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New Epigrams of Palladas: a Fragmentary Papyrus Codex (P.CtYBR inv. 4000)

The luxurious bright red cover with its title printed in gold looks promising: a papyrus with new epigrams by Palladas! Is it as exciting as the new Posidippus? Where does it come from? Is it an autograph? Is it an anthology? What kind of epigrams does it contain? How is the collection organised? Does it tell us anything new about Palladas? A first glimpse at the 12 plates of this 124 page volume shows that the codex is fragmentary indeed: it consists of several badly damaged bifolia covered by a handwriting that is rather difficult to read and only very few lines seem to be complete. The editor must have had quite a job deciphering it all. The plates are accompanied by a diplomatic transcription with paleographical notes and an edition of the text, preceded by an extended introduction and followed by a commentary.

Introduction (A-G)

Robert G. Babcock presents a codicological reconstruction of the fragmentary poems (A). Guided by their disposition on bifolia and the damage done to them in the course of the centuries, he convincingly reconstructs their order. It takes some leafing forwards and backwards through the book, but it is worthwhile to follow the author while he solves the puzzle. He demonstrates that the five (or maybe six) bifolia made part of a single quire codex with writing in brown and black ink. Their size (14.5 cm. breadth × 24-25 cm. height) fits within a category of single quire codices of 24 pages popular in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD (group 8 in Turner 1977). Although solid evidence is lacking, the references to the Egyptian city of Hermopolis in the text itself could indicate its provenance. If the codex consisted of 6 bifolia (12 leaves and 24 pages), its 22 pages roughly contained 38 lines each, while one page had only 28 lines and one page was blank. The total amount of lines could have been 864, suggesting a poetry collection of approximately 96 epigrams of 8 lines (768) with their respective titles (96). This kind of size coincides with the average length of poetry books from the ancient world and lies between the incomplete new Posidippus containing 112 poems with 606 lines and Ausonius’ epigram book of 112 poems with 946 lines.

Ruth Duttenhöffer, in her paleological analysis (B), identifies the handwriting as “cursive documentary script under the influence of the chancery style”
She concludes that it is the work of one hand, datable around the years 280-340. The section includes various surveys of letter shapes and ligatures as well as a series of samples of pages written in brown and black ink.

After some remarks on orthography and other scribal characteristics (C), such as a few cases of iotacism and scribal errors, punctuation, corrections and sigla, Kevin Wilkinson discusses the content of the codex (D). It contains epigrams in elegiac couplets with indentation and nearly always preceded by prose titles (ἄλλο, ἄλλα, εἰς... etc.) whose authorship is uncertain (1). Several poems are unusually long (i.e. longer than 14 lines) compared to the standard of the Greek Anthology. This is probably a consequence of the criteria of selection for multi-author anthologies with a preference for short poems, because longer poems have been attested in inscriptions and single author syllogae (2).

In part (3) follows a list with a short summary of the epigrams in the codex: most of them fit within the epideictic and scoptic epigrams of the Greek Anthology (resp. book 9 and book 11). The poems do not contain any ascription to one or more specific authors (4). Kevin Wilkinson therefore considers unitary authorship “highly probable” (p. 31) or even “virtually certain” (p. 41), also because there is consistency in subject matter and approach as well as in style.

The arrangement of the material is thematic and contains many verbal links: names of persons, politics (especially grouped in the central part of the papyrus), geography, cities (for example Alexandria and several cities from the Egyptian Thebaid: Hermopolis, Lycopolis and Skinepois1), expressions (such as ξένος, κακόξενος, ξενία, φιλέταιρος, φίλος, φιλοθήσιος): “Even in its current fragmentary state, the papyrus yields some valuable indications of how the epigrams were ordered. There are no alphabetical sequences or groupings of epigrams based on their length, and there is no division into sub-genres. There is, however, ample evidence that material on similar topics appears together” (p. 31) and “the general impression is that this collection was assembled with some care and not inconsiderable forethought for the arrangement of material, at least by subject matter, geography, and vocabulary” (p. 33). But the question is: who was responsible for the arrangement? Is it the work of the author or of an editor? Based on the type of errors and the vagueness of the titles, Kelvin Wilkinson is disinclined to believe that it is an autograph, but prefers to consider it a faithful copy of an authorial publication or a series of excerpts put together by an editor. In my opinion, the next section on the relationship to the Greek Anthology (5) shows the real interest of the codex and offers a background against which all the fragments can be read. Like the Milan papyrus of

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1 For a discussion of Late Antique Poetry from this region, see Miguélez-Cavero, L. 2008. Poems in Context. Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200-600 AD (Berlin).