The entire Hellenistic vogue for epigrams on great literary figures of the past shares, as has been aptly remarked, “a common impulse with the great contemporary projects of literary classification, such as the Pinakes of Callimachus: namely the wish, on the one hand, to engage the past..., but also the need to assert control, to master a past that was viewed as unattainably, at times oppressively distinguished. That mastery, however, often involves wholesale abridgement, truncation, even evisceration.”¹ Both aspects of this controlling relationship constitute forms of appropriation. Even the most sympathetic forms of epigrammatic re-enactment of literary history in miniaturized “pen-portraits” challenged the monumental sepulchral portraits that, in most cases, the pseudo-epitaphs on poets affected to describe; they also challenged the complexity of the deceased author’s achievements through the reductio ad unum of a pithy appraisal, adapting to the brevity of epigram a literary judgment of the sort that might otherwise be realized as an expanded essay. Needless to say, however, abridgement, truncation, and evisceration were forms of more invasive, and even deforming, mastery.

At least three of the most important epigrammatists of the third and second centuries, Callimachus, Asclepiades and Dioscorides, dealt with dramatic authors (whether contemporary or of generations past), as well as theatrical activity in general, in a way that primarily stresses their self-asserting mastery. Other epigrammatists broach the topic with the gentle tone of admiration and celebration that most often characterized epigrams written for other poets of the past—for the third century B.C. we have at least ten epigrams of this kind celebrating dramatic authors.² Drama, though, was certainly not the genre most

¹ Bing (1988a: 123).
² The main texts are: two epigrams on Sophocles, usually ascribed, in spite of some doubt, to Simias of Rhodes, an older contemporary of Callimachus, 4 and 5 GP (≈ AP 7.21 and 7.22); Nossis 10 GP (≈ AP 7.414) for Rhinthon; Phalaecus 3 GP (AP 13.6) for Lycon of Scarpeha, favorite comic playwright of Alexander the Great; the epigram on Cratinus AP 13.29, variously ascribed to Nicaenetus of Samus, 5 GP, or to Theaetetus, Demetrius of Halicarnassus, or Asclepiades; Theocritus 17 GP (≈
fêted in epigram, which (understandably) lavished more attention on the poets of shorter lyric and elegy. Thus it is surprising to find the systematic interest of Petrie II 49b = SH 985, an anthology of the third century B.C. that contained at least nine tetrastichs composed on individual dramatists or individual tragedies and comedies (the names Aristarchus, Astydamas, and Cratinus are clearly legible). It is possible that the anthology represents a collection of epigrams which prefaced texts of single dramatic works, and was edited by a philologist or librarian for practical reasons.

The fashion for celebratory epigrams on poets of non-theatrical genres, on the other hand, counted both Asclepiades and Callimachus among its followers: see, e.g., Callimachus 55 GP (ap. Strabo 14.638) on the cyclic poet Creophilus, or Asclepiades 28 and 32 GP (= AP 7.11 and 9.63) for Erina, poetess of the *carmen breve*, and Antimachus the epicist, respectively. These two epigrammatists, however, never commemorated a stage poet of the past, concentrating instead on a partial presentation of theatrical activity marked by what appears to be intentional minimalism. This subtle resizing of theater’s bygone grandeur, and in particular of the potential for greatness available to current writers engaged in this genre, represents another of the many points of contact between the poetics of Callimachus and his (probably older) contemporary Asclepiades. This may signal epigram’s intent, as a substantially new literary genre, to define itself and broadcast its own poetics vis-à-vis the characteristics of theater, one of the most glorious

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3 Antipater of Sidon, e.g., besides his two epigrams for Homer, and one each on Orpheus and Antimachus, offers a practical encyclopedia of lyric, with his five epigrams on Anacreon, three on Sappho, and one each on Ibycus, Pindar, and Erina. Cf. Acosta-Hughes and Barbantani in this volume.

4 There is an excellent new edition by Maltomini (2001).

5 Cf. Lloyd-Jones and Parsons (1983: 502 ad fr. 985) and Cameron (1993: 8). Indeed they can be seen as predecessors to the verse-*hypothesis* which survive for some comedies.

6 Other passages of Callimachus’ poetic works betray an opinion of theater; not to mention of contemporary theater: anything but generous: *Iambus* 2, where of τραγῳδοί (likely tragic actors, non authors) he says that τῶν θάλασσαν ὁ[κε]ντον ἐχο[ν]τοι φωνῆν (fr. 192.12–3 Pr.); cp. fr. 215 Pr., τραγῳδὸς μούσα ληφθο[ύσα], on the basis of which it is usually believed that Callimachus denounces the language of tragic actors (and/or authors) as resoundingly pompous.