

THE CURIOUS CASE OF A.P. 9. 363

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- Χείματος ἠνεμόεντος ἀπ' αἰθέρος οἰχομένοιο (1)
πορφυρέη μείδησε φερανθέος εἶαρος ὥρη.
γαῖα δὲ κυανέη χλοερὴν ἐστέψατο ποίην,
καὶ φυτὰ θηλήσαντα νέοις ἐκόμησε πετήλοις.
οἱ δ' ἀπαλὴν πίνοντες ἀεξιφύτου δρόσον Ἑοῦς (5)
λειμῶνες γελώσιν, ἀνοιγομένοιο ρόδοιο.
χαίρει καὶ σύριγγι νομεὺς ἐν ὄρεσσι λιγαίνων,
καὶ πολιοῖς ἐρίφοις ἐπιτέρπεται αἰπόλος αἰγῶν.
ἤδη δὲ πλώουσιν ἐπ' εὐρέα κύματα ναῦται.
πνοιῆ ἀπημάντῳ Ζεφύρου λίνα κολπώσαντος. (10)
ἤδη δ' εὐάζουσι φερεσταφύλῳ Διονύσῳ,
ἄνθει βοτρύοντος ἐρεψάμενοι τρίχα κισσοῦ.
ἔργα δὲ τεχνήεντα βοηγενέεσσι μελίσσαις
καλὰ μέλει, καὶ σίμβλῳ ἐφήμεναι ἐργάζονται
λευκὰ πολυτρήτοιο νεόρρυτα κάλλεα κηροῦ. (15)
πάντῃ δ' ὀρνίθων γενεῆ λιγύφωνον αἰεῖδει,
ἀλκυόνες περὶ κῦμα, χελιδόνες ἀμφὶ μέλαθρα,
κύκνος ἐπ' ὄχθαισιν ποταμοῦ, καὶ ὑπ' ἄλσος ἀηδῶν.
εἰ δὲ φυτῶν χαίρουσι κόμαι, καὶ γαῖα τέθληεν,
συρίζει δὲ νομεὺς, καὶ τέρπεται εὐκομα μήλα, (20)
καὶ ναῦται πλώουσι, Διώνυσος δὲ χορεύει
μέλπει πετεεινά καὶ ὠδίνουσι μέλισσαι,
πῶς οὐ χρῆ καὶ ἀοιδὸν ἐν εἴαρι καλὸν ἀεῖσαι;

Windy winter has left the skies, and the purple season of flowery spring smiles. The dark earth garlands herself in green herbage, and the plants bursting into leaf wave their new-born tresses. The meadows, drinking the

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nourishing dew of dawn, laugh as the roses open. The shepherd on the hills delights to play shrilly on the pipes, and the goatherd joys in his white kids. Already the mariners sail over the broad billows, their sails bellied by the kindly Zephyr.

Already, crowning their heads with the bloom of berried ivy, men cry *evoe!* to Dionysus the giver of the grape. The bees that the bull's carcass generates bethink them of their artful labours, and seated on the hive they build the fresh white loveliness of their many-celled comb. The races of birds sing loud everywhere: the kingfishers by the waves, the swallows round the house, the swan by the river's brink, the nightingale in the grove. If the foliage of plants rejoices, and the earth flourishes, and the shepherd pipes, and the fleecy flocks disport themselves, and sailors sail, and Dionysus dances, and the birds sing, and the bees bring forth, how should a singer too not sing beautifully in the spring?¹

Traditionally ascribed to Meleager (1st century B.C., see Pauly-Wissowa XV, 481), the authorship of A.P. 9.363 remains nevertheless a controversial matter. Although accepted by critics like Reitzenstein (1893, 103); Geffcken (1916, 73); and Webster (1964, 213), the Meleagrian authorship of the poem is rejected by many others, e.g. H. Ouvré (1894, 241f.); Dilthey (1887, 10 n.1); Radinger (1895, 80); Stadtmüller (1906, 203); Guidorizzi (1922, 131 n.124); Wifstrand (1926, 168ff.); Gow-Page (1965, 593).

The arguments used by one side or another in this controversy range from purely subjective opinions regarding the poetic merits of A.P. 9.363² to lexical,³ syntactic,⁴ and prosodic⁵ considerations. The rejection of Meleager as the author of this epigram is sometimes accompanied by suggestions regarding its possible author, and, among those put forward for consideration, one may find writers as different as Nicander⁶ (second century B.C.⁷), and

¹ The text and translation of the epigram are based on the Loeb edition.

² See, for example, Radinger (80) for whom A.P. 9.363 is just "eine rhetorische Schulübung." A similar remark makes Webster (213), who considers that A.P. 9.363 is "a pretty poem."

³ For example, Ouvré: "Nous avons observé en lisant les épigrammes un bizarre mélange de dialectes; l'idylle est franchement ionienne." (Méléagre de Gadara: 241)

⁴ Ouvré: "Dans les vingt-trois hexamètres qui la composent, le génitif absolu reparait deux fois. Cette construction diplômât à Méléagre." (241)

⁵ Ouvré: "Les abréviations par hiatus sont assez rares dans les épigrammes, très communes dans la pièce que j'étudie." (242)

⁶ Suggested by Stadtmüller in his *Anthologia Graeca*.

⁷ See Pauly-Wissowa XVII, 250f.

a presumed, but otherwise unknown pupil or rival of Nonnus⁸ (possibly fourth or fifth century A.D.⁹).

Since a definite solution of the authorship controversy cannot be given, the epigram must be analyzed bearing in mind the fact that the poem could be a reaction to (at least some of) the spring poems included in the tenth book of the *Palatine Anthology*.¹⁰ One soon realizes that, although *A.P.* 9.363 does contain some of the elements present in the rest of the spring poems (e.g. the meadows, the swallow, the sailor, the image of the sails bellied by the Zephyr, the double use of ἦδη), the epigram occupies, through its length, great abundance of details not found in any other spring poems,¹¹ and especially its peculiar focus on the beauty and regenerative power of spring, on the joy and the mood of celebration that characterizes the season, a place totally apart among the Greek spring poems. The author of *A.P.* 9.363 seems thus neither to care too much about the tradition of the genre nor to be willing to carry, on his turn, its 'burden.' At any rate, *A.P.* 9.363 has certainly not influenced the rest of the spring poems, and, in the last instance, could be seen as a statement against the tradition, a poem written by an author who deliberately decided to ignore the traditional way of writing a spring poem while employing some of its conventional elements in order to remind the reader of the object of its 'attack.'¹²

The epigram falls into two parts, as lines 1-18 contain the description of spring and lines 19-23 an extended sequence of if-clauses, which summarizing the description of the season, also adds some new details, and whose apodosis (cast as a rhetorical question for the sake of dramatization) functions as an indirect injunction addressed to the poet himself who, in such a beautiful season, should also occupy himself by singing beautifully.

The poem begins with the image of the personified spring smiling after the departure of the windy winter from the sky. Placed in emphatic position at the beginning of the line, χεῖμα forms a contrasting pair with εἶσρος ὥρη

⁸ Suggested by Ouvré (242).

⁹ See Pauly-Wissowa XVII, pp. 904f.

¹⁰ *A.P.* 10. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 14, 15, 16.

¹¹ The dawn and its dew, the shepherd playing his pipe, the goatherd taking delight in the white kids, the devotees of Dionysus, the bees, the flocks, the kingfisher, the swan, the nightingale, the poet, the indirect injunction to sing.

¹² The presence of these elements – too many to be a mere coincidence – suggests that the epigram was not written totally independent from tradition..

at the end of line 2, while the use of πορφυρή¹³ to describe spring anticipates perhaps the roses that appear in line 6. The poem starts stylishly, as the triple rhyme (Χείματος ἠνεμόεντος ... αἰθέρος) brings into the first line a cadence that may suggest the steady and irreversible pace of winter's retreat, while line 2 contains two rhymes (πορφυρή... ὥρη and φερανθέος εἶαρος), and the hapax legomenon φερανθής.

The description of spring continues in line 3 with the image of the black earth (γαῖα κυανή) that garlands herself with verdant herbage (χλοερὴν ποίην). The juxtaposition of κυανή and χλοερὴν, sharply contrasting the black colour of the barren fields during the bleak winter with the green lushness brought by the arrival of spring, effectively suggests the transition from one season to another, emphasizing the almost miraculous regenerative power of the vernal season, while the use of στέφω, personifying the earth as feminine figure, points to the esthetic aspect of this change. Both the regenerative and the esthetic dimension of springtime reappear in the following line where the flourishing (θηλήσαντα) plants (φυτὸν from φύω "to bring forth, produce," see LSJ s.v.) wave (ἐκόμησε), presumably in a seductive way, their new leaves.

The smile of the flowery (φερανθής) spring from the second line is echoed in the 5f. by the laughing meadows and the image of the blossoming rose (ἀνοιγομένοιο ῥόδοιο). The mention of ἠώς and its delicate (ἀπαλή) dew indicates perhaps that the time of this description is early morning, quite appropriate for an epigram in which the theme of regeneration and new beginning occupies a central place, while the characterization of dawn as ἀεξίφυτος reinforces the same idea. The entire passage (lines 3-6) contains also various features of style, e.g. tricolon crescendo in lines 3-6, rhyme (ἀνοιγομένοιο ῥόδοιο), chiasmus and juxtaposition in line 6.

While in the first six lines of the poem spring is described as a time of enjoyment (μειδάω, γελάω), a season of flourishing growth and fertility (θηλέω, ἀεξίφυτος), when earth is full of colours (πορφύρεος, χλωρός), vegetation (φυτὸν) and flowers (φερανθής, ῥόδον), the following six lines (7-12) bring into this paradisiacal world the human presence. Thus, line 7 introduces the shepherd (νομεύς), line 8 the goatherd (αἰπόλος), lines 9f. the sailors (ναῦται), and lines 11f. the devotees of Dionysus who, having their hair crowned (ἐρεψάμενοι) with the bloom of the clustering ivy

¹³ The word means "purple" or "bright-red," see LSJ s.v. II.

(ἄνθεϊ βοτρυόεντος κισσοῦ), give their homage to the god by crying evoe (εὐάζουσι). If the sailors are a familiar presence in the spring poems included in the *Palatine Anthology*, the shepherd, the goatherd, and the followers of Dionysus are new characters whose function is to shift entirely the focus of the poem from the natural world to the human level.¹⁴

The mood of joy and delight constitutes the link between the vegetal and the human world, and also between the two sections of the epigram, since the enjoyment that perfuses the previous passage is present in these lines too. Thus, the shepherd rejoice (χαίρει) in playing on his σῦριγξ, the goatherd takes delight (ἐπιτέρπεται) in his white kids, and the mood of celebration culminates in the description of Dionysus' devotees. The presence of Dionysus, characterized in this passage as φερεστάφυλος, with the implication that he is celebrated by his followers as a god of wine, and, therefore, of joy and ecstatic liberation, epitomizes thus the exhilaration provoked by the season; similar to the Dionysiac wine, the spirit of spring carries man away from his usual mode of living into a mood of joy and celebration. Spring is thus presented not only as a time of renewal, growth, and beauty but also as a time of celebration, the revival of life and the resuming of the activities associated with the coming of spring being inextricably linked with the expression of joy. This part of the epigram too (7-12) is characterized by the same stylistic care as the previous section: rhyme between line 7 and 8 (λιγαίωνν... αἰγῶν); assonance of α, ι, ο, ου; alliteration (χαίρει και); rhyme in line 8 (πόλους ἐρίφοις); repetition of ἤδη at the beginning of line 9 and 11.

The focus of the epigram changes again in the following six lines (13-18) that contain a description of the bees and the birds. At this point, the structural symmetry of the poem is obvious, as the first six lines, describing the lush vegetation of spring, are followed by six lines dedicated to the human presence (7-12), while in the next six lines (13-18), the emphasis is again placed on the natural world, but this time on the creatures that populate the vernal landscape.

¹⁴ Although both the νομεύς with his σῦριγξ and the αἰπόλος rejoicing in his kids are characters associated with bucolic poetry, A.P. 9.363 cannot be considered a bucolic epigram, since, as Rossi (44) points out, "the bucolic element (the shepherd with his song and the goatherd) serves to provide a touch of colour to a springtime description in which, naturally, an important role is played by the constituent elements of the *locus amoenus*. For these reasons, since the bucolic touch is purely an accessory, one cannot in fact consider the epigram belonging to the bucolic type."

Mentioned by Aristotle (*Hist. an.* 5.21-22; 9.40), and later by Varro (*Rust.* 2.5.5; 3.16.4), Virgil (*G.* 4.281-314) and Ovid (*Met.* 15.365-68; *Fast.* 1.363-80), the spontaneous creation of bees from rotting bull carcasses alluded in line 13 may be seen as an equivalent to the growth of vegetation at the beginning of spring, since the presumed existence of the βοηγενής bees suggests that not only in the vegetal world but also in the animal realm, death and rebirth are closely interwoven, new life emerging from dead. The idea of beauty associated with the bees and their hard work is prevalent in these lines (καλά, 14; κάλλεα, 15), and mirrored at the textual level by numerous features of sound and style, e.g. assonance of α and ε (13), *hapax legomenon* βοηγενής (13), rhyme in line 14 (ἐφήμεναι ἐργάζονται), alliteration of κ in line 15.

The pleasure of enumeration apparent throughout the poem is also evident in lines 16ff. in which the song of various birds (άλκυών, χελιδών, κύκνος, ἀηδών) seems to permeate the entire world (πάντη). The emphasis placed on the singing birds continues the mood of celebration that characterizes the season, and foreshadows the “necessary” (χρή) song of the poet in line 23.

The last part of the epigram (lines 19-23) summarizes the description of spring in a way that gives the poem an almost ‘symphonic’ character, since, although at first sight this section is just a re-enumeration of the elements found in the depiction of the season, slight variations and subtle verbal echoes ‘reshape’ the vernal landscape. Thus, the plants, the flourishing earth, the shepherd playing his pipe, the sailors, Dionysus, the birds and the bees are mentioned again, but this time the foliage (κόμαι, recalling ἐκόμησε from line 4, used also in a vegetal context) of plants rejoices (χαίρουσι, recalling χαίρει from line 7, but now, as a variation, used to describe the plants, not the shepherd); in line 19 the earth flourishes (τεθήλεν, recalling θηλήσαντα that describes the plants in line 4); in line 20 the fleecy (εὔκομα, recalling ἐκόμησε from line 4, and also κόμαι from line 19, but employed here, as a variation, to describe the animals not the plants) flocks (unmentioned before) disport themselves (τέρπεται, recalling ἐπιτέρπεται from line 8, used to describe the goatherd); in line 21 Dionysus dances (χορεύει), a variation on line 11; in 22 the birds (called this time πετεινά, a term even more generic than γενεά from line 16) sing (μέλπει, a word whose other meaning, “to celebrate with song and dance,” see LSJ s.v., recalls perhaps or even mirrors the song and dance of Dionysus and his devotees at 11f. and 21; and, in the same line (22), the bees are depicted as bringing forth

(ὠδίνουσι), a significant variation on *bougonia* suggested by βοηγενές in line 13. At the same time, however, the word ὠδίνω could be also used here in its metaphorical meaning¹⁵ to describe the bees' great concern for their ἔργα τεχνηέντα, although, in view of general fertility, the idea of birth is more likely the primary sense.

After the enumeration of these elements, the passage ends with a rhetorical question that reveals the unexpected presence of the poet¹⁶ in the vernal world, and ultimately the point of the epigram. The last line constitutes the climax of the poem, distinguishing the poet as an essential part of the season. Since the poet too must (χρῆ) sing beautifully and celebrate the season, his duty is to incorporate into his song as many aspects as possible of spring, which may thus explain the great length of the poem itself, since *A.P.* 9.363 is the very song required from the poet. One may even say that the poet has the duty to transform the season into a beautiful song, because ultimately only through him spring comes to birth in the mind of the readers. Also, as the author of *A.P.* 9.363 uses the word καλὸν to describe the way in which the poet should sing, one is reminded of καλά in line 14 and κάλλεα in line 15; the implication of καλὸν is therefore that, similar to the bees that are concerned (μέλει) over their ἔργα τεχνηέντα, the poet too should use his skill: his song must be thus the result of a deliberate effort, not the natural outpouring of enthusiasm.

Although *A.P.* 9.363 could appear just as a long and tedious list of the various aspects of spring, a close reading suggests that, in fact, the author deliberately, and rather successfully, adopted the enumeration as his primary literary technique, as the abundance of details clearly conveys the mood of exuberance and celebration, presenting spring as a time of fertility, beauty and joy. If we also take into consideration the careful structural arrangement and the great attention given to the various features of sound and style (quite a remarkable feat in such a long poem), one may conclude that *A.P.* 9.363 occupies a place apart in Hellenistic poetry.

¹⁵ Namely "to be in the throes or agonies of thought," see LSJ s.v. II.

¹⁶ The word αἰιδός, from αἰίδω, recalls ἀηδών, the nightingale that ends in line 18 the enumeration of the singing birds specific to the spring season.

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the distinctive literary qualities of epigram A.P. 9.363, traditionally attributed to Meleager of Gadara, focusing on the ongoing debates regarding its authorship, generic classification, and poetic innovation. Through a detailed analysis of its structure, stylistic devices, and imagery, the article reveals the poem's strategies of adopting and revising the established conventions of traditional Greek spring poetry, with particular focus on its enumerative method and formal innovations, that ultimately distinguish A.P. 9.363 within the context of Hellenistic poetry.

KEYWORDS: Meleager of Gadara, *Palatine Anthology*, Greek epigram.