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Évelyne Prioux, *Regards alexandrins. Histoire et théorie des arts dans l'épigramme hellénistique. Hellenistica Groningana, 12.* Leuven: Peeters, 2007. Pp. xxii, 324. ISBN 978-90-429-1842-9. €52.00 (pb).

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Prioux's book is a modified version of the first part of her doctoral thesis defended in 2004 at the University of Paris X--Nanterre. This information will surely make any reader of this superb book wonder what may be the entire thesis, and also long for reading it as soon as possible.

As the back cover claims, *Regards alexandrins* is the first monographic study of the aesthetic theories and descriptive texts of Callimachus' contemporary Posidippus of Pella, many new recently discovered epigrams of whom have been edited in 2001 by Claudio Gallazzi and Guido Bastianini (see BMCR [2003.06.27](#) for the *editio princeps*).

The subject of the book is in any case original and highly fascinating: confronting several poets under the light of Posidippus' rediscovery, the book investigates aesthetic theories of art of the Hellenistic age--especially on sculpture--formulated in poetic discourse. It is, however, not a comprehensive synthesis of the history and evolution of ekphrastic epigrams (in this context those which describe sculptures) but a study on how poetic form has been used to formulate and diffuse aesthetic theories.

Furthermore, Prioux's work may be regarded as a valuable study of Hellenistic poetry, since there seems to be no major aspect of it left untouched by the author. Her erudition is remarkable, and her acquaintance with Greek and Latin authors (and with the secondary literature on them) impressive.

Prioux begins by generically classifying Alexandrine writers' aesthetic theories as forms of response to four types of texts--(i) programmatic passages and metapoetic reflections that can be found in archaic poets; (ii) reflections and theoretical works of philosophers on mimetic arts; (iii) texts from the Fifth and Fourth Century that are related to sophistic discussions and pose a binary distinction between styles; (iv) lost works of the fathers of art history, Xenocrates of Athens and Duris of Samos. Prioux's method consists of detailed commentaries on various ekphrastic epigrams, trying to find traces of an aesthetic discourse

in them which are informed by those four traditions. Complementing the analysis, she illustrates the way the Hellenistic texts prefigure aesthetic theories of Latin authors, as Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace.

In part I, *Réflexions sur le portrait*, the author contrasts two poems that evoke the image of Anacreon (by Leonidas of Tarentum, Anth. Planudea 306, and Theocritus, Anth. Pal. 9.599) with one epigram by Posidippus that praises the statue of Philitas of Cos by Hecataeus. The verses of Leonidas and Theocritus on the archaic lyric poet represent what Prioux calls a "retrospective" portrait, whilst Posidippus (*P. Mil. Vogl.* VIII, 309, col. X, 16-25 = 63 Austin-Bastianini) gives an account of a contemporary poet. After a rapid analysis of Leonidas and Theocritus, Prioux establishes what she considers to be their common feature: both exude otherness by showing a poet who belongs to a distant past, and each of them finds a way to suggest the main characteristics of Anacreon's poetic work in the portrait. Posidippus' description, however, represents a quite different idea. Through an exhaustive analysis of Posidippus' epigram, Prioux makes it clear that his praise of Hecataeus' Philitas is the praise of both modern art and poetry. Posidippus praises the style of Philitas through the praise of Hecataeus' craft: the image here is perceived as a faithful metaphor of the poet's style and as an illustration of the style of the sculptor who crafted it. There is in this case a real agreement between poetic and statuary style. *Leptótes* (subtlety, delicacy, thinness) and *acribeia* (exactness, precision) are the central concepts employed by the poet of Pella to describe Hecataeus' bronze and Philitas' poetry.

Prioux gives a fine reading of Posidippus, but, although she demonstrates that there is an aesthetic theory in Posidippus' epigram, it is not easy to understand what her commentaries on Leonidas and Theocritus are to convey. Though they indeed represent a quite different description from that of Posidippus, they simply do not formulate any aesthetic theory, while Posidippus does. Maybe Prioux wants us to perceive that the very choice of subject--an old poet *versus* a contemporary one-- suggests a sign of theoretical filiation. However, we may ask, does the poetry of Leonidas and Theocritus not fall under the general concept of *leptótes*, too? Do they actually represent something different from the style praised by Posidippus?

In the second part of her book, *Querelle des Telchines, querelle des images*, Prioux suggests a clever response to a difficulty of interpretation raised by the first fragment of Callimachus' *Aitia* (vv. 1-12 and 17-24). In Roman elegy, the opposition between the poetry of Philitas, the *leptós* poet, and Homer, the *semnós* (grave, majestic) poet *par excellence*, is well established. In the third century BC, however, that opposition was not so clearly drawn. Until recent times, as Prioux explains, commentators have interpreted that fragment of the *Aitia*, along with the seventh Idyll of Theocritus, as questioning the viability of the epic genre and then renouncing it for shorter forms such as elegy, of which Philitas has become a symbol. But this opposition has been considered by some modern specialists as an opposition inside the elegiac genre, concerning rival concepts/ideas of elegiac composition.

The chapter's aim is to prove that there was a literary controversy in the first half of the third century and that Callimachus and Posidippus took part in it, holding different aesthetic conceptions that disagreed not only regarding poetry but art in general. The author analyses the middle part of Theocritus' poem (vv. 39-51), intending to establish a link between the speech of Lycidas and Posidippus' epigram on Philitas. There are, according to Prioux, some similarities in them: the theme of the truthful poet, the reflection on the notion of scale, and the

metaphorical use of references to the fine arts. Taking these similarities as not fortuitous, Prioux is able to establish that both poets echo a literary polemic, which may refer to the Telchines' quarrel, clearly opposing two modes of writing--one that gives privilege to shorter forms and to minuteness, and another that expresses admiration for the exalted epic genre.

The Telchines, against whom Callimachus directs his poem/words in the first fragment of the *Aitia*, were sometimes identified by commentators as Hellenistic epic poets like Apollonius Rhodius, but the Florentine scholia relative to that fragment name several poets, Posidippus among them. With subtle and erudite comments on several authors (e.g., Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Pausanias, Quintilian, Pseudo-Longinus), Prioux manages to set the scene for the existence of a dispute between Callimachus and Posidippus. Both poets, the author suggests, might have expressed their aesthetic disagreements and their critical ideas by constantly alluding to the art of sculpture. Reading the mentioned passage of Callimachus together with his Iambus VI, and contrasting them with several epigrams of Posidippus (especially *P. Mil. Vogl.* VIII, 309, col. XI, 6-XII, 11 = 68 Austin-Bastianini and *P. Mil. Vogl.* VIII, 309, col. III, 20-27 = 18 A-B), Prioux concludes that, while Posidippus' work praises *leptótes* but also recognizes the aesthetic value of *semnótes* (gravitas), Callimachus can only accept the first and considers the coexistence of *semnótes* and *akríbeia* impossible. Indeed, Callimachus' Iambus VI can be read as a satire on Posidippus' descriptive epigrams. Whereas Posidippus is ready to praise the art both of minute statues and colossal monuments, Callimachus refuses the conception that valuable art needs exaggerated dimensions.

Yet it is not clear what kind of elegiac *semnótes* is refused by Callimachus, if we assume that the Florentine scholia in Cameron's interpretation are decisive and that the poet of Cyrene did not have epics in mind. The *semnótes* and *leptótes* of sculpture alluded to by him and Posidippus seem to refer chiefly to the works' size. We might think of a pompous, exaggerated, ornate, inflated language but the allusions do not seem to express anything like this.

The book's third part, *L'herméneutique des images*, the longest and most audacious one, defies any brief appreciation. It consists of three chapters and of three investigative lines: the hypothesis of a literary polemic between Posidippus and Callimachus, the spread and importance of intertextual references in Hellenistic poetry, and the allegorical and symbolic references to politics and aesthetics embedded in the images described.

The detective-story metaphor is not inappropriate, for many studies dealing with Callimachus' *Aitia* resemble very much the task of some cerebral sleuth in an intricate case trying to make inferences from minimal clues and thus solve difficult mysteries. This is indeed what Prioux does--in chapter 5, "Callimaque historien d'art!", which to a large extent deals with the reception of Callimachus by later writers and philosophers-- in order to state that the statue of Theagenes of Thasos was the subject of a Callimachean elegy (fragment 607 of the *Aitia*). As Prioux explains, authors like Dio of Prusa, Pausanias, and Oenomaus of Gadara contributed to place the portrait of Theagenes of Thasos within the aetiological tradition of athletes who were derided by their cities and rehabilitated by an oracle. Their narratives on athletes resemble one another, and these athletes already appear or may have appeared in the *Aitia*. Several descriptive examples of athletes may reveal the influence Callimachus exerted on the prose of the Imperial Age. Thus, the fortune of Callimachus would be a direct consequence of the importance accorded by the *Aitia* to the exegesis of figurative

monuments and the historical inquiries that each sculpture and sanctuary could raise.

Having demonstrated that Theagenes' statue was indeed described by Callimachus, Prioux is able to establish that he and Posidippus (XIV Gow-Page = 120 Austin-Bastianini = Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai*, X, 412 d) expressed their rivalry by composing each of them one ekphrastic aetiology [what is "ekphrastic aetiology" supposed to mean?] on the same statue. Posidippus' good-humored epigram might be the response to erudite aetiologies such as Callimachus': it could be Theagenes as seen by one of the Telchines.

In chapter 6, "Le Kairos et l'Apollon Délion: dialogues sur l'allégorie", the author broadens her reading strategies even more. If it is accepted that Posidippus is one of the Telchines mentioned by Callimachus, and if the same statue of Theagenes of Thasos is described by both poets, then we can search for other intertextual references, and not only those regarding the subjects of poems. Thus in this chapter Prioux analyses two poems that at first sight might seem totally different, but eventually prove to be very alike: the ekphrastic dialogue of Callimachus on Tectaeus' *Delian Apollo (Aitia, III (?), fr. 114b Pfeiffer)* and that of Posidippus on Lysippus' *Kairos (Anth. Planudea 275 = XIX Gow-Page = 142 Austin-Bastianini)*.

Prioux highlights the poems' formal similarities, and how they can be read as sophisticated allegorical and symbolic microtreatises on ethics, politics, and aesthetics. Her analyses in order to find out the political subtext of the poems--concluding that Callimachus hiddenly alludes to Ptolemy I, and Posidippus to Alexander--may well be judged admirable.

The last chapter of the third part, "L'ecphrasis dans l'épigramme du IIe siècle", basically is a sort of appendix. It comments on the symbolic epitaphs 421-429 of Anth. Pal. VII and investigates how the perception of symbolic monuments developed through the Hellenistic era, analyzing the specificity of second century BC epigrammatists' views on them. Moreover, its aim is to clarify how the third century BC poems have shaped the way the second century BC epigrammatists perceive and compose.

Though one may regard Prioux's book as brilliant, some things might have been made clearer, e.g. the exact nature of the disagreement between Callimachus and Posidippus; what is the elegiac *semnótes* accepted by the poet of Pella? These questions notwithstanding, this is a precious book, teaching us on every page how rich Hellenistic poetry is.

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