HELENISTIC CHRONOLOGY: THEOCRITUS, CALLIMACHUS, AND APOLLONIUS RHODIUS

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1. Introduction

Research on early Hellenistic chronology is in a bewildering state. Although it is a well established fact that the poems of Theocritus and Callimachus and the *Argonautica* of Apollonius are closely linked intertextually and that the similarities, of which the most striking occur in the Hylas and Amykos stories of Theocritus and Apollonius, cannot be put down to chance, scholars are far from agreeing on who alludes to whom.

Whereas, for example, Gow fifty years ago was definitely sure that Apollonius' Hylas and Amykos stories antedate those of Theocritus and that Theocritus was a partisan of Callimachus in the latter's fight against the long epic poem, today a growing number of scholars are much more reluctant to commit themselves—or have even come to

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1 Gow (1952) vol. I, XXII f.: “In Id. 13 and in the second part of Id. 22 he took episodes from the first and second books of the *Argonautica* and rehandled them in accordance with the principles of Callimachus”; cf. (1952) vol. II, 231 f. (on Id. 13): “the view (sc. of Wilamowitz) … that T. writes with his eye on A. seems undoubtedly correct. The strongest argument in its favour is the inferiority of the story in A.”; see also his two earlier articles on *Id.* 13, (1938) 10-17, and *Id.* 22, (1942) 11-13. Although R. Pfeiffer objected strongly (1949-1951) vol. II, XII: “Si revera Theocritus meliora reddisset … id quod Gow mihi non magis persuasit quam alii critici …”, it has remained the prevailing, though increasingly contested view. In a detailed analysis of the Hylas and Amykos stories of both Theocritus and Apollonius I tried to show that the “inferiority claim” is, in fact, based on prejudice and insufficient understanding of Apollonius’ text (Köhnen [1965]: esp. 26-31; 56-83 on “Hylas”, 89-93; 108-121 on “Amykos”). Unsubstantiated criticisms such as that of Stanzel (1992) 230 n. 3 (“Köhnen eindeutig apologetische Tendenz”) fail to take account of the issue at stake. Or does Stanzel still believe that there is not much to be said in favour of Apollonius’ narrative? (See his one-sided remarks on “die Verdichtung des Geschehens bei Theokrit”, 242-247, and cf. below 74 with n. 6 and 7). See now my article (2005b) 85-91 with further references.

2 See, e.g., Clauss (1993) 198 n. 42 (undecided); Knight (1995) 133 (undecided); cf. Gummert (1992) 114 with n. 49 (Theocritus’ priority more likely); Hunter (1999) 265
regard Theocritus as prior to Apollonius and Callimachus. Assessing
the balance is, however, made difficult by an astonishing amount of
insufficient or even clearly wrong statements about the evidence.

To illustrate this last point I quote a paragraph from Stanzel's
recent monograph on _Liebende Hirten_. After stating that in questions
of chronology the arguments used often tend to be reversible, he writes
with regard to Theocritus' and Apollonius' versions of the Hylas story:
"... die Mehrheit der Interpretten (spricht sich) heute für die Priorität
des Apollonios aus. Dieser Auffassung wird man schon deshalb eine
gewisse Plausibilität nicht absprechen können, weil eine traditionalisti-
che Version, wie sie Apollonios bietet, nach der radikalen Darstellung
Theokrits schwerlich denkbar wäre". This assertion is unsatisfactory or
even misleading for more than one reason. On the one hand, recent
research has shown that Apollonius' _Argonautica_ is far from being "tradi-
tionalistic"; and on the other there is little reason for calling Theocri-
tus' version more "radical" (whatever that means) than that of Apol-
lonius. Preconceived ideas like this one will do little to establish the
relative chronology of Theocritus and Apollonius.

More specific but hardly more promising is the alleged adherence
of Theocritus to the "school of Callimachus", which is taken for

("more likely that T. knew ... some form of Arg. 1 and 2, rather than vice versa"), see
also Hunter (1996a) 59 and 61–63.

3 See, e.g., my book (1965) (with a survey of earlier views, 26–31); Vian, tome I

4 See, e.g., Rossi (1972) 287 (the "Golden Fleece"); or Effe (1992) 299–309, esp. 307 f.,
and most recently e.g. Payne (2007) 84 f., for presumed allusions of Theocritus to
Apollonius which are, in fact, references to pre-Hellenistic texts, esp. Pindar, P. 4: cf.
Kohnken (1996a) 459–461 (with further examples); for a striking error cf. Roth in his
(Theokrits) _Kallimachos_ und den ... von diesem abgelehnten Asclepiades in einem
Atemzug als seine Vorbilder nennt ... " (my italics); but "Kallimachos" does not occur
in _Id._ 7. The error is, however, revealing: it shows what this critic (and others) would
have liked to find in _Id._ 7. An incorrect reference to the state of the question now e.g. in
Asper (2004) 3 with note 5; a misleading report of my views also in Mauerhofer (2004)
109, although he eventually (110 f., cf. 112) accepts in the end the priority of Theocritus.


6 See, e.g., Clauss (1993) 1–13 (with references); Hunter (1993a); DeForest (1994) e.g.
10–17 (with further references).

7 By "radikale Darstellung" Stanzel seems to mean "'radikal erotische' Darstel-
This, however, is a difference of principle between the two authors which can hardly be
used as a chronological criterion.