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1 Preliminaries

1.1 Court Poetry and Scholarship in Hellenistic Societies
It is helpful to start by recalling some aspects, self-evident though they may seem, of the social context in which the surviving literary culture of the ancient Greek world evolved during the Hellenistic age (3rd–1st centuries).\(^1\) A critical debate has arisen between diametrically opposed views: the traditional assumption of the duality of Hellenistic poetic culture, in contrast to an interpretation that argues in favor of its cohesive unity. The former depicts a twofold manifestation of cultural creativity: a high/learned literature, linked to urban royal courts, mainly bookish and designed to be recited, and a low/popular production, predominantly performative, thus including music and

\(^*\) English translation by Rachel Barritt Costa.

\(^1\) If not otherwise stated, all dates are BC.
song;\textsuperscript{2} whereas the latter emphasizes the cohesion of poetic culture deriving from its social pervasiveness, contending that this was sustained by a great number of public festival competitions, civic or religious ceremonies and private symposia.\textsuperscript{3} However, although appraisal of these issues is currently still fraught with controversy, a significant portion of the extant Greek poetry of this period can, by virtue of its characteristics of court literature, be regarded as the learned expression of fairly narrow elites. These elites were composed of select social groups living in urban centers of the traditional Greek world as well as of predominantly ethnic Greek minorities ruling over Hellenized non-Greek East-Mediterranean areas (Egypt, Asia Minor, Near East) subject to Macedonian-rooted monocratic dynasties, and eventually came to include the most educated circles of the Roman aristocracy. It is therefore no cause for surprise, in terms of social history, that a derived and intellectualized activity such as the professional study of literature—\textit{i.e.} philology, which sprang up towards the beginning of the 3rd century—first arose and long remained as a minimal niche and ultimately became the self-referential expression of a Greek elitarian culture, in striking contrast to far less cultured and widely non-Greek backgrounds.\textsuperscript{4}

Hellenistic scholarship was undoubtedly a most exceptional cradle of ideas and culture for militant intellectuals and poets of the age (who not infrequently were scholars in their own right); and, in the long run, such a phenomenon inevitably had a strong impact on the poetics, reception and transmission of Greek literary texts. Yet it cannot be overlooked that the highly specialized


\textsuperscript{4} On the multifaceted society of, for instance, Hellenistic Alexandria and the relations between its components (Macedonian/Greek citizens, ruling in a foreign land; Egyptian natives; selected Greek intellectuals, juridically \textit{xenoi}, constituting the entourage of the court, according to the typology suggested by Fraser [1972] 1.60–92), see Lewis [1986]; Stephens [2010]; Vandorpe [2010] 171–173; Del Corso [2014]. For cultural implications in the times of Ptolemy II: Stephens [2003]; McKechnie-Guillaume [2008]. The debate on the Ptolemaic policy of intercultural integration has been revived by the discovery of monuments that seem to reinforce the idea of an Egyptizing attitude of the rulers: Empereur [2004]; Goddio-Claus [2006]; Manning [2009]; Weber [2008].