

SECTION ALPHA

A NEW MORNING OPENED
... IN THE LECTURE-ROOM

PTOLEMAIC ROYAL PATRONAGE

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Six years before Captain Cook sighted New Zealand the Ptolemaic Age was discovered. In 1763 Winckelmann's friend Christian Gottlob Heyne had just been appointed Professor of Eloquence at the University of Göttingen at the age of 34; he presented an academic *prolusio* on the twenty-sixth anniversary of the inauguration of the *Academia Georgia Augusta* by George II of England and Hanover.¹ The occasion was also a significant moment in the history of the university, for the speech celebrated its liberation from French control (1760–1762) and the victory of Frederick the Great and George III in the Seven Years War.

Heyne's theme was 'De Genio Saeculi Ptolemaeorum', on the character of the age of the Ptolemies:

Hoc est de ingenio eius aetatis, de studiorum, quam tum potissimum vigerunt, genere et ratione, et ingeniorum natura ac peculiari caractere, caussisque quae quidem harum rerum probabiles afferri possunt.

That is on the character of that age, on the type and form of the studies that flourished then, the nature and particular characters of the individual talents, and the causes which can with all probability be adduced for these things. (p. 79)

Heyne's account has been completely forgotten;² yet it is full and exemplary. He discusses the effects of Alexander's conquests; his general characterisation of Alexandrianism stresses its 'elegance, charm and amiable simplicity' (*elegantiam, amoenitatem et amabilem simplicitatem*), 'the

¹ Chr.G. Heyne, *Opuscula Academica Collecta* (Göttingen 1785) vol. i. 76–134; the treatise is divided into two parts, the actual speech delivered, and the fuller published account of his researches. I have used the copy in Balliol College Library, from the books of Benjamin Jowett; after the conference in Auckland, Graham Zanker and I decided that we would publish a translation of this little treatise with an introduction and commentary. On Heyne as a historian see now M. Heidenreich, *Christian Gottlob Heyne und die Alte Geschichte* (Munich-Leipzig 2006); she mentions but does not discuss the work.

² I have found passing references only in L. Canfora, *Ellenismo* (Rome 1987) index s.v., and G.W. Most in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism IV The Eighteenth Century* ed. H.B. Nisbet and C. Rawson (Cambridge 1997), p. 746 n. 7.

clear pure and elegant diction' (*orationem nitidam, puram et elegantem*) but warns that there is 'nothing lofty, noble-minded or sublime, no boldness in these writers' (*in iis nihil celsum, generosum et sublime, nulla audacia*); they hug the shore and beat the ground with their wings—and here he cites Longinus 33 on Apollonius and Theocritus (pp. 79–81).

Of oratory there was little: 'for no-one would naturally expect that the free speech of oratory could flourish much in a kingdom or a court' (*iam in regno et aula nemo facile expectet ut oratorum libertas multum se praeberere possit*). Its poetry is described as unaffected by Egyptian culture: 'one may easily recognise in the authors whose poems survive its elegant, charming, educated nature, but there is not to be found those highest attributes of poetry, the sublime, uplifted, or lofty' (*ingenium elegans, amoenum, cultum in iis, quorum carmina habemus, facile agnoscas, sed neque inveniundo, quae poetices summa est, felix, nec sublime, celsum, elatum*—p. 92). Heyne discusses Callimachus, Nicander, Aratus, Apollonius Rhodius, Lycophron, Manetho, Eratosthenes, Euphorion, Parthenius. He singles out the tragedians and the comic poets, and in bucolic poetry Theocritus, Asclepiades, Philetas, Bion and Moschus. Writings on the theory of tragedy and comedy abounded (Duris, Didymus, Aristoxenus, Hephaestion on the tragedians, and *de re comica* Eratosthenes, Lycophron and Hephaestion—p. 101).

The most dominant feature of Alexandrian culture was its love of *polyhistoria, polymathia, philologia*:

Nec poeta tum fuit, qui non esset grammaticus, nonullique utroque nomine clarissimi, uti Callimachus, Apollonius Rhodius, Aratus, Nicander, Alexander Aetolus; Eratosthenes et grammaticus et poeta et philosophus insignis habitus est.

There was no poet then who was not also a grammarian, and there were many famous in both arts, like Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes, Aratus, Nicander, Alexander Aetolus; Eratosthenes was famous as a grammarian, poet and philosopher (p. 98).

There were many learned men like Apollodorus or Rhianus who was both poet, historian and *grammaticus*. In fact grammar (philology) was the foundation of all the disciplines, due to the wealth of the library and the congregation of scholars in the Museum. This school of *grammatici* continued to exist until the Christian era, with Synesius, Nonnus, Gregory of Nazianzus, Proclus, Quintus of Smyrna and Tryphiodorus. *Grammatici* like Zenodotus and Aristarchus promoted the study of Homer, the emendation of the Homeric text and the creation of Homeric commentaries (*hypommemata*); the writing of scholia spread to

Hesiod and to the moderns. ‘That very grammatical erudition brought the first seeds of corruption to literature’ (*Ipsa illa grammatica eruditio prima corruptelae semina litteris attulit*—p. 104). The love of recondite knowledge (*studium illa antiqua et minus vulgo nota cognoscendi*) permeated the culture with a preference for ancient stories, myths, accounts of foreign peoples. Thus the *historici* wrote *Indica*, *Parthica*, *Scythica*, *Periplus* (p. 83). Alas, none of these works survives except in their use by later authors:

Omnino mirationem facit, quod e Ptolemaeorum temporibus, tanta litterarum luce illustratis, tam pauci libri sospites ad nos pervenere, rerum quoque gestarum fere omnis memoria intercidit.

In fact it is surprising that from the age of the Ptolemies, which was so resplendent in its literature, so few books survive to our days, and almost all memory of their history has disappeared. (p. 105)

The study of geography began from Alexander’s conquests and the explorations of the Ptolemies, with Nearchus, Daimachus, Megasthenes and Onesicritus; again everything is lost except what is preserved in those who made use of them—Strabo, Dionysius Periegetes, Pliny and Stephanus of Byzantium (p. 105). There were flourishing genres of natural history (*historia naturae, de mirabilibus, de fluviis etc*—p. 107). In science the Alexandrians were skilled at mathematics, astronomy, medicine, music and harmony (p. 108).

Despite all the benefits from royal munificence, the rewards of letters and studies, the banquets of the Museum and the wealth of the library (*in ipsa regum munificentia, in praemiis litterarum studiis propositis, Musei convictu, bibliothecae opulentia*), philosophy did not entirely flourish: there were few Stoics and only one Epicurean (Colotes). But the philosophy of pleasure was strong at court:

Cyrenaica disciplina, quae ad voluptatem omnia referebat, regum libidinibus palpabat, fuitque adeo grata iis et accepta; saltem tanta Theodori fuit auctoritas, ut a Sotere legatus ad Lysimachum mitteretur.

The Cyrenaic discipline which derives everything from pleasure flattered the royal desires, and so was pleasing and acceptable to them; at least the authority of Theodorus was such that he was sent by Soter as an ambassador to Lysimachus. (p. 114)

Under Egyptian influence, Greek philosophy also took on a new guise: the ‘ancient philosophy and theology’ with its use of symbols and hieroglyphs was a fusion of Greek and Egyptian ideas which mingled with Jewish superstition and Christianity (p. 112).

For an account of the *artes liberales* Heyne refers to his friend Winckelmann: but he remarks that the Alexandrians especially possessed a love of display rather than a sense of true beauty—*ad fastum et magnificentiam potius se inclinasse, quam ad iudicii elegantiam aut verae pulchritudinis sensum* (p. 114). Having described the nature of Ptolemaic culture, Heyne turns to the causes of Alexandrianism:

Cum saeculi Ptolemaeorum Genium aliquem, valde notabilem, satis declaratum dederim, in litterarum quidem studio, polymathiae et polyhistoriae amorem, in historiis, rerum mirabilium, novarum et insolitarum: causas eius rei, etsi iam in ipsa narratione interpositas, nunc seorsum breviter perstringere placet.

Since I have given a sufficient account of the particular and strongly marked genius of the Ptolemaic age, especially in the study of letters, the love of *polymathia* and *polyhistoria*, and in the stories of things marvellous, novel and unusual, it is appropriate now to separate out and explain briefly the causes of these features, which have already been mentioned in the foregoing account. (p. 115)

There is in human history a natural progression towards *subtilitas grammatica, historica ac philosophica* (grammatical, historical and philosophical subtlety):

Luxuriantius ingenium a simplicitate ad cultum et ornatum, hinc ad succum et lascivium prolabitur. Alexandriae autem maturior litterarum mutatio facta, quia incertum regum lubido, aulicorum vanitas, urbis luxuries, civium levitas, ipsae studiorum opportunitates, motui rerum iam per se inclinato momenti et impulsus haud parum addere debuere. Regum quidem munificentia et amor litterarum fuit qualem vix alia aetas vidit.

As it grows more luxuriant, talent slips from simplicity to the cultivated and ornate, and thence to high flavour and exuberance. But at Alexandria a deeper change occurred in literature because the fluctuating desires of the kings, the vanities of courts, the luxury of the city, the levity of the citizens, the very opportunities for study, must have added no little movement and impulse to this natural tendency. Indeed the munificence and love of learning shown by the kings has scarcely been seen in any other age.

The kings Lagus, Philadelphus, Philopator, Euergetes and Physcon were all lovers of literature, as too was Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemies:

Regum itaque liberalitas multos viros doctos invitavit: quibus, cum regiis stipendiis sustentati viverent, id studii erat, ut dictis scriptisque regi et aulicis se probarent. Inde adulatoria et parasitica illa laudandi licentia in optimis horum temporum scriptoribus. Imprimis vero regum liberalitas Museo et bibliothecae condita inclaruit.

And so the liberality of the kings attracted many learned men whose care it was, since they lived paid by royal stipends, to display themselves in their words and their writings to the king and his courtiers. So there is an adulatory and parasitic excess of praise in the best writers of this period. But above all the liberality of the kings made glorious the Museum and the library founded by them.

The Museum was organised with *syssitia* (communal banquets) under royal patronage, but it had its disadvantages:

Vrbis frequentia, regum facilitas et comitas, studiorum facile severitatem temperare potuit. Quod tamen in rebus humanis fieri solet, cum summis bonis ut mala indivulso contubernio coniuncta sint, hoc idem in his tantis bonis evenisse videmus. Ut aulici et principes de honorum fumo, sic viri docti de opinionum umbra inter se digladiantur; invidia, odiis, inimicitiiis gliscentibus optima quaeque evertuntur. Sic nulli facile doctorum virorum coetus contentionum libidine et conviciandi licentia carent. De Museo Alexandrino non mitiora accipimus. Nobile est Timonis Phliasii diciturum.

The crowded city, the ease and friendliness of the kings could easily temper the rigours of study. But as often happens in human affairs, since evils are conjoined in an indissoluble table companionship with the highest goods, so we see this happening in this case. Just as courtiers and kings dispute over the fog of honours, so scholars dispute over the shadows of opinions; as envy, hatred and enmities grow all good things are subverted. So no gathering of learned men can easily be free of the passion for contentions and the licence of quarrels. We hear nothing different of the Alexandrian Museum. There is a noble saying of Timon of Phlious. (pp. 118f.)

And here he refers to the famous fragment preserved in Athenaeus 1.22d: “Many there be that feed in populous Egypt, well-stocked pedants who quarrel endlessly in the bird-cage of the Muses.”

The library however was an important benefit (Heyne was of course the university librarian at Göttingen): ‘despite these ills how many great benefits there were for mankind in the Museum and library of Alexandria’ (*Cum his ipsis tamen malis quot et quanta beneficia Museo et Bibliothecae Alexandriae accepta refert genus humanum*). The disasters of the successive destructions of the library are recounted, together with the organisation of the Museum within the palace and of the library, part of which was in the palace, part in Serapeum. The successive librarians are listed (pp. 121–129).

For the citizens of Alexandria games and festivals were enormously important. (p. 131). The city of Alexandria itself was unique in the ancient world: ‘so much that scarcely any city of our age can compare

with it, except perhaps for London' (*hactenus vix urbs aliqua nostra aetate est, quae cum ea comparari possit, nisi forte Londinium*). Writers of all periods agree that it was marked by the *elegantia* of both *potentes* and *plebs*: the Alexandrians had a passion for inventions and devices, as well as being subtle, ingenious, light-headed, fickle and easily agitated (*Alexandrinorum ingenia fuisse sollertia ad inveniendum et excogitandum, simulque vafra, callida; eadem porro levia, varia, tumultuantia*—p. 133). Ancient Egyptian superstitions were rife among them:

Increbuit superstitio utpote in plebe inter incerta fortunae ex mercatu et navigatione iactata, advenarum ex diversis terris confluentium et promiscue habitantium coetibus admixtis imprimis Iudaeorum, a Philometoris maxime temporibus, quorum Philo non minus quam decies centena milia Alexandriae et per Aegyptum habitantium memorat.

Superstition increased as is natural in a mob tossed about by the uncertainties of trade and navigation, with masses of newcomers flooding in and living among them, notably Jews, especially from the time of Philometor, whose numbers Philo records as no less than a million living in Alexandria and throughout Egypt. (p. 134)

This is a full and sensitive description of Ptolemaic culture, which in its general lines is surely the equal of if not superior to any that has been offered since. But it contains of course throughout an implicit comparison with Heyne's own day:

Vos, autem, Cives in ea tempora servatos vos esse laetamini, in quibus Regum Ptolemaeis illis simillimorum munificentia omnium disciplinarum scholas vobis aperuit, viros, quales olim in Musei convictum illi adscribere optavissent, omnigena doctrina insignes, in hanc Academiam congregavit, bibliothecam ornatissimam vestris usibus liberalissime comparavit, eumque Virum summum et immortalem harum rerum Curatorem esse voluit, qualem ipse ille Ptolemaeorum inauditus litterarum et artium amor, earumque ornandarum studium, frustra in humano genere sibi dari exoptavit.

Rejoice, fellow citizens, that you live in those times in which the munificence of kings most like to those Ptolemies has opened for you schools of all the disciplines, and has gathered together in this University such men, famous for all forms of learning, as once they desired to inscribe in the life of the Museum, and has most liberally provided a splendid library for your use, and has desired such a man to be the supreme highest being and immortal guardian of these things as that unheard of love of Ptolemaic letters and arts, and the furthering of their study, has looked for in vain amongst the human race. (p. 84)

This Hanoverian construction rests firmly on the eighteenth century view of *historia magistra vitae*, in which the relationship between the ancient and the modern world is seen as one of model and copy, based on the unchanging character of human nature: a monarchic system will always produce the same effects in culture, and so we can read back and forth between the Ptolemaic and the Hanoverian ages.

Thus two generations before Droysen's invention of *Hellenismus*, which is conventionally taken as the invention of the Hellenistic age,³ Heyne had seen its special characteristics, and had already posed the central question of Ptolemaic culture: what is the relationship between patronage and culture in the Ptolemaic age, and how was that culture created? Today we as heirs of a progressive social Darwinism and a sceptical post-modernism should be able to come up with a less self-centred view of the relation between wealth and culture; and yet all too often our understanding of patronage implies that it is an unchanging factor in the creation of culture, in which all monarchies and all state funding have much the same purpose and much the same effect on the artistic tradition. Modern views of patronage and generic composition indeed lay great emphasis on the importance of monarchy as a simple factor involving primarily the political manipulation of literature, without considering how monarchies differ fundamentally from each other in their attitudes and aims, and have different effects on the cultures they support.

Thus the prevalent view of the nature of Ptolemaic poetry rests on the short and influential paper by Konrat Ziegler, *Das hellenistische Epos*,⁴ first published in 1934, but not widely known until its second publication in 1966. According to Ziegler, the whole development of

³ 'The inventor of the Hellenistic age or world ... is Johann Gustav Droysen, who in 1836 labelled or rather baptised his creation as "Hellenismus", Greekism.' Paul Cartledge in P. Cartledge, P. Garnsey, E. Gruen (eds.) *Hellenistic Constructs* (Berkeley 1997) p. 2. The literature on Droysen and the concept of *Hellenismus* is large: see esp. A. Momigliano, 'Genesi storica e funzione attuale del concetto di ellenismo', (1935) *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome 1955) 165–193; J.G. Droysen between Greeks and Jews' (1970), *Quinto Contributo* (Rome 1975) 109–126; R. Bichler, "*Hellenismus*" *Geschichte und Problematik eines Epochenbegriffs* (Darmstadt 1983); Canfora o.c. (n. 2); A. Demandt, 'Hellenismus—die moderne Zeit des Altertums?' in B. Funcke (ed.), *Hellenismus* (Tübingen 1996) 17–27.

⁴ K. Ziegler, *Das Hellenistische Epos: ein vergessenes Kapitel Griechischer Dichtung* (second edition, Leipzig, 1966); because Ziegler was persona non grata in Nazi Germany, the first edition was not noticed. I have not read the earlier essay of W. Kroll, 'Das historische Epos' *Sokrates* 4 (1916) 1–14; there is a useful survey by R. Haüssler, *Das historische Epos der Griechen und Römer bis Vergil. 1 Vom Homer zu Vergil* (Heidelberg 1976).

Roman panegyric epic poetry rested on a lost tradition of Hellenistic royal panegyric poetry practised at the courts of Alexandria and Pergamon: he proceeded to reconstruct this tradition on the basis of the titles of these alleged epics, and by means of reading back from Roman epic practice. This poetry consisted of long epics devoted to the exploits of the kings, written in a panegyric vein such as is attested in Roman literature from Ennius to the poets of the later Roman empire; the characteristics of the Hellenistic and Roman epic that does in fact survive, from Apollonius to Virgil and beyond, together with the tradition of critical comment on long poems and the practice of *recusatio*, must be understood in terms of reaction to this dominant lost school of poetry. Ziegler's theory has been accepted by a whole series of modern students of Hellenistic and Roman poetry, starting from Francis Cairns, with his belief that the scheme of the *logos basilikos* propounded by Menander Rhetor, a provincial schoolmaster in the third century AD, can be detected throughout the literature of the post-classical period.⁵ At its most general, Denis Feeney can even say, 'Epics treating the deeds of kings and people, contemporary, recent or remote, were composed all over the Mediterranean, and at every period, from the late fifth century BCE to the age of the Byzantine emperors' (p. 264). The theory has finally achieved canonical status in the classification used by Lloyd-Jones and Parsons, in their monumental *Supplementum Hellenisticum*, according to which 'of the 39 "epic" poets they included, all but five wrote on historical events'.⁶

This entire construct is a complete fantasy, which has done untold damage to the understanding of Latin poetry of the Augustan age especially, as I have been arguing ever since 1968.⁷ But it has at last been demolished by a scholar whose expertise in the literature of panegyric poetry cannot be disputed: Alan Cameron devotes chapter X of his book *Callimachus and his Critics* to the destruction of the theory. As he says 'There is in fact no solid or explicit evidence for long historical epics at any time in the Hellenistic world' (p. 268), and again 'there is not a single indisputable example of a full-scale

⁵ See esp. F. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh 1972); A. Hardie, *Statius and the Silvae* (Liverpool 1983) 86–90; Ph.R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford 1986); D.C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford 1991) 264–267.

⁶ A. Cameron, *Callimachus and his Critics* (Princeton 1995) 287, citing the list of genres in *Supplementum Hellenisticum* (Berlin 1983) XVII.

⁷ In this year I began a series of lectures at Oxford on 'The public voice of Horace', which contained a full-scale attack on the views of Ziegler and Cairns.

epic poem on the deeds of a Hellenistic king' (p. 281). While we know that the exploits of Alexander the Great were celebrated by a least five poets, all of them became bywords for their badness (p. 278); and it seems that the example of Choerilus and others prevented anyone from following suit in later generations. Cameron concludes, 'There is simply no basis for the dominant assumption that the advent of the Hellenistic kings created an immediate demand for large-scale historical epics' (p. 295).

The Hellenistic poets did of course experiment with forms of praise poetry. Cameron is prepared to admit the existence of paeans probably sung at royal festivals or victory celebrations (possible examples are listed on pp. 289–295). But as he says, 'Theocritus 17 is the only complete poetic encomium to survive from the Hellenistic world' (p. 272). It is for that reason that I want briefly to consider this particular poem, because it seems to me to demonstrate most clearly the actual nature of Hellenistic praise poetry. Francis Cairns indeed devoted twenty pages to its analysis (*Generic Composition* pp. 100–120): he began from the assumption that it followed a generic pattern exemplified in Menander Rhetor's *logos basilikos*, but ended by detecting Theocritus' substantial originality in deviating from this schema; the most recent editor Richard Hunter notes that in fact the divergences and omissions from the schema are far more striking than the similarities.⁸ The truth is that Theocritus was completely unaware of such a schema, since it did not yet exist; and that is why, though the topic of the praise of a ruler inevitably leads to some similarities, the structure of the poem in no way conforms to the rhetorical rules of Menander, which were designed centuries later for hack rhetoricians in the provincial towns of Asia Minor who were required to celebrate endlessly the emperor's birthday or his ceremonial progress through the provinces.

Theocritus is concerned with a different world and a different series of problems—how, within the existing conventions of Greek poetry, to create a means of praising his ruler. The Idyll is framed on the pattern of a Homeric hymn, and its echoes of themes in Callimachus' hymns show how each sought to offer a contemporary response to the demands of court poetry. The theme is that of the divinity of kings: this may be explained partly as an attempt to place king worship in an appropriate light for Greek readers, and partly as a legacy from

⁸ R. Hunter, *Theocritus, Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Berkeley 2003) 21–23.

the generic background in the hymn as praise of the gods. But the tone is light and ironic; the praise of Philadelphus is subordinated to praise of his father and mother, which concentrates on their status as human beings who have achieved divinity like Herakles and have been awarded seats at the banquets on Olympus. Philadelphus' own acts of sacrifice to them of course provide the food for those banquets; so his own relation to the world of the gods is presented as that of a hero descended from the gods. This picture is combined with a traditional description of the wealth of Egypt, and the power and wealth of its ruler which enables him to reward his poets. So after Zeus 'let Ptolemy of men be named first and last and in the middle, for he is the best of men'.

In his edition of this poem Hunter says, "we do not know the circumstance of the poem's composition and original performance" (p. 46), and of course without that information it is difficult to understand its implications for the nature of Ptolemaic praise poetry. But in fact, although this does not seem to have been recognised by modern scholars, the poem advertises very clearly its purpose and place of performance. Theocritus refers to the existence of competitive performance at festivals, in his reference to the lavish prizes awarded by Ptolemy at the Alexandrian Dionysia (112–114);⁹ this feature of Ptolemaic culture is clearly an adaptation of the Athenian Dionysia. But Theocritus' poem can hardly be written for a festival of Dionysus: I would suggest that the obvious occasion explains all the distinctive features of the poem. Gregor Weber says in a footnote that, 'das beherrschende Element des Enkomions die Etablierung eines Kultes für Ptolemaios I. und Berenike zu sein scheint'.¹⁰ The poem is in fact a sensitive and skilled adaptation of the Homeric hymn in praise of a god to the theme of praising a divine dynasty and its human embodiment: the emphasis is placed on the king's parents, themselves installed on Olympus, in order to render more traditional the ambiguous human status of the reigning king. The piety of Philadelphus in establishing the worship of his parents is indeed the most prominent aspect of the poem, which therefore finds its natural place as a hymn composed for performance at the festival of the Ptolemaicia; this royal festival for the divinity of the king's parents was

⁹ P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) i. 202–206.

¹⁰ G. Weber, *Dichtung und höfische Gesellschaft*, Hermes Einzelschriften 62 (1993) 213 n. 2.

first held in 279/8, and thereafter at four yearly intervals.¹¹ The slightly coy allusion to the brother-sister marriage of Philadelphus and Arsinoe, which is justified by the marriage of Zeus and Hera, appears to view it as a recent event. These two contemporary references have resulted in the generally agreed dating of the poem to between 278 and 270 B.C. (the death of Arsinoe).¹² ■ in rest of book: BC without dots

I therefore see the poem as written specifically for probably the first, or at least one of the first two (or possibly three) festivals celebrating the new cult of Soter and Berenice: it is not in fact constructed in accordance with existing conventions for the praise of a ruler, but is an original hymn carefully adapting a general theme to a precise religious occasion. It belongs alongside the famous *pompe* described by Callixenos of Rhodes and preserved in Athenaeus, which concerns a magnificent procession also likely to have been staged at an early celebration of the Ptolemaieia.¹³ In the 270s the new cult of the king's parents was the main focus of royal attention, as a means of legitimising the Ptolemaic dynasty through specifically Greek religion; this royal initiative may indeed be a Greek response to the Egyptian tradition of the worship of the reigning Pharaoh, although the ritual in no way reflects this. Theocritus 17 should therefore rightly be viewed as an example of Ptolemaic 'court poetry'; for it is functionally embedded in the religious ritual of the worship of the royal house, and must be understood in terms of the hymns appropriate to such an occasion.

Similarly, as Fantuzzi and Hunter have recently demonstrated, in such hymns as those to Zeus (I) and to Delos (IV), Callimachus seeks to incorporate Philadelphus within his own mythological world; neither poet praises Philadelphus directly in panegyric verse.¹⁴ Formal panegyric was not in fact a part of the Ptolemaic literary or poetic scene, because it had not yet been invented. The model that poets chose to represent their relations with their patron was that of Pindar, which involved an easier and less formal relationship, in which the

¹¹ T.L. Shear, *Kallias of Sphettos* Hesp. Suppl 17 (1978) 33–36; *CAH* VII.1 (1984) 138 f. (EG Turner) and 417 f. (H. Heinen).

¹² A.S.F. Gow, *Theocritus* (Cambridge 1950) II p. 326; Fraser o.c. II, 933 f.

¹³ E.E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (1983); D.J. Thompson, 'Philadelphus' Procession: Dynastic Power in a Mediterranean Context' in *Politics, Administration and Society in the Greek and Roman World* ed. L. Mooren (Studia Hellenistica 36, Leuven 2000) 365–388, esp. 381–388.

¹⁴ M. Fantuzzi and R. Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge 2004) ch. 8.

poet's ability to memorialise his patron in verse enhanced the status of the subject as well as preserving the independence of the art of poetry and the poet himself. This insistence on the status and dignity of the poet in relation to his patron was indeed inherited and adapted to a more vatic theme by the poets of the Augustan age. Each period in the ancient world experimented with the poetic tools inherited from the past; but not until deep in the later Roman Empire, with poets such as Claudian and his successors, did the rules of rhetoric come to play any part in the relationship between poet and patron.

We know a little, but not nearly enough, about the workings of Ptolemaic patronage. The catchall term "patronage" can in fact easily mislead, suggesting, as it does 'a [personal] relationship ... of some duration', particularly in the field of literature and the arts, where the well-documented subject of artistic patronage in the Renaissance and subsequent centuries seems to offer dangerously tempting analogies.¹⁵

These cautious words of Richard Hunter need to be heeded. The most important aspect of Hellenistic court poetry is those features which may loosely be described as 'sympotic'—the easy relationship between the poet and his patron, the friends and freedom of speech within a convivial context, and the apparent lack of royal protocol. All this is derived from a consciously recreated world of the *symposion* adapted for the royal palace, in which poet and patron are equal members, and indeed in which the poet is more important than his host because he provides both entertainment and the hope of eternal *kleos*. The ideal image is well expressed in Theocritus' praise of Philadelphus as a patron in *Idyll* 14:

εὐγνώμων, φιλόμουσος, ἐρωτικός, εἰς ἄκρον ἀδύς,
εἰδῶς τὸν φιλέοντα, τὸν οὐ φιλέοντ' ἔτι μᾶλλον,
πολλοῖς πολλὰ διδοῦς, αἰτεῦμενος οὐκ ἀνανεύων,
οἷα χρῆ βασιλῆ' αἰτεῖν δὲ δεῖ οὐκ ἐπὶ παντί,
Αἰσχίνα.

[Ptolemy is the best paymaster for a free man ...] kindly, cultured, gallant, as pleasant as may be; recognises his friend, and those who are not his friends even better; generous to many and not one to refuse a request, as a king should be, but you mustn't always be asking, Aischinas. (*Idyll* 14.60–66)

¹⁵ Hunter, *Encomium* (n. 8) 27; cf. id., *Theocritus and the Archaeology of Greek Poetry* (Cambridge 1996) 77–82.

So a king should be praised as *eugnomon*, *philomousos*, *erotikos*, *eis akron hadus*, able to distinguish friends and enemies; apart from the implication that kings should be generous, these are the traditional virtues of the fellow symposiast. The same picture of independence and reciprocity, though in a more formal and distant style—poetic fame for monetary rewards—emerges from Theocritus' description of his poetic calling in Idyll 16, addressed to Hieron of Syracuse.¹⁶ The ubiquity of this characterisation of Ptolemaic patronage is shown also in Herondas, *Mimiambus* 1, when Gyllis tries to persuade Metrike that her husband has deserted her and gone to Alexandria:

κεῖ δ' ἔστιν οἶκος τῆς θεοῦ· τὰ γὰρ πάντα,
 ὅσ' ἔστι κου καὶ γίνετ', ἔστ' ἐν Αἰγύπτωι·
 πλοῦτος, παλαιόστρη, δύναμι[ς], εὐδία, δόξα,
 θεαί, φιλόσοφοι, χρυσίον, νεηνίσκοι,
 θεῶν ἀδελφῶν τέμενος, ὁ βασιλεὺς χρηστός,
 Μουσῆιον, οἶνος, ἀγαθὰ πάντ' ὅσ' ἄν χροίζηι,
 γυναικες, ὀκρόσους οὐ μὰ τὴν Ἄιδεω Κούρηι
 ἀστέρους ἐνεγκεῖν οὐραν[ο]ς κεκαύχηται.

The home of the goddess is there. For everything that exists and is produced is in Egypt—wealth, wrestling schools, power, tranquillity, fame, spectacles, philosophers, gold, youth, the sanctuary of the sibling gods; the king is a good chap; the Museum, wine, everything he could desire, women—as many by Hades' maid as the stars that heaven boasts of bearing. (*Mim.* 1.26–33)

This is the characterisation of his court that Ptolemy Philadelphus actively sought to promote, and the reason why he welcomed poets who could both enhance and celebrate his cultural aims.

As with Pindar, Bacchylides and Simonides, in Hellenistic courtly culture the *symposion* remains the main conceptual focus for expressing the relationship between poet and patron, and for the demonstration of the courtly virtues of a civilised king. That this became a permanent aspect of the Ptolemaic court culture is shown by the many anecdotes about sympotic activity in Alexandria, the existence of sympotic epigrams and above all by the *mise-en-scène* adopted by the Jewish writer Aristeeas in his imaginary description of the reception of the 72 transla-

¹⁶ G. Zanker, *Realism in Alexandrian Poetry* (London 1987) 191f.: 'His failure to 'humanise' Hiero contrasts with his strategy for the Ptolemies. Perhaps this is further evidence of the uniqueness of the Egyptian monarchs' taste for the humorous realism of their court-poets.'

tors of the Septuagint by Philadelphus.¹⁷ Even the vices of the Ptolemies are expressed in sympotic terms—as anger, arrogance, and unwillingness to accept the *parrhesia* which is an essential part of the freedom of the *symposion*.

So in Ptolemaic culture we need to see the development of forms of royal patronage as a part of a process only partially connected with the new institution of monarchy. Ever since patronage entered ancient poetry (or had it always been there from Homer on?) there was a continuing need to adapt poetic themes to forms of patronage. The aristocratic and tyrannical patrons of Pindar, the tyrannical and democratic patrons of Simonides, existed as an inheritance of themes from which the Ptolemaic poets could draw; they could also invent or adapt themes from Homer and from established genres such as hymns to the gods. The poets of Augustan Rome were still experimenting with this inherited material, and adding to it the specifically Roman tradition of military epic often in praise of particular commanders. By late antiquity it is true that the rules were well established, and there is little difference between the poems of Claudian (himself of course an Alexandrian Greek, despite writing in a formal and classical Latin) and the rhetorical productions of the Latin and Greek imperial panegyrists. But when we consider the Ptolemaic age we are in a different world.

Arnd Kerkhecker has raised the question of the extent to which the concept of *Hofliteratur* or *Hofdichtung* can help us to understand Ptolemaic court poetry.¹⁸ He highlights two aspects of *Hofliteratur* as it appears in western literature from the Renaissance to the modern day—literature in the life of the court, and literature about the court (*de aula*). The second he dismisses on the grounds that there is no evidence in the Ptolemaic age for writers with the moralising tendencies of authors such as Castiglione, Montaigne or Gracián: he seems to forget the whole lost tradition of writings *peri basileias*, about which I have written elsewhere.¹⁹ He considers the question of the place of literature in the life of the court under two headings, the importance of royal festivals and celebrations, and the emphasis on the description of life at

¹⁷ cf. Cameron o.c. ch. III: ‘The Symposium’; Murray, ‘The Letter of Aristetas’, in B. Virgilio (ed.), *Studi Ellenistici* II (Pisa, 1987) 15–29.

¹⁸ A. Kerkhecker, ‘Μουσέων ἐν τάλάρῳ—Dichter und Dichtung am Ptolemäerhof’ *Antike und Abendland* 43 (1997) 124–144.

¹⁹ ‘Philosophy and Monarchy in the Hellenistic World’ in *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers* ed. T. Rajak, S. Pearce, J.K. Aitken, J. Dines (California forthcoming 2007).

court. Surprisingly he finds no evidence of either of these phenomena in Ptolemaic poetry: I hope this article has demonstrated that in fact both are present to the highest degree, even if their expression is different because the court life of the Ptolemies in no way resembled that of the hierarchical post-feudal societies of the Renaissance or German princelings, or the court etiquette investigated by Norbert Elias in his famous book *The Court Society*.²⁰ But Kerkhecker ends by emphasising the learned character of Ptolemaic court poetry and its dependence on an existing literary tradition (he calls it *Fussnotendichtung*—which seems intended in a non-pejorative sense); and he once again asserts the identity of poet and scholar-commentator. These are precisely the elements in Ptolemaic poetry that Heyne insisted on two hundred and fifty years ago, writing from the new Museum, the University of Göttingen, in one of the great ages of *Hofliteratur*, when he emphasised the importance of the learning of the Museum as a focus for royal patronage and for the understanding of Ptolemaic culture. There could be no better justification for my recalling the long-forgotten contribution of Christian Gotlob Heyne, and his characterisation of the chief features of Ptolemaic culture—*polyhistoria, polymathia, philologia*.

If I were to add anything to Heyne's characterisation of Alexandrianism, I would perhaps seek merely to place it in a more dynamic context. In the first generation after Alexander's conquests there had indeed been a moment of openness in Egypt, as there was throughout the early Hellenistic world; in the age of the first Ptolemy figures such as Hecataeus of Abdera and a little later Manetho struggled to understand the realities of Egyptian tradition and culture, as I argued long ago.²¹ But the closure of the Greek mind came under Philadelphus, with the foundation of the Museum, and the creation of a cult of the book in the Library of Alexandria. Thereafter, I would suggest, Alexandrian Ptolemaic culture was centred on three aspects of the Ptolemaic court—the royal *symposion*, the institution of the Museum and the grand religious festival; these three aspects contributed to a unique and complex courtly culture and literature, in which patronage and praise were less often offered openly than transmuted through the literary culture of the royal library and the Museum, and in public through the rewards for victory in festivals such as the Dionysia and

²⁰ N. Elias, *The Court Society*, Eng. trans. (Oxford 1983; originally published Darmstadt 1969): for literature see esp. ET 105–106.

²¹ 'Herodotus and Hellenistic Culture', *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972), 200–213.

the Ptolemaicia. Poetry was not therefore a separate phenomenon, but was incorporated into the pleasures of the royal *symposion*, the activities of the library and Museum, and royal displays at religious festivals. If Ptolemaic culture had a central or defining characteristic which differentiates it from other forms of court life, Heyne is surely right: it lies in the Museum and the library. This was the first, though not perhaps the only, time in the western tradition that scholarship has been central to a political elite.²² So Alexandria, its literary culture and its court became cut off from the hinterland of Egypt, and indeed from the practicalities of government, and created that symbolic form of Alexandrianism that we still enjoy in the work of the great modern poets and writers who have lived in, and been influenced by, the myth and the experience of Alexandria—Cavafy and Ungaretti, E.M. Forster and Lawrence Durrell.

²² It is a rare phenomenon, unknown in the modern western world, but to be found also in the Carolingian age and the Renaissance: contrast the more continuous tradition of mandarin culture in China.