware rhetoric of the learned, exclusive and obscure. Critics who dismiss Hellenistic poetry see similar qualities, though they value them differently – as aridity, a lack of sublime poetic force, an avoidance of the public passion of the classical performances of tragedy or oratory. Both sides of this critical fence – which I have, of course, oversimplified here for clarity’s sake – regard the close-knit academic world of the library and the court as the fundamental condition of possibility for this poetry. The small group of like-minded scholars attached to the showy court is a familiar construction of the context of Hellenistic poetry, whether it leads to a picture of the Hellenistic poet as a T. S. Eliot or as a ἀγωνίζομαι.

One consequence of this image is that Hellenistic poetry is often seen as political only in the limited sense that it engages in the necessary infighting of patronage and praise. It is possible and, indeed, desirable to see a wider political process at work too, however. A new Greek political system in a new Greek civic society needs to establish its place within and against the traditions of the old Greek world. Whether we think of Callimachus’ poems on the origins of things or on religious rites (of which the Aitia is the most celebrated); or whether we think of Apollonius’ great epic of quest in a non-Greek world; or whether we read Theocritus’ view of a timeless pastoral world of the Greek countryside, it is, I think, convincing to see one important aspect of Hellenistic poetry as the creation of a new sense of tradition for this new and changing society of Alexandria. Writers such as Peter Bing in America, R.L. Hunter in England, Marco Fantuzzi in Italy, and the whole group which gathers around Annette Harder and her colleagues in Groningen, have done much in recent years to articulate in detail this political and artistic rhetoric of rupture and revival. It is work which has repeatedly emphasized how the Greek poetry of Alexandria is obsessed with its Greek past as a way of forming its Greek cultural present.

All of these scholars – and I include myself here, as does St. – stand accused in this book of having failed to appreciate adequately what St. insists is a systematic engagement with an Egyptian here and now in Alexandrian poetry. She demands that Alexandrian poetry should be read, and was meant to be read, with a double perspective – the ‘seeing double’ of her title. By this, she means we should read Hellenistic poetry «through dual lenses – Greek and Egyptian» (18). There is,
she claims, a «Greco-Egyptian universe» which «converges in the person of the human king, Ptolemy» (18), who also acts as Pharaoh, and this mixed Greek and Egyptian mythological frame gives a different and deeper sense to the poetry’s work of cultural construction. She aims to recognize «the experience of the original audiences of these poets» (19). Her «ultimate goal is to remove Alexandrian poetry from the ivory tower and locate it more centrally in the social and political life of the city» (19). Hellenistic poets were the image makers, the spin doctors, of the Ptolemaic court, speaking to the whole population in a language the whole population could understand.

The structure of the book is clear and strong. St. begins with an introduction where she makes her case in the general terms I have been following so far (1–19). This is followed by a long first chapter (20–73) on «conceptualising Egypt». This looks in detail at how Egypt is represented by Greek writers (back to Herodotus), and how Egyptian royalty and Egyptian kingdom represents itself in Egyptian sources. There follow three extensive chapters, one each on Callimachus, Theocritus, and Apollonius. In Chapter 2 (74–121), the focus is on Callimachus’ ‘Hymn to Zeus’ and how this expresses ideologically charged images of kingship. In Chapter 3 (122–70), the emphasis is on Theocritus at Court (as Frederick Griffiths put it), and especially on two of the ‘Idylls’, Idyll 17, an encomiastic poem addressed to Ptolemy, and, more surprisingly, Idyll 24, the Heraclides. In Chapter 4 (171–237), the Argonautica of Apollonius is discussed as a cosmological work, seeing it as an epic about Greek colonization and in particular the colonization of Egypt. A final briefer chapter (238–258), entitled ‘The Two Lands’ is a conclusion that sums up the general case and explores its implications. In each of the central chapters, there is detailed and carefully argued readings of particular works of Hellenistic poetry, and St.’s case depends to a good degree on the success or failure of these readings, which are very much the proof of the pudding.

Let me begin with the general case, however. There is no doubt that Alexandria was a rapidly developing city. It was polyglot in that the population was made up of different linguistic groups, which also embodied different cultural traditions. (It is not clear, however, how many people spoke more than one language or were literate in any, let alone in more than one language.) The dominant Macedonian community took over some aspects of Egyptian bureaucracy, and certainly as the centuries unfolded, there is evidence in names, marriage patterns and social system, of some active interfaces between different groups – though the work of Dorothy Thompson, W. Clarysse and others have demonstrated how complex it is to analyze and evaluate these signs of permeable cultural boundaries. St. develops a model that draws on modern discussions of «colonialism». She sees the Greek rulers as fully embracing the signs and symbols of Egyptian ruler cults, and assumes that the «contact zone» between Greek and Egyptian is thus increasingly a zone of interchange, permeability, and, from the Greek point of view, appropriation and display of Egyptian symbolic capital.

The Egyptological material which St. marshals is of great importance, and should be read by all those working on Hellenistic cultural history.

The first chapter is subtly and intelligently written and should provoke a good deal of attention, especially after the recent full-length study of Egypt in Greek thought by Phiroze Vasunia, and the work of Daniel Selden (all three Californian scholars). Where I was left with a worry, however, was the degree to which the model of colonization being utilized was sufficiently flexible and nuanced. The case of the English in India might provide an interesting (and very well documented) point of comparison. There were indeed in India public displays which represented the royal power of England in terms that spoke to
Indian symbolics. There are also many signs of apparent permeability between English and Indian cultures (from the seemingly insignificant adoption of Indian words, like «pukka» or «gymkhana», or a taste for curry, to the massive influence of English education, political systems and army practices on Indian society). But there were also stark boundaries, and the fierce expression and defence of those cultural limits.

It is therefore not clear to me at least that the representation of a Ptolemy as a Pharaoh necessarily should be taken as support for a change in mythological thinking among the Greeks. There are different potential negotiations at each interface between cultures, and we must remain as sensitive to where the border controls are being enforced as to the apparent border crossings. There are also highly significant and formative blindnesses when cultures meet.

I wish to emphasize this doubt in general terms from the start, because it underlies my worries about each of the central chapters. In each case, St. chooses brief selections of only the three greatest extant Hellenistic poets. (There is no discussion of epigram, say, a favoured genre of the period, nor of Herodas’ Mimiambos, whose ‘slices of life’ might have been thought to show Greco-Egyptian culture at street level; nor does she treat later Alexandrian works which might be thought central to the issue of cultural interchange, such as Philo, let alone less germane but hugely influential writers such as Aratus.) In the writing of Callimachus, Theocritus and Apollonius, there is very, very little ‘explicit’ and ‘direct’ discussion of Egyptian royal symbols or any aspect of Egyptian society as such. There is simply no equivalent of the extensive and feverish fantasies of the East that dominate the English literature of the British Empire. Rather, St. picks out from her highly selective examples some often small details, and uses them first as keys for her interpretation of a Hellenistic agenda, and, second, as mutual, incremental supports for her claims of the importance of Greek engagement with Egyptian culture in Alexandria.

Thus the ‘Hymn to Zeus’ of Callimachus is easy to link to Ptolemy, as Ptolemy is referred to in the poem as «our king», and because ἐκ θεώ Διός βασιλεὺς — «kings are from Zeus». The association of the head of the Ptolemaic dynasty and the head of the Olympians is the sort of praise which critics of Romantic sensibilities have often found distasteful. Yet how does this poem, which nowhere explicitly mentions Egypt or anything Egyptian engage with Egyptian culture? St. argues that Arcadia, the birth-place of Zeus, has «contours…which are made to resemble Egypt» because it is arid and «watered at the birth of the divine child» (108). A series of suppositions upon suppositions connects Zeus with the «bee king» a symbol of Egyptian royalty (127). The description of Zeus’ birth is also described in terms that parallel Egyptian myth» (102) — that is, which in very broad structural terms resemble an Egyptian story. The summary is this: «an audience that lived in Egypt…could not have been unaware of the mythology of Egyptian kingship and its attendant ideology, an ideology that explicitly connects the birth of the king with the birth of the god Horus…Callimachus experiments with constructing a parallel cosmology for his Greek-Egyptian king.» Callimachus is thus «actively collaborating in setting the new world in order» (114).

The fine line between allusiveness and allegory is for me dangerously transgressed here. The argument depends on the supposition — no evidence is suggested — that a Greek audience must be familiar with Egyptian myths, myths that Plutarch (many years later) still has to collect, explain and analyze for his highly learned Greek audience. (Try the sentence as «an English audience that lived in India could not have been unaware of the mythology of Hindu kingship…» This would be a deeply unconvincing — indeed simply false — assertion.) The argument
depends not on the type of literary allusion to Hesiod and Greek tradition that are explicitly emphasized in the poem, but on structural similarities that are very general indeed. And it takes those vague similarities as the key to find the hidden political agenda, an agenda of promoting an Egyptian ideology of rulership to Greek readers.

Each step in this argument is open to challenge, and should be challenged, both in detail and in argumentative form. Each of the central chapters has the same form – necessarily, since there is no explicit discussion of such an agenda, nor even any but the barest of explicit allusions to anything Egyptian in any of the poets.

So in the chapter on Apollonius, St. suggests (on the basis of an unnamed Egyptian founder) that Colchis is «particularized as Egyptian» (175). The first clue of this is Apollonius’ «appropriation of one of Herodotus’ most distinctive narrative strategies. For Herodotus the inversion of Greek cultural norms is an essential and defining feature of Egyptian behaviour». This is a very strange argument. For sure, Herodotus describes how Egyptians invert Greek norms. But forms of inversion are prevalent throughout all of Herodotus’ descriptions of The Other, and it is a standard trope of how Greek writers of all periods deal with barbarians. «Inversion of norms» per se is a very diffuse idea indeed to «particularize» Colchis, the ends of the earth, as Egypt.

This is all part and parcel of St.’s central claim that «Jason’s behaviour conforms to a template of Egyptian kingship»; but because he is Greek, he is a «precursor to the Ptolemies who will rule as both Greek king and Egyptian pharaoh». (It is symptomatic that St.’s finds very little irony and not much fun in the Argonautica.) Thus anything Jason does that might look a bit Egyptian is added as incremental evidence. «Jason kills the legitimate son, Apsyrtus, and cuts off his extremities – a standard treatment Egyptians accorded their conquered enemies» (215). The Greek idea of μακροθυμία is studiously avoided at this stage of the argument. But is the emphasis here not firmly on the grimness of Jason’s behaviour in Greek terms rather than on its normality in Egyptian terms?

I found very few of these individual examples convincing in detail. What is more, it is hard to see them even when all put together as testifying to a Ptolemaic agenda of Egyptian kingship in Hellenistic poetry. Indeed, even if all of the examples attested were convincing and true, it would still be the case that the vast majority of the poetic output of the Hellenistic period seems to have a quite different agenda, which has less to do with a willing exploration of the interface of Greek and Egyptian culture than with the exploration of a Greek cultural identity in Greek terms.

This book comes garnered with praise on its cover from some of the leading figures of contemporary Hellenistic scholarship – Richard Hunter, Ludwig Koenn, Alessandro Barchiesi, Marco Fantuzzi. They are right to praise this book’s attempt to explore the «contact zones» of the pluralistic and socially fissured world of Alexandria, where the ruling elite of Macedonians were attempting to construct a symbolics of power in a new, and difficult cultural world, which necessarily brought together elements that traditional Greek systems of expression and value would keep separate. This is a necessary project, and it is wholly desirable that such a project should have been undertaken by such an informed and intelligent scholar. The volume is well produced, well written, and without any of the polemical tone that such a polemical argument might produce (and has so often done so, when ideas of the purity of Greekness and the status of African culture are on the table). The level of scholarly knowledge, especially on the
Egyptological areas where classical scholars are often deficient, is impressive. Yet these admirable qualities should not conceal the fact that St.'s argument is as extreme and as one-sided as any that has been made on Alexandrian culture, and argued with the quiet passion of a convert. This is a book to be discussed, and it will be debated at length by the scholarly world. There is no way now that the Egyptian frame for the production of Hellenistic poetry can just be ignored. But for me at least, the provocative answer St. gives to how Hellenistic poetry and Egyptian culture interrelate is unconvincing in its social and cultural politics.

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Crates, the second-century critic and grammarian, came from Mallos in Cilicia, flourished in Pergamum, quarrelled with the great Aristarch, and 'was the first to introduce the study of grammar to the city' of Rome (Suet. gramm. 2. 1). M. Broggiato has assembled his sparse remains. Her edition follows the hallowed pattern: introduction; texts, with apparatus; commentary; indexes. The book is elegantly presented and modestly priced. I have one complaint: there is no translation. Few of the texts are easy, and several are horribly difficult: the most austere scholar would tolerate a crib. Moreover, a translation will often do the work of a commentary, and do it concisely. It is true that a translation would have made a long book longer. It would also have made an excellent book even better.

The Introduction discusses earlier scholarship, reviews the information on life and chronology, sifts the evidence for the writings, and raises a number of general questions – Crates as textual critic, as geographer and astronomer, as aesthete, as grammarian, as Stoic. The documentation is complete, and the presentation judicious.

One persistent question is this: did Crates write before or after Aristarchus? Much of the evidence B. adduces is illusory; but Varro seems clear: in L. L. 9. 1 (= F 104) he has Crates arguing against Aristarchus (cf. Strabo 1. 2. 25 = F 37), and in 8. 68 (= F 103), he says that 'this is how Aristarchus wanted to reply to Crates'. Did Crates write before or after Aristarchus? – Both.

B. collects all and only those texts which mention Crates by name (p. lxviii). They are divided into 29 testimonia and 143 fragmenta. The principle of division is not evident, and one or two items classed as testimonia (e.g. F 132, F 137, F 138) are testimonia if anything is a testimonium. The fragmenta – with one or two exceptions – are not fragments of Crates but snippets from later works. Twenty of the 170 items are asterisked as dubious; and there is a list of half a dozen spuria.

The criterion for doubt is not plain. F 102 (= Phld. poem. 2, PHerc 994 fr. 17) gets an asterisk: the apograph offers ΚΑΙΤΗΣ and the papyrus itself shows ΚΡΑΙΤΗΣ (with rho and alpha perhaps phantoms). F 101 is unasterisked. It too comes from Herculaneum – it is by far the longest text in the collection, and the most important witness to Crates' views on poetry. The ascription rests on PHerc 1425, col. xxiv 25, where B. prints ΚΡΑΙΤΗΣ. She