On the Nature of Strato’s Humour: Another Look at Anth.Pal. 12.6

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In Anth.Pal. 12.6, one of Strato’s epigrams included in the book known as the Musa Puerilis of Strato of Sardis,\(^1\) the narrator refers to a discovery he has made. One day, as he was making some calculations, he found that the words πρωκτός (“anus”) and χρυσός (“gold”) both consist of letters indicating figures that add up to the same number (1570):\(^2\)

πρωκτὸς καὶ χρυσὸς τὴν αὐτὴν ψήφον ἔχουσιν:
ψηφίζων δ’ ἀφελῶς τούτο ποθ’ εὐρόν ἐγώ.

The numbers indicated by the letters of “anus” and “gold” are the same. One day, while I was calculating, I made that discovery by chance.

The obvious humour of this distich is generated by the contrast between the pompous tone of the announcement (τούτο ποθ’)

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\(^1\) This is due to the title Στράτωνος τοῦ Σαρδιανοῦ Παιδικὴ Μοῦσα given to Book 12 in the Palatine codex. Despite the title, the book includes not only the pederastic poems of Strato, which most probably date to the end of the first and beginning of the second century A.D., but also poems on pederastic themes by earlier authors such as Callimachus and Meleager. These were added to the collection of Strato’s poems by later anthologists so as to form the collection found in the Book 12. See A. Cameron, The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes (Oxford 1993) 39–42, 121–159; K. J. Gutzwiller, Poetic Garlands: Hellenistic Epigrams in Context (Berkeley 1998) 281–301, esp. 282 with n.111; A. Fountoulakis, “Male Bodies, Male Gazes: Exploring Erôs in the Twelfth Book of the Greek Anthology,” in E. Sanders et al. (eds.), Erôs in Ancient Greece (Oxford 2013) 293–311, at 293 with nn.1 and 2 for further bibliography.

\(^2\) The text of the Anth.Pal. used is H. Beckby, Anthologia Graeca\(^2\) I–IV (Munich 1965).
εὗρον ἐγώ) and the obscene and ostensibly insignificant topic of
the discovery. Humour is also generated by the unexpected
metaphorical equation of a metal considered precious and
beautiful with a part of human anatomy denoted by a vulgar
term with shameful connotations.3

Although these lines lack explicit homosexual references, in
the context of the thematic orientation of Strato’s poems and
the twelfth book’s pederastic epigrams they may be taken to
allude to the pleasures of anal intercourse in pederastic sexual
relationships. Seen from such a perspective, it is reasonable
that the poem is placed before Anth.Pal. 12.7, which is also
ascribed to Strato and refers to the sphincter of boys, the differ-
ences between boys and girls in terms of penetrative love-
making, and a preference for the former over the latter. The
epigram may thus be taken to suggest, as a variation on the
same theme, a similar preference for the intercourse that can
be offered by a boy.4 It has also been observed by commen-
tors that the epigram refers to a socially inspired link between
money and sexual favours, a theme found quite often in the
Greek Anthology,5 while the isopsephic pun is based on a tech-

3 Cf. Fountoulakis, in Erôs in Ancient Greece 303. For humour in Strato’s
epigrams generated by metaphor, polysemy, comparison, sexually nuanced
vocabulary, allusion, and antithesis see M. González Rincón, Estratón de Sar-
generated by lexical ambiguity) and 46 (on Anth.Pal. 12.204 and humour
based on antitheses). As for the obscenity of the word πρωκτός, it is for this
reason that it is often absent from Greek lexica like that of Pollux, where it is
not included in the section on anatomical terms (2.168–170). See H. D.
12–66, at 22. For the obscenity and the uses of this word see D. Bain,
“Βοτιάδες ὁ πρωκτός: An Abusive Graffito from Thorikos,” ZPE 104

4 See A. Richlin, The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman
Humor2 (New York/Oxford 1992) 36; Fountoulakis, in Erôs in Ancient Greece
303–304.

5 E.g. Anth.Pal. 5.16, 29, 30, 33, 34, 44, 101, 109, 113, 114, 125, 126,
217, 240, 9.411, 420, 10.50, 12.42, 44, 148, 204, 212, 214, 219, 237, 239,
nique thought to have been developed by the poet and astrologer Leonidas of Alexandria. These observations draw attention to some aspects of the epigram’s potential meaning which are associated with socially produced ideas and highlight the meticulous process of composition of the Anthology’s poems in a literary culture. Yet they fail to show other aspects of the epigram that have much deeper roots in its social and cultural ambience. Although the aspects of the poem’s meaning that have been noted so far may have been obvious to some of its readers, others, and especially those acquainted with the domain of pederastic experience and the vocabulary developed therein, likely would have been ready to discern in these lines a far more nuanced semantic load. Drawing mainly upon epigraphic evidence, this paper aspires to show that the poem’s references to πρωκτός and χρυσός stem from a vocabulary semantically formulated in social ambiances of male homosexuality. This will lead to a reappraisal of the poem’s potentially double meaning and a further understanding of its close associations with its social and cultural context.

To begin with the word πρωκτός, it is highly unlikely that in this epigram it is used in its literal sense. Throughout the twelfth book, whenever reference is made to a boy’s buttocks and related anatomical parts, this is either by means of a more

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elevated vocabulary using medical terminology or words such as πυγή (“buttocks”) and its cognates, or even through metaphors and innuendoes. Thus Strato Anth.Pal. 12.7 refers to the anus with the medical term σφιγκτήρ (“sphincter”), while the buttocks and then anal intercourse are alluded to with the poetic type ὅπιθεν (“at the back”). In Dioscorides Anth.Pal. 12.37 and Rhianus Anth.Pal. 12.38 πυγή is used in references to the buttocks of boys. In a similar way the piece of wood on which Graphicus sits is described as πυγαῖα σανίς in Strato Anth.Pal. 12.15. In Meleager Anth.Pal. 12.41 the sense of “hairy-holed” in a reference to anal intercourse with passive homosexual men is conveyed by δασύτρωγλος, which is used instead of δασύπρωκτος; even in the obscene context of this poem the word τρόγλη (“hole”) is preferred to the vulgar πρωκτός.

Metaphorical language is employed in Strato Anth.Pal. 12.225 in a reference to anal intercourse, which according to the poet should be avoided early in the morning: here the meaning of “anus” is conveyed by κύων, while that of “the large intestine” by the καρπολόχος Δημήτριος. Strato resorts to the art of innuendo in Anth.Pal. 12.208, where the move of a papyrus roll around the parts of a boy’s body may allude to sexual intercourse: τρυφεροῖς σφίγξει περὶ χείλεσιν (“he will press against his tender lips,” 3), referring to that roll, may well allude to the act of a boy’s penetration by an erastês, and the χείλεσιν to the boy’s anus. This anatomical part is evoked by using the verb σφίγξει, etymologically related to σφιγκτήρ.

The rarity of πρωκτός in its literal sense in other books of the


9 For this allusion see Maxwell-Stuart, Hermes 100 (1972) 222–223 (also 230–234, 238–239, for the often allusive manner in which Strato refers to sexual acts); González Rincón, Estratón 213–215; Fountoulakis, in Erôs in Ancient Greece 304.


and politicians who develop an empty and often disgusting rhetoric, it is also likely that Nicarchus' epigram refers to a man whose speech is regarded as nonsensical or annoying.\textsuperscript{13}

The use of πρωκτός as a vulgar term is attested in Hipponax (fr.104.32 W.), but is particularly common in Aristophanes, where it stands out as an obscene and abusive term usually denoting the male anus.\textsuperscript{14} Unlike the more decent word πυγή, πρωκτός is often used by the comic poet when a man is being ridiculed, as it is associated with buggery. These semantic overtones become even clearer in the use, often attested in comedy, of its compounds εὐρύπρωκτος (“with a wide anus”),\textsuperscript{15} λακκόπρωκτος/χονύπρωκτος (“with a gaping anus”)\textsuperscript{16} or λευκόκορωπρωκτος (“with a white [sc. feminine] anus”),\textsuperscript{17} which are employed sometimes as empty derogatory terms emerging even in political contexts and sometimes with reference to passive homosexual men who are regularly being penetrated, as with the different usages of καταπύγων.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} For this use of εὐρύπρωκτος see J. Davidson, \textit{The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece} (London 2007) 53–54.


\textsuperscript{15} E.g. \textit{Nub.} 1084–1100, \textit{Ach.} 716.

\textsuperscript{16} E.g. \textit{Nub.} 1330, \textit{Ach.} 104.

\textsuperscript{17} E.g. Callias \textit{Pedítai} fr.14 K.-A.

\textsuperscript{18} E.g. Ar. \textit{Thesm.} 200, Eq. 639, \textit{Nub.} 529, 909; Henderson, \textit{The Maculate Muse} 150, 201–202, 209–211; Davidson, \textit{The Greeks and Greek Love} 53–54, 60–63, 113. According to T. K. Hubbard, “Popular Perceptions of Elite Homosexuality in Classical Athens,” \textit{Arion} III 6.1 (1998) 48–78, at 55–59, καταπύγων may refer to men who play either an active or a passive role in anal sex. Its use, however, along with the feminine καταπύγαινα, which can only refer to a woman who is regularly being penetrated anally, suggests that it was initially meant to refer to passive homosexual men even though it was eventually used as an abusive term with a non-specific denotation. Cf. M. J. Milne and D. von Bothmer, “ΚΑΤΑΠΥΓΩΝ, ΚΑΤΑΠΥΓΑΙΝΑ,” \textit{Hesperia} 22 (1953) 215–224; K. J. Dover, \textit{Greek Homosexuality} (London 1978) 113, 142–144.

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Much like these compound epithets, πρωκτός was sometimes used not to denote a specific anatomical part, the anus, but as a metaphorical term of abuse deriving its meaning from that anatomical part, its potential sexual use, and its consequent degrading connotations. This is attested in a rupestral graffito from Thorikos of ca. 400 B.C., where reference is made to [- - -] Βο.τιάδης ὁ πρωκτός.19 David Bain has convincingly argued that the noun πρωκτός, used here instead of an adjective similar to the compounds mentioned above, is “an empty term of abuse,” whose semantic overtones have as a point of reference the potential homosexual use of a man’s anus. The characterization of a man as a πρωκτός might then draw attention to his passive homosexuality, but is also extended to his bad character as a more general insult.20 It would not be unreasonable to suppose that such general terms of abuse were at an early stage semantically formulated in homoerotic social contexts or contexts acquainted with homosexual practices, where words associated with a culture of homosexual experience were used with a related, albeit more general, meaning.

Epigraphic evidence from the Athenian Agora is suggestive of a similar use of such words. In a graffito on the internal part of a rim fragment from a lekanē, dated to the second quarter of the fifth century, a certain Sydromachus is described as λακκόπτος.21 The epithet may point to his passive homosexuality. Yet its use in a graffito on a pot in the social ambience of the Agora suggests that it must have been a more general term of abuse related to the man’s personality and character, as often happens in comedy. The graffito is published among similar graffiti from the Agora dated between the late sixth and the fourth century. In these graffiti words such as καταπύγων, καταπύγαινα, πυγαῖος, and λαικάστρια are used.

19 J. Bingen, Thorikos IX (Ghent 1990) 151, no. 88.
20 Bain, ZPE 104 (1994) 34.
as abusive epithets of a non-specific nature, not much different from the words ‘bastard’ or ‘arse-hole’ in English, even though the sexual character of their semantic nuances is obvious.\textsuperscript{22} This sort of abuse is directed against men and women alike. It is worth noting that in the same body of evidence we find the far more common epithet καλός, which very often appears inscribed in pederastic scenes in vase-paintings as well as in graffiti found on walls, pieces of stone, or fragments of pottery. The epithet suggests the beauty of a youth. At the same time, it appears as a more general term pointing towards a kind of schematic physical beauty, which is not specified more precisely, as well as towards complementary moral qualities such as decency, honesty, and modesty, which fit with ideals associated with handsome elite young males often entangled in pederastic affairs.

In these graffiti the terms καλός and καταπύγων or λακκόπρωκτος appear as polar opposites referring not only to physical characteristics, but also to moral features of young men in social and perhaps sexually charged homosocial contexts.\textsuperscript{23} It is worth noting that in the fragments from the

\textsuperscript{22} καταπύγων: Lang, Athenian Agora nos. C 5, C 18, C 22, C 24 (καταπύγων), C 25, C 26, C 27 (καταπύγωναι); πυγάῖος: C 12; λακκόστριμοι: C 33, C 34; cf. Jocelyn, PCPS 26 (1980) 12–16.

\textsuperscript{23} In most cases the καλός inscriptions do not refer to the youths portrayed in the vase-paintings, but to idealized erōmenoi, who could later become hoplites and citizens, and should not belong to the social category of κίναιδοι, who were thought of as effeminate, shameless, and constantly buggered. These inscriptions form parts of confessions or acclamations that might have been further developed and directed, either poetically or not, towards a boy in appropriate real-life contexts. The erōmenoi portrayed in scenes of pederastic courtship exhibit accordingly a modesty which is normally expected of brides or virgin girls and comes as a concomitant of their being καλοί. Cf. Dover, Greek Homosexuality 9, 111–124; Winkler, The Constraints of Desire 53–54, 62, 195; H. A. Shapiro, “Eros in Love: Pederasty and Pornography in Greece,” in A. Richlin (ed.), Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome (New York/Oxford 1992) 53–72, at 62–63; F. Lissarague, “Publicity and Performance: Kalos Inscriptions in Attic Vase-painting,” in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds.), Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy

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Agora a youth called Alcaeus is described as καλός in one graffito, while in another the same youth is καταπύγων. The application of these two opposites to the same person may imply that the same handsome youth might have been appreciated differently by different persons, perhaps according to his response to their advances. It may also imply that the youth might behave sometimes in a decent and honest manner and sometimes in an ill-tempered way characterized by shamelessness, arrogance, aggressiveness, and dishonesty so that he is rendered unattractive despite his beauty.

It should be borne in mind that, in addition to καλός, other words with related meanings were used in contexts of this kind. In rupestral graffiti from Thasos, which date to the second quarter or the middle of the fourth century, we find the names of boys accompanied usually by words denoting their beauty or grace in what seems to be pederastic admiration. Most frequent is the καλός, occurring twelve times. Other terms are ἄγρέος, ἀργυροῦς, ἀστεοπρόσωπος, ἀστέος, εὔρυθμος, εὔσχημος, εὐχαρίς, ηδύς, καλλιπρόσωπος, φιλόκομος, φιλός, χρυσός, and ώραῖος. The meanings of most of these words may range from “with a beautiful face” (εὐπρόσωπος, καλλιπρόσωπος) to “graceful” (εὔχαρις, εὔρυθμος), “polite” or “charming” (ἀστέος) and “looking polite” or “look-


24 Lang, Athenian Agora C 19 and C 22; see Milne and von Bothmer, Hesperia 22 (1953) 218, 220.


ing charming” (ἀστειοπρόσωπος).27 Considering, however, their occurrence along with καλός in the context of such pederastic graffiti, it is reasonable to assume that they fall within a semantic field found in the pederastic καλός inscriptions and probably developed in social contexts and common conversation. They thus denote in a more general sense the beauty and moral qualities of a desirable youth, as does καλός.

Among the words used in these graffiti as parallels to καλός, the word χρυσός occurs with the names of three boys: Σωσίων [χρυσός], Ἡροφώ [χρυσός], Μυίςκος χρυσός.28 The metaphorical use of the word χρυσός and its derivatives, which refer to a metal considered precious and beautiful, and used as a material indication of wealth as well as in the creation of beautiful artifacts,29 is often found in Greek literature to denote the beauty and moral superiority of the gods.30 Aphrodite, in particular, is often presented as “golden” in references that underline her sensual beauty as well as her divine grace and beauty. As is suggested by Diodorus (4.26.2–3), it is perhaps this latter feature that emerges more pointedly: τινὲς δὲ λέγουσι … χρυσὰ δὲ μηλα ἀπὸ τοῦ κάλλους ὀνομάσθαι ποιητικῶς, ὥσπερ καὶ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην χρυσὴν καλεῖσθαι διὰ τὴν εὐπρέπειαν (“some say … that the apples (of the Hesperides) were poetically named golden because of their beauty, just as Aphrodite is called golden because of her comeliness”).

Yet the beauty of gold is evoked not only for divine or feminine beauty. In Chariton 1.1.5 the beautiful and erotically attractive blushing on the face of Chaereas, the young male protagonist, as he is coming home from the gymnasium, is com-

27 For the meanings see Garlan and Masson, BCH 106 (1982) 17–18. For ἀστεῖος as both “polite” and “charming” see LSJ s.v.
30 E.g. Hom. Il. 3.64, Od. 8.337; Hes. Op. 65, Theog. 822, 962, 975; Mimm. fr.1.1–2 W.; Pind. Isthm. 2.39, 8.11, Num. 5.15, Ol. 13.10, Bacchyl. Diat. 15.2–4 S.-M., Epin. 5.174–175; Soph. OT 157; Ar. Ran. 483; Lucian Imag. 8, Pro Imag. 24, Diat.Mort. 9.3.
pared to gold: τότε δὲ Χαιρέας ὀπὸ τῶν γυμνασίων ἐβάδιζεν οἶκοις στίβων ὑσπὲρ ἀστήρ. ἔπηνεθι γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸ λαμπρὸ τοῦ προσώπου τὸ ἐρύθημα τῆς παλαίστρας ὑσπὲρ ἀργύρῳ χρυσός (“and then Chaereas was strolling home from the gymnasium shining like a star; the blush of the palaestra was blossoming on the shine of his face as gold on silver”). This visible sign of beauty, however, which is compared to gold, is also related to nobility. As is specified after a few lines (1.1.6), the generating of desire in the hearts of Chaereas and Callirhoe soon after they see each other is due not only to their beauty but also to their visually perceived moral qualities: ταχέως οὖν πάθος ἐρωτικὸν ἀντέδωκαν ἀλλήλοις τοῦ κάλλους τῇ εὐγενείᾳ συνελθόντος (“they soon fell passionately in love with each other, because of the beauty that came together with nobility”).

When “golden” is attributed to a male or a female, human or divine, this normally is with χρύσις or compounds such as χρυσοκόμης, χρυσόκομος, χρυσοπλόκαμος, χρυσωπός, χρυσόθρονος, or χρυσοφαής. In the graffiti from Thasos it is not an adjective of this kind, but the noun χρύσις which is used to characterize the three boys, like the noun πρωκτός in the graffito from Thorikos. This is not surprising especially if it is borne in mind that χρύσις often appeared in poetry to denote something “dear” or “precious.”

Drawing upon the metaphorical use of words pertinent to gold, the graffiti from Thasos use χρύσις to suggest the boys’ beauty and moral qualities, thus within the semantic field of καλός as used in pederastic inscriptions. Similarly, in Strato Anth.Pal. 12.204 χρύσις appears as the equivalent of καλός applied to the beauty of a boy named Sosiadas. The Homeric phrase χρύσις χαλκέων, which was taken up by later authors, acquiring a proverbial


32 Aesch. Cho. 372; Eur. Tmo. 432; Ar. Plut. 268, Nab. 912; Pind. Ol. 7.50.
is used in this epigram to underline the antithesis between the handsome (\(\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsilon\)) Sosiadas and the hairy (\(\delta\alpha\sigma\upsilon\varsigma\)) Diocles, who is thus presented as ugly—throughout the \(\textit{Musa Puerilis}\) body hair is thought to be undesirable and to mark the loss of youthful boyish beauty:\footnote{\textit{Hermes} 100 (1972) 226; S. L. Tárán, “ΕΙΣΙ ΤΡΙΧΕΣ: An Erotic Motif in the Greek Anthology,” \textit{JHS} 105 (1985) 90–107.} “\(\chi\rhoυ\sigma\varepsilon\alpha\ \chi\alpha\lambda\kappa\varepsilon\iota\omega\)ν” ν\(\nu\)ν ε\(\iota\)πάτε: “\(\delta\dot{o}\varsigma\ \lambda\acute{a}βε\)” ποι\(\iota\zeta\varepsilon\iota\ / \textit{Sosia\delta\alpha\varsigma\ς} \ο\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsilon\ καὶ \textit{Dio\kappa\omicron\lambda\omicron\varsilon\ς} \ο\ \delta\alpha\sigma\upsilon\varsigma\ (“‘Golden gifts for bronze’ you now say. The handsome Sosiadas and the hairy Diocles are playing ‘give and take’”).\footnote{\textit{Hermes} 100 (1972) 228–229. Cf. González Rincón, \textit{Estratón} 204, 206; Steinbichler, \textit{Die Epigramme} 102–105; Floridi, \textit{Stratone} 258–262.} In Asclepiades \textit{Anth.Pal.} 12.163 \(\chi\rhoυ\sigma\varepsilon\varsigma\) and \(\mu\acute{a}ρ\acute{a}γ\delta\omicron\) (“emerald”) are used also as analogous to \(\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsilon\). These words refer to two desirable boys in love with each other. To return to the use of the \(\chi\rhoυ\sigma\varepsilon\varsigma\) in pederastic inscriptions, it was not so widespread as \(\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsilon\). Yet its presence in the graffiti from Thasos suggests that it was part of a related vocabulary used by social groups engaged in pederastic activities.\footnote{Cf. González Rincón, \textit{Estratón} 206; Steinbichler, \textit{Die Epigramme} 102–105; Floridi, \textit{Stratone} 258–262.}
Strato’s awareness of the activities of such groups and so of a relevant vocabulary is implied by the closing epigram of the *Musa Puerilis* (*Anth.Pal.* 12.258). The narrator identifies himself as the poet and states that the divine gift of poetic inspiration and composition is used so that his work does not echo his own erotic affairs only, but encapsulates also the pederastic experience of groups engaged in such activities, identified in line 3 as pederasts (φιλόπαισι). The interests of such groups may coincide with the interests of some of Strato’s potential readers and their consequent ability to recognize in his poems patterns of speech, thought, and action familiar to them from their experience. The use of χαράσσω (3), to “write” as well as to “engrave,” with respect to the composition of these poems may point towards their culture of writing and reading as well as towards a culture of homoerotic practice which included the relevant inscriptions:

> ἦ τάχα τις μετόπισθε κλώνον ἐμὰ παιγνία ταῦτα
> πάντας ἐμοῦς δόξει τοὺς ἐν ἐρωτι πόνος·
> ἀλλὰ δ' ἐγὼν ἄλλωσιν ἂεὶ φιλόπαισι χαράσσω
> γράμματε', ἐπεὶ τις ἐμοὶ τοῦτ' ἐνέδωκε θεὸς.

When someone in the future will be hearing my poetic games, he will think that the pains of love described in them are all mine. But I’ve always been writing this or that poem on behalf of many other lovers of boys, because this was an ability offered to me by some god.

Marco Fantuzzi has made the attractive suggestion that the origins of Hellenistic erotic epigram may be traced back to the καλός inscriptions in vase-paintings, which functioned as a starting point for the expression of more developed poetic

explicit references to sexual acts in pederastic affairs. Some of the latter graffiti have an abusive character. See e.g. *IG* XII.3 536, 537a, 538b; Lang, *Athenian Agora* nos. C 2 and C 8; *CIL* IV 1825, 1825a, 2048, 2210, 2319b, 3932, 5408, 8512, 8805. Cf. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus* 82–83.


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forms of pederastic admiration in the context of the symposia.\textsuperscript{38} Such developed forms of poetic expression are attested in inscriptions even from the classical period and are echoed in pre-Hellenistic poetry.\textsuperscript{39} The familiarity of the poets of the \textit{Musa Puerilis} with such inscriptions, not only from vase-paintings but also from social contexts, is eloquently suggested by Anon. \textit{Anth.Pal.} 12.130. This epigram uses the epithet καλός, stereotypical in those inscriptions, here with respect to the beauty of a boy named Dositheus, as well as the related specification of his beauty, χαρίεις ὄμμασι. Moreover, reference is made to the act of inscribing such words on trees or walls as part of a manifestation of an older man’s desire for a youth:\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{quote}
εἶτα καὶ ἀνώ τὰλαν εἶπα: “καλός, καλός,” ἀλλ’ ἔτι φήσω, ώς καλός, ώς χαρίεις ὄμμασι ΔΩΣΙΘΕΟΣ.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{39} See e.g. \textit{IG} F I 1403, XII.2 268; Ar. \textit{Ach.} 142–144, \textit{Vesp.} 97–102; Dover, \textit{Greek Homosexuality} 111–113, where further instances in Hellenistic epigrams are noted.

\textsuperscript{40} At 4 Paton’s emendation καῦσεν is preferred to the ἵσχετ of the manuscript tradition.
οὐ δρυός οὐδ’ ἐλάτης ἐχαράξαμεν, οὐδ’ ἐπὶ τοίχου
tοῦτ’ ἔπος· ὀλλ’ ἐν ἐμῇ καυσίν Ἐρως κραδία.
eἰ δὲ τις οὐ φήσει, μὴ πείθεο. ναι μὰ σέ, δοῦμον,
ψεῦδετ’· ἐγὼ δ’ ὁ λέγων ὑπερεκεῖς οἰδα μόνος.

I've said it again and again: “he is beautiful, he is beautiful.”
And I'll say again that Dositheus is beautiful and has lovely eyes.
We didn’t inscribe those words upon an oak or a pine, nor upon a wall. But Eros burned them on my heart. If anyone denies that, do not believe him. I swear in the name of god that he lies.
I alone, the man who says that, know the truth.

The reference to the typical vocabulary of pederastic admiration as well as to the habit of creating inscriptions using that vocabulary in the context of pederasty points towards a domain of pederastic social and cultural experience which is echoed in the epigrams of the Musa Puerilis. The habit, in particular, of inscribing words or short phrases pertaining to the beauty of boys in social contexts is poetically exploited in a self-conscious manner that evokes the ancestry of those poems and the process of their composition out of the inscribed phrase, and is turned into part of a process taking place in a

41 Cf. Meleager Anth.Pal. 12.41; Aratus Anth.Pal. 12.129. In Callimachus Anth.Pal. 12.51, for instance, καλός is used of a beautiful boy in a phrase that reproduces the typical phrasing of the inscriptions (καλὸς ὁ παῖς), so as to allude to the common theme of a boy’s chastity as opposed to a boy’s promiscuity. As Kathryn Gutzwiller aptly observes, the boy may belong to the category of the καλά not only because of his beauty, but also because he is not appealing to anyone other than the speaker: Gutzwiller, Poetic Garlands 223. As in the inscriptions, καλός refers not only to physical, but also to moral qualities. For Strato’s parody of conventions found in inscriptions see Floridi, Stratone 18–19.


man’s heart. This process is associated with the motif of erotic suffering which is amply attested in the *Musa Puerilis*. The words καλός and χαρίεις ὣµµασι, in particular, are no longer inscribed on trees or walls, but are transformed and appear as the traces inscribed on the heart of the man in love by the burning fire of Eros. The metaphorical conception of fire as a form of erotic suffering, which occurs in the twelfth book of the *Anthology* with many variations,\(^4\) is thus being formulated with the skilful use of material coming from actual social practice, the wider cultural phenomenon of Greek pederasty.

Considering the use of πρωκτός and χρυσός in Strato *Anth.Pal.* 12.6 in the light of the associations between the *Musa Puerilis* epigrams and the experience they echo, it is likely that these words are used metaphorically as elements of a vocabulary developed within the boundaries of that experience. They recur in patterns of thought and action which pervade the *Musa Puerilis* and determine the book’s themes and motifs in a way much like that of *Anth.Pal.* 12.130 discussed above. The semantic load of these words, deriving from homoerotic contexts, is developed further through the fundamental technique of the variation of language, style, theme, motif, imagery, and ideology that is characteristic of these epigrams.\(^4\)


\(^4\) For the metaphorical presentation of erotic suffering as fire burning the man in love see e.g. *Anth.Pal.* 12.63, 72, 81, 82, 83, 87, 91, 92, 93, 126, 127. The metaphor is amply exemplified in the *Greek Anthology*, but constitutes in fact a common perception of the suffering of love found in many ancient authors. See Fountoulakis, in *Erôs in Ancient Greece* 295–298 with n.18.

often a way of creating more variants—so, for instance, not only in *Anth.Pal.* 12.6, but also in Strato *Anth.Pal.* 12.225, 238, and 242.

That an erômenos possessing all the physical and moral qualities that justify the characterization χρυσός can nevertheless exhibit a bad character so that he may be characterized as πρωκτός, given the numerical equation of the two terms in *Anth.Pal.* 12.6 and their use in non-literary contexts of homoerotic experience, evokes the major theme of erotic suffering, which stands as the polar opposite of erotic pleasure and pervades the *Musa Puerilis*.\(^{46}\) A desirable erômenos capable of bringing pleasure may at times be so arrogant, unresponsive, and hostile to an older man’s feelings and advances that he causes pain. In Diocles *Anth.Pal.* 12.35 a boy named Dames, περισσος καύλλει (‘‘eminence in beauty’’), may be desirable, but is so arrogant and unresponsive that he refuses to say even χαίρε to the men who greet him in the street. A boy’s arrogance may be regarded as the dark side of his beauty so that the desire for him appears futile. Hence a boy’s beauty is described as κεναυχὲς κάλλος (‘‘vainglorious beauty’’) in Anon. *Anth.Pal.* 12.145.5–6.\(^{47}\) A beautiful boy may be so deceptive that desire for him causes suffering worse than that caused by a hetaera or a virgin girl (Anon. *Anth.Pal.* 12.90); the beautiful youth of this poem offers the older man, whose voice emerges as that of the narrator, only glances and empty promises.

The perception and characterization of a beautiful boy as good and desirable may sometimes depend on his response to the older man who is in love with him. Thus in Anon. *Anth.Pal.* 12.107, a boy described as καλός is desirable only so long as he

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\(^{47}\) For the arrogance of boys see also *Anth.Pal.* 12.183, 186.
responds to the older man’s feelings. In Dionysius Anth.Pal. 12.108, if the boy turns to another man he is regarded as detestable. Promiscuity is often a feature of those boys’ behaviour, which implies their bad character and makes them unwanted despite their beauty. The sorrow caused by a boy who is prone to ἀδικεῖν may be turned into hatred and this can be reversed only when the boy responds in a like manner to the older man’s love, as in Anon. Anth.Pal. 12.103. In Anth.Pal. 12.124 the boy whom an older man sees in his dreams appears at times as smiling and at times as hostile. This betrays the older man’s perception of the boy’s potential double nature, which might result either in kind and decent behaviour or in arrogance, aggressiveness, and deceit.

The sense of erōs as a bittersweet feeling, which is common in Greek poetry, is applied in Meleager Anth.Pal. 12.154 to a boy who may at times be ἡδύς, γλυκύς, χαρίεις, and καλός, and at times ἀνιηρός (“troublesome”). That in a pederastic affair a beautiful erōmenos might possess the physical but not the moral qualities expected of a καλός must have been quite common in the world of homoerotic experience, as depicted not only in the Musa Puerilis, but also in earlier poetry. In ‘Theognis’, for instance, a boy considered καλός on the grounds of his physical beauty may stand in sharp contrast to his bad and shameful

48 Promiscuity can appear as a feature of the behaviour of boys who offer their sexual favours for gifts or money: e.g. Anth.Pal. 12.42, 44, 204, 212, 214, 237, 239, 250. Cf. Maxwell-Stuart, Hermes 100 (1972) 226–230; F. Buffiere, Eros adolescent. La pederastie dans la Grèce antique (Paris 1980) 629–635; Floridi, Stratone 258–259; Fountoulakis, in Erōs in Ancient Greece 305. In this light, Strato 12.6 may well refer to the venality of pederastic erōs not because of the reference to χρυσός, but because a boy characterized as πρωκτός might exhibit such behaviour.

49 Cf. Dover, Greek Homosexuality 176–177; Fountoulakis, in Erōs in Ancient Greece 308.

50 Described as anonymous or as belonging to Artemon.

51 For a similarly easy reversal of the beloved’s attitude and feelings cf. Meleager Anth.Pal. 12.159 and Asclepiades Anth.Pal. 12.153, which however refers to a heterosexual relationship.
As has been noted, it is perhaps for similar reasons that in the graffiti from the Agora a boy is described once as καλός and once as καταπυγῶν. In accordance with this poetic and probably socially determined pattern of thought and action, an ἐρῶmenos, who may at first sight be characterized as χρυσός, may turn out to possess only the beauty and not the moral qualities of χρυσός. If he behaves badly, he may be considered πρωκτός.

The venality of ἐρός is an important theme in the erotic epigrams of the Anthology’s fifth book. This is because in the heterosexual epigrams of that book many of the women portrayed as objects of desire may be understood as hetaerae or common prostitutes, offering sex for money. But the boys who are objects of desire in the twelfth book appear to conform to the norms of Greek pederasty attested in social contexts. They mostly emerge as elite young males exhibiting an arrogance reflecting their social position, above financial concerns, although cases of avarice, buying sex-slaves, or even male prostitution were not alien to pederastic affairs.


53 See Anth.Pal. 5.2, 18, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 44, 45, 46, 101, 109, 113, 114, 121, 125, 126, 159, 162, 175. Note, however, that the eagerness of these women to engage in erotic or even sexual relationships does not necessarily mean that they are hetaerae or prostitutes. As Cameron has shown, many of the women depicted in Asclepiades’ epigrams do not conform to the stereotypical attitudes and features of prostitutes, but represent a variety of female types one might come across in social settings. See Cameron, Callimachus 494–519.

54 See e.g. Strato Anth.Pal. 12.214. It is perhaps for similar reasons that in pederastic scenes in vase-paintings the ἐρῶmenoi are never offered money, although they are often depicted accepting gifts: Shapiro, in Pornography and Representation 56.

55 The fourth-century case of Timarchus, who as a boy, according to Aeschines’ Against Timarchus, prostituted himself to other males, and later was engaged in politics, provides the best-known evidence concerning male prostitution in ancient Greece. For other evidence see Ar. Plut. 149–159; Hyp. Ath. 2; Theopompos FGrHist 115 F 225b; Timaeus 566 F 124b; Curt.
While the venality of erōs may have appeared as the thematic core of Strato Anth.Pal. 12.6 to some of its readers, it is likely that those acquainted with the main themes of the Musa Puerilis and the pederastic experience those themes echo would have also been able to discern in it a semantic breadth deriving from that experience. As the first epigrams of the twelfth book hint at the principal themes of the book’s poems, it comes as no surprise that Anth.Pal. 12.6 may refer to the pervasive theme of the ambivalent view of boys who appear as beautiful and desirable, but also can cause sorrow and pain through their arrogance, indifference, aggressiveness, and promiscuity. Drawing upon a relevant thematic strand, which is attested with variations in many epigrams of the Musa Puerilis and goes back to the Theognidea, Strato employs the device of isopsephy as well as a socially nuanced metaphorical vocabulary in order to hint at that theme. The unexpected association between πρωκτός and χρυσός not only generates humour, but also brings to the foreground the theme of erotic sorrow. The bitter irony that this generates emphasizes that theme in the poem and marks the character of Strato’s satire. As χρυσός may suggest the venality of pederastic erōs as well as the beauty and moral qualities of boys in pederastic affairs, the poem acquires a potential double meaning which is largely contradictory and invests Strato’s satire with further irony, created by ambivalence and ambiguity. While the isopsephic technique and the use of metaphorical language show the literary sophistication of the author and his audience, the origins of his lexical material


56 See Floridi, Stratone 52–53.
58 Cf. Floridi, Stratone 17–18 (for a typology of Strato’s humour) and 22–24.

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and its semantic nuances in the social field of Greek pederasty show a kind of humour that stems not only from a literary pun, but also from a conscious play with perceptions, assumptions, and preconceptions arising in a wider social ambience. This humorous variation on the theme of erotic sorrow due to an ill-behaving erômenos points in a self-reflexive manner to the process that led to the creation of erotic epigrams out of erotic inscriptions and suggests a profound relation of these poems to their social and cultural context.\(^{59}\)

September, 2013

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\(^{59}\) Cf. Cameron, *Callimachus* 71–103, 494–498, 517–519; Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* 227–236; Fantuzzi, in *Tradition and Innovation* 284–285. Thanks are due to the editor and the anonymous referee of *GRBS* for their valuable suggestions and comments on an earlier version of this article.