INTRODUCTION
ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

Rock

Epigram: EPI-GRAMMA, a text written or incised upon something. 'Inscription' is one obvious translation of the root meaning, and epigram began with inscriptions: texts carved in stone to fix cultural memory. Epigram and epigraphy, the modern study of inscriptions, are two sides of the same linguistic coin. The classical Greek epigraphic habit manifested itself across many different contexts. Inscriptions broadcast the laws and decrees of the city-state, the *polis*, and secured the meaning of monuments and tombs against a forgetful future. Cut into trophies and statues, they celebrated victory in war and sport. Inscriptions were unavoidably costly in skilled labour, and competed for the attention of the passer-by with many others of their kind. Official decrees and honorific inscriptions were as long as their elaborate phrasing dictated, but for more personal messages these factors could combine to create a pressure to keep the text short and to the point. A small minority of these inscriptions were in verse.[1]

In the Hellenistic age, cultural nostalgia for 'old' Greece seems to have impelled the compilation of collections of these verse inscriptions as part of the local lore of the traditional Hellenic heartland. These collections were nothing inherently special, and were not compiled with the intention of launching a literary genre. Writing up the verse inscriptions of Nemea or Olympia was, instead, a small part of a wider antiquarian project by which the court intellectuals of rival dynastic centres, predominantly Alexandria and Pergamum, sought to maximize the cultural capital of their local regimes.[2]

This antiquarianism encompassed other, more properly literary genres – didactic epic, universal history – as well as new kinds of textual

[1] For an indication of statistics, see Bing and Bruss 2007b: 3.

[2] In Krevans' bracing formulation, '[the] kings collected objects (art, books) and creatures (zoological specimens, scholars). The scholars collected information' (Krevans 2007: 131).

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tools: dictionaries, summaries, lists, and digests. Knowledge of the past was power over it. Callimachus and others launched an information revolution of cataloguing, systematization, and scholarship, directed towards mastery over a prestigious period of shared history that was already becoming 'classical' in the sense in which we use the term. A new standard system of education turned the texts of this classical period into the basis of an enduring literary canon. In schoolroom and gymnasium, the canon now transmitted a ring-fenced legacy of shared knowledge and values – *paideia* – that increasingly defined Greek identity in a cosmopolitan world of diaspora.[3] This is the version of Greek literary culture that Rome later appropriated – a classical core packaged as heritage by Hellenistic scholarship.

Paper

The genre of epigram was not a part of this canon, and could claim no place in the schoolroom of *paideia* (however useful its retrospective focus might have been there); it was a new arrival.[4] The scholars' handbooks of locally derived verse inscriptions somehow became the template for books of short poems of a kind not seen before. They quickly became popular, attracting major literary figures such as Callimachus, Philetas, and Nicander. A poet could now become famous as a 'fashioner of epigrams' – *epigrammatopoios* – although he might not yet refer to his poems under that name. There may have been residual resistance to calling a poem 'epigram' when it was no longer composed for inscription, regardless of its formal similarity to actual inscribed texts.[5]

Certainly, epigram's mutation from an epigraphic archive into an active literary genre was not an obvious development. The editors of a major recent collection on Hellenistic epigram plausibly suggest that these poets were attracted to epigram precisely *because* it was outside the traditional canon (as, for instance, pastoral had been before

[3] A useful survey of Hellenistic education is supplied by Cribiore 2001.

[4] Wissman 2002 accounts for the near-total absence of epigram in papyri identifiable as ancient school-texts. Epigram's use in the Victorian schoolroom (on which, see Ch. 5) thus stands in pointed opposition to ancient practice.

[5] On epigram's Hellenistic popularity, see Cameron 1993: 3. On nomenclature, see Bing and Bruss 2007b: 1 n. 4; but cf. 14–15 on a third-century-BCE decree identifying Posidippus as an *ἐπιγραμματοποίος*, 'epigram-maker'. On the implicit tension between inscribed *ἐπίγραμμα* and formerly-inscribed *ἐλεγεῖον* ('elegy') in Thucydides, see Petrovic 2007a: 55.

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Philetas and Theocritus) and because mainstream genres such as epic and tragedy had always been about performance first and text second. Epigram offered the scholar-poets an experimental workspace that gave unique priority to writers and readers.[6]

The limited evidence available to us makes it seem likely that the new literary epigrammatists typically arranged their books by thematic category.[7] We would not expect this arrangement in an original poetry book (although we might in a compiled anthology), and Latin authors such as Catullus and Martial did not adopt it when they wrote epigram in imitation of the Hellenistic poets; perhaps it reflects the organization of those lost collections of local verse inscriptions. As we will see in the case of the Milan Posidippus, organization by category did not rule out artistry in the details of arrangement, and the choice of categories could itself demonstrate creativity.

Arrangement by category also plays to epigram's strengths as a genre of short, occasional poetry. *Epi-* in Greek carries the same double sense as its English translation. Epigrams were now no longer (or not only or primarily) incised physically *upon* a monument, slab, or statue-base; they were composed 'upon' a topic, as responses to a set theme or given occasion. Inscriptional epigram had always been brief and formulaic. As a literary form, these same qualities encouraged participation and creative variation. Anyone could have a go: staying in metre for four lines was not an impossible challenge even for novice writers.[8] In a genre built on formula and variations on a standard theme, individual poems practically wrote themselves. It was easy to get sucked into tinkering with an old chestnut, working the changes in search of a satisfying new twist.

A well-known example is the cycle of poems on Myron's *Cow*. This famous statue stood in the Agora at Athens; later it was moved to Rome (Plin. *NH* 24.57). At some point, poets started writing epigrams about it. These are *epi*-grams in a complex sense: written

[6] Bing and Bruss 2007b: 7.

[7] Gutzwiller 1998: 28–36, with the benefit of a sneak preview of the 'Milan Posidippus' papyrus (discussed later in this introduction), remains properly cautious about extrapolating from its structure in an unqualified way. The further papyrus examples that she surveys are broadly compatible with a default practice of organization into categories, but there could well have been significant exceptions. Gutzwiller plausibly suggests that Callimachus arranged his own epigrams alphabetically (1998: 38–40).

[8] Epigrams tend to have an even number of lines because the typical metre is the elegiac couplet; four lines is the typical length of surviving poems in the *Greek Anthology*, our main source for Greek literary epigram. How this *Anthology* came into existence will become clear as the introduction progresses.

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'upon' the *Cow* as a topic for literary composition, but also playing with the idea that such a poem might end up incised *upon* the statue (or its base) as an accompanying inscription. This playful ambivalence is absolutely typical of the genre.[9] Literary epigrams know they come from stone, and are forever throwing out hints of making the return trip; but thematic variation within the collection gives the lie to their epigraphic nostalgia. In the real world, the statue can carry only one caption; the ninth book of the *Anthology* gives us an unbroken run (*AP* 9.713–42) of thirty-one possible versions, enough to cover the statue's plinth several times over. Successive epigrams find new ways to stress how utterly realistic the statue is, but make the scenario of inscription increasingly unrealistic. The effect of paradox is surely intentional; sequences like these almost parody the idea of authentic inscriptionality:

> I am Myron's little cow, and I am set up as a dedication upon a pillar. Oxherd, use the goad on me and drive me home to the herd.
>
> Oxherd, pasture your herd at a distance, in case you should drive off Myron's little cow with your cows, thinking it to be alive.
>
> Myron lied: he did not sculpt me, but drove me off from the herd as I grazed, and bound me to a stone base.
>
> If Myron had not fastened my feet to this stone, I would have been driven to pasture with the cows as a young cow myself.
>
> Myron set me up here, his little cow: but the herdsmen throw stones at me, thinking that I have wandered from the herd.[10]

To ask whether or not Myron's statue ever carried an actual verse inscription is practically beside the point. Literary variations such as these circulate far more widely than any notional epigraphic original, which – forever fixed to its inscriptional context – remains of interest only to scholarly collectors and the most dedicated of tourists. We might take this further: Peter Bing suggests that ancient readers only become interested in inscriptional epigram *at all* through encounters with literary imitations such as the Myron's *Cow* poems. By this

[9] For thoughtful consideration of a single such poem from several angles, see Petrovic and Petrovic 2003.

[10] *AP* 9.713 (Anon.), 715 ('Anacreon' – clearly a false attribution), 719 (Leonidas), 720 (Antipater of Sidon), 731 (Anon.). All translations in this book are the authors' own unless otherwise indicated.

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provocative account, the literary texture of faux-inscriptional epigram made it much more interesting than the real thing.[11]

It was also more accessible and inclusive, for readers and writers alike. The first and last of our *Cow* examples are anonymous. There are some big names in the overall sequence – Antipater, Dioscorides, Marcus Argentarius, Philip – but many of the poems are transmitted with no name attached, and some of these will have been one-off compositions by amateurs. (Each poem in the *Anthology* has an individual heading or 'lemma' stating its authorship, to the editor's best knowledge; often it is *ΑΔΕΣΠΟΤΟΝ*, 'Anon.') Later in the same book (*AP* 9.793–8), a single author – Julian, a Roman Prefect of Egypt – supplies another six poems on exactly the same topic. By his time, people had been composing epigrams 'on' Myron's *Cow* for hundreds of years.

Scissors

Two of the poems in the earlier sequence (*AP* 9.738–9) are also by Julian, and this ramshackle structure hints at the *Anthology*'s difficulties as our main source for Greek literary epigram. It is important to know a little about its origins and history. The first books to include literary epigrams by multiple authors were Hellenistic; we catch late echoes of them in papyri from Greco-Roman Egypt, discussed in Chapter 4. One major multi-author collection was known as the *Sōros* – 'the Heap', suggesting winnowed grain. Given the title, it was probably not arranged according to an obvious logical or artistic scheme. The *Anthology*'s famous early source and structural prototype is instead the *Stephanos* or *Garland* of Meleager of Gadara, a poet and prose satirist of the early first century BCE.

As his title suggests, Meleager arranged his *Garland* (which ran to several book-rolls) according to a definite scheme, weaving together poems by many hands. A marginal note in the Palatine manuscript of the *Anthology* states that he abandoned the arrangement by category (as used in books by a single author), instead ordering his selection alphabetically by the first letter of the first word of each poem; but Alan Cameron has shown that the surviving traces in the *Anthology*'s text

[11] Bing 2002, elaborating on the curious absence of encounters with inscriptional epigram in the touristic scenarios of the Greek novel, but he may overstate his case: for further consideration of the readership of inscribed epigram see our first chapter.

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make this impossible. Instead Meleager transferred the conventional scheme of organization by category, previously reserved for books by a single author, to the broader ambit of a multi-author anthology. He also appears to have scaled the categories up: each category now filled a whole book.[12] The *Garland* included Hellenistic greats such as Callimachus and Euphorion, but also earlier poets such as Sappho and Archilochus: their shorter work was now appropriated retrospectively, giving the upstart genre a ready-made genealogy of 'classics'. None of Meleager's authors was later than the third century BCE – with the notable exception of Meleager himself, who asserted editorial privilege by including his own admittedly excellent work.

Meleager's mission statement is his preface, which survives in the *Anthology*'s fourth Book along with the prefaces of his successors in the garland-weaving trade (another indication of the *Anthology*'s complicated back story and slightly clumsy composition). These successors include Philip, who compiled a follow-up *Garland* of more recent poets in the middle of the first century CE – this one *was* arranged alphabetically, more or less, with no differentiation into thematic categories at all; and Agathias, a Christian anthologist of the sixth century, who pads the preface of his *Cycle* with praise of the Emperor Justinian. Many of the poems selected by Agathias and later included in the *Anthology* are recognizable by the Byzantine official titles given to their authors.[13] Agathias followed Meleager in his organizational scheme, but on a slightly larger scale – seven categories, each filling a book. These categories included several that play with inscriptionality: imaginary dedications, captions for works of art (such as Myron's *Cow*), and epitaphs. But Agathias also included reflections on Fortune, humorous invective, love-poems, and sympotic verse (132–3):

> …the joys of Bacchus, and tipsy dances, and wine, and the mixing-bowl, and lavish banquets.

We find Agathias' categories carried across into the structure of the *Anthology* as we have it, showing that its compiler leaned on him heavily.

There were other proto-anthologies too, notably the *Anthologion* of Diogenianus, probably compiled in the mid-second century CE.

[12] Cameron 1993: 20–6.
[13] Ibid.: 16–17, 37.

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None of them survives today. Cameron argues that even Constantine Cephalas, the tenth-century compiler of the *Greek Anthology*, did not have access to complete copies of the *Garlands*; he made do by juggling two different versions of each, all of them more or less abridged. His copy of Agathias, on the other hand, was very good.[14] Cephalas also had access to at least one collection on a specialist topic: the *Mousa Paidikē* ('Boyish Muse'), a repository of homoerotic epigrams that had grown up around the collected poems of the second-century poet Strato of Sardis. The *Mousa Paidikē* became the *Anthology*'s twelfth Book.

Cephalas modelled the organization of his *Anthology* on the example of Agathias, scaling it up even further. Book Five, for instance, consists of heterosexual erotic epigrams; Book Seven, funerary. The massive ninth Book is filled with 'epideictic' epigrams (827 in all), a vague and permeable category of epigrams displaying the features of declamatory rhetoric.[15] Even the 258 poems of the *Mousa Paidikē* make it far larger than any genuinely ancient poetry book.

There are several exceptions to the general principle of arrangement, especially early on. Book One flags up the compiler's pious credentials by collecting inscriptional epigrams from Byzantine churches. Book Two is a weird hexameter poem by an Egyptian tourist, Christodorus of Thebes, cataloguing the statues in a famous gymnasium at Constantinople. A disproportionately short third Book reports nineteen epigrams inscribed on a monument at Cyzicus, erected by the Hellenistic dynasts Attalus and Eumenes in memory of their mother. All of this early material may well have been tacked onto Cephalas' original design by the copyists who produced the Palatine manuscript.[16] The fourth Book, as we have seen, collects the verse prefaces of Cephalas' predecessors. The interminable eighth Book is by another mother's boy, Saint Gregory the Theologian (fourth century CE). At the *Anthology*'s far end, a fifteenth Book admits defeat and presents 'Assorted Poems' that the compiler had failed to fit into his previous categories, including additional Christian verses and the so-called *tekhnopaignia* – epigrams, mostly Hellenistic, in the shape of the objects they describe (an axe, an altar, a shepherd's pipe). We will see an example of such a poem in Chapter 4.

[14] Ibid.: 44–8.
[15] For further discussion of the term 'epideictic', see Ch. 2.
[16] Bing and Bruss 2007b: 21.

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There is occasional subdivision within some individual Books. The run of epigrams on Myron's *Cow* is one instance. Another is *AP* 11.65–225, a series of satirical or 'skoptic' poems divided up by subheadings into small categories. Cephalas must have taken these subheadings from his source for this part of Book Eleven – conceivably a version of a book by the main skoptic poet, Lucillius, who has poems in each of the categories. Book Eleven also has its own, separate preface, the origin of which remains unclear. It is not for nothing that the *Anthology* has recently been called a 'labyrinth'.[17]

These quirks reflect the complex and messy sources available to Cephalas in compiling the *Anthology*. What happened to the work thereafter is almost as confusing for the uninitiated reader. Several times now we have used the abbreviation '*AP*'; this stands for *Anthologia Palatina*, the Palatine Anthology. This fairly reliable parchment manuscript version of Cephalas' tenth-century original was probably produced during the anthologist's own lifetime by two of his pupils.[18] It is named for the Palatine Library in Heidelberg, where it was found in 1606 by the great humanist scholar Claude de Saumaise, more widely known by his Latinized form Salmasius. The single surviving exemplar of Cephalas' text, it had not been read for centuries. Prior to its rediscovery, the only known 'Greek Anthology' was a fourteenth-century abridgement and rearrangement of Cephalas' text in seven books by a Byzantine monk, Maximus Planudes. Many of Planudes' editorial decisions were morally motivated: the *Mousa Paidikē* was an obvious case for excision. This was the 'Anthology' the Renaissance knew; and it was one of the first classical Greek texts to be published in print.[19]

Nowhere in his Anthology (now known as the *Anthologia Planudeana* or '*APl*') had Planudes made it clear that his text was merely a bowdlerized version of a larger work – 'smaller and vastly inferior'.[20] The rediscovery of the Palatine Anthology thus came as a complete surprise. Thousands of poems we had never even known we had lost suddenly came back from the dead. No-one had even heard of Cephalas before, and Planudes was suddenly revealed as a hack by Saumaise's

[17] Bing and Bruss 2007a: ix; and cf. Bing and Bruss 2007b: 20; Gutzwiller 1998: ix.

[18] Bing and Bruss 2007b: 20–1.

[19] 'Printed versions of [the *Anthology*] have been available in the West virtually since the invention of the printing press' (Bing and Bruss 2007b: 22). The first (1494) was by John Lascaris, who also produced *editiones principes* of (among others) Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Lucian.

[20] Cameron 1993: 17.

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characteristically astute identification of exactly what it was he had found. However, knowledge of the Palatine Anthology was slow to spread. Saumaise's own plans for publication went nowhere, and the manuscript migrated through various major European libraries.

Astonishingly, the first complete edition of the Palatine text did not appear until the very end of the eighteenth century – more or less two hundred years after Saumaise's discovery. A selection came out first, Brunck's *Analecta Veterum Poetarum Graecorum* ('Selection of Ancient Greek Poets', 1772–6), arranged by author; and finally a full scholarly edition in several volumes, by Jacobs (1794–8). Even Jacobs' first edition took liberties with the manuscript text: he followed Brunck in presenting the poems by author, arranging these in no discernable order. Two decades on, he relented and offered a revised edition that faithfully presented Cephalas' Agathian structure.

Just as astonishing is that, in the years and decades after Brunck and Jacobs, some publishers preferred to stick with the familiar text of the obsolete Planudean Anthology.[21] Its proportions were manageable, the plates were to hand, and it was free of sexually controversial content. Addressing the working classes, an eminent Victorian critic wrote cagily that 'there are not a few epigrams suppressed by [Planudes] which have since come to light, and which had better never have been published or never written'.[22] Even to describe their contents would be morally dangerous to society.

The Greek Anthology as we have it today consists of the fifteen Books of the Palatine Anthology, followed by a 'Planudean Appendix' of 388 poems occurring in Planudes but not in the Palatine manuscript. The Appendix is also known as Book Sixteen. That its poems survive by chance in Planudes' radical abridgement, but *not* in the faithful and relatively complete Palatine Anthology, hints at the scale of what we may have lost to attrition in even the (probably) relatively few years between Cephalas' original and the copying of the Palatine manuscript. Many of the epigrams of the Appendix are on works of art; these may derive from an entire lost Book of Cephalas' *Anthology*.

[21] A lavish illustrated edition by J. de Bosch and D. J. van Lennep, completed in 1822, reproduces a 1566 text of Planudes by Henricus Stephanus (Henri Estienne); the Tauschnitz *Anthology* of 1829 must spell out in its title that it is *ad Palatini codicis fidem edita*, 'faithful to the Palatine manuscript'.

[22] Neaves 1874: 4–5.

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'The joys of Bacchus': Greek epigram in performance

What were all these epigrams *for*? We saw that three of Agathias' categories of poems had inscriptional origins, on tombs, statues, and monuments. Four did not, and together they supply a clue to an important context for epigram in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Fortune is fickle, these poems tell us: we should live for today, see the funny side, and fall in love; and we should drink together to celebrate our good fortune. Three of these categories – protreptic (advisory), erotic, and skoptic – come together in a masculine domain defined by the fourth: the symposium, a traditional after-dinner drinking party with entertainments of the kind we saw Charicles attend in our Prologue. Elegy, the characteristic metre of the epigram, was also by now the name of a characteristic type of poetic song, written in that metre and intended for performance in a sympotic context. Elegies were generally longer compositions, with themes and concerns unlike those of epigram, but we find suggestive parallels to Agathias' non-inscriptional categories in elegiac remnants such as the Theognidea.[23] The symposium is also what garlands – and *Garlands*? – are made for. In the Greek world after Alexander, the normative social institutions of the symposium and gymnasium formed a classicizing axis along which Greek male identity was constructed, tested, and affirmed. The gymnasium formed the body beautiful on canonical lines, and brought it into contact with the community of its peers; the symposium broadened the mind and forged the personal connections of the private citizen.[24]

Types of Greek epigram with non-inscriptional topics map very neatly onto sympotic activities and concerns – *too* neatly, a sceptical critic might argue.[25] The *Mousa Paidikē* is an obvious case in point. Praise of pretty boys is always at home in the symposium, whether incised as slogans on red-figure amphorae (the '*kalos*-names' so useful in assigning dates to pots and painters), called out drunkenly as the wine dregs are thrown in the messy game of *kottabos*, or – we might think – inspiring the composition of witty short poems. Poems on

[23] For a discussion of archaic elegy and its possible relation to Hellenistic sympotic epigram by an expert on the Theognidea, see Bowie 2007.

[24] For useful discussion of the complementary roles of athletics and literary culture in identity formation, see e.g. Cribiore 2001; Gleason 1995; Newby 2005; Nisbet 2003b. Whitmarsh 2005: 29–32 concisely explains the importance of the trained body to sophistic self-presentation.

[25] Cameron 1995 argues vigorously for composition at symposia; for useful cautions, see now Bing and Bruss 2007b: 12–14.

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the vicissitudes of life, cutting pretension down to size, or ridiculing unsociable behaviour and attitudes are equally at home in this context. These topics remind the symposiasts of the values they share, and of the importance of coming together to celebrate them. Life is too short not to:

> Drink now and love, Damocrates! For we shan't be drinking for ever, and we won't always be keeping company with boys. So let us wrap our heads in garlands and sprinkle them with myrrh, before others bring the same things as offerings to our tombs. For now, let my bones drink wine for the most part – and when they are dead, let Deucalion's flood wash them away.

> The astrologers tell me I am short-lived. I *am*; but, Seleucus, I don't care. We all go down to Hades by one route; and if mine is quicker, I shall lay eyes on Minos sooner. Let us drink! For it's true what they say: wine is a horse fit for the road, while pedestrians [i.e. non-drinkers] must take the footpath to Hades.[26]

Book Eleven of the *Anthology* shows us how these types of implicitly symposiac poems come together with explicit ones and cross-fertilize. Its prose preface, perhaps dating from the Second Sophistic, asserts that sympotic and skoptic poems naturally fit together:[27]

> The sympotic type is made up of skoptic jests and cautionary maxims from the ancients, who were forever improvising at one another over drinks. Therefore, in order that you may enjoy your share of these as well, I have organized the following selection.

This is not *exactly* evidence – or at least, it is not a document. As a grand and confident generalization it reassures a nostalgic Greek readership (or a readership identifying as Greek) that their current cultural practices are seamlessly continuous with those of an ideal classical past. The claim about 'the ancients' is probably meant to suggest classical Athens: to the Second Sophistic this was the only past worth having. If so, it is a misrepresentation of what we know of classical practice (and presumably of what *they* knew as well) – that there was no literary or sympotic epigram as such in classical Athens.[28]

[26] *AP* 11.19 (Strato), 23 (Antipater (of Sidon?)).

[27] For an excellent introduction to the 'Second Sophistic' – broadly, Greek culture in the Roman world of the early centuries CE – see now Whitmarsh 2005, with extensive bibliography.

[28] One could add caveats. Short quotations from elegy could have been seen as epigram-like by a later age projecting its own categories back into the past; and at Pl. *Phdr.* 264c–d Socrates illustrates a point in his argument by quoting from memory a funerary epigram for the legendary King Midas. This epigram is represented as circulating orally – 'some say' that it is inscribed on Midas' grave, perhaps with the implication that others disagree, and Socrates has no way of determining whether it is genuine or not. Of course, Plato is not the same thing as

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The author of the preface is caught red-handed trying to retrofit epigram into the canon. This does not make the preface useless. Its message is probably what Greeks under Rome *wanted* to believe – a desire that led to numerous ancient fakes of epigrams by 'Plato', and indirectly (much later) to the ersatz epigrams of Becker's *Charicles*. It seems reasonable to suppose that epigram was a common feature at later Greek symposia; otherwise, there would be no need to look to the revered past to justify its inclusion.

Studying Callimachus and his circle, Alan Cameron has argued vigorously that epigram was already a sympotic form at court in the Hellenistic period.[29] Poets improvised rough versions of poems as their contributions to the after-dinner entertainment, and later worked the better ones up for publication. This is an intuitively attractive model for epigram production within Alexandria's metropolitan and consciously Hellenic elite, and goes a long way towards explaining why the new genre took off. Epigram's defining technique of variation on a theme (seen to eventually exhausting effect in the poems on Myron's *Cow*) was an ideal fit with the symposiac dynamic of 'capping', in which participants tried to match and outdo each others' contributions to the entertainment. Once the genre became associated with the symposium, its range of themes naturally expanded and refocussed to address the values and activities of its new performative context – from tombs and statues to wine and pretty boys.

We will see that Catullus represents the Latin epigrams of the Neoterics as operating in exactly the same way as those of the highbrow Hellenistic symposiasts. In the world conjured up by the Catullan corpus, suave young party animals jot down brilliant improvisations in reusable *tabellae* – books of wax tablets – and later work them up for publication in smartly packaged literary collections. Epigram enters their repertoire as part of a wider pattern of self-fashioning against the deliciously risqué models of the Alexandrian elite, seen through the filter of late Hellenistic mediators such as Meleager. Whatever his actual practice may be, Catullus talks the talk of the smart Callimachean.[30]

the performance of epigrams as sympotic entertainment – and Plato is in any case poor evidence for actual social practice. For a fascinating and bold discussion of the Midas epigram, see Munn 2006: 70.

[29] Cameron 1995: 71–103.

[30] Catullus the scholar-poet and Catullus the edgy urban contender sit uneasily together as personae. The tension between them may be a designed literary effect: see Nisbet 2007a: 548.

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However, the structure of ancient Greek books of epigram may also reflect use at symposia beyond the charmed circle of the Ptolemies. 'Capping' was collaborative as well as competitive: each contribution was meant to respond to the one that preceded it. Ordinary symposiasts knew that they were not Callimachus; prior reading of epigram books arranged by category could have helped them recall to mind suitable poems that matched the theme of the moment. Fragmentary copies of books of epigram on papyrus from the rubbish dumps of the Greco-Roman city of Oxyrhynchus in Egypt in the first few centuries CE are comparatively low end in their production values, perhaps suggesting that epigram (and particularly skoptic epigram) was becoming accessible to a wider demographic than was true for more traditional literary genres.[31]

Greek epigram in this more inclusive Greco-Roman milieu was certainly not highbrow – Plutarch's *Table-Talk*, a compendium of elite sympotic lore, disdains to acknowledge its existence – but this will have made it all the more attractive to many of its consumers. Their idea of a good symposium excluded high-end intellectuals as dull and pretentious. This parody of a dinner-invitation goes to a guest with a Roman name:

> You know the rule that governs my little dinner. Today, Aulus, I invite you under new precepts for the symposium. No lyric poets at my table – and no starting (or putting up with) literary criticism.[32]

Greek epigram now

The discovery of epigrams and related material on papyri from Oxyrhynchus set the stage for exciting developments in modern epigram studies. Over the twentieth century, a succession of minor finds suggestively mapped out the uses of Greek epigram in the life of a provincial city.[33] In one large fragment of the first century CE (P.Oxy.

[31] Ibid.: 14–35. For a lively introduction to Oxyrhynchus and its papyri, see Parsons 2007; for specialist discussion, see Bowman et al. 2007. This publishes a centennial exhibition, some exhibits from which may still be viewed online at http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/VExhibition/exhib_welcome.html (accessed 3 November 2009).

[32] *AP* 11.10 (Lucillius); cf. 11.20 (Antipater of Thessalonica).

[33] For a fuller discussion of the papyrus evidence on epigram, including material from other sites, see Gutzwiller 1998: 20–36; more briefly on Hellenistic anthology-making, see Stephens

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LIV 3724), an ancient editor lists the first two or three words of nearly two hundred epigrams; many of them (but probably not all) are by the important literary theorist Philodemus of Gadara, a houseguest of L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus in the Bay of Naples a century earlier, whose poems can be read in a good modern edition.[34] These 'incipits' (beginnings, from the Latin *incipit*, 'it begins') are a common way of identifying verse literature in antiquity – Homer's epic of war is as likely to be cited under 'Sing, Goddess, the wrath' as by its title, *Iliad*. The scholars and booksellers of Oxyrhynchus are sifting and cataloguing on a large scale. There are occasional ticks in the margin; whatever the project is (a themed anthology? a collected edition?), individual poems are being found, identified, and checked. Each tiny poem is treated as a self-sufficient literary work.

At a more modest level, any literate participant in this culture could become their own literary garland-maker, sourcing their materials as and when. One small fragment (P.Oxy. LXVI 4501) carries a complete epigram, the start of another, and an epigram-sized gap in between, ready to be filled in from a separate source that the compiler never managed to acquire (epigram was a 'lossy' genre from the start). This points to a textual economy of circulation and exchange, and reminds us that we should see epigram against a wider pattern of the social uses of literature in Greco-Roman Egypt. Because of its climate, Egypt is the only imperial province from which such material survives; it also happened to be the only commercial source of papyrus in antiquity, but there is no reason to think that its literary culture was fundamentally different to that of other parts of the empire. Friends made copies and recommended connections, as in the famous circular letter from Oxyrhynchus, P.Oxy. XVIII 2912:[35]

> I pray that you are in good health, my lord brother… Make copies of Books 6 and 7 of Hypsicrates' *Characters Mocked in Comedy* and send them to me. For Harpocration says that these volumes are among Polion's books. But it's a fair bet that other people have them too. He also has epitomes in prose of Thersagoras' *The Myths of Tragedy*…

The consumers of these texts are also keen amateur producers, in a world without many professional ones; books become a convenient

and Obbink 2004: 12–13. Krevans 2007: 132–3 concisely attests the diversity and energy of ancient collecting practice.

[34] Sider 1997, with a valuable introduction, pointing out among other things that this is the 'Piso' of Cicero's *In Pisonem*.

[35] Recently re-edited by Hatzilambrou 2007.

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pretext for social exchange and networking. Strikingly, though, most of the books they are seeking are not canon classics: they are digests and dictionaries. These efficient secondary texts chunk and concentrate *paideia* for busy, real-world readers. As the instantly portable *ne plus ultra* of digested culture, the single epigram epitomizes in microcosm this world of the literary quick fix.

A more recent papyrus discovery is even now fleshing out our understanding of epigram's classic macrocosm – the published book of many epigrams by a single hand, arranged by category. The 'Milan Posidippus' (P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309) is a nearly complete poetry book of 112 poems, almost certainly all composed by the important Hellenistic author Posidippus of Pella.[36] Recovered from the papier-mâché casing ('cartonnage') of a late second-century-BCE mummy, and published in 2001, the book divides its poems into a series of headed categories. This discovery usefully confirms an already fairly safe working hypothesis of earlier epigram-scholarship: Hellenistic epigrammatists did indeed arrange by category.

More important and exciting is the *range* of categories presented by Posidippus. Their diversity and originality suggest a new understanding of how Hellenistic epigrammatists worked. A decade ago, our picture of the genre in this period was comfortably stable. Much like Caesar's Gaul in *Asterix*, Hellenistic epigram was divided into four parts: erotic, sympotic, dedicatory, and funerary types. These were Meleager's categories, of course, and the early scholarship did not speculate beyond them; by unspoken consent, these were the main and perhaps the *only* types of Hellenistic epigrams.[37] But the Milan Posidippus interleaves traditional dedicatory and funerary categories with unheard-of types. There are epigrams 'upon' bronze statues, but also on tiny gemstones, pushing the fiction of inscriptionality to breaking point; on victories in horse and chariot races, a new subset of dedicatory poem; on people lost at sea in shipwrecks (fictional epitaphs for empty tombs). Other categories include omens related to birds, and miraculous cures from diseases. Meleager's retrospective selection now appears thin and restrictive.

The Milan papyrus is also beginning to reveal the organizational and thematic subtleties of an original Hellenistic epigram book. The poems interrelate, within and across their categories: names recur, in

[36] For token and impressionistic dissent, see Lloyd-Jones 2001.

[37] E.g. Tarán 1979: 3 on her aim of studying examples from 'all four classes of Hellenistic epigrams'.

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scenarios that seem to connect into stories; the last word of the final poem in one category seems to suggest the theme of the next. Many poems, such as the impossible inscriptions of the gemstones category, seem in combination to speak figuratively of the epigrammatist's art as a literary miniaturist.[38]

These recent discoveries on papyrus have inspired a new wave of critical thought about epigram among Hellenists; the contributions to recent landmark collections reflect the quality and diversity of the work currently being done.[39] Simultaneously, innovative work by leading Latinists is extricating the scholarship on Martial from its former methodological stasis. Older twentieth-century views on the solitary major Latin epigrammatist had typically been disdainful. Martial was 'a nasty little man', a servile flatterer of despots, only worth reading as a source of picaresque urban colour.[40] His reporting of street-level incident made him appear ideal for padding out school sourcebooks on daily life in ancient Rome, and topographers of the *Urbs* could sieve the corpus for likely-sounding archaeological nuggets; but he was hardly proper literature. Much of this work reflected the sluggish state of play in studies of Roman satire prior to the late 1980s.[41] Martial's rehabilitation began with his identification by the late J. P. Sullivan as an 'Unexpected Classic'; since then, important studies have begun to reveal his sophistication as a literary author and an innovator within his genre, particularly at larger structural levels.[42]

The scope for original research is now wider than ever before. The later Latin epigrammatists of the fourth century await a Sullivan of their own; but the most famous of them, Ausonius, is vigorously defended by recent publications, and post-classical poets of even later centuries are beginning to attract attention. As the romantic cult of originality loses its historic hold over the academy, the skills of these late poets as receivers and transformers of material from the canon are increasingly appreciated.[43] (Perhaps the *Anthology*'s Christian poets,

[38] Gutzwiller 2004 offers some striking initial suggestions along these lines.

[39] I have in mind Gutzwiller 2005c and especially Bing and Bruss 2007a.

[40] For 'nasty little Martial', see Highet 1954: 19.

[41] On Martial and the sourcebooks, see Nisbet 2006: 160. The turning point in Anglophone studies of Latin satire is Braund 1989.

[42] For Martial recuperated as a classic, see Sullivan 1991. Examples of recent studies include major articles by Fowler (1995) and Lorenz (2004) and the recent monograph by Fitzgerald (2007).

[43] On Ausonius, see Kay 2001, aiming at quite a wide readership, and the very serious English edition and Oxford Classical Text by Green (1991 and 1999); and cf. provocatively Nugent 1990 on Ausonius and the 'post-modern' poetics of Late Antique epigram. Kay 2006

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so breezily dismissed earlier in this very introduction, will be next in line for critical reappraisal.) Inscriptional epigram remains shockingly under-exploited, in part because of difficulties of access that are gradually being solved. Its dissemination is already enabling insights that leap across the boundaries of genre to energize the study of other ancient verse forms, a phenomenon also seen with the publication of the Milan papyrus.[44] The recent scholarship on the genealogy and reception history of the *Anthology* is outstanding, but is surely not the last word on those inexhaustible subjects; epigram's place in the classical tradition has some takers, but its uses in reception make for an exciting story that is only now beginning to be written.[45]

Like modern-day Meleagers we pick and choose, making of epigram what we will. This short book is a case in point, and we hope that it will provoke independent exploration of ancient epigram in all its diversity, in the *Anthology* and beyond.

directs attention to the anonymous sixth-century poet of the booklike sequence 78–188 in the miscellany *Anthologia Latina*, placing him in Vandal Carthage; this makes him a contemporary and neighbour of Luxorius, the named poet of *AL* 287–375.

[44] For information on modern collections of inscribed epigram, see Bing and Bruss 2007b: 17–19. Carrying over insights from the Milan roll to Latin lyric, elegy, and epic, see Thomas 2004, and cf. Dinter 2005. On literary response to inscriptional epigram, see e.g. Ramsby 2007 on Roman elegy.

[45] Epigram in the classical tradition can be followed up through Sullivan 1991 and Haynes 2007, both with exhaustive referencing. The closing chapter of the present book develops *an* approach to the study of epigram in reception.

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