It is a well-known fact that the Greek Anthology contains a sizeable body of spurious epigrams ascribed to Anacreon, Sappho, Simonides, and other authors of the Archaic and Classical period. While some are quoted in biographical and anecdotal sources, a large number of these compositions belonged to Meleager’s Garland which, as he tells us in the preface (AP 4.1), featured poems written by him as well as epigrams ascribed to a number of authors of the Hellenistic and pre-Hellenistic periods. There is a broad consensus among scholars concerning the authorial status of these compositions: hardly any of the poems appear authentic and many seem to belong to the Hellenistic period, reflecting a deep desire to create retrospectively illustrious archaic ancestors for the epigrammatic genre which in essence was, if not altogether an invention of Hellenistic poets, definitely much expanded in its range by them.

However, while much effort has been spent on questions of dating and authenticity, the role and function of these pseudo-epigraphic compositions in Hellenistic collections remain under-examined. For the most part, modern scholars have looked at this body of Hellenistic pseudepigrapha with a mixture of disbelief and derision: assuming that Meleager endorsed the authorial attribution of these spurious compositions by incorporating them in his collection, Page writes thus in relation to the body of pseudo-Simonidean epigrams:

It is not easy to understand why a Hellenistic poet should circulate his own compositions under the name of Simonides, and it is a curious comment on the literary taste and judgment of the Hellenistic period that the world—even in poetic circles, as exemplified by Meleager—accepted the ascription of these latter-day exercises to Simonides without question.

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2 Sens (2007).
Page’s puzzled reaction addresses a problem of critical importance: what is at stake when an ancient editor presents his readers with a poem by “Simonides,” “Sappho” or “Anacreon”? Is the inclusion of falsely ascribed poems by an editor proof of his being “duped”? If not, what meaning does authorial ascription have for ancient readers of the Garland and other epigrammatic collections? The issue of how to interpret Meleager’s inclusion of these poems is far from trivial: for, as Benjamin Acosta-Hughes notes in his recent study of the reception of Archaic Lyric in Hellenistic poetry, what is at stake is not the historicity of the attribution but rather its meaning and plausibility for a Hellenistic readership.4

Progress in deconstructing this uncomfortable gap between the stringent methods of modern authenticity criticism and the apparent gullibility of an otherwise sophisticated reader such as Meleager must begin with a serious effort to examine the practice of assumed authorship in its original historical and literary context.5 The focus on issues of authenticity has traditionally consumed the efforts of commentators, oftentimes leading scholars to read this category of pseudepigraphic compositions as pieces floating in a literary and cultural vacuum. As a result, the contribution of the peculiar context in which the bulk of the extant poems are found—that of Meleager’s multi-authored anthology—towards an understanding of the authorial persona of these pseudepigraphic texts as well as the relationship between the latter and their neighboring Hellenistic counterparts has gone unnoticed. Because of the mangled transmission history of the Anthology, it is often challenging to reconstruct with certainty the role that the pseudepigraphic epigrams would have played in Meleager’s collection.6 As table 1 shows, the bulk of the surviving material comes from books 6 and 7 of the Anthology, respectively the dedicatory and sepulchrall sections, one erotic epigram is attributed to Simonides from book 5 and none are present in the epideictic or pederastic books (9 and 12).7 This is not to say, however, that pseudepigraphic epigrams are not

4 Acosta-Hughes (2010).
5 Along these lines see, for example, Graziosi (2002) and Beecroft (2010).
6 On the question of identifying Meleagran sequences in the Anthology see Weisshäupl (1889); Radinger (1895); Wifstrand (1926); Gow and Page (1965) xxi–xxvii; Gutzwiller (1998) 36–46 and tables; Cameron (1992) tables. In this paper, I have followed the latter’s tabulation.
7 Gutzwiller (1998) 36–37 advances the hypothesis that the first Meleagran sequence in book 6 ends at 6.132, noting that the chronological (as opposed to largely thematic) arrangement in 6.134–157 runs counter the principles of order preferred by Meleager and is evidence that the sequence was not originally part of his anthology. If so, the pseudo-Anacreontic sequence (6.134–145) would not have been part of the Garland.